

# Stepping out from behind the curtains of Academic Oz: an autoethnography of restorative learning

An exploration into the intersecting influences on  
practice when constructing feedback for undergraduate  
Registered Nurses

Submitted by Julie Luscombe to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree  
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How to get there  
(a poem by Michael Leunig)

Go to the end of the path until you get to the gate  
Go through the gate and head straight out towards the horizon  
Sit down and have a rest every now and again  
But keep on going, just keep on with it  
Keep on going as far as you can  
That's how you get there

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## **Abstract**

This critical autoethnographic exploration evolved following an initial curiosity concerning diversity of practice amongst (other) Lecturers when constructing feedback for mature undergraduate Registered Nurses. As an early exploration revealed that I was viewing my professional experiences as a learner and practitioner through a previously unacknowledged working class lens, I began to foreground personal experiences from which a more relational understanding of the intersecting nature of personal, professional and broader influences on practice has emerged. A reclaimed marginalised perspective provided an ethical direction for the research and for the development of a more nuanced understanding of feedback practice.

Within this thesis, autobiographical writing, stories from practice and theory share a symbiotic and reciprocal relationship illustrating the intersectionality of multiple influences on practice. This layered and intertwined approach to data generation and interpretation allowed me to critically engage with my social and practice worlds incorporating the tensions and dilemmas of what it means to practice as a teacher and to be human within the academy.

The theory of restorative learning (Lange, 2004, 2007) underpins the structure of the thesis, foregrounding the emerging influence of a restored marginalised perspective. The concepts of habitus, field, capital and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1973) have been used to think through how these restored perspectives and personal experiences intersect with professional and broader influences in practice. Through autoethnographic exploration insights emerged; the influence of a wounded learner habitus on feedback practice, a renegotiation of a privileged position in the feedback relationship and the development of trickster properties as a device to open up dialogue and reflexive spaces within my own culture in order to develop feedback practice beyond the self.

In practice we are rarely encouraged to confront why we think the way we do about ourselves as teachers, particularly in relation to the social, cultural and political

world around us. This thesis contributes to the ongoing scholarly conversation concerning influences on professional practice from a practitioner perspective and the role of a layered approach to autoethnography in making these perspectives accessible.

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## Chapter 1

### Standing on the edge of meaning

The edge of knowing...my experience has shown me that the edge is the most precarious and important transformative space. It is this liminal space that we can come to terms with the limitations of our knowing and not knowing and thus begin to stretch those limits. (J.Berger, 2004, p.4)

#### Introduction to a 'messy' text

Thus begins my journey through the maze of autoethnography which has found me hovering on the precipice of knowing throughout the process. Certainly, where I began did not lead me to where I thought I was going. Having entered Higher Education (HE) as a third career, my research interests stemmed from curiosity concerning the diversity of practice amongst Lecturers when constructing formative feedback for students. Although the construction of feedback has remained the practice context for the study, I soon found myself in a similar position to the autoethnographer McIlveen (2008) who found that he began with one topic before realising that exploration of his autobiographical data was taking him in a different and unexpected direction. During an early exploratory phase of the inquiry, the emergence of my previously hidden working class identity revealed an unacknowledged marginalised perspective on the research. This was an unexpected and discomforting twist producing insights that I initially psychologically resisted for reasons that are explored as the story unfolds. However, this restored marginalised perspective provided an ethical direction for the research and for the development of a more nuanced understanding of practice. The inquiry evolved into a critical autoethnographic exploration into the intersecting nature of personal and professional influences on my own feedback practice examined within the broader socio cultural context of my field.

At times, I have felt as if I was wrestling with a text that did not seem to have an obvious beginning, middle or end. Krause (2003, p.284) suggests that "reducing a person's story to words on a page robs it of complexity" and I often felt I was writing without a safety net (Vickers, 2002). Yet, this messiness has felt real and reflects the hesitation, stumbling and backtracking that characterises the complex world of research and professional practice. Autoethnography foregrounds the

researcher as central to the inquiry, a perspective that implies accountability (Dyson, 2007), responsibility and voice (Ings, 2013). Although this thesis is written in *my* voice, I am aware that the ideas and the way in which I express them are also heavily influenced by other writing and that what has emerged is not just me. I offer collages of moments, memories, reflections and scholarship meaning that my language is also peopled with the intentions of others (Bakhtin, 1981). This initial chapter is aimed at providing a starting point on a map that will assist the reader to navigate the twists and turns of the research puzzle as it evolved. I followed where the inquiry was taking me and, as a result, I am stepping out from behind the curtains of 'Academic Oz' (Spry, 2001) and inviting others to join the conversation.

### **The research setting**

The research setting is an off campus Health and Social Care HE department located within a small community linked to a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the United Kingdom (UK). Since 2013, initial nurse training has been delivered at graduate level in the UK (Department of Health, 2008). However, the student group I specifically teach are Registered Nurses (RN) whom prior to the introduction of graduate entry to the profession studied for their initial professional qualification at Certificate or Diploma Level and whom are now studying to achieve a degree in professional practice. This student group could be described as 'non traditional' in that they are mature students who are studying part time on a modular basis away from the homebase of the HEI, whilst working full or part time in their posts as RNs (Scott et al, 2011). Students studying in this position have been found to classify themselves as employees/workers first and students second (Chen, 2014) possibly because many of these students have not previously studied within HE and have multiple family commitments outside of work and study.

The staff team focusing on this student group is a small one, consisting of five full time Lecturers, all of whom are RNs from a variety of specialties having moved into the HE setting as a second or third career. All have achieved post graduate teaching certificates and post graduate academic practice qualifications as a condition of working with the HEI. Although teacher preparation should go beyond

technical issues and be rooted in the ethical formation of self (Freire, 2000; Picower, 2013), my experience of the preparation programme had focused on educational methods, strategies and techniques in the classroom rather than on providing lenses to question policies, structures or curriculum. The lack of any explicit reference to pedagogical knowledge or critique within these programmes has been noted elsewhere (Edmond & Hayler, 2013). Therefore, in common with many educators (Picower, 2013), I entered the profession without fully appreciating the highly political nature of the field of education or consciously interrogating the hegemony of the broader context of HE.

### **Walking towards the edge: a pedagogical entry point**

The trigger for this inquiry has been protracted rather than singular and dramatic (Baumgartner, 2001) and the research focus developed as a gradual cumulative process involving everyday occurrences in my practice (Dirkx, 2000). Coming from a professional background of Mental Health Nursing and Public Health, taking on the role of Lecturer felt like a change of career. The transition from 'expert' to 'novice' was not a comfortable one as identified as common to new Nurse Educators (Diekelmann, 2004; McArthur-Rouse, 2008; Neese, 2003; Young & Diekelmann, 2002). Soon after joining the team, I had immediately been asked to undertake dissertation supervision for a group of undergraduate students which involved the provision of written and verbal formative feedback on draft chapters. I experienced a mixture of feelings that ranged from excitement about taking on the task and anxiety about whether I was sufficiently prepared to do so. As someone new to the role, I had concerns and questions. How much feedback is appropriate per chapter? What type of feedback is useful? In order to establish what was 'best practice', I started to investigate the topic further.

In essence, I was searching for the 'right' way to provide feedback. During early conversations with my new colleagues, it was not always clear what theoretical constructs were being used to inform practice. Brookfield (1993) suggests that practitioners do not necessarily access the theory behind their practice in any systematic way. Yet, as Polanyi (1966) states "we know more than we can tell". In

relation to my conversations with my colleagues, they were able to articulate the general rules and standards but perhaps not their own subjective way of coping with the complexity of practice. Even when Lecturers appreciate the theoretical constructs that underpin formative feedback and assessment, this is not always consistent with application to practice (MacLellan, 2001; Sach, 2012).

There is a growing body of literature concerning the principles of effective feedback as identified in recent reviews (Evans, 2013), publications (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Merry, Price, Carless & Taras, 2013) and multi institutional projects such as the JISC Feedback and Assessment programme (Ferrell, 2012, 2013), and TESTA (Transforming the Student Experience Through Assessment) (Jessop, Al Hakim & Gibbs, 2014). The empirical evidence was helpful to me as a new practitioner in the field, and has continued to influence my practice throughout this autoethnographic study. However, despite the existence of principles and frameworks for good practice, it is clear from the literature and from my own experience that there continues to be diversity of practice among Lecturers. The presence of marking criteria and learning outcomes which are presented as supposedly transparent standards for students imply that teacher judgement is analytical, can be made explicit and is systematic and fixed (Bloxham, 2013). Yet, educators can differ considerably in their interpretation of academic conventions and the importance they attach to them. There can be contradictory feedback, difference in approach and lack of consistency between academics who work on the same programme. A recent report by Ferrell (2012) confirmed that there remains inconsistency in assessment and feedback practices across institutions.

I became aware of a feeling of disequilibrium and dissatisfaction as I confronted my assumptions that there was a 'right' way to do things as the educators I considered experts were taking different approaches to practice. This feeling of disequilibrium provided a 'pedagogical entry point' (Lange, 2004, p.129) from which to investigate my practice further. J. Berger (2004) describes this feeling of uncertainty or discomfort as a precarious but important transformative space. She has used the term 'being on the edge of knowing or meaning' (J. Berger, 2004, p.338), a

transitional space in which we can come to terms with the limitations of our knowing and not knowing. My previous ways of thinking and reacting were not making sense but new ones had not yet formed to take their place. Being 'on the edge' offers the potential to move outside of current understanding into a new place and become better informed about practice. However, this can be and was an uncertain time. As a new Lecturer, faced with a broad literature base and diverse perspectives and approaches in practice, I felt uncertain of how to proceed.

Questions about this diversity of practice continued to play around the edges of my mind until the doctorate process allowed me the opportunity to explore them in depth. I had assumed that the source of my uncertainty was my inexperience in this particular role and that with more experience and knowledge these uncertainties would decrease. Yet, as I began doctoral study a few years into my new career I continued to feel curious about the different approaches taken within the team. Prior to conducting this autoethnography, I had developed my own style in terms of feedback practices. As I had become embedded in the frenetic world of daily practice, I had not been immersed in the literature about formative feedback so could not claim that the developing body of research and growing evidence base was underpinning my practice. Yet nor was I operating in an atheoretical way. I was aware that I had informal theories about my practice that may be philosophically different from some colleagues so I became curious about the development of these informal theories.

### **Problematising feedback from a practitioner perspective**

Although it is recognised that effective feedback is an integral component of successful learning (Merry et al, 2013), formative feedback has been described as a slippery term to define (Boud & Molloy, 2013). There have been recent moves to reconceptualise the practice as a process rather than a product, enhancing the student role in the process. Its breadth as a teaching and learning activity is captured by Sach (2012, p.261) who defines it as "an informal and continuous process, embedded in teaching and learning and conducted by teachers as an integral part of their everyday classroom work". The National Student Surveys regularly indicate that feedback is one of the most problematic aspects of the

student experience requiring further investigation (Yorke, 2013), yet problematising feedback from a Lecturer perspective remains an area where there is a lack of empirical research.

This is perhaps surprising given that within the recent literature, there has been a shift to a relational view of feedback as a social process where the fundamental points of analysis are the human relationships involved (Adcroft, 2011; Evans, 2013; Molloy & Boud, 2013). Earlier literature tended to conceptualise feedback as a product with a focus on the activities rather than on the actors involved. Focusing on purely the technical aspects of provision of feedback leads to an incomplete picture as it fails to address the assumptions that underpin the actions of a practitioner and those of the student. Understanding our own assumptions and perceptions is a starting point for our understanding as practitioners of the tasks we undertake.

The relational aspect of providing feedback is captured by Price, Handley, Millar and O' Donovan (2010) who state that fundamental beliefs about learning and the learning process will strongly influence how individuals see the role of feedback. As Lecturers, we have a responsibility to examine these beliefs to understand how they are impacting on our practice. There is nothing new about asserting that the ways in which we teach and the pedagogical purposes we pursue are directly connected to the way that we see ourselves (Kincheloe, 2005). However, in practice we are rarely encouraged to confront why we think the way we do about ourselves as teachers, particularly in relation to the social, cultural and political world around us. Becoming a critical practitioner requires insight into the construction of ourselves in practice. It has been suggested that academics need to be able to characterise the sources of knowledge that inform our practices in order to effectively formative feedback practice (Dunn, Parry & Morgan, 2002; Wyatt-Smith & Klenowski, 2013).

A recent review of research by Evans (2013) highlighted a research gap addressing feedback from the perspectives of staff and this has been identified as

a particularly under researched area in the field of Nurse Education (Bailey & Garner, 2010; Koh, 2010; Orsmond, Maw, Park, Gomez & Crook, 2013). Through exploration of influences on practice from a Nurse Lecturer perspective, this study is an opportunity to develop contextual based understanding of practice that can add to the body of knowledge concerning professional ways of knowing.

### **Questioning my motives: moving towards a focus on personal inquiry**

Within empirical research, there are few detailed explorations as to how discrepancies in practice launch reflection (Malkki, 2012). As I engaged with potential methodologies I was starting to question my motives for this inquiry. I had considered researching the diversity of practice from the perspective of 'others' but was now questioning why the views of others would be more appropriate to explore than my own. By researching others, it was possible that I was finding a way to keep my own experiences and influences at a safe distance. One of my early starting points in the research was to wonder why diversity in practice *appeared* to be only a disorienting dilemma for myself and not others within the team. As Smith (2013, p.195), states, often "we tend to look everywhere but in the mirror".

I had made some initial assumptions about the possible sources of influences on my practice but as I started to write in my research journal and engage with the literature I became aware that I was actively ignoring others. Whilst I was conscious that my assumptions and beliefs were likely to be influencing my practice, I had not fully considered the origin of these beliefs. Until I started to consider researcher positionality, I had actively avoided acknowledging any influence of my working class background on my practice. In fact, I rarely discussed it and very few of my colleagues were aware of it.

However, I had not entered the profession with a blank slate. My practice comes with a personal and cultural history. Neese (2003) acknowledges that each journey begins with packing luggage and like Neese, my baggage cart of assumptions was full. Educators often enter the profession with problematic or unexamined assumptions, beliefs, knowledge about students, teaching and the role of

education in society (Carrington & Saggars, 2008), not forgetting that we bring around 16-20 years of personal experiences as learners ourselves. I became curious as to how my own educational background and experiences were playing a role in shaping my professional practice. A quote by Tanaka, Nicholson and Farish (2012, p.262) captures the origins of my move towards personal inquiry; as I became aware that “my unconscious beliefs were informing my teaching...I could not risk leaving them unexamined”.

Foregrounding and exploring my own experiences and concerns about diversity in practice would enable me to focus in depth on the role and interaction between my assumptions, values and practice which could then serve as a vehicle for promoting dialogue among the team. By using my own experiences, I can illuminate the taken for granted assumptions that might have been difficult to uncover in others (Adams, 2012). In essence, I would be role modeling the questioning of my own values (Baumgartner, 2012). My developing focus on personal inquiry has been influenced by the thoughts of Pepper and Hamilton Thomas (2002, p.161) who stated that:

The starting point for change is not system change, nor change in others but change in ourselves. Change and growth in ourselves show a commitment to improvement. Modelling your own beliefs and ideals is much more important and effective than merely telling others how things should be.

### **Aims and focus of the study: introducing critical autoethnography**

Critical consciousness starts with the self (McIlveen, Beccaria, du Preez & Patton, 2010). Adopting a critically reflexive stance has been described as being ‘inherently political’ (Wright, 2004, p.40) and one in which it is important to be able to analyse a range of influences on our practice. I became curious as to the ways in which influences arising from my working class background were manifesting themselves in my feedback practice and what was the relationship between these and broader socio cultural influences including power relations in practice. This curiosity formed the basis for this autoethnographic exploration of the intersecting influences on my professional practice when constructing formative feedback for mature undergraduate students. From this aim, I formulated two initial questions to guide the initial inquiry:

- In what ways do my personal educational experiences influence my professional practice when constructing feedback for mature undergraduate Registered Nurses?
- In what ways do influences arising from personal experiences intersect with current professional and broader socio cultural influences to impact on my practice?

Autoethnography has been identified as having significant potential as a point of interrogation for critical, reflexive practice on education (Austin & Hickey, 2007). With a focus on the personal within a broader socio cultural context, autoethnography emerged as a methodology that allowed me to investigate the intersecting influences on my practice by telling the story of my multiple selves as researcher, practitioner and human in relation to a story of a culture. By problematising myself in the practice situation, the intention has been to illuminate the complexity of the relational nature of practice. It is hoped that the dilemmas discussed will be recognisable and that practitioners will think *with* my story rather than about it (A. Frank, 2000) and actively join in the scholarly conversation about the intersecting nature of personal and professional influences on our practice as they interact with each other in innumerable and uncertain ways.

However, a trawl through my early learning journals revealed that my choice of questions and approach has not solely been influenced by the literature but by my personal motivation for commencing doctoral studies. I entered the programme wanting to deepen my understanding about the profession I had joined and for learning to be transformational both for myself and for my approach to my work. Ellis (2004) suggests that you do not choose autoethnography, rather autoethnography chooses you. As I reclaimed a marginalised perspective, I started to wonder whether my choice of research approach also reflected a desire to perhaps challenge the dominant hegemony of traditional academic writing as well as challenging myself. Writing autoethnographically arguably makes the research accessible to wider audiences which is an activist stance in itself. Using personal

vulnerability as a means to understand my practice I was able to give voice to my previously ignored marginalised perspective and thus instigate discussions about and across differences examining the intersectionality of personal, professional and socio cultural influences on practice.

Since discovering and becoming immersed in the world of autoethnography, I have been navigating a fine line between using the methodology and discovering what it is. I have learned by reading, writing and doing. Critical engagement with the potential influences on my practice when constructing feedback was opening up opportunities and insights which were being applied back into practice thus provoking further reflection and action. My practice when constructing formative feedback and interactions with colleagues and students has been constantly evolving throughout the period of the research and continues to do so. Examples of specific evidence based interventions for providing feedback and approaches to practice are given throughout the thesis. However, engaging with this methodology was allowing me to focus on developing a more informed and relational approach to practice with students and colleagues and I wanted to capture and explore the role of the methodology in this further. To reflect this, I added a third research question giving this thesis a dual focus.

- In what ways can using a critical layered approach to autoethnography lead to a more informed mode of practice?

This thesis reflects an exploration of the intersecting nature of multiple influences on my professional practice as a Lecturer but it is also an account of ‘doing’ autoethnography; an exploration of how a critical layered autoethnographic approach to investigating practice can lead to a more informed mode of practice. This additional focus positions autoethnography as a site for further theorising about scholarship and theory. The specific use of autoethnography within this research is explored in detail within the methodological discussions in chapter two.

### **Restoration of a marginalised perspective: using theory to ‘think’ with**

Within this thesis, theory is used as a way of working with the personal story rather than explaining it. As a critical focus evolved and insights began to emerge from my study concerning the influence of my working class background on my practice, the work of Pierre Bourdieu became important. He suggested that researchers should adopt a reflexive attitude towards practice, reflecting upon how forces such as social and cultural background and our position within certain fields shape the way we see the world (Bourdieu, 1973). His scholarship has been described as a synthesis of philosophy, social anthropology and sociology, underpinned by a passionate commitment to social justice (Reay, 2004). As a sociologist, he intended for his theoretical ideas to be connected with empirical research that was grounded in every day life (Grenfall, 2008) with the aim of understanding the relationship between practices and the contexts in which those practices occurred (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). This is consistent with an autoethnographic approach of studying the self practising within a broader context. As the influence of a previously unacknowledged marginalised perspective emerged, Bourdieu’s work was relevant as he was particularly interested in the ways in which social inequality is masked and perpetuated within HE (Naidoo, 2004). His work is concerned with the link between original class membership and how this link is mediated by the education system (Sullivan, 2002).

As part of his ‘Theory of Practice’, Bourdieu (1973) introduced the concepts of capital, habitus, field and symbolic violence but suggested his ideas should be conceptualised as method; a way of thinking and a vehicle for asking questions rather than as theory (Bourdieu, 1985). Criticisms about his work being too eclectic (Webb et al, 2002) or deterministic (Jenkins, 1992) can be seen as much less problematic if his concepts are seen as method rather than theory. Bourdieu (1984) has described his concepts as ‘open’, designed to guide empirical work. This conceptual looseness constitutes a potential strength for autoethnographic study as this indeterminacy fits well with the complex messy nature of practice in the real world.

Bourdieu's works have been described as 'good to think with' (Jenkins, 1992, p.11) or as a way of 'thinking through practice' (Webb et al, 2002, p.61). As the study progressed, I began to think of his work as a conversational partner, using his concepts of habitus, capital, field and symbolic violence to contextualise the insights from the personal story and practice context. Using his concepts enhanced a more nuanced understanding of some of the underlying assumptions and tensions that have impacted on my practice as a Lecturer and as a learner. The key components of his concepts are introduced here and then integrated throughout the thesis.

Habitus can be described as a multi layered concept that operates both at the level of the individual and within teams, institutions and society. The concept constitutes a set of durable values and dispositions that we carry with us that shape our attitudes, behaviours and responses to given situations (Bourdieu, 1973). It is manifested in the ways in which we engage in practice (McLeod, 2005) and, although durable, it can also be viewed as permeable in response to the cultural field. Reay, Davies, David and Ball (2001a) discuss habitus in terms of being a core from which everyday experiences emanate. Using this concept helped me to make sense of my experiences as a learner and practitioner within the education system. However, in order to work with habitus, it needs to be understood as a relational concept. As explained by Bourdieu (1977, p.72), "it is not a uniformly imposed and fixed way of being but a generative structure formed in dynamic relation with specific social fields". The dynamic nature of the concept is captured by Savage (2003) who uses the term reflexive habitus to reflect the possibility of change.

Cultural field is Bourdieu's metaphor for representing sites of cultural practice. Fields are described as structured social spaces which shape and produce practices each with its own rules, discourses, schemes of opinions and rituals (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). HE could be described as a field, as could the department I work within and the smaller team within that. As a Lecturer, I am an agent in that field but my position within it is determined by the amount and

strength of capital that I possess, e.g. economic, cultural, linguistic, social and symbolic. All forms of capital are context specific and values of each form of capital will be different within different fields and should be considered as metaphors rather than descriptors of empirical positions (Skeggs, 1997).

Symbolic violence is the non physical violence that is exercised upon individuals often with their complicity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It may take the form of being denied resources, treated as inferior or being limited in terms of realistic aspirations (Webb et al, 2002). Thinking with the concept of symbolic violence allowed me to explore whether or to what extent I was complicit in developing dominant practices when providing formative feedback within this field.

Practitioners know their practice world well and can take it for granted because they are immersed in it. This concept encouraged me to consider the power relations inherent in my practice as a lecturer and as a learner.

Bourdieu (1985) calls on researchers to question not only how they operate within their immediate field of reference but also in the wider structure and objectivities that make up their own social world. His concepts provided me with a method for simultaneously interrogating my experience as a social agent (subjectivism) and the objective structures which make that experience possible (objectivism). Within this thesis, I have used the concepts of habitus, capital, field and symbolic violence to think through the intersecting influences on practice within the field. For Bourdieu, practice is always an effect of the habitus, capital and field and is the sum of our activities as we are located within and associated with field (Bourdieu, 1985). He suggests his theories should be closely related to the specific contexts in which they are employed and should allow for people to respond to and alter activities in the face of complex variable conditions. Scholarly research is viewed as a means to an end rather than disinterested reflection. The purpose is to change.

However, this thesis is not a story about the experience of being a working class female in an academic world. Rather it is about how my previously hidden working

class identity started to emerge through the research process, leading me to a critical focus and a more nuanced understanding of the multiple influences on my practice. As personal dispositions influenced by a working class habitus started to emerge, an early research hunch was that transformative learning theory, initially conceptualised by Mezirow (1981), would be instrumental in helping me to think through my practice as critical reflection is a key component within this. Yet, as my reading progressed, I became aware that in much of the research using transformative learning theory as a framework, there appeared to be an assumption that transformation of a meaning perspective will occur. I had started to question whether my exploration would necessarily lead to a change of perspective. Indeed, similar concerns were acknowledged in a study by Malkii (2012). Critical reviews of the research using transformative learning theory identify that it is still unclear as to what warrants a perspective transformation (Taylor, 2008; Taylor & Snyder, 2012). I was uncomfortable with the assumption that transformation was taken for granted as an end product. Therefore, I was unsure whether the theory fitted with the direction I was going.

A 'lightbulb' moment occurred when I encountered the work of Lange (2004) focusing on critical transformative learning from which she developed the concept of restorative learning. According to Lange (2004, p.134) "the reification of change is an extreme modernist assumption itself". Her work offered the possibility of restorative learning by demonstrating that participants did not necessarily transform their fundamental principles and values, but were able to return to their "inner compass which was submerged under the deluge of adult expectations, cultural scripts and workplace practices" (Lange, 2004, p.130). Autoethnographic exploration had led me to question whether my values and beliefs were always evident in the way that I practised. As my study progressed, I had started to reconnect with personal ethical beliefs that had been suppressed by practice (Lange, 2004) and rather than requiring transformation, they required restoration or recovery to a rightful place in my professional life.

The intent of critical transformative learning linking to restorative learning as described by Lange (2004) is consistent with the aims of my autoethnographic study in that it is not just concerned with personal transformation but rather how individuals can be creative producers of both self and society and the relations that exist within this. A critical approach allowed me to investigate the systems and forces that shape my professional life as an educator and as a learner. Thinking with the concepts of restorative learning encouraged me to consider the extent to which my awareness of these influences had impacted on my practice and to what extent I was colluding with these influences.

My learning process in response to the research questions has been framed within the three facets Lange describes in the second phase of her research (Lange, 2007); recovery, relatedness and reflectiveness. Engagement with the autobiographical data (explored in chapters three & four) allowed exploration of my personal educational experiences leading to a restoration of a marginalised perspective and a recovery of the values that were important to me (recovery). From this restored vantage point, I was able to move forward with a critical focus in order to examine the intersecting nature of personal influences with broader professional and socio cultural influences within the field (relatedness), offering the potential to enrich relationships with both colleagues and students together with the challenges this brings (explored in chapters five, six, seven and eight). I have interpreted the third phase of Lange's framework (reflectiveness) as reflexivity which is characterised by the critique of self within a socio cultural/political context (Short & Grant, 2009). The interplay between personal and professional influences and the broader socio-cultural influences is threaded throughout the thesis demonstrating how a restoration of values led to my attempts to live them out in practice and develop a more emancipatory mode of practice. The final chapter brings the narrative threads together to illustrate the reflexivity of the research in response to the research questions.

## **Standing on the edge of meaning: a voice in the process of 'becoming'**

Throughout this layered account (Ronai, 1995), I have sought to demonstrate the intersecting nature of the influences on professional practice and how my understanding of these has changed over the course of the research as I struggled to make sense of a restored marginalised perspective. Stories from the past are interweaved within the context of the present and the present is contextualised in the past (Chang, 2008) as I attempt to develop a more informed and relational approach to feedback practice. As a result, this thesis may perhaps feel like an ongoing conversation with myself which may sometimes be hesitant or 'wobbly' as I have been moving towards 'stuttering knowledge' (Gannon, 2006, p.491).

Investigating the multiple influences on my own practice has been far from unproblematic. At times, I found myself writing about issues that I would have preferred to avoid. However, I was aware, as suggested by Tenni, Smyth and Boucher (2003), that in order to produce authentic autoethnographic research, I needed to write a rich, full account that included all the 'messy' stuff, the self doubts, the mistakes, embarrassments and inconsistencies. It was about writing all of it and seeing what emerged. J. Berger (2004) describes 'being on the edge' as a variable experience, a complex continuum that ranges from those who seek out and enjoy transformation to those who are in anguish at the edges of their understandings. My excitement and curiosity were tempered by a feeling of trepidation. Yet with tension comes the opportunity for learning (Pillen, Beijaard & den Brok, 2013). A phrase originating from the autoethnographer Tami Spry (2001, p.714) has been the inspiration for the title of this thesis. When talking about the courage required to be vulnerable as an educator, she describes stepping out from behind the curtain and revealing the individual at the controls of "academic oz." This thesis finds me stepping tentatively out from behind the curtains.

## Chapter 2

### **Winding my way through the methodological maze**

The research process is a messy business yet when researchers communicate with each other through journals or when experts attempt to explore the nature of the research process, little of this messiness emerges. (Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, McCulloch & Sikes, 2005, p.107)

### **Introducing the messy business of autoethnographic research**

To present this thesis as a seamless progression of logical, rational and objective decisions without acknowledging the false starts and speed bumps along the way would not represent my lived experience of doctoral research. Ellis (2004) suggests that conducting autoethnography can be likened to being sent out into the woods without a compass. However, she also encourages researchers to live with the uncertainty of the process so that adequate time is taken to wander about and get the lay of the land. Learning to live with uncertainty became part of the process. Although autoethnography may be viewed as a journey rather than a destination (Ellis & Bochner, 2006), it cannot be assumed that a journey can be completely planned or that we will be prepared for all obstacles (Dyson, 2007). We cannot always know what the endpoint will be or what will happen along the way. Thus, this inquiry is presented as a layered, unfinished, continuing journey.

Within this chapter, I begin by discussing the move towards a critical framing of this inquiry. My decision to use a 'hybrid' approach to autoethnography using sections of evocative writing linked with theoretical insights is explained followed by a discussion on the methods used to produce the layered account. Although ethical concerns are introduced in this chapter, specific aspects are discussed in more detail throughout the thesis to demonstrate an audit trail of my reasoning, judgement and emotional reactions (R. Berger, 2013). Finally, I offer thoughts on quality criteria for this inquiry and discuss opportunities and limitations of autoethnography.

## **Researcher positionality leading to a critical focus**

Who a researcher is, is central to what a researcher does.  
(Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p.13)

In autoethnography, reflexivity can be considered the primary methodological instrument (Foley, 2002). Reflexive analysis should begin from the moment the research is conceived (Foley, 2002) and be considered at every stage of the research process (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Thinking with Bourdieu's concept of habitus helped me to understand that my own characteristics represent my world view and background which affect the way I construct the world, use language, pose questions and choose the lens for filtering information and making meaning from it. Thus my habitus has shaped all aspects of this study from the conception of ideas, interpretation of insights until the writing of the research and beyond. Yet, reflexivity is not just about developing greater self-knowledge, but is concerned with developing practice through a more critical knowledge and understanding of the role of power relationships within the structures and institutions in which we work.

Roth (2005) suggests that when coupled with critical theory, autobiographical research has the potential to heighten practitioner researcher's reflective awareness of their embodiment of the culture of their setting and profession, bringing to consciousness the moral, ethical and political values that shape their educational practice. A central element of critical theory is the understanding that the self is socially and politically created and that choices and actions are therefore ideologically manipulated (Brookfield, 2012; Romo, 2004). Autoethnography offers the potential to develop a critical reflexivity where the self is examined in terms of the social processes that mediate our lived experience (Hickey & Austin, 2007). By exploring my selves as a social construct, social structures became open to critique and change within the context of my practice. Through self analysis of multiple influences on practice, I can reveal culture at work. This inquiry became not just a story of 'self' but a look at 'selves' within a broader context (Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008).

Although not an autoethnographer, Bourdieu (1990, p.116), suggested that social scientists should perform “a sociology on themselves” prior to starting research, as individuals become aware of the structural determinants of their practice through reflexivity. To help me find my way into the inquiry and consider my positionality as a researcher, I created a ‘snake diagram’ (Cabaroglu & Denicolo, 2008, p.30). This technique involved drawing a representation of my early educational and professional experiences in the form of a winding snake, each turn of its body depicting a personal experience which influenced the direction of my career or decisions made (Appendix 1) thus using the metaphor of “connecting threads...reaching into the past gathering up experiential threads meaningfully connected to the present” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, p.47). These turns were annotated briefly and subsequently formed the basis of a more extended piece of writing in the form of an autobiographic life history using a framework suggested by Wellington et al (2005) (Appendix 2). This life history evolved into an unstructured narrative interview with myself (Foster, McAllister & O’Brien, 2005) and focused on recollections of home, neighbourhood, childhood, family and educational experiences with the aim of identifying how those experiences have influenced my views, values and beliefs about the world and shaped the type of practitioner and researcher I am becoming.

Stories from past experiences can be used to draw attention to the ways in which experience shapes our approach to constructing particular research and teaching interests (Bochner, 1997; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Conle, 2000; du Preez, 2008; Ellis, 1999, 2001). Although my initial intention had been to use these exercises purely to establish my positionality as a researcher, completing them revealed that I was researching from a marginalised perspective; something I had previously avoided consciously naming. As insights concerning the influence of a previously ignored working class habitus and a restoration of values began to emerge, the use of these initial exercises shifted from tools to develop researcher positionality to a method of data generation as a key part of the autoethnography with a critical emancipatory focus. Their subsequent role and interaction with other

sources of material as methods within the study are discussed in more detail later in this chapter to demonstrate the layered approach to this inquiry.

In addition to my growing awareness of the influence of my working class habitus, I was also becoming aware of the influences of the cultural fields in which I was living and working. This left me uncomfortable with the status quo of practice, wanting to investigate this further. Critical theory research is shaped by the emancipatory intent to transform practices in order to achieve social justice (Leonardo, 2004). As a methodology, it can be seen as a critical intervention in social, political and cultural life that can move “tellers and listeners into a space of dialogue, debate and change” (Holman Jones, 2005, p.764). I employed autoethnography as a critical intervention to interrogate my practice within a broader context with the catalytic potential to provide consciousness raising practice (Hickey & Austin, 2007).

### **Developing my autoethnographic personality**

There is definitional uncertainty around the term autoethnography. As stated by Chang (2006), no researcher can claim an exclusive license to use the label but it is the researcher’s responsibility to become informed of the multiple usages of the term and to clearly define how they are using it. I initially felt overwhelmed with how much was left for me to decide and rationalise, a not uncommon feeling among doctoral autoethnographers who have written about the experience (Johnston & Strong, 2008; Manning, 2007; Struthers, 2012; Wall, 2006, 2008). Whilst the lack of methodological guidance offers a certain level of freedom, it has the corollary aspect of a lack of direction which made it difficult to visualise a methodological pathway. I engaged with the debates concerning evocative autoethnography (also known as creative analytic practices) and analytic autoethnography to develop my own autoethnographic style and personality.

Analytic autoethnography has been presented as a specialised subgenre of analytic ethnography (Anderson, 2006). The key principles to this approach are that the researcher is a full member in the research group and setting, that they are

visible as such in the publication and they are committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena. The process of analysis and link to theory is particularly important within this conception. Initially, the focus on theory and structure appealed to me as a novice researcher. My professional socialisation into research from my Masters programme and the evidence based practice culture of health care had resulted in me feeling 'safe' and familiar with an analytical approach and possibly, I was still hiding from a more extensive use of the self. As doctoral level study is not about feeling safe, I investigated further.

In the use of evocative autoethnography/ creative analytic practices, the use of self is foregrounded with a focus on evocative personal stories that are aimed at repositioning the reader as co participant in the dialogue. Writing that is both aesthetic and evocative often uses conventions of storytelling such as character, scene and plot (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). It is usually written in the first person voice and can take a variety of forms including short stories, poetry, drama and fiction.

