

**‘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

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.

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