‘It’s my time now’:
An exploration of the relationship between Foundation degree students’ epistemological beliefs and their emerging identity as learners.

Submitted by Laura Osborne, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education, October 2012.

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(Signature) ........................................................................................................................................
Abstract

This thesis is an exploratory case study that investigates the epistemological beliefs of students' on a Foundation degree in Teaching and learning, and the possible influence of these beliefs on their learning. Critical realism provides the theoretical context for this case study through a multi-phase approach. This study explores the students' beliefs of knowledge, knowing and learning through the employment of questionnaires and in-depth interviews which reveals the stories and experiences of five of the students.

The research data suggests there is an apparent relationship between personal epistemological beliefs and the engagement with learning in higher education for these students. Moreover it emerged that there were personal transformations in their attitudes and beliefs towards knowledge, knowing and learning that had a profound impact on their self-belief. The changes can be attributed, in part, to the students’ capacity for change-readiness and openness to learning mediated by the situated and contextualised nature of the learning environment.

Findings from this case study are not generalisable due to its specificity to one particular setting and small number of participants. However, a conceptual model of the relationship between students’ epistemological beliefs and transformation is offered exposing the complexity of social phenomena in real-life settings.

The findings are discussed within the context of previous research. As part of my own learning, and in harmony with the theme of learning and change of the participants, I have also explored my learning changes as a result of engaging in my doctoral studies.
## Contents

Abstract 2  
Acknowledgements 3  
List of contents 4  
List of Figures 6  
List of Tables 6  
List of Appendices 7  

1. **Introduction and Rationale** 8  
   1.1. Context 9  
   1.2. Lifelong learning 11  
   1.3. What is a Foundation degree? 12  
   1.4. A focus on epistemology 15  
   1.5. My approach to the study 17  
   1.6. The study 19  

2. **A personal exploration of my approach to research** 22  
   2.1. Initial exploration of language and concepts 22  
   2.2. An understanding of my ontological and epistemological framework 24  
   2.3. The present 30  

3. **Literature Review** 32  
   3.1. Epistemology 32  
      3.1.1. Some definitions 34  
      3.1.2. Epistemological models 36  
         i. Developmental models 36  
         ii. Cognitive models 38  
         iii. Contextual models 40  
   3.2. Epistemological beliefs and relationship to learning and beliefs about intelligence 41  
   3.3. A challenge to the notion that sophisticated beliefs are best 45  
   3.4. Epistemological beliefs and the link to conceptual change 47  
   3.5. Context of epistemological beliefs 49  
   3.6. Implications for higher education 55  

4. **Research approach and methods** 58  
   4.1 Evolution of research questions 59  
   4.2 Ethical considerations 62  
   4.3 Critical realism as the philosophical compass for this study 64  
   4.4 Case study design 67  
   4.5 Mixed methods approach 69  
   4.6 Methods 71  
      4.6.1 Questionnaires 73  
         i. Beliefs About Intelligence (BAI) 74
ii. The Epistemic Belief Inventory (EBI) 75
4.6.2 Analysis of the questionnaires 76
4.6.3 Interviews 77
4.6.4 Analysis of interviews 79
4.7 Quality control 84

5. Data presentation and findings 90
5.1. Interviews 92
  5.1.1. Themes arising from the interviews 93
    i. Contextual aspects 93
    ii. Themes relating to knowledge, knowing and learning 95
5.2. Questionnaires 109
  5.2.1. The Epistemic Belief Inventory (EBI) analysis 109
  5.2.2. Beliefs About Intelligence (BAI) analysis 115
5.3. Case study narratives 117
    i. Emma’s transformation 118
    ii. Rachael’s transformation 122

6. Discussion 129
6.1. Students’ epistemological beliefs and change in these beliefs
    (Questions 1 and 4) 129
    i. The sophisticated nature of epistemological beliefs 133
    ii. Beliefs about learning 135
    iii. Beliefs as demonstrated by the whole cohort 136
6.2. An examination of the inconsistencies in the data 137
6.3. Links between beliefs about learning and epistemological beliefs
    (Question 2) 140
6.4. The entwined nature of epistemological beliefs, conceptual
    change and transformative learning (Question 6) 142
    i. Epistemological beliefs and conceptual change 142
    ii. Epistemological beliefs and transformational learning 143
6.5. Summary 150

7. Conclusion 155
7.1. Limitations 156
7.2. Implications for practice 157
7.3. Suggestions for further research 162
7.4. Personal Reflections 163

8. Appendices 165

9. References 181
List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Three phases of research 20
Figure 3.1 Nested epistemological belief system 51
Figure 3.2 The reciprocal interaction between the individual, context and epistemological beliefs 54
Figure 4.1 Three phases of research 59
Figure 5.1 Amount of overall change relating to naïve and sophisticated beliefs in all categories. 113
Figure 5.2 Change in beliefs of the 5 interview participants in the 5 categories. 115
Figure 5.3 Amount of overall change relating naïve and sophisticated beliefs in fixed nature of intelligence. 116
Figure 6.1 Possible mix of belief stances 131
Figure 6.2 Model of epistemological change 152

List of Tables

Table 3.1 Comparable epistemological positions 37
Table 4.1 Epistemological beliefs represented by the EBI and possible scoring 76
Table 5.1 Epistemological beliefs represented by the EBI and possible scoring. 110
Table 5.2: The change in the point scores for each belief subset 111
Table 5.3 Change in scores representing each belief subset from Phase 1 to Phase 2 of the study. 112
Table 5.4 Percentage change of participants towards sophisticated beliefs in all categories 114
Table 5.5 Number of questions demonstrating an increase from naïve to more sophisticated views. 114
Table 5.6 Change in scores from the BAI and the EBI representing belief in fixed ability 117
Table 6.1 Epistemological belief stances 130
| Appendix 1 | Certificate of ethical research approval | 167 |
| Appendix 2 | Letter of explanation and consent for participants | 170 |
| Appendix 3 | Beliefs about knowledge, learning and intelligence: The Epistemic Belief Inventory (EBI) and Beliefs about Intelligence (BAI) | 171 |
| Appendix 4 | Changes to questions on the EBI following pilot group suggestions | 174 |
| Appendix 5 | Interview questions | 175 |
| Appendix 6 | Phase 1 and 2 data for EBI: Totals for each participant according to the belief subset | 176 |
| Appendix 7 | Graphs to show amount of overall change relating to naïve and sophisticated beliefs | 177 |
| Appendix 8 | Statistical data for EBI and BAI questionnaires | 180 |