The main differences between the two approaches appear to be focused on two main areas; the extent of the use of self and the function of theory. Analytic autoethnography foregrounds the role of theory and limits the use of the self with the aim of pursuing theoretically informed, inductively grounded realistic ethnography (Anderson, 2006; O' Riordan, 2014). The use of the self and the personal is subordinate to the empirical and theoretical story. However, this would appear to be a description of what I understand to be traditional ethnography incorporating researcher reflexivity and so I was able to understand why Ellis and Bochner (2006) struggled with Anderson's use of the term autoethnography. However, the inclusion of data from or about others is not a necessary requirement of analytic autoethnography (Vryan, 2006) and the necessity, value and feasibility of this will vary according to the specifics of a given project and research aims. The limited use of self could potentially lead to the reader becoming a detached observer without the use of a personal story to engage them (Ellis & Bochner, 2006).

However, Ellis and Bochner (2006) admit that their main point of contention with the analytic approach is the commitment to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena. Their belief is that the aim of autoethnography should be the 'journey' rather than the 'destination' and are concerned that the analytical approach is an attempt by realists to turn autoethnography into mainstream ethnography. In contrast, other autoethnographers appear to agree with Anderson (2006) about the role of theory and analysis. Spry (2001) could be described as an evocative autoethnographer as she presents and performs her research as poetry. However, she describes her approach as "a provocative weave of story and theory" and highlights the role of the scholarly aspect (p.713). She defines autoethnography's purpose as the production of research in which person, phenomenon and theory are articulated. These approaches do not limit the use of self but also recognise the role of theory and analysis.

Some of the debates within the autoethnographic landscape read as polarising and, at times, dismissive of alternative points of view. Miller (2009) has described how these debates can appear as gladiatorial struggles when presented in print, each defending their own version of the truth. When considering how to proceed, I was reminded of an article by Foster et al (2005) who, when undertaking an autoethnographic study for her doctorate was faced with trying to understand the myriad perspectives of the methodology. She was cautioned by her supervisor (as was I) to be wary of binary thinking as it often has the effect of forcing us to choose between one side or another. Instead it might be possible to replace 'either/or' thinking with 'and/both' thinking. These thoughts helped me to develop what I consider to be a hybrid autoethnographic style.

Immersing myself in these debates and autoethnographic research helped me to clarify the direction I wanted to take by paying attention to how I felt when reading them, what further insights they provoked, and what new insights I felt I was gaining. I reflected on my responses to both the content of the readings and the way in which they were presented. Autoethnographers such as Bochner and Ellis

tend to use reflections (Bochner, 1997, 2012) and/or reconstructions of dialogue and description (Ellis, 1999, 2001) within the text to 'show and tell'. Their writings are accessible and I can feel myself sitting back to get comfortable in order to read. However, too often, I have read evocative work that, despite being interesting and engaging to read, I have not always felt as if I was coming away with any new insights. This may be due to my lack of knowledge of a topic, or a result of unacknowledged biases or perhaps I have experienced a situation differently. Yet, I have sometimes been aware of a feeling of irritation with how the information is presented in terms of style and a nagging concern about the potential for self indulgence (Delamont, 2007).

In contrast, reading an article by Bochner (1997) within which he uses reflections from his past and the present echoed exactly how I felt as a Lecturer trying to incorporate the use of self into teaching and learning. This led to further reflections for myself within my research journal and copious note taking with many underlined comments of 'yes' in the margins! I found myself experiencing that 'shock of recognition' (Adelman, Jenkins & Kemmis, 1975) that I am hoping to provoke in others with this inquiry. Although I did not consciously process this as such at the time, these considerations were my first step towards developing my own quality criteria for the study discussed later in this chapter.

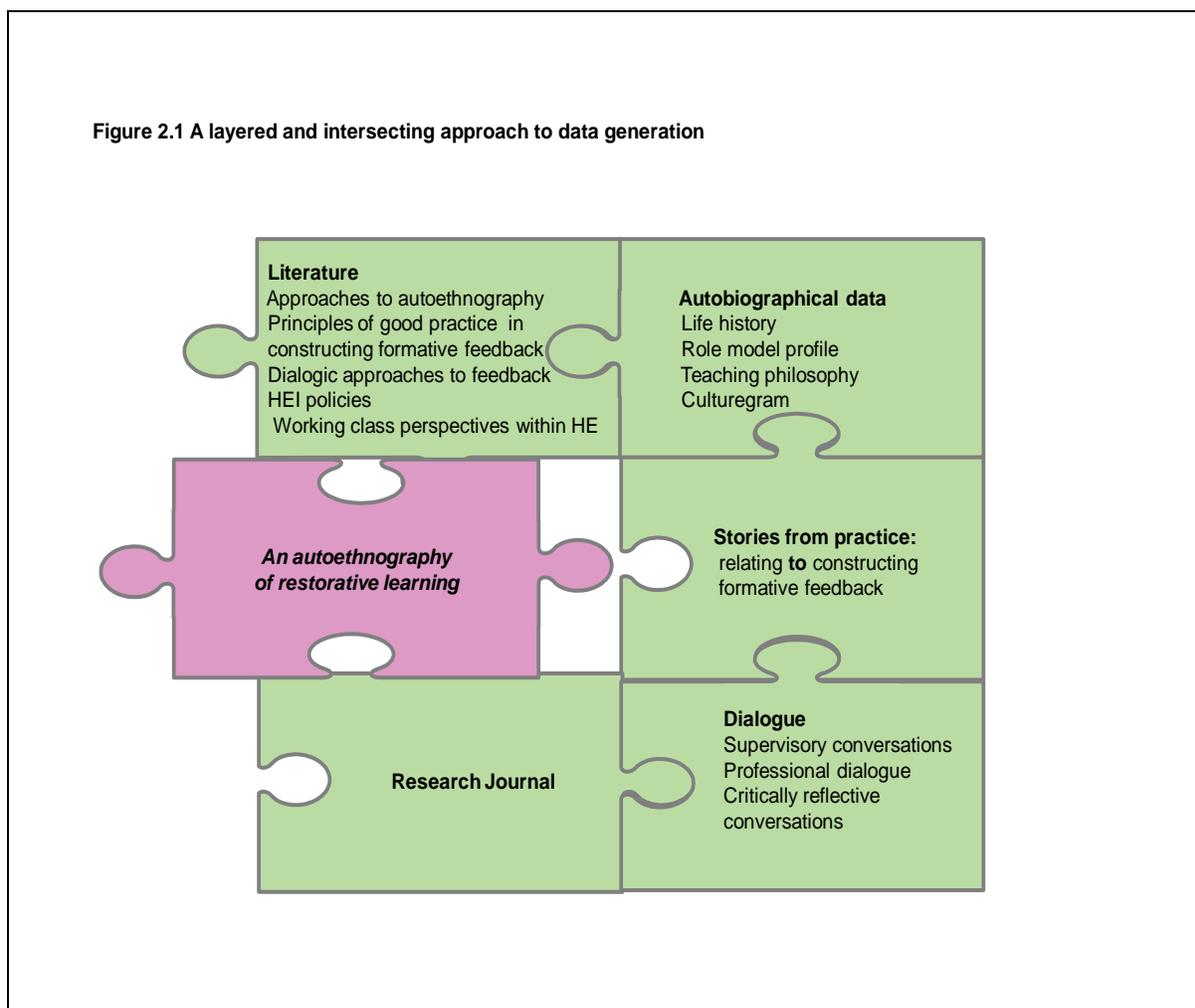
As I became more comfortable with wandering in the woods without a compass (Ellis, 2004), I started to notice that I was writing more evocatively in my research journals but I was also 'conversing with' Pierre Bourdieu and Elizabeth Lange and others to root the story in a broader socio-cultural context. My aim was to tell a story that readers can enter into and feel part of and to write in a way that evokes readers to think about their personal and professional experience in relation to mine and potential influences on their own practice. Reviewing my research journals whilst paying attention to my responses to the literature helped me to conclude that I wanted to produce an autoethnography that combined my individual personal story with the scholarly story.

The autoethnographic process as described by McIlveen et al (2010) most accurately reflected the direction I wanted to take to achieve these aims. They describe the process of autoethnography as typically entailing a researcher describing elements of their life and experience in explicit detail in relation to a specific ethnographic topic, then interrogating that experience and integrating that experience with theory. McIlveen (2008) makes the link with the critical paradigm by describing autoethnography as a specific form of critical inquiry that is embedded in theory and practice. Within this thesis, I am offering theoretical frameworks that have helped me work with the emerging insights. By making my lived experiences accessible to others, I aim to encourage critical reflection on the influences on practice and how that might perhaps be contextualised within a body of theory. In order to address the research questions and critical aims, I have placed an equal emphasis on auto (self), ethos (culture) and graphy (research process). Within the next section the methods used to build up layers of engagement with my experience in support of this critical autoethnographic study are discussed.

### **Methods: a layered approach to critical engagement**

A critical focus required methods that would facilitate my understanding of the influences on practice and allow me to illustrate the emerging insights in relation to socially imposed perspectives within my field and the ways in which power is exercised. Autoethnographic writing typically begins with a descriptive narrative of events and activities that unfold within a particular culture and then develops into a reflective analysis of those events and activities to generate new insights and to enhance the researcher's sensitivity towards the knowledge gained in that process (Duarte, 2007). Multiple sources of evidence were used within this study to enhance critical reflexivity including autobiographical writing, reflective exercises, stories from practice, the research journal, faculty feedback policies, the literature, dialogue and critically reflective conversations. However, although discussed separately here, the process of critical engagement with the evidence was non linear and intertwined meaning that none of these methods were considered in isolation. This has led to the production of a layered account that has been

informed by simultaneous engagement with the sources of evidence over the period of the research. Figure 2.1 demonstrates the intersectional approach to generating autoethnographic data.



### **Autobiographical writing**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the technique of snake diagrams (Cabaroğlu & Denicolo, 2008) and life history (Wellington et al, 2005), were used to develop ontological and epistemological positionality but then evolved as method as they unexpectedly produced insights concerning the influences of my working class background and submerged values that I had previously not considered. Insights from both exercises are used as data to structure the evocative autoethnographic narrative concerning the personal influences on my practice presented in chapters three and four.

To further explore the influence of my personal dispositions on practice, I completed a values exercise (Appendix 3) and a culturegram developed by Chang (2008) to stimulate a further layer of critical engagement with the influence of values on my practice (Appendix 4). Insights concerning personal values and preference cannot be easily noticed by observing behaviours or passing thoughts, rather they come through the process of self reflection. By completing the culturegram, I was aiming to view my present selves from multiple perspectives in terms of social roles I play, groups I belong to, diversity criteria by which I judge myself and primary cultural identities I assign to myself. This technique enabled me to produce a visual representation of the dynamic intersectional nature of my habitus; the cultural synergy that is created through interactions of race, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexuality, nationality and religion. This was used to stimulate reflexivity and to illuminate the multiple dimensions that have influenced my development as a professional. Information and excerpts from these pieces of autobiographical work are used to support the interpretation of the autobiographical information in chapters three and four.

In order to question the relationship between my life history and philosophical beliefs about teaching further and interrogate how they are applied into practice, I completed a series of reflective exercises to further interrogate the influences of my habitus on my professional practice. Using a framework suggested by Cranton (2006, p.193), I articulated my teaching philosophy (Appendix 5) and completed a role model profile (Appendix 6). Brookfield (2005) suggests that those we regard as role models are often those who embody talents and characteristics we feel are absent from our own practice and being and that we tend to view those who can do easily the things with which we struggle the most as heroic. Our responses to these questions can indicate areas of our practice we want to develop. Insights from these exercises are used to support the insights from the practice stories in chapters five, six, seven and eight.

### **The reflective journal: using a storied approach to investigating practice**

Using stories from practice as a reflective device is a powerful means by which we can seek to explore and understand our own values, ideas and norms, helping us to create order out of a chaotic professional world (Gray, 2007). Self observation has been identified as useful in accessing elusive cognitive processes, emotions, motives, concealed actions, omitted actions and socially restricted activities (Rodriguez & Ryave, 2002). Writing stories from practice enabled me to recapture my experiences and think critically about them, highlighting contradictions, inconsistencies and connections. Considering the personal influences on my practice in conjunction with stories from practice situated my experience in a broader socio cultural context.

I have defined a practice story as a brief account of an actual situation or episode of feedback practice. These were recorded in a reflective journal which has been acknowledged as a powerful tool with which to engage practitioners in their own learning and for uncovering tacit knowledge implicit in practice (Cunliffe, 2004; Gray, 2007; Ortlipp, 2008). Writing is an individual activity located within the subjectivity of the experience of the writer as a person (Rolfe, Jasper & Freshwater, 2011) and so the process of writing journal entries helped me to externalise assumptions and reactions to people and situations that might otherwise have remained unacknowledged (Duncan, 2004). Using the stories in combination with other sources of information made it an effective medium to move from reflective analysis of an experience to critical reflexivity located within my socially constructed reality.

Over a period of 18 months, 79 practice stories were generated consisting of typewritten entries, averaging a page of A4 each, created in response to a feedback conversation or interaction and sometimes supported by other forms of evidence such as emails, records of meetings and professional development activities. The practice stories were all titled and numbered (PS1 – PS79) and were maintained in a secure password protected file with no names or genders specified. To capture thoughts at the time an event occurred, field notes were

occasionally kept in a notebook in the form of bullet points or brief sentences to remind me of the practice episode and later written up into practice stories. Ellis (2004) suggests that it is important to write about experiences at the time when thoughts and feelings are intense but to return to interpret it when emotionally distant. I wrote freely, allowing the thoughts to percolate and returned to the stories at a later date with an interpretive focus.

The starting point had been my thoughts about everyday practice when engaged in constructing formative feedback with students. Writing about everyday practice can be less restrictive allowing for unexpected issues to emerge (Hughes, 2009). It can also provide important opportunities for uncovering practices that often go unnoticed (Levett-Jones, 2006). Some of my earlier practice stories read very descriptively. However, as insights began to emerge from engagement with the autobiographical data and the literature, writing became part of the interpretive process. Writing the stories promoted an inner dialogue with myself (Attard, 2008; Tenni et al, 2003) about issues that were arising in relation to formative feedback and so served as a reflexive device. Internal dialogue has been identified as an effective tool for stimulating self critical reflection which can supplement dialogue with others (Hughes, 2009). This dialogical approach to my writing developed and it often felt as if I was having a conversation with myself as I wrote my practice stories. The stories are peppered with ideas and counter ideas in a series of questions and answers that arise from the writing. Although uncertainty was ever present, my growing tolerance of this promoted ongoing inquiry (Attard, 2008). In essence I was 'puzzling out experience' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.103).

As the inquiry progressed, I was not just writing to convey my stories but rather writing as a dialogic method of engaging in a process of reflexivity. This involved interrogating my storied understandings of my experiences (Miller, 2009) and then relating them to the literature and autobiographical information to help me make sense of my experiences. By applying my new understandings to practice, I was testing and modifying these new understandings in the light of new experiences

which in turn led to new writings. In this process, data generation and interpretation were intertwined and interactive.

### **The research journal as a tool of data generation and interpretation**

Commencing the research journal in July 2012 coincided with the beginning of generation of practice stories. At this point, I was reflecting on my personal experience as a learner on the doctoral journey and theoretical readings around my broad area of interest; formative feedback. Journalling about experience called readings to mind, readings of which I then made sense of through more stories of practice or conversations within the classroom. As the research progressed, I reviewed the journal every month to stay in touch with interpretive moments such as feelings, speculations, hunches, reflections on assumptions, prejudices and developmental theories.

By reviewing the journals, I was able to identify that the influence of my working class habitus was emerging as significant and so the focus of the study started to shift in subtle ways as the critical emancipatory emphasis became more pronounced. Insights emerged that directed future reading and clusters of ideas started to take shape. I focused on the thoughts and feelings pertaining to my engagement with autoethnography and working class perspectives and started to access autoethnographic readings from marginalised perspectives. Thoughts arising from engaging with this material were brought into conversation with the emerging insights from the stories from practice and life history shaping the development of my research meaning research and practice constantly influenced one another.

I continued to keep the research journals throughout the process which has helped me identify all those twists and turns and the messiness of research and practice. It provides evidence of an ongoing interpretive process and has become the glue that stuck my research and practice together. In addition to providing an audit trail of gradually altering methodological decision making, it evolved into a vehicle for writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 1994), enabling me to capture various

insights before they disappeared into oblivion (Altrichter & Holly, 2005). Using the research journal reflexively and alongside the other sources of data transformed this from merely being an item in the research audit trail into data in terms of critical reflection on the political and social constructions that influence both myself as a researcher and the research. Insights from the journal are used to support the interpretations of the practice stories throughout the following chapters.

### **Literature as data**

Within this thesis, story and theory share a symbiotic and reciprocal relationship (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2014), merging so that story becomes theory in action. A range of literature is used to think through the nuances of experience situated within my social and professional cultures and story is the mechanism that embodies these nuances and experiences. However, working with the eclectic strands of literature relating to methodology, the phenomenon of formative feedback, theoretical frameworks and literature to support the emerging insights often felt like trying to persuade an octopus into a glass (Kamler & Thomson, 2006). To make this psychologically and practically manageable, I used the dinner party conversation metaphor (Kamler & Thompson, 2006) which suggests an emphasis on conversation with a community of scholars. As the researcher, I would 'invite' these scholars to join me for a conversation. As host, I would not just be a bystander to the conversation but instead I would make space for guests to talk about their work but to do so in relation to mine. Therefore, my own research would never feel disconnected as it is present at the table and ideas are there to be considered and digested. The analogy of the dinner party also suggests that not everyone can fit around a table so not everyone will be invited. After a dinner party has ended, I can reflect on the ideas and the connections between their work and mine which is a starting point for other conversations and further dinner parties with invited guests. This strategy is presented in Figure 2.2 using colour to illustrate the progression of the conversation.

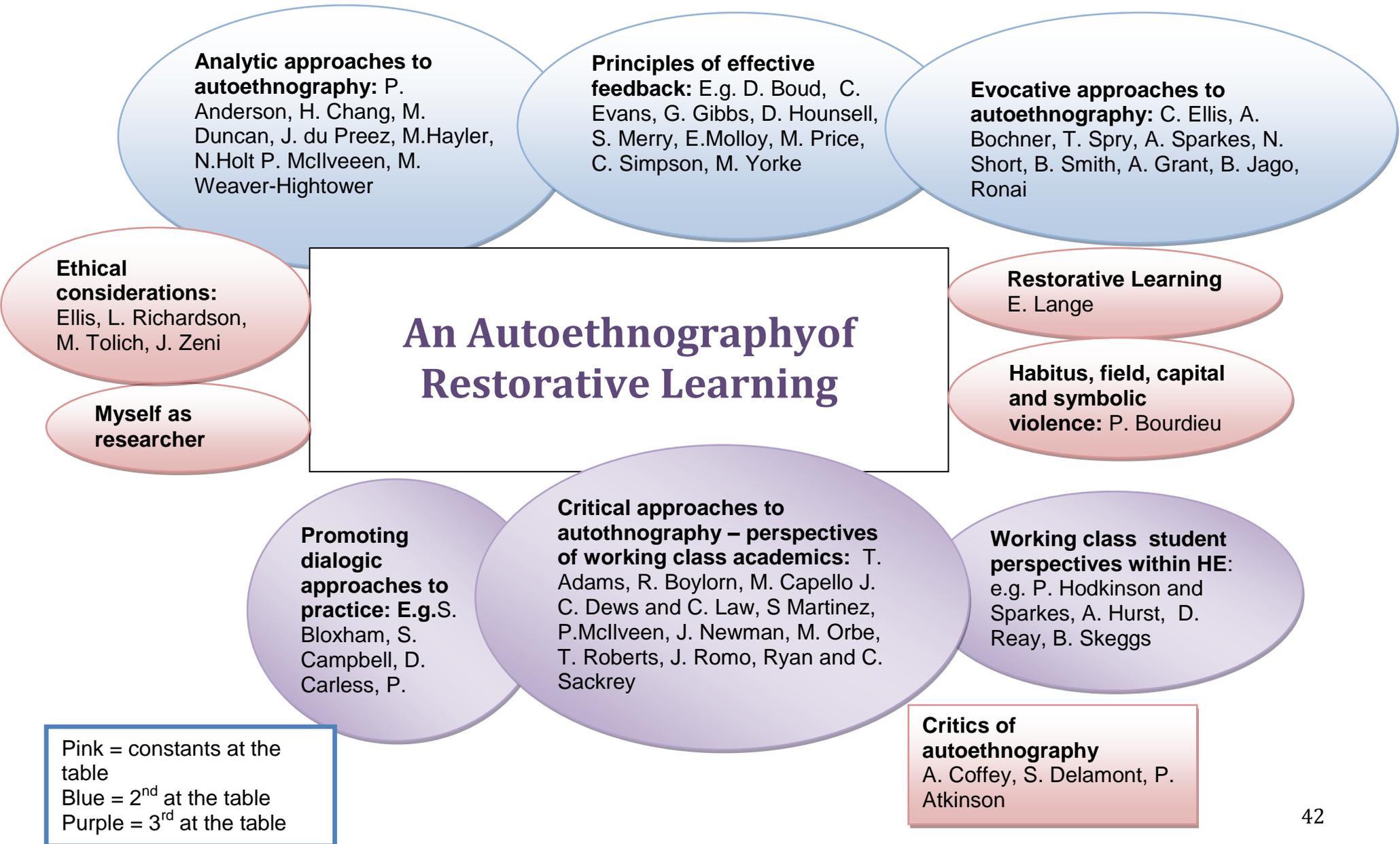
In recognition that the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu and Elizabeth Lange were ever present throughout the thesis, they sit at the head of the table. I have also placed

myself at the head of the table as my work needs to be constantly present within the conversation and as researcher and practitioner, I am making the decisions as to what and who to include. Ethical considerations were always at the table. There were some guests I would perhaps have preferred not to invite; for example, those who are scathing about the use of autoethnography. However, their views were important in helping me to think through some of these debates so they were always present but in the background to help keep me alert to potential criticisms of the work.

Literature concerning approaches to autoethnography were part of the initial dinner party conversations. Analytical and evocative autoethnographers are positioned separately, not to construct a binary position but to offer up and discuss alternative perspectives and ways of doing and thinking. In reality, autoethnographic researchers combine elements of many approaches. The early 'conversations' also focused on the principles of constructing formative feedback as the practice element of the research.

As the critical focus of the study progressed, and I began to consider my practice in emancipatory terms, those who had used critical autoethnographic approaches to explore experiences of marginality joined the conversation. These were my new 'colleagues' that I found within the pages of books and journals. I was also starting to experiment with emancipatory approaches to constructing formative feedback and increasing transparency in my work. Thus, literature concerning dialogic approaches to formative feedback joined the conversation. As I kept renegotiating the direction of the work through use of the various layers of data the literature retrieval became a pathway for the research rather than a strategy (Dilworth, 2008). The scholarly literature was used to help me to interpret my experiences.

Figure 2.2. Invitation to the dinner party: literature pathway



### **Reflective conversations: the use of dialogue as an interpretive tool**

By its nature, autoethnography within critical inquiry is a solitary process, fraught with the potential for inadvertent self delusion and misunderstanding (Ramirez, Allison-Roan, Peterson & Elliot-Johns, 2012). Therefore, when working with autobiographical data, there is a need to engage in external dialogue with others as this plays a vital role when reflecting on practice (Cranton, 2006; Tenni et al, 2003). Within this study, critical and reflective conversations were used as a device to help me to recognise my own cognitive and affective distortions and reframe my beliefs and practices. This added a layer of interactive, interpersonal reflection which involved engaging with others in the following ways.

Through professional dialogue, my supervisors questioned and challenged my direction thus helping me to consider alternative perspectives. Openness and challenge are central to the criticality of research supervision with autoethnographic research. Supervision should model the robust engagement the researcher has with the data, being able to step away but be connected so that the researcher is challenged to work with the data at a deeper level (Tenni et al, 2003). Continuing the metaphor of being at the edge of meaning, my supervisory team provided openings for me to 'push against the edge' and 'stand with me on the precipice' (J.Berger, 2004, p.342). My responses and thoughts following our supervisory conversations were recorded in the research journal.

However, their company alone on this journey was not enough. I took the opportunity to present aspects of my methodology at an International Conference (Luscombe, 2013) as well as local forums to engage in critical debate about the methodology and emerging ideas. Dialogue with colleagues concerning the issue of formative feedback occurred often, sometimes spontaneously and sometimes guided by myself. Practice stories were recorded following these, which were focused on my reactions to these conversations. Excerpts from the research journal and practice stories supporting insights emerging from the dialogical aspect of the research are explored further in chapter eight.

In order to add a further level of critical engagement, I was drawn to the analogy used by Manankil-Rankin (2014) who talks about the need to keep our mirror clean of dirt (e.g. ignorance and confusion) when critically reflecting in order to see things with clarity. It has been suggested that we should go through the mirror, rather than looking at what is reflected back; a willingness to go beyond the surface (Bolton, 2010). By restructuring my experiences from practice verbally, the potential was there to revise my perspectives. When peers listen to stories from practice and then reflect back to us what they see, there is an opportunity for the mirror to be wiped clean of the layer of dirt that is blinding a way of seeing alternatively (Manankil-Rankin, 2014). I employed the technique of a 'critical friend' to specifically discuss my practice stories with me in order to explore and encourage clarification of ideas by asking challenging questions and supporting the reframing of events. The process has some similarities with Manankil-Rankin's (2014) use of a reflective guide and fits with what Gray (2007) and Nilsson (2013) describe as reflective conversations or dialogue with the aim of seeking another individual to listen and stimulate reflective conversation.

The choice of critical friend was a deliberate one. He was a colleague undertaking a clinical doctorate pathway with another HEI. Having acted as critical readers for each other during the modular phases of the doctorate, he was aware of the developing focus of my research and I was confident that he had an understanding as to the level of critical thought required. He had previously worked in a similar role to myself and so had an understanding of the culture of both the department and the wider organisation. However, more importantly, I had to choose somebody that I trusted. For critical conversation to be effective, I needed to feel safe when disclosing my practice. I was becoming increasingly aware that autoethnography often leaves the researcher feeling exposed and vulnerable. We knew each other well and had worked closely together on other educational projects. From this experience, I made the assumption that he would have the ability to be supportive but also honest, constructive and challenging.

Similarly, my colleague needed to feel comfortable enough to be able to identify and discuss aspects of my practice that I may be taking for granted. When working with autobiographical data, the most personal, professional and theoretical learning comes when we take personal risk (Tenni et al, 2003). My critical friend's comfort in the process would depend on me developing an understanding of my defences and sources of resistance to occasionally difficult and unexpected confronting information that may emerge from the practice stories. If challenge is not worked with, there may be the temptation to discard, ignore or rationalise issues (Tenni et al, 2003). Genuinely reframing behaviour is difficult as it is arguably easier and more common to rationalise it (Berry & Loughran, 2008). For this reason, the critiquing aspect of critical friendship needs to develop slowly and sensitively and needs time for analysis and assimilation by the person being critiqued (Schuck & Russell, 2005).

Conversations are not automatically critical and have the potential to mutually reinforce prejudices. Just as I come to the practice situation influenced by my own habitus and associated dispositions, so too does my critical friend. There was the possibility that he may share and reinforce my assumptions rather than question my perspectives. This was an issue we discussed regularly to maintain our awareness of this and subsequently developed ground rules for our conversations based on the communicative virtues described by Burbules and Rice (1991). These included; tolerance and patience, respect for differences, a willingness to listen, the inclination to admit that one may be mistaken and the disposition to express ourselves honestly and sincerely. How these conversations were used to support the practice stories is discussed in chapter five.

### **Making meaning from the autoethnographic data**

The willingness to see, confront and discover oneself in one's own practice and to learn from this is at the core of this work and central to the creation of good data. (Tenni et al, 2003, p.6)

Autoethnographers are expected to approach their autobiographical data with critical and interpretive eyes in order to detect cultural undertones of what is

recalled and observed (Chang, 2006). To be critical is to be aware of and alert to the external and internal constraints and forces that prevent us from seeing the world as it really is (Habermas, 1984) recognising and challenging 'false consciousness' (Rolfe et al, 2011). Contextualising my practice stories in relation to the other sources of data was key to the critical layered approach to the inquiry as was investigating why certain events were storied and not others (Riessman & Quinney, 2005).

Tenni et al (2003) suggest that the creation of rich autobiographical material replete with issues for interpretation cannot happen unless the researcher is prepared to deeply engage with what is going on for them as they are immersed in practice and the research process. Through adopting a dialogic approach to writing my reflections in the reflective journal, reflections on the research process in my research log, having conversations with colleagues, supervisory team and my critical friend, new insights were emerging. This experience of reflexivity required me to shift attention back and forth between my personal and social context and to be patient with uncertainty (Chang, 2008). Ellis (2004) suggests a story is analytical in itself and that when people tell stories they employ analytic techniques to interpret the world. However, she also acknowledges that a researcher might also decide to add another layer of analysis by stepping back from the text and theorising about it from a different perspective. I applied a set of critical questions to my writing as a means of further sensitisation to what was emerging.

In terms of the emerging significance of my working class habitus, the way in which I had constructed the stories and how the language I had chosen to convey meaning seemed important to interrogate. Although as educators, our profession is based on relationships and communication, it is uncommon to closely examine the words we use, their connotations or the context of those interactions. Application of narratively based questions with which to consider my practice stories and autobiographical information helped to reveal the influences on my practice but also the assumptions and biases that might otherwise have remained hidden from me (Lyle, 2009). I adapted questions from Fraser's narrative framework (2004) as

a starting point to sensitise my thinking about the stories from practice in relation to the other sources of data throughout the process including the production of the autoethnographic text (Figure 2.3). Fraser (2004) invites modification of her framework stating that the relevance of the questions depends on the aims of the study and the specific interest of the researcher. I included a question suggested by Riley and Hawe (2005) in order to alert me to stories I might be choosing not to tell, known as mindful slippage (Medford, 2006).

**Figure 2.3 Sensitising questions for critical interpretation of data (adapted from Fraser 2004; Riley & Hawe 2005)**

Phase 1: Hearing the stories – noticing the emotion

- What sense do I get from the stories?
- How are emotions expressed?
- How do the stories start, unfold and end?
- What do I feel curious about?

Phase 2: Interpreting the stories – noting the specifics of each transcript.

- What words have I chosen and how have I emphasised them?
- What contradictions emerge?
- What significance do the titles of the stories have?
- Am I only telling some stories? Why? What am I excluding and why? (Riley & Hawe 2005)
- Which parts of the stories relate to interpersonal relationships and interactions? How do they relate to other aspects of the stories? Who am I including/excluding and why?
- Are cultural conventions/transgressions evident? If so, what are the effects?
- Are social structures present? If so, how do they appear and what is being said of them?
- What relationship do the stories have to particular discourses?
- What alternative views may be considered?
- What are the emergent insights and how are these unveiled?
- Are sensational, provocative or contentious stories foregrounded or avoided? If so, what are the implications of this?

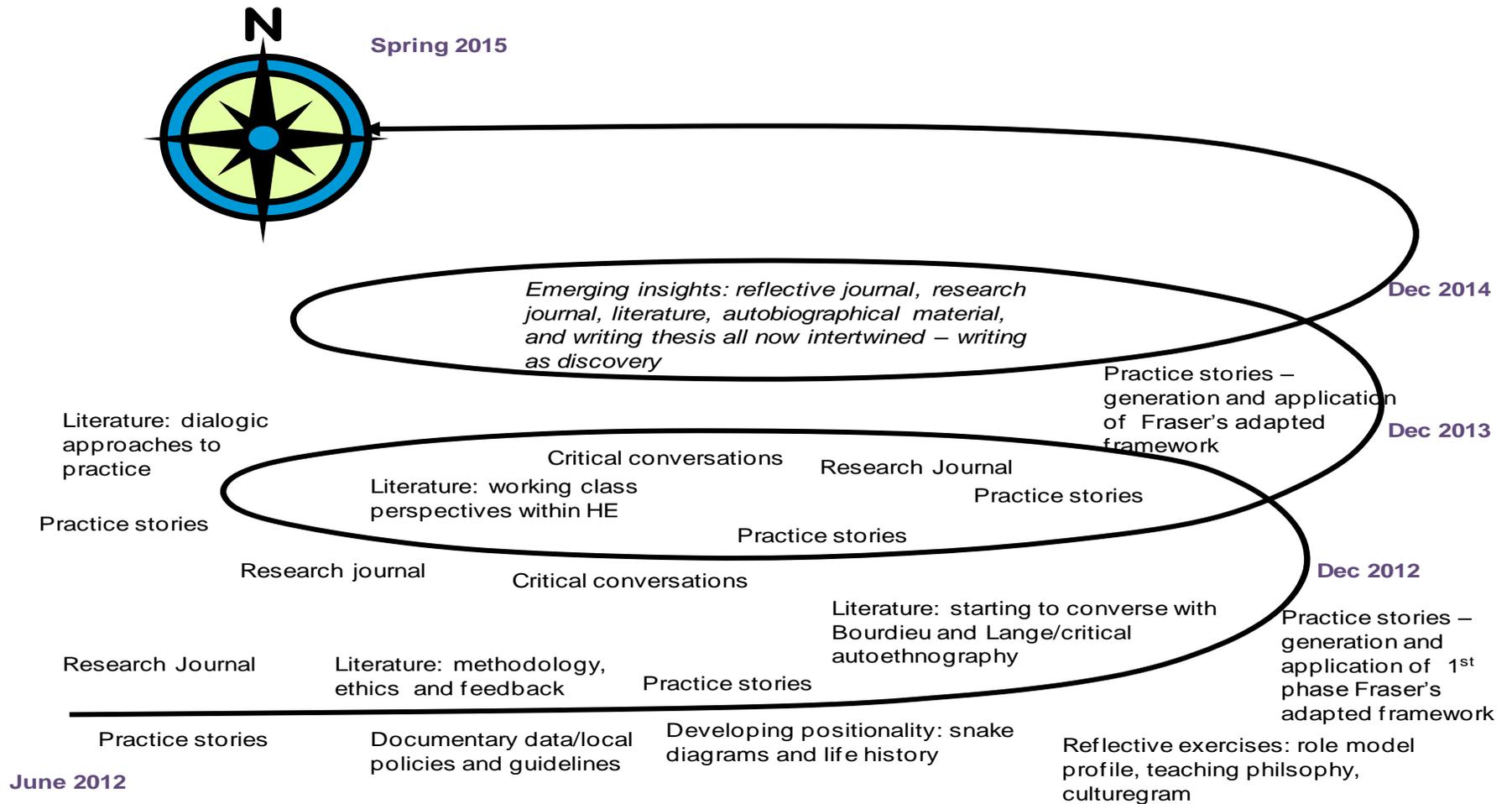
The sensitising questions encouraged initial immersion into the practice stories in order to get a sense of what they were about before focusing on language, form and structure of the story as well as content and potential structural influences. This process led me to consider issues that might have remained otherwise unexamined by providing clues as to how I think through events and what I value. This revealed itself in how and when particular events or activities are introduced, what was missing, how tension was portrayed and how I portrayed right and wrong.

This aspect of my methodology was a departure from Bourdieu's concept of reflexivity. It has been suggested that Bourdieu overplays the unconscious impulses of habitus and that our adjustments to the social world are less than conscious (Sayer, 2004). Through a layered approach using multiple sources of data, I made the process of reflection conscious as Crossley (2000) argues that development of habitus needs to include a dialogue with oneself – a 'mundane reflexivity' that consists of inner conversations. In summary, this 'jigsaw' of various sources of data was worked with simultaneously. Figure 2.4. demonstrates the non linear, levels of critical of engagement with the data throughout the study.

