

Exploring accounting students' interaction with their assessment feedback in a UK post-92 university

'The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place' George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

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Dedication

In loving memory of my mum and dad:

Albert & Maureen Lawless

Abstract

This thesis offers a holistic insight into the expectations and experiences of university students in relation to academic feedback. The subjects are a diverse group of first year accounting and finance students in a post-92 university. What is identified and examined here is the lifeworld of a student studying within the current politicalised higher education environment. Many assumptions evident in the literature relating to students' attitudes and feelings about feedback are challenged. The approach adopted to develop this research is based on Layder's (1998) 'adaptive theory' combining existing social theory with my empirical data to identify and reconcile the impact of the observable social world on the lived experience of our students.

A student's habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) and prior educational experiences often means she is unprepared for university study which results in a difficult and often painful transition. Building strong relationships with peers and academics is one of the most important components of student success, but many academics are often unaware of the reality of these students' lived experiences, neither are they aware of the possible impact the structures, regulations and overall power of the institution can have on students.

This research establishes a link between students' pre-conceived ideas and expectations and their transition into university. Failure on the part of the institution to respond and manage students' expectations can lead to growing dissatisfaction with their academic experience which manifests itself in dissatisfaction with assessment, feedback and other aspects of their early experience. When a young, often disadvantaged student attends university she may already have overcome multiple obstacles: poor schooling; poor housing; limited financial resources; and a general lack of higher education knowledge. This research identifies the vast chasm in our understanding of students' needs and expectations.

This study challenges the reliability and usefulness of using a broad range of metrics as proxies for learning, student satisfaction and quality assurance during a period when

metrics and benchmarks are being used to shape education. The underpinning rhetoric and ideology which informs political decisions is flawed. The study challenges the current performative approach to providing feedback and measuring effectiveness. Contrary to the classical concept of *rational economic man* many people's choices are restricted to a simple *satisficing*¹ strategy because their academic ambition is bounded by *cognitive limits* because they have not had access to all the cultural and social capitals which might have shaped their decisions and prepared them for their university experiences differently. Using Pierre Bourdieu's sociological concepts of habitus, capital and disposition (Bourdieu, 1977a), I reposition assessment and feedback within the wider context of the students' life experiences and identify the limitations imposed on these students, first by their past and then by universities' failure to position their higher education provision within a framework in which these adolescents can develop and grow within a suitable supportive environment which recognises and accepts who they actually are. Such an approach to their higher education experiences will begin to redress the issue of feedback in accounting.

¹ Simon, H. (1972) used the term *satisficing* to describe a combining of *satisfy* and *suffice* to describe a point at which an individual has what they believe they need or want.

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Table of Acronyms

HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEPI	Higher Education Policy Institute
HESA	Higher Education Statistical Agency
IA	Institutional Audit
MFQ	Module Feedback Questionnaire
NSS	National Student Survey
NSSE	National Survey of Student Engagement (USA)
NUS	National Union of Students
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SAES (2016)	Student Academic Experience Survey - a joint publication from HEPI and HEA constructed and written by Neves & Hillman
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QA	Quality Assurance
TQM	Total Quality Management
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research context and sets the scene within which this research emerged. The focus of the research is to understand feedback from the student perspective. This is done by uncovering and listening to the student voice in a variety of ways.

1.2 The Context of the Study

This research was undertaken within the Accounting and Finance department of a post-92 university in England. The study was undertaken during a time when students were being re-positioned as customers and were being asked to rate their chosen institutions, and subject areas, through a National Student Survey (NSS), an annually distributed questionnaire circulated to all final year undergraduate students.

The number of young people entering university in 2014 was just over 40 percent of eligible 18/19-year olds (UCAS, 2014). In some post-92 institutions the make-up of the student body lies well outside average student demographics and this is particularly true in accounting and finance. The 295 first year students admitted to accounting and finance, in this institution in 2015/16 were diverse; 63 percent were male (appendix 1) while the national average for 15/16 for male undergraduates was approximately 44 percent (HESA, 2017)², 84 percent came from ethnic minority backgrounds (appendix 1) when nationally just over 25 percent of new students come from this background (HESA, 2017) the remaining 16 percent of our students were white British (appendix 1). Nationally 54.3 percent of new entrants to the accounting profession are female

² Higher Education Statistical Agency

(Catalyst Inc, 2017), quite different to the population studying accounting at this university where only 37 percent are female (appendix 1). The surprising statistics reflected here relate to ethnicity and gender where our cohorts lie well outside national averages. This institutions' figures show that over 50 percent of our students live off campus with an average commute time of 51 minutes each way, 65 percent have part-time jobs and of these 80 percent work more than 10 hours a week (appendix 2).

The statistics above indicate the complex life of a young accounting and finance student studying in this post-92 institutions. The average age of a new student was just 19 (appendix 2), still in the throes of adolescence (Siegel, 2014). We are tasked, by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) with providing a high-quality student experience to a body of students where many are from lower socio-economic and under-represented groups, often first-generation students. Many of these students travel long, costly, distances each day to get to and from university and in addition may be working long hours.

This research concerns students who do not fit neatly into any specific national average and while this is true for every degree programme, accounting and finance students are potentially disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds and often first generation students (appendix 2). These students may need additional support and help to achieve their potential.

Institutions are ranked through the use of a range of metrics including the NSS and the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and judged against other institutions using benchmarking tools which are unable to fully capture the student makeup, background or experiences of university because the metrics are based on the views of only those who respond while those from ethnic minority groups are less likely to respond and are thus underrepresented (Office For National Statistics, 2016: sec 2.1.3), this can make the metrics statistically unsound, particularly in relation to an institution or degree programme with a large ethnic and diverse body of students (Lipsey, 2017). The potential problems experienced by these students because of their prior learning experiences and their social and cultural backgrounds (see section 2.6), remain unaddressed in the

literature and in many policy studies (Brien, 2011; Bowl, 2008), except as statistics of exception to be labelled and identified by their existence as a group by organisations such as the Sutton Trust (2009; 2009a; 2011), or categorised by their socio-economic grouping across educational statistics in HESA annual reports. Their views are however represented in the Student Academic Experience Survey (SAES) prepared by Neves & Hillman (2016) and are used in this research.

For many staff the social, economic and cultural issues of students are invisible. "A" level results or points that students hold when they arrive at university are the only consideration.

1.3 Why this Research?

This research is predicated on the belief that examining the student as a holistic whole person will enable staff to, more easily, provide students with the feedback they need and want on their academic work. More appropriate and considered interaction with students' academic work could improve their level of satisfaction with their higher education experience, enhance their learning, while having the potential to improve pass rates and increase grades for some students. The neo-liberal, economic and political environment of higher education makes it imperative that students are happy with their university experience and with feedback. This is because a failure to satisfy students could result in a reduction in university income through poorer recruitment initially, and then through the impact of NSS scores on other metrics which can directly hinder future recruitment prospects. Higher education operates in a fully-fledged market environment relying, almost wholly, on fees for income, with less than 15 percent of higher education income now coming from grant funding (Higher Education Reform Directorate, 2016).

This research represents a very personal journey, one in which I seek to identify and understand connections between what I do in the classroom and what happens in the minds of the students, I work with, when they receive read and/or use academic feedback. I needed to examine and analyse the characteristics of both the domain of

accounting and the students of accounting and then redesign my teaching and practice in ways which might assist students fully develop the expertise necessary to be successful. Receiving and reviewing students' comments on feedback enabled me to change my practice and change my feedback. For me the minute details of the everyday experience of each student in their own social world, impacts upon their ability to appreciate the purpose of feedback and to learn from it. At the same time much of what has happened in the students' social world is outside their control. They are products of their environment such as their prior educational experiences, their family and their culture, and they are now studying for a degree in a post-92 institution, with its own different and unique culture and history and pre-occupations.

This research is being undertaken at a time when the views of students are being evaluated on a national basis through the NSS and internally within universities, using a range of different methodologies all with a single purpose: to improve students' satisfaction with their university experience and enhance external metrics.

The social world of each of us is a complex place and our interactions with each other and with our environment are complicated, varied, and experienced differently by each of us. We act in terms of the meaning we ascribe to the language being used and the situation we are in (Layder, 2006, Layder, 1993). I recognised, almost from the beginning, that it would not be possible to produce a single theory which would solve the feedback problem being highlighted students in different ways. Feedback is far more complex than the literature leads us to believe.

How people act in a given situation is a function of how students see, experience, and understand, that situation: but they are expected to act in 'a limited number of qualitatively different ways' (Marton and Tsui, 2004: 8) allowing the conceptualisation of some aspects of their experiences. These conceptions of aspects of the student experience evidenced in their words were my target. If students act on feedback in a limited number of ways and we can identify even some of these, we may change our responses to some of their reactions and become more supportive and understanding.

Student failure rates in accounting and finance can be high (Appendix 3), linked in part to the traditions of the accounting profession which is discussed later (S.2.5). For me student failure is, in part, my failure but also failure on the part of the institution to meet the needs of its student population. Trying to unpick the complexities of, and relationships between, learning, feedback, assessment and failure is difficult (Jordan et al., 2014; Knight and Page, 2007), and is not easily explained. At the same time, students themselves often seem perplexed at their own failures demonstrating, potentially, their inability to make the connections (Bell et al., 2013; Young, 2000).

In attempting to understand why we fail, I sought out students' views and opinions, while continually discussing feedback with them at every opportunity. My objective is always to critique, challenge, transform, and then empower my own practice and the experiences of my students (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015) and this has been enhanced during my doctoral studies. Collecting my data over many years allowed me to reflect across time, layer my knowledge with new information in support of my getting to know my field of research and identifying relevant theory. Identifying how accounting students think and feel about assessment, feedback, and their early experience of being students is only possible by examining closely students' words which form the bulk of data used here. The students' lived experience (Carless et al., 2011; Churchman and King, 2009) is who they are, and is the core of their identity (Berzonsky and Kuk, 2000) even though most are unaware of the impact that their social class, their history, and their past has on how they feel, see and understand their world here and now. But, these students do not exist or live in a cultural or historical vacuum (Bloomer, 2001), they bring their past with them.

The world of education continues to be hotly debated (Williams, 2016; Vignoles and Murray, 2016) and appears complex, responding regularly to conflicting new political and economic imperatives introduced in the name of new ideologies which then impact upon our daily life as teachers and that of our students. There are many questions and conflicting ideas surrounding thinking in higher education, and some unanswered questions gave me cause for concern. I wanted to understand:

1. Why feedback and assessment appeared to cause such turmoil in the world of higher education evidenced by NSS results, and reactions to those results, and to consider if it is because we are dealing with a complex³ and wicked⁴ problem that is almost impossible to solve?
2. Whether UK education helps enhance social justice or in fact helps to reproduce existing inequalities in our society?
3. Whether it is possible to create an educational experience which meets the needs of students more closely by responding to their habitus (Bourdieu, 1990)?

This research is concerned, mainly, with what happens in the invisible space of the student mind (Ainley, 2003), which is the result of actions, reactions and interactions with, and to the world (peers, cultural history, internet, school, family, ethnicity, buildings, teachers past and present) and of course with academic feedback. Our only access to what is invisible comes through the descriptions and words used and thus to understand this, we need to find answers to the questions raised above.

Students on arrival at university enter a new social world, bringing with them their own diverse, often different, cultural habitus (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991) and different social worlds (Blumer, 1969; Hanley, 2016). These different social worlds, theirs and ours, become our students' reality for the duration of their studies (Hammersley, 1992). I needed to identify students' reactions and interactions with a range of connecting assemblages in the form of life experiences (Masny, 2012: 116), as these relate to their university experiences. These reactions and interactions can be dynamic, driving and stimulating change, supporting learning while forming the building blocks of a complex

³ Complexity theory or complexity science refers to a specific approach to modelling complex, adaptive, non-linear systems which can be found in biology, nature, physics, finance and economic SHARIF, A. M. & IRANI, Z. 2006. Applying a fuzzy-morphological approach to complexity within management decision making. *Management Decision*, 44, 930-961.

⁴ A "wicked problems" is a term used by Horst Rittel, a physicist, to describe problems in urban planning which were not tame (tame problems could be difficult but there were specific and consistent ways of solving them) and thus not easily solved. A wicked problem comes with built in complexities and as you solve one part of the problem another part is disturbed, changing the nature of the problem (Pacanowsky, 1995) but many authors discussing "wicked problems" see them as problems which can never be solved. See Section 4.2.2 for a full explanation of how this problem impacts feedback.

model where peoples' internal interactions trigger further interactions in a self-organising process.

Granovetter (1985) developed the concept of social embeddedness when examining economic life. His ideas can be extended further to include other forms of behaviour and actions, such that we can accept that people's actions are embedded within their social life. We are social actors and the actions we choose are context-defined. We act and react partly at least based on the behaviour of others and their reaction to us. But embedded within each of us is a unique past which influences our everyday experience of life and thus our reaction to others and to the world. Each one of us is attuned to some aspects of our surroundings but not to all aspects (Boud and Miller, 1996) and what we see and interpret to be around us may be very different to what the person sitting next to us sees. Learning is the process of making sense of ourselves, of others, and of our surroundings and then transforming it into our knowledge; into new possibilities for creating new experiences and new understandings (Boud and Miller, 1996).

Feedback is an interaction in time and space between the tutor, the student, the module, the institution, but most of all the student's identity, expectations, educational capital (economic, cultural & social) and their perceived satisficing needs. Feedback is a sociomaterial enacting and assembling of the minute assemblages, human and material, which together form the platform in which feedback occurs (Fenwick et al., 2011). Exploring the complexity of this interaction provides the basis for this research and the range of external and internal factors or phenomena which make up part of this interaction, provide the context for this research.

1.4 My Rationale.

I am deeply invested in this research. I left school early with no qualifications, I went to university only after I was married and had 2 young children. For me, higher education opened doors I never imagined going through. This brought home to me the levelling

influence of education as well as the sheer, enjoyment of knowing, recognising my own not knowing, and finding out.

Returning to teaching after a 10-year break from the lecture theatre/classroom, my teaching roots were disturbed. I had spent more time working in education management, outside the classroom than I had teaching, culminating in a year in Malaysia. Malaysia had just created its own *new* private universities, a model we now emulate. These institutions were run by private, profit motivated, organisations. I was employed to assist in the development of quality assurance procedures for one such new university and met for the first time in education, the conflict of profit versus quality.

I returned to the UK with renewed respect for our educational system. Once back in the UK I observed the extent to which feedback and assessment had become an issue for students. This provided the impetus to use my practice to identify possible effective approaches to my feedback to my students. I set about re-engineering my practice as I sought to understand and interpret what worked for students. Practice is invisible to some degree, while appearing very visible in the classroom (Whiteford et al., 2009).

The education environment had changed significantly since the inception of the new, post-92, universities and appeared to have a less caring, less personal, approach to the student. Management was now using top-down, managerial approach (Elton, 2006) and education had a much more regulated feel to it (Ball, 2003b). Changes in approaches to funding, increased student numbers and increased monitoring meant greater emphasis on the percentage of exit awards, failure rates, and drop-outs. Targets were set, performance was monitored, and high failure rates were unacceptable (National Audit Office, 2002). Widening participation had led to significant increases in student numbers during the 1990s and while this was often blamed for high failure rates, there is no evidence that this led to greater student wastage rates (Thomas, 2002).

What appears to have developed in higher education as a result of growing participation is a form of '*victim blaming*' (Tight, 1998: 483) where students are seen as unprepared for university. You can hear people say they fail because they are not ready, or not prepared, not bright enough, not interested, not engaged in the process, not motivated:

these types of comments are common across institutions although failure rates had not significantly increased (Thomas, 2002). What was becoming clear was that failure rates were now being monitored more closely as total cost grew: failure was considered a waste of investment and thus less acceptable.

Reflecting on student failure in accounting and finance, where fail rates were higher than average (appendix 3), led me to consider different approaches to my teaching, seeking ways to reduce that failure and in the process my research project was born. I began to elicit and then responded to student issues with feedback reported by them in a reflective assignment (appendix 4a & 4b). These assignments set the scene within which this research emerged.

For me good teaching can be improvisation without rehearsal, without script, a unique performance which is never repeated in the exact same way and thus very difficult to regulate and control. I rely on my disciplinary and pedagogic knowledge as well as years of experience using a form of reflective action research in the classroom. Nevertheless, as action my teaching has consequences, and while my practice was built on a solid foundation of knowledge, skill, and experience one is always learning and reacting to external stimuli. Being a good teacher is '*belief in action*' (Sergiovanni, 1985: 14) even when misguided and/or misplaced. My re-entry and re-casting of myself as a teacher for a second time occurred in the middle of the feedback problem. It became essential, for me, to understand what the feedback problem was:

'Feedback is information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way'
(Ramaprasad, 1983: 4).

I decided to use a module I was teaching as a means of identifying student issues. This was a new non-numeric module called Skills for Accountants. The module included regular, often non-assessed tasks on which feedback and sample grading was provided. Students were given more, smaller, assessed pieces of work which were quickly returned with feedback, enabling feedback to be used to enhance later assessed work. At the end

of the module the final assessed coursework was a reflective essay (appendix 4a & 4b), which required students to reflect on their first semester experience and to identify and evaluate their entry expectations. I had created data which enabled me to undertake my own interpretivist research. Students were asked to comment on their academic progress and specifically on the availability, usefulness and uses of feedback in a module in which feedback was provided regularly across the 12-week semester.

Teaching, like learning, assessment, and feedback, is a complex interplay between actors, often in a formal classroom setting, almost always with props, with cultural artefacts, within a formally organised space. In addition, teaching is always being shaped by individual and group forces, a sociomaterial (Fenwick et al., 2011) interplay. Teaching is a personal journey which, to be effective, requires that we bring ourselves to the venture. When examining this research, this journey, it is important to recognise that my voice is the loudest, even as I seek to listen to the voices of my students. I began with my own set of assumptions or patterns of expectations, which initially shaped my activities and my approach, and I had to learn how to select, shape and re-arrange my ideas, and the data I was collecting, so that it made sense to me (Midgley, 2014).

The research is a consequence of different events colliding in time. I returned to teaching after time in senior management and a year working in Malaysia. Technology began to play a much greater role in both learning and teaching. When I returned to teaching, I recognised the need to review and adjust my practice in response to what, to me, seemed excessive failure rates in accounting and finance, statistics for which are included as appendix 3.

In a previous professional/academic role, at the end of the 1990s, I was responsible for promoting effective teaching, learning and assessment in a Business School. I enjoyed an aerial view across many different departments, professions and disciplines and while there are many differences between disciplines and professions, there are also many similarities in the problems encountered. It was during this time that the more intimate personal relations that one can develop when numbers are small began to disappear. Higher staff: student ratios together with far more administrative paperwork, began to

erode teaching time and staff-student time. It was no longer possible to discuss problem areas and make appropriate changes; the curriculum was fixed, assessment was relatively fixed, and teaching and pedagogy became the problem; something needing fixing and monitoring. It is easier to suggest that it is the teacher in the classroom who is at fault, than to recognise that regulation and control limits manoeuvrability and thus limits the freedom of the teacher to take control and change in response to the specific needs of diverse students (Smith et al., 2010).

At the start of this journey the role and significance of feedback and assessment on students' perceptions of their university experience was just beginning to emerge. 10 years of students' views, collected through the NSS between 2006 and 2016, have begun to impact upon every aspect of internal university life and enable external rating agencies to generate metrics, or in the language of business Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which are then used together with other metrics such as the Key Information Set (KIS) and research ratings used to rank institutions. It was predicted that future students, when making choices about what institution to apply to, would make decisions based in part on these metrics. However, this relies on the assumption that they, or their families, understand their significance.

1.5 The Research Study

To achieve the aims of this research it is necessary to construct a narrative designed to bring together a series of complex themes which include: *learning, feedback, assessment, the student, emotion* and other concepts. This thesis was constructed using an array of different data collection methods designed to meet many different objectives (Major and Savin-Baden, 2011; Major and Savin-Baden, 2010). This makes a traditional linear literature review obsolete because to do so could lead to a focus on specific prior research which might limit the range of different problem areas and conceptual issues being included and which then limit what becomes part of this study. Here the literature is embedded across the work to demonstrate the complex nature of the problem(s) and

issues which circumscribe any question about the nature and role of feedback. Students' reactions to a given piece of feedback will often confuse the message that is being given, and thus fail to lead to future improved performance. It is only by linking the parts which make up a learning environment it is possible to listen to, and hear, the voices of the participants, or actors in a post-92 university and to recognise their reactions for what they represent, an emotional response. Emotion, for the purpose of this research, refers to basic human emotions which are more than biology and can be seen as *'a signal, a psychic (embodied) signal to the self-produced through sensations, feelings, affects and moods'* (Ellis and Tucker, 2015: 3). Emotions are *'patterns of relationships between self and others, and between self and world'* (Burkitt, 2014: 2) and learning and feedback are emotional.

1.6 The Value of this Research

The findings from this research are particularly relevant in post-92 institutions where student diversity is a common factor. The study explores students' reflections on their first semester at university, initially using four consecutive years of data in the form of a student reflective assignment submitted as part of their assessment (appendix 4a & 4b). After analysis, the findings are cross referenced with more recent (2016) student reflections to confirm the applicability of the findings. I chose to focus on the views of first semester students because at this point in their university experience they would not have received any formal, ratified, assessment results and all accounting students still face final semester exams; these students were in the throes of settling in. Data relating to assessment was collected using focus groups during students' 2nd semester, after exams and results had been received. Together this pre-assessment and post assessment data provide an overview of students' first year experiences.

In a modern new university, feedback to students is generally provided on work which is also the subject of their assessment and therefore clearly linked to the grade they receive. Assessment and grades are central to how students' experience their studies (Sebatane, 1998; Biggs, 1998) and often create some of the strongest emotional

memories of being a student (Young, 2000; Leach et al., 2001). Examining the impact of feedback on students' emotional state, their confidence, motivation and their identities will add to our understanding of the student experience. Memories of assessment are often memories of the grade received or the comments provided by way of feedback (Smith and Gorard, 2005) rather than the assessment task itself. To the student they can represent moments of panic, worry, fear, and even disorientation while lacking any real learning value (Taras, 2006). Assessment is essential to the accreditation of knowledge (Boud, 1995) which in turn is essential to any accounting student seeking exemption from future professional examinations. Assessment is both a disciplinary activity, i.e. it is used to make judgements about levels of achievement but also should be a pastoral activity whereby as tutors we give advice, support and encouragement to students on their work (Barrow, 2006).

We know that assessment often determines a student's approach to the curriculum and to learning (Ramsden, 1992; Biggs, 1999) and in effect frames their learning (Gibbs, 2006a). Also, we know that feedback is central to the possible impact and influence of assessment (Hounsell, 1987; Kluger and DeNisi, 1996). This research throughout will adopt a critical approach to many of the assumptions on which feedback practice is based with a view to exposing and questioning current political, social and ideological assumptions.

We are accountable to our students and currently, this is, in part being measured by the annual NSS and by collecting internal student feedback. Both appear to demonstrate our failure to understand students' assessment and feedback needs, but even as we collect or measure students' views, we have not stopped to consider whether we are asking the correct questions and more importantly whether we can rely on the conclusions which are generally drawn from the NSS results. The Office for National Statistics' recent review (June 2016) of the data sources used to calculate a range of metrics suggests that there is a degree of unreliability in the analysis of the data because of under representation of minority ethnic groups who appear to choose not to complete the NSS (Office of National Statistics, 2016).

Students deserve to have their voices and views recognised. We, the faculty and the institution believe we listen to our students, but our students appear not to share our view given their NSS responses (2006-2016). Perhaps we fail because we do not ask our students the right question and do not know what questions to ask, but more likely we fail to listen, and they fail to hear what we are trying to say (Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano, 2014). Students often do not understand our written communications about feedback because we deliver our feedback message in an unfamiliar language (Starling, 1987; Hanley, 2016). It is our responsibility, as academics, to give students the best possible chance to succeed with their studies and reduce failure rates by providing students with the '*feedback for learning*' (Jarvis, 2010) and '*assessment for learning*' (Black et al., 2007: 233) that they need and want.

Cumulative NSS results suggest we do not know or understand what students want while at the same time we also fail to explain or defend our actions in terms of establishing and explaining more clearly the purpose of feedback and explain our objectives in terms of giving students what they need through feedback, rather than necessarily what they might like or want. Additionally, there is evidence from the internal institutional analysis (Table 1.1 below) that not all students perform equally well, even when they begin studying with equal entry "A" level or BTEC qualifications. The table below provides an extract from this institution's Student Performance Monitoring Group Report 2016/17 showing trend analysis over 3 years for overall module failure rates (Level 4-7) by ethnicity where white students represent the benchmark group.

Business School	2013/14	2014/15	2015/17
Asian	10%	9%	10%
Black	16%	15%	16%
Chinese	10%	10%	8%
White	6%	6%	6%

Table 1.1: Ethnicity & Module Failure rates

The SAES (Neves et al., 2016: 10) points out that nationally '*UK students of Black, Asian, or Chinese ethnicity are much less likely than average to be very satisfied with their experience*' in higher education and this and other institution's failure statistics for these students may point to part of the reason why. Given that our accounting students are very diverse (appendix 1) we probably should acknowledge this in our overall institutional achievement in the NSS results, even as we do not accept that they measure what they claim to measure. It is also possible that students' feedback reflects general dissatisfaction about some other aspects of their experience and not necessarily feedback and assessment alone.

1.7 Research Aims and Objectives

Asking students what they want and expect from feedback and from their university experience has formed the basis of this research. My aim is to uncover and listen to the student voice by

- a) *identifying students' expectations from their feedback and their expectations of the university while examining how feedback, in the domain of accounting, impacts upon students' attitudes and behaviour in relation to their academic experience;*
- b) *Exploring the nature of accounting and finance students' identity and how this relates to their attitude to assessment and feedback;*
- c) *identifying and linking students' dissatisfaction with their feedback experiences, to a range of internal and external factors which might impact their behaviour;*
- d) *Examining the role of adolescent feelings and emotions, together with student stress and anxiety on their perspective on their university experience.*

To achieve these aims I must develop a clear understanding of the student's feelings about learning, assessment and feedback during their first semester at university and thus I will examine the following questions:

- 1. What impact do students' prior social, cultural and academic experiences, including those with assessment and feedback, have on their expectations while at university?*
- 2. How does the context in which feedback is provided in a post-92 university play a role in students' interaction with, and response to academic feedback?*
- 3. How do different phenomena, including emotion, academic identity, power relations, initial expectations and relationships with academics, impact upon students' interaction with feedback?*

The remainder of this research documents my journey towards achieving these aims and objectives.

1.8 Shaping of a Story

There are eight chapters in this thesis. This chapter has introduced the reader to my research, identifying its aims and objectives, and has outlined the context, both personal and institutional, within which the research is set. In shaping these contexts, it is important to appreciate the current state of higher education in England. The next chapter explores the historical and contemporary context of higher education in England, exploring events that have shaped the political, economic, ideological, and policy imperative influencing all aspects of education today. Specifically, I interrogate the link between education, economic status, disadvantage and class and how these impact upon university choice and career opportunity.

Chapter 3 examines the empirical context of the student using concepts from Bourdieu including habitus, social and cultural capitals and class. A critical analysis, of education, from a social justice perspective, explains how the dominant features of the current system fail to address issues of diversity and equality. While acknowledging the

achievement of students in gaining university places, their unpreparedness for learning in the current university setting and our failure to address this issue is highlighted.

Chapter 4 reviews the debate surrounding the role of feedback and examines how emotion impacts students' relationship with learning and feedback in the context of its environment. Emotion and its impact on the brain are used to examine why students can disengage while at university, in effect ignoring the opportunity that a degree can provide. This chapter also draws attention to the role of social theory in our understanding of higher education and learning in the 21st century. The aim here is to demonstrate the sheer complexity of trying to explain and understand why it is that students appear to be dissatisfied with their feedback and assessment.

In chapter 5, I discuss my methodology and identify the multiple research methods used to gather and generate my data. I explore my ontological perspective as well as my epistemological position. I explain and justify the use of an interpretivist qualitative methodology approach taken to investigate the phenomenon that is feedback and describe my approach to the analysis of the data used and identify the themes which inform the remainder of this research.

Chapter 6 brings the student voice into the discussion as 4 of the 5 key themes are directly articulated by using the students' own narratives, their words, to demonstrate their expectations from university, their inability to respond to our initial demand for students ready for independent learning, and their overall wellbeing in terms of stress and anxiety, including fear and loneliness. The student identity and their view of self in relation to their overall experience and performance are also examined.

Chapter 7 continues to use the student voice, this time in relation to feedback, the 5th theme identified. Here feedback is examined from the perspective of students, the institution and academics as feedback is examined from the wider context of assessment and learning. The emotional impact of feedback is examined together with considering what students learn from feedback and what they want or expect from feedback.

Chapter 8 brings this research to a conclusion by summarising the 5 themes which emerged from the student data and links these to the political, economic, ideological and theoretical framework which informed this thesis. Using the concept of a pyramid of prestige it is easy to demonstrate the link between privilege, class, schooling and university choice at the top end, with a similarly directed link at the bottom of the pyramid between class, school and university choice. However, for those at the bottom end of the pyramid, every future opportunity may be dictated by this initial positioning and therein lies the truth in Bourdieu's concept of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). A series of recommendations are made based around the 5 themes identified as key components of the students' experiences of feedback and being a student. This may offer a more holistic approach to student transition and first year experiences for future cohorts.

