

**‘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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# Abstract

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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

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Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
List of contents	4
List of Figures	6
List of Tables	6
List of Appendices	7
<b>1. Introduction and Rationale</b>	<b>8</b>
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
<b>2. A personal exploration of my approach to research</b>	<b>22</b>
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
<b>3. Literature Review</b>	<b>32</b>
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
<b>4. Research approach and methods</b>	<b>58</b>
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
<b>5. Data presentation and findings</b>	<b>90</b>
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
<b>6. Discussion</b>	<b>129</b>
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
<b>7. Conclusion</b>	<b>155</b>
7.1. Limitations	156
7.2. Implications for practice	157
7.3. Suggestions for further research	162
7.4. Personal Reflections	163
<b>8. Appendices</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>9. References</b>	<b>181</b>

# List of Figures

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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

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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

# Appendices

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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