### **The ethical 'I' in autoethnography**

Not unexpectedly with emergent research, ethical matters shifted as I worked my way through the inquiry. Therefore, in the spirit of acknowledging the many twists and turns of the research, specific ethical decisions will be articulated in more detail in later chapters to allow me to reflect the reality of ethical decision making as a dynamic process rather than an event. However, in terms of procedural ethics, ethical approval needed to be obtained from both the HEI and the Health Care Organisation within which I work. I did initially question whether I needed ethical approval from my own setting as I was essentially reflecting on my own practice. Zeni (2001) suggests the line between good teaching, professional practice and research is often blurred until a study is underway.

Figure 2.4 Layers of engagement with data



Although I was accustomed to reflecting on my practice on an informal basis, through this study I was doing so with a greater intentionality of purpose with a heightened focus on the inquiry process. It was also significant that I intended to develop practice based on the findings and disseminate these to a wider audience. Once my name is linked to the research, it will not be difficult to know which organisation is involved. Although I was investigating the 'self', my reflections were not going to be the only source of data as my practice was being examined within a particular context and other documentary sources would be accessed such as policies and guidelines. I was intending to use minutes of meetings and emails that are all 'owned' by the organisation. Therefore, it felt like an ethical decision to apply for approval.

Autoethnographers often encounter ethical situations that do not fit strictly under ethics committees specified procedures (Ellis, 2007) as many organisational forums (particularly within health care settings) have been designed for scientific research and can be unfamiliar with the potential ethical challenges of non traditional research. The inductive, emergent nature of my proposed design meant I was unable to predict where the study would be taking me. Therefore, when negotiating access to my organisation, all I was able to do was present the initial outline to the Research Ethics Committee, the initial questions and how I was planning to answer them. In doing so, I acknowledged that this would not address the potential ethical dilemmas that may arise in an inquiry that develops as it progresses. Thus, ethical decisions needed to be revisited at every stage of the project and required consideration of issues such as identity, authority and power (Hill, 2006) not just during the active research phase but also when writing up (Magolda & Robinson 1993).

Although the ethical literature directs attention toward the potential for harm to research participants, there is little discussion on the potential for personal or emotional harm to the researcher. This approach was exposing of my own values, beliefs, emotions and practices to those around me leading to feelings of vulnerability and anxiety which could have either impeded progress or led to further

learning. Ethical issues around the vulnerability of myself as researcher are discussed in detail in chapter three when introducing the interpretation of the autobiographical information.

Dauphinee (2010, p.60) suggests that even though ethical approval is likely to be granted to studies that do not involve other participants, this “does not let autoethnographers off the hook”. Within autoethnography, other people are always present in self-narratives as we do not exist in a vacuum. Working and researching in the same establishment can present dilemmas such as the potential compromise of professional relationships and the difficulty of writing a critical and honest report when a researcher continues to work in the same setting (Zeni, 2001). It would be important not to underestimate the potential impact a research project might have, considering that acquiring new insights and understandings might upset not just my own equilibrium but that of my colleagues. An increased awareness of the politics of education and my own power to act may lead to isolation. These ethical considerations are discussed in detail in chapter five when introducing interpretation of the practice stories.

### **Quality of the study**

Within the field of autoethnography, it has been questioned whether criteria for quality should be used at all, being social products created in the course of evolving a set of practices to which we agree to conform (Bochner, 2000). Judging quality is considered to be political where some voices and research approaches are privileged whilst others are silenced (Adams et al, 2014). Although discussions within the autoethnographic literature concerning quality often have an anti criteria flavor to them, autoethnographers have nonetheless offered suggestions for considering studies using this approach (Bochner, 2000; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Ellis, 2007; Richardson, 2000). Most of the commonalities amongst these perspectives are encompassed by Richardson (2000) who suggests considering substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, impact and expression of reality within the text.

Instead of developing lists of universal criteria, it has been suggested that it would be more constructive to begin with the acknowledgement that the selection of criteria should be related to the particular piece of research being evaluated and the purpose for which it is to be used (Armstrong, 2008). Ellis (2004), Duncan (2004) and Sparkes and Smith (2009) have all taken the approach of offering their own criteria for reviewers with which to consider their work. These authors are established in the field of autoethnography and the approaches they take to their own research will arguably have influenced the aspects they are interested in, meaning their discussions of criteria feel very personal. Reviewers are likely to have their own criteria for judging alternative forms of research that will be further challenged and modified when engaging with actual inquiries (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Their views are likely to be influenced by the type of research they have conducted, other studies they have read and what they personally find engaging. These views are also likely to be open to constant re-interpretation depending on the context and purpose of the research. Whilst this is exciting for me as a researcher using an alternative approach it is also disconcerting from a student perspective as I will have no concept of the personal criteria that my examining board might be bringing to the table in addition to the established criteria for doctoral work. However, it also provides an opportunity for dialogue and discussion about the role of criteria in judging alternative forms of research.

The reader plays a crucial part in establishing the value of autoethnographic research. Ellis and Bochner (1996) suggest that a good account can inspire a different way of reading and is not meant to be consumed as 'knowledge'. My aim for this inquiry was to spark recognition with the reader who can then take an active role, reflecting critically on their own influences and experiences and come to their own conclusions about what it might mean for them and others. However, I am aware that readers will also interpret this thesis through their own intersubjective lens as they will understand my account on the basis of their own experiences. I have written this thesis through a class tinged lens but others may view it as a gendered account for example. Although I am offering the work of Bourdieu and Lange as theoretical possibilities to illuminate my discussion, readers

may consider other theories with which to think through the work. In order to add to the requirements of the examining board I am putting forward some questions for other readers of this inquiry which are influenced by Ellis (2004), Bochner (2000) and Richardson (2000) and are linked to the aims of my research (Figure 2.5).

**Figure 2.5. Suggested questions for engaging with this autoethnography**

- Substantive contribution: in what ways does this inquiry give you an insight into the influences on my lived experience as a learner, practitioner and researcher and the resulting development of professional practice?
- Aesthetic merit: does this thesis engage you narratively by inviting resonances with your own experience as a researcher and/or practitioner? Has it prompted a spark of recognition? In what ways has the text engaged you emotionally and intellectually?
- Reflexivity: in what ways has my subjectivity been both a producer and product of this inquiry? Has there been adequate autobiographical disclosure to support the interpretations?
- Impact: In what ways has this inquiry stimulated you to critically reflect on the influences on your own professional practice or stimulated your thinking concerning the role of autoethnography?
- Have I taken a relationally responsible approach to the research?

**Bringing bias out of the closet**

As the use of the self is foregrounded, autoethnography is often tainted with accusations of self indulgence and solipsism (Atkinson, 2006; Delamont, 2007). As a researcher and practitioner, I am a socio-cultural being; a living, contradictory, vulnerable, evolving multiple self who is speaking in a partial, subjective and culturally bound voice, relationally connected to the world around me. By acknowledging the situated perspective of my work, my aim is not to overcome subjectivity as a perceived limitation but to reveal what helped to shape it which is the very essence of this autoethnography. As a socio-cultural being, my research will constantly be impacting on myself and subsequently others around me. Subjective perceptions, personal knowledge and uncertainty are therefore not only

valid but also should be expected and be considered a resource for understanding the problematic world of practice.

My role as an autoethnographer is to deconstruct the biases that influence my personal and professional life. I am bringing “bias out of the closet and situating it within heart and soul” (Mitra, 2010, p.13). My challenge was not to eliminate bias but to use it as a focus for more intense insight (G. Frank, 1997). However, my interpretations should certainly be treated as problematic and open to construction rather than as truths. Writing the stories and the research text has been conditional on my decisions as a researcher. I decided where to begin my story, what to tell, in what order and in how much detail. I can only reveal that of which I am aware. As Peshkin (1985) suggests, my ideas are candidates for others to entertain, not necessarily as truths but as positions about the nature and meaning of my work as a Lecturer which may fit with their sensibilities and shape their thinking about their own inquiries.

This thesis is based on my memories which will be distorted and inconsistent. The aim is to reflect on my memories thus demonstrating reflexivity and opening up dialogue rather than providing explanations. This process has been rigorous and demanding, requiring courage and high levels of personal, relational, cultural and theoretical reflexivity (Grant, Short & Turner, 2013). Therefore, practice based on autoethnographic exploration could be considered more credible and ethical with inherent integrity and the potential to be transformative or catalytic for others beyond the individual (Short & Grant, 2009).

### **Continued wandering in the methodological maze**

The process of producing this research text has been layered in complexity. As I negotiated the inquiry, I experienced considerable nervousness, if not occasional panic, at the interweaving of data generation and interpretation which has ultimately led to the production of this autoethnographic text. The following chapters present the interpretations as emerging insights. The term ‘findings’ would have implied an end to the research when in reality the process continues to be

ongoing as I work with these emerging insights every day in practice. Through engaging with the layers of data, I have been continually applying new insights into practice and these are presented in the next chapters to demonstrate the learning, challenges and dilemmas that emerged as a result.

The remainder of the thesis is framed by the concepts of restorative learning (Lange, 2007) beginning with an introductory chapter to the presentation of the evocative personal story that emerged from the autobiographical writing and reflective exercises brought into conversation with concepts from Bourdieu and others. A restored marginalised perspective and resulting personal influences emerged as a core insight that influenced the critical focus of the inquiry, providing an ethical direction for a more informed mode of practice. Following the evocative story, emerging personal influences are brought into conversation with emerging insights from the practice stories illustrating the intersectionality of personal, professional and broader socio cultural influences on feedback practice.

## Chapter 3

### Looking backwards in order to move forward

Letting go of the quest for mastery over the world in turn opens us up to the world – it just may not be the world we had intended. (Heidegger & Farrell Krell, 1993)

### The role of autobiographical writing in developing the focus of the research

This chapter serves as an introduction to the evocative personal story woven with theory that emerged from the autobiographical life history and reflective exercises. Although we tend to live forward but understand backward (Bochner, 1997) there is not a clear division between the past, present and the future, as the past is always viewed through the lens of the present. However, in looking backward, the emergence of personal influences on my practice brought with it an emotional health warning (Struthers, 2012). Within this chapter, I discuss how my emerging personal vulnerabilities were experienced and framed within ethical decision making in autoethnography. I then focus on the methodological role of autobiographical writing in revealing a core insight concerning personal influences on practice that determined the critical direction of the research and a move to a more informed relational approach to practice.

### Vulnerability in autoethnographic writing

Let it go, let it out, let it all unravel, let it free and it will be a path on which to travel. (Leunig, 2012)

As I approached the task of autobiographical writing, I became aware of a feeling of discomfort. I noticed that I was avoiding thinking about or producing the life history, choosing instead to tackle notes on more complex methodological issues or potential theoretical frameworks. Once I started to write autobiographically, I understood why. When Bochner (1997) wrote about his 'divided self', he described his academic and personal worlds colliding and here I was confronted with the wide gulf that divided mine. Du Preez (2008) talks about experiencing a sense of relief at having put together the series of events that led him to embark on his doctoral journey. I am unsure whether relief was the correct word to describe writing this section. The act of writing some of my experiences down on paper and

having them stare starkly back at me was deeply uncomfortable at times as they produced unsettling memories. The caution by autoethnographers, Short (2010) and Struthers (2012) that autoethnography should come with an emotional health warning sat on my shoulder during my writing processes.

Until I started to critically reflect in depth on my practice, I had avoided acknowledging any influence of my social class on my learning and professional trajectory. As intended, the autobiographical writing enabled me to reflect on the origin of my research questions and research interests. However more disconcertingly, it was also prompting me to question how I had ever reached the point of doing doctoral study at all. As the influence of my working class habitus emerged and I made the decision to include the autobiographical information, I recalled the experience of the critical autoethnographic researcher Roberts (2013) who, as a first generation HE student, stated that she worried about being judged by her professor for sharing personal information and wondered whether it would change his perception of her. My discomfort indicated that I had underlying concerns about revealing my social class background. This anxiety has been articulated by Newman (2013) who examined his anxiety around trying to hide his working class habitus within the academy and associated social events. He questioned whether if his colleagues knew who he really was, would his existence in the academy unravel like the tangled web he had woven to get there. However, as Stone (1997, p.142) states “every story worth telling is a dare, composed of everything we’re not supposed to say, for fear of being found out, pointed out”.

Vulnerability of the researcher was an issue that I had considered at the beginning of the study. Yet, it was not until I was immersed within the autobiographical data that these issues became more than just words on a page and I began to experience the meaning of that vulnerability on both a personal and professional level. Ellis (2004) cautions us that there is a risk that the inclusion of personal stories means that you ‘become’ your stories to your reader and to yourself, as readers will often assume we continue to be the story we write. Through writing this thesis, I am making myself vulnerable and open to critique from my peers bringing

with it the possibility that students and colleagues will think differently of me. As discussed in chapter two, charges of solipsism have been levelled at autoethnography (Atkinson, 2006; Delamont, 2007) and I did not want this to read as a self absorbed 'poor me' story as this is not how I want to represent myself. Although vulnerability can be a tool for research insight, Behar (1997) cautions that it must have a purpose in that it should be essential to the argument and not exposure for its own sake. I needed to tread that line between experiencing and examining that vulnerability within the broader context of the experience. Once words are 'out there' in print, they cannot be taken back and I will have no control about how others will respond to or interpret it (Ellis, 2004).

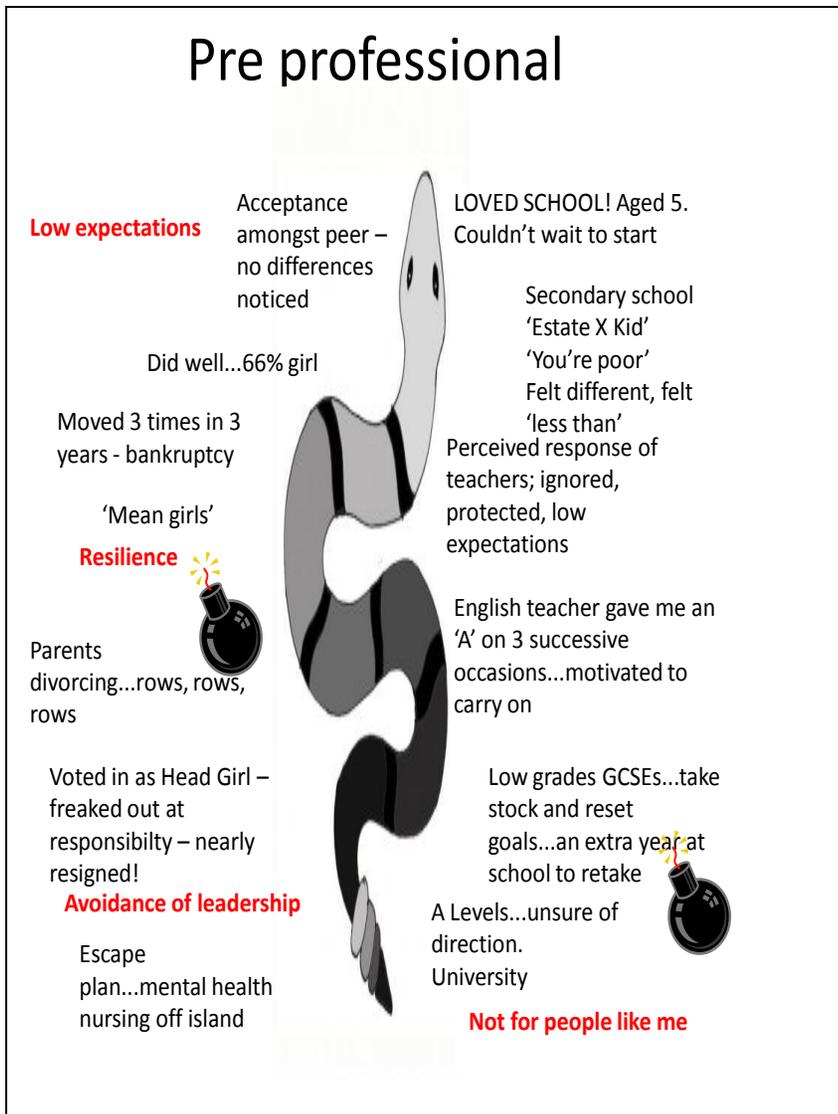
In order to help anticipate issues of potential vulnerability, Tolich (2010) suggests treating the writing as an inked tattoo with no opportunity of a skin graft, further cautioning that there are no reversible skin grafts for autoethnographic doctorates. This was disconcerting. However, emerging from the text was a personal story in which my early experiences of social class became a predominant influence on my habitus and dispositions and these insights underpinned the developing critical focus of the research from a marginalised perspective. Stepping out from behind the curtain of academic oz requires transparency. Not including the personal story would have been like leaving out a piece of the jigsaw; the piece that makes the sky complete. Although the use of autobiographical information has at times left me feeling that I may have disclosed too much on a very personal level and has led to feelings of vulnerability, this has been part of the process of producing what Ellis (1999) may describe as a 'heartful autoethnography'. Yet, the purpose has not been purely personal, rather the aim was to produce research in which myself, phenomenon and theory are articulated. This distinguishes autoethnography from personal confessional and instead self exploration is used to influence practice.

### **Autobiographical writing: restoring a marginalised perspective**

My growing conscientisation of the influence of my working class habitus on the way I view the world and practice within it started to emerge as I completed the snake diagrams (Figures 3.1 and 3.2) and the life history. Through creating this

data visually and the act of writing down my experiences, my working class background and subsequent impact on my self perception and educational experiences was there to see. A commitment to reflexivity drew me towards the realisation that I was writing from a marginalised perspective. This caused a disjuncture in my thinking as not only had I not been acknowledging my working class background, now that I was working in a relatively privileged professional position as Lecturer, I did not consider myself marginalised. However, I was curious to explore how these early life and educational experiences were now impacting on me as a practitioner and researcher. Completing a series of reflective exercises as discussed in chapter two demonstrated a commitment to working with learners that I consider marginalised within the HE system.

*“Critically reflecting on this issue has made me more aware that it is no accident that I have chosen to work with mature students who are working full time whilst studying for a degree with many competing responsibilities. Many of these students face challenges in their studies both because of these competing responsibilities but also because many of them have not studied for many years, did not do well at school, are nervous of undertaking the work or do not think themselves capable of achieving. Here, I am describing myself.” (Excerpt from life history).*



Figures 3.1 Snake diagram: School Years

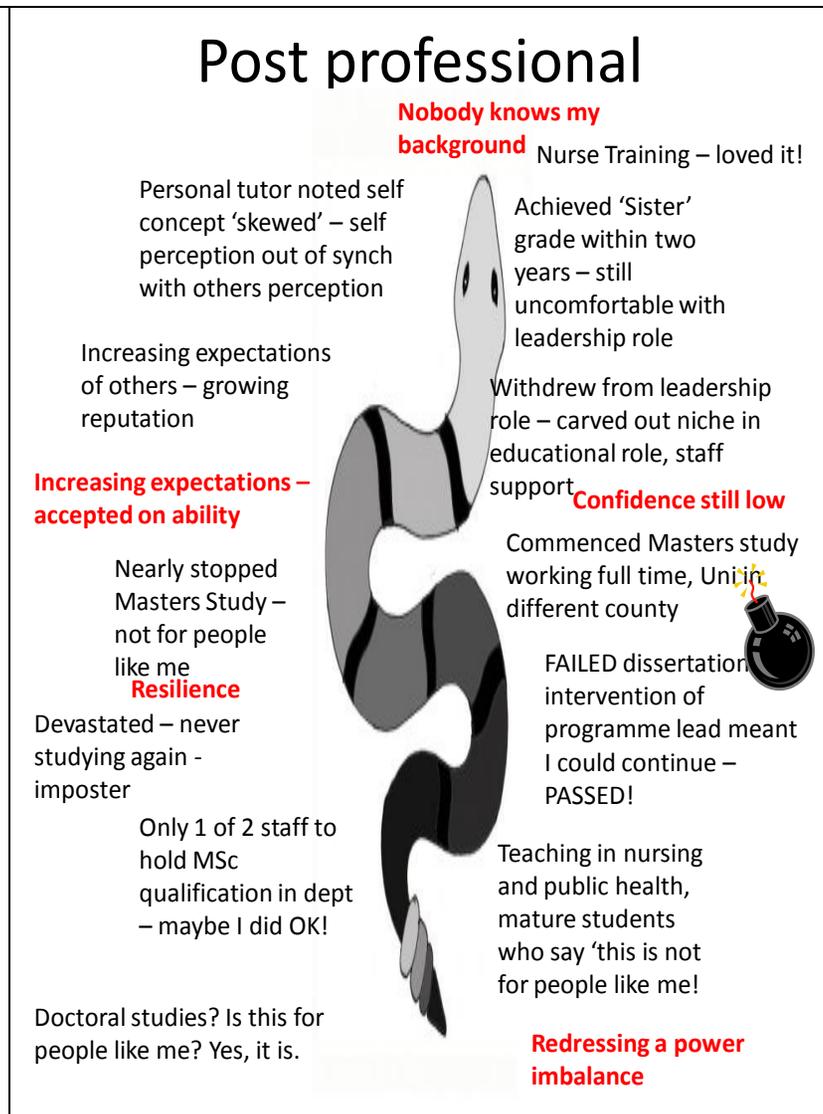


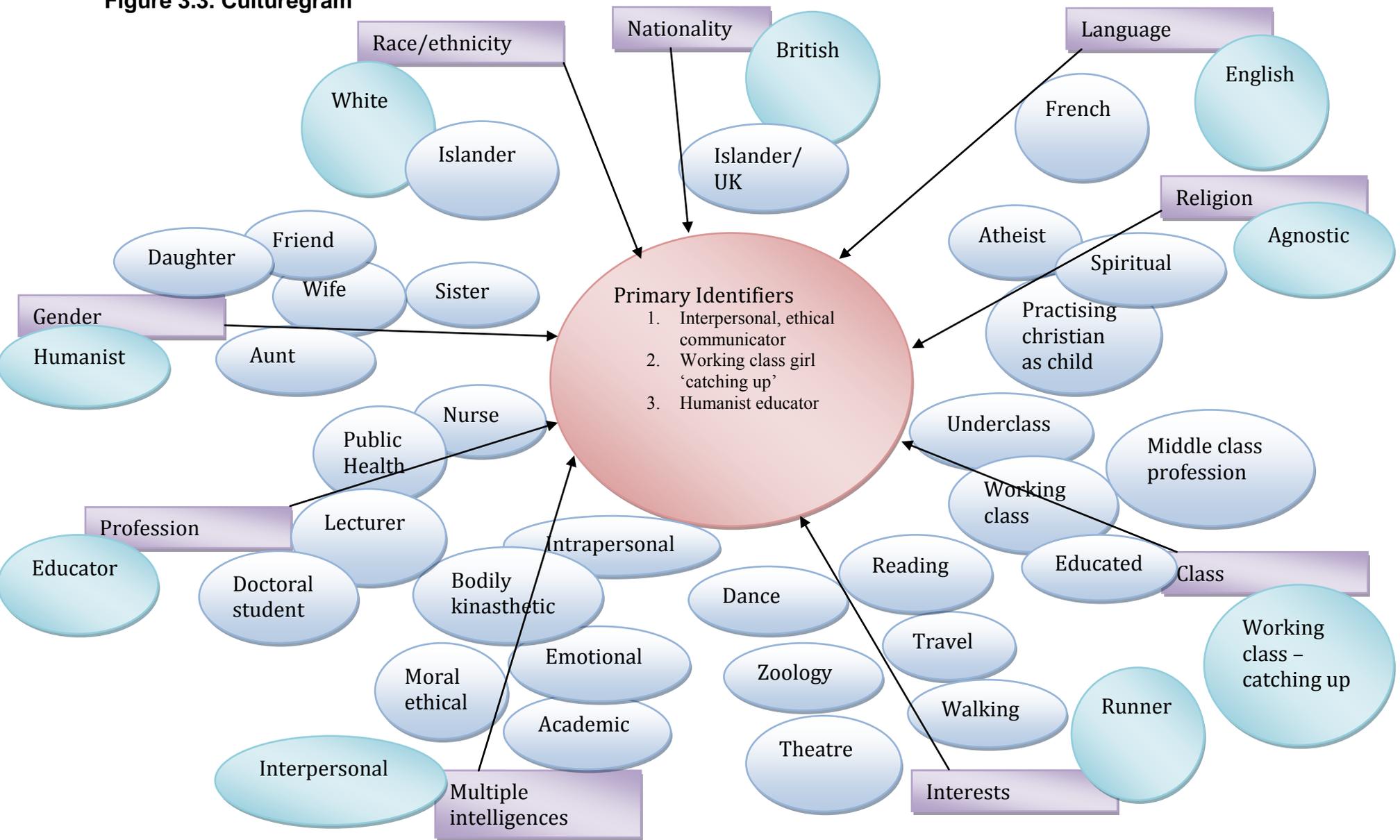
Figure 3.2. Snake Diagram: Professional years

The culturegram (Chang, 2008) (Figure 3.3) illustrated an array of life experiences, involvements, familial groups, passions and cultural competencies which influence my habitus and dispositions. Having started out with a naive assumption that I was quite mono cultural, particularly in the diversity dimensions that others may attribute greater significance (e.g. nationality, religion, race/ethnicity), this diagram demonstrates that my human experience is indeed multicultural and that I exist in a complex cultural web. In particular, the culturegram allowed me to identify conflicting aspects of the dimensions of my social world in relation to social class.

Social class emerged as an important but confused identifier as I became aware that my experiences within that dimension have formed the foundations for who I am becoming and what is important to me. I had initially labelled myself 'middle class' as I live a comfortable lifestyle, am in a middle class profession and earn a good income. However social class is a way of life and does not necessarily change with personal or family income (Orbe, 2013). I have always felt that I am somehow trying to 'catch up' although I am never sure with exactly what. Feelings of discord during this 'labelling' exercise prompted me to reflect on the source of that discomfort. As I am learning not to deny my origins, my working class status has increased in prominence, as explored in chapter four. The final step of creating the culturegram is to fill the centre circle with three primary self identifiers in the order of personal importance. These may change depending on time, occasion and context (Chang, 2008). At this time, my primary identifiers emerged as being consistent with the developing direction of the research; interpersonal, ethical communicator, working class girl 'catching up' and humanist educator.

Class identities can be found in practices and how we think and feel about those practices (Reay, 2005; Savage, 2003). As the autobiographical information indicated that I was writing, thinking and practising from a marginalised perspective, my dispositions arising from my previously unacknowledged working class habitus emerged as a significant influence. This connection between social class, thinking, feeling and practice has been described as the 'psychic landscape'

**Figure 3.3. Culturegram**



of social class (Reay, 2005). The issue of class is, of course, only separable from identities of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality in the abstract sense as they are all interlinked (Hurst, 2007). Yet, discussions about class can be unsettling (Sayer, 2004). Reay (2006, p.260) describes class as “everywhere and nowhere, denied yet continually enacted, infusing the minutiae of everyday interactions”. Similar points are made by Nesbit (2005) who states that although social class is rarely evident in adult education discourse, no one should doubt its existence and Zweig (2000, p.4) describes it as “one of the nation’s best kept secrets with any serious discussion of this tending to be ‘banished from polite company’”. Through this inquiry, I am bringing it to my autoethnographic dinner table to be discussed in polite company. When generating the autobiographical material, class was there, peeping out from behind the life story I was writing and creating, moving from a whisper to be heard to a shout that I could not ignore.

Viewing my social and professional world through a critical lens heavily tinged with social class connotations was not something I had expected or wished to be writing about. However, I opened myself up to a world that was not one I had intended (Heidegger & Farrell Krell, 1993). I turned to the anthologies of working class educators who have struggled with their class identities (Dews & Law, 1995; Ryan & Sackrey, 1996) and investigated more recent work of critical autoethnographers who have written from a class perspective regarding academia such as McIlveen et al (2010), Newman (2013), Orbe (2013), Roberts (2013) and Romo (2004). Their works are referred to during chapter four in order to illustrate or explain emerging insights from my autobiographical data. Insights from this initial layer of engagement with the data led to the evolving critical focus of the research during the first six months of the inquiry.

### **Weaving story with theory to explore personal influences on practice**

Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field, capital and symbolic violence have been used within chapter 4 to ‘think’ with when examining the autobiographical data. This has facilitated critical reflection on the educational and professional ‘choices’ I have made along the journey to becoming Lecturer and doctoral student. As an

individual, my 'habitus' is a concept that consists of a set of values and dispositions that I carry with me that shape my attitudes, behaviours and responses to given situations (Bourdieu, 1973). Individual histories are considered vital to understanding this concept (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009). Habitus is made up of various forms of capital and it is the distribution of capitals amongst individuals that determines the chances of success for practices (Reay et al, 2009). As we enter into various 'fields' of practice (school, workplaces, friendship groups, neighbourhoods, HE), this translates into symbolic capital which we use to negotiate our position in these fields. Each field has its own rules or doxa and individuals are evaluated by these rules and ascribed their positions in the field. Gaining an understanding of these concepts enabled me to understand the relational nature of decisions and choices I have made or not made and identify structural influences on practice. Habitus is not static but instead an ongoing and dynamic process as we continually make our history albeit not always under conditions of our own making. My reading of Bourdieu sees habitus as permeable and responsive in relation to field thus allowing individuals a sense of agency and fluidity. The appeal of the relational nature of these concepts is the potential for change it brings with it.

### **Moving forward from a restored vantage point**

Lange's (2007) concepts of recovery and relatedness within the theory of restorative learning frame the discussion in the following chapter. As I engaged with the autobiographical information, my values were brought back to the surface, providing an ethical direction for the development of the research and a more informed mode of practice when constructing feedback for students (relatedness). Through presentation of the evocative section of the autoethnography in chapter four, I explore the unpacking of the baggage cart of beliefs, values and assumptions (Neese, 2003) that underpin my developing professional practice.

## Chapter 4

### Looking out from behind the curtains of Academic Oz

A person can't change the past merely by opposing it – this is an act of self deception. (Bochner, 2012, p.169)

#### Restoration of a marginalised perspective

This section of the autoethnography explores my lived experiences as someone from a previously uninterrogated working class background working towards entry into HE as a learner and as a practitioner. In response to the first research question, influences arising from my personal experiences as a learner within the education system are explored working with the concept of habitus in relation to field (Bourdieu, 1973). These personal influences are then considered in relation to my current practice as a Lecturer, thus providing the impetus for further critical questioning as the research progressed. This chapter is an exploration of my path leading to HE viewed through a critical social class tinged lens. It is about who I was, who I am becoming and who I may be as I find new ways of understanding my personal professional self within the cultures I inhabit.

Chovanec and Lange (2006) suggest that most adult education literature is concerned with the *transformation* rather than the *formation* of consciousness whereas their work starts with the assumption that social consciousness begins early in life. Their comparison of various studies demonstrated that the experience of or exposure to marginalisation were precipitating factors that engaged individuals in a greater awareness of social contradictions and a deepening critical consciousness. One of the most significant discoveries in Lange's (2004) research was the restoration of the participants' foundational ethics in their daily lives. Therefore, the concept of 'recovery' within the theory of restorative learning (Lange, 2007) is used to illuminate the final sections of this chapter relating to application to practice.

Writing about my past experiences has involved writing from recreated memories. Memories are "tricksters and shapeshifters" (Sparkes, 2012, p.184) and likely to be distorted or inconsistent. As I am interweaving recall, (re) interpretation and critical

reflexivity, my aim is not to depict experience as it was lived but rather to try and extract potential meanings from my reflections about my experience. Therefore, the narrative within this chapter is presented from a restored vantage point resulting from a layered approach to writing and interpretation. The autobiographical information has been brought into conversation with relevant literature and examples from practice stories, reflective conversations and the research journal where appropriate. In essence, I am linking story with theory in a non linear exploration of the influences of my working class habitus and resulting sense of impostership on my current practice.

### **Recovery. Introducing an 'imposter': a developing consciousness of class**

Don't peek; don't look behind the facade! If you do, you might just discover that I don't belong here: that I do not fit neatly into the prescribed mould of the academe! (Long, Jenkins & Bracken, 2000, p.1)

I have spent my professional life waiting to be 'found out'. Exploration of the autobiographical data and the literature allowed me to understand why. I started to question whether some of my experiences as a learner and a professional within HE can be partly explained by the quote above which Long et al (2000) suggest often reflects the fear of the working class academic. The 'imposter phenomenon' was developed by Clance and Imes (1978) initially to refer to accomplished women who have a belief that they do not deserve recognition and that they are less competent and intelligent than they appear to be. Their research identified several factors that are relevant to me personally that are considered to be contributory; working class background, first born, first in the family to achieve academic or professional success and no expectations or encouragement from school or family regarding achievement.

I grew up on a state funded social housing estate which provided long term housing for people on low incomes. It housed a concentration of families with complex needs and was considered an area of deprivation which is, of course, relative in global terms. However, to offer some perspective in Western societal terms, a local politician described the estate as containing the 'underclass' which

has been defined as the societal strata that experiences chronic poverty across generations and is entrenched in social constructs that perpetuate these circumstances (Van Haitsma, 1989). Being labelled as and identifying yourself as the underclass can be accompanied by a range of negative connotations that include being seen or seeing yourself as less deserving (Reay, 2007). Social class remains an elusive and contested construct (Liu & Xu, 2011) and typologies of class stratification have been criticised since the early 1980s. It can have multiple meanings in peoples' lives and can be conceptualised differently. This complexity of conceptualisation is what I understand now. However, once I entered the education system I understood that according to traditional classification systems, we were a working class/underclass family.

When researching experiences, there is a danger that individuals rather than the objective structures within which dominant structures are perpetuated can become problematised (Bowl, 2003). However, without going into unnecessary detail (I have no wish to demonise the area in which I lived or unnecessarily expose any behaviour of my family), a few snapshots should provide the reader with an insight into the type of background that contributed to shape aspects of my habitus; not having the right clothes and being teased for it at school, a teacher at primary school buying me a bathing cap as my mother could not afford it and I would not be allowed to swim without it, bailiffs evicting us from our home and taking all our property due to unpaid debts. Social class is not just concerned with economic capital, but those of us who grew up without it tend to be very aware that not having it impacts on every other area of your life. Lack of income shapes and constrains priorities and choices and, in combination with other social factors, can marginalise citizens (Clayton, 2000). Class is not all about theory. It matters in ways that are painfully obvious to those disadvantaged by it and often goes unrecognised by others who are not (Skeggs, 1997). Categorisation in terms of class misses the complexity of lived experiences.

Before commencing school I do not remember being conscious of class. As children, we only played with other children on the estate and so were not exposed

to different experiences other than through popular media. Primary school must have felt like a level playing field. It had a close catchment area and I remained unaware that my life represented an underclass classification that was viewed by society as being disadvantaged, in poverty and 'at risk'. In Bourdieuan terms I was like a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.27), operating within the field in which my habitus was formed, not necessarily conscious of the water around me and in a comfort zone that allowed me to cope with my situation. It was not until I went to secondary school where the catchment area was much wider that I discovered divisions, labels and expectations based on class.

I discovered I was considered as 'other' in secondary school as I experienced being judged by where I lived, as identified by participants in studies by Reay (2007) and Bottrell (2009). I do not remember considering myself deprived until others defined me in this way. I can remember one of the boys at school saying to me 'you're from Estate X – you must be poor'. He said this with disdain, as if I was not worth talking to anymore. This was one of my first experiences of language and labels being not only stigmatising but also identity forming. I learned that stigma was associated with living in low income housing. Yet, whilst outsiders viewed my housing estate as possibly dangerous, with criminal behaviour and poverty, my early memories are of a tight community and lots of laughter with the estate children. However, having read Diane Reay's work (2007) about perceptions of and about children in sink estates I now wonder whether my description of a tight community is an attempt to reframe the environment in order to minimise the stigmatising properties I may be presenting. This presents a complex, contradictory, interweaving of ambivalence and defensiveness because in reality, as the years progressed, I could not wait to leave the place and all it represented.