Chapter Two

Historical and Contemporary Context of Higher Education in the UK with specific focus on England.

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 explores historical events which have shaped the political, economic and ideological discourse and policy imperative currently driving higher education, often operating through the seemingly benign language of accountability (Churchman and King, 2009). I interrogate the link between schooling, family background, location and economic status on an individual's lifetime opportunities. I explore the historical link between the Accounting Profession, accounting education, class, students and staff as identities are formed and reformed.

2.2 Higher Education

History records not only changes in education and its institutions over time but also in social behaviour (Layder, 1993) and opinions. Higher education in the UK has undergone significant change during the past 25 - 30 years with English student numbers increasing annually to a current level of 40.5 percent (UCAS, 2014: 14) of eligible 18 & 19 olds. For the first few hundred years of their existence universities admitted only men from affluent families' around the country: the first females allowed to attend university graduated in 1869⁵ and for most of the 19th and 20th century attending university was a privilege reserved for a limited few (Palfreyman and Tapper, 2014). In the mid-1950s, 3.5 percent of young people were awarded undergraduate degrees, in 1970 it was 8.4 percent, by 1990 just over 19 percent (Bolton, November 2012: table 8), but by 2000,

⁵ The Edinburgh Seven were the first female undergraduates in the UK – but they were STILL prevented from becoming doctors.

33 percent of young people graduated from University and the numbers have continued to rise, most years since then. Higher education is an evolving and changing social phenomenon, a phenomenon which has been problematised in different ways over time. Glynos & Howarth (2007) identified:

- the need for academic institutions to serve the economy by providing graduates with appropriate skills to meet the needs of industry, while making the UK more competitive;
- recurring efficiency demands driving down the unit cost of providing said education;
- using student loans to place the cost of education directly on the shoulders of those who benefit from it, its graduates, and indirectly on taxpayers, a hidden loss;
- the need to demonstrate transparency and accountability through national audit and the use of metrics to describe *quality*.

Through problematising higher education, it has been possible to remove universities right to self-regulate, creating quasi-public organisations providing a consumer service in an accountable and competitive environment (Glynos and Howarth, 2007; Williams, 2012). We now work in a restrictive, regulated and controlled environment which continues to change at an unprecedented pace (Marginson, 2000; Palfreyman and Tapper, 2014). Higher education institutions have become '*providers*' (Palfreyman and Tapper, 2014:18) in a state-regulated market where academic freedom has been eroded, where teaching, assessment and feedback have been dictated by the '*bureaucratic meddling*' (Palfreyman and Tapper, 2014:230) of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and now also by the use of metrics in the form of the NSS.

The political and educational policy of widening participation and increasing opportunity has been achieved through the rhetoric of neoliberalism being applied to education and its institutions (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005; Ellis and France, 2012). The curriculum has become a way of helping the market economy to grow, expand, and develop; a political approach built on the belief that better education serves the *public interest* (Dupuis-

Déri, 2016) by producing skilled labour leading to productivity gains, more employment and reduced poverty and thus reducing some of the causes of class differences (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001). The evidence across the past 50 years, however, does not support the assertion that more education brings greater equality (Williams, 1961; Bourdieu, 1987; 1991 & 1999). The UK produces a far greater number of graduates than in the past (Bolton, 2012) but the class divide is still evident in politics, the law, the judiciary and across many of the professions (SuttonTrust, 2012) and there is ample evidence that disadvantage (SuttonTrust, 2009a) or privilege are bound up with the properties of the social space and one's position within that space (Bourdieu, 1985) where unconscious structures around the individual are powerful forces or codes of operation that create one's view of what is possible which in turn can determine future outcomes (Spiegel, 2005).

While the UK has several old well established elite universities, access to higher education was very limited until the expansion of the polytechnics in the 1960s. In turn, polytechnics were given university status in 1992 and are also referred to as New Universities. During the last thirty years, understanding of the role of the university has moved and shifted. The old elite, aristocratic (Smyth, 1995), individualistic and monastic Oxbridge educational model, envied as the ideal, could no longer be sustained across the sector. Growth and consolidation were the watchwords of the 1990s leading to massification and marketisation (Foskett, 2011; Barnett, 2011). This was closely followed by commodification (Lawrence and Sharma, 2002) and commercialisation as institutions were driven by a '*new economic motivation*' (Alexander, 2000: 411) built on economic orthodoxy emanating from contemporary political policy discussions (Rooney and Hearn, 2000), bringing with it the need to demonstrate accountability (Alexander, 2000; Craig and Amernic, 2002), increased production and new levels of efficiency (Alexander, 2000; Sinclair, 1995). A *human capital* approach is now seen as essential to the economy which is according to rhetoric, dependent on an educated and skilled workforce (Yorke, 2004). Education is subjected to regular new policy developments and major decisions are more centralised than ever before. Academics work in an environment which has multiple layers of management, based on a market culture (Bernstein, 2000). This management imposes

new policies and regulations resulting in constant changes while at the same time academic independence is being eroded and these have directly impacted on the students' educational experience. In addition, academics' professional identity as teachers and researchers are being manipulated (Naidoo, 2005) and fundamentally changed (Billot, 2010).

The first notable change across higher education was student number growth, initially with substantial investment to support expansion. Numbers increased from approximately 6 percent of 18-year-olds in 1960 (Foskett, 2011) attending university to over 42/43 percent in 2012/13 (Heywood, 2010) but from the mid-1990s staffing and resources were squeezed. At this point, continued increases in student numbers created a need for a new educational paradigm (Apple, 2004; Apple, 2004; Archer and Hutchings, 2000). Teachers faced new, unimagined, learning and teaching complexities creating problematic paradoxes leading to a period of experimentation as pedagogies had to learn to respond to a very different learning environment. Today academics deal not only with large classes but also with:

- A general reduction in funding per student of nearly 50 percent (Gibbs, 2006b) creating real tension between social justice and economic priorities(Lynch, 2009);
- Diversity in many different forms including inequality of opportunity (Boliver, 2011; Collins et al., 2015);
- Reduced staff-student contact time due to increased student numbers, reducing funding per student, but also increased administration and management (Ball, 2003) reducing further funding available to spend on each student;
- Students paying full-cost fees;
- Constant interference from the state (Ball, 1997) and from management;
- Marketisation and commodification of both the university, education and the student (Furedi, 2011);
- Instant and constant feedback via social media and new cultures entering the learning environment (Thomas and Brown, 2011);
- Explicit and quantifiable measurements (Broadfoot, 2000);

- The NSS;

Increasing the number of graduates was an economic imperative which had to be achieved while decreasing the unit cost of a degree (Willmott, 1995). The polytechnic sector had proved itself efficient and in their new guise as new universities were expected not only to remain efficient but to reduce unit cost further. This expansion was necessary and desirable to meet the growing labour market need for a more highly skilled work-force and this, in turn, meant that educational institutions needed to adapt and change (Broadfoot, 2000).

Demands placed on institutions and on academic staff have been growing and changing in line with changing objectives. Institutions and staff are often required to support centrally created policy incentives, sold through a narrative of serving the interest of greater social justice and society (Ellis & France 2012). The debate over the purpose of education is confused and confusing (Speight et al., 2013; Pring, 2000). Institutions and staff face demands for better retention (Yorke and Longden, 2007; Harrison, 2006); more engaged students (Yorke and Longden, 2007); students better prepared for employment (Speight et al., 2013); improved pass rates; increased recruitment of low socio-economic status students (Marr et al., 2013) while at the same time we are asked to ensure that students give us better NSS ratings. The pressure on the academic has never been greater.

Education has been recast as the saviour of our future while being '*colonised by economic policy imperatives*' (Cope and I'Anson, 2003, p220). A never-ending series of political, policy and management interventions together with new economic targets means the concept of education itself is often lost or confused within this new alternatives or different objectives. We are dealing with a new approach to education reform across the whole of the educational sector, a reform designed to realign public sector organisations and methods with those of the private sector (Ball, 2003b). It is impossible to ignore the social importance of higher education and its contribution to the quality of life of many of its graduates, to the economy and the country (Ruben, 2007). However, regulation, conformity and commodification wrapped in performativity, management

control, and audit, infantilises students and staff and changes the role of academics and the university while reducing the time available for building staff: student relationships which are so important in our educational system (Pritchard, 2006) driving a wedge between staff and the students they teach.

We see changes in what constitutes knowledge (Williams, 2016) and the role of the university in knowledge creation, as the effect of the internet unfolds (Thomas and Brown, 2014; Rohde, 2014). Our world today is made up of data which quantifies our lives and is the new currency. Data feeds the digital world, leading to a technological and psychological revolution that in turn is changing our sense of ourselves (Fry, 2016). Our students and future students are more and more *'citizens of the internet'* (Schostak, 2012: 420), a different and much bigger social space than was ever imagined, and many faculty have little knowledge or understanding of how social interaction and instant connection is affecting students' individual views of the world or their approaches to learning (Jackson, 2014). These students' understanding of the role of technology, the internet and social media, is very different to that of many, even most, academics. We are in the midst of a *'paradigm shift'* a crisis of knowledge, or at least what constitutes knowledge or what passes for knowledge (Barnett, 1997). According to Barnett (1997: 167), we live in an era in which our belief systems in relation to education and the university are being undermined and are riddled with disenchantment. Slowly academics are coming to recognise that:

'the lived conditions of practice in educational settings – the laws, policies, rules and procedures that govern educational institutions at all levels – have endangered the moral agency of educators to the point where the ability to be more than operatives in a system or institutions is being threatened' (Smith et al., 2010: 3).

In education, academics need to begin to challenge the current performative perspective being imposed to meet the neoliberal policy empiricism that demands measurement and metrics as evidence of quality and standards (Alderman, 2009; Ball, 1995). The modern managerial environment ignores the daily experiences of staff and students (Bansel et

al., 2008), slowly dehumanising learning and teaching and abandoning the pursuit of social justice (Beckmann and Cooper, 2005). Teaching is being pushed to become a technical craft with teachers as operatives (Smith et al., 2010) designed to deliver industry based objectives in support of a singular economic view of the world (Bottery, 2000).

2.3 The Cost(s) of Education

Education policy in England has been increasingly influenced by the dominant ideology of the market (McPhail et al., 2010; Williams, 2012; Craig and Amernic, 2002) under the rhetoric of increasing choice (Lynch and Moran, 2006). However since the decision to increase access and widen participation in the 1990s, reducing the overall cost of higher education became an essential driver (Carpentier, 2012; Harvey and Knight, 1996) with economic rationalism essential (Simon, 2013).

Education is now a commodity (Williams, 2012) to be bought and sold, adding additional financial pressure to the student experience as fees are borrowed. The cost to students of a university education in England has grown from zero in the 1980s, £1000 in 1998/99, £3000 in 2004/5 and now £7-9000 with the potential for regular increases in cost as the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) becomes fully operational. To fund education most students borrow, creating loans that will impact on their disposable income once they reach the earnings threshold at which repayment is required. Research indicates that students have acquired a consumerist view of education, seeking '*value for money*' (Kandiko, 2013: 22) while having no understanding of how their fees are used across the sector and more frustratingly a narrow perception of value linked to how well their programme met their expectations (Kandiko, 2013).

Student loans are managed by the Student Loan Company which is owned by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills. Student loans are therefore public money which in turn demands accountability, although some older loans (1990-1998) have been sold to the private sector (Weale, 6th February 2017). Society as stakeholders in education need to know that continued funding is worthwhile, producing a reasonable

return on this investment. An alternative view, of course, is that education has become training designed to fit, or mould, students to the labour market (Beckmann and Cooper, 2005) through a process of certification (Lawrence and Sharma, 2002). This can be understood as the capitalisation of education where universities train workers rather than teaching students (McLaren, 2015; Lawrence and Sharma, 2002). Education is now an investment in human capital immersed in an ideology of measurement and outcomes rather than that of learning (Bernstein, 2000). Students invest (input) money and universities produce an output in the form of results and certificates, the corporatisation of education and the university. Education is a rationed good (Hall, 2015), a scarce resource where only a limited number of individuals get the opportunity to obtain a degree. The median graduate salary in the bigger UK firms in 2015 reached a figure of £30,000 (High Flyers Research Limited, 2015) with graduates joining the bigger accountancy firms in receipt of a starting salary at this median figure although the range of salaries in accounting is quite wide £15,000-£42,500 (High Flyers Research Limited, 2015: 21 table 3.4). For students, the risk of failure is very high in terms of potential job satisfaction and accumulated salary loss over a lifetime.

The other side of examining the cost of education is to question the approach to some funding which has been used over the past 20 years particularly research funding. Given the emphasis placed on discipline-based research within the different research assessment reviews and the resulting distribution of research monies, government policy appears to be designed to ensure that the bulk of the research funding ends up in the hands of a small few (Palfreyman and Tapper, 2014). While Government has never openly acknowledged that post-92 institutions were to be wholly teaching institutions, changes in the policies on the distribution of research funding over the past 20 years appear to have been used to modify and massage the process towards funding the more elite universities (Palfreyman and Tapper, 2014). At the same time, the advice from the Department of Education and Skills (2003: S4.31) clearly articulated the view that good scholarship was what was necessary to be an excellent teacher while active involvement in research is not an essential skill for all teaching staff (Department of Education and Skills, 2003).

2.3.1 The Value of Education

Despite years of rhetoric about equal opportunities, the reality is very different, inequality remains in our society and has moved little in 50 years, perhaps even widening further the gap between the *haves* and *have nots* (The Equality Trust, 2017). Getting into a university is difficult and thus represents a major achievement for many of our students. We inhabit a world where there appears to be an '*uncritically accepted common sense*' that education is '*pivotal*' to our economic and social well-being (Avis, 2006, p341-342). There is ample evidence demonstrating that more education leads to higher earning power (Altbach et al., 2009; Galindo-Rueda et al., 2004), and higher income leads to greater happiness (Easterlin, 2001) for the individual. It is believed that a highly-educated workforce brings economic success to a country. This makes it imperative to understand the nature of the students in our care and any associated difficulties which may hinder their opportunity to succeed. To be successful, education needs to be a lifelong goal (Boud, 2000; Porter and McKibbin, 1988) carrying on after school and university and continuing into the work environment to facilitate the economic success of the individual and the organisation, leading to the success of the economy.

Employment levels in the UK are currently very high with an unemployment rate of just 4.5% (Office for National Statistics, 2017), but at the same time a relatively large proportion of the population live in relative poverty (Tinson et al., 2016; Giddens and Diamond, 2005). Current recognised poverty figures indicate that 13.5 million people live in poverty in the UK even though 55 percent of these live in a working family (Tinson et al., 2016: Table 1, p7). This means that in the UK employment is no protection from poverty in our modern society. The potential added-value from university success, versus the consequence of failure, provide a clear indication of the impact and importance of attending university. Success offers the potential of a good job, better pay and a profession (Brown, 2003) while failure may signal unemployment or underpaid employment with its associated poverty (Altbach et al., 2009; Brown, 2003; Tinson et al., 2016). A

report from the Institute of Fiscal Studies (Britton, 2015) indicates that there is a graduate premium in the UK, although it has proved difficult to calculate accurately. One report commissioned by the Government, as part of its Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, claimed that the average return on higher education was approximately 27 percent, while the Financial Times (2016) reported that graduate earnings by those in their late thirties were approximately 1.6 times higher than those of non graduates (Tetlow, 18/08/2016). These figures indicate that a university degree represents a sound investment decision but also demonstrates the potential pressure and emotional stress striving to achieve this may cause. However these figures, while up to date, are based on the earnings of individuals who did not have to make a major investment in their university education and as such may not be predictive for students making choices today.

2.4. Audit, Accountability and Work Environment

'Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts' —Albert Einstein, 1879-1955

Academics are subjected to pressure through the undermining of their professional and academic identity (Hall and Schulz, 2003) because of the new *managerialism* (Winter, 2009) which accompanies new forms of accountability (Alexander, 2000, Connell, 2013). Professional autonomy is being undermined and constrained by demands for accountability and the creation of a corporate/commercial form of organisation (Churchman and King, 2009). The *'benign language of accountability'* together with an array of new initiatives is creating an environment in which *'students, academics and institutions are distrusted, and in which diversity and difference are suspect'* (Danvers, 2003: 50). We face an onslaught of the *audit mentality* (Rhoades, 1998, Charlton, 1998, Power, 1996, Power, 2000) as we become *managed professionals* (Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013) or as accountants see the problem, we need to be input into a formal management control system producing outputs which can be verified, quality controlled and ranked. We are locked into performativity systems which require us to meet targets *'as a way of managing work*

processes' which creates '*a sense of security, of being in control, of being able to define directions'* (Schostak, 2012, p414).

This attempt at formal control of academic work undermines the very idea of pedagogy. Craig and Amernic (2002) see the effect of this attempt at control, producing a reaction, not unlike that of *teenage angst*. They explain the current environment as:

'Universities show the symptoms of conflicting values, ideologies, and demands, thereby creating a sort of professorial version of teenage angst, along with attendant trauma to body and soul' (Craig and Amernic, 2002 p122).

This new state of being in which we as teachers find ourselves, is supported and re-enforced by regulatory interference, reorganisation of funding, measurement and audit (Power, 2000; Elton, 2006) and new state ideologies (Barnett, 1997). These result in a general fall in our own confidence about what we are doing, what we know and how we practice, in effect a general undermining of our professionalism as teachers and as disciplinary specialists (Altbach et al., 2010) We now operate in an environment which believes that teachers are technicians delivering a curriculum emanating from government policy, strategy and ideologies, with little freedom to experiment (Giroux, 2010). Institutions have adopted the language of the market and the processes of the factory to create a competitive environment (Aronowitz, 2000). Policy changes are also changing our social identities (Bernstein, 2000; Altbach et al., 2010). We seem to have lost the ability to resist and Craig and Amernic (2002) drew attention:

'to the need for university teaching to offer 'resistance' to dominant ideologies of 'the market', through the embracing of methods of 'social critique' (p122).

It is possible to see universities general acceptance of the current forms of enforced accountability as a betrayal of the ideals of *the university* while trying to satisfy market-based policy and financially linked, yet ill-defined, objectives (Craig and Amernic, 2002; Barnett, 1990); creating a society which sees no problem in comparing the output of a

new university with that of world-class institutions, without regard to funding, selectivity, historical endowment or the overall cultural capital of many of the students who attend post-92 institution. This is unjust, as is any form of discrimination which is based on irrelevant criteria (Rawls, 2001). It can be difficult to find the relevance in many of the modern evaluative metrics being used and their use can lead to a form of *'purposive impression management'* (Aerts, 2005: 493) designed to create and sustain confidence (Ginzel et al., 1993).

At the same time, it is imperative that some form of accountability is evident, both as a public necessity and as evidence of the proper use of students' funds; funds some of which will come wholly from the public purse. Currently the purpose of the university is in part the promotion of *'life changing opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds at every university'* (Universities UK, 2017) and in part the development of the skills of the workforce to transform and drive our low-wage economy (Universities UK, 2017).

As academics we are aware of what is happening around us yet seem paralysed, unable to intervene, suffering *'a crisis of loss'* (Beck and Young, 2005: 184) whereby our traditional role as academic has been undermined and changed through the imposition of both an internal and external culture of conformity (Williams, 2016), monitoring and audit (Beck and Young, 2005; Smith, 2005). Disruption is no longer appreciated or supported, not even dialogical disruption (Glynos and Howarth, 2007). Some believe that we, the academics, are our own policing system (Williams, 2016), using *'coercive accountability'* (Brenneis et al., 2005: 8)

The 'hidden hand', the combined effect of funding and quality imperatives, has not only introduced a culture of performativity, which itself has a menacing psychological impact on those who are managed, or are ciphers for such judgements, but has also standardised an educational good, modifying a (learning) process into a recognisable, measurable and assessable product that can be exchanged in the global market (Howie, 2005: 2)

Over time '*governmentality*' or acceptance settles in as we fail to question the rules we follow (Foucault, 1994: xxiii) It is not just education or accounting which is subjected to audit, Charlton (1998: 249) described '*medicine as a microcosm of the audit society*' when he wrote:

'Medicine is progressively being engulfed by a rising tide of form-filling, monitoring, inspection and regulation. Managers are dominant, aggressive and well paid; while `doers' are increasingly defensive, demoralized and de-skilled'
(Charlton, 1998: 249)

And went on to say that the audit represents a '*seismic shift of effort and resources from production to regulation*'.

Educational institutions, willingly or not, appear to have bought into the '*corporate/state discourse*' (Dodds, 2002: 175) where universities, in return for their status and some degree of public funding, must demonstrate greater accountability within a more regulated environment. Increased external scrutiny or accountability has been creeping forward at unprecedented rates. Between 1993 and 2001 the QAA had responsibility for teaching quality across the UK higher education, an assurance system designed to oversee the quality of the processes being used within these institutions and designed to provide external reassurance rather than any real measure of standards (Alderman, 2009) assuming such a measure could be designed and/or agreed upon. It would seem that the use of a quality assurance system, of itself assures quality based on a Total Quality Management (TQM) inspired system (Hoecht, 2006). In 2001 the system was modified in response to complaints about the costs associated with a system which was all about process and managerial control and not about standards, or social institutional and peer control (Hoecht, 2004) but involved considerable expense with each QAA visit. We now use a form of '*policy empiricism that focuses on measures rather than meaning in its appraisal of educational activities*' (Smith et al., 2010: 3; Barrie et al., 2005) The current system involves regular Institutional Audits (IA) designed to assure the quality of standards in the UK higher education system. Quality is about process and not actual

content or activities in the classroom (Bird, 2001) where no quality evaluation is undertaken. Quality Assurance (QA) in education is comparable with business TQM systems which evaluate a product's ability to conform to some service norm. This type of QA assumes that quality has a specific meaning which is well understood and can be measured autonomously from its surrounding circumstances (Moss and Dahlberg, 2008). How does one apply these measures to the classroom or to the student experience? QA may, alternatively, represent a power struggle for control over *knowledge* and the regulation of knowledge. According to Salter and Tapper (2000):

'quality assurance combines technical, bureaucratic and value elements in ways which give power to some and remove it from others' (Salter and Tapper, 2000: 66)

In effect we talk about education now in the same way as we talk about a factory's industrial processes (Hood and Peters, 2004), using the language of neo-liberal free market ideology, (Mann, 2008; Sikka, 2010; Ball, 1997) a production line in need of control, or any aspect of business where quality assurance and a recurring systems approach to activities is used (in effect the methodology used to organise and run call centres). We use industrial metaphors and over time these will shift attitudes as we construe a new industrial meaning of education (Cope and I'Anson, 2003; Carr, 1989). We now use single figure benchmarks (Lingard, 2014) or metrics to monitor and control academic activities, a simplistic *black box* approach to the re-engineering of public sector management which hides many of the real issues. Metrics and numbers have the power to be used to support governance and government strategies (Lingard and Ozga, 2007) and lead to a type of *'legislative codification'* (Lingard and Ozga, 2007: 91). We appear to have abandoned a *'more fundamental debate about the goals of education'* (Broadfoot, 2000: 358).

In the vacuum left by our uncertainty over objectives, it seems that higher education has been hijacked by the state to become a tool for economic development and perhaps even; social engineering. Within our institutions now we are (un) managed often by

academics turned administrators, managers who over time lose their connection with, and understanding of teaching and students and become instead management, talking budgets, surpluses and failure rates, rather than justice, education, pedagogy, poverty, struggle and feelings. These managers are trained and professionalised; no longer elected by their peers. These new style managers are put in positions of divided loyalty, divided between their employers and their peers, the institution and the discipline. They become accountable rather than responsible. The economy seems to be driving education when government purports that education should be driving the economy Should we resist, or should we comply? Economic efficiency trumps social justice. The culture of the audit which has developed across the educational sector would appear to represent a methodology of control; an attempt to reduce and even limit academic freedom (CAUT, 2001).

Performativity defined by Ball (2003) as *'a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements'* where *'the mechanics of performativity'* (Ball, 2003b: 216), just as with the audit culture, requires the production of forms and ticks as general evidence of quality. However, no solid generally agreed form of evidence has been identified or theorised about. No clear understanding of the *quality* that is being measured is available except a general recognition that what is being measured is an institution's ability to do what it says and tick the relevant boxes as evidence of that compliance, hence the quotation from Einstein above. How do we know that the thing, the event that we are asked to count has any value? Just as the original QAA audits failed to differentiate between academic standards and their conception of quality, so too does the current QA regime. The value of the current QA regime might be seen as facilitating institutions' ability to manage these *tick box QA measures* in the interest of their public image and league-table metrics rather than in the interest of the student. Accountability is overriding pedagogy and adopting a *'method'* approach to teaching rather than a *'human science'* approach (Smith et al., 2010: 3). We appear to have abandoned a university system shaped in part by peer processes and academic freedom and replaced it with *'public sector managerialism'* (Hoecht, 2006: 542) and eventually perhaps even public opinion.

In the past institutions owned and regulated their own standards with the help of the external examining system introduced for just that purpose. The regulation, or monitoring of standards, occurred usually at a discipline level (Alderman, 2009) and in some respects nothing has really changed. There does not exist a definition of a standard and most of our ideas about standards were acquired through our own university education and transmitted by word of mouth and by example within institutions (Alderman, 2009). The consequence of this approach to standards is the potential inequality and mismatch between mainly middle-class academics who populate our universities and the diverse student body in many post-92 institutions. It can be difficult for an academic to bridge the gap between their social identity and that of their students. This is often a two-way problem; students may stigmatise (Crocker and Major, 2003) both the institution and its academics as elitist, as advantaged and under-representative while seeing themselves as different and thus undervalued or even devalued in this environment (Johnson et al., 2011). Students from disadvantaged backgrounds and ethnic minority groups often believe that they live within or with a stereotyped status which in turn impacts how they feel about university and its academics (Pinel et al., 2005) and Hanley (2016) provides her own detailed experience and refers to the divide as a *'wall in the head'* (Hanley, 2016: xii).

In a commodified, customer driven higher education system perhaps standards can change? Alderman (2009) suggests that during hearings of the Select Committee of 2008 evidence presented demonstrated:

'interference by administrators with the judgments of teachers; deliberate lowering of thresholds; external examiners being pressured into toning down critical comments; even evidence allegedly being withheld from a Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) inspection ("audit") team' (Alderman, 2009: 12)

This, demonstrates that different people can have different views on what constitutes quality or standards, and these have not been successfully identified. Quality in higher education represents a contested arena (Filippakou and Tapper, 2008) with institutions

responsible for their own standards and the QAA responsible for ensuring that they have the necessary systems in place to monitor these standards (Filippakou and Tapper, 2008). Over time emphasis has moved from *assurance* to *enhancement* but this also provided the foundation on which to create the NSS and to use metrics as tools of measurement.

In accounting, there is a saying: *what gets measured gets done* and the truth of this is found in the importance placed on the metrics used externally which can expose elements of what are seen as institutional failures such as the low NSS scores for assessment and feedback. If we then assume that these metrics actually provide valuable measures it would seem that many institutions have problems, however knowing that feedback or assessment is not all that students would like it to be, does not of itself tell us how to fix the problem (Biesta, 2009). What the annual measurement of satisfaction with assessment and feedback and the literature in these areas fail to acknowledge is that feedback is a social undertaking based on human relationships and not a technical performative process (Adcroft, 2011).

2.5 Disciplinary and Professional Influences

The average accounting academic, like all UK academics, is in her/his 50s (HESA, 2017) For accounting academics, however, this reflect the fact that many enter higher education after a successful career in professional accounting practice. The educational experience of these academics whether in a polytechnic or a university, was very different to that of our students today. Additionally, an accounting professional background with its formalised curriculum and training (icaew, 2017) used to develop accounting knowledge and skills necessary for practice provides one of the strongest influences and impacts on teaching (Anderson-Gough et al., 2002) and on students. For some academics, the objectivist approach to learning and teaching is the dominant *theory in use* (Argyris C., 1974) even today. Teaching becomes an organised, routinised activity, structured around the technical goals and the '*formal and informal norms*' (Anderson-Gough

et al., 2002: 41) of becoming and being an accountant. Teaching is being boxed into a technical role (Ball, 1995) disguised as pedagogy, controlled and often subjected to explicit regulatory mandates and rules, a type of '*factory model*' of education (Rogoff et al., 2003). This approach seeks to produce similar experiences and outcomes for each participant so that we get good NSS ratings. However, at a time when our understanding of how learning occurs is growing (Abeysekera, 2008; Siegel, 2012), we are being corralled into a learning and teaching model designed to deliver pre-determined goals and outcomes which limit individual opportunity to experiment (Atabaki et al., 2015), sinking creative expressions under a wave of regulations, forms, and a general desire for performativity. Performativity is shutting down individuality (Ball, 1996), eliminating colour in the classroom and exchanging it for a monochromatic approach to teaching, exacerbating the gap between what students expect and what we can provide. Ball (1996: 191) claims '*the humanistic commitments of the substantive professional are replaced by the teleological promiscuity of the technical professional*'

Academic accountants belong to a discipline which was created on the back of professional training (Covaleski et al., 1998). The profession was successfully organised using repetitive systems, structures and processes which, together with exams, imbued reliability which in time become a form of trust. Accountants established their own *rules of the game* by creating occupational autonomy, self-regulation, codes of practice and a dress code like that used by other prestigious professions (Covaleski et al., 1998). Regulative structures then helped to sustain and build the myth that is accounting today, where myths become statements of fact and not an explanation. The effect is a fairly uniform approach to being a professional accountant (Chua and Poullaos, 2002). Accountants construct their own subject matter, knowledge, social practices (Fairclough, 1992) and social identity (Popper, 1975). They have created a distinctive culture within which they operate and work within, they are both its authors and its outcomes. Accounting is a function of the social, cultural, economic and historical factors which have shaped it, a cultural prisoner of its own success, a monopoly created by the state through its licencing of the Audit Profession giving this profession a monopoly over

specific fields of practice in accounting (Willmott, 1986) leading to a profession working with:

'taken for granted values, attitudes and ways of behaving which are articulated through and reinforced by recurrent practices among a group of people in a given context' (Becher and Trowler, 2001: 23)

Over time it has created a '*legitimate language*' (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991: vii) an occupational identity, and a collective belief in the uniqueness of its practices, techniques, knowledge base and the services it provides. Accounting is an enclosed world, a world constructed and given meaning '*through the rites and rituals of the profession*' (Hamilton and Ó hÓgartaigh, 2009: 911) and its practices operating under the guise of its own collective and controlling belief system (Scott, 1990). A process of indoctrination which begins in university and continues during professional training is very important (Smeby, 2007). The process of learning a collection of mundane processes becomes part of who we are as accountants such that we forget or ignore that these practices and rituals are learned within a given social and political context which in our society is capitalism (Hamilton and Ó hÓgartaigh, 2009). The problem then faced when we become teachers is the difficulty, if not impossibility, of unlearning since these acquired dispositions are now who we are, they are our daily deliberate processes (Smeby, 2007). To change or unlearn requires significant challenges to our belief system, the creation of dissonance (Stewart et al., 2016) which often involves upheaval and a re-writing of the past. The close relationship with, and reliance on, professional knowledge and practice can make it difficult for the academic accountant to respond to the needs of a diverse body of students thereby adding to students' feelings of *other*, feelings of stigmatisation (Major and O'Brien, 2005).