Certainly, once I was aware of the working class label, I resented it. I became a 'fish out of water' experiencing moments of dissonance and disorientation having moved into an unfamiliar field. Reay et al (2009) describe this feeling as an 'out of habitus' or 'out of field' experience. I became quiet, earned the nickname 'mouse' and started to develop social behaviour and dispositions that would inform my

further interactions in this field, retreating into myself. Bourdieu (1985) talks about the body as being the physical site where class relations are embodied and practised as bodily dispositions carry the markers of social class. This has led me to recognise that my posture, the way I move and often my silence in a learning situation was a reflection of my self perceived disjuncture of my own working class habitus; an embodied habitus. This form of passivity has been linked to alienation and marginalisation (Lange, 2004).

As I became conscious of my 'otherness', my class consciousness grew and I internalised shame about my class identification. This is illustrated by a memory of a sociology class in secondary school, where we were being taught about the traditional classifications of social class and the identifiers and characteristics that were attributed to each sector. Sociologically, looking at the criteria I thought that my family fitted firmly into the working class descriptions in terms of income, occupation and attitudes. However, I can remember looking at the attributes for the 'lower middle class' sector and trying desperately to fit myself into this, perhaps my first attempt at dis-identification, a concept developed by Skeggs (1997) to describe women who distance themselves from their current class position. I remember that this exercise provoked feelings of inadequacy and a feeling of being 'less than' (Reay, 2007); an early example of my experiences of symbolic violence.

The role model profiles (Appendix 4) suggest that I have a tendency to view educators as 'experts' which perhaps also explains my initial confusion at diversity of practice amongst colleagues. This perception has perhaps been an entrenched belief since I was young. I remember a conversation with an English teacher, when I was about 14 years old. As a class, we were reading 'Down and Out in London and Paris' by George Orwell (1972). In one passage, Boris, one of the Paris tramps covers up a hole in his black sock with charcoal in order to disguise it. My teacher's opinion was that this demonstrated eccentric behaviour. I did not view it as eccentric but instead thought it showed resourcefulness and a desire to maintain his dignity. We discussed this for a few minutes, both offering supporting evidence of our points of view from other episodes in the book relating to this character and

his actions. From a restored perspective, I now understand that my views were informed by my personal knowledge of how resourceful people without money can be in order to maintain appearances or present a facade. However, when I came to write the essay, I presented my teacher's point of view rather than my own. He expressed surprise that I had done so as I had disagreed with him in our conversation. I knew I had done so because I thought he must be right as he was the teacher. This was perhaps also a reflection of my belief at that time that knowledge originates from outside of my 'self'. I remember feeling genuinely surprised that he had expected me to express an opinion that was different to his in my written work.

This was the first time I had realised that my opinion might be valid if I was able to support it and suggests that although I had the ability at an early stage to be thinking critically and to use my personal background to inform an alternative opinion, I did not have the confidence to follow this through and to express my 'voice'. I believed the authority figure with a perceived higher social standing than myself must be right. These memories helped me to identify a contradiction in my current thinking. I had joined the profession as a qualified 'educator', yet I did not consider myself to be an 'expert'. I remember feeling disconcerted when RNs, with whom I had worked in nursing practice, now seemed to assume I knew everything about education even though I had just joined the profession. How did they think I had suddenly accumulated all of this new knowledge? The label of 'Lecturer' is a powerful one. I felt uncomfortable. I felt I was an imposter. These feelings could have been related to my novice status in the profession (Diekelmann, 2004; McArthur-Rouse, 2008; Neese, 2003). However, with a few more years experience, I still do not consider myself to be an expert in relation to the students, preferring to ally myself to Freire's (2000) concept of social constructionism between students and teachers in which both learn, both question, both reflect and both participate in meaning making. Why then, would I consider other educators to be always right and why did I not consider myself to be able to contribute to that partnership with educators when I was a learner?

### **‘Choices’ or ‘horizons for action’?**

At school, I always thought of myself as a ‘B+’ girl. I remember doodling 66% on my books as that was my average grade. I even occasionally got As! In Year 9, every year, a selection of students were ‘recommended’ to go to the advanced college to continue their GCSEs and ‘A’ Levels, recognised as a local feeder institution for HE. Only a small number of students received this recommendation each year and I was one of those selected but I declined the offer. I am unable to remember my reasoning around this. Perhaps I felt nervous at making the move or did not see the value of it. Engaging with the concept of ‘horizons for action’ (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p.34) which encompasses habitus, external opportunities and whether these opportunities are seen as available or appropriate helps me now to understand that horizons for action can both limit and enable our view of the world and our choices we make within it. Although there may have been encouragement by teachers to take advantage of this opportunity, this was irrelevant if I did not consider it a route to take thus creating the effect of a ‘non-decision’ where the possibility of choice is effectively removed (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Habitus produces action but if horizons are limited, those actions tend to be reproductive rather than transformative. We act according to our ‘feel for the game’ (Grenfall, 2008), the ‘feel’ being our ‘habitus’ and the ‘game’ being the ‘field’. I was effectively relegating myself out of the game.

I did not fail my exams but did not do as well as predicted. I had always blamed myself for this. However, when writing the life history, I remembered that my home life at that time with a messy divorce could only be described as a battlefield which made concentrating on exam revision difficult. Cramped housing meant that there was no space for homework or escape from noise. In retrospect, perhaps I can be excused for not concentrating on my exams. Although I stayed on an extra year at school to increase my grades before starting on my A levels, this decision was not related to any plans or vision as to what I may do next; I just enjoyed school as it was an escape from home. However, going to university was not a consideration. Nobody I had grown up with on the estate or any of my family had ever been. That was not for people like me. Neither of my parents or any of my teachers ever discussed this with me as an option. In fact, my mother strongly encouraged me to

take typing and shorthand classes as I would need this skill for employment. I followed her advice and am pleased I did so as I am very competent with a computer keyboard!

From everyday social practices, we construct knowledge as a set of assumptions that are taken for granted (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) describe how various stimuli during upbringing shape our outlook, beliefs and practices influencing our dispositions in ways that impact on our educational trajectories. Social experiences are an integral part of our decision making processes concerning choices about HE. Bourdieu talks about the value of social networks as capital which can be used to produce or reproduce inequality. I remember there was an opportunity for me to go on a visit to view universities with the school. However, this coincided with the opportunity for my younger sister to go on an adventure field trip with her own school. There was not enough money for both of us but I immediately said that my sister should go as university was not an option for me. As far as I can recollect, I said this with disappointment but without bitterness and was not contradicted by my mother or my teachers despite my good grades at that time.

These experiences are likely to have impacted on my self perception regarding my potential to achieve in an educational arena. Student's self esteem can be permanently affected as perceptions of their academic abilities and future possibilities are not recognised (Romo, Bradfield & Serrano, 2004). When discussing working class women within HE, Long et al (2000) identified how they often devalue their own abilities if they have not been supported or validated within the family unit. The lack of encouragement from family arguably contributed to my unchallenged belief that university was not a viable choice. Here, it could be argued that I was complicit with symbolic violence. I internalised knowledge and expectations about HE being an alien place for me and so arguably positioned myself outside of that field. Bourdieu (1992) suggests that the dominated always contribute to their own domination but that this should be understood within the context of it not always being a deliberate or conscious concession but an unconscious fit between their habitus and field.

Engaging with Bourdieu's relational concepts of habitus, capital and field, allowed me to understand that I had choices but they were not necessarily visible to me. Choices are not decontextualised or disembodied (Reay, 2012) but determined by the amount of resources that individuals can bring to their decision making. I had unconsciously accepted that certain pathways and options were not available to me. Yet, my choices were constrained by my habitus and the opportunities; my horizons for action (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Some possibilities are considered inconceivable, others improbable thus limiting my range of acceptable choices.

Having discounted university as an option, I saw an advert for Mental Health Nurse training. Nurse Registration at that time was certificated rather than considered as an academic pathway and so would have been consistent with my horizons for action. However, what appealed to me more was the fact that accommodation came with the job and it was geographically far away from home. Laub and Sampson (2003) suggest that any move out of poverty is associated with relocation. According to Payne (2003), people leave poverty because it is either too painful to stay, or they have a vision or goal, a key relationship or a special talent. Although this is arguably an over simplified typology that privileges individual agency in social mobility, reading her work did cause me to reflect on why I had left my background behind. I did not have any special talent or skill, there was no key relationship to guide or influence me. I did not have any clear visions or goals. I did not even understand fully the implications of the training programme I was applying for.

From my current vantage point, I can only assume it came down to being too painful on a psychological level to stay. I have often used the term 'escape' when talking about leaving home. If I had stayed, it is possible that my habitus would have been reproduced through continued immersion in a field that reproduced my dispositions. Bourdieu sees habitus as permeable and responsive to the interaction within fields as although dispositions can become ingrained, they can and do change over time as habitus is constantly being restructured as a result of encounters in the field (Reay, 2004). Geographical distance allowed me to avoid

an unwanted biography, downplay my class identity and psychologically continue the process of dis-identification (Skeggs, 1997), thus resinscribing my past. Away from my social space and immersed in a profession that unexpectedly enthralled me, I started to experience the impact of moving within a different field. Nobody knew who I was or where I had lived.

### **Putting ink on the hole in my sock: an imposter moving forward**

Like many educators from the working class (Orbe, 2013, Ryan & Sackrey, 1995), my journey towards HE was a long and circuitous one. During the following thirteen years, I completed various certificated nursing courses, before enrolling on a Masters programme in Health Promotion whilst working as a Senior Staff Nurse. Developing links with the local Health Promotion department who valued professional development and education had led to a shift in my horizons for action (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 2007) and this route now felt accessible and appropriate for me. However, there was a mismatch between my horizons for action and my bank of cultural, linguistic and symbolic capital. I did not have a first degree, had never had any contact with HE and had no awareness of what Masters level study entailed. My bank of linguistic and cultural capital was virtually empty in terms of educational discourse and previous qualifications. My motivation was influenced by my interest in the subject and desire to learn. Reay et al (2009) talk about the choice of university ranging from the determined ambition of middle class students to the 'clueless serendipity' of the working class. I would place myself at the clueless end of the spectrum at the time I enrolled.

As a late entrant, mature student, studying whilst working full time and travelling to the university in a different county one day a week on my day off, I could be described as a non traditional student. At this time, I did not know that delaying entry into HE had significantly decreased my likelihood of completing a degree or that completion rates continue to drop the longer the delay of starting due to the experience of life demands of employment, family commitments (Wells & Lynch, 2012) and work intensification (Scott et al, 2011). I am glad that I did not know these statistics. Labels can be stigmatising and demotivating. A reliance on risk

factors alone as predictors of potential failure can miss the ways in which we are differently located within our social fields (Allard, 2005) and the social capital that exists within that field. Being 'at risk' is a dynamic lived experience rather than an accumulation of negative social indicators. Although cultural capital is important, Aschaffenburg and Maas (1997) suggest that it fails to predict at what time it is important and for how long and what is the relative importance of the individual's own characteristics versus those of the parents. When studying marginalised adults and the reproduction of social class, Lange, Chovanec, Cardinal, Kajner and Smith (2010) identified that individuals can be very resourceful and goal directed, probably as a result of having to overcome structural barriers. Like Boris, the tramp in George Orwell's classic (Orwell, 1972), we will cover the holes in our socks with ink.

What these statistics and categories could not explain is my subsequent academic journey despite challenging earlier circumstances. Although my parents did not attend university, their lived experiences have influenced my life choices and my eventual decision to use education to improve my circumstances. Statistics could not have predicted that my fathers' difficulties with money and gambling would focus me on a path that would be different to his. Although my mother did not attend university, she was resourceful, worked hard and was an avid reader. Books were everywhere in the house. We were always given books as gifts and I spent a lot of time in the children's library. To be honest, at home they were mostly crime novels and horror stories but my siblings and I became very literate with extended vocabularies! Research by De Graaf, De Graaf & Kraaycamp (2000) demonstrates that parental reading sets the norm for children, thereby enhancing linguistic and cognitive skills. Literacy is an example of the invisible cultural capital that helps students to be successful at school (Romo, 2004). It was interesting to discover that many of the autoethnographic and autobiographical pieces of work from working class academics that I accessed discussed the importance of childhood reading to their development and progress. For example, Stephen Garger (1995, p.44) states "What saved my butt was reading, I loved it".

However, if I had understood what I was enrolling for, I doubt I would have continued. Feelings of dissonance occurred from the first day of the Masters programme when I once again began to suspect that I was different from other students. It was a large class and I remember feeling underconfident, unsure of what to say and too nervous to contribute to the discussions. Although I would not have used this language at the time, my perception was that other students had the cultural and linguistic capital to contribute and if I spoke, I would expose myself as someone who did not belong there. I stayed quiet and tried not to draw attention to myself, retreating to the embodied habitus of my school days. Once again, I was Bourdieu's fish out of water. At this time, I had many years of experience as a RN and would have held various forms of capital within my professional field. However, in essence, this was hidden capital to me as I did not realise how transferable it was to the academic field.

Yet, these self limiting beliefs were my own, albeit influenced by the socially constructed nature of my previous experiences. I did not know these people who may have come from similar backgrounds to me. As they were unaware of my background either socially or academically I imposed these restraining thoughts on myself. Newman (2013) describes his experience as a working class academic trying to negotiate his place in the world. He used his experience as feeling out of place in a golfing club to describe his discomfort. His words illustrate the anxiety that accompanies this:

I usually play poorly on the first few holes, especially when I am playing with a new group for the first time, largely because I know they are watching me, judging my swing, perhaps connecting my swing with my working class past. (Newman, 2013, p.252)

He uses the term 'social class hysteresis' to describe reverting to an embodied habitus. During that first experience of HE, I made myself to be out of place by the very subject position I negotiated for myself, another example of being complicit in a form of symbolic violence.

Research identifies a lack of cultural capital characteristics that are common amongst students from a working class background. For example, research suggests that I was likely to have less confidence in asking questions or asking for support for fear that my questions would not be valid and I would be exposed (Bowl, 2003; Devlin & Mackay, 2011). I completed my Masters programme without asking to discuss my thoughts, essay plans or drafts with any member of the teaching staff. I produced the work and handed it in. It was not so much that I did not have the confidence to ask although perhaps would have been reluctant to do so, more that I had not realised that this was an option. An alternative perspective may be that lacking in external support and resources, I had developed a self reliant independence. A study by Reay et al (2009) found that even where there was parental encouragement and good will, there is little evidence of active teaching and guidance with the consequence that working class students often display strong self regulatory skills in writing. This insight led to further critical questioning concerning the perceived vulnerability of the students I now teach when seeking feedback. The emotional nature of giving and receiving feedback is discussed further in chapter six.

My experiences suggest that the field of HE as a part time student was not a level playing field. Those arriving with greater amounts of 'capital' are able to accumulate more and advance further than others. Timetables, library opening times and university support services are all based on the assumption that students are full time, living on or near the campus, do not need to work during term time or indeed throughout the year, have no responsibilities for dependents and will not need study support or advice. These assumptions all operate to exclude those that are different (Wilson, 2011). Garger (1995) wrote that it took him years before he stopped berating himself over his academic performance until a friend reminded him that he had been working close to 40 hours a week whilst studying whereas she had not worked at all through college and sometimes studied because there was nothing else to do.

The RNs that I teach are often snatching time to study in cars whilst waiting to pick their children up or working late into the night when the children have gone to bed before taking charge of an early shift the next day. Some come to class having worked a night shift. Kristen Wilson's (2011) autoethnographic piece about her experience of teaching with a non traditional group demonstrates her 'penny drop' moment about the daily challenges faced by the students she taught. When recollecting the responses from various students whom she had asked why their papers were late or had missed deadlines for feedback, she reflected that...

So I know that over the years, I have failed abused wives afraid to report their spouses, I have failed aspiring nurses who were struggling with bipolar disorders, I have failed mothers with sick children and undependable day care, I have failed people with broken printers and no gas money. Every semester in every section, I have failed someone with a fantastic reason and that someone was human. (Wilson, 2011, p.454)

The RN student group locally often manage to produce work in the face of enormous challenges, often unknown by me until some time has passed, if at all. Students often demonstrate resilience in challenging circumstances. Remembering my experiences within an uneven playing field led to a curiosity as to the ways in which I might be perpetuating symbolic violence within my practice as a member of the academy through the use of 'official truths' (Smith, 2013) concerning the rules of the academic game. This was explored through the stories in practice and is discussed in chapter seven.

### **Widening horizons for action: habitus in relation to field**

I achieved my degree but I used to feel as if I had somehow cheated by 'only' having a Masters degree and not a first degree as if that were not worth having on its own – an imposter! I had not taken the traditional route and somehow felt less deserving than those who had completed an Honours degree first. Long et al (2000) describe how women who do not feel their intelligence has been recognised or celebrated within the family do not then integrate intelligence into their self concept. Instead they are likely to distort the experience in order to keep congruence with a sense of self. I did not attend my graduation ceremony as I did not feel I belonged there.

Without the cultural capital to fully participate and appreciate the rules of academia, I still did not understand the impact of what I had achieved in terms of the symbolic capital a Masters award afforded me in the developing professional world of nursing at that time. After seventeen years away, I returned home to work and at that time, I was the only mental health nurse in the locality who had been educated to Masters Level. I did not tell anyone I worked with that I had achieved this, not thinking it relevant or important. A few years later, I moved to work for the local Public Health Department and found that I was one of only two staff to hold the required qualification there. My horizons for action widened further as I started to move comfortably in this field of practice, my habitus evolving further as a result of my own raised expectations and the expectations of others in response to this new field. Academic advancement was considered valuable cultural and symbolic capital within this field which also allowed me to develop social capital as other people expressed belief in my ability. My habitus began to evolve further in relation to the structures of the field I had entered.

When I took the post of Lecturer, I had occasion to revisit Masters level study for the Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice. This time, the experience was very different. The Lecturer role had allowed me to develop a feel for the game and I had become familiar with marking grids, criteria and learning outcomes. Although education can highlight our idiosyncrasies, it can also offer the means to accumulate the capital required to progress in our chosen professional fields. I was comfortable with academic discourse and developed cultural literacy. Thus, I entered this field with accumulated social, cultural and symbolic capital. Studying at this time felt like my first real socialisation into the field of HE and fundamental to the journey I continue with today. Now, my (self imposed) back story was not one of someone from a working class background who did not belong. Now, I had symbolic capital. I was a Lecturer with a Masters award and a recognised teaching qualification. This time the classroom experience felt comfortable. I had the required knowledge, skills and language to contribute, leading to more self belief and I understood the rules. My habitus had evolved in response to moving in a

social space that encouraged belief and opportunity and thus expanded my horizons for action.

Unfortunately this newly accumulated capital proved to be fragile as I moved towards doctoral study. Although I was excited about starting the doctoral programme, there was also a sense of trepidation and a real uncertainty as to how I would fit in, and whether I would understand what anyone was talking about. In the first week, I was reassured as I was able to understand most of the lectures and could follow the Lecturers in their sessions. However, anxiety set in once the students started asking questions. I was lost. What foreign language were they talking in? Academic discourse? Everything was an 'ism' My capital appeared to fracture at this point and I once again started to question whether this was perhaps a step too far for me. I reverted to my embodied habitus of quietness, rarely offering ideas in the larger main group although I would be quietly formulating thoughts and responses in my head to follow the discussions. In essence, I employed survival strategies although effectively silencing myself in a form of self censorship, concerned that I had nothing that others would think was worth saying.

However, when we were in smaller groups discussing ideas I felt secure enough to contribute. During the introductions of our smaller cohort on that first day, I was open about my lack of confidence in whether or not I had the ability to study at this level. Several other members of the group, including the tutor, agreed they had felt the same. This was a revelation to me. For the first time in an academic context, I had not tried to cover the hole in my sock with ink. Being honest about my insecurities seemed to give everyone else permission to do the same. I later read that this effect had been noted by Brookfield (2006) who noticed that once one student talks about their own sense of impostorship there tends to be a domino like effect.

It could be argued that the imposter phenomenon is alive and well within me. I continue to work extremely hard at academic study. I feel I only achieve good marks because I work very hard. I am aware of how the way that I have worded the

previous sentence positions me in relation to the imposter syndrome. In practice, I have a perfectionist tendency to over prepare prior to teaching, identified as a trait consistent with the imposter syndrome (Clance, Dingman, Reviere & Stober, 1995). Alternatively, my need to prepare fully could be related to a work ethic of my working class habitus. Reay et al (2009) identified that working class students tended to forgo wider cultural accomplishments and work extremely hard. I am arguably displaying my working class habitus through visible industry and intensive single minded application (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

However, it may also be a reflection of the commitment and professionalism I believe we should be displaying as Lecturers. This is not so much out of fear that someone might recognise my imposter status but actually reflects what I believe educational 'work' entails. Time spent preparing adequately is a sign of respect for the students whom we are teaching. Having previously understood the imposter phenomenon as a negative impact on my practice, through discussion with my critical friend and engagement with the literature, I can now reframe it as troubling in a productive way which stops me from becoming complacent in recognition that this world of practice is in constant flux and evolution.

### **From dis-identification to re-identification**

Writing autobiographically deepened my understanding that my habitus remains influenced by my working class background, something which until recently, I had denied in a process of dis-identification (Skeggs, 1997). It was with some discomfort that I read research by Hurst (2007) involving students from working class backgrounds describing their experiences of 'crossing the borders' into HE. I wanted to identify with the category of 'double agent' (Hurst, 2007, p.338) which describes individuals who are trying to keep a foot in both working class and middle class camps. The 'double agent' falls between the categories of 'loyalist' and 'renegade' with characteristics of both. For example, 'double agents' avoid assimilation with the middle class and are proud of their roots (loyalist traits) but also have a key motivation to prove themselves to a world that has denigrated them (renegade characteristics). Just as I had as a young sociology schoolgirl all

those years ago, when reading this article, I managed to shoehorn myself into the category of 'double agent'. Yet, when I returned to the article some weeks later, I could clearly see that this was not the case. I was a 'renegade'! I had made a definite decision to move away from my working class background. I had actively hidden it and did not want to return. Further reading has led me to understand that this tendency for working class individuals within academia to hide or run from their identity is not uncommon (Hurst, 2008; Skeggs, 1997).

This was not a comfortable realisation. By disidentifying with my social class, I had arguably been devaluing my background and perhaps unconsciously positioning the field of university culture as superior. This led me to question whether by, denying or hiding my class identity, I might be losing an opportunity to influence others who are trying to negotiate their habitus within the academic setting and trying to develop their own 'feel for the game'. Skeggs (1997) suggests that by denying origins or dis-identifying with class there is no challenge to the status quo and there is a risk of reproducing the hierarchies that regulate, devalue and de-legitimate those from the working class. Through dis-identification, I was limiting expression and discourse within my field about marginalised perspectives and as such was potentially becoming complicit in the perpetuation of symbolic violence. With 'renegade' tendencies, it was possible that I had forgotten the struggles of the people coming after me instead of working to redress the balance. I also now question whether dis-identification is another form of symbolic violence. By distancing myself from that which I considered unacceptable to me and limiting my expression of social class, I was possibly implicating myself in these dominant discourses. This dilemma has been described as 'a complex psychological paradox' (Reay et al, 2001a, p.867) and is explored further in chapter seven in relation to the concept of 'artificial persons' (Smith, 2013) and the renegotiation of a privileged position.

Yet, the resilience and resourcefulness that I developed as a result of challenge has served me well on my academic journey and within my professional life. Studies have shown that being the 'first' in your family to complete a degree can

instil in individuals a sense of pride which motivates them to act as role models for their families (Orbe & Groscurth, 2004; Putman & Thompson, 2006). Studies focusing on students from disadvantaged backgrounds emerging as competent adults in HE (Bottrell, 2009; Reay et al, 2009) demonstrate the presence of resilience and an ability to adapt positively and cope with adversity despite challenging circumstances. Disadvantaged students can be committed rather than disaffected as a result of the barriers they faced (Bowl, 2003). I have perhaps developed a propensity for living with the feeling of being a 'fish out of water'. Reflexivity and flexibility have become productive resources when faced with the unfamiliar. My lack of awareness of my supposed 'at risk' status and the traditional pathway for accessing education meant that I was not deterred by labels or expectations. However, I am not suggesting that resilience is a 'good' thing. As I engaged with the literature, I started to question how much adversity resilient students should endure before social arrangements are targeted for interventions rather than individuals.

Until now, my working class background has probably been my best kept secret; one kept by silence rather than dissembling. Having avoided discussing my past educational and social experiences at work, I have been toning down my perception of a stigmatised identity to fit in with my academic colleagues more easily (Yoshino, 2006). Working with layers of data has allowed me to see how I have tried to assimilate into the world of academia by rejecting my working class origins in order to feel that I belong. One of my colleagues is friendly with someone who grew up on my estate and he discovered that I had also lived there. He used similar phrasing to that schoolboy years ago; 'so you were an Estate X girl'. I was immediately transported back to the insecure, defensive feeling that I recognised, feeling that I had been 'found out' and somehow diminished. I often wonder if people knew my origins, would I again experience that labelling and would people think differently of me. I found similar concerns in the work of Bochner (1997) and Orbe (2013), whereby Bochner felt at ease sharing his stories and his experiences with his students but for a long time felt less able to draw meaningfully on his personal experiences in the rest of his academic world. Orbe (2013) actively avoids

discussing his background with colleagues for fear he will not be promoted, something which is also identified by working class female academics in the study by Long et al (2000).

As a result of this exploration, I am learning not to deny my origins and instead try to use the learning that accompanied those origins to contribute to the debate around marginalised perspectives within education. Bochner's (2012) autoethnographic writing about his relationship with his father suggests that acting 'against' our past could be considered as another form of submission and dependence and that individuals should take responsibility for their own psychic lives. My habitus, dispositions and subsequent experiences as a learner from a working class background provide me with the opportunity to be sensitive to the potential struggles that those mature students with low confidence may have.

### **An emerging critical consciousness**

Critical consciousness refers to the process by which individuals achieve a deeper awareness of the socio-cultural reality that shapes their lives (Freire, 2000). It is not a static phenomenon and should be considered fragmentary, contradictory and constantly in the process of becoming. Certainly, when immersed in the autobiographical information and reflective exercises, my experiences felt both fragile and contradictory as I struggled with restoring a marginalised perspective. I turned to the principles of restorative learning (Lange, 2004) to heighten my ethical consciousness, re-identify my priorities and find ways to animate these in my practice. As a participant in Lange's original study stated, "good work for me is something that is consistent with who I am and what I believe" (Lange, 2004, p.130). I wanted to do 'good work'.

Values are not always strictly applied or articulated in people's daily lives (Chang, 2008). Recreating my experiences led me to question whether I had become complicit in the maintenance of an uneven playing field and whether I had forgotten the power that I may be perceived to hold as an educator. Those with power are frequently less aware of it or the least willing to acknowledge its existence as well as their role in maintaining inequitable social and cultural capital which can lead to

student marginalisation (Romo, 2008). It is possible that because of privilege, dominant culture members actually resist change toward equity (Freire, 2000). I started to become concerned that a combination of dis-identification with my working class habitus and the frenetic pace of working life together with developing my academic identity had submerged my ethics of equality of opportunity and openness. Reflecting on my attempts to assimilate reminded me of the analogy of the 'boiled frog' (Orbe, 2013). If you place a frog in boiling water, it will jump out straight away. However, if you place the frog in cold water and heat it until it boils, it will stay there and eventually become soup! I started to question whether academic socialisation within my field had caused me to subvert an important part of who I was and who I am. I started to wonder to what extent I had chosen my mode of academic practice or whether I had unconsciously internalised and embodied the doxa of the field. Had I become a boiled frog within the academy? Again, these were disconcerting thoughts. On occasions, it felt that rethinking and reflection was intensifying a sense of confusion and I was finding myself in a war between my own values and personal ethics and the cultural scripts of the field in which I was working. Lange (2004) suggests individuals often adjust themselves to inherently unjust and/or alienating situations just in order to assimilate. As I recovered (restored) suppressed values and ethics, I started to engage in a critique of dominant and cultural values within my practice on the feedback landscape. This is explored further in chapter seven using the concepts of official truths and artificial persons (Smith, 2013).

It is not uncommon for the RNs I teach to talk about negative experiences within the education system, not feeling that they are intelligent enough to access a degree leaving them afraid of accessing HE. The reality of those experiences can become an embodied identity as incompetent adult learners. A phrase that is often used to me when discussing potential enrolment for the degree programme is 'I do not think a degree is for people like me', an indication perhaps of their horizons for action (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Adults who re-engage with educational systems following poor experiences at school or college have been described as 'wounded learners' (Lange et al, 2010). Yet in Bourdieusian terms, not returning for education potentially produces further marginality as nursing moves towards an all

graduate profession and they are left behind. This could be considered a form of symbolic violence where individuals unknowingly become complicit in the reproduction of their marginality. Alternatively, an accumulation of forms of capital within the educational field can be seen as a form of power with the potential for capacity to exercise control over their own future (Calhoun, LiPuma & Postone, 1993).

### **Relatedness: bringing my past into conversation with my present**

My personal experience sensitises me to things others wouldn't notice, that others would find normal. (Bourdieu, 2002).

Instead of hiding my working class habitus and trying to escape from it, use of my unique personal perspective can potentially contribute towards reducing inequalities that are inherent in my current field of practice. Non traditional students are certainly not a homogenous group (Scott et al, 2011) and I am not making the assumption that the students I work with are socio economically disadvantaged. Studies focusing on mature working class students within HE (e.g. Reay et al, 2009; Tett, 2004; Scott et al, 2011) have identified characteristics that apply to the group I teach now; negative attitudes from others (partners, friends), lack of time and space to study at home, reaction of children and dependents particularly those who feel abandoned and childcare arrangements. Similarly Reay, Miriam and Ball (2001b) have identified characteristics such as working long hours throughout the period of degree study, identified as work intensification (Scott et al, 2011).

Education is an important field because of its capacity to confer cultural capital on participants (Webb et al, 2002), yet it can also play a crucial role in the reproduction of dominant social relationships and structure. A critical focus led me to consider the possibility that I might have become blind to the objective structural relations and institutional processes that can perpetuate symbolic violence on already marginalised students. Does the way in which I work with the students contribute to an existing power imbalance? I found Bourdieu's ideas useful for understanding how objective relations can become embodied in students through discourse and daily practice. As I was writing practice stories, I started to pay

attention to the extent to which I may be contributing to symbolic violence through my practice, how I was presenting ideas and the language I was using. The espoused discourse of our department aims to provide student centred practice yet to what extent does my practice reflect this? Bourdieu uses the term 'misrecognition' (Bourdieu, 2000) to identify the key to symbolic violence. He describes this as a form of 'forgetting' that we are caught up in and produced by our practices.

The agent engaged in practice knows the world...too well, without objectifying distance takes it for granted, precisely because he is caught up in it, bound up with it; he inhabits it like a garment...he feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of habitus. (Bourdieu, 2000, p.142)

Engaging with my personal story and the literature had led to a deepening understanding of the influence of my working class habitus on the choices and direction I have taken on the road to working within HE. The disadvantages and limitations of my background had been there all along but I had not fully understood how they affected my journey towards HE or my choices of profession and way of working. I had not understood how to emancipate myself from them and to use them effectively to enhance my practice. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, capital and symbolic violence enabled me to explore how my experiences were being filtered through my habitus and associated dispositions which were in turn influencing my perceptions and interpretations of these experiences. These new insights and questions were used to inform the generation and exploration of my practice stories and helped me to 'notice' my practice throughout the course of the research. The emerging insights from practice are discussed in the following chapters.

Perhaps I am working towards becoming that 'double agent' (Hurst, 2007). Instead of rejecting my home experiences and culture in order to assimilate and be accepted into the mainstream, I am trying to understand and embrace my working class habitus in order to negotiate the knowledge, dispositions and skills from different fields and social spaces; occupying the border states. Capello (1995) sees the border states as a negative place to occupy, describing a sense of being

neither here nor there; a working class academic never feeling fully able to move in. However, I see that I can use the privileged position of experiences in different worlds to make a difference to those also trying to make that transition into the border states. It is the structure that we place upon the past that determines how we let it influence the future (Kelly, 1955). Starting to interpret my social world of practice through a newly restored marginalised perspective led to an increased critical awareness of the world bringing the potential for developing more emancipatory forms of practice. The next chapter prefaces the exploration of my current practice using layers of data to demonstrate how these personal influences (recovery) are manifested in practice as both constraints and opportunities when intersecting with broader influences on practice (relatedness).

## **Chapter 5**

### **Practice stories, critical conversations and ethical dilemmas**

You might think its more telling than showing but to me its showing what's in my head in a personal, vulnerable and revealing way. I feel like I've found my voice now even if it doesn't have flashbacks and surprise endings.  
(Valerie, fictional character in Ellis, 2004)

### **Adding a further layer of critical engagement: applying insights to practice**

The next level of engagement with the data was to consider how the recovery of my submerged dispositions (values and beliefs) were now starting to shape my academic practice when constructing formative feedback. New insights about my working class habitus were brought into conversation with my academic and professional self through the medium of practice stories supported by critical conversations and engagement with the increasing body of literature focusing on formative feedback practice. This layered process allowed me to externalise my inner dialogue and further explore personal influences in relation to other dimensions of influence within the broader social structures of my field of practice. Within this chapter I provide more detail on the role of the practice stories, supported by critical conversations, in developing the research focus further thus serving as an introduction to the next section of the autoethnographic narrative. Ethical decision making relevant to this phase of engagement is also discussed.

### **Using the practice stories to develop the research focus: July 2012 - December 2012**

After the first six months of writing practice stories (PS1-PS38), each one was read individually using phase 1 of the sensitising questions discussed in chapter two as a guide to stimulate critical thinking and curiosity. Notes were written on each story detailing the overall sense and tone of the stories. The final question of this phase allowed me to identify curiosities that made me want to explore further. Emotions were scattered throughout the practice stories. The presence of emotion emerged as a tool to question practice further but also I was curious about the potential influence of emotion in practice. This phase also provided clues about the impact of my communication style with students and colleagues. I was interested to explore these emerging issues further during the generation of further practice

stories and started to actively record episodes of practice that provoked emotion involving feedback interactions with students or colleagues.

### **Further exploration of influences on practice: January - December 2013**

Writing the practice stories allowed me to express the complexities of practice but also to demonstrate how I have attempted to develop a more informed mode of practice at the same time as trying to make sense of the experience. After a further 12 months of writing practice stories, the remainder of the questions (incorporating those from phase one) were applied to PS 39 – 79. This provided a focus on my use of language and the way in which I constructed my stories thus allowing me to explore with interpretive interest why any exclusions or exaggerations existed. It also encouraged consideration of who appears in the story and who does not and the role they have in the telling of events. Use of this question prompted further consideration of relational ethics, discussed later in this chapter. The emerging insights from this exploration are presented in chapters six, seven and eight. Excerpts from the stories are used to bring life to the research and bring the research to life (Ellis, 2004) in the following chapters. An example of a practice story with interpretive comments can be seen in Appendix 7.

### **Critical conversations in support of the practice stories**

The technique of critical friend was discussed in chapter two. Having agreed to meet every two months for the duration of the research, the conversation usually started by my colleague asking me a 'grand tour' question requiring me to retell a story as I saw it and experienced it. Our conversations did not always necessarily follow a linear pattern. I was not always aware of the course our conversations might take or what I might divulge about my practice. There were often unscheduled side trips where we talked about unrelated topics, often moving back and forth between events, referring to previous conversations. By working in this way, we were able to identify contradictions in some of my thinking. These contradictions were occasionally surprising as I had not identified them myself or were sometimes uncomfortable when I had been avoiding addressing an issue. Yet, they did not negate my story, rather they indicated a sense making process as

our conversations progressed, a clarity that might have eluded me if I had not talked it through. It was one such conversation concerning the avoidance of discussing the influence of colleagues that led to further exploration and the emerging insights in chapter eight.

Dialogue and the sharing of perspectives with colleagues and my supervisory team have influenced me to deconstruct and reconstruct my perspectives thus informing the construction of this thesis. Although the content of these conversations are not represented as text within the thesis, where they have acted as a catalyst for learning is indicated within the following chapters.

### **Researching ethically with 'others'**

Critical conversations with others and taking a critical approach to questioning my stories from practice reinforced the importance of relational ethics within autoethnography (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2014; Ellis, 2007; Tolich, 2010). My professional practice as a Lecturer and as an autoethnographic researcher does not exist without relationships with colleagues, students and those within my social sphere, all of whom are implicated within my research. Tolich (2010, p.1608) suggests that the word *auto* within autoethnography is a misnomer as, although the self might be the focus of research, 'the self is porous, leaking to the 'other''. Autoethnographers play multi faceted roles as researcher, informant and author but others are there, sometimes visible, sometimes not (Chang, 2008). Those implicated within the text have rights.

In the context of autoethnography, relational ethics recognises and values mutual respect, dignity and connectedness between researchers and the communities in which they live and work (Ellis, 2007). I wanted to acknowledge my responsibilities to others whilst presenting my story in a complex and truthful way. Although the stories are written from a personal perspective this narrative is not entirely my own (Morse, 2002) and others implicated would tell it differently. As the author, I am deciding what to include and exclude, share or restrict and I needed to make these decisions ethically protecting both myself and others. My own evolving critical

consciousness had brought the power structures and dynamics within my professional practice into focus. The opportunity to develop my own agency within the field had the potential to not just upset my own equilibrium but that of my colleagues.

Within his proposed ethical framework for autoethnography, Tolich (2010) suggests considering who would be offended by reading the work in order to assist sensitisation to the responsibility to minimise harm. To help me 'notice' potential ethical concerns, I paid attention to any occasion where I was starting to feel uncomfortable or reluctant to share my work with my colleagues or my family due to being concerned about their reaction. Discomfort would suggest an indication of an ethical issue that required further consideration. Not only was this a helpful tactic ethically but within this autoethnography, it also prompted further consideration of my thinking behind how I was presenting the information thus leading to a deepening understanding of my fallibility when communicating in the field, discussed further in chapter eight.

Although I have not named anyone else within the practice stories or the thesis, they would at least be recognisable to themselves so it seemed like a reasonable benchmark to not write anything I would not want to show to others implicated within the text (Ellis, 2007; Medford, 2006; Tolich, 2010). In order to be open about the choices I was making and the decision making process, I started to discuss and share the changing direction of my research with my family, colleagues and students. As stated by A. Frank (2000, p.191), "by remaining open to other people's responses to our moral maturity and emotional honesty...we engage in the unfinished dialogue of seeking the good". I feel I have acted as best I could at a particular time.

### **To 'show' or to 'tell'?**

Within the remaining chapters, I have used techniques of both 'showing' and 'telling' with alterations in authorial voice (Ellis et al, 2011) to connect scholarly and personal narratives. The narrative is structured around linking story, theory and

practice 'showing' extracts of my practice stories, internal dialogue from my research journal and information taken from the autobiographical writing (presented in italics). Excerpts are presented in my words within the text as unaltered from the time they were written in order to demonstrate my thinking in a personal and revealing way (showing). However, I have also chosen to 'tell' parts of the story, when relating it to the theoretical concepts of Bourdieu, Lange and others providing some distance from the events which I did to encourage thought about my practice situations in a more abstract way. By employing techniques of both 'showing' and 'telling' is consistent with my aim for a hybrid approach to autoethnography, discussed in chapter two. Adding the 'telling' to the 'showing' situates both story and theory in my lifeworld through an everyday living through of events (Adams, 2006).

### **A layered approach to inform practice: recovery and restoration**

The next three chapters continue the autoethnographic story by demonstrating how a layered approach incorporating a jigsaw of data has enabled me to critically engage with the intersecting influences on my practice. Bringing my submerged working class habitus and associated dispositions to the dinner party into polite conversation through the medium of practice stories and critical conversations offered the potential to enrich relationships with both colleagues and students. However, it also brought challenges as my emerging critical consciousness also proved constraining at times. The interpretive process has been continuous, allowing me to work with emerging insights that were being translated into practice. These insights provide the foundation of the remainder of the autoethnographic narrative.

Within the following chapters, I consider the dynamic relationship between my habitus and field, incorporating the concepts of capital and symbolic violence to help me deepen my understanding of the intersecting nature of the influences on my practice. Lange's (2007) theory of restorative learning continues to be used to structure the emerging insights in relation to the research questions. The concepts of recovery and relatedness are used within each chapter to demonstrate firstly an

understanding of the influences on practice (recovery) and secondly how these influences are manifesting themselves in practice (relatedness). Each chapter is structured in two parts: recovery (insights on influences on practice) and relatedness (impact on and development of practice). Chapter six returns to the concept of the 'wounded learner' (Lange et al, 2010) to demonstrate how my habitus as a learner has led to an increased sensitivity to the emotional nature of producing and receiving feedback. The discomfort in practice related to incidences where I am not practising in accordance with my values and beliefs is explored further within chapter seven in relation to the dynamic relationship between my habitus and my field of practice. Chapter eight focuses on the influence of the social actors within a field and how my attempts to apply my emerging critical consciousness to practice has brought the potential for isolation within a team. The metaphor of the 'trickster' is used to respond to my experience of Brookfield's (2006) concept of cultural suicide. Lange's third concept, reflectiveness, underpins the interpretations throughout but is used specifically to structure the final chapter in order to bring the narrative threads of the autoethnography together. The process is and continues to be ongoing as I work with these emerging insights everyday in practice and continue to pull aside the curtains of Academic Oz.

## Chapter 6

### **The experience of a 'wounded learner': the influence of emotion on practice**

School experiences of failure have left many low income adults scarred and afraid of returning to any form of adult or HE. Such adults have been wounded by the schooling system: intellectually and psychologically. (Lange et al, 2010, p.208)

#### **Recovery leading to relatedness**

Within this chapter, I introduce the presence of emotion as a sensitising and potentially debilitating influence on practice when constructing formative feedback for students. My experiences as a learner, past and present, have provided "a rich vein of experience that can be mined for insights into the power dynamics of teaching" (Brookfield, 2005, p.50). Critical questioning using my adapted framework alerted me to the emotions present in my practice stories and research journal as a learner, researcher and practitioner. Firstly, I work with the concept of 'wounded learner' (Lange et al, 2010) to suggest how my personal experiences as a learner within HE shape my professional knowledge, informal theories and ways of working with the students when constructing formative feedback (recovery). The second section of the chapter demonstrates how these recovered experiences have led to a heightened sensitivity concerning the emotional nature of feedback and how this is impacting on my practice with others (relatedness).

#### **Recovery: a previously hidden 'wounded learner'**

Lange et al (2010) introduced the concept of the 'wounded learner' following their research on the learning needs of adults from low-income populations. In their study, they discovered that school experiences of failure left many low-income adults wary of returning to any form of adult or HE. They describe such adults as being wounded by the education system intellectually and psychologically; a form of symbolic violence leading to an embodied habitus as an incompetent and/or incapable learner. Although concerns have been expressed about the term 'wounded learner' due to the implication of an internalised perspective and a focus on individual deficits (Wojecki, 2007), here the term is used to express the structural dynamics that create learning conditions. This removes the emphasis on

individual blame for failures but instead seeks to understand the symbolic violence perpetuated by a system that can victimise and pathologise people.

As someone who re-engaged with HE at a later age, I consider myself one of Lange et al's (2010) 'wounded learners'. Reading so far, a reader may be forgiven for perhaps thinking that despite the disadvantages of my social space, my educational experiences have not been so bad. However, there is a story that I have not yet told, one that I decided to tell only after I started to critically interrogate my autoethnographic material. Here the question from Riley and Hawe (2005) was helpful.

*Why was I only telling some stories? What was I excluding and why?*

The most honest place to write this story is here as the decision to include this was made towards the end of the process and so demonstrates yet another turn in the methodological road as the research progressed. I had no intention of including this part of the story when I began writing the thesis as it is still painful to recall. I questioned whether it was appropriate to make this inclusion and needed to reflect on my motives in order to ensure that disclosures were connected to broader cultural issues. It is taken from my autobiographical life history (Appendix 2) and details my recreated memories of an experience when completing my Masters dissertation.

Critical questioning prompted me to unpack why I was reluctant to include this story within the thesis. It clearly had an emotional impact on me and including it makes me feel vulnerable. However, if I had excluded this section, I would have been socially editing my story (Sparkes, 1994) and indulging in some mindful slippage (Medford, 2006). As I returned to my practice stories with an interpretive focus, I could identify a clear sense of my awareness, understanding and empathy concerning the emotional impact of less than positive feedback on students.

*"I was getting marks in the 70/80% range for my assignments throughout the Masters programme. When I reached the dissertation stage, I felt daunted but keen to get going. However, I was allocated a supervisor about whom I had misgivings from the beginning as he appeared disinterested in and dismissive of my research topic. I didn't voice my concerns and assumed that he was the expert so would guide me effectively. About two thirds of the way through the year, I was not happy with how my research was progressing. I lived in a different county and travelled to him for supervision and on one of these occasions, I said to him during supervision, (luckily I had a witness who was in the office at the time) that I was not happy with the direction my research was going and I was struggling with the process of analysis as it did not seem to be coming together. I wanted his advice and guidance as to how to proceed. He said that my work was fine and he would mark the piece of work as a pass as it was. So, despite my misgivings, I continued. The dissertation failed. See, I still can't write that properly. I failed – not the dissertation. I will never forget that phone call. It came at work from the programme lead who had marked me highly the whole way through the Masters programme. I was in tears because it was such a shock. I had been doing so well and my supervisor had told me it would be a pass. I explained this to the programme lead who was sympathetic but in support of her staff member said that my work was ultimately my responsibility. They were going to give me 6 weeks to resubmit. 6 weeks to resubmit a 20,000 word piece of original research! Even if I had not been working full time as well as studying, I knew this was not feasible. To say I was devastated was a massive understatement. I cried for a day and felt sick for a week. This was mainly because of the amount of work I had put into it but also the sense of injustice that I had been badly advised. It would also be fair to say that it just consolidated what I had expected. University was not for people like me. My confidence was on the floor.*

*I wrote a letter to the programme lead (not an appeal – I did not realise I could appeal) and explained it would not be feasible for me to do this in six weeks. I expressed my disappointment about the level of supervision (i.e. poor advice) I had received and that, whilst I understood the work was my responsibility, if a*

*supervisor was telling me it met the standard, it did not seem unreasonable to believe him. I concluded by saying that I would reluctantly be withdrawing from the Masters programme having been thoroughly demoralised by the whole experience. I used my voice!*

*As far as I was concerned, that was the end of it. I was not expecting a response. I was devastated but had resigned myself to forget it. About a month later, I received a phone call from the programme lead who said she had discussed my case with the Dean of the university and wanted to offer me a further year to resubmit at no cost. The next supervisor I would be allocated was the Lecturer who had been witness to the fateful conversation described earlier with my first supervisor.*

*I may have used my voice but I had not expected anyone to listen to it! Having psychologically accepted that I was not good enough to do the Masters, I now had to pick myself up and decide whether or not to complete it. Could I do it? Would a year make any difference if I wasn't intelligent enough to do it? A large part of me could not face the thought of putting in another year of extremely hard work whilst working full time but I had to listen to the voice that said that I would not respect myself if I didn't give it a go. So I did it and I passed. This time the results came in the post. I cried when I opened it and swore never to do any academic work again". (Excerpt from life history, written in December 2012)*

Negative experiences of formal education can result in reports of shame, depression, discouragement, and despondency which make it difficult to generate the desire and energy required to restart an educational journey (Lange et al, 2010). As a result of my experience, I felt discouraged and stayed away from HE for a further 13 years due to a loss of trust in the educational system and a conviction that I had not belonged there. I could not even bring myself to look at my dissertation until I took up the post of Lecturer. Every time I came across it hidden at the bottom of a cupboard, it provoked negative emotions as I associated the experience with shame and powerlessness. Although I felt I had been poorly advised, self doubt was the dominant feeling. The emotional mind is often quicker

than the rational mind, taking beliefs to be true despite evidence to the contrary (Bukor, 2014). I discounted the good marks I had been achieving and I was possibly influenced by a discourse of individualism, blaming myself for failing rather than considering the possibilities of structural or systemic responsibility. Self blame can be a powerful force in perpetuating a sense of exclusion (Bowl, 2003).

By turning my back on HE, I was arguably positioning myself as a passive victim and withholding a learning power which would have further enabled me to develop my intellectual capacities (Lange et al, 2010). I became 'wounded' when I internalised the messages of discouragement and shame that I interpreted from my initial academic failure, a recognition of the judgement of others (Skeggs, 1997). It probably also explains why I did not tell anyone I had achieved a Masters qualification or attend my graduation. I am unsure that I really believed I had passed. Someone was going to turn up at my door, tell me they had made a mistake and take my certificate away again. Although I eventually emerged with a good Masters award, this incident had given me what Hunt (2001, p.358) describes as "an enormous side-swipe, which knocked me off balance and convinced me that I did not have the intellectual ability" required.

Subsequently my evolving habitus from an incompetent to a competent learner has influenced my self positioning as a student at different stages of my learning journey within education. Wounded learners are likely to be found in every adult learning situation although they may not necessarily be socially or economically marginalised. I am aware of a tension of not wanting to portray or label the non traditional learner as 'needy', which would suggest a deficit position (Fenge, 2010). However, adult learners from non traditional backgrounds may feel excluded from participation in HE due to prior negative experiences (Crossnan, Field, Gallacher, & Merrill, 2003) or a lack of sense of belonging (Reay, 2002). I became curious about how my own experiences influence my professional practice with learners, all of whom are non traditional but not all of whom will have experienced 'wounded learning practices'. Being 'wounded' by these experiences affords me an insight into the potential for relational practice when constructing feedback in order to

minimise the potential for symbolic violence and wounded learning practices. Within the next section, the influence of my experiences as a wounded learner is explored within the context of my current practice with a focus on the presence of emotion.

### **Relatedness: the influence of emotion in developing a relational approach to practice**

The body in academe is rather like a headless horseman galloping wildly and uncontrollably to somewhere driven by unruly emotion while the head – holder of the mind – is enshrined under glass in the halls of academe. (Spry, 2001, p.715)

As an uncertain but committed part time doctoral student, working full time and faced with what at times has felt like an insurmountable amount of work to do is likely to have resonance with the situation of many of the RNs I work with in practice. The emotional dissonance identified by Jansz and Timmers (2002) in doctoral students when in the transitional and fragile stage of identity development, moving from previous self to becoming researcher and scholar is also pertinent for non traditional students trying to establish an academic identity in addition to their nursing persona. This dissonance can lead to feelings of vulnerability and anxiety which can either impede progress or lead to further learning.

Reflection on the lived experience of teaching requires engagement on an emotional level as emotion is central to relational educational practice. However, it is rarely considered explicitly in the context of everyday practice (Akinbode, 2013). As emotion emerged as a constant presence in my practice stories when constructing feedback for students, I started to write about my experiences as a learner within my research journal when receiving feedback as a doctoral student. Paying critical attention to the links between the different sources of data, led to an emerging insight that my personal experiences of feeling 'wounded' have left me alert to the emotions feedback can provoke, the impact on future motivation and the need for transparency in approaches to practice with students in order to minimise wounded learning practices. Critical exploration of the practice stories

offers evidence of how this subsequently influences my practice in terms of the process of constructing and the nature of my feedback to students.

### **Influence on practice: sensitivity to the presence and impact of emotions when *receiving* feedback**

Recipients of feedback can experience the process as difficult and confronting (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Molloy, Barrell-Carrio, & Epstein, 2013). I am reminded of the day the post arrived with an envelope containing my first doctoral assignment results and of being too anxious to open it. At this early stage of doctoral study, I was not excited to receive my results. In fact I felt sick! What if I was not writing at doctoral level? How did I know what doctoral level was? My next step was to rationalise the situation. Well, if the university threw me out because I had not achieved the standard, at least it had not been me that had given up. Following my experience with the Masters programme, I remember opening up the envelope slowly after staring at it for a while, and slowly edging out the paper. I can only describe the feeling as euphoria as I realised I had passed well, having put so much effort in. I felt my effort had been validated but also my habitus as a capable learner took a further step towards being restructured and restored.

My reaction illustrates the emotional connection learners can have to their work. Two students have recently told me that when an email from our team arrives in their inbox indicating feedback they are wary of clicking 'open' and have to steel themselves to do so. This level of anxiety demonstrates an emotional engagement with their work but also suggests an awareness of a relational power dynamic between learner and Lecturer. An excerpt from my research journal three years after receiving those first doctoral assignment results demonstrates the pervasive nature of those feelings. This captures the anxiety I felt when receiving feedback on an early draft of a doomed theoretical framing chapter. Knowing that I was not happy with how it was going to fit into the final thesis ...

*"I was expecting the worst. As the email appeared in my inbox, I felt that familiar feeling of stomach bottoming out and a feeling of impending doom. I haven't had it*

*for a while but that feeling was instantly recognisable. A version of muscle memory for anxiety perhaps”? (Excerpt from Research Journal, April, 2013)*

Similarly, Hunt (2001, p.358) describes feeling “a stirring of the sickness in my stomach” when, as a Lecturer, she received some troubling feedback on a draft of her writing. This physical and emotional impact feedback has on ourselves as academics should sensitise us to how students might feel when receiving our comments. However, despite being apparently sensitive to the emotional nature of feedback, it is clearly unavoidable as we cannot predict or contain the reactions of others. My practice stories alerted me to the importance of the language used when communicating feedback messages.

*“Today I was metaphorically hit over the head with the emotional impact of feedback. I had expected this student to have an emotional reaction to the amount of comments I had made and I did wonder whether I had made too many. However, the draft required major reworking and if I had not pointed out areas that needed clarification, the work was likely to fail on submission. In my email to the student, I had said ‘try not to be disheartened’. The student said they read this and my feedback and felt like throwing the draft across the room at home and swore that they were not going to carry on. The student said they had felt low since receiving the comments and much of this was due to their perception that they had done a good job with this chapter and would just need to tweak it and could get on with the next one. Instead, they were faced with what they saw as a major rewrite. We talked about this and I explained it was common for students to feel like this at some point in their dissertation but that it could be a constructive learning opportunity. I had just read a thesis whisperer post talking about THAT meeting with your supervisor when you want to divorce them because they have challenged your ideas and hard work when you thought you were on the right track. I shared this with the student and then pointed out that they had come to the meeting with a positive list of new themes that were much more related to the data they had presented. In terms of the direction of the chapter, the student went away with a plan of how they were going to address the points in a realistic timescale. The*

*student turned the piece of work around and gained a good pass". (Excerpt from PS65, August, 2013)*

Receiving feedback as a learner has reminded me of the power of the language used in the accompanying message and the format of the comments. On one occasion, I received feedback from one of my supervisory team reassuring me not to be disheartened by the amount of comments made about order and clarity. Having read the comments, I was not at all disheartened as it was exactly the type of questioning and clarifying feedback I had been hoping for. However, that initial caution indicated to me that something might be wrong so I opened the document with trepidation. In the accompanying message to this student described in the excerpt above, I had written "try not to be too disheartened". My own responses to that same phrase, helped me to understand that although it is meant to be reassuring, this phrase can be as ineffective as saying "do not be disheartened" or "I hope you will not be disheartened" and potentially invalidates any dissonance with emotional engagement the student may be experiencing. When communicating with students, I now tend to encourage open discussion about frustrations which can be used as a catalyst for further learning instead of becoming debilitating.

This student had been confronted with an alternative version of reality which can be disorientating and can shift self belief. However, engagement with my own experiences as a learner allowed me to use my own emotional responses to feedback. I had anticipated the emotional reaction and so had been able to prepare for this meeting. I had drawn on both my own experience, other students' experiences and what the literature said about these moments, enabling me to normalise it in terms of the challenging process of learning and writing and not making it about the student personally. The student reworked that chapter and an external marker commented that the exact chapter that the student had struggled with had brought the dissertation alive.

However, when considering what was *not* present in the practice stories, it became apparent that at no time during interactions with the students was I being open about my own past struggle with academic work. I questioned whether my internalised shame concerning my past experience of failure had led me to unintentionally model the absence of struggle (Haggis, 2010). When discussing the complexities of the work with feedback, I was not conveying any sense of the challenges I had experienced as a time poor learner trying to understand new material, thus unconsciously perpetuating the belief of educator as all knowing expert. I returned to the work of Biggs and Tang (2007) who suggested that students were more likely to develop a sense of being able to achieve if the work was acknowledged as complex but that with application and discussion, it would be achievable. Restoring and owning a marginalised perspective has allowed me to step further out from behind the curtains of academic life and explicitly discuss the challenges of learning as a non traditional student. This has become a core component of my feedback practice in tutorials.

### **Influence on practice: sensitivity to the presence and impact of emotions when *producing* feedback**

There is an emerging field of research focusing on the role of emotions in teaching (Bukor, 2014). An awareness that grades matter and represent high stakes for learners (Sadler, 2010) combined with a sensitivity to the emotional impact of feedback for students can lead to an emotional impact on the Lecturer which is potentially disabling. The following excerpt describes my thought processes as I constructed feedback for a student who had misinterpreted the written guidelines for a task which resulted in a draft chapter of a dissertation requiring a major rewrite.

*“When I first read this piece, my heart sank. It took me twice the amount of time I would normally take to construct this feedback. Reading the work has been like wading through treacle. My comments were extensive which I thought might provoke anxiety in (the student). I tried very hard to word my comments constructively whilst acknowledging the amount of work and background reading*

*they had clearly put into this. It was hard to press the 'send' button as I knew it was going to cause anxiety. Sure enough, the next day, I found that the student had emailed me in the early hours to say that the chapter was driving them crazy and when they had first got my comments they felt like they could not achieve this. However, having re-read the comments they then realised there were many positive aspects and they understood where they had gone wrong". (Excerpt from PS53, April, 2013)*

This practice dilemma challenges the discourse of feedback being an objective product and emphasises the relational nature of the process. The wording here suggests that I find it challenging to construct meaningful feedback to a struggling student when considering the emotional impact it may have. 'Wading through treacle' and 'my heart sank' are not positive phrases! The knowledge of the potential demotivating anxiety of the student on receiving the feedback made it difficult to frame and I am conscious of my memories of having had the experience myself of handing in a piece of work only to find you have gone down the wrong track. Pressing the 'send' button in these instances is difficult as it can feel as if you are sending a hand grenade into someone else's world. The relational aspect of providing feedback is illustrated further below:

*"I still feel the enormous sense of responsibility as the time for marking the dissertations arrives. This doesn't seem to get any easier! I only see one draft of a chapter at a time, they go away and make amendments based on the feedback but I don't see how they have used the feedback until it comes in as a final submission. I always find this an anxiety provoking time. Have I supervised them adequately? Have I forgotten anything? The students trust me. Have I fulfilled that trust?" (Excerpt from PS79, November, 2013)*

Bourdieu (1992) talks about the uncertainty of a working class habitus meaning that one is never sure whether one is doing things 'right'. This has been described as the 'emotional politics of class' (Skeggs, 1997, p.90). Pegueros (1995, p.96) writes about her experience as a Lecturer from the working class and states that

“being working class means never knowing for sure why someone is laughing at you”. To take this thought further, I would say that being from my background, I am never sure whether my anxieties are due to my lingering imposter phenomenon or an accepted part of professional practice. I am learning to treat my beliefs tentatively looking for evidence that can confirm or disconfirm a belief and replace it with a new one. My stories from practice demonstrate that I question myself constantly and this combined with an over-sensitivity to emotions is potentially disabling. However, a deepening understanding of the origins of these emotions has developed into an exploration and uncertainty that promotes inquiry and reflection rather than provoking anxiety.

### **Using the presence of emotion to promote further inquiry**

It could be argued that discomfort is necessary if learning is to be transformative and that emotions are an essential part of the learning process, a means to gaining insight (Varlander, 2008). In addition to emerging as an influence on practice, the presence of emotion was also used as a catalyst for further exploration of issues arising in practice. As I explored the sources of my discomfort further, I found discord between my attempts to practice relationally and further internal and structural influences within my habitus and field of practice. I became interested in the politics of positionality that led me to explore the inevitable privileges brought by my position as Lecturer alongside my experiences of marginalisation. Within the next chapter, emotion is used as a sensitising tool that aided a developing understanding of the the dynamic relationship between habitus and the influence of field when applying restored values into practice.

## Chapter 7

### **Official truths and artificial persons: renegotiating a privileged position**

A defining condition of being human is our urgent need to understand and order the meaning of our experience, to integrate it with what we know to avoid the threat of chaos. If we are unable to understand, we often turn to tradition, thoughtlessly seize explanations by authority figures, or resort to various psychological mechanisms such as projection and rationalisation to create imaginary meanings. (Mezirow, 2012, p.73)

### **Recovery leading to relatedness**

As my newly restored marginalised perspective led me towards developing a more relational and emancipatory form of feedback practice, I was confronted with the politics of positionality concerning power imbalances within the field. Writing autoethnographically had deepened my understanding of the influence of structural disadvantages I had faced as a result of my working class background and habitus, restoring a marginalised perspective. However, through the medium of practice stories, I was now facing the corollary aspect; being a Lecturer put me in a position of privilege, power and responsibility. Tensions and contradictions were evident within my practice stories leading to emerging insights as to the intersecting nature of influences arising from my personal experiences with broader socio-cultural influences within my field of practice. Within this chapter, I explore my insights into three aspects of intersecting layers of influence on my feedback practice; academic socialisation, influence of policy and politics of positionality (recovery). These are discussed within the context of my attempts to apply new insights to practice (relatedness). Excerpts from the autobiographical data, the research journal and the practice stories are used alongside relevant literature to continue the exploration into intersecting influences on my practice.

### **Recovery: a 'simmering' frog and the socialising nature of the field**

Entering the profession I had not fully understood the highly political nature of the educational field or that certain interests and agendas are pursued at the expense of others (Brookfield, 2012). From individual decisions about teaching and learning activities in the classroom and interactions with students through to the broader policy context concerning recruitment and retention of students, there is no area of

education that is not shaped by a philosophy that represents a particular political stance. The dominant ideology in a field will incorporate the broadly accepted beliefs, assumptions and perspectives that we use to make sense of our experiences (Brookfield, 2005). These are embedded in language, social habits and cultural forms. So, although as professionals we have the potential to be free and purposeful agents, we do not always exist in conditions of our own making (White, 2006). Professional activity is social in nature. Team cultures are locally accomplished and reproduced and thus sustain the tacit practices of those teams. In essence, they could be described as institutional or team habituses that have a history and have been established over time (Reay et al, 2001a; 2001b).

I return to the analogy of the boiled frog (Orbe, 2013) to illustrate my deepening understanding of the socialising influence of my field of practice when I joined the team and the resulting disjuncture with my personal habitus. Through autoethnographic exploration, I have been attempting to reduce the temperature of a pan of water that was slowly coming to a boil. As a new Lecturer, I had arrived hoping to work in 'partnership' with students who had previously been my colleagues in clinical practice. However, somewhere in the three years between starting my new career and commencing doctoral studies, something shifted. I started to slowly 'simmer' within the department. By not interrogating the normalising discourses within this new field that I had previously taken for granted as a learner (Miller, 2009), I had started to unconsciously reproduce the scripts from my learner past into my practice. Using feelings of discomfort as a sensitising factor and thinking with the concept of symbolic violence, I started to question the extent to which I had become complicit within a system I once viewed as closed to me.

Institutional and organisational factors contribute to socialisation into the custom and practice of a department (doxa). Academic life can be impersonal and can provide a web of distractions that can protect us against unacknowledged feelings of "helplessness, isolation and anxiety that we would feel if we faced the human

condition honestly” (Bochner, 1997, p.421). The academic self is frequently cut off from the ordinary experiential self when issues are not considered relationally. Prior to working my way through this autoethnography, I had not been consciously aware that I was starting to subvert my values in practice. The only clues were my ever present feelings of niggling discomfort concerning the lack of discussion about the role of subjective influences when constructing feedback or marking. I did not feel neutral and was conscious that latent criteria was likely to be impacting on my professional judgements in practice yet this was something that was not being discussed amongst our team or with the students. What is considered legitimate and valued is the product of field structures and the actors within it and policy discourse within the organisation prioritised analytical judgement based on criteria and standards. Legitimation further establishes the doxa of practice (Bourdieu, 1973). These social arrangements can be so entrenched that staff and students can accept or mistake them for the natural order of things – doxa. If stories conduct people (A. Frank, 2010), the dominant story in my department was conducting me to practise as a supposedly objective analytical practitioner.

As a new Lecturer with limited experience and despite the transferability of capital held in other fields, at that time I did not feel as if I had earned sufficient cultural and social capital within this new field to contribute. This was a self imposed silence influenced by both my habitus and the structural influences within the field. If the dominant stories that circulate within our cultural habitus are at odds with our own, it can be difficult to articulate our own experiences (Carless, 2013). The team membership was different at this time and I worked with a team of self confessed positivists in terms of approaches to knowledge production and research. The valued cultural capital at that time was positivist knowledge. Through this discourse, I learned what I understood academia to be and what was accepted and valued. I started to quieten my heretic thoughts about the role of personal influences and settled into a way of working and interacting with students, not discussing what I considered to be the ‘elephant in the room’.

Despite my silence, I continued to feel that my personal biography was shaping and being shaped by my practice in a dialectical relationship. As Bochner (1997) suggests, we tend to cover the details of individual experience beneath the practice of professional jargon which arguably maintains the illusion that the personal self does not infiltrate the professional self. Conducting this autoethnography was to be the first step of demystification in which I acknowledge that my own condition of being inhabited by scripts and storylines is pervasive (Freeman, 2010) and when intersecting with the broader socio cultural context of my field influences my practice with both the students and my colleagues. Looking back then, at the beginning of the autoethnographic process, I was not quite a boiled frog within the academy but I was simmering!

Reading an autoethnographic piece by Brett Smith (2013) introduced me to the concept of 'artificial persons', originally described by Wolgast (1992) as individuals who tend to follow the organisational party line and espouse institutional procedures and rules, thus removing their own responsibility in the interaction. If relations of power are hidden in individuals, they are likely to be even more deeply hidden in institutions because institutions practise through individuals (Adamovich, Kumsa, Rego, Stoddard & Vito, 2014). Fields are created by us as social actors (Bourdieu, 1973) and social practices within departments can reproduce authority structures. My silence as an actor within this field contributed to the illusion presented to the students that marking and feedback are purely objective and analytical tasks.

As a past learner with less capital, I had unquestionably accepted the discourse of HE as legitimate and the evaluation standards as fair and objective. Now, as a Lecturer, I started to question my complicity in maintaining the status quo. Maintaining 'official truths' on behalf of an organisation can lead to a lack of feeling of personal responsibility for actions towards others and can result in a form of symbolic violence. According to Smith (2013), the construction of an 'artificial person' requires both structure and agency. I exist within my field with my personal dispositions and habitus. Exploring the dynamic relationship of habitus within a

field allows me to understand that I share responsibility for what is happening within the dynamic of the team but it equally offers the potential to influence change within it.

Developing critical consciousness involves developing a deepening understanding of the world, allowing for the perception and exposure of personal, social and political contradictions. As I continued to generate practice stories and apply new insights back into practice, I looked for discrepancies in my practice between my espoused beliefs and values and actively searched for contradictions in my thinking and practice within the stories. This was aided by the following questions in the interpretive framework.

*What contradictions emerge?*

*What relationship do the stories have to particular discourses?*

Although I had not intended to only record episodes of practice when I felt uncomfortable, it became apparent when returning to the practice stories that dissonance was a predominant theme. Many of the stories from practice were 'conflict' stories involving either internal conflicts or challenging conversations which I now understand reflected an internal destabilised state – a dislocated habitus. Negative emotion and language was articulated when I was experiencing dissonance in my thinking or my practice. This interpretation helped me to actively search for instances when I did not act in accordance with my values and to attempt to understand why this was. I started to question to what extent I was complicit in dominant culture forms and practices that may contribute to the marginalisation of non traditional students. I questioned in what ways my habitus was intersecting with the wider structures of the field and in relation to other social actors. All actors within the field can act in ways that reinscribe traditional teaching relations (Yannuzzi & Martin, 2014).

Consciously examining these conflict situations allowed me the opportunity to reconnect with my moral self and further restore my values to my work. Paying

attention to uncomfortable emotions enabled me to question assumptions and viewpoints which enabled further conceptualisation and meaning making (Malkki, 2012). Critical reflection on assumptions becomes possible only after disconcerting feelings are accepted as an indicator of problematic assumptions. If I had not interrogated uncomfortable emotions or had tried to exclude them or to explain them away from awareness, I would have been clinging onto previous perspectives. However, by the act of accepting the feelings, I was making room for an alternative perspective that would frame these negative feelings. I have learned to value my internal conflicts as a prompt to push against the edge and rethink my interpretations. The next section uses excerpts from the practice stories to demonstrate emerging insights concerning the intersecting nature of personal and broader influences on practice when constructing feedback.

### **The influence of policy: relying on ‘official truths’**

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) suggest that researchers should pay particular attention to how the policies of our disciplines affect how we think and work. My practice when constructing feedback is shaped by the relevant institutional policies and guidelines which detail what students can expect in terms of feedback from tutors. A recent review of feedback practices across the UK HE sector (Ferrell, 2012) identified that it is assessment rather than feedback that is more likely to be mentioned in institutional strategies. Where they exist, guidelines are likely to be of most use to students who are able to understand the need for self regulation and to be proactive about seeking feedback. It has also been identified that formal documentation takes a significant time to catch up with the current evidence base and thinking (Ferrell, 2012).

Within the local HEI documents, there is no acknowledgement that the learner might need support to interpret the feedback, a factor indicated in the feedback literature (Adcroft, 2011; Adcroft & Willis, 2013). Feedback is described as something that is ‘given’ to the students rather than an interactive dialogic process with clear roles and responsibilities within this. It is very focused on the Lecturer ‘giving’ and ‘managing student expectations’ suggesting that the Lecturer is

reactive, waiting for the student's work to arrive, that the student will understand the nature and value of feedback and is willing to put themselves in a position of feeling vulnerable by asking for support. This may not meet the needs of the under confident student who is wary of feeling or appearing vulnerable and is too anxious to share their draft work or plans for review for fear of being exposed. Students who are beginning their programme of study may not yet have learned the skills of self regulation or do not understand how to get the most out of feedback.