Accounting is a complex, practice-based profession, an applied subject and an academic discipline. It provides a good example of the two distinct meanings that the word discipline can hold, being a member of a disciplined profession following given rules and regulations to deliver a service or business function and the concept of an academic

discipline. Accountants also rely, to some degree, on the development of their profession through the use of academic disciplinary knowledge (Hoskin, 1993b). Accounting is stereotyped as difficult, prestigious, professional and exclusive; its social location clearly identified. Accounting's quest to maintain its social and prestigious image is never forgotten and while it is now recognised as a social practice and not simply a technical practice it still has to compete with all the other prestigious professions for talent (Carnegie and Napier, 2006).

Accounting training and education is designed to standardise a way of thinking and seeing, a *singular* with a discourse all about itself (Bernstein, 2000). Accounting is an economic activity that involves us in learning an instrumental skill rather than providing a traditional transformative education in the classic sense (Barnett, 1990). There is a strong sense of skills development as the technical manoeuvring of numbers is learned. It is a *calculative discipline* (Vollmer, 2003) which has a very specific disciplinary context which is meaningless to anyone not having the same training (Burns and Scapens, 2000) and thus the foundation of the *power* that accountants enjoy in society today (Kholeif et al., 2007). Schon (1987: 7) used an observation from the work of Everett Hughes (1959) that is appropriate here:

'the professions have struck a bargain with society. In return for access to their extraordinary knowledge in matters of great human importance, society has granted them a mandate for social control in their field of specialization, a high degree of autonomy in their practice, and a license to determine who shall assume the mantle of professional authority (Hughes, 1959 - quoted in Schon 1987 (p7)).

To maintain its monopolistic position and its status the profession can control or limit entry through stringent educational entry requirements and difficult examinations, often with low pass rates. In a university setting accounting academics who are usually professionally qualified, can accept student failure because of the traditions and norms entrenched in professional accounting education (Dale, 2000; Hoskin, 1994; Hoskin and

Macve, 1986). Barnett (1994: 123) saw disciplines being able to '*exert a life-long claim on individuals' attention*' through the maintenance of their own standards which demand allegiance.

Demands on accountants, by their first career choice of professional practice and training, impacts and infuses the needs of their second career, teaching practice and pedagogy. This is clearly evidenced by the fact that a large part of the university accounting curriculum is closely aligned to that of a professional body and usually offers exemption from some elements of professional exams after graduation. The curriculum is in part a mirror of professional requirements to enable students to obtain future exam exemptions and this limits the freedom of academics to develop the curriculum because exemptions attract students in this commodified marketplace. The curriculum is then *topped up* or *filled out* with specific university requirements. The professional bodies, without any direct interference in setting the university accounting curriculum, nevertheless exercise a degree of power and control over what is taught in most new universities by reference to what needs to be known to enter practice and gain early exemptions.

In the early years of a degree programme, higher failure rates are generally accepted within the domain of accounting because we are, or see ourselves as, gatekeepers of our profession. Scott (2008) describe professions as '*institutional agents*' (Scott, 2008: 219) who control belief systems and define a reality and in this instance as accounting tutors we often see ourselves as keeping out the unworthy (Hamilton and Ó hÓgartaigh, 2009) and thus maintaining *standards* while unknowingly operating as a class reproduction system (McPhail et al., 2010). Examinations and grading are the corner-stone of the professions and provide a means of credentialing society (Hoskin, 1993a) while also providing disciplinary control, allowing one to select who belongs and who does not. High failure rates or low pass rates ensure the profession retains its high standing, thus within a university high failure rates may be acceptable to accounting academic staff. But academic staff are not or should not be professional gatekeepers. It is essential that the methods and standards used to set and mark assessment and give student feedback

are fit for purpose in the 21st century and this applies to many other professional areas of education which operate within a Business School context. Today in an economically competitive university environment, our jobs depend on our ability to attract and retain students and the pendulum is swinging away from our expectations and moving towards some measure of student satisfaction. Students as consumers in an expensive educational setting make their feelings and opinions known through a range of feedback mechanisms including the NSS even if in doing so we allow student opinion to interfere with the curriculum.

It is important to identify and build a bridge between the expectations gap of students and staff. Feedback should be a social process and be visible in the interaction between staff and students but currently both staff and students' operate with their own individual mythologies, mythologies which provide the framework within which we behave and thus operate as academic or as student (Stewart et al., 2016) and these form the basis of our cultural behaviour as student or teacher but also mythologies exist across our institutions and again influence behaviour.

Accounting is classified as a '*soft applied*' discipline, where students learn technical skills and knowledge which are considered particularly relevant to their discipline (Neumann and Becher, 2002: 405) and which are then tested formally assessed. It becomes difficult to escape a professional identity especially when a large proportion of students wish to become professionals themselves. In many respects, most of their teachers are what they want to become, and they are very happy with this aspect of their curriculum. There is a rational order to much of what is taught in accounting and students like the reliability of this, often rejecting modules designed to offer a broader perspective on knowledge and knowing. Modules designed to enhance critical thinking, creativity, or communication skills are unwelcome and can be rejected by students as evidenced in Module Feedback Questionnaire (MFQ) comments. Since the inception of the NSS, students' concerns, sometimes irrational, become management's guiding hand in the development of courses and modules; the ideology of the market wins out over the long-term value of a good education.

2.5.1 Identity and Accounting

Identity is a dynamic construct which is shaped by personal, ethnic, and family contexts (Billot, 2010). Billot also pointed out that our individual identity is our sense of self and this changes over time and as we experience new events and thus we constantly need to try to make sense of who we are. Once at university, the student joins a new *social society*, a symbolic and ideological bounded new identity (Brown and Phua, 2011) as *university student* being educated. During the three or four years at university, this has specific and perhaps symbolic meaning in the lives of each student. Graduating with a degree creates another symbolic and shared identity (Kraus and Kivisto, 2015) and each identity while constructed by the person is also socially constructed (Billot, 2010). In university and later in the workplace each student will belong to a range of social groups or societies, if we take the Godelier (2009) concept of society and look for the connections between groups of people as social connections creating a shared identity, we might look at the:

'political, religious, economic, kinship, or other – that have the capacity to bring together groups and individuals who thereby form a 'society' (with borders that are known if not recognized by the neighbouring societies)' (Godelier and Scott, 2009: 142).

Once at university, students' new daily activities and routines begin to emerge in and through lectures and tutorials and other required activities. This helps create new routines for students, routines which will develop and slowly reinforce a professional approach to work and this, in turn, forms students' understanding of higher education, but this is being built on top of their understanding of assessment and feedback learned through school. Accountants, as teachers, can lapse into old routines and habits learned and acquired during training which can narrow their view of their subject and their role (Ball, 2006). Their *'theory in use'* becomes their own *'self-fulfilling prophecy'* confirming what they believe (Ball, 2006: 198), while often corresponding to what students expect when studying accounting at university. Academic accountants aim is to develop and enhance

professional practice skills through learning about protocols, procedures, rules and regulations. There is a shared objective: get students ready for employment in an area with very specific demands in terms of skills and knowledge.

Accounting academics have power in an academic setting (Hoskin and Macve, 1986), because of the *power relations* that exist between the profession, institutions and professionals employed by institutions, each, in turn, can play a role in deciding who is *worthy* of becoming an accounting graduate or becoming an accountant (Hughes, 1959; Rosenberg, 1979)). University accounting departments introduce students to the profession they are planning to join, they begin to give them a professional identity through rules on how to behave, act, and on occasions dress (Stibbe, 2011). Students are expected to *slip on* or *step into* the character and identify, of the accountant at different times during their studies. Students are acquiring a new identity, a linguistic and professional habitus (Bourdieu, 1977b) formed through a type of inculcation over a 3-year period, one which will sit beside their other identities. In the end the ability to create a *professional* image impacts upon students' career prospects (Covaleski et al., 1998; Alvesson, 2001) so they must conform.

University is a new place, a new concept to form, and successful students learn to work with and respond to, this environment and this dictates the nature of the student/lecturer interaction. However, students arrive at university with preconceived meanings of a range of common terms used both in school and university such as assessment and feedback. Students can retain throughout university life traces in their minds of their school understanding of these terms unless we are able to disturb their certainty by creating dissonance and challenging their world view (Stewart et al., 2016). Doing things differently can disturb students' beliefs and expectations, leading to cognitive conflict (Lee and Byun, 2012) where expectation is based on some initial standard against which one makes a comparative judgement (Oliver, 1980). While cognitive conflict can aid learning and is often used as a means of achieving conceptual change (Niaz, 2001), it may also explain why it is so difficult to meet some students' expectations with respect to feedback. It can be difficult to change students'

expectations since doing so would involve a conceptual change and require internal conflict resolution to disturb their *hard-core* belief system (Niaz, 2001; Limón, 2001). It has been argued that even when students are faced with contradictory evidence they may not change their views in the longer run (Dreyfus, 1990; Hewson, 1989) and thus the need to introduce change must begin the day they arrive on campus. To do this we begin by identifying their existing thinking and behaviour and explaining why and how it must change and the importance of those changes for their long-term wellbeing. We create new mythologies but recognise that the old ones lie there beneath the surface (Stewart et al., 2016) so we need to constantly reinforce the value and importance of our mythologies, our cultural habits and requirements while not appearing to simply demand change which would represent an exercise in power.

Accountants, like any professionally qualified individuals, can have dual identities, at the level of the personal and the discipline, and these in part shape the third identity as teachers:

'Disciplines are the institutional mechanisms for regulating the market relations between consumers and producers of knowledge. They are also instruments for distributing status; by grounding expertise and skill, discipline sets boundaries'
(Rosenberg, 1979)

Entry to the profession is highly competitive since the rewards of professional membership are high. Higher education gives choice and freedom to successful students and for some first-generation university students, academic study offers the opportunity to move up the social and economic ladder even while the current academic structure and regime can work against them⁶. These are individuals who refuse to accept the egalitarian principles which are all around them and instead seek some element of advantages by attempting to overcome exclusionary practices. A university degree linked

⁶ There are over 100 universities in the UK and approximately 40% of 18-year olds attend university. Not all universities are equal or even nearly equal with more prestigious and professional jobs often going to those from the old Universities. But within this figure a more revealing socio-economic map emerges: while only 6% of pupils in the UK (mainly in England) attend private schools they make up nearly 40% of those attending the top 10 Universities in the UK PATON, G. 2009. Private school pupils dominate universities. *The Telegraph*, 16/10/2009.

to a profession like Law or Accounting usually offers advanced standing into some parts of the profession.

The fate of the failed students can be very different to that of a successful student. Failure can be a form of *performativity* in its own way. Failure, borrowing from Butler's theory of performativity (Butler, 1990), can be a life-sentence in that a student's identity linked to failure can then repeat itself over and over again in our dominant discourse. We make assumptions about such students and now, because of the cost of higher education, there is no room for alternative study strategies to escape that sentence. We do not easily recover our equilibrium when we fail at something that is important to us. This might be hypocritical given the history of the profession and its approach to examinations, however, exam failure can be accepted and seen as an acceptable selection approach. Anecdotally colleagues have been heard saying that "*we do them a service by failing them at this early stage as they are clearly not cut out to be accountants*". The usual jokes are made "*would you want a failed accounting student negotiating your tax return*" and so on. For many of us, it is very difficult to shake off our accounting habitus which was acquired through '*a myriad of mundane processes of training and learning*' (Hamilton and Ó hÓgartaigh, 2009: 914). Our students find themselves learning within the traditions of accounting now set in an educational institution with its own structures, rules and regulations but also its assumptions about the world and about the profession. The student's educational experience is constrained by the traditions in which it is provided. We forget that a degree opens many doors not just a door to accounting, and given that the brain does not fully mature until after the age of 25 (Barlow, 2014) there is lots of room for improvement still available at graduation. Many students across disciplines use further study and training to enhance their undergraduate CV. The existing student loan system, however, does limit second chances.

2.6 Education, Economics and Class

Most UK universities offer business degrees that include accounting, but elite institutions generally have more demanding entry criteria. Some students will not meet these requirements, often acquired in private, grammar, or other selective schools. These schools' pupils generally originate from specific socio-economic positions in society (SuttonTrust, 2009c) and thus the *enclosed* nature of society which is replicated and supported through the professions come full circle. In effect, the elite universities use the same limiting entry criteria as do many professional firms. The Big 4 Accounting firms⁷ sustain the system by employing most of their trainees from elite universities, maintaining and continuing the link between individual and professional habitus, whereby access to the premier, privileged, socially elite professions such as accounting is limited and controlled. Elite universities continue to foster and support a form of social exclusion or social exclusivity: a class conspiracy with the major professions. It is impossible to obtain any form of social justice while our structures facilitate the maintenance of advantage (Furlong and Cartmel, 2009).

At no point does education easily facilitate social justice. Going to university for many involves stepping into another *class*, crossing borders between working class and middle class. Getting to university for these students is an uphill struggle and when they get to university they can be full of self-doubt and feelings of unworthiness, and we fail to acknowledge and understand their struggle and their feelings. Disadvantaged students are 2.4 times less likely to attend university than those that are advantaged (Higher Education Reform Directorate, 2016). Each one that succeeds in getting here is a success. Lynsey Hanley (journalist) had this to say about her first year at university:

⁷ The top international accounting firms who dominate the industry

'the wall in my head manifested itself in a desperate sense that I had to change my destiny at the same time as believing I had no right to do so. Any elements of struggle in the journey from one class to another felt as though they came from forces present inside me, rather than forces from outside. Social factors affecting my experience of life – the area I lived in, the schools I went to, my family's income and status – filtered inwards and expressed themselves psychologically'
(Hanley, 2016: x)

In the UK, education has always been functionary serving someone's objectives, whether it was the church, the upper class, the middle class or in more recent times government policy and the economy. Higher education is a limited *resource* and for most of its history only available to those who could afford to pay, thus reserved for the upper classes, with similar systems operating in Europe and the US. Students' learning and feedback requirements are in part a function of who they are, their prior education and their current educational expectations, their social and cultural backgrounds, their financial situation; in effect their identity and their cultural resources (S.3.2).

Education has been and still is, a class stepping stone. In the past, economic conditions and the class system excluded most people from a basic school education. The public-school system existed for those that could afford to educate their sons. The idea of mass education was widely feared because many believed that *ignorance* preserved the status quo. Over time different interest groups accessed education creating their own school systems: in the UK, we had '*Anglican schools dominated by the gentry*' (Green, 2013: 76), middle-class schools for the children of the industrial (middle) class and independent working-class schools, funded by charity (voluntary schools).

The development of a public educational system occurred in many European countries and in the US by the 1830s (Green, 2013) but not for another 70+ years in the UK. In the UK, education was '*characterized by a singular diversity of institution and a chronic lack of integration between the various parts*' (Green, 2013: 204) and because of this, our educational system lagged behind developments in Europe and the US. Class relations in the 19th century have often been blamed for the lack of development of education in the

UK. Adam Smith in '*The Wealth of Nations*', first published in 1776, describes the education of the working class as inferior to that of the middle classes; an education designed to '*contain and pacify rather than to educate and liberate*' (Reay, 2001: 334) but in the 21st century there are many who question if anything has changed! There is still clear evidence of a lack of social mobility (SuttonTrust, 2012; Ball, 2003; Apple, 2013) lower than in any other developed country except the US. Our schools reflect the remnants of a partisan system, where elitism class and money give one an easy pass to the future through access to elitist higher education institutions from which the premier professions choose their future employees, in their image creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of success (SuttonTrust, 2009c). Today approximately 7 percent of young people attend private schools, with a further 4 percent attending the remaining grammar schools; these are the chosen ones, the elite selected either based on family money or exam success. By way of example, 17,000 students applied to Oxford in 2010 for 3200 places. The final allocation of places was as follows; 27 percent to comprehensive applicants, 16 percent to grammar school applicants and 45 percent to private school applicants (Coughlan, 2011). An elite group of secondary school pupils who make up 11 percent of total secondary school young people, take 61 percent of Oxford places (Coughlan, 2011) with these percentages replicated in other similar institutions.

'In every single sphere of British influence, the upper echelons of power in 2013 are held overwhelmingly by the privately educated or the affluent middle class'

Sir John Major former UK Prime Minister (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014).

For those attending ordinary neighbourhood schools, be they comprehensive, faith schools or academies, those rated *better* attract students from the more affluent, well-educated middle classes⁸. Those young people, not from a privileged background, who gain university places are special; they are survivors and in their way elite, just different to many of us working in higher education. But for these less privileged students university

⁸ The use of geographic selection processes means many parents choose to live within the catchment areas of better schools increasing house prices

can be blighted by the *silent symbols* (Hanley, 2016: xii) of culture, class and power (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991) that they meet within the university. It seems that for most children opportunity is decided at birth and not by ability (Reay, 2006; Reay, 2004) rather because of social positioning (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). In 1993, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) examining *Access and Achievement in Urban Education* found that those living in disadvantaged urban areas were underachieving at a very early stage in their primary education. Only 6 percent of the adult population in those areas being examined had post "A" level qualifications while the national average was 13 percent. Even worse was the possibility, at that time, that only 32 percent of school children were likely to leave school with the equivalent of 5 GCSEs where the national average was 81 percent.

10 years later OFSTED revisited the same or similar schools to examine what had changed. The sad fact was that half of the primary schools reviewed were rated in the bottom 25 percent at Key Stage 1 & 2, with only 2/27 schools in the top 25 percent. Of the 7 secondary schools in the sample; 5 of these were in the bottom 25 percent and just one in the top 25 percent nationwide based on GCSE results. What hope is there for most of these children? They appear doomed to reproduce repeatedly their parents' social circumstances and continue to live under conditions of urban disadvantage. It seems that schools and their pupils in deprived urban areas are at a disadvantage partly because of a lack of targeted funding designed to provide them with the education they deserve, but also because, when choosing universities, they are directed to those in the bottom section of the Pyramid of Prestige. These students then find it hard to move up from the bottom of the pile, irrespective of the efforts of parents to improve their children's future.

10 years later again, in June 2013, an OFSTED press release had the title '*too many of England's poorest children continue to be let down by the education system*'. This report also noted how unfair the UK education system appeared to be with those from the highest social class being three times more likely to get to university than their poorer peers.

Only 20 percent of students in our leading universities come from poorer, disadvantaged or lower social class areas such that the remaining 80 percent are from more affluent backgrounds. Many disadvantaged students attend post-92 institutions (Johnson et al., 2011), often through their own choice, choosing to study in institutions where they can feel less exposed or stigmatised (Pinel et al., 2005). We must learn to value those young people that make it through what is apparently an impossible task; leaving school with adequate grades for university entry.

A few statistics bring home the message:

- Able students in deprived schools are 10 times more likely to take GNVQs than GCSEs and achieve lower grades, thus making university entry much more difficult.
- Approximately 20 percent of students in secondary schools in the UK have or are eligible for free school meals (FSM), an indication of their level of poverty and these students, on average, attain 28 percent less than a student not on FSMs (Sutton Trust, 2009b).
- Young people from the richest fifth of families are nearly three times more likely to go to university than the poorest fifth (Anders, 2012: taken from Francis (2013: 8)).
- *'Only 7 % of children attend private schools, but 17% of Russell group university entrants and over 40% of Oxbridge entrants have been privately educated'* (Francis 2013: 8). Access to one of the elite institutions is also directly linked to access to the top professions (Sutton Trust & Carnegie Corporation, 2012).
- Attending a high-status university brings additional rewards in terms of up to 6 percent higher income (Jerrim, 2012) which in turn adds to the overall material value of an already advantaged group.

- *'The highest-performing 15 year olds from poor backgrounds are, on average, two years behind the highest-performing pupils from privileged backgrounds for reading ability'* (Jerrim, 2012: taken from Francis (2013: 8)).
- 3.9 million (29 percent) of children are brought up in poverty in the UK and are thus more likely to be materially deprived compared to others of the same age group (Tinson et al., 2016).

The result of the clear partitioning of our educational system leads to cultural reproduction as top jobs go to those who attend elite private and grammar schools followed by attendance at Oxbridge and/or Russell Group universities. A quotation from *Elitist Britain* (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014: 10) puts a rather unusual context on the dominance of a specific class in the UK *'Our examination of who gets the top jobs in Britain today found elitism so stark that it could be called 'Social Engineering''*. It seems you need advantage to gain an advantage.

The UNESCO 2009 report (Altbach et al., 2009) indicates very clearly that where a child is born, where they live and the economic status of their parents, together with their overall family background impact on their chances very early in life, in most countries around the world. In the UK the achievement gap continues to grow and gets wider for children from deprived backgrounds between the ages of 11 and 16 (Francis, 2013) because educated parents are better able to negotiate their children's future secondary school, even down to moving house to be in a better catchment school' area. In many instances, parents can afford to purchase an independent education which brings disproportionate advantage. To return to an old, but very relevant classification, social class and income are the strongest predictors of both educational achievement and future success (Francis, 2013). Here in the UK we now have a situation where according to a 2005 report by the Centre for Economic Performance (supported by the Sutton Trust) the *'intergenerational mobility fell markedly over time in Britain, with there being less mobility for a cohort of people born in 1970 compared to a cohort born in 1958'* (Blanden et al., 2005: 2) mainly because those from better off families could afford to remain in

education post 16 and even post 18, bringing greater long-term rewards to them and then their families (Altbach et al., 2009).

Our educational system from age 4 onwards appears to be part of a system which is facilitating a system of cultural reproduction such that disadvantage can be inherited and passed on (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Statistics from a report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2010) suggests that during each year of schooling disadvantaged children's attainments gap grows rapidly in comparison to those children enjoying a more advantaged upbringing (Gregg, 2010).

By the time a young person gets to university their class is an easily identifiable insignia worn externally for all to see, but more importantly for a young working-class individual, it represents a '*wall in the head*' (Hanley, 2016: xii) limiting progress and undermining self-belief and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982). Hanley (2016) writing from first-hand experience of moving from a working-class background and associated schooling to 6th form and then university where she achieved the minimum required to graduate, both because she was '*ill-primed for post-compulsory learning*' (Hanley, 2016: xi) and believed that she was a fraud in these educational settings. The theory of intersectionality, which is used in feminist and race research provides another means of interpreting, understanding and explaining the complexity of our interactions with each other, with our histories and with the world but specifically fits with concepts of ethnicity, race, gender and difference while providing a tool for understanding Layder's (1994: 2) macro-micro '*sociological dualism*' proposal that society and the individual are '*intertwined and inextricably fused*' (p207).

2.7 Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated the failings of the school system for many young people in England, these failings rob them of opportunities one might expect in an egalitarian society. Instead, our system is divided based on class and wealth, and this transfers to

our university system and influences students' abilities to make the transition. Working class students face a double transition; they must transition into university, itself a difficult period in the life of an adolescent, but in addition, these students must transition into a middle-class institution, crossing into a foreign and unknown territory. The role and impact of our stratified educational social system on students is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

The Empirical Context of the Student

3.1 Introducing the Student

'Who or what is this "person" whom we profess to be educating?' (Marshall, 2006: 177).

The previous chapter provided a brief synopsis of UK education in the context of current policy, ideology, funding and cost, and the influence of the accounting profession on academics as teachers, and on the university curriculum. In this chapter, a broad student identity is sketched out in the context of a student's possible social world while recognising and accepting the multiplicity of meanings that exist within any given context (Youdell, 2006b). These social contexts are explained in terms of history, diversity, expectations, friends, family, and institution. Youdell's quotation below makes his view clear and captures the essence of what I am examining here:

'that "who" students are biographically and as learners should not be taken for granted ("that's who the student is"), or taken as either discreet ("learning has nothing to do with background") or inevitably linked ("of course students from professional, middle-class background get the best results")' (Youdell, 2006a: 33)

Asking who is this person is, this *'paradox and multiplicity'* (Rochat, 2009: 195) that is the complex person in front of us, is essential to understanding our role in higher education in a post-92 institution.

Many new students struggle during their first weeks in university as transition can be difficult (Bernardi, 2012; Pascarella et al., 2004). But, when one also considers the impact

of class difference, inequality, new power relations and possible emotional and social discomforts, one can appreciate that the first few months can be difficult. Students can arrive with naive expectations and different mental models of the university, based on prior experiences (Feinstein et al., 2008). This makes it easy to sympathise with their situation and see how their level of preparedness, or unpreparedness, can be disruptive, stressful and lead to thoughts of an early exit. Students' mental models, while accurate in relation to past experiences, will rarely represent what will happen at university. Students' preconceptions, their past mythologies, form the starting point for their understanding (Adcroft, 2011). Recognising that students hold a set of *'underlying assumptions and beliefs that determine interpretations and behaviour'* (Adcroft, 2011: 406) can help us to appreciate the gap in expectations (Leese, 2010) that exist between staff and students, a gap that undermines many of our efforts to be helpful and supportive. Understanding the context of students' possible prior experiences can inform and perhaps enhance academics' understanding of their relationships with students when they arrive here at university.

The impact of social origin (parents, education, jobs, and location) has been well studied in the literature but we do not appear able to overcome the relationship between where we are born and how we progress (Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Sutton Trust, 2009a; Sutton Trust, 2011). First generation students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds arriving at a middle-class institution must adapt and learn how to interact with its occupants, both staff and students. This can be a daunting experience which will destabilise some students as they are made to feel like *'outcasts on the inside'* (Bourdieu and Champagne, 1999: 421). This type of experience can cause a form of destabilisation (Hanley, 2016; Reay et al., 2010) which makes transition to higher education extremely difficult, even impossible. To quote Reay (2006: 294) *'the collective patterns of working-class trajectories remain sharply different from those of the middle classes'*. Those that make it further up through the educational system are nevertheless marginalised and have become *'outsiders within'* Reay (2006: 295). While institutions are generally trying to tackle issues of inequality caused by gender and ethnicity, the impact of class and disadvantage are being ignored (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001) and these overlap all

other inequalities (Bradley, 1995). It appears that higher education is refusing to acknowledge that class remains one of the most significant causes of long-term inequality in society and in education generally. Instead this is treated simply as a kind of category, an object to be identified, *an effect* but not a *state of being* which needs to be treated in a specific way to enable growth and development. This *state of being* is described by Hanley (2016) as a *wall in the head* or as McLaren and Farahmandpur (p136) see it, a more radical '*controlling paradigm that frequently leaves the exploitative power of capitalist social relations largely unaddressed*'.

3.2 Bourdieu, Habitus, Class and Social Justice

Despite a growing research literature on the role and impact of class and ethnicity across education, an out of date ideology of difference still '*insidiously inserts itself in and through individuals*' (Barnett, 2003: 57) and their actions. Decisions are taken based on power: power exercised by government agencies, university management, university structures, academics, and by the professions. The history of ethnicity and class are interwoven with the history of universities and the accounting professions and traditional recruitment approaches (sec 2.6) provided a strong impetus for examining feedback from a wider and more complex perspective. This allows one to take a holistic view of the lived world of the typical student and identify the barriers faced by those wishing to join a profession by initially pursuing a degree.

The widening participation agenda and policy of successive UK governments over approximately the past forty years was designed to enhance *human capital*, considered essential for economic growth and competitiveness (European Commission, 1995; OECD, 1995 and OECD, 1998). Universities are often seen and understood as '*storehouses of cultural capital*' (Bowl, 2003: 133). Thus it seems obvious that the enhancement of some of our *human capital* would be trusted to these institutions. Earlier in chapter 2, it was demonstrated that the historical context of the development of the English school system, while not creating the class system, has however done much to sustain it. Reay,

writing in 2006 on social class (Reay, 2006), reviewed the history of class and education using a series of quotations which of themselves tell an important story about primary and secondary school education in the UK which forms the basis for progress into university:

'If the lower classes must now be educated ... they must be educated that they may appreciate and defer to a higher civilisation when they meet it'. (Lowe, 1867, pp. 8-10) taken from (Reay, 2006: 293).

Was it possible that the children of the working class, however fortunate, however plucky, could hold their own later with those who in the formative years drank deep and long of every fountain of life? No. It's impossible. Below every strike, concealed behind legislation of every order, there is this fact – the higher nutrition of the favoured few as compared with the balked childhood of the majority. Nothing evens up this gross injustice' (Margaret McMillan, 1912) taken from (Reay, 2006: 292).

'The attainment gap between the classes in education is just as great as it was 20, 50 years ago and mirrors the growing material gap between the rich and the poor in UK society' (Reay, 2006: 304).

Reay's views above echo those of Bourdieu's on class structures:

'it is in fact one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequality and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a social gift treated as a natural one' (Bourdieu, 1974: 32).

Bourdieu (1999) offers a view on the damage that a lack of understanding of what it is like to be *working class* can do:

'those who govern are prisoners of a reassuring entourage of young, white, middle-class technocrats who often know almost nothing about the everyday lives of their fellow citizens and have no occasion to be reminded of their ignorance' (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 627).

This could be a comment on the current teacher/student/institutional relationship in a new university where it seems nothing much has changed, as those that govern today remain mainly *'white, middle-class males'* (Sutton Trust, 2009c). Education appears to simply *'recreate systems of social stratification'* (Lamont and Lareau, 1988: 155), and forms of discrimination appear to have become institutionalised (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). A well catalogued social class achievement gap exists for disadvantaged students in their overall performance at university, both in the UK and the US (Bowl, 2001; Inkelas and McCarron, 2006, Stephens et al., 2014). This gap can be traced directly to issues of poverty, schooling and parental education (Harackiewicz et al.; 2014, Cook, 2012). This gap usually overlaps with class measured in terms of where students live and where they went to school (see Section 2.6), hence linked directly to a student's prior experiences or social capital (Soria and Stebleton, 2012; Ofsted, 2013; Galindo-Rueda et al., 2004). Class and its impact on higher education's diverse population has often been ignored in higher educational research (Archer and Hutchings, 2000), concentrating instead on issues of gender and ethnicity. Class, however, overlaps these other issues and should not be ignored.

Inequality because of class difference is a problem that needs to be recognised and addressed as this is an issue which can impact on every aspect of learning, teaching, assessment and feedback. In ignoring the impact and consequence of inequality, student failure is often treated as their failure, their responsibility, and leaves us free to ignore the impact of poverty, or poor underfinanced schools (Clegg, 2011). One might question what middle-class university tutors with good jobs and pension prospects really know or understand about the everyday life of a working-class student. A working-class student whom Bourdieu (1988) would describe as an improbable survivor of the system while Ball et al (2002: 53) see these students' success as the exception *'in terms of educational trajectories and aspirations'* by the time they get to university.

Education builds a *capital/resource* for the benefit of the economy and as such education is an instrument of social justice (Clark, 2006). Widening participation should facilitate greater inclusion and a fairer distribution of opportunity. While limited real progress has

been made across the higher education sector, post-92 institutions have recruited a large proportion of those from the lower socio-economic groups in our society while the social mix of students in the more elite institutions remained almost unchanged. More students, fewer members of staff, a truncated academic year of 2 or even 3 semesters, more assessment and its associated marking and feedback, all leave staff with less time to build relationships, and thus build social capital, with students. The gap created by greater teaching demands from a diverse student body requires institutions to use more professional⁹ (non-academic) support, channelling the limited resources of the institution away from the classroom into alternative, non-teaching, support systems. On reflection, it seems universities were not well prepared for the multiplicity of different factors which a more diverse student population would bring (Bowl, 2003): the widening participation agenda lacked a cohesive and inclusive plan (Greenbank, 2006; McHarg et al., 2007).

Educational institutions are organised, managed and administered mainly by academics, and thus by the middle classes. Normally one must have an education to be part of education and educational qualifications are the first building blocks of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital is linked, not only to our educational qualifications, but also knowledge, social mobility and disposition and according to Bourdieu (1986) cultural capital comes in three forms:

Embodied cultural capital (cultural habitus) is represented in how we present ourselves. This is determined by our historical socialisation and is demonstrated through our accent and our ability with language (Bourdieu, 1991). These traits carry very specific socio-historical connotations and distinguish us and often place us within a specific class. Other aspects of our behaviour also provide evidence of our embodied cultural capital such as the newspapers we read or the events we attend.

⁹ Professional administration, counselling, and professional support systems designed to help students suffering from stress, to monitor illness, and record learning problems is the sort of information that would, in the past, have been held by tutors and used where necessary, with discretion.

Objectified cultural capital refers to our cultural sensitivity and our ability to appreciate the finer things in life; art; books; wine; and the theatre but also where we live.

Institutionalised cultural capital refers to our educational and professional qualifications; our credentials.

Symbolic capital (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991) refers to our ability to use our different forms of capital together, drawing from our networks of friends, family, associates and social connections to provide us with greater opportunity than might otherwise have been possible. In effect, symbolic capital provides us with a form of symbolic power and domination in any linguistic exchange (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991). The term *nouveau riche* is a pejorative term used to describe those with some elements of the capitals described above but without the ability to use them and combine them effectively. Different levels of capital are normally ascribed to people across the class divides and for simplicity, we refer to the combinations of capital as an individual's social capital.

3.2.1 Social Justice

There are those that believe that social justice should be the objective of education and should take priority in our society (Nussbaum, 2000; Walker, 2003). Education makes an important contribution to the future life opportunities of the student and to society (Clark, 2006). From a policy perspective, massification of the education system was designed to increase opportunities for a much wider and more diverse section of the population. The approach, however, lacks a clear singular objective, instead we have a history of 'patchwork' attempts at social justice (Walker, 2003: 169) and now with all students being asked to pay and therefore probably borrow to fund their education, the system is reverting to one which favours those with wealth and thus privilege. While the rhetoric advises that future loan repayments are defrayed against future earnings, many working class and middle-class young people are horrified at the weight of debt they must carry forward into their working life (Kirby, 2016) and the levels of interest being charged once in work. To date widening participation has failed to deliver social justice.

As part of the policy polytechnics were elevated to university status, however, the partitioning by social class in the school system followed students into university. This reinforces the class system further. Professional and higher paid jobs in both the private and public sector are dominated by the upper and middle classes (Sutton Trust, 2012). The unfortunate consequences of history and education is that:

'The expansion of higher education (HE) in the UK has disproportionately benefited young people from relatively rich families: the gap between rich and poor in terms of participation in HE having widened since the 1970s (Adnett and Slack, 2007: 23)

Statistically, in 2012, approximately 65 percent of young people from the high socio-economic group went to university, 30 percent from the middle socio-economic group but only 20 percent (or a 1 in 5 change) from a low social economic background attended a university (Sutton Trust, 2012).

Bourdieu's theory of capital might be understood as a deficit theory for first generation or disadvantaged students as it appears to identify and examine what they are missing but ignores what they bring to higher education (Clegg, 2011; Reay, 2001). However, if they never make it into higher education we cannot examine what they bring with them. Even when they become our students we often ignore how disadvantaged their journey to university has been, and simply accept their achievements as representative of ability, to some degree a limited (reduced) ability and thus what they deserve. We legitimise their position (Sullivan, 2002) instead of recognising their achievement for what it is: a major step and clear evidence of outstanding potential. In part, this research draws attention to the gaps which exist between our students, the institution and its academic staff. One such gap is cultural; many students, either because of their age or their prior education, are in a different cultural space to the academics whom they are taught by. Some colleagues openly discuss what they believe to be wrong, or lacking, in current students rather than what can be done for them. The negatives such as poor writing skills, limited language, a need for support and guidance settling into university are often

regarded as essential tools for success. These negative views reflect a cultural gap between students and staff. Academics examine these students' potential from their perspective of the ideal university student probably modelled on themselves, when what is required is an approach that determines what can, or might be done, at your university to level the playing field and give these students an experience they can work with thus helping them grow and develop. Bourdieu in 1974 claimed that *'the university system does not take inequality with regard to the school system into account'* (Bourdieu, 1974: 37). Today students face the same unfair system, but we can change this.

We work, teach and learn in a fractured society; where economic capitalist ideologies dictate the policies to be applied to higher education resulting in knowledge and knowledge creation being subordinated to the needs of corporations and industry (Williams, 2012) (Aronowitz, 2000). Critical education is replaced by training and development of human capital (Giroux, 2010). A world where the market comes into the university and slowly comes to construct the activities of the university and will eventually construct our identities within the university (Barnett, 2003). Our reconstruction happens as we begin *'to project inwards the state's agendas and so assimilate those agendas that they come to constitute'* (Barnett, 2003: 46) who we are.

Our systems, i.e. the people, structures and processes that work together in a learning environment and including our academic and disciplinary language. Our ways of teaching evolved from traditional universities built on a historical and social inheritance in need of updating (Barnett, 2005). As we try to move forward and respond to the needs of our diverse student body the rate of regulatory and policy change does not slow down constant change depletes teaching resources as the QA, NSS, the REF and now the introduction, in 2017, of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) require administration, measurement and annual reporting adding to the responsibilities of all members of staff in a university.

Social class continues to play a significant part in the degree of personal capital we have (Bourdieu, 1986b). Our social attributes confer on us different degrees of distinction (Moore, 2004). People's capitals have been developed over time, through the investment

made in their homes, in family life, in the source or quality of their education together with exposure to and familiarity with the dominant culture of a society; often referred to as high culture and seen by some as essential to *good taste* where good taste is defined by individuals who see themselves belonging to a more superior class. This capital is part of the social networks one is exposed to and belongs to. These are automatic in the lives of some while missing from, or very different in, the lives of others. One's capitals contribute to stratification by class because some students' prior experiences are not valued by some academics or some future employers (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014; Sutton Trust, 2011). These students are seen as different as this is particularly important in a discipline and profession where a particular image is valued; an image built around the educational background and so many of these students are excluded from top jobs (Sutton Trust, 2012) and in some instances from joining the premier accounting firms. Bourdieu has helped to clarify the relationship between work, class, culture and resources (Bourdieu, 1977b; Bourdieu, 1987; Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991; Bourdieu, 1986a) which demonstrate the complexity of the barriers faced by our students. Bourdieu provides a theoretical framework in which to evaluate how we behave in relation to those students. This may enable us to review our own behaviours, our words and our activities from the perspective of the students' social world. Our students are complex individuals, often different and when we look at students perhaps we are more comfortable when they share our cultural identity?

3.2.2 Diversity

The widening participation or massification, policy of the 1990s extended the opportunity to study to degree level to a much larger percentage of the population. Despite the myth of uniformity, both of students and of institutions (Antonucci, 2016), widening participation led to greater diversity in the student population (Broadfoot, 1996) Today, within our highly-stratified system, diversity is evident in many ways. Working-class students with parents holding manual or technical jobs account for over 30 percent of UK students while approximately 46 percent of young people attending university in England and Wales are also first-generation university students (Antonucci, 2016).

Reay et al (2002), examining what it was like to be a non-traditional student at university, believed that government policy oversimplified the complexities of class, ethnicity and gender on students' participation in higher education, leading to a very difficult transition. However, most research on diversity concentrated on the wider spread of learning styles rather than the potential impact of being a working class and/or disadvantaged student in a middle-class institution. Few academics come from a truly working-class background and fail, almost completely, to appreciate the shame and fear that this type of background can create when attending university. Instead of pride, students become more aware of their differences, living with that *wall in the head*' (Hanley, 2016: x), or as Reay et al (2002: 15) point out *'fear and shame haunts the working-class relationship with education'*. Kolb (1984) discussing student diversity pointed out that:

'many of these new students have not been rigorously socialized into the classroom/textbook way of learning but have developed their own distinctive approach to learning, sometimes characterized as 'survival skills' or 'street wisdom' (Kolb, 1984: 6)

Finding a way to engage with the street wisdom and survival skills of our diverse body of already high achieving, students might offer a way forward.

Post-92 institutions are often seen as failing their students, not because of student failure or an unsatisfactory education experience, but because the media and employers devalue some institutions and their achievements by ignoring these students when making appointments. These students who by birth are excluded from the elite selective school system will also find they are generally excluded from the established elite *redbrick* institutions because of class and social capital. This can be by choice as these students choose to apply to institutions where there is some degree of *class or cultural matching* (Ball et al., 2002) in order to feel more insider than outsider.

Staff can, at times, stigmatise any degree class below a 2:1 (Levin, 1999) and make this known to their students almost as soon as they arrive thus demoralising them by adding

to their identity as a *failure*. We demonstrate, using statistics, the small proportion of our students leaving with first class honours and 2:1 degrees to motivate students to aim high, but it can appear like a badge of honour, demonstrating not only our high expectations, but also our willingness to dismiss those who do not measure up. The negative impact of this hostile and slightly condescending attitude can damage students' already fragile views of their own academic self-worth. Students for whom achieving a degree is an enormous personal and family achievement are again made to feel like *second-class* citizens or *failures* by the value judgement of middle-class individuals who operate and control higher education and many of the professions. This process of the privileged holding on to their privilege through education is best shown using two pyramids based on Halsey's 1961 'Pyramid of Prestige'. Fig 3.1 shows prestige within the educational system while Fig 3.2 overlaps professions and jobs onto the same pyramid, demonstrating the link between schooling, university selection or not, and futures.

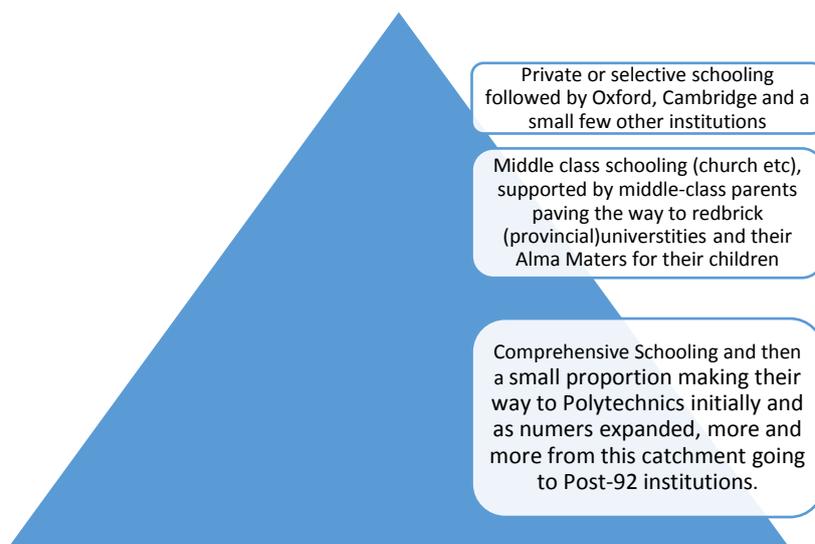


Figure 3.1 Pyramid of Prestige: Education

As a post-92 institution with a diverse body of students studying accounting and finance, feedback must be viewed from the perspective of the student body and thus their place in the pyramid. Students early experiences frame expectations when they arrive at university (Smith and Wertlieb, 2005; Tinto, 2012) and they do not come with a well-articulated understanding of what higher education is or what it will involve (Lowe and Cook, 2003). From the other perspective Halsey (1961) who was writing about the link

between class and status hierarchy, in the context of entry into Oxford and Cambridge in 1961, was commenting at a time when the possibility of creating a few new universities was being examined and he wrote '*For most parents of public school boys a 'provincial' university is not considered*' (Halsey, 1961: 343). While students in 2017 have many more opportunities to attend university those students at the top of the pyramid continue to attend schools and universities from the top of the pyramid and this is how class is reproduced.

We might ask why students choose to come to university or as Barnett (2007) asked: '*how is it that students persist?*' (Barnett, 2007: 1) particularly at a time when it is more difficult '*for children from less privileged backgrounds to move up in society than it used to be*' (SuttonTrust, 2012: 3). Working in a discipline such as accounting, which attracts a very diverse student population, and appeals to many immigrant families gives real weight to this question. It is not easy for a young person to get a university place. We have built walls, and created barriers (Adnett and Slack, 2007) designed to keep many out, perhaps designed to protect the few and maintain their status:

'because their class position insulates them They fail to perceive the suffering of the oppressed or they believe it is freely chosen, deserved, or inevitable. They experience the current organization of society as basically satisfactory' (Jaggar, 1983: 370)

Barnett sees students choosing a form of '*voluntary servitude*' (Barnett, 2003: 56) when they come to a university where our rules, our systems and our demands are accepted as just, and natural, an ideology (Barnett, 2003), often self-imposed (Barnett, 2003; Hanley, 2016). Ball sees student university choice being based on an '*imagined future*' (Ball et al., 1999: 210; Ball, 2004): where they can imagine a career and choose a university based on the best way of fulfilling their career objective; or a different imagined future where they choose an institution where they will be among others like themselves, perhaps with friends and often remaining at home; approximately 51 percent of our accounting and finance students live at home (Appendix 2). Our diverse non-traditional students may be

further *disadvantaged* by the internal culture of the institution as they are taught mainly by middle-class staff who themselves, often being accounting professionals, were generally educated in pre-1990 institutions. Older universities have traditionally been the source of students for many of the professional bodies (McPhail et al., 2010) as can be demonstrated visually using again the concept of the Pyramid of Prestige, but this time reflecting the distribution of top jobs to those who attend the institutions at the top tip of the pyramid in 3.1 above.

Students in our institution studying accounting are imagining their future; their prospects as professionals, while struggling to be *students* in the way we academics remember our days as students. For us, university was a period of personal focus, fun, and little if any, financial worries as our families and the state funded our education. When providing feedback to our students today we are often unable to imagine their world. However, if we cannot see ourselves in our students are we able to empathise, to provide meaningful feedback in a language they understand? Can we appreciate their dilemmas when deciding whether to go to college for the day (spending 2 hours travelling: Table 2) or go to work to be able to afford to go to college tomorrow? Academics look at the empty seats in class and are frustrated at students' apparent disengagement failing to recognise that there is a different 'new student' (Leese, 2010: 241) in our midst who spends much less time on campus and is probably more dependent on our support and less able to be independent learner when they arrive on campus (Haggis, 2006).

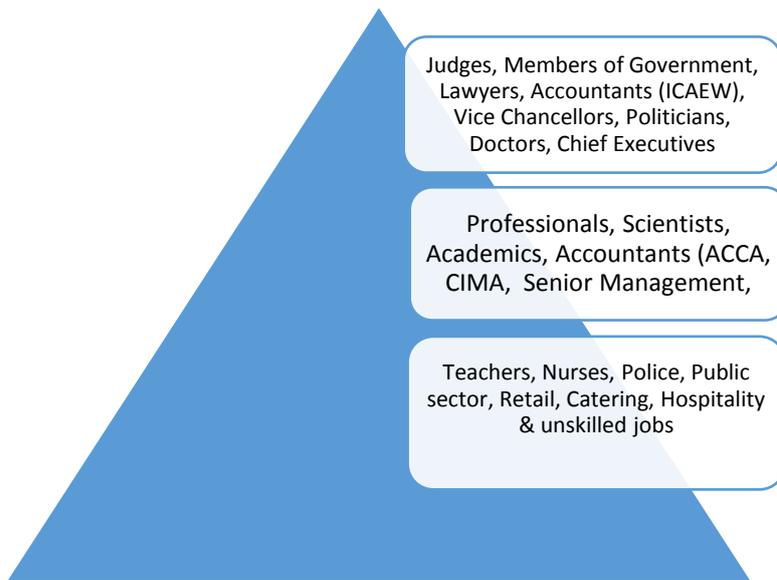


Fig 3.2 Pyramid of Prestige: Jobs & Work

(see Elitist Britain report from the Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission 2014 for statistics and distribution of jobs)

If we accept that students face unequal opportunity both at school and then in terms of the universities they attend, this becomes a form of discrimination which limits long term opportunities. Research by Collins, Collins and Butt (2015) visually demonstrated how an index of deprivation (2010) mapped across Birmingham city mirrored a map of the poorest living areas of Birmingham. Those living in deprived areas tended to be from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups and begin life disadvantaged and to date the long-term record of social mobility has been rather weak here in the UK (Boston Consulting Group, 2017: sec 5). Some disadvantaged groups of young people are thus left facing a much greater struggle to achieve, yet many of these young people and their families have ambition and strive to get to university and escape.

Some students who progress from GCSEs to sixth form colleges and Further Education colleges to complete their school education and prepare for university entry, adopt and learn from the habitus of these institutions. This experience will in turn impact on their developing identity as they move into university. Schools in middle-class areas often have a more focused and supportive system to facilitate university application, providing students with the skills, language and understanding of the university selection process;

this is not as clearly articulated in schools in working class areas with a working-class ethos (Reay, 2001; Reay et al., 2001; Reay, 2004; Reay et al., 2009). Additionally, some students with vocational qualifications can be limited in their choice of university by how their qualifications are received and accepted because places in highly selective universities mainly go to those holding traditional "A" level qualification (Hoelscher, 2008). Some UK academics show concern over admission criteria as they fear the *unskilled* or *unprepared* new students (Parker, 2002) and can reject non-traditional qualifications. There is also evidence that even when students from non-traditional backgrounds meet the entry criteria of the redbrick universities they feel more comfortable in accepting places at new universities where someone they know or knew went (Ball et al., 2002; Reay et al., 2010). Choosing a university is of itself a complex decision involving prior experience and prior knowledge, often mingled with fear and trepidation (Ball et al., 2002).

Universities are run by the middle classes using taken for granted middle and upper-class models of the university (Bernstein, 2005; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Hanley, 2016). Entering a wholly middle-class institution is very difficult for a working class young person as it undermines their identity and their feeling of self (Hanley, 2016). In a letter to the *Guardian* (12th February 2001) Sara Covington wrote

'Our universities are essentially middle class institutions. Poor kids have seldom had the 'benefits' of a middle-class upbringing and thus tend to feel like aliens from another planet on entering such institutions. Despite being as well qualified as everyone else' (taken from Walker, 2006: 38))

3.2.3 Being Invisible

Often students are present in class yet feel partly invisible, living as they do between two cultures, that of their ethnic, and or, class history, and the culture of the middle-class university. Many students live in subordination in both cultures (Freire and Ramos, 2000 (original publication 1970)), or in simple terms, one leg in, and one leg out, of each

cultural habitus (Hanley, 2016). Being a student is not always an all-encompassing experience between individuals with a shared identity, instead we find students often self-organise around ethnic or other shared cultural identities. At the same time within the classroom, we teach them as if they are all the same wanting them to be like us and believing it to be possible to change them, changing their individual habitus to that of the institutional habitus (Reay et al., 2010) Bourdieu sees an individual's habitus as the ability to adapt to the world (Bourdieu, 1993: 78), a way of linking one's past to the present and thus influencing the future. However, this influence is limited by the limitations of one's past experiences and this makes the present often reproductive rather than transformative (Bourdieu, 1990; Reay et al., 2001). First-generation students are particularly at a disadvantage being not just economically, socially and culturally different, but different to our expectations of the traditional university student (Gibbons et al., 2011; Inkelas and McCarron, 2006). For these students, university represents a new unknown environment, one that can be threatening in many ways by introducing students to a foreign culture (Harackiewicz et al., 2014).

At 19 most young people are unsure of their own identity and the new environment of a university often challenges their understanding of themselves. Students' identity and their class may create for them a *different* educational experience from that which we believe we are providing. Bourdieu's understanding and explanation of class supports the idea that education reproduces the class system (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). From a social and economic theory perspective, we must also consider that students may use their university experience to determine their own unique optimal equilibrium within their primary social group, i.e. find a way to remain attached while also taking steps outside this group to become a member of other groupings. The model of a rational economic individual would suggest that each student would use university as a means of maximising their personal utility from the experience (Friedman, 1957) One of the most difficult issues we deal with is trying to understand why students appear uninterested or disconnected in maximising their opportunity. Perhaps the answer lies in the Herbert Simon's idea of *bounded rationality*, i.e. that humans are unable to make the

necessary calculations to recognise the full potential of the options facing them¹⁰ and after that their behaviours are impacted upon by habits, history, and their learned standard operating procedures (Simon, 1982; Schmid, 2004)) To move to a position of being able to imagine more would involve acquiring more detailed information on the profession, of education and on career requirements.

The identity presented to tutors in class will be a stage-managed self (Hyland, 2012) who monitors how she engages with tutors and peers as the student tries to create an image of herself as a certain type of person, separate from her own safe space, that place where she can just be. But working in an uncertain environment unsure of the most appropriate *'front'* (Goffman, 1971: 22) or *self* to expose and present, creates and adds to the pressure of being a university student. Most of us are very good at impression management (Jones, 2011) most of the time, but in a new unfamiliar setting, students recognise that the rules may be different, hence the majority remain quiet and compliant in the first few weeks of university. They are observing while self-monitoring how well they fit and identifying other similar individuals, but of course, we cannot just manufacture a new identity for every new occasion; our identity will always to a degree be locked into our accumulated unconscious practices (Hyland, 2012: 9) our habitus (Bourdieu, 1986b).

In a post 92-institution, the discourse surrounding new diverse first year students can dismiss them as *unworthy* because of pre-conceived ideas held by some academics. Using Butler's idea of the performative¹¹ we can understand that once we name these students in this way they can become what they are named, i.e. the performative power of language at work by naming can wound, stigmatise and change how we see students (Butler, 1993) or in the words of Bourdieu (1991, p105) *'the act of naming helps to establish the structure of the world'* in this instance the students' university world. These young people are viewed in this way because of academics' dissatisfaction with their entry qualifications or how

¹⁰ Because of the limits of pre-existing knowledge and the brains ability to calculate across all the options because of a lack of reliable information

¹¹ Where performative is the constant, compulsive repetition of an act, or in this instance a categorisation of students, until they become what we name them (Hey, 2006).

they interact or engage with teaching and in class, or perhaps their writing skills, or their ability, or lack of ability, to be independent learners. Research, however, indicates that who students are when they begin university, i.e. their background characteristics, and how they behaved in school is clearly linked to how they behave in university (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Kuh, 2008). These are learned behaviours and perhaps we need to help them unlearn. Evidence suggests that intervention programmes providing *'bridging activities designed to prepare students for the academic demands, social dimensions and 'culture shock' of HE study'* (Moore, 2013: 4) can be helpful, but these can be different for different students and require a degree of individualisation (Stanley and Goodlad, 2010). Successful intervention needs to begin before students enter a university and this makes the task of the university almost impossible. This research identifies many key areas of concern to students which can be dealt with through an early intervention programme.

Academic staff in post-92 institutions often appear to be attempting to impose on students a set of expectations based on their own middle class educational experiences (Reay, 2001). We impose a form of censorship as we communicate using an *'authoritative discourse'* (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991:138) based on the language of our professional discipline and this can limit the input from our students. We expect degree ready students sitting in our classrooms, students who had experienced a school education like ours. It is very likely that many of these students did not experience school in the way that we did and thus it comes back to class barriers or borders hindering valid communication which relies on both parties to a communication, sharing the symbols and the images that are triggered to delivery or decode the message being communicated. (Folorunso, 2013). We are each very comfortable with those with whom we share similar dispositions, similar interests (Bourdieu, 1991) and who read similar newspapers etc. We look for mirrors of ourselves where communication is much easier and safer. Those that are different can be foreign to us in many respects and this can influence how we respond.

3.3 Student Engagement

Student engagement which is both the time and effort and the cognitive and emotional investment by students in their learning (Kuh, 2008, Munns and Woodward, 2006) is considered key to success. Engagement is used to describe what we encounter in our classrooms; students joining in or complete student silence (Mann, 2008). Barkley (2009: 3) wrote

'it is, therefore very disheartening to look out into a classroom and see disengaged students who make little effort to hide their apathy. They stare at us vacantly or perhaps even hostilely when we attempt to pull them into a class discussion, and then bolt for the door like freed prisoners the moment it seems safe to do so'

While it is indeed disheartening to fail to engage students in one's class these are harsh words, examining their meaning we find:

- Apathy (Cambridge English Dictionary) = behaviour that shows no interest or energy and shows that someone is unwilling to act
- Vacantly = showing no interest or mental activity (Cambridge English Dictionary)
- Hostility = feeling or showing ill will

An alternative interpretation would be to see **apathy** as the inability to understand most of what is being said as result of unfamiliarity with the words and with the setting. This could also explain the **vacant** look that can appear on students' faces, as they begin to turn off the sounds of the tutor because they represent what they see as their own failure. **Hostility** can be fear, desperation, signs of stress and worry, and of course a degree of hostility at being spoken at, rather than to, representing our failure to understand their inability to understand our foreign language as we take for granted the way we speak and communicate. Our silent students may appear *disengaged* but are often simply intimidated, having taken a leap into the unknown. But again, in naming we brand them, but in my view, more telling in the Barkley quotation is the clear dislike or disdain

for students. The words we use reveal us both here, and when we give feedback to our students, our words reveal a lot about us and how we feel about students.