Freire (1985) recommends that educators should ask themselves for whom and on whose behalf we are working. As Lecturers, the social practice norms have been defined by us as the dominant group within this field in response to structural influences and thus help to create the dominant discourse. I started to question the extent to which we, as a team, are proactive with those students who do not approach us with draft work but who still struggle in terms of their grades. I feel the thoughts of the under confident student about accessing feedback are represented in the following quote:

I don't want to go to my module leader who's given me so many lectures on this and you would have thought I would have got it by now. Well actually, I still don't know what you're after. (Bloxham & Campbell, 2010, p.64)

These views are similar to those in studies by Carless (2006) and Hounsell, McCune, Hounsell and Litjens (2005) who concluded that tutors should be proactive in providing guidance, particularly for struggling students rather than waiting for them to turn up at the door. Timelines for the production of draft work prior to submission can be very prescriptive within policies. These guidelines may be of less use to the non traditional student, struggling or not, who may then feel they cannot approach the tutor for help if it is outside the deadlines. Research regarding mature non traditional students within HE has identified that time poverty is a significant factor with this group (Bowl, 2003; Scott et al, 2011) as students often combine study and paid work with caring and family commitments. Bowl (2003) suggests that there are two initial assumptions about the framework of HE concerning the time available to students; firstly, that it is fairly limitless and secondly that it is flexible. The reality for many of the RNs is that they are working full or part time, are juggling family commitments, possibly have confidence issues

with academic work having not studied for many years and have to do the work when they get the time. This is illustrated by the excerpt from my research journal below.

*“I met with a student today who had failed their first submission of an assignment and wanted to discuss the feedback so they could restructure and resubmit. As we talked through the feedback, they talked about how annoyed they were with themselves for missing the deadline for drafts as they had just returned from a family funeral of a close relative. When I reminded the student that they had had grounds for an extension, the student replied that it hadn’t even occurred to them, as they had been out of HE for so long and had not thought to investigate what they were entitled to”. (Excerpt, Research Journal, October, 2014)*

Mature non traditional students are less likely to understand the discourses, practices and procedures of HE and do not know what standards are expected of them or what they should do differently if unsuccessful (Tapp, 2014). Learning away from the main campus leads to students often finding the culture and norms of HE a mystery, a lack of understanding of the rules of the game of university life and feeling as if they are working in the dark without a clear idea of what is required, expressing a sense of powerlessness in the face of implicit rather than explicit rules (Reay, 2002). Their learning and coping strategies might not fall into the neatly prescribed deadlines set by the university. Life often gets in the way. Yet, I often hear policies and procedures quoted to students on occasions when a deadline has passed for feedback on drafts. Critically reflecting on my own agency within my field, I was able to identify my own complicity in participating in oppressive practices and symbolic violence. There were occasions within the practice stories when I identified myself espousing ‘official truths’ relating to feedback policies and felt uncomfortable observing this. The excerpt below illustrates how an episode in practice contributed to my questioning as to what extent I am complicit within the system, using the policies for my own protection rather than as a tool to help students develop self regulation.

*“Yesterday I received an email with another full draft attached saying the student had forgotten to ask me if they were being ‘critical’ enough. The student said they knew they had already used their tutorial time but wondered if I could look at the work again. I must confess that I almost immediately responded, asking them to revisit my earlier feedback and I would be unable to comment further as per the guidelines”. (Excerpt PS64, August, 2013)*

Smith (2013) argues that espousing official truths is a behaviour that is particularly insidious as the artificial person speaks with authority deriving from both a base of expertise and a claim of acting in the person’s best interests. Quoting the policies and guidelines affords me administrative authority that resides elsewhere (A. Frank, 2004) which can be damaging to both the student and myself as practitioner. I felt uncomfortable at my response to the student which was an indication that I knew I had not practised in accordance with my values. Moral stress has been conceptualised as when we know the right thing to do but institutional constraints make it difficult to pursue the right course of action (Ehrich, Kimber, Millwate & Cranston, 2011). However, although I am arguably constrained by the structural influences of my field in terms of workload and policies, this does not excuse me. I have agency. In terms of the policy guidelines, I was technically correct. Yet, this exchange left me feeling uncomfortable. I had used the policy to protect me in terms of workload. This student was trying to understand how to add layers of criticality and I had responded as an artificial person spouting official truths. The full practice story acknowledges this and goes on to consider other alternative more helpful responses I could have made.

*“On reflection, I could have perhaps suggested they look at the article on critical writing I had given them all initially and perhaps included a paragraph reminding the student to focus less on description and more on alternative perspectives. I could also have reminded them of the benefits of using the peer support group they had developed to discuss their work. I am not their only source of feedback. To be honest, I was tired. I am so tired...due a break and not in the mood to be accommodating. I am not happy to acknowledge this but there it is. So, whilst I was*

*trying genuinely to ensure parity with the other students, I was also trying not to add to my workload. I should have entered into an email dialogue with the student that would have been more helpful than my short ‘by the book’ response”. (Excerpt from PS64, August, 2013)*

Bailey and Garner (2010) suggest that HE Lecturers need to be aware that what we write is not simply a pedagogic interaction between ourselves and the students but is also symbolic of what is required to fulfil other wider demands. The policies and practices of the HEI, the pressures of internal and external audit, the varied practice of colleagues across and within disciplinary and subject boundaries all contribute to the shape, the amount, form and quality of feedback we produce. Provision of feedback is an interface between our pedagogical goals as Lecturers and the student needs but also between the institutional and governmental educational policies which structure and regulate our practices and procedures. Yet, discussing this does not form a regular part of practice. As stated by Bochner (1997, p.432) “we do not see ourselves as embedded in a strange subculture and our department within the larger culture of the university and we do not analyse and talk with each other about either culture in profoundly self critical ways”. Although as practitioners, we heavily influence feedback practice, that practice is also influenced by the learning environment and context which are shaped by a variety of factors ranging from staff training and beliefs about the learning process. Words written on a page of policy document have potentially limited impact unless they are placed within their context. Ways of working can also reinforce the policy discourse of feedback as product which can undermine it as a process. For example, workload planning systems allocate time to produce a feedback product but do not take into account time for meaningful dialogue with learners. However, through writing my own stories, I have become more alert to the stories of the students which helps me to consider the pressures of my own practice in relation to theirs.

*“I’ve just spent an hour with one of my dissertation students and for the first 20 minutes they expressed their exhaustion with the whole process. Our discussion*

*reminded me of the reading I've been doing recently, both in terms of the mature non traditional student who holds down a job and a family with varying other responsibilities trying to fit in studies but also that all the good practice evidence around self regulation and feedback seems to be based on or aimed at students in full time tertiary education. Listening to the student who was in tears at the effort the work was taking, they said they thought it was their age and that they were not capable of completing this but when we talked through all the competing responsibilities at home as well as a clinical role with a high burnout rate, it was not surprising they were feeling so shattered. The student ended by saying 'it's killing me but it's worth it'. (Excerpt from PS65, August, 2013)*

*"Today, one of the students who has been achieving well throughout most of their degree pathway came to hand in an assignment without the reference list, purely because they had run out of time and the printer had broken down. I questioned further as this was very unlike this student and the story that followed left me completely astounded that they had managed to write a word, let alone hand in an unfinished assignment. They had felt unable to ask for assistance with a draft because the deadline for draft work had passed. Yes, they could have applied for an extension to the HEI but the issue was so personal and painful that they did not want to write it on paper or expose it to a faceless institution. I felt helpless within the system and that the guidelines had left this student feeling powerless. I explained the process of applying for special consideration for mitigating circumstances for this assignment which they are going to do but I wonder how many other students suffer in silence without the assistance they could be entitled to purely because they are trying to work within the guidelines". (Excerpt from PS40, January, 2013)*

This led to a further raising of critical consciousness concerning the need to avoid reproducing the inequalities experienced by myself as a student in the past by not understanding the rules of the game or feeling as if I had a voice. It is arguable that the doxa of the system prevents us from developing emancipatory forms of teaching and more supportive roles in relation to the students' efforts to understand

the tacit roles of academic life (Bowl, 2003). Adamovich et al (2014) investigated the use of self in teaching and asserts that we cannot blame the 'unconscious' for our not knowing anymore than we can blame external social structures of inequality of social practices. One of the reflective exercises completed involved consideration of my educational role models (Appendix 4). When completing it, I immediately thought of a colleague who had worked within the team when I first joined and has since left.

*"I remember very clearly her saying that when we were nursing, our role was to advocate for the patients where needed but in this role the students are our 'patient' and it is our role to advocate for them. From a nursing perspective, that really struck a chord with me as a nurse Lecturer at that time. Although I now feel that sounds quite a paternalistic point of view, at the time it was a point of reference that I understood. She was a strong advocate for students and put them at the centre of the learning process rather than systems working for the educator. When I think of this person, I think of the word 'integrity' which I value greatly and although we did not always agree on every issue, she remains someone who has probably influenced my practice more than most". (Excerpt, Role Model Profile, Appendix 4 , September, 2012)*

As a team we espouse the official discourse of student centred processes yet there are silent but present power imbalances between the 'expert' Lecturer and 'passive' student which seem inappropriate in the context of adults working together. As Lecturers and students we are social actors in the broader field of HE whilst also moving in different fields within our specific contexts of practice. However, these fields are not autonomous from each other as we interact constantly and power relations within one field may affect an individual's position in another. Field boundaries are therefore dynamic and the product of changing social relations (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In addition, differentials in habitus mean that each playing field is not level for everyone. As Lecturers, we hold a powerful position and the structure of the feedback policies encourage us to assert the 'expert' status of our knowledge. I began to look for instances where my

espoused intention to practice democratically were in contrast with my practice; in essence, I was trying to catch myself out.

### **Power differentials in practice: contradictions and tensions**

During the course of the research, I have been developing my knowledge and practice by engaging with the literature concerning dialogical approaches to feedback (Yang & Carless, 2013) and applying these understandings to practice. Carless (2013, p.90) defines such approaches as “interactive exchanges in which interpretations are shared, meanings negotiated and expectations clarified”. In her review of feedback practices, Evans (2013) identifies two main approaches to constructing feedback; cognitivist and socio-constructivist which should be considered as part of a continuum rather than as opposite ends of the spectrum. Cognitivist approaches are associated with a directive, largely corrective approach where the expert is providing information to the passive recipient. The socio-constructivist approach is more consistent with my values involving a more facilitative style using comments, questions and suggestions with the aim of enabling students to make their own revisions and through dialogue develop new understandings (Evans, 2013). I have been aiming for a socio-constructivist style as an expression of my values into practice. Yet, my practice stories demonstrate contradictions and tensions as it emerged that my espoused theory and values were not always evident in my practice. These insights emerged as a result of considering the following critical question.

#### *What contradictions emerge?*

My written feedback is indicative of a socio-constructivist approach and is full of questions, curiosities, comments and invitations to the student to respond with their own ideas. Yet, when I am sitting face to face with a student, I started to notice that I tend to take the lead in the conversation and set the agenda thus placing myself in a position of authority and knowledge as expert. One module I teach is assessed through a written examination and Observed Clinical Structured Examination (OSCE) which tends to provoke much anxiety amongst the students. On the final

day of the taught element, I spend an afternoon facilitating a revision workshop with the students which is followed up in the subsequent three weeks prior to the exams with an individual tutorial for feedback on their revision plans.

*“I’ve seen about 70% of the students so far and every single one of them has said they have felt much better and more clear about things having sat with me and gone through the process. This brings up two possibilities for me. One: in the class they had so much information to take on board, they were unable to process the same information in the classroom. Second: maybe I was unclear in the class. Perhaps I spend too much time on revision (which I feel is important) in terms of content and focus but they were more concerned with how things were going to work on examination day. I should have perhaps picked up on this, particularly as my own concerns as a student would have been very similar to theirs in this situation. Should I have asked them what would have been most helpful for them to know in our final revision session? Yes, probably. However, I can’t escape the fact that I know I needed to check that they were on the right lines in terms of content. Now I have written that, I’m thinking – says who? It is to alleviate my anxieties as a teacher that I put that revision session in but it is not just about my anxieties, it is about helping them in the right direction. Listen to me spouting on about partnership and sharing power and I have been making all the decisions”! (Excerpt from PS55, June, 2013)*

The language used in the excerpts above suggests that it was my needs that were being met when I structured the sessions in order to alleviate my anxieties as a Lecturer ensuring they knew what was expected of them. I did not involve the students in any of the decision making around the final day of this module in order to alleviate their own anxieties. I just presumed what their anxieties would be. The tutorials for feedback on their revision strategies were also directed by me. Instead of asking them how they would best like to use the time, I launched into what I wanted to tell them first. The teaching profession is arguably governed by political decisions concerning targets that are detrimental to students. Practitioners can experience a dual loyalty, held concurrently to both students and institution

(Colnerud, 2014). As a practitioner, I am influenced by policies and assessment procedures but also by my desire for the students to develop their 'voice' and achieve. Using the evidence base about student perceptions within the literature (Blair & McGinty, 2013; Carless, 2013), I started to structure the revision and feedback sessions with a student focus. The excerpt below demonstrates my efforts to change my approach, this time with a dissertation student.

*“Anyway, today I started by asking ‘How do you want to do this? What will work best for you? The student responded immediately by asking if we could spend half the time talking through the feedback, half the time going through what was required for the following chapter with a final five minutes to bring me up to speed with a development in practice that would impact on their emerging work. So...that’s exactly what we did! We went over time and spent more time on the feedback but I let them lead and talk through why they had approached the work in a particular way.” (Excerpt from PS63, August, 2013)*

Here, I have given up control of the agenda, although the words 'let (the student) lead' still indicates I also had control over that decision. My reflective journal hints at a concern about experimenting with approaches if the student feels underprepared when their marks are at stake. The dominant approach to provision of feedback within the team tends towards the cognitivist end of the spectrum thus the students may feel unprepared for a socio-constructivist approach when they take modules led by myself. There is complexity around encouraging students to feel that they are members of an academic community where the norm is not to discuss work in a relatively open, informed and scholarly manner (Handley, Szwernik, Ujma, Lawrence, Millar, & Price, 2007). Bowl (2003) suggests that there is also a complexity to the role of Lecturer in terms of maintaining hegemony. Strategies such as increasing dialogue can suggest the illusion of equality whilst leaving the power differentials within the relationship intact (Ellsworth, 1989). Our positions afford us economic, social and cultural capital within the field which is arguably less developed within non traditional students. The ideal of emancipatory practice is challenging given the power differentials of assessment so whilst one of

my aims is to minimise that power hierarchy, in practice this is very difficult to do. An example from my practice illustrates this.

*“I’ve been trying to implement a more dialogic approach to my written feedback that I follow up when we meet face to face. I’m not sure how effective this is though. I had sent some feedback to a student on a draft essay and my comments were worded in the form of suggestions of issues or trains of thought they may consider investigating further, but also questions that invited the student to respond with their own thoughts and ideas to my comments. However, I have just received an email from the student thanking me and but with no response to my attempts at an email dialogue, instead just saying they will make the necessary corrections. This was not the aim of my feedback! How well am I explaining my perception of the feedback relationship?” (Excerpt from PS62, August, 2013)*

My personal learning experiences are helpful in understanding this further. As a doctoral student, I am now more likely to enter into a dialogue about feedback given to me. This is demonstrated by an excerpt from a reflection on my own experiences of receiving some written feedback from a supervisor when writing this thesis. An email message reproduced below gives an example of a response to one of my supervisory team following the receipt of feedback on a draft chapter.

*“I am finding it difficult to know what is expected of me in this largely theoretical chapter. Your comment makes me think you had a certain expectation of what an auto ethnography literature review chapter should look like but I don't have any idea of what one should look like! Can you be more specific about what you are expecting? Thinking back to the earlier piece of writing I sent you last year debating the style of autoethnography I would adopt, I wonder whether your perspective influences what you are expecting to see? I know I am in the process of finding my voice and developing confidence in this which is a learning process but I suppose I still want to be that 'hybrid' auto ethnographer that mixes the analytical with the evocative. However, I can see that I need to make myself more visible within the discussion of the theory and I think this will be easier to do when*

*writing about literature concerning the uncertainty/complexities of practice". (Email communication from me to Supervisor, included with their permission, April 2013)*

My response prompted a productive dialogue between us about the nature of the supervisory process and epistemological opinions and became part of the process of me getting used to justifying my work and finding my academic and researcher voice. However, in my undergraduate days with my incompetent learner habitus, I am not even sure I would even have responded. I would just have accepted that I had got it 'wrong' because I had not written it in the way that the tutor had expected just as I had with my English schoolteacher many years ago. Reflecting on my responses to feedback caused me to question how many of my students feel this way about feedback I have written and either do not feel able to say anything or just assume they are wrong. Even if Lecturers understand the current evidence about dialogical feedback, students are less likely to be aware of what this means. If this is not specified anywhere, how likely are they to feel comfortable in opening a dialogue with someone they may perceive as an expert?

Learners are typically positioned as novices within the learning relationship (Molloy & Boud, 2013). However, if the concept of learning relies exclusively on the 'teacher as expert', this suggests that helpful feedback can only be generated by a teacher, thus perpetuating a power dynamic where the student remains potentially dependent on the teacher as the arbiter of quality (Price, Handley, O'Donovan, Rust, & Millar, 2013). As a learner, I have personally found this a difficult label to leave behind. One of my supervisory team noted early on in the doctoral process how often I used the word 'novice' to describe myself as a practitioner and as a researcher. By positioning myself as a novice, I was concurrently elevating the supervisor to a place of authority; arguably a default setting as a result of my habitus. However, for learning to occur, rational discourse needs to be present (Baumgartner, 2012). If I perceive my supervisors as the voices of authority, this could inhibit my potential for learning. My supervisory team have their areas of expertise which I appreciate greatly, yet neither of them impose this on me, instead offering suggestions and asking questions to help me clarify my ideas and

direction. I started to take notice of how I am responding to them in discussions as in the excerpt from my research journal below.

*“Having just received some feedback on a draft chapter, I am thinking again about how I am responding to feedback from my supervisors. I am noticing a difference. Instead of assuming any alternative views they have indicated that mine are at fault, I am starting to take note of their epistemological stances and influences and use these to help me consider different standpoints. I find that their comments and questions are immensely helpful in encouraging me to think through the rationale for my decision making processes”. (Excerpt from Research Journal, November, 2012)*

I am finding my ‘voice’ through an evolving habitus as a capable learner developing my self concept over a number of years. I should not then find it surprising that the undergraduate students I work with may find it challenging to find their own ‘academic voice’. I now include a discussion on each module about making the most of feedback and encourage discussion on the expectations and roles of each person within the feedback landscape, encouraging and assisting them to utilise other sources of feedback including the development of peer support groups. I direct them to the good practice guidance for students on making the most of feedback developed by the TESTA project (Gibbs, 2013). Opportunities to work with feedback are also incorporated into the teaching and learning activities within the classroom. Using evidence by Bloxham and Campbell (2010), I have introduced the use of interactive cover sheets that I ask students to complete when they send me drafts of their work with the aim of encouraging dialogue and engagement with previous feedback (Appendix 8).

Within the next section, I discuss how the tensions and contradictions that emerged when trying to develop a democratic approach to my feedback practices became indicative of a discomfort with a position of privilege which felt in conflict with my restored marginalised perspective. Further exploration of feelings of discomfort within the practice stories supported by critical conversations led to a

deepening understanding that I often appear to be fighting against a position of privilege and looking for ways to lessen this.

### **Relatedness: renegotiating a privileged position**

As I developed a critically reflexive attitude towards my practice, I reflected upon how my social and cultural background and position within the field and my intellectual bias shapes the way I see the world (Bourdieu, 1990). I became aware of tensions and frustrations in my writing that indicated a feeling of a burden of guilt as the differences between my position and that of the students became more obvious. My practice stories suggested that I was trying to ignore and deny my difference. I felt uncomfortable being positioned by others (students, colleagues and family) as a 'legitimate knower' and this contributed to my feelings of fraudulence within the academy. This discomfort with the symbolic capital bestowed on me with the title of Lecturer generated uncertainty and further reflection on my own positioning but also produced blind spots during the interpretation of the data. For example, the writing in some of my earlier practice stories and entries in the research journal suggested I was tending to align myself with the experiences of the students and thus positioning myself with them in opposition to what I perceived as inequitable ways of working. I started to notice that although I was reviewing the policy documents from the perspective of several identities (i.e. Lecturer, doctoral student and researcher) it was surprising to me that the predominant perspective that I approached them with was that of the non traditional student. I noticed that I was actively looking for evidence that their needs were not being met adequately. The following critical questions were helpful when unpicking some of my reactions:

*Are sensational, provocative or contentious stories foregrounded or avoided? If so, what are the implications of this?*

*What alternative views may be considered?*

These questions helped me to notice that often I was focusing my stories on my reactions to what I perceived others were not doing rather than what I was doing.

Similarly, when writing my practice stories, I could detect an angry tone when I described episodes of practice I considered unjust instead of interrogating my role within them. Returning to my life history, I found that I had ended it by writing:

*“I just might need to make sure that large chip on my shoulder does not turn into a potato”! (Excerpt from Life History)*

Through critical conversations and reviewing my writing, I was able to identify a ‘them’ and ‘us’ scenario emerging, possibly as a result of a newly restored marginalised perspective. I needed to avoid blaming and shaming when representing experience and instead examine my own involvement in perpetuating oppressive systems. This developing self awareness kept me alert to consideration of other perspectives and different ways of seeing leading to a deeper level of engagement with the data.

Within my practice stories, there was evidence that although I try to practise democratically, this is not only influenced by policy constraints but also the students themselves as social actors within the field. In order to promote self regulation and independence in learning in students, my practice is to encourage them to consider their preferred learning styles and negotiate deadlines (within the university guidelines) to send me draft work. This is also in recognition of the complexities of their lives outside of study. With the dissertation module, the organisation allows more flexibility in terms of timelines for drafts and this is negotiated between student and tutor. One student had repeatedly set negotiated deadlines to send me draft work to comment on but had not kept to any of them. I was conscious of not wanting to put too much academic pressure on the student as the individual was experiencing a variety of quite considerable difficulties outside of work and study. However, the delays were causing problems for my own workload.

*“My workload is such that I am starting to panic about the amount of time available to look at the student’s work and produce useful feedback. I sent a reminder email*

*this week and once again reminded them of the submission date and set out very clearly that my diary is very full and unless they can give me an idea of when the work is coming in, I cannot build time in to look at it. I felt uncomfortable doing this as I felt it meant I was now working more to my agenda than theirs". (Excerpt from PS42, January, 2013)*

My response to this situation is supported by the university guidelines on feedback (official truths) and when returning to this practice story I initially suspected that I was once again protecting myself with the policies, using my privileged position as Lecturer to prompt the student to send me the work. However, as I started to explore my discomfort with a privileged position, I considered that my response could be a reflection of my view of the student as partner and I was treating the student as someone who also has responsibilities in the relationship. Although trying to reduce privilege, neither do I position myself as a 'benevolent' teacher who will provide feedback when the student is ready. The reality was that I was literally having sleepless nights caused by the volume of my work and waiting for these draft chapters to arrive felt like the straw that was close to breaking the camel's back. The directive approach worked and the draft chapters duly arrived. Yet I felt uncomfortable. This situation is not an unusual occurrence. A few weeks later another practice story demonstrates my increasing frustration about another student's inability to stick to their deadlines and how this impacts on my preferred way of practising.

*"I have to admit that this student is causing me stress. Not because of their ability or the quality of their work but their inability to keep to deadlines. As much as possible, I incorporate their deadlines to help me plan my workload. I voiced my frustrations in the office today with my colleagues and one of them reminded me that the student had responsibilities too and I did not have to respond to their new timelines if I was unable to do so. Yet I do! I can't not respond or give feedback but the student is going to have to wait until I have space to do it as my other work will not just disappear. I am not there purely to respond when students feel they are ready. Sometimes it feels as if students think we just sit at a desk waiting for their*

*work to come for something to do! I may have made a rod for my own back with this as I have always responded quickly to student drafts if I know when they are coming in. This is impossible to do if they just land on your desk when you have other deadlines to meet or teaching commitments. I think I have clearly communicated to the students. They have responsibilities too". (Excerpt from PS54, March, 2013)*

The language and tone of this practice story demonstrates a feeling of powerlessness and perhaps regret that I have created this situation for myself through my attempts at a democratic approach. My use of language and punctuation illustrates the frustration I am feeling. This dilemma demonstrates my struggle with what I see as tensions when renegotiating a position of privilege. I have responsibilities as an academic advisor both to maintain standards and to be a facilitator of self regulating behaviour. However, irritation and frustration is littered throughout this practice story. Exclamation marks are everywhere and the tone indicates confusion. I am trying to fulfill my responsibilities to the student whilst at the same time trying to protect myself both emotionally in terms of increasing workload resulting in more stress and academically regarding quality control. I returned to the literature to assist me in thinking through this dilemma.

*"I have been reading today about teaching as a mode of friendship. Rawlins (2000) suggests questioning how I address students. Am in a hurry? What does my posture and tone say about my regard for them?"*

*When the student arrived, they apologised for the late work and we immediately got down to business by talking through the feedback. I'm not sure whether this was deliberate on my part. I was interested to know how they were coping with the very substantial outside pressures but at the same time was very aware of my limited time and needed to make sure we covered what was needed so they had the required information to continue. We had time left at the end of the session to discuss what was going on at home.*

*However, looking back and reflecting on Rawlins comments, I was aware that I was talking quickly, trying to get it all in. I was not asking for the student's opinion as much as I normally would have and I felt I was rushing. I am not sure whether this is a reflection on the fact that they have virtually no time left to complete or because I have become increasingly irritated with the situation. I did not feel irritated during the session but was definitely aware of the time pressures. It felt like a student-teacher interaction rather than two professionals discussing ideas".*  
(Excerpt from PS56, March, 2013)

Although I was aware that the student's lack of organisation was not aimed at irritating me, I was aware of an emotional response and wanted to explore this further. Once again, I am trying to practise in accordance with my values and am trying to make sense of the relationship between myself and the student. Tone and the type of address are important in terms of communicating regard (Rawlins, 2000) yet my practice story above demonstrates how I did not behave in this way. However, it would it have been ungentle of me to pretend that the lack of responsibility in terms of meeting agreed deadlines was acceptable. There is a mutuality within a relational approach to teaching which includes the recognition of the equal validity of each other's personhood. In my quest to develop equity in the relationship, I question here whether I am subverting my own personhood and giving an inaccurate message to the student. If the teaching and learning relationship is about mutual respect and partnership, then this respect needs to be reciprocal. I began to question whether I am over accommodating to students' circumstances because I am aware of and uncomfortable with the privilege inherent in my position and so try and balance this out with an empathetic approach. Napier and Fook (2000) identified that professionals are often uncomfortable with the idea of having power. The practice story continued later on that month and further demonstrated the need for honesty in a reciprocal relationship. Submission date had arrived.

*"The student also said they had to thank me for my honesty and the fact that I had given them a kick up the proverbial and said that If I had not done so, they would have left it and not completed the work. The fact that I had found it so hard to*

*behave in this way but that it was exactly what the student needed is interesting”.*  
(Excerpt from PS59, March, 2013)

This entry made me question my (in)flexibility of approach. My position as Lecturer invests me with the authority and expectations of expert associated with that position but this feels discordant with my desire to practise in a democratic way. If teaching is to be considered as a mode of friendship (Rawlins, 2000) or if I want to consider myself as a learning companion (Cranton & Wright, 2008) or ally (Richardson & Radloff, 2014), then those words are significant. Being a ‘friend’ or ‘companion’ does not mean staying quiet and accepting everything the other person says. A friend also knows when to say ‘get your act together’ or ‘you’re on the wrong track’.

This also made me consider the importance of reciprocity within the feedback relationship. My irritation is an indication that my values were being subverted. I felt dissonance because although I behaved in a way that is inconsistent with my preferred approach, I felt let down due to my perception of the student as partner in the process. However, as Brookfield (2005) states, teaching democratically does not mean that we cease to speak authoritatively or that we pretend to be exactly the same as our students. It is not an abdication of our responsibility to judge work but that we should endeavour to create conditions under which all voices can speak and be heard. That includes our voices as well as the students for a truly reciprocal, negotiated educational process. This autoethnographic process has enabled me to accept that being a Lecturer comes with a privileged position in the learning situation. Power imbalances within the educational relationship should be considered as inevitable (Ellsworth, 1989) and can be renegotiated and challenged but not completely overcome. However, by problematising my own stance in terms of my own interests of class and gender, I acknowledge that I bring a social subjectivity that means I can never unproblematically reduce privilege. However, recognising my position in these relations of power enables me to practise in a way that takes account of the experiences of those I work with.

## **Taking the simmering frog off the boil**

In this chapter, the discussion has focused on aspects of my individual teaching practice with students and the intersecting influences of personal habitus with broader socio-cultural influences. The relationship between the objective relationships of field and the subjectivity of habitus is one of complicity (McLeod, 2005). Disjunctures of habitus encountering an unfamiliar field can be destabilising or socialising but can also generate restoration of values. Critical reflection on my practice individually and in relation to my field has enhanced a more nuanced understanding of my position as an educator in relation to power and agency. I was starting to feel implicated in a structure and team habitus even as I was trying to develop my individual practice through a more democratic approach with the students. A critical approach to the data allowed me to uncover some of my remaining hegemonic assumptions that sat uncomfortably with my espoused beliefs and values but I am learning to replace judgement with curiosity (Gilligan, 2011). This autoethnography has offered me the opportunity to take the pan of simmering water with the frog away from the heat and by understanding the dynamic relationship between my habitus and broader influences, I continue to work towards a more informed mode of practice.

However, I was becoming aware of a paradox in the way in which I was trying to employ empowering approaches to practice which focused on the individual, either myself as professional or student, rather than challenging oppressive social structures within my field of practice which maintain and reinforce inequality. As I questioned the basis of the work I was doing, I was sending ripples into my practice world (Fenge, 2010) by exposing contradictions and tensions. It had been uncomfortable to identify instances in practice when I was behaving in the manner of an 'artificial person' and speaking 'official truths'. However, it is not inevitable that we mindlessly reproduce through our practices the inequalities already present (Miller, 2009). My practice stories also demonstrate my growing awareness that I now appeared to be starting to teach 'against the grain' (Boomer, 1988), against my own academic socialisation, my previous learner scripts and the doxa of the team. Through my practice and interactions and conversations with colleagues, I

was questioning the doxa of the team practices. By making visible my own privileged position, I was by default exposing the privileged positions of my colleagues. Having questioned for whom I was working, I came to understand that to teach critically required me to take risks within my practice and within my team. Within chapter eight, I discuss the challenges and dilemmas this presented and how social relationships within the field add a further level of intersectionality to influences on practice.

## Chapter 8

### Creating 'lively talk' to develop feedback practice: the influence of social relationships within the field

...the origins, liveliness and durability of cultures require that there be space for figures whose function is to uncover and disrupt the very things that cultures are based on. (Hyde, 1998, p.7)

#### Recovery leading to relatedness

Fields are sites of struggle that are constantly being restructured by the habitus of the social actors within it. The department in which I work is a socially structured space delimited by values and principles within which we, as social agents, struggle depending on the position we occupy within that space (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). There is a dialectical relationship between myself and my colleagues as actors within my field of practice and the constraints of the social structures of that field. Within this chapter, Bourdieu's (1973) concepts of habitus, capital and field are used to think through the dynamic intersecting relationship between my personal habitus and dispositions and social relationships within the field as a further influence on practice (recovery). The following sensitising questions were helpful here:

*Which parts of the stories relate to interpersonal relationships and interactions?*

*How do they relate to other aspects of the stories?*

*Are cultural conventions/transgressions evident? If so, what are the effects?*

Questioning official truths concerning approaches to feedback practice had led to the initiation of discussions about approaches to our work but by troubling perspectives for myself, I was also troubling perspectives within the team which held the potential for conflict. The concepts of cultural suicide (Brookfield, 2006) and the trickster metaphor (Hyde, 1998) are used to illustrate the opportunities and challenges of using critical conversations, dialogue and forms of capital when developing professional practice (relatedness). Stimulated by critical conversations, extracts from the practice stories and research journal are used to demonstrate how both ineffective and effective communication can produce ripples

within a field of practice which can result in a subtle shift of boundaries and changes in practice.

### **Recovery: risking cultural suicide**

Those who seek to transform a thing; don't want to ruffle the edges but to rend the fabric. They don't want to tweak a few parameters; they want new parameters. (Washburn, 2008, p.234)

The maintenance of team doxa and the production and reproduction of potentially coercive systems requires unreflecting and unquestioning docile bodies (Foucault, 1980). By adopting critical distance from dominant and previously unquestioned beliefs in my own professional practice, I was able to start to consider how to trouble perspectives concerning feedback practices within the team. Practice within education occurs within the context of organisational and professional cultures and are often taken for granted. Our capacity as practitioners to shape what can be thought, said, or done within that context are not often examined and can be maintained by a culturally sustained vocabulary which is employed to justify actions and beliefs (White, 2006). This has been described as 'final vocabulary' (Rorty, 1992), beyond which language can break down and other possibilities are not considered.

Having remained silent about the doxa of the field in my earlier time as Lecturer, I was now keen to discuss new perspectives and open up the debate about different ways of working and using dialogic approaches in feedback. Recent research on increasing consistency of quality of feedback (Ferrell, 2013) has indicated that dialogue is the key to changing beliefs about feedback being participatory and developmental rather than 'given' and 'short term'. However, interpretation of my practice stories demonstrated that throughout the early stages of conducting this autoethnography, I was not using opportunities for dialogue in the most effective way. Instead, as demonstrated in the following sections, my interactions had the potential to lead to cultural suicide (Brookfield, 2006) within the field. As a mental health nurse, I am aware of the serious and emotional connotations of the term 'suicide' within nursing and society and my intention is not to use this term lightly or

offend. However, here I am using the term to discuss and extend an already established concept within the context of my educational practice.

A chief outcome of liberatory educational practices is a break with distorted, constraining ways of thinking and acting (Foucault, 1980). Grant et al, (2013) talk about an important function of autoethnography being to expose 'the elephants in the room' of the cultural context, social and organisational practices which require critique but which have been taken for granted as business as usual; doxa. However, those who come to interpret their actions, situations and cultures in changed and critical ways risk committing cultural suicide which is described as the process whereby professional (and personal) relationships can become compromised as a result of participating in learning (Brookfield, 2006). As educators speak to colleagues about how they are questioning and re-evaluating their practice, or how they are doing things differently, there is a risk that those colleagues will see them as potential whistle blowers on the unspoken collective agreement not to rock the boat by asking questions or by doing things differently (Brookfield, 2006).

Using the sensitising questions, I paid attention to parts of the stories that related to interpersonal relationships and interactions within the team and how they related to other aspects of the stories. I searched for incidences where social structures and cultural transgressions were evident and considered alternative ways of interpreting my stories. I started to take notice of my tone, communication style and considered what significance the titles of the stories had. As I applied new insights into practice, I became aware of the challenging aspects of troubling discourse in professional practice. Through interpretation of the practice stories, I was able to identify incidences in practice where I acted proactively and sometimes provocatively to stimulate discussion about commonly held cultural assumptions concerning feedback practice which could potentially lead to resentment and suspicion. As I started to critically question culturally conventional assumptions and beliefs shared within the team, this led to feelings of instability as my professional

relationships had the potential to become threatened by the changes I was experiencing.

Whilst I am in the process of understanding and reconciling the intersecting nature of personal and professional influences on practice, similarly colleagues will be influenced by their own dilemmas and motivations. Dialogue has been a key part of my autoethnographic exploration meaning that colleagues are also being placed in a situation where perhaps their own assumptions are being challenged. I have been developing an understanding of the privilege inherent in my everyday teaching practices and my complicity in systems that have the potential to create inequality. Working towards increasing transparency with students involves a constant renegotiation of a power base but it is not just *my* power base that is being troubled. This has clear implications for my colleagues with whom I work. My communication style as a colleague wanting to develop professional practice is key in this process. It was uncomfortable to acknowledge some deficits in my practice in this area. My awareness of this is demonstrated in an early entry into my research journal.