3.3.1 Being Prepared

Research indicates that some students are ill-prepared for university study (Byrne and Flood, 2005; Lowe and Cook, 2003; Kandiko, 2013) yet we expect them to be able to survive and respond in a fast-changing new environment with a host of new expectations (Baxter Magolda, 2012). This gap in expectations can create for them a feeling of alienation (Leese, 2010), a feeling that they do not belong (Walker, 2006). These students need more and different support than what is normally on offer (Marr et al., 2013). They may have difficulty in managing their time, feel isolated, are unhappy with feedback and assessment, often because they do not understand what is required and at the same time they worry about money (Yorke and Longden, 2007). Disadvantaged or under-represented students can experience difficulties in transition into university at an economic, educational, and social level (Bowl, 2001). They face greater financial pressures due to lower family incomes (Kuh, 2006). They often arrive with more limited and less clear aspirations (Gorard et al., 2012). They also have less well-formulated expectations often because of their families' lack of experience of higher education.

First generation students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds may exhibit what appears to be lower levels of engagement simply because of their prior educational experience. Students' ill-preparedness is not their fault but the result of limited social capital such that while their family may applaud their success in gaining a university place they are unable to go beyond cheering, to actually coaching and helping, which is what happens in most middle-class families (Bernstein and Henderson, 1969; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Lucas, 2001; Kraus and Kivisto, 2015) They are eager but not always prepared yet have their own specific and often well-established expectations which colour how they view what is happening to them during their early weeks in university.

Research indicates that addressing expectations early can positively impact performance (Steele, 1992; Sander et al., 2000; Tinto, 2012a; Pascarella et al., 2004) and help

students settle into higher education. We must abandon the *deficit* model of our students and instead adopt the approach that recognises that these students have great power of perseverance, they have made it to university (Steele, 1992) so they are achievers even if many are without first-hand knowledge of what university involves and need a helping hand. These students' experience of higher education will be influenced by their experience and relationships with their tutors enabling us to support them and manage their expectations. This relationship is central to the quality of the student experience (Bowl, 2003) and is even more important today when numbers in the classroom can be quite large. We must find ways to build and strengthen staff-student and student-student relationships (Cashmore et al., 2011; Palmer et al., 2009) but we lack a co-ordinated evaluation of what happens in individual institutions or any focused research indicating what is needed and what works (Thomas, 2013a) and thus we continue to devise individual institutional strategies. There is significant evidence of what works in the US and Australia with a little from Ireland but no way of knowing if the problems experienced in the UK are the same (Thomas, 2013a). This reflects what has happened in relation to feedback also. While research is accumulating and there are lots of proposals and good ideas about how to improve feedback we still find disenchantment growing (NSS scores 2006 - 2016).

3.4 Expectations

Students' motives for attending university can be mixed, for some it is an assumption or expectation that career opportunities will be enhanced (Byrne et al., 2012) while for others it is the desire to learn more about a favourite subject, but when a student chooses to study accounting one can assume that the profession holds some attraction. Regular in-class polls of our first-year accounting students reflect their initial intentions of preparing to join a profession, the same poll of final year students reflects less certainty. In effect, new students bring with them a wide selection of assumptions, values, attitudes, skills and pre-existing knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 2012; Tinto, 2012a; Kandiko, 2013). Some having studied accounting or business successfully at college see

themselves as *good at the subject* and their self-belief in their own abilities and skills with accounting has been found to be one of the factors that correlate with their overall success in their first year (Byrne et al., 2012). They expect to be able to cope and they do.

Individual's expectations about an event can have a powerful effect on their performance. Students anticipating their own success often know what they need to do to succeed and this determines how they will act (Bandura, 1986b; Bandura, 1982; Bandura, 1977b). Dweck (1988: 256) explained that students exhibit two major cognition-affect-behaviours; a '*maladaptive.. helpless.. response*' or an '*adaptive ..mastery-orientated .. response*'. What Dweck and colleagues found to be important here is that those students that fall into the helpless category tend to avoid challenges and thus their performance is impeded while the mastery orientated students look for challenges and see them as obstacles to be overcome and thus tend to succeed (Dweck, 1988).

Kandiko and Kinchin (2013) examining student expectations and perceptions of higher education discovered that there were gaps between what students expected and how they experienced higher education. Expectations are framed in terms of past experiences which enable individuals to create a mental model or representation of current expectations (Vroom and Deci, 1992) and we use these repeatedly as we approach new situations. Students may fail to appreciate that their expectations based on past events may not relate to, or fit, the context in which they are now emerging, i.e. the university setting, and they can be false and even mislead (Lucas, 2013). Our sense of future fills in gaps in our knowledge about the future, we read cues, we seek markers, we hear words, we interpret, and we expect (Huron, 2007).

Academics expect new students to be capable of independent learning while they adjust to university, learn to study on their own and with peers while also learning to clean, shop, cook and feed themselves, make friends and build a social network and for some, they will have left home for the first time. This is asking a great deal of a young adolescent, perhaps full of anxiety and concerned or anxious about the possibility of negative

evaluation or feedback (Byrne, 2000) and often weighed down with self-doubt or low self-esteem (Kernis, 2003). Self-esteem is a psychological construct and refers to how we feel about ourselves (Kernis, 2003) and the research indicates that students with low self-esteem are less effective learners (Abouserie, 1995) and suffer from more emotional problems. These students join us from a highly structured, externally assessed, school system (Parker, 2002). We want them to be able to '*respond to shifting contexts and expectations*' (Baxter Magolda, 2012: 1) and forget they are inexperienced adolescents, there are expectations gaps on both sides.

The two different levels of expectations, ours and theirs, do not create a welcoming and comfortable environment. We find academics frustrated (Billot, 2010) as their rarefied and ideological view of the university as an '*island of culture*' (Kuman, 1997: 30; Barnett, 1990) is shattered, as they face many students in poor emotional states, lonely for home, and often alone. These students' *state of being* is clearly visible in their body language and failure to make eye contact and overall in the obvious nervousness which is displayed during the first few days and weeks of university, revealing their habitus. Yet the majority persist and graduate, displaying what has been described as '*a will to learn*' (Barnett, 2007). The gap in habitus, the gap in expectations, theirs and ours, is evident as we dismiss them as uninterested while they are going through inward contestation trying to juggle their new life and their old life, their part-time jobs, their expectations, the need to study with the need to make friends (Palmer et al., 2009). We confuse students and often undermine their attempt to build a new identity (Palmer, 2007) because our words, our language and thus our feedback can be alien to them and at cross-purposes (21st Century Learning Initiative, 1999). As we attempt to communicate with each other we often fail to take account of generational and social differences, our different habitus and thus different experiences and expectations. We ignore the students' expectations rather than managing them (Cashmore et al., 2011) and appear to impose our own expectations, believing *we know best*.

Accounting students like many others generally arrive with a host of untenable perceptions and expectations (Byrne and Flood, 2005) about the nature of what they are

joining and hope to engage with (Kandiko, 2013). Our students arrive with unacknowledged social norms of behaviours linked to their perceptions of our and their role again based on past experiences. We can explain how we are different, but our words alone will not change or modify their individual mental models unless we help them relearn.

Emotion and expectation are intertwined (Papier et al., 2015; Robotham, 2008; Pekrun, 2014; Ellis and Tucker, 2015). When faced with a new situation we rely on our past experiences to provide us with a mental representation of what to expect and our expectations trigger our emotions. Together, these prepare us for what is coming and focus our attention. New students experiencing university life for the first time may be confused initially over what to expect, they are fearful, nervous, concerned but excited and they are experiencing emotions. As they engage with learning, teaching, assessment and other aspects of being a university student they will bridge their gap in knowledge using their prior experiences, creating those mental models which guide all of us in confusing times but may not be accurate for the students and thus misinform them.

Each institution, school, college and university has its own, perhaps unique, distinctive culture (Martin, 2001) with accompanying language, ideologies and rituals, its own habitus (Thomas, 2002). Accounting also relies on students' learning additional new calculative techniques and a new disciplinary vocabulary relating to business and to accounting. This vocabulary is essential to the understanding of accounting and until a student understands the meaning of the words we use in accounting they are unable to put together the concepts we try to introduce them to, and until they can do this our words, and our sentences, can be meaningless.

New students must adjust to new social norms, new ways of learning and new ways of interacting and behaving (Tinto, 1993; Tinto, 2012a), in effect to begin to change their identity. Incoming students' expectations of the university have been built on *stories*, stories from school, the media, siblings who perhaps have gone to university before them, parents and friends which together construct student's views, expectations and initial feelings about the university. Students' expectations often do not match what actually

happens (Kandiko, 2013; Tinto, 2012a), they may need modification and we need to decide where and how we replace or update expectations built over 13/14 years of school? It is easy to ignore the reality of students' past life, their '*habitus*', where habitus is the '*embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product*' (Bourdieu, 1990:56).

It is common for students to feel lost and confused during their first days and weeks in university and a few will *go home* very quickly and give up on the experience (Thomas, 2002). Research by Parker (2002) working with students in their first and second years of study indicated that their expectations were that lecturers would model the discipline for them, while staff interviewed felt students expected to be told why they had to do each task required of them, then shown what to do. They appeared to lack motivation and did not understand what their discipline required of them. These different expectations result in misunderstandings on both sides.

3.5 Being an Adolescent

Students at 19 are adolescent (Siegel, 2014) often living in a state of confusion and indecision, both terrified and excited as they set out on a new journey to explore the boundaries of their own abilities (Siegel, 2014). Starting university is challenging and intimidating (McInnis et al., 1995) as students move from a formal, tightly controlled and regulated school or college environment (Lowe and Cook, 2003) where staff appear always to be available and home is nearby with any part-time work limited, moving to a more informal unregulated, unknown, and uncertain future at university which can be daunting. However, when we look at our students, when we interact with them, when they speak to us in corridors or we give them written or verbal feedback, we should remember the heights they have already ascended getting here. We should understand and appreciate just how difficult it is to succeed in education in the UK.

Just as students are working to fit into a new environment for which they have not been adequately prepared, and for which little guidance or support is given on arrival, they

must also begin to loosen their parental and family bonds and build stronger relationships with friends and peers (Siegel, 2014). Students are pushing away from family support and learning to both give and receive care from friends, developing interdependence (Siegel, 2014), an essential life skill. Some find it very difficult to develop these necessary relationships. This can be particularly true for students from different cultural backgrounds. Students whom we label as *lazy*, or *unfocused*, or whom we see failing to engage, may, in fact, be struggling, trying to develop initial friendships which are essential if they are to be supported through their studies. Young adolescents are not ready for complete independence, they are in fact still '*semi-dependent*' in the process of transitioning to adulthood (Antonucci, 2016:4 & 5). During these years young people are learning how to survive in the world, they are learning how to interact socially, living in a period of '*increased emotional intensity*' (Siegel, 2014: 4) which will impact on how they react to most events as they develop their own way of '*being in the world*' (Raz, 2010: 433) and their horizons broaden.

Who we are or believe we are, and who our students are becoming, is shaped through experiences, actions, and reactions to those experiences (Raz, 2010). As this is occurring the student's brain is changing quite quickly (Siegel, 2014) and as tutors, we need to appreciate and understand the intensity of their daily lives currently and then build on this knowledge to provide exciting and interesting learning opportunities. The quality of students' relationships with tutors at university is a key component of their feelings of satisfaction (Neves et al., 2016) with their learning experience (Bowl, 2003) such that this makes it essential that all staff are approachable and supportive. This is not to suggest that our objective is satisfaction, as an educational goal in its own right, even if this has become an important metric as a measure of educational quality, rather I would suggest that students grow and learn in an environment where they feel happy, valued and supported and they perceive support as something that emanates from academic staff in the classroom (Dean and Gibbs, 2015).

Adolescents are in a state of '*interdependence*' (Siegel, 2014: 3), being in-between adolescence and adulthood, still needing support, with much of this support being

provided by peers and tutors (Cashmore et al., 2011). On arrival at university students can be unsure and untrusting and at this point they need tutors to act in *loco parentis* and create the opportunities for friendships with peers to develop (Cashmore et al., 2011) but we often fail to acknowledge or recognise the role that developing friendships play in overall student satisfaction (Yorke and Longden, 2007). Tutors, on the other hand, are encouraged to pass students along for professional help when what students want, and need is to feel they belong to a community (Pinel et al., 2005) and a friendship group. We can change this.

Universities welcome new students, but then treat them as if they are all the same, already formed in the likeness of a university student, *'able to stand on their own feet from day one, without expectation of support from the institution itself'* (Bowl, 2003: 134). We place students in an adult learning environment which has been designed for independent learning. They enter a social drama but have no rehearsal opportunity and their experience becomes their reality, for the next three or four years. We do not train or teach students how to survive in their new environment. Almost immediately they are placed in the centre of their own learning, we command, we do not teach how (Broad, 2006), but expect our students to immediately take control. Students must manage their time, manage their study and revision, attend to coursework, travel to university and get here on time and for the majority find and retain a part-time job, in effect take on the mantle of adulthood. Research by Giedd, reported by Barlow (2014) pointed out that

'the human brain matures by becoming more connected and specialized. The prefrontal cortex matures last, not finishing until after age 25. That means that executive functions such as reason, long-range planning and impulse control aren't fully operational during identity' (Barlow, 2014: 1)

Our students are usually 19 or 20 years old when we meet them. We create the space in which they learn, but we do so, on the basis that they are fully functioning adults able to plan their own futures and take responsibility for study. Of course, tutors have a responsibility to treat students as young independent adults, to accept them, respect

them and support them (Merriam, 2001), but they also need considerable support to transition into our very complex systems. They need us to demonstrate a degree of understanding and even empathy with their initial limitations and at a minimum appreciate that what is happening outside of the classroom is also impacting their life (Antonucci, 2016). Learning to learn while living with a limited budget, weigh students down (Kirby, 2016), then as debt mounts, worries grow and move from one year to the next (Cooke et al., 2004b).

Financial worries manifest in many ways including increased mental problems, stress (Yorke, 2008), sleeping problems, pains and aches and a general reduction in optimism (Cooke et al., 2004b). US research particularly, demonstrates that financial worry is one of the biggest problems faced by students (Kuh, 2006; Tinto and Pusser, 2006), creating not only a need to work but also influencing students' decision to stay on at university or leave (Braxton, 2003). Lack of money reduces choice and earning money can become the overriding driver of one's daily life as a student. Like many other aspects of the life of a disadvantaged young person, debt can feel terminal, if you do not earn money there is no fall-back, no family support and inequality again play its part (Antonucci, 2016). For the average middle-class child family and parents provide support so that financial issues are not as pressing (Cooke et al., 2004a). So why do so many disadvantaged students make the extraordinary effort of going to university? For some the problem is also the answer, they see and recognise the advantage offered by higher education and they want access to that advantage. We all want this for our children.

3.6 Students and Learning

Traditionally, the reason most students attend university is a desire to learn and/or acquire new skills, to improve prospects or their level of knowledge (National Union of Students, 2008) and understanding of existing knowledge. Learning is the acquisition of new skills and knowledge and the modification of existing knowledge and skills thus building new knowledge (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1999). Academics, generally, see their role

as one of supporting students in their learning. Learning according to Langley & Simon (1981) is '*any process that modifies a system so as to improve, more or less irreversibly, its subsequent performance of the same task or of tasks drawn from the same population*' (p. 367 quoted in Shuell (1986)) but in reality, one can forget or lose an ability that was learned.

Learning is a complex, holistic, interplay between students their cultural capital, the teacher, the subject area and the learning environment; an interaction between the social material and the human elements of a students' life (Fenwick et al., 2011) where holistic means they are interconnected and can only be examined or explained by reference to the whole. Students are not a collection of '*disconnected knowledge-processing agents*' (James and Bloomer, 2001: 1), but are actively involved in the process of constructing knowledge and learning. Using the analogy from medicine which requires doctors to treat the *whole person*, we must also appreciate the *whole person, the student*, as they adapt to university life through interaction with faculty, with systems and each other. Students are constantly changing and being changed through their interactions in a complex world. Learning research, and our understanding of learning is immersed in disputed, conflicting, and varied theories from different disciplines and by politicians and political ideologies (Coffield, 2004). The idea of *educational theory* has itself been a topic of substantial debate with a great deal of cynicism surrounding issues about its existence or not, and its value, or not (Oancea, 2005; Thomas, 2007; Carr, 2001).

Education research generally has a preference for examining one element of a particular learning or pedagogic problem and then trying to solve that specific problem thus concentrating their efforts on one-dimensional '*linear causality, reductionism, reliability of logic and universal determinism*' basically using '*a paradigm of simplification*' (Fenwick et al., 2011: 22), ignoring the complexity of learning, ignoring the structural problems in our society and within the university, as different cultures meet and try to work together. Educational research has generally ignored the emotional complexity of the student such that this type of research can only identify limited solutions (Allen, 1975). The consequence of this is that research can often simply confirm taken for granted views while perpetuating existing interests (Lehman, 1992).

Some causes of student failure or success have been extensively examined in the US (Tinto and Pusser, 2006; Tinto, 2012b; Tinto, 2012a; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1976), but much less so in the UK. Success and failure have been described in terms of individual traits which students should have to be able to learn, and without these traits they are seen to have a problem which must be fixed (Hidi and Harackiewicz, 2000; Maslow et al., 1970; Pintrich, 1990; Dweck, 1983). Research of this nature deals with learning as if it were simply a behaviour that can be acquired and will then enable individual success (Bandura, 1977a). From this behavioural perspective intelligence, motivation and personality are desired traits which need to be measured, and are seen as measurable (Skinner, 1954; Skinner and Belmont, 1993), they must also be *turned on* to enable effective learning to take place, in effect we need to be able to harness student agency. Several studies demonstrate that having efficacy and agency leads to motivation (Bandura, 1977a; Cohen and Sherman, 2014). But how useful is this research in the day to day operation of the classroom. Many of these research projects involved interventions in the student learning environment or explanations for students' specific behavioural traits but offer little evidence that interventions produce long term impact into the future but instead work in the moment (Yeager et al., 2014).

One must question whether these theories and experiments lead to reliable results which can be generalised producing something akin to laws which can or will aid future practitioners to make predictions about individual students' ability to pass or fail, in effect act as predictive models of learning. The UK, Australian & Hong Kong based research of Biggs (1979, 1995), Entwistle (1988, 2000) and Marton et al (1976, 2000) using a constructivist interpretation of learning still treats the process as a one-dimensional event. Their research ignores the impact on learning of all the externalities of life. In addition, the internal emotional turmoil which can accompany learning and feedback is rarely mentioned in any of the UK or US based research.

The current market-based ideology which dominates educational thinking and policy has led to students who see the purpose of education as credentialising, often with little regard for knowledge. We facilitate this by offering students a broad range of modules,

divided into bite sized, often disconnected pieces of learning which can leave students' failing to make the necessary connections across and between modules. Students can accumulate the necessary credits to graduate through collecting and learning little bits of information they are unable to join up and to absorb as knowledge. In these circumstances internalisation, which is a necessary condition of being able to construct a reality which includes this new information (Berger and Lukcmann, 1967) has not occurred.

When the average student enters university, their brain is undergoing significant change. During this period the brain becomes more integrated with more connections between the parts occurring while at the same time their ability to specialise is growing, leading overall to '*more efficient and specialized processing of information*' (Siegel, 2014: 89) which generates the ability to drill down into a complex subject area. Our genes and experience contribute to making cross connections in the brain shaping its physical structure (Hinton et al., 2008). '*What we focus our attention on and what we spend time doing directly stimulates*' (Siegel, 2014: 90/91) the brain so that attending university becomes part of a student's experience and thus plays its part in changing their brain as well as impacting on their identity. For this reason, students and teachers must understand that learning is both a function of biology and experience and occurs through everyday activity. These everyday activities can include:

'inorganic physical materials, forms of energy such as electricity, or these used in our bodies, barely visible organic matters such as bacteria, semiotic materials such as inscriptions' (Fenwick et al., 2011: 168)

and these collide or interact with people's habitus, their cultural and social capital, in effect with their identity, their habits, their fears and most of all their emotions. It is our role, as teachers to focus on supporting and directing students' learning as it is this that develops the brain.

The overall organisational structure of a modern university has taken us more and more into a systems approach (Marshall et al., 2013) to all aspects of students' university life.

Students are managed by administrative systems which in turn are supported by IT Systems and Learning Management Systems, all working together to deliver a satisfactory student experience with limited need for human interaction. We have automated letters advising students of their start dates, giving them individualised timetables, automatic access to their assessment results and feedback, but with limited opportunity to question or adapt their mental states to what will be a very new and different learning environment. Research suggests that fragile self-esteem is implicated in, though not necessarily the cause of, low levels of achievement of students (Crocker and Luhtanen, 2003). They are confused and believe it is their fault that they do not fit or are not ready. Self-esteem

'is a central component of individuals daily experience; it refers to the way that people feel about themselves, which reflects and affects their ongoing transactions with their environment and the people they encounter in it' (Kernis, 2003: 1)

When our attention is on one thing, we do not see clearly what is happening around us. We take in information using all our senses, what we see, what we hear, what we smell affects what we notice. We are surrounded by so many stimuli, our brains must select what we perceive, what sensory information to pay attention to (Fiske, 1991). What we choose to see and what is happening is often very different. This is the situation students find themselves in when they arrive at university. Students attend orientation and induction and we expect them to be able to begin their studies, but, what they heard and observed during this period varies between students and fails to communicate.

In this chapter I have focused my discussion on the nature of the student and the externalities which impact on their daily lives and how these interact in an emotional adolescent working with and through their identity in a complex and not well-understood way. In the process, it is hoped that the reader will begin to develop an alternative understanding of their students' experience of learning in a post-92 university. Particularly I would like the reader to appreciate the differences in experiences of those

students who have followed a traditional route to university, following in their families' footsteps and those attending university for the first time, breaking barriers and creating a new family history and building cultural capital.

Chapter Four

Learning, Assessment and Feedback: an Emotional Journey

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter used Bourdieu's theory of capital and his concept of habitus to demonstrate the limitations placed on students by their social class and the clash of ideologies they face when they attend university. Our students are adolescents, with a significant percentage from working class backgrounds who can feel invisible and misunderstood while with us. We label them as unprepared and unengaged while failing to connect with them. We expect them to change and adapt to our cultures and norms, while we remain unchanged, locked into our middle-class experiences and expectations.

In this chapter, I will discuss and explore academic feedback and the role and influence of emotion on students' relationship with learning, assessment, and feedback. This is particularly appropriate in the current climate where discussing feelings, mental illness, and other mental issues is finally in the public domain. This chapter draws attention to the role of theory in our understanding of higher education and learning in the twenty-first century. Specifically, I introduce complexity theory with a view to demonstrating the sheer complexity of trying to explain and understand why it is that students appear to be dissatisfied with their feedback and assessment. Through complexity theory, it is possible to visualise the messy and complex process that is learning.

It is widely acknowledged and recognised in the literature that assessment and feedback sit at the heart of learning and influence student behaviour (Knight et al., 2014; Black and Wiliam, 2003; Ellery, 2008; Ramsden, 1997; Biggs, 2011; Joughin, 2008). Both

activities, or processes, are proving to be problematic as evidenced by the NSS (2005-2016) results (Boud and Molloy, 2013; Orrell, 2006; Boud, 2015; Price et al., 2010; Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano, 2014). It is also acknowledged that feedback is one of the most powerful tools used to improve students' work (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Nicol, 2007; Black and Wiliam, 2005; Orrell, 2006). The value of feedback comes mainly from the acceptance of learning as '*a process of mutual influence between learners and their environment*' (Bangert-Drowns et al., 1991: 214), where the influence to be brought on learning comes from and through feedback, whether peer or tutor based (Bangert-Drowns et al., 1991), although self-testing and computer-based testing can also be sources of useful feedback. Some students, as soon as they begin to receive feedback acknowledge the value of being shown and told where they have gone wrong and how to improve (NUS, 2016; Yorke and Longden, 2007; Higgins et al., 2001). Some value this more than any attempt to be supportive or nice as they see part of the purpose of feedback being the provision of help with understanding the nature of their errors and omissions as well as giving advice on how to improve (Higgins et al., 2001) but many others seek more, or different information and/or support as feedback.

Research during the past 20-30 years has changed our understanding of learning, assessment and feedback (Boud, 1995; Boud, 2013; Carless, 2007; Brookhart, 2008). Research demonstrates the potential value of feedback for students (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Plank et al., 2014; Black and Wiliam, 1998a; Hattie, 1987), even as mounting evidence of student dissatisfaction with feedback and assessment has become more prominent (Adcroft, 2011; NSS 2006 - 2017; NSSE, 2006). Despite annual attempts to improve assessment and feedback, particularly since the NSS was introduced, institutions are left struggling to understand why it is that the assessments we set and the feedback we give our students fails to meet students' expectations. Perhaps this indicates that it is not the volume or timing of feedback or the perceived quality of feedback that is at issue, rather it is the context in which feedback is provided (Molloy and Boud, 2013) or perhaps linked to the assessment experience itself (Falchikov and Boud, 2007). Student feedback is often given to accounting and finance students by academics involved in teaching large cohorts of 200+ students, these academics often do

not have the time to develop a *relationship* with their students. From the students' perspective written words mainly delivered on their computer, represents the impersonal nature of modern university life (Yorke and Longden, 2007; Thomas, 2013b). It is essential to understand the emotional impact of feedback when discussing students' interactions and reactions to feedback (Pekrun, 2006; Elliot, 2007) and this forms one of the central themes in this research.

4.2 What is feedback?

Simply put, feedback can be conceptualised as providing corrective information and simple encouragement and support to students as a consequence of work submitted for evaluation (Hattie and Timperley, 2007) and more formally:

'Feedback is information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way'
(Ramaprasad, 1983: 4).

Ramaprasad is simply pointing out the need to give students the information they need to eliminate the gap in their performance such that they may be able to do better next time. Academic feedback involves tutors giving qualitative judgement and quantitative numbers on the value and nature of submitted work (Sadler, 1989). Sadler (2010) points out that feedback based on qualitative value judgements cannot be converted into a formal set of procedures. When we mark we are simply characterising and inferring the quality of a students' work and are not working with any degree of certainty (Bennett, 2011), except when working on problems where there is a single correct response such as a math problem. Assessment involves making evaluative judgement based on our own internal views of what counts as worthwhile or good (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006). Just as I decided what to research in this thesis and what questions to ask, so I also decide on the assessment for the modules I run. When marking, together with my teaching team, I decide how to interpret what our students write, where specific emphasis should be

directed and valued. Embedded in our decisions is our view on what is worthwhile, what counts as knowledge but often our students do not know what this might be (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006). Yet institutions are trying to create systemised methods for marking and for providing feedback ignoring the evaluative nature of the process. They seek to disguise from students the infallibility of the judgement and marking process as part of their approach to *dealing with* poor NSS results.

During the 1990s, an extensive literature review and meta-analysis by Black and Wiliam (1998) and Hattie et al. (1996) was used to confirm the role and importance of feedback to learn. However, both the giving and receiving of feedback can be ambiguous and the language evasive, leading to misunderstandings and misconceptions. Higgins and Kram (2001) see feedback '*as a unique form of communication*' (p269) and believes we need to understand students' responses to our feedback. It is important to acknowledge the plurality of viewpoints (Kember, 1997) expressed in relation to another's work, be that student or colleague and thus the need to consider the language we use. Yorke (2003) also believes that as well as thinking about what we say (the language) when we give feedback we must also be aware of the psychology of giving and receiving feedback. The assessment on which the feedback was based may be skewed by our individual contexts, i.e. our understanding of the assessment, its purpose, its role for the student, institutional requirements, all of which may change our judgement of students' work (Joughin, 2008). Receiving feedback may momentarily be a unique '*subjective experience*' (Layder, 2006: 3) for each student, but reactions and actions following receipt of feedback will depend on prior social experience and social relations (Layder, 2006) particularly for feedback; one bad feedback experience can colour all future feedback.

There are many different perspectives on feedback (Butler and Winne, 1995; Duncan, 2007; Brown, 2007; Wojtas, 1998), many different approaches to feedback and a wide number of feedback styles in use. There is also ample guidance on how to give *good* feedback (Brookhart, 2008; Boud, 2015). While we know feedback is important for learning (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Price et al., 2010) we also recognise that giving

students' feedback, including feedback on summative assessment, carries a degree of misunderstanding (Young, 2000) appropriate in any one-sided conversation, but also in a situation where one is working with dual objectives, i.e. trying to be both supportive and judgemental at the same time. Students do not understand our intentions or our limitations when we make assessment and feedback judgements (Beatty et al., 2015; Milton et al., 1986; Yorke, 2008; Cao and Nietfeld, 2005). Students then often judge us harshly because they are unhappy and do not agree with our grade or perhaps our feedback.

An examination of feedback is, in part, an examination of learning, learning is not observable, it is not a detached, objective, event occurring outside of the individual (Cohen et al., 2007) and thus it is not immediately obvious when someone is learning. Learning is full of potential phenomena which can, if examined, lead to a better understanding of how learning occurs. Learning is an active process of interpreting, reinterpreting and constructing individual knowledge representations (Jonassen, 1991) within the context of one's lifeworld, one's social world. Assessment is, unfortunately, sitting at the core of students' learning and like feedback is central to students' unhappiness with their university experience.

To fully appreciate the views expressed by the accounting students who informed this research and to be able to ascribe meaning to what they write in their reflective assignments, one must keep in mind exactly who they are and how they experience their daily lifeworld (Lucas, 2000). The students discussed here fall mainly into the 18-22 age bracket and thus are between adolescence and adulthood (Aherne, 2001), living their own life for the first time and slowly loosening the bonds that have tied them to their families (Tinto, 1993 and 2012a). Most find starting university life difficult (Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008). They are often vulnerable, in the process of forming their own identity, their *'adequate self'* (Aherne, 2001: 177) while developing individual personal characteristics which they will need to function with more psychological and financial independence than ever before (Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008). Transition from school to university can, quite often, lead to emotional and even psychological stress (Papier et al.,

2015; Robotham, 2008) but there has not been a great deal of research into stress and its impact on students, particularly those in transition from school to university and from home to living away from home (Robotham and Julian, 2006).