*“I seriously must be driving my colleagues mad and I wonder how annoying I must be, yet it seems unethical not to address this”. (Excerpt from Research Journal, November, 2012)*

Evidence within the practice stories demonstrates the limitations of my initial approaches. I was able to recognise myself in Brookfield’s (2006) description of a newly energised teacher who often speaks evangelically about their raised awareness and developing knowledge. I was excited by critical questioning and by a newly restored perspective and belief in the importance of educators questioning why we work in the ways that we do but was aware that others might not share this enthusiasm. An individual who is engaged in exploring new skills and knowledge can cause discomfort in those who are not on a similar journey of self-discovery (Brookfield, 2006). If I was too energetic about the need to question and challenge taken for granted assumptions, there was the potential to unintentionally alienate

my colleagues. However, with relational ethics in mind, if I was experiencing a restoration of values and subsequently developing my professional practice but not sharing ideas with others, I questioned in what sense this research was relational. Reading around ethical issues concerning the impact of my research on team relationships had helped me predict that this might happen so I needed to keep these personal risks manageable, in order to remain critically active.

Despite awareness of this, I noticed contradictions when writing about my practice. The practice stories and research journal demonstrated a tendency towards adopting a directive communication style with colleagues when frustrated with what I perceived as non participatory approaches to feedback, another example of positioning myself alongside the students and in potential opposition to my colleagues.

*“When we started to talk about involving the students in dialogic exchanges following written feedback, I was ready for the party line about ‘workload’ and I imagined myself metaphorically standing in opposition with my arms folded, ready for a verbal fight”. (Excerpt from Research Journal, January, 2013)*

Cultural suicidal tendencies are demonstrated within the practice stories by the forceful way in which I can communicate when I feel I have a strong point to make. One of my practice stories is entitled ‘proved right’ (PS57), and I note that I can be an ‘aggressive arguer’ (PS76) when noticing my communication. However, my working class habitus may be significant here. An account by a working class academic describes the ‘Bronx Syndrome’ detailing how he has to try hard not to resort to the aggressive way he communicated growing up in the Bronx, particularly when stressed or challenged (Garger,1995). I questioned whether in times of challenge or frustration I revert back to my defensiveness as an Estate X girl and my evolving habitus peels off me in layers. I could identify with La Paglia (1995, p.177) who felt that “the great majority of academics come equipped with middle class manners...I often made many mistakes asking foolish things and got frustrated with people who never said what they actually meant”. It has been

suggested that those from the working class tend to have less commitment to hyper politeness (rules, practices and niceties) that we never entirely learned or understood (Overall, 1995). I have been told that I have a tendency to say things that others avoid. Perhaps I feel less burdened by what I am 'supposed' to do in social or practice situations and am more able to be direct and say what I mean which is not always an effective mode of communication.

In her research, Skeggs (1997) illustrates that antagonistic feelings are often a product and response to systematic devaluation over time of not being heard suggesting that challenging responses represent the survival tactics of every subordinate group (Skeggs, 1997). Bourdieu (1996, p.29) talks about engaging with 'combat sport' as a means of defence against the various forms of symbolic violence that can be exerted against individuals. Often individuals can feel wrongly judged, mis-recognised and diminished, leading to a moral defensiveness. However, my colleagues may be feeling the same way about their positions when I present my points of view. One of my espoused values is the need for respect. I questioned how respectful I was being to colleagues by trying to persuade them to my point of view. My growing awareness of this is demonstrated in the extract below.

*"I feel increasingly as if I am the person who always brings up difficult issues. Are my colleagues sick of me questioning and constantly asking 'why do we do it this way'? I am aware that there is a risk of alienating my colleagues by my constant need for discussion. Staying silent is not an option but I have to think of ways of provoking this discussion rather than creating defensiveness". (Excerpt from PS48, February, 2013)*

*"Why do I have to be so forceful in my communication style with the team when I am trying to get my ideas across? This is clearly not a winning communication strategy! I know in theory about communication and behaviour change but I am not putting it into practice with my colleagues. I need to really think about this or I will alienate people". (Excerpt from Research Journal, May, 2013).*

It was disconcerting to identify through interpretation of my practice stories that on occasions, I have a tendency to use 'final vocabulary' myself (Rorty, 1992). This can restrict interaction and further discussion and become adversarial. I started to question whether I was guilty of what Foucault (1980) describes as reforming zeal. Foucault has expressed suspicion of those with 'reforming zeal' as it can be a means by which truth, power and knowledge considerations become inverted and one is substituted for another. The work of Tamas (2008) led me to question whether I was competing for the dominant narrative. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) use the analogy of a battlefield to frame the concept of field in which we establish monopoly over the species of capital that are valued within it. I started to notice how often I try and persuade others to my point of view and questioned whether I was developing a moral superiority (Skeggs, 2009) in response to previous experiences of marginalisation and trying to legitimise my position. I had arguably been displaying the emotional politics (Skeggs, 1997) of my working class habitus (insecurity, doubt, indignation, resentment) and positioning myself alongside the students (repressed) in opposition to my colleagues (oppressors). However, claiming moral superiority of my own ideas would potentially be at the expense of reflexive engagement with the views of others or my own presuppositions or prejudices. I could identify that the tone and content of some of my interactions was potentially leading me towards cultural suicide and that I needed to change my approach.

These insights were disorientating and discomfoting as I started to understand the fallibility of my approach influenced by my habitus. Phrases such as 'disheartened and dispirited' (PS74) and 'I just felt deflated' (Research Journal, January, 2013) started to appear. My increased awareness of self and privilege within practice has been unsettling and increased my dissatisfaction with the status quo. As I was faced with the potential negative influence of my habitus and communication style on others I started to feel as if I had lost direction, feeling unable to understand why everyone was not as frustrated with the status quo as I was. A quote by Brett Smith (2013, p.188) struck a chord with me when he stated "for a while now, I've realised I'm not much fun to be around" and echoes entries in my research journal.

*“I’m not dealing with this well. I can hear it in my tone. I am at risk of alienating myself”. (Excerpt from Research Journal, June, 2013)*

*“I’ve just read a thesis whisperer post in which the blogger stated ‘it’s so exhausting being angry all the time’. Yes...it is”. (Excerpt from Research Journal, June, 2013)*

Yet, still I found it challenging to remain silent. I am an active social agent within the field. People can and do act and we have a choice as to what type of practitioner we want to be. Being an artificial person is not a matter of destiny and can be resisted (Smith, 2013). I can contribute to a more equitable field by having “courageous conversations” (Collay, 2014, p.789) to address the challenges we face as educators. Teaching is not neutral and whatever level we practice at, we are able to act with greater political clarity through our words and our actions about whose interests we further in our practice. I wanted to explore how I could minimise risks to myself and the team but to continue to critically question and trouble perspectives within our practice. Instead of being adversarial I started to consider how to initiate critically reflective conversations concerning final vocabularies within the team in a way that does not imply that colleagues are enemies or unthinking, making it as non threatening as possible. If every interaction communicates an attitude of respect (Varlander, 2008), I knew I needed to change my approach and reframing was required. Thinking with Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field and capital helped me to make sense of the intersecting nature of these influences on interactions within the field.

Fields are not fixed or concrete spaces, rather they are conceptual spaces created by individuals, teams and organisations (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Within this, as social agents, each individual brings with them their different histories, tastes and dispositions (habitus) and thus how they operate and interact within those fields are all going to impact on their individual habitus. If I am constructed from my history so too are those I work with. They will be similarly shaped by the social and cultural discourses that define them. We are the products of our histories but not its

prisoner (Bourdieu, 1996). However, if we are unconscious about this construction, we are unlikely to question the stories and values we bring into the classroom. Colleagues are unlikely to confront or transcend that which they do not see as problematic.

It has been suggested that despite individual differences within the academic field, all agents are likely to possess a habitus with similar properties and are ultimately in the same game in terms of aims for the students (Webb et al, 2002). Reay et al (2001b) discuss this in terms of institutional habitus. Teams have history and are established over time. There is scope for change but due to their collective nature, this change may be less fluid. My colleagues will be making pragmatic decisions from their own perspectives. These differences produce a fluid mixture of alliances, negotiations, agreements and conflicts (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Fields are as much about conflict as they are about agreement (Webb et al, 2002).

As a field is a non static field of forces, a system of relations, alliances and power struggles, there are no official rules. Instead it is the “state of relations of force between players that defines the structure of the field” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.99). Agents individually or collectively implement strategies in order to improve or defend their positions in relation to other occupants (Naidoo, 2004). Within a field, as players in the game we have different and fluctuating amounts of capital. As my studies have progressed, I have accumulated certain forms of capital valued within my field. Cultural capital represents the systems of value and meaning a person can draw upon which counts as having value within a group. I have an increased knowledge base about formative feedback and issues of equity within educational practice. I am studying for a doctorate, which could be described as academic capital (Bourdieu, 1996), an insitutionalised form of cultural capital based on recognition of achievement but also on a disposition to be academic, manifested in manner of speech or writing (Naidoo, 2004). I have presented at conferences and submitted papers for publication. However, symbolic capital rests on recognition and possessing this can influence the rules of the game. My cultural capital only becomes converted into symbolic capital when I have access to power

networks and are legitimated by those in power. It is also hidden capital if I do not recognise its value myself. Bourdieu (1984) suggests that it is the more resourceful players who determine the rules of the game.

Critical pedagogy is not a solo activity. A sense of connection can position you for success with professional support and allies for future change (Picower, 2013). Therefore, if I wanted practice to develop beyond my own, I needed to develop social capital which is constituted through the accumulation of exchanges and shared ideas (Bourdieu, 1993). A statement by Oosterheert and Vermunt (2011, p.162) caused me to reflect on my approach to dialogue with colleagues. "Dynamic sources remain alert only when the learner is keen on solving the problem. If such commitment is absent, new internalised information remains 'floating', i.e. unconnected to a person's perception of reality". Relating this to my practice helped me to understand why some of my colleagues did not appear to be connecting with our discussions or only vaguely recollecting some of the educational practice dilemmas and theories that we had discussed. Through conducting this autoethnography, I have been fortunate enough to be able to give these issues the mind space required and constantly use examples from practice that illustrate something we have discussed or refer to literature I am accessing. Prior to conducting this research, these issues did just 'float' on the edges of my mind. Yet now, through my discourse, accumulation of capital and changed practices, I was attempting to modify the structure of the field. Thus, the relationship between my habitus, social and symbolic capital and social actors within the field were emerging as another layer of influence on practice.

### **Relatedness: introducing the 'trickster' and reframing interactions**

Research has shown that taking risk emerges as a powerful theme when participants try to change culturally oppressive practices (Adamovich et al, 2014). In his critical autoethnography, Romo (2004) suggests that those with power are frequently least aware of or least willing to acknowledge its existence as well as their role in maintaining inequitable social and cultural capital which can lead to student marginalisation. As I acknowledged that my frustration was hampering

effective communication, I needed to consider alternative ways of influencing change. My reading led me to the metaphor of the 'trickster' (Hyde, 1998; White, 2006; Short et al, 2013) as a helpful way of encouraging thinking about everyday practices by troubling accepted discourse and the norms of a team. Seen as a marginal figure, the trickster is a mischievous character known from indigenous folk tales and myths from many cultures and has been described as a cultural agitator.

What tricksters quite regularly do is to create lively talk where there has been silence, or where speech has gone prohibited. Trickster speaks freshly where language has been blocked, gone dead, or lost its charm...for usually language goes dead because cultural practice has hedged it in, and some shameless double-dealer is needed to get outside the rules and set tongues wagging again. (Hyde, 1998, p.76)

Doxa of a culture contains established forms of thought, vocabulary and meaning and often does not receive scrutiny. The critical autoethnographer has the opportunity to investigate beneath surface appearances, disrupt the status quo and unsettle both neutrality and accepted assumptions by bringing to light underlying operations of power and control thus fulfilling the role of cultural trickster (McLeod, 2011) by interrogating and troubling cultures (Grant, 2010, 2013). An important role of the trickster is as a device to open up dialogue and reflexive spaces within one's own culture (White, 2006). The skill of the trickster then, lies in 'tickling the imagination of their kinsfolk' (White, 2006, p.36).

Awareness of my own and others' world views had the potential to promote a more informed understanding of how our interactions with students are influenced by our social and cultural locations (Hammerness et al, 2005). In order to become less adversarial and more humble, I did not need to abandon or ignore my own final vocabularies and those within the team, but instead recognise them and put them up for debate in order to create lively talk. Foucault (1994, p.132) stated that his job was "making windows where there were once walls" and identified the need for agents to build an ethics based on an understanding of multiple perspectives which should also be used to challenge our own ideas. I was learning to watch my world with its contradictions and occasional absurdities whilst understanding my fallible

place within it. Starting to recognise final vocabularies within my own domain enabled me to think more critically and now provokes a self consciousness when they are used (White, 2006). Now, not only was I probing my own influences on practice but also starting to listen to and consider the stories of those around me.

When reviewing my practice stories, I was able to identify incidences in practice where my approach was evolving and I began to think of these as 'cultural suicide prevention' strategies as an extension of the established concept of 'cultural suicide' (Brookfield, 2006). These episodes demonstrate my growing awareness of my role as a social agent within the team and my attempts to mitigate against any discord by adopting trickster strategies. For example, being immersed in the literature around formative feedback, I regularly initiated dialogue about our practice which inevitably included my opinion. As I became aware of this, I tried a different approach. I learned to use the theory more effectively; my cultural capital. As Boomer (1988) stated, when armed with theory the likelihood of manipulation by someone else's world view is lessened. Theory is a valued form of cultural and symbolic capital within my field; a respected form of knowledge. Through the reflective exercises (Appendices 1-6), I became more articulate in my ways of knowing why I teach the way that I do. Boomer further states that 'opposition tends to wilt if it argues from dogma and entrenchment rather than from rationality and understanding" (1988, p.5).

The frenetic nature of faculty life leaves little time for structured critical conversations. I noticed that I had a tendency to initiate conversations with colleagues in the middle of the working day as issues occurred to me in practice. In recognition that not everybody is ready or has time for trickster conversations, I started to plan structured discussions for team meetings, using questions and dilemmas from practice to provoke debate and provided evidence to support alternative points of view. Hyde (1998) uses the analogy of the trickster greasing the hinges and joints of whatever logic is in vogue but importantly, not offering anything prescriptive in its place. I tried to acknowledge that there are many philosophical views about our practice and none are necessarily any better or

worse than others but perhaps some may be more suitable than others in particular contexts. When I become conscious of final vocabulary either from myself or the team, I will use questions such as 'have you considered etc...' and 'can I offer an alternative point of view?' or 'have we ever stopped to think why we are doing it like this'?

The trickster is not just a boundary crosser (Hyde, 1998) but a boundary creator (White, 2006) with the potential to 'shift' doxa. My practice stories demonstrate my emerging approach to promoting critical discussions within the existing team. Conducting this autoethnography has given me a personal and professional understanding that allows me to work within and develop my professional knowledge of practice. Carless (2013) recommends dissemination of good practice and encouraging educators to engage in critical open discussion of their beliefs and approaches to assessment and teaching. Therefore, as well as constantly developing my own dialogical approaches to feedback, I used the evidence base from the literature to develop professional development activities for the team that would focus on discussing examples of good practice as well as addressing underpinning influences on practice. In essence, I was trying to introduce a community of inquiry (Achinstein, 2002) posing problems and dilemmas, acknowledging uncertainty and differing viewpoints rather than focusing on finding solutions.

I arranged a staff development workshop focusing on the functions of feedback which included an 'assumption' activity to promote thought and discussion (Appendix 9). This promoted debate both before and during the workshop. I designed different activities for the workshop that facilitated discussion on how individuals viewed the functions of feedback and encouraged consideration of how this was influenced by their educational philosophies (Appendix 10). The workshop highlighted our different perspectives and motivations as individuals within the team and promoted discussion of each others views. On another occasion, I facilitated a workshop incorporating two of the reflective activities I had completed as part of this autoethnography (Appendix 11) focusing on role models in education to help us clarify our individual teaching philosophies. Towards the end of this

research, I facilitated a second workshop focusing on the use of self and peer monitoring of feedback together with exploration of the influences on our work (Appendix 12).

### **Development of critical thinking 'muscles'**

There will always be dynamic tensions with others as we never exist in static, problem free situations. Part of this process has involved learning to 'exist in the middle' (Adams, 2006, p.717). As I continue to write about my practice, I recognise that I still have cultural suicidal tendencies when I feel I have a strong argument to make. However, I am now more aware of this so can change approach and adopt cultural suicide prevention tactics using questions and self modelling. A key transformation of sociopolitical awareness is the ability to reframe the location of problems from within individuals or communities to within systems of oppression (Picower, 2013). By reframing from individuals to systems and using the concept of habitus, I was able to move from deficit views that blame to positioning myself as a social actor who could influence the dynamics of the field. This demonstrates a significant transformation of my development of practice on an individual level to critical questioning that can impact on practice within the team. The process of reflexivity enabled me to use my autobiographical narratives to examine the relationship between my working class habitus and dispositions with my subsequent development as a researcher and practitioner demonstrated in the practice stories and research journal.

As critical insights from my practice emerged, I had been anxious to start redressing what I saw as unjust power balances immediately. As stated by Hanson (2013, p.81), "critical reflection is like wanting to shake the earth and only making a ripple in the puddle". Yet, as a marathon runner, I know that I cannot just show up to run the race without training. Through this occasionally painful autoethnographic process, I had learned that I needed to take time to develop my critical thinking muscles to sharpen my understanding of the political nature of my practice and the multiple perspectives that exist within my field. Where my supervisors and critical friend have provided me with company at the edge of

meaning, through creating spaces for reflection concerning the practice of constructing feedback I feel able to now provide company for others in both recognising the edge (J.Berger, 2004), perhaps walking towards it and working together to build firmer ground (Baily, Stribling & McGowan, 2014).

## **Chapter 9**

### **Stepping out from behind the curtains of academic oz**

What kinds of practices are possible once vulnerability, ambiguity and doubt are admitted? (Britzman, 1989, p.17)

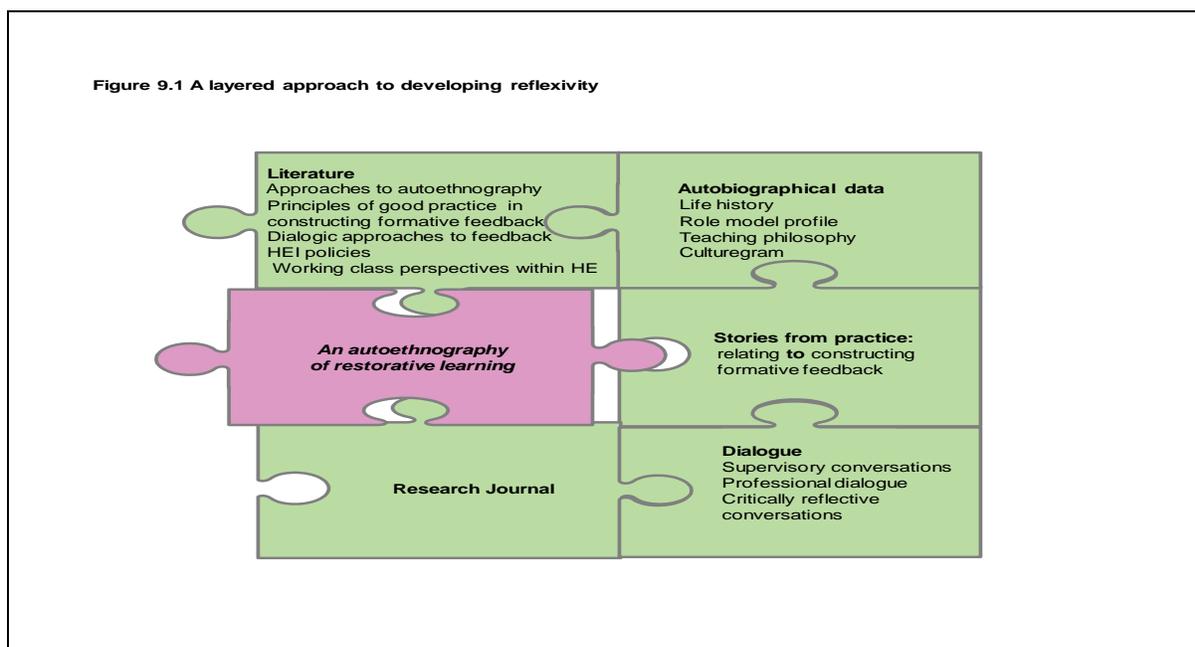
#### **Reflectiveness: drawing together the narrative threads of a messy text**

This final chapter draws on Lange's (2007) third category of restorative learning (reflectiveness) to pull together the narrative threads of this autoethnographic exploration. However, the text remains 'messy' in that I am addressing the final research question first in order to illustrate how developing reflexivity (Lange, 2007) through a layered approach to autoethnography can facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the intersecting influences on practice leading to the development of a more informed mode of professional practice. I then return to the work of Bourdieu to illustrate how the restoration of a marginalised perspective led to opportunities and challenges within practice when personal experiences intersected with professional and broader influences in practice. Transparency concerning personal fallibility, tensions and contradictions in practice see me stepping further out from behind the curtains of academic oz.

#### **Developing nuanced understandings of self within culture using a layered approach to autoethnography**

My personal experiences have been the focal point from which a more nuanced understanding of the intersecting nature of influences on practice has been revealed. I began by exploring my practice implicitly until a more explicit critical focus emerged as the exploration of autobiographical data revealed layers of personal influences on myself as a learner and practitioner from a restored marginalised perspective. Further layers of exploration using policy documents, feedback literature and critical autoethnographic writing led me to examine the relationship between personal influences within broader socio political structures. The act of recording stories from practice then enabled me to adopt a critical stance to the social relations present within practice and how my habitus is influencing my educational philosophy, pedagogical practice and interventions within the field. This resulted in further conscientisation of my social positioning

(Hickey & Austin, 2007) which, when considered in relation to cultural and social discourses made autoethnography a valuable tool to examine the complex, diverse and messy world of practice. Using a layered approach, I have documented my voice, illuminated my theoretical knowledge and applied it to my practice; a collaborative engagement with the literature, my life and my practice. Figure 9.1 demonstrates the layered components leading to an autoethnography of restorative learning. In recognition that the exploration continues, the jigsaw remains not quite complete.



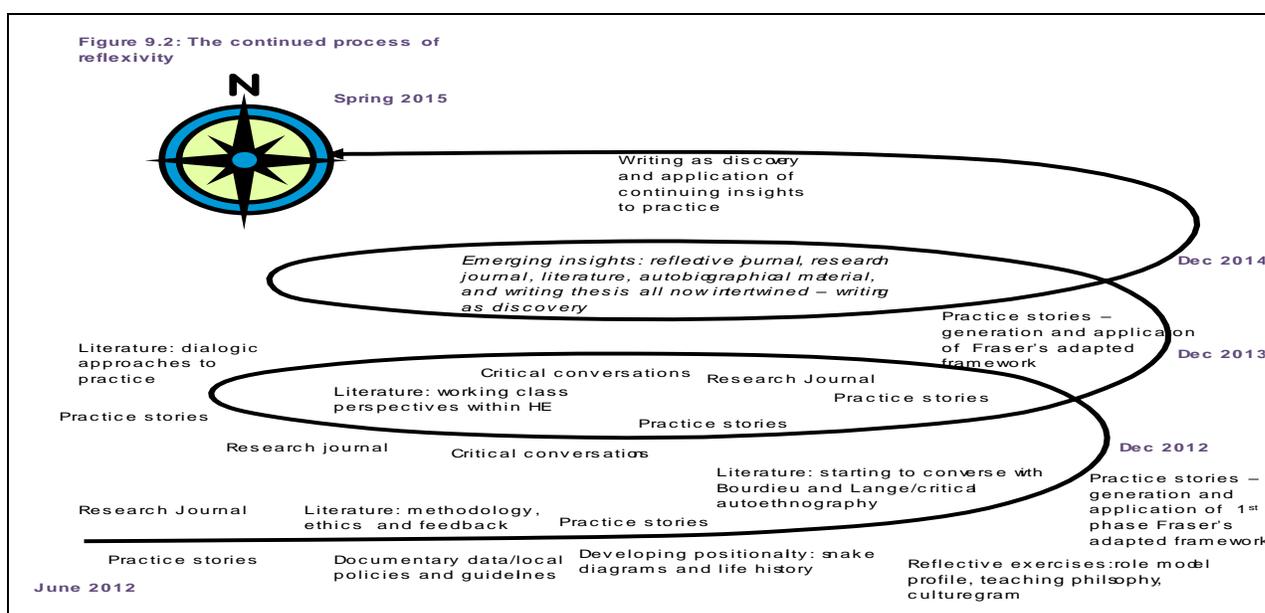
Working with Lange's (2007) concept of reflectiveness has encouraged me to view myself and my practice in relational terms within a continuously changing and fluid configuration of relationships and influences. Through autoethnographic exploration I became conscious of my own personal value base and structural inequalities present in my past and current social worlds and my evolving critical consciousness has brought my field of practice and its power structures and dynamics into focus. Critical reflexivity enabled me to examine the dynamic relationship between these restored values, dominant professional constructions influencing practice and other social actors within the field which has laid the foundations for a more ethical and informed mode of practice, examples of which have been given throughout the thesis. The emerging insights were a result of the

reflective processes of the research endeavour and a restored marginalised perspective.

The production of this written narrative has been part of the interpretive process. I wrote constantly as a means of discovery but every time I sat at my computer to write and think, each draft of my writing has led to new interpretations and emerging insights as my perspectives shifted and changed. I am still in the process of coming to understand the intersecting influences on practice and my thoughts have never been free of doubt and ambiguity. Areas in my thinking required shifting or a change in perspective. The layered approach to this autoethnography using complementary forms of data allowed for a continual interplay of changing views, ideas, knowledge, understanding and new learning. The process has required me to reveal the complexity of what I do, why I do it and what this means about me personally and professionally. However, it also required me to deepen my understanding about my field of practice and the power dynamics which I had not previously considered. The dynamic interaction between these variables is what has made the production of the research inherently complex.

The reflexive process is not ending with the completion of this thesis. Although for purposes of goal setting and completion, I conducted the research in intersecting phases, I have not stopped writing about practice. The research journal has evolved into my practice journal where I continue to write fluidly about literature I am accessing, dilemmas and celebrations from practice and results from experimentation with approaches to feedback practice. This layered approach to autoethnography has become an embodied form of practice. I no longer distinguish between doing this research and living my life. I now keep returning to, pushing at and walking along the edge of meaning from a newly restored marginalised perspective in all aspects of my life. This continuing reflexive process is providing further layers of influence for my professional practice in recognition that conducting this autoethnography has resulted in a more informed mode of practice and communication as demonstrated in the previous chapters. However, it is not only self exploratory and reflexive but it can potentially advance the understanding

of other researchers by encouraging practitioners to be responsive to this introspective growth (Lyle, 2009). Conducting this autoethnography has led to a greater awareness of the need to constantly re-examine my frame of reference for professional practice through continued use of the literature, dialogue and reflective journalling. My practice is inherently unknowable and contextual. Use of critical dialogue around these issues can provoke lively debate among learners and tutors examining how individual perspectives can impact on our practice. In order to acknowledge and work with diversity among us both in the Lecturer and student population, professional dialogue needs to occur. Figure 9.2 illustrates the continuing process of reflection and reflexivity.



The complex world of practice offers a myriad of messy uncertainties. Schon's (1983) swampy lowlands of practice can offer opportunities for reflection and enhance the integration of theory, emerging insights and practice. Reflexive interpretation adds complexity to the assumed certitude of professional learning. (Mackay & Tymon, 2013). Through this autoethnographic study I have demonstrated how I have adjusted my frame of reference when I was uncertain. A teaching approach that encompasses a lack of certainty and allows room for doubt has the potential to provoke critical thinking as it opens up spaces for others to be heard. Autoethnography awakened me to the intersecting nature of personal, professional and broader influences shaping the ways I act in my professional

world that I had not previously interrogated. In response to the first two research questions, these influences are discussed in the next section.

### **Understanding the intersecting nature of influences on practice and implications for practice**

This inquiry provides an insight into the influences on my lived experience as a practitioner and researcher and how these manifest themselves in the development of my feedback practice. My autoethnographic exploration revealed that my practice and interactions with others are shaped by many factors, the most significant being that which originates within me (habitus), that which I have accumulated (capital) and the relationship between my habitus and broader socio cultural influences (field and social actors). Using concepts and ideas from Bourdieu, I actively engaged in my world to question my perspectives, develop emerging insights about personal influences and implications for practice and tried these out in practice when constructing feedback for students. Bourdieu's position is that practice is always informed by the ability to understand and control our actions (agency) but the possibility of agency needs to be understood and contextualised in terms of its relation to the cultural field of the practitioner. The relationship between cultural field and habitus does not completely determine our actions and thoughts but practice cannot be explained without reference to them (Webb et al, 2002). It is the interaction of habitus, capital and field that generates Bourdieu's logic of practice.

A newly restored marginalised perspective emerged as both an enabling and constraining factor in my practice. It has taken 30 years of professional practice for me to explicitly identify my origins as working class and to understand that a working class identity is not incompatible with an academic identity (Chen, 2014). Once I started to acknowledge my internalised shame about my background and the influences of structural inequalities and episodes of symbolic violence, I emerged as a budding activist keen to redress imbalances. In this sense, my habitus emerged as a potential constraining and disabling influence on my practice as I struggled with my discomfort with a privileged position. This impacted on my self positioning within the field and was a barrier in my initial attempts at

democratic teaching practice and promoting dialogue within the team. As my fallibility in this process became apparent, I worked towards renegotiating a privileged position with a marginalised perspective and used this new understanding to work towards assuming the role of a benign trickster. In this way, my working class habitus can be utilised in opening discussion with colleagues about the potential struggles of disadvantaged groups of students. A marginalised perspective can contribute to challenging discourses around bias against non traditional students that is inherent within our system which is essential if we are to understand the challenges of practising democratically. Just as I had done with the resourcefulness of Boris and his inked socks in that conversation with my school teacher, I am able to offer a different perspective and to broaden discussions.

Beginning to understand the dynamic relationship between my habitus and field has been an unsettling but empowering process. Like habitus, a cultural field is a fluid and dynamic entity as the rules and ways of working are socially constructed by the individuals within it. As Lecturers our feedback practice is influenced by dominant discourse represented in policy, guidelines and workload models. Inequality proliferates on a daily basis (Skeggs, 2009) and non traditional students are arguably disadvantaged by mainstream policies and practices. However, Freire (2000) stated that teachers are able to make conscious choices about whether to challenge or be complicit with policies and practices that reproduce patterns of inequity. As the research progressed, I made that conscious choice to interpret and intervene by challenging dominant discourse in the hope of not reproducing the inequalities that I had intended to ameliorate (Picower, 2013). I have articulated my place within my field which has involved using my voice, my past experiences and advocate for the hidden students who are not served by mainstream policies.

The ongoing process of sense making and applying new insights into practice through undertaking this autoethnography has meant taking a critical step towards forging a new transparent identity in practice; one that gives agency to others who may be in similar positions to myself (both students and colleagues) so that they start to make sense of their positionalities and identities in the academy and to

consider new possibilities for themselves. I recognised my complicity in committing symbolic violence within the system through my silence and my use of 'official truths'. However, within Lange's (2007) concept of reflectiveness, this restoration of positionality grounded me leaving me more able to withstand these disorientating aspects of transformation and thus remain open to potentially challenging new knowledge. By being transparent about my practice and playing the role of trickster as cultural conscience agent, I can open up the debate about issues that perhaps linger in peripheral consciousness but are not necessarily discussed. This offers the potential for individual and collective storytelling within the field. It could be argued that the future of education is contained within the present and as educators we have some control over this. We are not all passive actors and have a part in structuring the future.

This inquiry began with frustration around diversity in practice. Recent work suggests that the consistency of feedback needs to be addressed at an institutional level (Ferrell, 2013; Merry et al, 2013) which involves engaging with or even confronting the belief systems and existing practices of staff (Ferrell, 2012). Our beliefs and assumptions influence how we operate within the systems and this behaviour goes towards shaping the immediate educational environment in which we work thus has a significant impact on any educational innovation and arguably determines the quality of life within it. Through exploration of my own role and influences on my practice, I was able to reframe my frustration towards diversity of practice and differing perspectives within the team to a more respectful stance in terms of developing shared learning.

Understanding that value conflicts in daily practice are not often articulated (Biesta, 2009) allowed me to reflect on the relational ethics of respect and care towards those I work with rather than feel a constant sense of puzzlement and disapproval that was evident in my earlier practice stories. Instead of becoming angry with dominant discourse I am now trying to occupy the border states and utilise the knowledge, dispositions and skills from different worlds. This renegotiation has resulted in a more enabling mode of practice that recognises and celebrates

multiple perspectives instead of a disabling approach that presents purely frustrations. I feel less compelled to retreat to binary positions regarding practice but rather I am more interested in creating spaces for exploring their reasons for seeing the world the way they do. I am more tolerant of ambiguities (Hunt, 2001) and no longer assume that a choice has to be made between my world view and others. Instead, all have their own validities, constructions, comparisons and contradictions. White (2006, p.27) talks about the reflexive practitioner being able to “tell stories about themselves and others that defend the openness of human conversation and create possibilities that things could be otherwise, not because they necessarily ought to be but so they might be”. Telling my fallible story through this autoethnography is becoming part of that process.

Perhaps one of the most significant influences on my practice has been the process of conducting this autoethnography as I have come to understand that the primary tool in developing reflexivity is myself. The use of dialogue and critical conversations were integral to the process as it is through recognition of others that we begin to understand ourselves, including our qualities, abilities and shortcomings (Adamovich et al, 2014). The process of increasing my awareness of these influences on my practice left me unsettled but ultimately better equipped to develop my practice and to challenge practices that sustain unequal power relations. In order to fully recover my values in practice, I needed to place myself in a vulnerable position and use that vulnerability as a way of understanding my cultural life. Fook and Askeland (2006) question how many of us actually go to these places. This is one of the benefits but challenges of autoethnography. By deepening my understanding of these intersecting influences, I feel better equipped to challenge practices that sustain unequal power relations in culture.

### **Opportunities and limitations of the study**

Understanding how we know, what we know, what we feel and what we do informs, makes and remakes our pedagogy and allows us to understand, adapt, respond and remake again. (Hayler, 2011, p106)

Within autoethnography, the contribution to knowledge in terms of content is based on what a story of experience does, how it is used, understood and responded to

(Ellis, 2004). Knowledge is situated, contextual and created relationally. Taking a relationally responsible approach to autoethnography includes making the research and writing accessible to a variety of readers as an opportunity to engage with the debate (Adams et al, 2014). In chapter three, I suggested the reader considers whether the thesis is narratively engaging by inviting resonances with experiences as a researcher and/or practitioner. This thesis or aspects of it, will be open to multiple interpretations by readers who do not read from a neutral position. For those from a working class background or those who have other experiences of marginalisation along the route to HE, my text may be viewed as becoming part of a collective story and may provoke those feelings of recognition I have experienced when I have read stories of others. Others may reject my understandings and 'speak back' to my thoughts. Whether from a marginalised perspective or not, the intention is for readers to think with this story to raise their own questions about influences on their practice and ways of knowing. We find our own experiences in the stories of others (A. Frank, 2000) thus this thesis contributes to the ongoing storying of influences on professional practice.