As they go through their first year at university students must learn to respond to a range of '*macro (social, political, economic and cultural) as well as micro (personal, emotional and psychological*' (Bowl et al., 2008: 85) phenomena. These phenomena interact together in a complex and individualised way, where individualised does not mean isolated, rather the impetus for each interaction, each phenomenon, can be the result of stimulus from:

1. any aspect of the external physical and social world and could be a single comment from a peer, a friend, a teacher, a lover, a parent or a change in the surrounding temperature, a change in the surrounding noise level, a passing car, a light flicker, a pencil dropping.

But it might equally be the result of:

2. a reflective personal moment, a feeling of hunger, pain, thirst, longing, anger, knowing, or any other human feeling or emotion or:
3. Exposure to new ideas, concepts, and thus a change in understanding, even a transformation and/or interpretation of events new or old.

This process of stimulus and reaction is described as complex because we cannot explain it away as mechanical, i.e. a logical cause and effect event (Sumara, 2009). Sumara describes complexity as that which occurs in the interactions of the various system which in turn lead to collective actions giving rise to '*actions and traits that are not possible independently*' (Sumara, 2009: 359). He goes on to explain that '*a complex phenomenon dictates how it must be studied*' (p359), offering no generalized approach and thus it resists precise explanation making it appropriate to describe it in terms of what is being examined (Sumara, 2009) as in this project, rather than how it is being examined. It is a description of a living system, one constantly in flux and we must acknowledge '*the situated, positional, relational and participatory nature of learning*' (Bloomer, 2001: 429) if we are to hope to reflect the complexities of learning in a model.

4.2.1 Feedback and Teaching

In a modern university senior management generally determine the structure of the organisation (Watson, 2000) and these structures determine how roles and power are assigned, controlled and managed and determines how information flows between different levels of management. The chosen structure influences the day to day activities of staff including the overall role of management, the curriculum, how goals are set and communicated and the interaction between quality regulations. Additionally, semester lengths, the annual calendar, the timetable and even the number of students in each class can be pre-determined. Sometimes these arrangements work very well and at other times they fail us. Teaching is risky, but we ignore this when we discuss pedagogy, new assessment methods, changes in the rules and regulations governing how and what we do and when we do it. The management literature would suggest that this is a dynamic complexity problem which changes over time (Devaney, 1992). As we teach we are constantly in receipt of feedback and this is impacting what we are doing, we are in a loop and to some degree do not fully control what will happen, but the system will self-organise towards a state, not so much equilibrium, but to a new state of *'adaptive tension'* (Lichtenstein et al., 2007: 236). This is both the excitement of teaching and the fear for many of us - that it will all go wrong.

Education is an activity designed to promote learning (Fenwick et al., 2011) and I am simply a bit-player in the production; there are many props in the form of books, the classroom, the library, general IT resources, sources and the space students occupy at different times. I am not the only actor in this play. As well as the individual student there are other students, friends, family, other teachers, social interactions generally and social interactions specifically with and within the classroom, there are virtual spaces and internal spaces all enacting (Fenwick et al., 2011) together, a collection of material

entanglements (Fenwick et al., 2011). This complex environment fits well with the theories developed to explore and explain complex responsive processes and systems.

4.2.2 Complexity Theory

At the start of this submission, I pointed out that for me teaching is a performance but a performance in a complex and often difficult environment. A dynamic complex problem occurs during a period of '*heightened uncertainty*' when one's balance between doing and thinking is disrupted (Moore and Koning, 2016: 28) and this can happen in the classroom. We then must *think on our feet*, act and change what we do, and the process begins again and may need further modification, if not now then the next time we are in the classroom. New teachers find this constant need to adapt stressful, but over time we become better at adapting as our pedagogic skills grow. Even as we are responding to our environment it must be remembered that we are a small part of the whole. The students are also part of the scenario and they bring their own complex identity with them.

It is impossible to fully understand educational issues in isolation. I cannot simply examine my teaching or examine students' relationship with feedback, these are all intertwined with how any of us might feel on a given day. What we do and how we receive or give feedback is simply a small part of our ongoing lives (Bateson, 1989). Feedback for the student, however, is much more. It influences the wellbeing of each student, an unpredictable effect (Warren et al., 1998) that can vary significantly between students, and is always different for each individual student. Students' reactions to feedback are linked to multiple, unobserved, invisible, contexts. These contexts are their biography, their history and their prior learning experiences (Moore and Koning, 2016), but also their identity which is constantly under construction (Ybema et al., 2009) and their expectations of their university experience (Kandiko, 2013).

Complexity theory is an approach to explaining change, evolution and adaption which emanates from the biological sciences (Bertalanffy, 1969) and the need for our species to evolve, adapt or die. Survival is often seen as the result of a combination of cooperation and competition. While traditional science tried to make the world

intelligible and linear, systems theory recognises the complexity and interrelationships that exist (Von Bertalanffy, 1969). Systems theory seeks to understand events which lead to change, but which cannot be explained by a simple linear cause and effect model (Warren et al., 1998). In this respect examining students' relationship with feedback is impossible without also examining their relationships with those that give the feedback, the nature of that feedback, their own history and culture, i.e. taking a holistic look at the whole process. Systems theory, up to a point facilitates examination of the transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary nature of a range of events which interplay with each other and if we accept the concept of intelligent systems we can add to this list the mental processes (conscious and unconscious) of the student.

Systems theory was designed to explain '*problems of interrelations of a great number of variables*' (Von Bertalanffy, 1969: xx) and can bring together variables and concepts from philosophy, sociology, economics, psychology, cognitive and psychological theories and even biology. This can then become an integrated framework of methods and ideas where events that have been ignored in the past can now be considered and examined as some of the basic elements that explain observed aspects of student behaviour, such as ignoring feedback (Jacobson and Wilensky, 2006). By bridging different concepts, a clearer picture of the interplay between a vast array of human characteristics such as identity, emotion, cultural capital, motivation, agency and the role of the brain can emerge resulting in a more interdisciplinary explanation of the factors which affect assessment and feedback.

Using complexity, we can examine the many phenomena or variables described so far, while also including additional variables such as feelings and actions, i.e. one's mood, one's biological reactions; creating a more holistic picture of events. For this purpose, one must see complexity theory as '*a descriptive or reflective theory*' (Morrison, 2005: 7) which enables us to identify the relations within and across the interconnected network of phenomena that form the educational experience of learning (Morrison, 2005). This approach allows one to examine both closed and open systems where a closed system is a machine or in my terminology a classroom, a learning space or a computer, with an open

system being akin to this research revolving around students and the other people and events involved in their learning. The closed system is constrained and difficult to change while the open system is constantly evolving. Within complexity theory, these two co-evolve with their overall environment so that one cannot describe learning, assessment or feedback out of context with the whole. Using this methodology, it is possible to see how the design of this research is something occurring outside the system with the researcher both the outsider looking in, and one of the variables of the system. In this way, an explanation emerges rather than being something which is imposed. This is an organic approach to research rather than a linear one. Rittel and Webber's (1973) wicked problems are so complex it is impossible to model them because you cannot include all of the variables and necessary information to create a predictive model of human struggles and conflicts, they simply would not work (Norton, 2012).

Stacey describing social relations or *'human relating'* as *'the simultaneously cooperative-consensual and conflictual-competitive relating between people'* (Stacey and Griffin, 2005: 3) captured the essence of the complex nature of feedback. Stacy's theory of human interaction, or *'complex responsive processes'* (Stacey, 2003: 4) demonstrate that:

'Essentially, the individual is understood to be social to the core because the processes of mind are the same as social processes. Both are processes of communicative interacting and power relating between human bodies in which individual minds form and are formed by social relations at the same time, Individual mind is the actions of a body directed toward itself while social is the actions of bodies directed toward each other in paradoxical processes of continuity and potential transformation at the same time. This is, therefore, an action theory that makes no appeal to notions of inside and outside. Mind is not regarded as an internal world inside a person and social is not regarded as a system, field, matrix, or third, outside a person. The theory of complex responsive processes, therefore, is a theory of experience understood as direct interaction between bodies. In their interaction bodies do not create any system above them and they are not driven by any system, such as 'the unconscious', acting as a causal power beneath or behind their interaction. Instead, interaction is understood to construct further interaction in processes that pattern themselves. The patterns that emerge in these self-organizing processes are patterns of collective and individual identity at the same time' (Stacey, 2003: 17).

Complexity theory provides the foundation for a model which can be used to demonstrate the difficulties associated with trying to fix the *feedback problem* by focusing on the dynamics of interacting systems and recognising the de-centered, multi-factored causes of events (Haggis, 2007). It is also described by Byrne (2005) as *'the interdisciplinary understanding of reality as composed of complex open systems with emergent properties and transformational potential'* (Byrne, 2005: 97). This approach overcomes the problems associated with the traditional science-based argument which sees the purpose of research as the discovery of universal laws. Using complexity, we work on the assumption that *'knowledge must be contextual'* (Haggis 2007; Byrne 2005) and this offers a different approach to explaining the intersection of multiple complex social events, both human and material. It

'highlights the elaborate intertwining of human/non-human elements, and the non-linear simultaneous dynamics and conditions which produce emergence. The system in complexity theory is an effect produced through self-organization and is continuously adaptive' (Fenwick et al., 2011)

absorbing, evolving and adapting. Complexity does not rely on behaviourist reductionist approaches to educational research, it does not claim linear predictability, instead, it can be used as a way to model phenomena such that it becomes easier to see and understand their interconnectedness and intersectionality as they change and emerge (Walby, 2007). Each organism responds to its environment and in the process changes and influences other organisms and impacts the outcomes of later events (Urry, 2005). Bertalanffy (1968) pointed out that:

'it is necessary to study not only parts and processes in isolation, but also to solve the decisive problems found in the organization and order unifying them, resulting from dynamic interactions of parts, and making the behaviour of parts different when studied in isolation or within the whole' (Bertalanffy, 1969: 31)

Bertalanffy compared this observation in biology to similar phenomena in other disciplines including the social sciences and went on to discuss living organisms as open

systems and as *'complexes of elements standing in interaction'* (Bertalanffy, 1969: 33) and in this research people are seen as open systems interacting with and being impacted on by their environment. The point here is that while we can study one aspect of what is happening during learning or during a feedback moment we cannot ignore the dynamic interaction between the individual parts. These individual parts are self-organising phenomena and are not related to each other in a proportional way (Stacey, 2012) and there can be more than one cause for a given effect and more than one effect for a given cause, making much of what has been tested in educational research somewhat incomplete as it ignores the integrative nature of the many phenomena at work (Glenn, 1999). Ignoring for instance the idea of intersectionality whereby complex issues such as race, gender and class are intertwined - each acting on the other but in a nonadditive way (McCall, 2005). The fact that events are self-organising does not imply a free for all, instead, everyone, over time, determines their own approach to organising their lived experiences and their internal representation. Our emotional responses to events which are almost always the overarching control mechanism available to us recognise the interdependence of events and in most instances, act to control our actions, except perhaps for sociopaths.

4.2.3 Feedback and Emotion

'there is little we do with our bodies that we can think apart from feeling'

(Davidson and Milligan, 2004: 523)

In chapter 1, emotion was explained using a quotation from Burkitt (2014) as *'patterns of relationships between self and others, and between self and world'* (Burkitt, 2014: 2) The university and each classroom are theatres of emotion where patterns of relationships exist. We all experience emotion (Adolphs, 2002) every moment of every day. For the new student, it is a mix of fear, curiosity, interest, pride, anger, anxiety, shame, love, confusion, hate and many, many more feelings (Pekrun and Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2014). The role of emotion is central to who we are (Ellis and Tucker, 2015) and how we react to

given situations (Falchikov and Boud, 2007), to education and generally to life's stresses (Hinton et al., 2008).

Academics are often unaware of the impact that grades and feedback have on students' feelings of self-worth (Young, 2000; Aherne, 2001), on their identity (Crooks, 1988a), their emotions (Falchikov and Boud, 2007; Shute, 2008) and their motivation (Dweck, 1988). Emotion is a complex process which cannot be easily identified or mapped (Aranguren, 2015). It is a set of differing feelings and bodily sensations organised in part from our cultural and historical backgrounds but also the complexities of our individual history (Burkitt, 2014). Emotion is communicated through our expressions, tone of voice and the intensity of our reactions, in effect through non-verbal manifestations (Siegel, 2012). Recognising and understanding the role and effect of feedback on students' emotions is necessary for all of those involved because students will seek to hide these emotions from most of their tutors: just because we do not see it, does not mean it is not having an impact.

If students see grades and feedback impacting their self-worth and their identity, then their perception of their self-worth may change with the grades they achieve (Crocker et al., 2003). Students, because of their fear of judgement will often insulate themselves through '*wilful blindness*' (Heffernan, 2011: 1) and choose to simply avoid a situation where there is potential for embarrassment (Goffman, 2003) hence we have silence in tutorials. Some students will use silence or even a decision to avoid attending some classes as a way of maintaining a '*kind of ritual equilibrium*' (Goffman, 2003: 13) and saving-face. This, in turn, may affect their sense of being a student and of belonging to the institution. Over time poor performance and its associated critical feedback can manifest as poor psychological well-being leading to depression, and increased anxiety (Cassady, 2004; Putwain, 2007; Aherne, 2001). Passing judgement by giving a grade based on a student's piece of work, imprints an '*indelible mark*' (Edwards, 2000: 201), a label, on the student which will be viewed by others in the future, often others with real power over the progress of that students' future life. Thus a grade, as a label, becomes an identifier, a part of one's self, one's identity (Edwards, 2000).

Students believe that feedback is not given quickly enough while we the teachers complain about the need for its fast turnaround (Yorke, 2008). In our Business School we work in 12 or 13-week cycles where the first assignment is usually in week 6, 7 or 8, and thus feedback is often far too late to be useful for improving work in the same module, even assuming it is relevant, succinct, and to the point (Higgins et al., 1999; Yorke, 2001). Hounsell (2007) sees late feedback as a source of disenchantment when coupled with unconstructive and uninformative feedback, leading to a general lack of faith in the process. Staff, producing feedback for large cohorts of students and then finding that it has not been read or used can be disenchanted with the process. This can lead to the dismissal of the role and importance of feedback to the student (Crisp, 2007), rather than staff examining their own practice (Crisp, 2007). Staff can end up *blaming the students* for feedback failure while students blame their lecturers (Carless, 2006). This clearly has the makings of a complex problem and then add to this the range of disciplines, the variety of approaches to feedback, the diversity of students and diversity of staff and this complex problem grows.

The sheer complexity of the feedback problem makes it difficult to solve because there is no obvious place to begin. Is it with the assessment, the marking, the language or the timing? There is no clear answer as the issues are all different but related to the problems of feedback. Academics and researchers try to solve a single issue relating to feedback but as one aspect is addressed it can create a very different problem elsewhere (Carless, 2006; Hounsell, 2008). By shortening the turnaround time for feedback it is possible that less useful feedback is provided. By asking or encouraging academics to use university-wide assessment criteria, a tick box mentality is encouraged (Carless et al., 2011). This approach speeds up feedback but reduces its specificity and may therefore not reduce student dissatisfaction or may even exacerbate it.

4.2.4 Policy, Practice and Discourse on Feedback

Historically the tutorial system of teaching was the model used in old universities able to work on a one-to-one or one-to-two approach to students' (Horn, 2013), providing regular, individual, formative feedback. In some disciplines exams are limited and students wait more than a year before receiving formal summative grades. For post-92 institutions immersed in massification and cost cutting, there is limited time, and the best we can offer is written or oral feedback which may be formative or summative and occasionally a little of both. Summative assessment, also referred to as *the hidden curriculum* (Snyder, 1971) forms most students driving guide and thus dictates what the value.

Much of what happens with feedback is invisible, we give feedback and then in the process of moderation are expected to ensure consistency. As evidence of our consistency and our adherence to standards, a small sample of our feedback may be reviewed. It is however basically a private transaction between student and tutor (Hounsell, 2008). Feedback was initially highlighted as problematic by the QAA. Early QAA Academic Reviews involved both Academic Audit and Subject Review and identified issues relating to the timing, quality and quantity of academic feedback. In addition, issues relating to assessment were highlighted and these are still considered issues today, as evidenced by the NSS (NSS, 2006-2017). Were students always unhappy with feedback? Institutions have undergone significant change in their systems and processes since the introduction of the QAA, but these changes have either not been enough to satisfy the needs of students or perhaps more realistically reflect our failure to understand fully, the nature of the problems associated with feedback and assessment.

For some considerable time, but particularly since the adoption of the NSS, student feedback has been seen as a major problem for institutions wanting to ensure strong NSS ratings and good external rankings (Little et al., 2013). To fully comprehend the role of feedback as a policy issue it is necessary to examine the practice and discourse surrounding student feedback in higher education today, with specific emphasis in the

area of accounting and finance, while considering some of the interwoven dimensions of the students' social world (Layder, 1993). Inferring meaning and understanding in the life of a young person can be quite puzzling and thus increases my responsibility when using and interpreting students' reflections because evidence would suggest that educational transactions are not easily open to interpretation or explanation (Pring, 2000).

Institutions repeatedly develop and then re-develop rules and regulations designed to close the assessment and feedback loop. These rules and regulations tell us how, when, and where feedback is provided, attempting to overcome the reputational threat NSS scores are causing. In my view each university's management team attempt to deflect, perhaps obfuscate, but almost always rationalise poor NSS performance as if it were a problem for just their institution when in fact poor NSS scores for feedback and assessment are a national problem. The scale of the problem is evidenced by the fact that question 7 and 9, both relating to feedback have the lowest scores across the 30 questions which form the NSS, with question 24 which relates to the student union being the only other question with a score below 70 percent. After 10 years of similar NSS findings in relation to assessment and feedback we must accept that the evidence of students' dissatisfaction is robust and as such provides evidence of real cause for concern over feedback making this both a political and managerial issue.

Attempts to solve the *feedback or assessment problem* have been unsuccessful and lead to the same problem being '*re-solved, over and over again*' (Rittel, 1973: 160). Feedback is thus a *wicked problem*, not ready to be tamed (Roberts, 2000, Rittel, 1973), where *wicked* means it is almost impossible to solve because the conditions in which it is set are complex, misunderstood or unknown and constantly in flux, changing and resisting resolution. Feedback is a wicked problem (Knight and Page, 2007) because those involved in the dialogue surrounding feedback disagree with the nature of the problem (Molloy and Boud, 2013) and even with how to formulate the core, or real nature, of the problem (Sadowski et al., 2013). Many of those involved in explaining or examining feedback have competing concepts on how to solve the problem, have different concepts about the nature of the problem, see solutions as the responsibility of teachers alone and generally

refuse to recognise the complexity and reach of the problems (Boud and Molloy, 2013) associated with feedback. Management in their need to demonstrate accountability seek quick solutions to these complex problems, so we get temporary, quick *'band aid'* (Boud and Molloy, 2013: 3) fixes that push the problem forward to the next NSS or next benchmarking session and in the process the nature of the problem can have changed.

Knowing that a problem exists with feedback and being able to identify an acceptable solution can be difficult (Boud, 2007). The visibility of a feedback problem mirrors growth in student numbers and reductions in the unit of resource because of massification which began in the late 1980s (Hounsell, 2008). Carless (2011) considers constant tinkering with feedback as pointless and instead seeks a *'fundamental reconceptualization of the feedback process'* (Carless et al., 2011: 395). The real problem or issue may lie in the boundary, that boundary which links feedback to grades and grades to assessment, creating a problem which is the result of *'the complex workings of open societal systems'* (Rittel, 1973: 160) which are very difficult to control because they are so difficult to define and identify and occur in continuously changing contexts. This is a wicked problem, and our problem solving abilities are not up to the task because we face a *'plurality of objectives'* (Rittel, 1973: 160), satisfying students' need to learn, to receive and use feedback, to appreciate, respect and perhaps even like and use their feedback, to be happy with their grades or at a minimum to receive grades which meet their expectations. At the same time, satisfying management's need for results which will enhance results against benchmarks and maintaining our real or imagined professional and disciplinary responsibility to graduate students' ready to join the profession. We are drowning amid multiple objectives as we deal with wicked problems in an open, unbounded, social system. We seem coerced by our own insecurities from examining in detail the nature of our own feedback and fail to make full use of our colleagues and the collegiality of education to question feedback and learn from each other.

4.3 Assessment

There do not seem to be any well '*articulated theories of assessment*' (Delandshere, 2001: 113) which we can rely on when we begin to discuss the problem with assessment. Without some foundation on which to develop assessment it can end up being variations on a theme over time (Delandshere, 2001) simply being reproduced, having changed little in 150 years. At the same time, we know that assessment plays a very influential role in what students learn (Snyder, 1971; Miller, 1974). We design our assessment instruments based on our own experiences, often subjecting our students to our own cultures and norms (Sosnoski, 1993). We set assessment tasks which students often do not understand, or the tasks are too difficult or even obscure. Our default mind-set programmes us to act in specific ways and this mind-set is based on our own prior experience and these past experiences impact the present (Hart et al., 2009; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996) and can lead us to ignore our students and their past experiences. This is often a reflection of our inability to adapt such that we categorise, label, and stereotype people and events to reduce the need for using up our limited attention span, our memory and physical stamina (Kashdan 2010). To some degree this may result in us treating all students the same.

From the student perspective, feedback only arises after completion of some form of assessed work, thus to receive feedback one must first be assessed. When I began to read students' reflections I recognised the need to examine more thoroughly the emotional impact of assessment and feedback, to seek out the student voice, looking for the emic point of view (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). The Assessment Reform Group (2002) found that students' current feelings about feedback and assessment are based on their earlier experiences and that as they mature their overall resentment, their feelings of unfairness and a general mistrust of testing grows. These feelings of unfairness and mistrust are evident in the NUS Benchmark (2015) and thus are part of what it is we need to attend to if we are to improve our NSS scores.

Academics are often unaware, or have no understanding, of their students' *emotional state* at the time that they complete an assessment and later when they receive a grade

and feedback. At this time students' emotional state may influence their decision on whether to read their feedback. Assessment is often understood as a technical act designed to assess, evaluate and estimate the quality of students' learning (Falchikov and Boud, 2007; Joughin, 2008) as if it were a one-sided activity, *'a cool and rational process'* (Falchikov and Boud, 2007: 144) undertaken by the student and having nothing to do with the assessment instrument, the assessor, the institution or its rules.

In the case of professionally linked subjects such as accounting, additional rules and regulations linked to the profession may also exist. It is not always possible, using an assessment instrument, *'to penetrate the private world of someone coming to an understanding of an idea'* (Laurillard, 1993: 41). As teachers and assessors, we rarely ever discuss or consider the emotive nature of assessment (Falchikov and Boud, 2007). Yet we also receive feedback when students complete a questionnaire rating our teaching, learning and assessment and we are ranked against our colleagues. Students' feedback on staff mirrors some of those areas covered in the NSS. I believe that most tutors care deeply about the scores gained and have an emotional response to both good and bad scores, I know I do. If we care about what we do, then we have an emotional response. In acknowledging this we should begin to consider how students' feel.

In many disciplines including accounting, we rely on assessment, some of it in traditional exam form, to secure professional accreditation (Knight et al., 2014) of our courses and give added value to our students. Assessment is a proxy for knowledge measurement that often requires the reproduction of what has been taught, rather than what has been learned and thus assessments can fail to assess or measure any wider educational objectives, being in effect assessment of learning (Gipps, 1994; Reimann and Sadler, 2017). A great deal of assessed work is not measured within any recognisable concept or theory of measurement but is instead judged on some invisible concept of achievement, but according to Knight (2007) achievement is not epistemologically measurable. There is also evidence of the negative effect of assessment or any form of testing on the quality of teaching (Black and Wiliam, 1998c; Flodén, 2016) and of course testing drives and directs students' learning through the hidden curriculum (Snyder, 1971; Sambell and

McDowell, 1998) because students learn to work towards the assessment and not on the basis of the overall curriculum. Yet in spite of this, much of the growing body of assessment research has concentrated on how best to effectively measure students' performance (Broadfoot, 1996), or alternatively on evaluating the reliability and validity of testing methods (Gipps, 1994; Haertel, 1999) such that we appear to be operating an instrumental system (Torrance, 2007) while ignoring the real spirit of assessment (Reimann and Sadler, 2017). Students know in advance the exact content of some of their assessment - that which requires them to complete coursework and they seek *cues* (Donovan, 2014; Conway, 2015; Crooks, 1988b) in every word spoken by tutors and in their tone of voice as they try to decipher emphasis, and often do not hear what is actually said. Boud (1995) believes that this is, at least in part, our fault as *'The message is always interpreted in context and the cues which the context provides offer as much or more clues to students than the intentions of staff, which are rarely explicit'* (Boud, 1995: 2). Criteria-referenced assessments using clearly specified learning outcomes are what we use, but *'attempts to capture the complex achievements in the language of objectives simplify and distort them'* (Knight, 2007: 78) and thus still leaves us and our students struggling. Students' completed assessment, their work, must be *marked* irrespective of the clarity of the assessment instrument or the clarity of the outcomes specified because without that grade it would not be possible to rank and certify students.

4.3.1 Problems with Assessment

The *feedback for learning* narrative articulated in the Black & Wiliam publication "*Assessment and Classroom Learning*" (1998a) has influenced and changed conceptions of the purpose of feedback across the UK educational terrain. The Black & Wiliam pamphlet, "*Inside the Black Box, raising standards through classroom assessment*" (Black and Wiliam, 1998b) was sent to every school in England. This pamphlet, together with its authors and its commissioners, has had a major influence on assessment and feedback policy in the UK particularly in schools. Its adoption and use in some schools may have influenced how some students now perceive feedback and thus shapes their expectations when they arrive at university. A student's habitus is deeply ingrained because of beliefs,

habits and life experiences. Our actions and even our thoughts can be shaped by routine and by habit, uninformed by reflection and therefore not necessarily based on rational thinking reflecting Bourdieu's habitus (Susen and Turner, 2011). Changing ingrained beliefs involves a conscious response when many of our responses are dependent on unconscious awareness leading to reaction (Susen and Turner, 2011). In effect, students are a product of their earlier life experiences and earlier schooling which becomes a form of conditioning (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) and:

'Because the habitus is an endless capacity to engender products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production' (Bourdieu, 2005: 191).

The use of semesters and short modules means that the timing of academic feedback in relation to the next round of assessment is a crucial and almost immovable issue given the academic calendar. The 12/13-week semesters, used in many institutions, are not conducive to assessment for learning. I see no evidence that *assessment for learning*, was or even could be, used or practised effectively in higher education. Feedback usually occurs after an assessment has been completed and graded and thus can only be applied in later assessment work. Much of the feedback provided on mid-semester coursework arrives at the end of the semester, just as students are sitting exams, or completing their final assignments. Feedback is almost always summative with mid-semester feedback hopefully serving a dual purpose of being formative as well as summative. But feedback at the end of a semester could only be used in the following semester and thus on a different module in a different context. It is clear, that from a student perspective, feedback is still not being used as an effective and efficient part of our pedagogies. Students may value feedback but only if it can improve their chance of success (Hemingway, 2011).

4.4 The Impact of the NSS

The NSS, which is in effect a measurement and benchmarking tool designed to facilitate systematic comparisons (Cheng and Marsh, 2010) across the sector and across disciplines, is believed to give students a voice in the form of an opportunity, in their final year of studies, to rate their experience across a range of categories. The metrics produced from the NSS is designed to inform future potential students as they decide on where to apply to study. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Policy Guide on the NSS claim that:

'The purpose of this is to contribute to public accountability, help inform the choices of prospective students and provide data that assists institutions in enhancing the student experience' <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/nss/>

The NSS has led to more focused research into student satisfaction (Thomas, 2012; Neves et al., 2016; Rhodes and Nevill, 2004).

Institutions have sought quick fixes to NSS scores by insisting we give more feedback (Molloy and Boud, 2013) as if more feedback could compensate for poor feedback or inappropriate feedback which could be the basis of students' dissatisfaction. Institutions suggest that we need more consistency in feedback while the National Union of Students (NUS) wants consistency in marking and their benchmark uses the following words for their concept of outstanding practice listed as part of Principle No 6:

'Marking is consistent across every student's programme of study. Use of the full range of marks is regularly reviewed, including students in the process, and support is provided for staff to ensure it happens' (NUS, 2016)

This statement may, however simply reflect the differences that exist between academic discipline. In maths and accounting and other disciplines where numbers play a major part, a student can be awarded 100 percent or a very low mark for calculations and work linked to calculations. However, there is also an important point in the quotation

above. Many of us are reluctant to award very high marks when we apply our judgement to a given assessment.

Institutions and academics are ignoring the need to identify the meaning ascribed by students to their experience of feedback or the emotional journey across three years that takes them to the point where they complete the NSS. But to be able to understand or explain students' approach to feedback we must consider their total, holistic, experience and their state of mind. Additionally, however good or bad feedback is, it provides no useful information if the student fails to use it and understanding why this happens could be key to improving feedback.

I believe that one of the issues with the NSS is its timing which may have a major impact on the value of the results. If we accept that emotions play a significant part in the student experience of higher education (Mann, 2001; Vince, 2016) then while final year students are completing their NSS, they are also waiting for grades and feedback that will play a part in determining their degree classification. This is a period of intense emotion for students (Pekrun et al., 2011). Receiving grades and feedback from their final years first semester's work may have disappointed them and will surely distract and perhaps demotivate them during their crucial last semester of undergraduate study. "*Achievement emotions*" (Pekrun, 2006: 316) are a constant part of being a student such that at the time that they are completing the NSS it is assessment grades which concern students as they worry and stress about their final degree classification. This worry and stress must surely impact how they respond to the NSS questionnaire.

4.5 The Emotional Experience of Adolescence

'Modern biology reveals humans to be fundamentally emotional and social creatures. And yet those of us in the field of education often fail to consider that the high-level cognitive skills taught in schools, including reasoning, decision making, and processes related to language, reading, and mathematics, do not function as rational, disembodied systems, somehow influenced by but detached from emotion and the body. Instead, these crowning evolutionary achievements are grounded in a long history of emotional functions, themselves deeply

grounded in humble homeostatic beginnings' (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007: 3).

Being 18 or 19 or 20 is a very emotional time in one's life (Siegel, 2012) and while choosing to go to university involves students making a purposeful decision to continue to build on their knowledge, it also involves taking a very expensive and risky step into the unknown (Barnett, 2007). This unknown is an educational setting *'replete with affective experiences, anxiety and fun, frustration and fulfilment, disappointment and pride'* (Fiedler, 2014: 36), adding again to the building or creation of wicked problems. At all times students, as young adolescents, are in a complex emotional state as they deal with new regulations, conflicting demands, new experiences, new friends, new ways of learning, new forms of assessment and the need for a whole new armoury of skills to survive. Learning is complex, and the classroom is an emotional tinder box, combined learning and emotion have the makings of an explosive situation (Baxter Magolda, 2009).

Ignoring emotions is ignoring something with a substantial impact on our daily behaviours. Emotion, together with cognition and motivation, is now recognised as one of the three central factors impacting upon human mental operations (Trigwell, 2012). Affect has been used to describe and encompass a range of experiences including feelings, emotions, valence, affective states and moods (Boekaerts, 2007). To fully comprehend the role of emotion we need to consider modern brain function research and what this tells us about our young adolescent students.

4.5.1 Emotion and the Brain

Students are emotional human beings and as Broadfoot (2000) so aptly pointed out 18 years ago:

‘Despite the increasingly powerful messages from neuroscience about how the brain works, and the centrality of the whole person—feelings and dispositions as well as intellect—to the business of learning, these messages have yet to impact significantly on either educational policy-making or practice’ (Broadfoot, 2000: 366).

however, the research inquiry into the link between emotion and education has been relatively silent (Pekrun, 2014). Yet for three or four years, students spend hours in classrooms, studying alone, working with peers, building social relationships with other students and with their tutors all because of a belief that by doing so they will enhance their future wellbeing (Pekrun and Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2014). A significant volume of research in the US has concentrated on specific individual cognitive traits such as motivation, self-regulation, personality and agency but without making any strong, or specific, link in those areas to emotion. Fear or anxiety, in relation to tests, has been examined in detail (Smith, 1987; Pekrun et al., 2002) but this is but a limited aspect of the emotional spectrum students experience. There is however, a clear indication in current research that attention is being paid to emotion (Bolton, 2000; Fontanari et al., 2012; Hinton et al., 2008), particularly since technological advancements in brain imaging (Yano, 2013; Christoff, 2008) provides clear evidence that we have an emotional reaction, evidenced by brain movement, to every external stimulus we encounter. How we interpret our world is individually determined, and that determination must be based to a great degree on who we are culturally, economically and socially i.e. on our prior experiences of life (Siegel, 2012).

An OECD (2007) publication points out that neuroscientists now believe that progress in brain research and neuroimaging advances are opening up new avenues of educational enquiry (OECD, 2007) and has already demonstrated *‘its relevance to education research, policy and practice’* (Hinton et al., 2008: 87). We know that the brain is the core of our emotional being and that it plays a very important part in adolescence development (Siegel, 2014). The OECD (2007: 1) report confirms that:

Neuroimaging of adolescents now shows us that the adolescent brain is far from mature and undergoes extensive structural changes well past puberty. Adolescence is an extremely important period in terms of emotional development partly due to a surge of hormones in the brain; the still under-developed pre-frontal cortex among teenagers may be one explanation for their unstable behaviour. We have captured this combination of emotional immaturity and high cognitive potential in the phrase 'high horsepower, poor steering'

Going to university is a big step for the average 18-19-year-old and can be very emotional and stressful for students (Byrne and Flood, 2005). It occurs at a time in life when hormones are closest to the surface, and when most young people are vulnerable.

Stress appears to be on the increase (Robotham, 2008; Robotham and Julian, 2006) and stress is understood to be the result of an individual's perception that they do not have the resources to cope (Robotham and Julian, 2006), they are not fully prepared for the task ahead (Byrne and Flood, 2005) and when they arrive at university and we make settling in difficult, their experiences may confirm their beliefs and aggravate their stress levels. Some 18-year-olds are simply not ready to live by themselves and they get lonely, they are unable to order and structure their own lives, they do not have the emotional intelligence or the discipline to do what is best for them. Yet here they are in a strange institution facing a new *grown-up* experience and in need of support and our commitment to their success (Tinto and Pusser, 2006; Tinto, 2012a). Very soon after arrival students' face their first assessments, often within the first 5 or 6 weeks, and these can play a major role in heightening students' feelings of stress and anxiety (Zeidner, 2007; Zeidner, 2014). Our emotional brain sits at the centre of the physical mass that is the brain and its neural facilities control the regulation of our emotions (OECD, 2007). This control is effective most of the time but in times of stress, fear and sometimes anger our judgement can be compromised and learning are disrupted. Appreciating the impact of stress must be a priority.

The OECD (2007) brain research report has refocused attention on the relationship between physical wellbeing and intellectual wellbeing of the individual. Important factors in brain development and thus in learning, are the simple human necessities bound up in *'the quality of social environment, and interactions; nutrition physical exercise; and sleep'* (OECD, 2007: 14), so obvious we all overlook them. This research also highlights the existence of a formal link between emotion and cognition, between how we feel and how well we learn.

4.6 Emotion in Feedback, Assessment and Learning

Feedback often leads to tears (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Handley et al., 2008) and I, like most academics, have boxes of tissues waiting for students who come to question their grades and their feedback. Stenberg (2011: 350) writes that emotion is now generally accepted as a *'dominant cultural category'* that impacts on our experience of the world and shapes the way we experience ourselves. The process of learning involves a wide range of individual emotions, but historically this is a taboo subject. Emotion has not been a popular subject for scientific research, yet James Hillman (1997) 20 years ago suggested that emotion was the source of our human energy.

Before receiving feedback, students will have worked on coursework, perhaps examinations or in-class tests, been part of a debate, made a presentation alone or as part of a group. Submitting assessment or preparing for exams involves hard work. Once completed students hope for good grades, perhaps some praise and appreciation. Their first feedback is momentous. But as a tutor, we will not even be aware if our feedback is their first feedback. We will never know how important it is. The social, emotional and psychological state of each student is different. Many researchers assume that emotion and cognition are related or even integrated (Graesser, 2014). The volume of research linking learning with emotion (Brockbank and McGill, 2007; Falchikov and Boud, 2007; Schutz and Pekrun, 2007; Stenberg, 2011) has recently grown substantially and this research enables a better understanding of learning.

Evidence of growing stress, depression and general illness is evident across the higher education sector with UNICEF (2017) reporting that British youngsters have the lowest levels of emotional wellbeing amongst the world's wealthiest nations. Brown (2016) in a HEPI report highlights the degree of stress and mental health issues which occur in the lives of students. This does suggest that we all need to appreciate and understand the human nature of learning, assessment and feedback and the role that these play, in and on emotion (Dumont, 2010). Neale (2016) reporting on a Unite Student survey of approximately 6500 students, found that 12 percent report they suffer from a mental illness, such as depression, schizophrenia or an anxiety disorder, while 32 percent reported that during the previous four weeks they had '*always*' or '*often*' felt depressed.

Feedback can affect self-esteem, student identity and students' emotional state, with consequence for their learning (Abouserie, 1995). Those feeling depressed may react to feedback in a way that is different from a student feeling well and happy. Poor feedback, for any student, can result in emotional turmoil from which they recover but for a depressed student the impact can be far more severe and last longer. The possible emotional reaction to feedback can begin as soon as work is submitted, as some begin to imagine how poor their grades and their feedback might be. When a student fails to read or even pick up her feedback, this can be due to fear rather than negligence; fear because of prior outcome related failures (Pekrun, 2006) which in turn can induce shame. Each student's perception of failure, or shame, is different but these can influence students thinking and emotions and determine how they behave when they next receive feedback (Turner, 2007).

We know we have a problem with feedback and assessment and must talk and then listen to our students. Institutions are trying to do this, but they do it from an institutional perspective and not from a student, academic, disciplinary or subject perspective (Yorke, 2003; Swarat et al., 2017). The evidence that we need to do this is shouting at us, so why are we not listening?

Accounting students are in a particularly good position in relation to some forms of feedback. Much of their learning involves learning specific and very particular skills in the presentation and evaluation of numbers in response to a series of problems. For feedback one simply presents them with solutions that demonstrate the correct answers and how these were calculated. Students are then encouraged to go back and identify where they went wrong before the next test. Tests of this nature can be regular, often marked electronically almost instantly. Additionally, more complex problems of the type used in exams can be provided with detailed worked solutions after the exams and worked solutions to prior year's exams as a means of revision or feedback where the problems were given in advance for practice. These students, like many others, get regular feedback in a range of different ways and like others appear to remain dissatisfied.

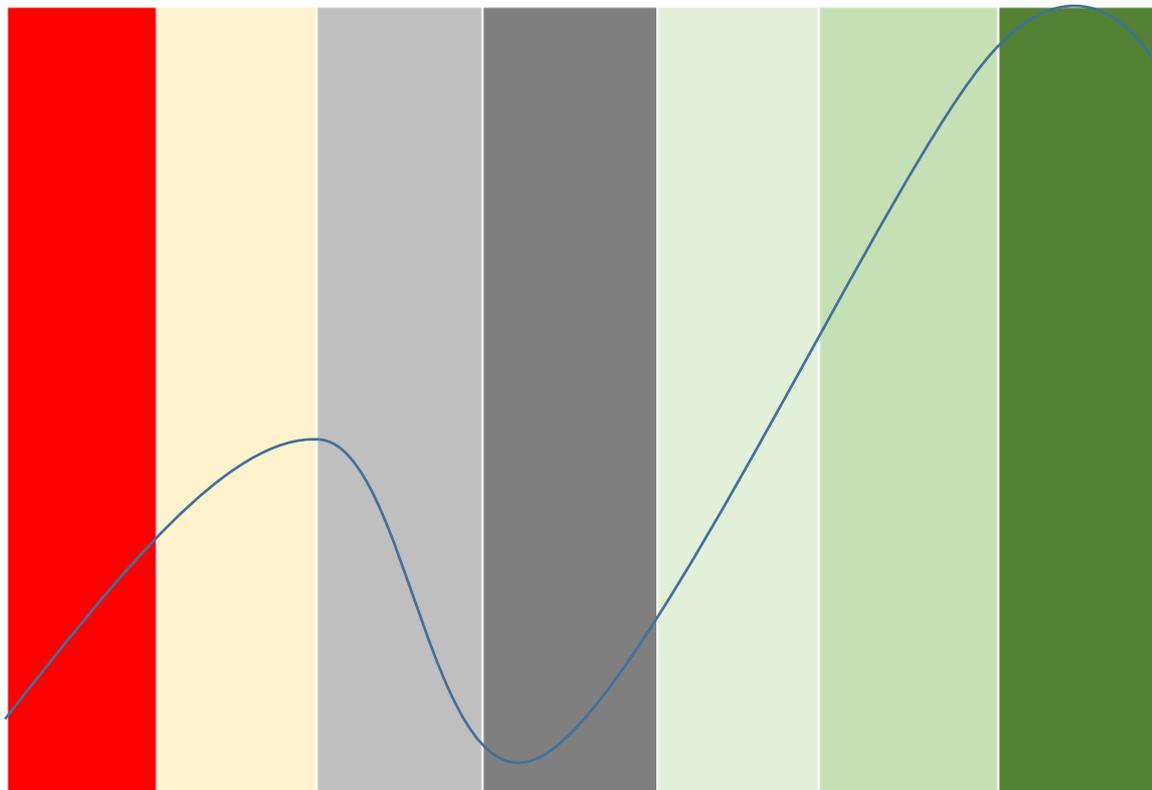
4.6.1 The Student Feedback Emotional Curve

The Kubler-Ross Change Curve¹² created in the 1960s is used here to demonstrate the various levels of emotion that students experience when they anticipate and receive feedback. This feedback emotional curve demonstrates the highs and lows experienced by students when in receipt of feedback. This allows students and staff to appreciate and recognise the role of emotion, and the changes in emotions, that occur when feedback and grades are provided. This should facilitate our ability to imagine and understand students' reactions when feedback is given and received. This simple model is designed to visually explain and demonstrate the complexity of learning and offers an aerial view of the emotional rollercoaster that is feedback. This should make it possible to review current institutional and academic practice and relate more symmetrically with students' struggles with assessment and feedback. I recognise the traditional stigma attached to the concept of emotion and its perceived lack of relevance in learning research, but this research aims to put greater emphasis on the role of emotion in our life and identity.

¹² Elisabeth Kubler-Ross developed the Change Curve, in the 1960s, to explain the stages of grief that people go through. It is used here to help us understand how students react to receiving feedback

Reason, detachment, independence, certainty, clarity, eternal, and order, for example, are culturally associated with masculinity as well as with traditional science, while emotion, connection, interdependence, fallibility, vagueness, changeableness, and chaos have been pushed away as the feminine-associated "other." (Nelson, 2003: 110).

The diagram below is intended only as a representation, an aid to understanding and not a road map. For some students, the journey will be different but Kubler-Ross's 5 stages of grief model has received worldwide recognition from industry and is used in counselling. Here it is used to enable visualisation of what can occur emotionally after receiving feedback.



Shock, Denial	Anger & Depression Denial and then the semblance of acceptance by some while failure and withdrawal for others	Acceptance or full rejection. But a response of some sort to reinforce identity and self
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Fig 4.1The Emotional Change Curve: responding to feedback (modelled on the Kubler-Ross - 5 Stages of Grief curve).

When we are concerned, unsure, and worried about events, we experience an emotional surge for example when we walk into new situations we may feel nervous. Burkit (2014: 8) sees emotion or feelings arising *'in relation to others or certain situations'*. He goes on to describe feelings and emotions as *'prime examples of how the body and bodily sensations are always fused with social meanings in the patterned relational weavings of our immediate social encounters'*.

4.7 Conclusion

Emotion is intertwined in how we behave and what we do (Burkitt, 2012). All aspects of a student's educational experience are emotional (Bartram, 2015). Our emotional reactions to events will encourage us to pursue behaviours that are adaptive while we shun behaviours that are maladaptive to us (Huron, 2007: 4). When students avoid reading feedback it is often because they expect it will be critical based on the grade. Again, when a student is satisfied with a grade, seeing it fit their own expectations of their performance, they again do not necessarily read feedback because they believe they know what it will say and do not recognise an opportunity to learn, or the need to improve. Our ability to operate within our own bounded rational world is evidenced everywhere.

Chapter Five

Setting the Research in the Context of its Natural Environment - A Methodology

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to place this research within a clear methodology and to identify the research methods used. Previous chapters provided a historical and contemporary background to current higher education in the context of a post-92 institution, linking these with concepts of social justice, the class system and the accounting profession. The role of regulation, policy, ideology and accountability in shaping education today provided the backdrop for examining young diverse adolescent students' experience of feedback and assessment.

This chapter clarifies how this research helps to achieve the aims and objectives set out in section 1.7 and examines and evaluates the suitability of the methods selected in relation to this work while justifying choices made. The methodology that underpins this work emerged as the project was executed and was not the starting point for this journey (Leavy and Hesse-Biber, 2006). What finally emerged was very different from that which was initially envisaged, and this chapter records the *natural history* of the evolution of my methodology (Silverman, 2000).

All the different processes: identifying the literature, the methodology, data collection and data analysis were linked, overlapped and were constantly informed, reworked then re-informed through further reading and through the regular re-engineering of the student assignment at the core of this research (appendix 4a & 4b) and again informed through on-going conversations with students and colleagues. The social world is complex and complicated (Layder, 1998) and this research is undertaken in an environment of messy '*wicked problems*' (Rittel, 1973) and it is important to accept that there is no evidence of a *best-fit* solution when it comes to feedback. While doing this research a

range of different wicked problems which are not well documented in the literature have been encountered. These include the social, political, and long-term financial implications of widening participation and the impact of misunderstandings about the nature of the student as customer (Williams, 2012). In addition, the impact of a more diverse student population (Youdell, 2006a; Bowl, 2001; Pearce et al., 2008) on teaching, teachers and university support staff as well as the impact across and between students in the classroom are often ignored. The role of social media in higher education and its impact (Patrut, 2013) on all of those involved in education has hardly been examined at all. The impact of institutional conformity (Williams, 2016) and other issues facing students, teachers and institutions in this environment of external *knee-jerk* reactions to modern educational problems, all play a part in creating a complex learning environment (Williams et al., 2008).

This chapter identifies the different sources of data used in this research explaining the role of students, my unknowing participants, around whom this project was born as I set out to identify their everyday experiences during their first months at university. I describe my methodologies and the qualitative methods used to gather my data and will justify both my research design and my approach to data analysis in the following sections.

5.1.1 Laying a Foundation

The project evolved directly from my teaching practice where I was using a student reflective assignment as part of the assessment of a module I was teaching. These assignments provided most, but not all, of the data used here. These written assignments provided an opportunity to examine students views on their early university experience so that their views on feedback could be put within a wider context. The need to understand this wider context also led to an examination of how students felt about the process of being assessed, resulting in the use of focus groups to identify feelings and reactions to different forms of assessments, including coursework and examinations.

At the end of their first semester of study, as part of the module assessment, students were asked to write a self-reflection on their early experiences. They were encouraged to include commentary on how well their initial expectations were met, how they settled into university life, feelings on the assignments they had worked on to date, and on any feedback, they had received. This was an exercise in student reflection which had not been designed as a research project. The students writing revealed that feedback was one of many problems experienced by new students at the point of transition into university and drew my attention to my own lack of understanding in relation to feedback and its role. This reflective assignment formed the bedrock of what was to become this thesis. Examples of the student assignment task and guidance provided during the academic years 2007/08 and 2008/09 are attached as Appendix 4a and 4b. Similar guidance across other years was also used.

When writing their reflections, students would already have received grades from a range of assignments, both in the module they were producing the reflection for, and for many other modules. Students would have begun to form views on how well they were progressing, they would have had the opportunity to read feedback, both on this module and on other modules. This experience and this feedback would then inform their views as they wrote this assignment as would other aspects of their learning experiences including how they felt about the actual requirements of the assignment itself. Reflexivity provides an opportunity to begin to develop a writing identity to consider how to interpret and communicate thoughts and ideas (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Students were given some guidance on how to construct their reflections (Appendix 4a & 4b) but were free to write as they wished. In many respects this was naturally occurring data as it formed part of the overall assessment of a module. Later focus groups were used to provide a context within which this assignment data could be analysed. Focus groups concentrated on the feelings which surround all forms of assessment.

5.2 Finding my Methodology

I wanted to understand why students are unhappy with their feedback experience while at university. My research task was to understand students' social reality as they see it and then examine and identify, where possible, how this shapes their actions (Cohen et al., 2007) and to construct their stories, through my interpretation of their words (Hammersley, 1992). The complexity of feedback, and the multiplicity of data available created some initial difficulties in determining the most appropriate methodology to use, creating a need to accept a degree of flexibility. Flexibility allowed me to identify and then incorporate the layers of information (Layder, 1993) revealed through the students' narratives as I became immersed in, then interacted with their words. Each interaction can change what is revealed and the direction of the research can shift ever so slightly. Layder (1993) makes the point that a deeper and richer understanding of social activities is obtained with these interactions. Layder (1998: 142) recognised the *'density and complexity of the social world'* revealed through these interactions but also acknowledges the need to continue to search for a *'best approximation'* to the truth. The phenomena, set in and across the sociomaterial context of learning, are not organised in accordance with an externally drawn up plan and are not linear in nature. As discussed in Ch 4 these are self-organising, not necessarily directly related, and can have more than one cause for a given effect, and more than one effect for a given cause. Often this makes the linear approach to educational research uninformative. In this context, analysing students' reflections for interpretation is challenging. Selecting which parts of students' reflections to use, based on a range of different phenomena involved selecting which parts of a student's narrative to reveal. The students' words to a degree reflect the students' lived experience. By selecting, analysing and interpreting these words an additional layer of meaning may be added, and this process is essential if a deeper understanding of the issues is to emerge.

I use an interpretivist epistemological perspective strongly influenced by Layder's (1993) notion of adaptive theory.

My theory of knowledge is influenced by an acceptance of a clear link between the social world of the subjects being examined and the context in which they are examined and recognition of the existence of inequality (Mahalingam, 2007) and unfairness which is often reproduced in education. We live in a world where a degree of moral indifference exists (Giroux, 2012: 328), and where class and economics plays a more important role in the quality of an individuals' education than ability (Osborn et al., 1997; Ball, 2003a; McPhail et al., 2010). Of course, not all inequality in society can be blamed on the class system, but inequality in education was carved through and across its history (Palfreyman and Tapper, 2014; Reay, 2001; Osborn et al., 1997). I am entangled in the politics and practices of the institution in which I work, my discipline and my social world. Across this research I see my epistemology as contextual, set within a specific time in higher education in which I seek to understand how students' experience their life, while recognising my own historical context brings an inevitable personal form of subjectivity.

As a researcher, I need to make my philosophical framework clear. Several different approaches and methodologies were considered for this research and I travelled down a few blind alleys before finding my way. Given my background I could see possibilities in collecting data from questionnaires and then identifying what it is that I could measure; perhaps asking students to rank their feedback based on an ordinal, an interval, or ratio scale, and then performing statistical tests to describe my findings. Alternatively, I could use the data I had and convert my students' feelings, opinions and attitudes into a measurable scale of some sort, based on my judgment of the importance placed on their views. But this limits the research to things that can be measured and ignores any other obvious message which might emanate from students while ignoring the complexities of the human condition. I wanted to focus on what we might refer to as the student experience, how they felt, reacted to, wrote about and described their experiences.

I can see the value of the objective approach to research in the right circumstances, but for this project I needed to use a critical and interpretative approach to successfully challenge, particularly in the discipline of accounting, the dominance of objectivity, and use instead alternative ways of researching the social world stepping outside the

bounded world of accounting. This is not to reject objectivism outright, rather it is to acknowledge that using Layder's (1998) adaptive theory allowed me to embrace and acknowledge both the objective and subjective nature of social research. Students' lifeworld and their words reflect to some degree their subjective experiences while the NSS metrics becomes the objective evidence of their dissatisfaction. I needed to consider what was important to the student and then select the most appropriate methodology to ensure I captured their world. A student was to me a complex, emotional, human being facing a wide range of daily struggles to survive a university experience. Using qualitative research methods allowed me to capture contextual factors efficiently and allowed me to make knowledge claims using a constructivist approach where multiple meanings can be construed from each individual experience based on their social and historical context. Even as I construe meaning I am very aware that each phenomenon I encounter can be the result of many different unobserved, unknown, other phenomena at work. At best using the data set collected I will identify the patterns that emerge and then use these to develop casual explanations and some theory (Creswell, 2003).

Layder's (1993) research map provided a framework within which I was able to articulate my ontology and my epistemological approach and my theoretical influences (Table 5.1). I was able to identify and work with the '*layered nature*' (Layder, 2006: 37) of society and by using Layder's (1998) adaptive theory I could reconcile inductive and deductive processes when examining students' words. I may safely hypothesise that students who receive very low grades or fail are unhappy with their results however this does not lead me to a position where I can deduct that students who receive a pass grade, or even a relatively high grade will be happy with their result. However, for much of this research it is inductive reasoning which is applied to the data, as I interpret the students' words while identifying connections between their words and the social structures and systems which shape their world. I needed to identify and acknowledge the '*partly independent characteristics of systemic phenomena....(values, ideology, power, money and the socially organized settings in which they are embedded)*' (Layder, 1998: 141). Only by recognising the impact of these invisible objective phenomena or structures is it possible to interpret students' words and behaviours beyond the reasons they themselves express. This multi

layered approach enabled me to recognise the complexity of events involved in the process of giving, receiving and reacting to feedback. Our students operate from, and within, their own independent social and historical environment but this is impacted upon by a myriad of structural factors including the university and the people they encounter therein and thus have social interactions with (Goffman, 1971), however few of us are aware, or even acknowledge the impact that external factors have on our internal emotional self.

Students as individuals are observable and through their words, their actions and behaviours one can begin to explain the meanings they ascribe to events. It is almost impossible to fully comprehend or understand the impact on the individual of the unobservable phenomena such as social class, power or wealth at work on a daily basis (Layder, 1998) however their impact is clearly discernible and must be identified in order to understand and explain students' actions. This research provided an opportunity to examine students' written reports on their early university experience through the student assignment (sec. 5.4.2), but also to investigate students' feelings about writing assessments and sitting exams to provide a more holistic context of the student feedback and assessment experience.

Layder (1993: 8-9) believes that we can obtain a better and deeper understanding of social activity when we see how the different domains of social activity affect or interact with each other. Layder identified four domains, or research elements: the self; situated activity; social setting and the context. These are demonstrated below in my Research Map: Table 5.1 where I set out how the different research elements overlap and interweave across the thesis such that no clear empirical boundary exists between them. The domain of self is central to this research where the 'self' here is the students and how they see, feel, and interact with their university experiences clearly reflected in my research objectives in Sec 1.7. This provides the primary focus of the research while the remaining domains indicate the issues that influenced the study and how the data was analysed. By recognising that the different domains are interconnected and interrelated one can envisage the complexity of the issues being investigated. The map

set out in table 5.1 demonstrates how my ontology and epistemology evolved. The second column is an ontology of the subjects/objects of my research. I had identified an issue to be investigated: feedback. I then found that this was deeply embedded in who the student is, and this became the focus of much of this research. The third column reflects my epistemological thoughts, how I came to know. It became obvious that who the student is by the time they arrive at university is a function of a complex web of prior events linked to education and social background and the final column provides a brief overview of how the literature informed the development of this research.

Table 5.1 Research Map based on Layder (1993: 72)

Research Element	Research Focus and Objectives: The Ontology of what I am researching	Methods: My epistemological approach	Theoretical thinking
Context Who and what is the student	Focus: examining role of class, social identity and history of students. Research Objective: to place students clearly in the context of their economic, social and cultural capital and examine how this affects their experiences and opportunities	Historical Review of UK education and examination of Bourdieu’s thinking and ideas on cultural deprivation, power and the reproduction of class and privilege through education	Educational history, social policy, educational systems and policies (Ch 2) Examination of social identity theory (Hogg 1995) & cultural capitals and privilege (Bourdieu 1977, 1986, 1987) and an overview of the student in Ch 3
Social Setting	Focus: Diverse student population studying a subject with a class focused history and exclusionary practices Research Objective: situate a diverse student populations’ social world within a middle-class university experience	Literature Review and use of internal information on cohort diversity, NSS results and student fail rates Personal diary, observations and reflections	Theories of class (Reay 2001, 2004, 2009). Theories of professions in Ch 2, Critical theory & Theories of Power, Ch 3
Situated Activity	Focus: First Semester, first-year undergraduate students of Accounting and Finance, in a New University Research Objective: to identify the barriers to students’ interaction with feedback and examine the role of emotions in this interaction.	Systematic literature review of historical and current research on educational theory and review and exploration of complexity theory	Massification, commodification, neo-liberal theories, Commercialisation and cost of education Need to work, family background, class and schooling, Bourdieu’s Capitals
Self	Focus: an exploration of the identity of my students, who are the focus (subjects) of this research, looking at how being a student impacts on their image of self while recognising the role that my own history plays in how I see the world Research Objective: Explore students’ expectations and the effect of these on their reactions to events.	Analysis of 4 years of data collected as part of students’ assessed work, a small number of interviews, focus groups and regular discussions with staff and students on the purpose and meaning of feedback.	Looking at issues of commitment in relation to time, family, class, work, preparation for study and expectations See Ch 3 on “The Student”

Table 5.1 brings together the different influences on the lived experience of students. It shows how identity and self are linked with students' expectations and their real-life situations: i.e. the need to work long hours to support and pay for aspects of their living expenses while at university. The problems, both as barrier and border, that class creates is dealt with in both chapter 2 and 3. The map also draws attention to the limitations of this research as it is an examination mainly of the views of students in their first year and often their first semester at university. Research evidence suggests that students' dissatisfaction with their experience changes across their years of study (Neves et al., 2016; Kandiko, 2013). In support of this, the anonymous collection of 2nd year student views in this institution, together with final year NSS results and comments are evaluated and do not undermine the evidence from this research which clearly identifies students' first year experiences as, in part, a precursor to what happens in later years. Evidence of growing pressure and stress experienced by students across their 3 or 4 years of university offers some explanation for their changing view of their experiences (Aherne, 2001; Bandura, 1982; Bartram, 2015).