Methodologically, autoethnography has the catalytic potential to provoke emancipatory consciousness raising leading to the enactment of a critical pedagogy. It has been suggested that professional knowledge in education emerges from a complex and continuous interplay between critical reflection on practice, theory and policy (Edmond & Hayler, 2013) which could be considered within the framework of self study or critical reflection on practice. However, the addition of autobiographical exploration considered within the context of a broader socio cultural context has enabled me to pay attention to the way my own fragmented, fallible and contradictory discourses function in relation to others, deepening my understanding of how I experience everyday practice. Within Nurse Education, the use of the methodology is relatively rare and, as discussed in chapter one, the perspectives of Nurse Lecturers concerning the provision of formative feedback is an under researched area. Therefore, this research aims to extend the discussion within the profession concerning autoethnography as an approach for researching and understanding situated and contextual knowledge;

developing an awareness of “what it means to be a teacher: to be human” (Kincheloe, 2005 p.155).

One of the most interesting and exciting aspects of this autoethnography has been the shifting and developing nature of ideas and insights during the writing process. Yet, this also feels like a limitation of the approach as even as I write this final draft, I am aware of different avenues I could have taken and it has been difficult to know when to stop. I hope I have demonstrated reflexivity in terms of the impact of a class tinged perspective but I wonder could I have gone further and interrogated my age and gender, for example, to add further layers of reflexivity and complexity to understanding my experiences? The answer is probably yes but as stated by Denzin (2014), no autoethnographic text can do everything. When trying to decide which aspects to concentrate on and which ‘face’ to put on the research, I found the experience of Manning (2007) helpful. She was facing similar dilemmas and a colleague suggested that perhaps the research needed to ‘rest in its own cradle” (p.13). The issue of class was the most prominent in the autobiographical data which gave me the focus for the research and so I have left it to rest in its cradle.

My developing understandings are not just incomplete but rely on the contextual matters that surround my presence and interactions with others at a particular time. This incomplete, contextual nature of the narrative makes it hard to draw conclusions as my habitus and dispositions continue to evolve in relation to broader influences within my field. Yet, the aim of this autoethnography was not to confirm or settle but to develop a more nuanced understanding of intersecting influences leading to a more informed mode of practice. I hope that telling my story from both a previously marginalised perspective and a current relatively privileged position as Lecturer and researcher can serve a critical agenda by opening up the space for debate about the multiple influences on professional practice.

One of my fellow doctoral students (conducting experimental research) often teased me about writing ‘all about me’ and as I was immersed in the autobiographical data and practice stories, the criticisms concerning solipsism and

self indulgence were never far from my literary dinner table. However, as I progressed, the relational nature of my professional practice emerged, contextually linking field and social actors to the personal. My subjectivity is right there as both a producer and a product of this inquiry and I have aimed to provide adequate autobiographical disclosure to support the interpretations. If I wrote this thesis again, I may well adopt a different perspective or lens through which to view my experiences. I might highlight other insights, connections or relationships as they emerge through the process of writing. I was aware that I was writing very eclectically in terms of the theory and literature and my work perhaps does not fit into any particular niche. This autoethnography has evolved through risk taking, doubting and questioning but all of those things feel like a rite of passage as I near completion. This account may be unflattering at times and contain imperfections but I hope it feels human and credible. This thesis represents my ongoing evolution as a practitioner, researcher and person.

Autoethnography has required me to be rigorous, courageous and has challenged my relational, cultural, theoretical and political reflexivity. Insights concerning a previously hidden working class identity caused discomfort and the temptation to take another route was always there. Yet here is where the real opportunities in autoethnography lie. Walking along the edge (J. Berger, 2004) can be an emotional endeavour accompanied by a fear of falling off and it requires trust to stay the course until firmer ground is formed. Yet, it is often through experiencing discomfort that significant learning can take place (Baily et al, 2014).

Having initially searched for that autoethnographic manual or framework to guide my study that did not exist, I found my own way in the woods, albeit a meandering path and became my own compass. I read about a doctoral student who handed in a piece of work during the early stages of the doctoral process and whose supervisor responded by saying "...you are writing what you think others want to hear. Stop. Find *your* passion then write *it* out" (Brook, Catlin, DeLuca, Doe, Huntley & Searle, 2010, p.663). Passion emerges from the experience of the personal and points of remembrance (Hooks,1994). This autoethnography has

been about continuously reclaiming and reframing experience, making use of my personal narrative in relation to broader contexts and influences. I have continually revised and reframed my arguments based on critical conversations with colleagues, feedback from my critical friend and supervisors, or whilst out running or walking my dog, (described by Mitra [2010, p.4] as the “post scripted nature of autoethnography”). This thesis and the emerging insights have become my passion, which is not static nor solely mine. The process has been personally and professionally confronting, particularly now at this time of submission as I question whether I am committing ‘academic heresy’ (Spry, 2001) by stepping out from behind the curtains of academic oz.

### **A final word**

Having promised family and friends that I would not start speaking ‘academese’ when I began the doctoral process, I fear this thesis has proved me a dissembler. I am reminded of my first week at doctoral summer school five years ago when I was sharing student accommodation with others from concurrent cohorts of doctoral students. During the evenings we would meet in the kitchen for a bottle of wine and some food. The conversation was very ‘academic’ even on these social occasions and all I wanted to do was give my brain a rest and chat about ‘normal’ things. By the end of the week, I threw in the towel, moved to a hotel and soothed my brain with TV drama. As I near the end of the doctoral process, I hope I have retained that sense of me. I am still a working class girl from Estate X who is an avid watcher of TV crime dramas and reader of thrillers although I now surprisingly find myself discussing social constructs within education in my spare time.

Contradictions are sometimes perceived as situations of chaos; not orderly or rational (Childers & bell hooks, 1990). Yet, as humans we have contradictions and those contradictions do not make us ‘less than’. Having restored my working class habitus as part of my self and explored my fallibility within practice, I now continue to celebrate my difference within my professional context. I have come to understand that I am comfortable on the margins and perhaps always will be. Aware that I had taken a non traditional approach to my research, I did feel like the

'wanderer' student (Brook et al, 2010), leaving an established path and often questioning my thesis' merit and originality. However, I never questioned my passion for the topic. Just as I find autoethnography exciting and challenging to read, I have found writing this research both exciting and anxiety provoking to produce. Chatham-Carpenter (2010) talks about simultaneously loving and hating the word autoethnography. Although I have discussed the discomfort and vulnerability experienced throughout the process, it is also important to say I have thoroughly enjoyed the exploration. I had wanted it to be challenging and transformative and indeed it has been. I have written that autoethnography is not just about me. Yet such a statement is disingenuous. I now understand that it is about redeeming my soul. When I see students who are written off because of their background or their wounded learning experiences...I see myself.

As I step humbly out from behind the curtains of Academic Oz, I invite colleagues and students to join me in this continuing conversation.

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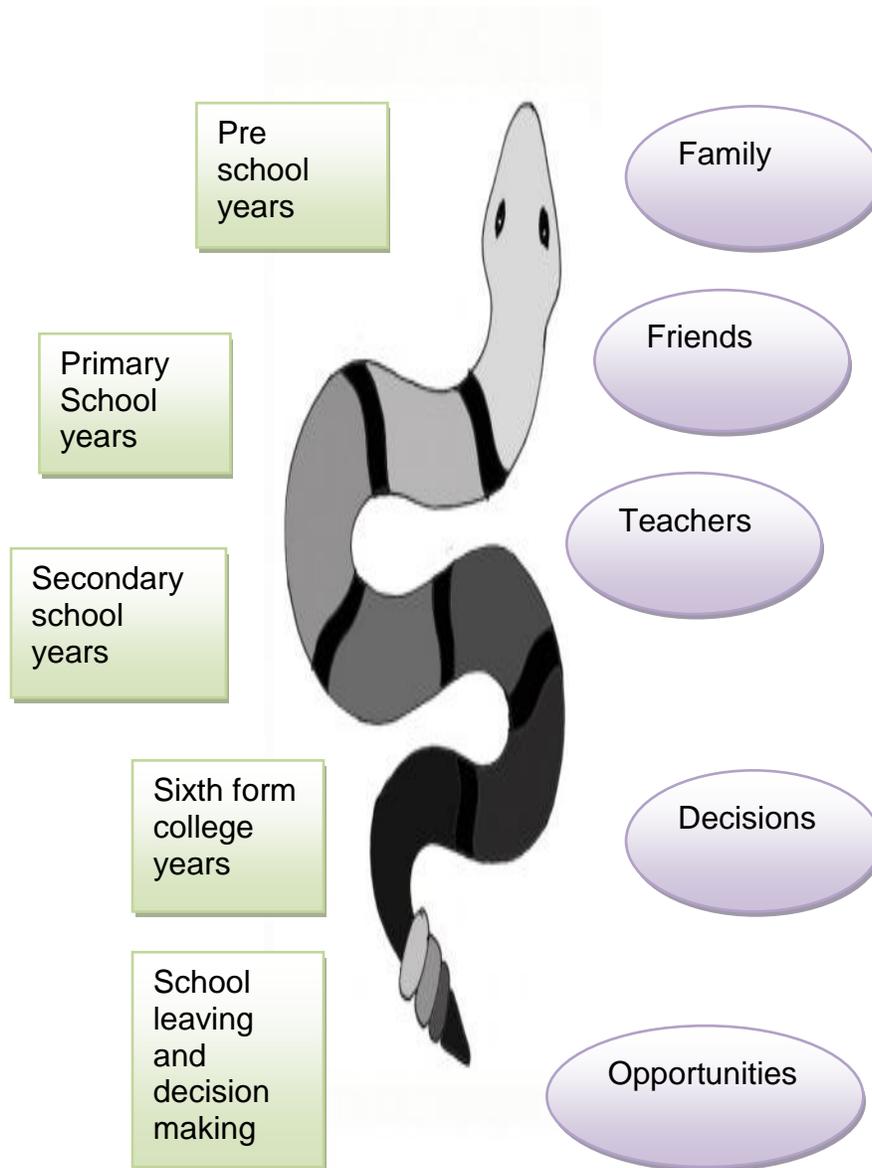
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**Appendix 1: Snake Diagram (adapted from Cabaroglu & Denicolo, 2008, p30.)**

Each turn of the snake's body will depict a personal experience which influenced the direction of my learning and professional career or decisions made. These turns will be annotated briefly to be used as the basis for the autobiographical narrative.



## **Appendix 2. Framework for a personal life history** (Wellington et al, 2005)

- Place and date of birth, family background and history including ethnicity and religious affiliation
- Parents' occupations and level of formal education; their general character and interests, siblings: places and dates of birth; occupations and level of formal education; their general character and interests
- Extended family: occupations and level of formal education; their general character and interests
- Your childhood: description of home and general discussion of experiences
- Community and context; general character and feel
- Educational experience; pre school, schooling, courses taken, subjects favoured, qualifications attained or not; general character of school experience, peer relations; teachers, good and bad experiences
- Higher education and professional preparation
- Occupation; general work history, particular interests, highs and lows, successes and failures
- How you came to enrol on a doctoral programme
- Personal relationships: partners, children, their interests and pursuits

*Data from my life history has been woven with theory to produce Chapter 4.*

### **Appendix 3. Values exercise (Chang, 2008, p.97)**

#### **Individual (completed November 2013)**

List five values, in order of importance, that you consider important in your life. Give a brief definition of each in your own terms. Select the most important one and explain why it is important.

1. Integrity: encompasses everything else I have written but is the most important one because unless I act in accordance with my beliefs and values, then they are not worth having. For me, integrity also encompasses the concept of consistency – behaviour needs to be consistent with beliefs.
2. Openness (transparency): both in my interactions with others and in the way we communicate with and work with students. I dislike ‘game playing’ and prefer directness.
3. Fairness: equity is important to me in that everyone should be given the same opportunity to succeed or access what is available. Consistency is also appropriate here. This is also about trying to correct an imbalance of power.
4. Courage: acting with integrity sometimes requires courage.
5. Respect: I would not necessarily have listed this a year ago but my reflections are demonstrating that respect is an important value to me. If I feel I have been disrespected, I do tend to react.

#### **As part of a staff development workshop (completed February 2014)**

We were given an extensive list of words that could describe or encapsulate values and asked to choose three with some rationale for why they were important to us.

Mine were:

- Integrity
- Openness
- Courage

It could be argued (and was) that ‘integrity’ encompasses honesty and openness but for me, integrity means acting in accordance with my beliefs/values rather than just espousing them. For example, if I have ‘trust’, ‘honesty’ and ‘openness’ in my list then integrity for me means displaying those values in my behaviour.

The majority of the team identified very similar values. As identified by Chang (2008), values are not always strictly applied or articulated in people's daily lives. The remainder of the discussion was around how we would demonstrate those values in our practice resulting in a list of demonstrable behaviours towards each other and our students that would evidence these. This included ensuring equity of experience for the students and working within agreed standards in terms of feedback. This exercise allowed me to discuss these issues in a group environment and promote discussion.

## Appendix 4

Culturegram: cultural identify and cultural membership (Chang, 2008, p.97-100)

The culturegram contains different types, sizes and shades of figures and lines connecting them. The figures are designated by four different types of information and lines indicate connectivity among figures. All the figures connected by lines indicate they belong together in one category. The rectangles are the diversity dimensions and are connected to a shaded circle in which you write down a primary self identifier indicating that you have knowledge, skills, competence, familiarity or emotional attachment to function as a member of this group. This is a subjective labelling of yourself not based on precise measurement but on personal perception and desire. The remaining ovals are self identifiers in the same dimension.

Completing this should result in an implicit and explicit array of life experiences, involvements, familiar groups, passions and cultural competence. The final step of the culturegram process is to fill the centre circle with three primary self identifiers in the order of importance to you. Chang acknowledges that whilst not everyone will select a religious identity as a primary self identifier, the gravity of this identity needs to be acknowledged and suggests that religion is the the core of our expression of the human heart. I am unsure if I agree with this. Where does it leave people like myself who do not have a named religion or a particular set of beliefs? I do not identify myself in a religious context. I would describe myself as spiritual but could not elaborate exactly what I mean by this. For me, my behaviour and thought processes are guided by my values so the 'multiple intelligence' dimension emerges as more significant.

Completing this was interesting and the following points emerged for further consideration:

1. I am very white. If you look at my Facebook page of 'friends', there is only one person who is off a different race and she is in a relationship with my brother. This is in stark contrast to my young niece who has a multicultural

friend list which reflects the cultural make up of her school. I only speak English fluently and have a smattering of French. All my circle of friends are white and British, yet where I live is now very multi-cultural. Nursing here is certainly very multi-cultural. In our wider department of Nurse Educators, there are 15 of us and we are all white, all British. I teach other cultures in the classroom from the nursing profession and I wonder now how much thinking I have done about diversity. I am reminded of an incident in the classroom last year when we were looking at inequalities of health (in the UK) and a student who had grown up in Zimbabwe found the exercise difficult as it bore no relation to her own perception of inequalities. I don't think I dealt with this very effectively and should have promoted discussion around this to allow a consideration of multiple perspectives. Being constantly around people from a very similar nationality and ethnicity to myself has probably led me to develop a narrow privileged view. I teach anti-discriminatory practice and there are often multiple nationalities in the room. How well do I try and use their experiences? I'm embarrassed to say...not enough.

2. I found the gender dimension difficult to complete and I'm still not completely happy with it. I've listed identifiers within that dimension but in truth, I rarely think of myself in this way. I forget that I may be seen as a 'wife', 'daughter', or 'sister'. I was much happier when I wrote 'friend'. I also initially wrote 'feminist' in the shaded circle but did not feel this was particularly honest either. I do have feminist views but a more accurate descriptor would be humanist. Am I in denial here? I may get questioned around not considering the feminist perspective within my thesis but I'm unsure how influential it is. I need to keep an eye on this through all my reflective exercises. Where is it relevant? If it is not relevant – why not?
3. Profession was probably the easiest dimension to complete. Having said that, I can see that I tend to 'jump ship' quite easily when it comes to professional identification; a professional chameleon. I used to strongly

identify as a nurse when I worked in that capacity. Yet, I was very happy to leave that identifier behind when I went to work at Public Health and became a 'Health Promotion Officer'. My current identifier as educator is the one I feel most at home with. I often feel like this is the job I was meant to do. The other professions, I would leave at the end of the day and not think about work or want to do any extra. With this job, it is more of a life choice. It is not an office hours job as every news item, discussion with friends, give me ideas to bring into the classroom. I often work later because I want to and am interested in what I'm doing. Perhaps I have changed colour for the final time.

4. Multiple intelligences: I struggled with this at first. All I could think of was that I now do well academically, have good interpersonal, communication skills with a particular knack for motivating adult learners who do not feel they are capable. I looked up Gardner's multiple intelligences and now this list reads like I am extremely intelligent on multiple levels! This new list made me feel uncomfortable as I do not want to sound like I am blowing my own trumpet. Imposter syndrome again? However, perhaps I should start to feel more comfortable with acknowledging my strengths. As it turns out, one of these identifiers is essentially my primary identifier and replaces the 'religious' aspect.
5. Interests were easy but what was interesting is that when I think of 'primary identifier' the first word that comes into my head is 'runner'. I think I am going to have to include this as I know if it was taken away, it would remove a big portion of who I am and how I see myself and would probably cause an identity crisis!
6. I struggled with what to write here. How could I label myself working class when I live a comfortable lifestyle, am in a middle class profession and earn a good income? Yet, as I am learning not to deny my origins, I still identify as working class. I have supposedly working class attitudes; strong work

ethic, imposter syndrome tendencies, I am not particularly good at accepting deferred gratification, and I have socialist leanings. Or do I? As I started to unpick this, my liberal politics indicate that I am actually stuck somewhere in the middle, not feeling like I belong in either camp, socially or professionally? I am in a middle class profession with largely middle class friends but with working class attitudes or underpinnings. I used to try so hard in the sociology class to fit myself into the middle class category and deny where I belonged. I no longer feel the need to do this. What has changed? Perhaps I can see the value of what I bring. This is very much part of using my self at work. What I do know is I what I am not...part of an underclass.

7. Organised religion is not important to me. Values and living true to those are.

My 'primary identifiers' were chosen but, as Chang (2008) says, although they tend to be enduring and persistent over time, they are not always permanent fixtures in life. Some may remain steady and others change depending on time, occasion and context. For example, my professional identity is very important to me at this point in my life but may change depending on my next moves. It is very much embedded in me at this time. Class is an important identifier to me and my experiences within that dimension have formed the foundations for who I am now and what is important to me. This is how Chang describes the religious dimension. I still feel that I am always trying to 'catch up' although I am never quite sure with what. My values within the multiple intelligences dimension have in essence replaced religion as they form the basis for how I try to live my life.

## **Appendix 5. Articulation of teaching philosophy (Cranton, 2006)**

**Completed October 2012**

The following questions were used to help me articulate my philosophy and approach to teaching:

- What is my purpose in being an adult educator?
- How would I describe my practice in relation to this purpose?
- How do I bring myself – my beliefs, values, assumptions and preferences – into my teaching?
- How does my view of myself as a learner contribute to how I teach?
- How do I view the learners I work with?
- What do I see as the adult learner's role within education?
- How do I allow for change and variation in my practice?
- What constraints or resistances influence my practice?
- How do I know when I've done well?

*My purpose as an educator of mature nontraditional adult learners is to work in partnership with individuals in order to develop their learning potential to reach their learning goals. I adopt a relational approach to my work, emphasising the interactive nature of learning and my aim of co-constructing learning between us. I have immense respect for these learners who are studying part time whilst working in demanding managerial and/or caring roles and juggling family responsibilities. I try to share my knowledge and expertise, encourage them to contribute the same with their own knowledge and expertise and support and challenge them to question what they already know and what they are learning.*

*I am conscious of my own learning and teaching style, my values and preferences and I have started to bring who I am into the relationship with students. However, although I do try to bring my 'self' into the classroom, by talking about my experiences where relevant, I have started to notice that I do not share my mistakes and failures or issues that I am struggling with.*

*I am able to determine the content of my teaching programmes but have little control over the assessment methods and find the feedback policies constraining in terms of the way I would prefer to work. I have become aware that I could be more*

*collaborative in my approach to work within the classroom to echo the collaborative approach to feedback. I try and use learning and teaching strategies that foster support, challenge and collaboration. These include team debates, use of case studies, discussion, action learning groups and individual work.*

*I evaluate my own success based on formal and informal evaluation by the students but also by the personal responses I get from learners. I also judge how well my approach is working by the quality of discussion and engagement within the group and how the learning is represented within their assessments.*

## **Appendix 6. Role model profile (Brookfield, 2005)**

**Completed October 2012**

*Think about the colleagues with whom you work or have worked, or those you know in other institutions and settings:*

*1. As you look back over your career, which colleagues in your opinion, best represent what a teacher should be?*

Is it terrible that I cannot think of many teachers who best represent what a teacher should be? I can think of many characteristics of several individuals that I would like to emulate but nobody that has the 'whole' package. However, three teachers did come immediately to mind.

*2. What are their characteristics?*

One of my chosen people is very charismatic in the classroom – funny, personable and very knowledgeable. I find charisma in the classroom very appealing. Another I would say has particular integrity about the centrality of the student and is probably the person who influenced my practice most when I joined the profession. The other one is not a colleague but is a member of the teaching team at the University of where I am a student whose approach suits me perfectly. She challenges but in a thought provoking way, is very approachable but also very direct. So she has that combination of being direct when she needs to be (or when I need her to be) and facilitative when that is needed.

*3. Which of their actions most encapsulates and typifies what it is I find most admirable about them?*

I have only seen my charismatic colleague teach a handful of times but was pretty much captivated both times at his ability to 'hold' the attention of a classroom by speaking for fairly long periods of time which I avoid doing. He obviously knows his topic inside out and has the ability to ad lib and go with the flow because of his confidence in the underpinning knowledge. He is funny and confident. I remember watching him and considering his style and thinking 'you

cant learn that'. You either have charisma or you haven't. I do not have the confidence to present material in the way that he does but I would love to.

I remember one colleague saying that when we were nursing, our role was to advocate for the patients where needed but that in this role the students are our 'patient' and it is our role to advocate for them. From a nursing perspective, that really struck a chord with me as a Nurse Lecturer at that time. Although I now feel that sounds quite a paternalistic point of view, at the time it was a point of reference that I understood. She was a strong advocate for students and put them at the centre of the learning process rather than systems working for the educator. When I think of this person, I think of the word 'integrity' which I value greatly and although we did not always agree on every issue, she remains someone who has probably influenced my educational practice more than most.

When I first met the challenging and thought provoking Lecturer, I found the direct approach slightly disconcerting. However, I began to appreciate her directness and could see that she was very approachable, offers practical advice and suggestions and is very reassuring and builds confidence with her feedback. From a learner perspective, she embodies what I want from a teacher – technical expertise, approachability, directness, thoughtful action and responses, constructive feedback and challenge and also a 'human' side. I know a bit about her life and things that make her cross!

4. *Which of their abilities would you most like to borrow and incorporate into your own teaching?*

- Colleague 1– charm and charisma and the ability to 'hold a room'.
- Colleague 2 – the focus on the student – although I believe I have developed this, her influence is strong!
- Colleague 3 – that level of expertise. I don't think I've got it and am unsure whether I ever will have.

## **Appendix 7. Example of a practice story with interpretive comments**

Written on 12 August 2013

### Developing the dialogic approach...or am I?

Having come to the crushing realisation that I have cognitivist tendencies within a constructivist orientation, I made a real effort today with one of my dissertation students who is writing their dissertation chapter three, typically the toughest to construct due to the need to critique the literature in detail prior to organising their critique in a logical, succinct way.

To be fair, this particular student makes it easy for me to practise my constructivist aims by taking such an active part in the learning process. When they send me a draft, they always send me some questions or comments concerning aspects they are unsure of that we can discuss. Still, on reflection, I realised that when we meet, I tend to take the lead and do what students in Blair and McGinty's (2013) study perceive as transmission; expert to passive student style. I usually go through my comments (that I will have sent beforehand) and talk through them explaining what I mean. Although I respond to their questions, I definitely have been setting the agenda.

Anyway, today I started by saying 'How do you want to do this? What will work best for you?' The student responded immediately by asking if we could spend half the time talking through the feedback, half the time going through what was required for the following chapter and a final five minutes to bring me up to date with a development in practice that would impact on his work locally. So...that's what we did! We went over time and spend more time on the feedback but I let the student lead and talk through and justify why he had done things in a certain way. I don't know how they felt afterwards but I found it a much more satisfying session. What will the finished version look like? I don't know. Does it matter? The other thing the student talked about was their learning throughout the process and how it was impacting on their practice. Surely, that is what it is all about.

When I emailed the student back following the meeting, I also emphasised that the active role they are taking in the process has been very constructive and makes it more of a two way process. Now I have written that, I wonder whether it might have sounded patronising. Might the student prefer me to take on the role of expert?

I received another chapter three from a different student in the same cohort today and prepared my feedback comments to send to them prior to our meeting on Thursday. This was tough. The writing was all over the place and it took me almost double the time it had taken me with the other chapters to construct some guidance. Whereas with the previous student, many of my comments were questions or invitations to explain or convince of a point, here I was having to suggest corrections and it felt much less like we were going to be having a conversation about it as I was writing. It did feel like I was writing as the expert. I noticed that I tried to add in invitations to participate, comments such as 'What do you think?' or 'I noticed that you had brought in x to the discussions on many occasions but had not included this as a theme. Is this something you had thought of exploring further'? At our meeting on Thursday, I hope to make it more of an interactive process. However, as I was writing the feedback, I was constantly aware that there was going to be an emotional impact on this student when they received it. I have had a lot to say as there was a lot to say...a lot of work to be done, particularly about readability and clarity. The student writes as they speak. We have had this conversation before, yet here it was worse than I had seen before. I was trying to get across that I could identify the genuine passion and interest for the topic but that it was difficult for the reader to follow their train of thought and decision making processes. The track changes on the document mean they will open the document and see a lot of 'red'. These are not corrections but comments and questions but the impact of seeing a lot of comments can be disheartening. I hope I have conveyed that this chapter is challenging but once it is conquered it paves the way to the end of the task for the student. Let's see on Thursday.

## Interpretive comments: December 2013

Within this story is another example of how I use positive language to talk about a student who works in the way I like to work – ‘makes it easy for me to practise my constructivist aims’ – , ‘always sends me questions and comments concerning aspects the student is not so sure of that we can discuss’. Catching myself out/contradictions: I think this demonstrates my growing awareness of the need to use different approaches depending on the situation. I knew this already but still tend to veer towards a facilitative style. Yet there are still contradictions here. Although my written feedback is very socio-constructivist, full of questions, comments and curiosities, when I am with a student, I lapse into the ‘expert’ taking the lead in the conversation and setting the agenda. This story demonstrates my growing awareness of this and gives examples of me trying to change my approach – evidence into practice. Here, I have given up control of the agenda, ‘let the student lead’ although this still indicates I had control over the decision as well! I found it a more satisfying session and made an effort to be explicit when I emailed them afterwards that the role they had played in the process made it much more constructive. I have since tried to take this approach wherever possible. (Footnote here is that at the end of the process, 5 months later, this student wrote a dedication in their dissertation that my approach had motivated them to keep going when they thought it was hopeless). Was this because my approach suited their style?

Within this same story, I note that I had to take a cognitivist approach with a student at the same stage who had completely gone off piste with their chapter. My feedback here was much less about having a conversation and much more with me as the expert. Could I have handled this differently? The following stories demonstrate that this student was very affected emotionally by the feedback. Could I have asked them how they felt it met the criteria instead of taking the expert route immediately? I took a long time to construct this feedback and it is becoming clear through these stories that I am sensitive to the emotional impact of feedback – is this part of using my self through experience? My experience is directing my

practice here. If none of my colleagues have ever failed or received poor feedback, to what extent do they consider the emotional impact? I am starting to think that I may need to be brave and bring my experience of failure into this research.

## Appendix 8. Interactive cover sheet

### Module: (Module number)

In order to help me provide the feedback that will be of most use to you based on your concerns or your past experiences, please complete the form below and email this along with your draft essay(s).

As discussed in class, the aim of this exercise is for you to develop the self regulation skills of critiquing and identifying potential gaps and areas for development in your own work.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Name  |  |
| Module title  |  |
| Title of assignment   |  |
| Word count of draft, which should be no more than: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1200 for part 1</li><li>• 800 for part 2</li></ul> |  |
| Date of submission of draft essay   |  |

Thinking of any feedback on a past essay (or essays), please indicate how you have used or tried to incorporate any previous feedback that helped you prepare for and write this draft essay:

If you would like feedback on any particular aspects of your draft essay, please make a note of what you would like the feedback to address (be specific about any particular concerns, anything you are struggling with or parts you think you are doing well):

## Appendix 9

### Assumption Activity Preparation for team practice development day (December 2012)

This is for your eyes only. You will not be expected to share any of your responses with the team unless you want to. It is purely to help you start thinking around some of the issues that we will be discussing on the team development day which will make a more thoughtful contribution to the day rather than having to think about it on the spot!

For the purposes of this exercise, formative feedback is defined as written and/or verbal feedback given to students on either draft submissions of an essay or a draft chapter of a dissertation. Please think about the statements below and mark on the continuum what you personally believe or think about the practice of constructing formative feedback

- 1. I see the provision of formative feedback as a the beginning of a dialogue with the student rather than as transmission of information from educator to student**

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree



- 2. I think it is more important to tell students what needs to be revised and fixed rather than providing them with comments and suggestions to help them in their own revision of their work.**

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree



- 3. I think it is important to correct spelling, grammar and give suggestions for sentence structure**

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree



- 4. I structure my feedback differently depending on where the student is in terms of their degree pathway (e.g. first module may be more directive, less so having reached dissertation level)**

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree



- 5. I tend to focus my feedback on what the student has not done or needs to improve rather than the parts they have done well.**

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree



**6. My feedback tends to be retrospective rather than prospective**

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

**7. As a team, we are consistent with our approach to the provision of feedback**

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

**8. My practice is influenced by the university policy on feedback**

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

**9. My practice is influenced by the evidence base around provision of formative feedback in terms of what students find helpful?**

Strongly agree

Strongly disagree

**10. What else influences my practice?**

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**Consider:**

**What do your responses reveal about your beliefs and assumptions about formative feedback and our role as educators?**

**What has influenced your responses?**

**Thanks for your time in doing this. Although you will not be expected to share your specific answers, it will hopefully help you clarify your thoughts around the subject prior to our workshop on the 17<sup>th</sup>.**

## **Appendix 10. Diamond 9 activity**

Activity used as part of team practice development day, December 2012

### **Aim**

- To provide the basis for a discussion on the provision of formative feedback on a both a team and individual basis.

### **Task**

Below is a list of various functions of formative feedback that have been identified in the literature. Although, your practice may change depending on the student, please try and think of the issue on a general level as we will be using this as a basis for general discussion. Focus on the formative feedback you give to students either on draft assignments or on draft chapters for the dissertation rather than summative feedback following submission.

Please prioritise these from your own personal point of view. What is most important to you in terms of your aims of providing feedback for students?

Place them in a diamond format. Once you have done this, we will discuss how and why we prioritised them in this way.

### **Functions of formative feedback**

1. Helping the student to apply the learning from their classroom to their writing and to their practice
2. Being directive; showing them what needs to be fixed and revised
3. Being facilitative; providing comments and suggestions to help guide students in their own revision and conceptualisation
4. To encourage dialogue with the student about how they are applying the concepts taught to their writing
5. To check they are covering the learning outcomes

6. Providing general information that will not only help them complete this piece of work but also to help them in future pieces of work – e.g. how to construct an argument, highlighting examples of critical analysis
7. Providing specific information that will help them complete this particular assignment – i.e. relating to content
8. To help them develop their writing style
9. Think of one other function of formative feedback that is important to you in your practice?

Then...look at everyone elses. Use this as a basis for discussion:

- How easy was it to prioritise?
- Why did you prioritise in the way that you did?
- What was on your extra piece of paper?
- What influences your practice? Policy? Literature? What else?

## **Appendix 11. Preparation for workshop on developing professional identity, December 2013**

Please give some thought to and complete the following two exercises prior to our workshop on 13 January. They will form the basis for discussion during the first section of the morning. You will not be expected to show anyone what you have written but it should help to clarify your thinking around some of the issues we will be discussing and allow to contribute to the discussion in a meaningful way.

### **Part 1: Role model profile**

*“One way in which teachers become aware of their assumptions is by talking about colleagues they admire and why they admire them”.* (Brookfield, 1995, p.77)

Stephen Brookfield suggests completing this exercise to promote reflection and discussion on the aspects of teaching that are important to us as individuals. This exercise asks you to think about colleagues with whom you work or have worked or those you know who work in other institutions and settings or those who have taught you in the past. Please answer the following questions and be prepared to share some of your thoughts with the team:

- As you look back over your career as a teacher or a learner, which teachers, in your opinion, best represent what a teacher should be?
- What *characteristics* have you observed in these people that make them so admirable?
- As you think about how these people work, which of their *actions* most encapsulates and typifies what it is that you find so admirable about them?
- As you think about what these people do well, which of their abilities would you most like to be able to borrow and integrate into your own teaching?

### **Part 2: Developing an individual philosophy of practice**

Patricia Cranton (2006) suggests that whether we call it a theory of practice, a philosophy of practice or a perspective on education, we need to have a rationale for why we practice in the way that we do. What do we believe about education?

What drives us to do our best and what do we hope to achieve? She suggests answering the following questions to help develop your own philosophy of practice:

- What is my purpose in being an adult educator?
- How would I describe my practice in relation to this purpose?
- How do I bring myself – my beliefs, values, assumptions and preferences – into my teaching?
- How does my view of myself as a learner contribute to how I teach?
- How do I view the learners I work with?
- What do I see as the adult learner's role within education?
- How do I allow for change and variation in my practice as I am practising?
- What constraints or resistances influence my practice?
- How do I know when I've done well?

Cranton suggests that there is no one format or style for creating your philosophy of practice but offers her own example that might provide some guidance as to how answering these questions might help in developing your thoughts on your own practice. Everyone is individual so you will all have your own ideas and there is no right or wrong. Once again, any written work is for your eyes only and is purely to help you clarify your thoughts around your professional practice. However, it may be useful for your professional portfolios.

Thank you for your time in doing this in order to contribute to the discussions at the workshop.

December 2013

## Appendix 12. Feedback Analysis Tool (adapted from JISC Research Project 2014)

| Category of Feedback            | Sub-category  | Examples   | Score (how many comments) |
|---------------------------------|---|--|---------------------------|
| Giving praise                   |   | 'A well constructed assignment'  |                           |
| Recognising progress (ipsative) |   | 'This represents a significant improvement'<br>'You have taken account of previous feedback'   |                           |
| Critical feedback               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Correction of errors</li> <li>• Factual critiques (of content)</li> <li>• Critique of approach (structure and argument)</li> </ul>                     | Spelling, grammar, referencing etc<br>'This is not discussed in enough depth'<br>'Your arguments do not flow logically'  |                           |
| Giving advice                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific (to current assignment)</li> <li>• General points (specific to current assignment)</li> <li>• For future assignments (feedforward)</li> </ul> | 'You might want to consider X'<br>'There is scope to tease out further detail on X'<br>'For future assignments, I would suggest considering/paying attention to....' |                           |
| Clarification requests          |   | 'What do you mean by?'   |                           |
| Unclassified statements         |   | Statements which do not make a judgement e.g. descriptions of the work   |                           |

### Consider the following and discuss with a colleague:

- What do you think is the overall tone of your feedback?
- Does this example of your feedback demonstrate a tendency towards any particular category?
- What influences how you construct your feedback?

Orsmond, P. & Merry, S. (2011). Feedback alignment: effective and ineffective links between tutors' and students' understanding of coursework feedback. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 36(2), 125-126.

### Used within team practice development day (December 2014)