The rationale for some of the decisions made and the methods used was informed by the literature but also dictated by the students' voices. Throughout this project, theorising is a continuous process from start to finish (Layder, 1998). Thoughts about interpretation and the research question involve giving consideration to what it means to interpret, what data to gather, which issues or phenomena to include for students to comment on, what methods to use. In the words of Schostak:

'The project... defines what is seen, what counts as 'real', the community of believers and the community of disbelievers' (Schostak, 2002: 4).

Using qualitative data clearly places my ontological assumptions in a space where social reality is emergent and constructed in so far as I recognise that meaning is constructed by my students as they learn and become students. I looked at my students on accounting and finance degree programmes and I looked carefully at the process of giving and

receiving feedback and this research became an ontological investigation into what these objects, processes and events are. Instead of looking at the individual parts I began to look at the whole, taking a holistic view of the student life and examining how different social phenomena create an experience, a movement in time, an emotion, part of which is observable and part of which is invisible and may even be an unspoken cultural experience in the past. While the meaning students give to their initial experiences may change over time and with reflection, the past always leaves an imprint.

5.3 What kind of Research is this?

A qualitative interpretivist research approach built around my practice was selected for this project using multiple data collection methods and a critical lens and using the historical and contextual information provided in chapter 2 and 3 as both background and orientating information. Chapter 2 provided a macro (Layder, 1994) overview of our educational system focusing on the larger scale external influences which change and often radically disrupts our view of the world: the NSS possibly being one of these external influences and more recently the introduction of the TEF.

Chapter 3 focuses on the micro or more personal elements of the students' social world (Layder, 1994). However, I wanted to dig beneath the surface of the historical social structures and identify their impact on students and the university, in the belief that knowledge is structured around existing, often oppressive, social structures and relations between them (Harvey, 1990). Thus, the macro is always impacting the micro often in visible ways but also in more hidden ways. These complex macro and micro phenomena, while relating intimately to each other (Layder, 1994), can also be interpreted in terms of the theory of intersectionality (Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2010). Theories of social justice and class together with Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus and capital also helped to inform and enable this research. We and our students do not live isolated from each other, from our habitus, or from the institutions and structures that surround us.

The students' reflections helped me to reflect and evaluate my teaching and my actions. I was going through some of the phases of reflection, recognised by Dewey's '*sequence and consequence*' (Dewey, 1933: 68) and constantly asking myself *what worked* and *what failed*, I became expert at recognising and reading students' reactions to my teaching. My notes became my reflective journal in which narratives, observations, conversations, and opinions were noted and used to inform me. I had begun to practice '*reflection-on-action*' which led to '*reflection-in-action*' (Schon, 1983: 49), as I learned to think on my feet and to fill the silences left by students' failure to engage in dialogue during class. I was collecting data, I was acting on what I learned from that data, but at an instinctive level and I soon realised that to give weight to my views they would need to be supported by means of a recognisable research approach and evidence.

Once I began to investigate my research options it was clear that contemporary educational research was involved in a continuing debate over the use of qualitative versus quantitative research as evidenced in the literature (Cohen et al., 2007; Bryman, 2006; Higgs et al., 2009; Lincoln and Cannella, 2004; Maxwell, 2004; Hammersley, 2000). Denzin and Lincoln articulate the nature of qualitative research:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 3).

Quantitative analysis generally works on the basis that problems are linear such that over time one can review and measure the effect of a range of variables, individually, to identify those with the greatest impact. But the classroom is a complex and dynamic space with its own context, which is a function of the discipline (Huber and Morreale, 2002), the individual class content (Alexander and Judy, 1988; Ames, 1992), the students' mood (Baumeister et al., 2003), the time of day, the day of the week, what

happened last night and into this one must fit the *'subtle social difference produced by gender, race, ethnicity, linguistic status or class'* (Lincoln & Canella, 2004a: 7).

What was becoming very clear is that;

'...causation is complex. Outcomes are determined not by single causes but by multiple causes, and these causes may, and usually do, interact in a non-additive fashion. In other words the combined effect is not necessarily the sum of the separate effects. It may be greater or less, because factors can reinforce or cancel out each other in non-linear ways' (Byrne, 1998: 20).

Qualitative research offered an overview of the messiness of the everyday life of a student (Kanuka, 2010), allowing me to situate myself in the space occupied by students and explore their thinking and observe their reactions. Qualitative data can be analysed using *'realist, interpretive or postmodern assumptions'* (Haggis, 2008: 159) and each can lead to different approaches to one's conclusions, each valid in their own way. Scientific research looks for laws which can be retested and replicated but given the nature, and source of most of my data: my students' reflections, then using a qualitative approach was, in many ways, pre-determined. I needed to understand students' meaning making and using a qualitative approach allowed me to situate myself in a way that allowed me to read and re-read students' words. As their tutor, I was able to question and explore their thinking and observe their reactions when they received feedback or were given a grade and I began to recognise the unpredictability of students' responses.

The students' lived experience (Carless et al., 2011; Churchman and King, 2009) is who they are and is the core of their identity even though most are unaware of the impact that their social class, their history and their past has on how they feel, see and understand their world, here and now. At the same time, in interpreting the students' worlds and constructing their stories it was necessary to ensure that established theoretical relationships between some of the phenomena were acknowledged and used; theories of class and social justice and particularly Bourdieu's theory or logic of practice whereby individual's activities are in fact a blend of influences. I needed to investigate the impact of Bourdieu's habitus (1990) on students' perceptions of their social identity

(Hogg et al., 1995) and in the process help colleagues to facilitate and enable an enjoyable and supportive transition into university for students.

5.3.1 Research Design

Most research into learning focuses on the individual student's role, often ignoring the role of a vast array of externalities in the form of sociomaterial constraints. Students' learning, from the moment they start school, has been managed within a political discourse of reform (Ball 1997), while dressing up *learning research* and *social problems* within a '*façade*' (Ball 1997:263) of educational policy reform, and social regulation; wrapping these changes into '*a post-Fordist rhetoric of flexibility and entrepreneurialism*' (Ball 1997: 258) funnelling thinking down the neo-liberal rhetoric of market economics both in terms of how we access higher education and the purpose of higher education. This ideological shift has moved educational institutions from knowledge creation to managed and controlled capitalist institutions working for the economy. I was determined to expose this and where possible identify and evaluate its impact, mainly on students but also on institutions and academics.

While feedback forms a small part of the total learning experience of a student, educational research and the students themselves see feedback as a core part of the learning process (Boud, 2013; The NSS 2006 - 2017). The potential number of possible phenomena that impact learning or even a part of of the learning process such as student feedback, make modelling the social world an almost impossible task, as would modelling even a few of these events, or assemblages, that create and impact on the social world of a student (Latour, 2005). Additionally it was clear many aspects of the phenomena or '*the structural features of society*' (Layder, 1993: 29) are difficult if not impossible to measure because so much of what is *at work* in and between the many phenomena is invisible, for instance any power relationship between student and teacher, or between two students, and of course the perceived power of the institutions and its rules and regulations (Bourdieu, 1977b; Bourdieu, 1977a; Annisette and Kirkham, 2007).

5.3.2 The Research Framework

The research framework set out below gives an indication of the direction my thinking has taken as this research progressed. Many approaches to theory are possible when undertaking research (Layder, 1998). In this instance, a range of different theoretical approaches were used to aid understanding of the significance of the students' views as I searched for patterns. It was imperative to be open-minded but observant and to identify and construct relevant theories around the findings but also to examine how my work fitted into recognised approaches to understanding human experiences. Research which examines social phenomena generally focuses on human subjectivity, their agency, recognising that they perform their roles in unique ways (Kabele, 2010). The focus of this research is human beings who are social actors with agency, but not completely free to play out their life just as they want, they are confined by the social rituals and rules of society, family, peers, tutors, culture and by the institution's rules, regulations and culture and so on, or to simplify: by structures. It is simply not possible, in my view, to reduce students' actions, feelings and behaviours to individual events occurring in isolation as part of an idiosyncratic event, but rather these are part of the overall social system in which they occur and thus must be studied in this context (Dolfsma and Verburg, 2008). Dolfsma et.al. (2008: 1032) go on to point out that:

'Individual behavior, interdependent and interwoven with behavior of others, unintentionally gives rise to structured regularities in processes, relatively autonomous with regard to the intentions and preferences of individuals'

To interpret the role of the social on, and in, students' lives, it was necessary to examine theories of social justice which Rawls (2001, 2009) sees quite simply as fairness. From this perspective, our social order is dominated by those at the apex of power and prestige described in the Pyramid of Prestige represented in Fig 3.2. The dominant power of those who attend the old *elite* universities depicted in Fig 3.1 also dominate our legal, political and justice systems (chapter 2 & 3). This demonstrates the link between class and

opportunity, between schooling and privilege or schooling and disadvantage, depending on where one sits in the pyramid and must be critiqued in the context of this research into students' experiences of higher education. Table 5.2 below provides an overview of the framework adopted for this research, identifying the research tradition, purpose, and approach but also setting out clearly the methods selected, and the sources of data used.

The students' reflective accounts formed the basis of the analysis and the identification of the key themes which form the backbone of this research. The Research Framework below draws together the research approach and purpose, identifies the range of data collected and used and identifies the interpretivist critical approach adopted to interrogate the data once identified setting out the range of lens which were brought to bear on the data.

Table 5.2 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Research tradition	Practitioner, interpretivist, research which generated data, followed by analysis and critical interpretation. Practitioner research provided an opportunity for a self-reflective approach to my practice to enable a clearer understanding of students' perception of starting university and receiving feedback. For me, this brought together my actions, reflections, the literature and theory of practice.	
Research Purpose	To begin to fill a gap in the literature by bringing together theory relating learning, assessment, and feedback, but also incorporating, in much greater detail, the role of adolescent development and emotion in learning, assessment, and feedback.	
Research approach	Interpretivist research allowed me to modify and re-engineer my practice to identify appropriate approaches to giving students useful feedback on assignments.	My practitioner research developed into a form of critical interpretivist research situated in the centre of the power relationship between the students, the teacher and the institutions: the university and the profession. It enabled me to identify the constraints this relationship places on the initial experience of new accounting students in a modern university.
Methods/ Data collection	<p>Naturally occurring data from Student assignments (800+ see Fig 5.3 for more information)</p> <p>Interviews (5)</p> <p>Focus groups (11)</p>	<p>Initially assignments were collected from all students across four cohorts. These were then sampled to reduce numbers (see table showing analysis)</p> <p>Self-selected</p> <p>Invited, self-selected, and subdivided into roundtable discussions around keywords.</p> <p>conversations with students and colleagues</p>

<p>Interpretivist Critical Research -</p>	<p>This research used a similar approach to that of action research, in so far as I experimented over a period of years with my approaches to student feedback, to understand and reduce student dissatisfaction with feedback.</p> <p>It was practitioner research based on my practice, which evolved and changed as I attempted to enhance students' experiences.</p> <p>It was critical as my interpretation was context-sensitive responding to the socio-political environment which has been playing out in the UK over the last thirty years. The findings from the research project became the basis for seeking to unlock the systematic misunderstandings which exist in higher education, between student, faculty and institution when it comes to academic feedback, misunderstandings magnified by the NSS results across the sector.</p> <p>Critical in so far as all aspects of my practice and the literature were evaluated from a critical perspective. While I may not need to liberate my students from some form of enslavement (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013) to prove I am being critical, I do seek to identify the degree of disadvantage that many of our students bring to their learning.</p>
<p>Lens</p>	<p><u>Insider/outsider position</u></p> <p>Accepting, identifying and recognising personal bias from my own history, age, gender, discipline and role as a teacher.</p>

	<p><u>Reflexivity</u></p> <p>Using reflexivity to moderate and improve practice from a growing knowledge of the relevant theory associated with learning, assessment and feedback. In addition, examining and using theory of practice to inform my actions</p> <p><u>Social Justice</u></p> <p>Recognising the degree of achievement of our students when they arrive here and seeking ways to build on this to provide an environment in which all students see their own potential and build on it.</p> <p><u>Learners</u></p> <p>Learners create their own internal representation of the world which then influences how they act, behave and learn. This internal representation is used to judge their performance and our performance and further used to filter through their own perceptions and decide what needs to be modified.</p>
Ethics	Ethics protocol approval obtained to interview students and run focus groups. These students were volunteers. All the student reflective assignments were provided as specific assessment and all student quotations selected have been fully anonymised.
<p>Data analysis</p> <p>A range of appropriate methods designed to extract the lived experience of students with feedback</p>	<p>Data interpretation</p> <p>Was interpretative & critical</p>

5.4 Data Collection Methods

Gathering data for research is never simple: what sample? how many? how much? who to use? permissions? volunteers? rules and regulation? ethics? all conundrums to be considered and solved. Across time my views changed as I learned from my data, the data in effect began to dictate the issues which were important. The students' written reflections provide the bulk of my data and inform most of my data analysis. This data was initially supported by a small number of student interviews. I was seeking an understanding of students' language and understanding about feedback and assessment. Students individually can be unwilling to engage in general discussions about assessment seeking instead a discussion about their own individual assessments. To overcome this and encourage debate on assessment several focus groups were used to provide a less threatening opportunity for students to express their opinions.

The student assignments would always, first and foremost be assessment in the students' eyes and thus a staged piece of writing. The focus groups were voluntary, did not involve me directly and thus should providing a more independent view of students' attitudes. The focus groups were managed, mainly by staff they did not know and who did not teach them. Additionally, my own written observations and reflections together with conversations with colleagues and students provided support for my evolving thinking. Learning to pay greater attention to my own interactions with students made me more observant, more reflective and more careful, I began to construct in my mind a deep and complex picture of what it was like to be a student of accounting in a post-92 university.

5.4.1 Ethical Issues

To comply with the university regulations in relation to ethical protocols, where human subjects are used, I obtained 2 separate protocol approvals to enable me to interview and talk to students. The student assignment, described in the next section falls into the category of naturally occurring data as this was students' work submitted for

assessment, and as such was not subject to ethical approval but was subject to university regulations relating to maintaining student anonymity. This has been secured by initially giving each assignment a number which can be linked back to a specific student and then changing these numbers to fictional names, but using names, nevertheless, which hint at the diversity of the student population who provided the data in the first place.

5.4.2 The Student Assignment

Annually between 200 and 250 students were registered on the module: Skills for Accountants. Each year, across a 4-year period, these students provided me with significant raw research data through their reflective assignments described above. I collected over 800 pieces of written work, of between 1000 and 1200 words and used random sampling over the years to select a smaller number of detailed qualitative essays for analysis. Table 5.3 below shows the actual distribution of assignments selected and used.

Year	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	TOTAL REFLECTIONS USED
No of students randomly selected	53	44	42	50	189

Table 5.3 No of Students randomly selected across 4 years

Sampling involved selecting 1 in every 4 assignments from the initial large number of assignments.

5.4.3 Early Exploratory Interviews

Before deciding to use the student assignment as part of my data set I had obtained ethical approval to undertake some initial exploratory interviews with a view to undertaking additional interviews at a later stage. Interviewing students for research

purposes was a new experience for me, despite nearly 30 years in higher education. The interview-based method is acknowledged as useful for drawing out deep, often personal tacit knowledge through conversation and reflection (Masters, 1995) while the act of listening and asking questions draws out useful information from those involved (students and colleagues). This in many ways is a multi-faceted exchange, one listens, reflects and asks, listens again, learns and then asks again, with a different inference gained from earlier asked and answered sections of the conversation. However, while many see the interview as accessing the individuals' social world and thus a good method of data collection allowing for *'important truths'* (Calder et al., 2002: 53) to be revealed through direct questioning, and *'subtle interrogation of experiences, attitudes and belief'* (Kellehear, 1993: 1). I felt, as soon as I began the interview process that it did not work effectively for me. I failed to record our conversations, relying instead on my ability to type very quickly. I missed out on all visual aspects of communication such as body language, facial expression etc. In addition, after the event, I had no recording from which to analyse tone of voice, intonation and other aspects of a conversation. The only information retained for analysis was my rather limited typed transcript of my conversations with these students.

When I asked questions some of the students reverted to formal student mode, they were listening but not necessarily answering, simply nodding their heads. The interview became a form of interrogation and our relationship as student and teacher was impacting not just their listening, but also their responses, a form of Hawthorne Effect. I met multiple problems at this stage of the research; I asked for volunteers and it was evident that those agreeing to be interviewed were generally those whom either liked me and used any opportunity to speak to me or sought evidence of my approval. I also recognised that I was responsible, at the same time, for assessing these students across two modules and thus responsible for 45 out of 120 credits in their first year. This was not a neutral event, it was laden with possible relationship problems. From the student perspective I had the power; I decided their fate in a large proportion of their first semester of study; I was both judge and jury and they were new to the university experience (Nilsson and Wihlborg, 2011; Hoskin and Macve, 1986; Vähäsantanen and

Saarinen, 2013). I wanted students' feedback on feedback, they simply wanted more feedback on themselves. I hoped for an open and uninhibited conversation with my students, but it was stilted and awkward, I recognise now this may be because I was typing, students may have felt I was not giving them the attention they needed to be forthcoming. Alternatively, students may have believed that they could not be honest with me as I was asking them for feedback, not just on colleagues but on myself and on my feedback to them. This was not a sound basis for identifying problems with their experiences of university, I was too involved, while not involved enough. I soon decided that this was not an effective research tool for me with these students, because of my own failures and inexperience. This led me to consider alternative methods of collecting data and I decided that focus groups would enable me to collect similar data to that which I had hoped to obtain via the interviews.

5.4.4 Focus Groups

Focus groups are valuable because they are, of themselves, a form of social and cultural activity which generate data (Atkinson, 2005), but also generate a form of knowing as students discuss and debate the issues being investigated. This social activity generated a different, much more focused, response from students and while the atmosphere was bright, chatty and happy the discussion was serious and the outcomes, demonstrated in chapter 7, are specific, often harsh and focused.

One of the possible negative aspects of the focus group lies in the idea of "mob rule" i.e. where one or two, sometimes disgruntled students, dominate the conversation and eventually wear down other participants, reducing significantly the value of the data collected and for this reason using independent facilitators allowed more control, when necessary. When seeking volunteers, two distinct categories of student may respond, those who seek any opportunity to spend time with their tutors in the hope of gathering appropriate assessment cues, and those seeking an outlet for their frustrations with their experiences; frustrations that may have little to do with the subject being discussed. Students were very willing to discuss and share their views on assessments.

The focus groups were organised across 4 different groups/events with multiple students attending each session. 3 sessions were with students, and one involved staff, leading in all to 11 different discussions as larger groups were sub-divided into smaller groups of 4 and 5 students, which provided a series of different views on aspects of assessment and feedback.

The first group consisted of 14 students (3 sub-groups) with a second separate group of 11 students (2 sub-groups), all first year Accounting and Finance 2007/8 students. All groups were asked and encouraged to discuss and identify their experience of assessment. Their instructions involved advising them that their opinions and feelings on assessment were being sought to enable the School to identify students' views on the many processes being used. They were asked to have a general discussion and identify how they felt about assessment, what it was like to be about to write an assignment, or while waiting to enter an exam room. Different groups were given slightly different tasks.

1. How did they feel at the start of an assessment task, and again once that task was finished?
2. Same question as 1 above, but this time in relation to exams (before and after feelings).
3. Others were asked to consider their feelings as they physically begin the process of reading and then writing an exam paper and as they progress their writing.

After widespread discussions with some minor arguments and disagreements, students were asked to prepare sticky labels using words or phrases which best described their views and feelings and from this a series of words were produced. The independent convenor then put some key words on a board and asked students to stick their words around the most appropriate. The key areas were:

1. Feelings at the start of an assessment task (fig 7.1);
2. Feelings at the end of an assessment task (fig 7.2);

3. Feelings about exam as they sit down to begin reading and writing and then when they are finished (fig 7.3);
4. Students' feelings when locked into the moment of writing an exam (fig 7.4);

During the focus group discussions, I wanted students to interact as a community allowing their culture and how they saw themselves as students, to emerge. To avoid any possible power impact with myself and following my experience with the interviews a 3rd party, independent person¹³, was employed to lead the students into a discussion of their experience with assessment. It was important to identify the possible emotive nature of assessment and how students felt when working on coursework or taking exams. Beginning to identify the emotive nature of the student experience with assessment provided a window through which I was able to imagine how they reacted to receiving feedback on their assessments.

The focus groups gave students a chance to express their views and opinions in a potentially safe environment. The focus group convener, an experienced colleague from a different department, simply asked a series of open-ended questions and allowed student discussion to ensue. The objectives of these focus groups were to collect some information on students' feelings about completing different forms of assessment as this would provide some background on feelings that occurred before any grades or academic feedback is provided. The convener ensured that groups discussed the issues raised and when necessary redirected them back to the focus groups objectives. Generally, the students' approach to discussing the issues raised during these focus groups was undirected and thus the direction and tone of each discussion was guided by students' own perceptions of assessment and feedback. Students could describe how they each experience different aspects of being assessed, and in the process, their different perspectives emerged.

¹³ A member of staff from the university Education Department who was also involved in consulting work within the Business School

In 2008-09 cross disciplinary focus groups were used to elicit students' views on both the different types of assessment used across the Business School and students' understanding of assessment and feedback. Working with a colleague I led the groups discussing feedback. Students were asked to discuss the following questions in relation to feedback:

1. What do you think feedback is for?
2. What would you like to see done differently?
3. What should we change?

As students in their second year, one can assume that these students' views were more firmly formed. The purpose here was to get a more holistic view of the student experience to date. While most of my data came from first-year students, it was important to listen and take account of the voices of 2nd year students as this gives greater weight to research. These 2nd year students' views are also reflected in recent literature (Kandiko (2013; Winning et al., 2005).

A final focus group, with teaching staff colleagues (set up as 2 sub-groups) was organised at the end of a Learning and Teaching event within the Business School, volunteers were invited to join a discussion on feedback and at the end of the discussions asked to feedback on the most important points to emerge from their discussions, specifically what they believed students wanted and needed from feedback.

While the numbers of students used in these focus groups are quite small student views did offer strong support for the view that assessment is an emotive and often a fearful undertaking as it is always, at a minimum, a risky undertaking. Additionally, the focus groups on feedback re-iterate the views of students on the nature of feedback.

5.4.5 Observing, Conversation and Listening

The moment I returned to the classroom and experienced being a teacher again I wanted to frame, reframe (Schon, 1983) and examine what I did and how this impacted on my students (Loughran, 2002). I attempted capturing my teaching experiences by using the '*discipline of noticing*' (Mason, 2001: 59). I became my own '*fieldnote*' (Jackson, 1990: 3) and started to reflect (Dewey, 1933) on my pedagogy and occasionally record my thoughts and feelings, a form of self-study. I observed and considered carefully the process that students go through when they come to university and I talked to these students openly.

Once in the classroom I listen to the room and observe and feel the mood. Listening and observing are key to developing one's practice through reflection and can be enhanced as one's understanding evolves and grows. Natural unconstructed conversation, using unguarded language is often more telling than the written word. Some tell little stories to demonstrate their use of feedback, and my task is to listen and remember that in asking questions and listening to the answers, a new understanding can be generated. Observation and conversation as research tools have much to recommend them but it is not a neutral transaction, the mere fact that you are observing or being observed, asking or listening, can change behaviour and thus the phenomena being investigated is changed.

There is no such thing as a neutral enquiry or objective knowledge, we see part of our world, not all of it. We are able to shut out a lot of the noises (where noise is all physical substance in our orbit, all physical substance which can engage our senses in any way) because we use what we think we know to select, decode and understand what we are experiencing but this is a very small part of what is in our orbit (Clark, 1994), we are always ignoring more than we are using.

5.5 Data Analysis

The variety of writing and the different conceptions that students held, provided a rich source of data from which to elicit themes for this research. Reflective writing gives

students the opportunity to articulate their experiences while limiting, but not eliminating, issues of hierarchy and power that can be present during a research interview.

Initially, students' reflections on their experiences and their commentary on feedback provided a basis from which I re-engineered my module. Later this same data was re-examined, and it became obvious that a complex web of events were interacting before and during their first semester at university. It was soon apparent that it was necessary to consider not just the problem of feedback, but a much more complex problem played out in the interplay of individual capitals, in a Bourdieu sense. Consideration of how the research might reflect the complexity of human behaviour (Butler-Kisber, 2002) was now also a major research issue. There are many variables, factors or phenomena, that impact on learning, making it a complex process but it also became clear that feedback is of itself a complex event creating an interplay between expectations (sec 3.5), agency, identity and emotions (Reay and Wiliam, 1999; Clegg, 2011). Thus multiple self-organising complex phenomena are at work in each individual, interacting with each other within social structures and in social situations (Stacey, 2003) and because we are each unique, we each have our own unique reaction to our life and events in it, to life's phenomenon.

Student reflective data needed careful analysis to identify the situated meaning found in the complex and detail of their everyday life (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). When working with written words you must initially *'ignore what goes on "beneath", or "over or above" or "outside" those words'* (Edwards, 2006: 43) using the *'rich surface'* (Edwards, 2006: 43) of words as a starting point. As you put together a collection of similar words in the recounting of experiences, you must then look underneath and identify the phenomena itself. I could ask: why have they written this; what do they mean? Or I can consider the circumstances within which these written words were produced and recognise the intentionality of the work that is being examined, where intentionality refers to the fact that students were aware who would read their words and the fact that it was an assessment.

When I first read students' reflections I recognised the need to examine, more thoroughly, the emotional impact of assessment and feedback to seek out the student voice, looking for the emic point of view (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). From my review of the literature, I had identified a number of '*background concepts*' (Layder, 1993: 129) as a potential basis from which to begin the analysis. For Layder background concepts can be used to sensitise one to the data '*without imposing a 'closed net' on the research as a whole*' (Layder, 1993: 129). Layder saw this as a starting device for analysing one's data and recognised that the original concepts might become less important as one progressed.

By combining a range of reflective themes or concepts it is possible to create a series of constructs such as expectations, satisfaction, etc. which are then used to demonstrate how different aspects of their experiences interact and become visible, but also the complexity of the problem emerges. Analysing research data involves the researcher worming down to the minutia of the detail of the students' conceptualisation of their experiences and then stepping back to get that *bird's eye* or holistic view of the whole which enables a meaningful perspective to emerge (Weiss, 1971) which then become the foundation for the constructs and traits used in this research. Over time the constructs and concepts were analysed, reviewed, re-ordered, re-analysed and re-categorised until a limited, clear set of constructs emerge which provide a clearer picture of the student experience, and which can be described as the students' social construction of their reality.

Many different approaches could be used to analyse qualitative data. One can examine the formation of sentences, the grammar used, or linguistic content: I chose to identify key themes based on the number of times they recurred in the language or because they exposed an issue or phenomena of interest. Using text and words as the basis of one's research can result in a more artificial view of the phenomena, a view devoid of emotion and feelings, but given that most of the text being analysed here began in a written form and may have been written with a view to hiding true feelings, one must accept that some aspects of the phenomena may have been lost, or are well hidden, but is this not always true of our writing, it is after all a construction.

It is the student words which are important to this research and thus form the basis for most of the data analysis. As an assessment the students' reflective assignment had to be marked, then after marking it was possible to review and analyse the students' work using a different lens, that of the practitioner. Feedback from the students, at first glance, appears to generate little criticism. What was evident, was the extent of feelings expressed in relation to other aspects of their experience. The other significant issue to emerge was the extent of the gap between the students' actual experiences and their expectations and this does raise questions about how and where student expectations are formed. My analysis moved beyond the focused examination of student feedback. I began to unpick and understand the complex (Barnett, 2003) '*lived experience*' (Marshall, 2006: 188) of the student. I recognised the '*emotional states*' (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1999: xv) that assessment generates, and saw that students' emotional barometer was activated, not by feedback alone, but by all of their other experiences as new students. In their first year, students' reaction to feedback can be seen or understood as a metaphor for the complex emotional reactions that are occurring in response to an enormous change in the life of a young adolescent.

5.5.1 Thematic Analysis

It is generally acknowledged in the literature that the rigour of qualitative research has been questioned when compared to scientific research (Denzin, 2009; Gergen and Gergen, 2000; Malterud, 2001). Issues around validity and reliability have proved contentious (Cope, 2004; Savin-Baden and Major, 2013) providing probably the single biggest criticism of qualitative research. Both internal and external validity are believed necessary to demonstrate objectivity, but one must ask what these words mean in relation to research (Denzin, 2009). All research will, to a degree, be biased (Maxwell, 1998), when using scientific methods, one still must decide what question to ask, what variables to examine, what sample to use and one's political, moral and social views will have a direct bearing on the approach to be used in that research. There is a risk when one begins to think about reliability and validity that one can get locked back into the quantitative requirements for confirmability and credibility in the positivist scientific

sense, when as qualitative research unfolds it raises a range of new and different questions which might not have been anticipated, new variables are exposed and thus the direction of this type of research is not so easily mapped or planned. I have used where possible, reason, detachment and independence in selecting which of my students' stories to be used, but as described above, the choices are mine, and mine alone, specifically when it comes to choosing which words to include in this thesis. Can this be described as independent? I believe that I have not used a '*manipulative methodology*' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 201) even though my research was to some degree an experiment, but it was an experiment on myself, in so far as it was my practice that was being altered, rather than an experiment on my students.

Choosing thematic text analysis and inductive reasoning (Cohen et al., 2007) as the basis for examining my qualitative data enabled me to impose order on that data, facilitating extraction of meaning and structure. Using NVivo allowed me to open code the data under initial headings based around those the students were given as guidance when creating their reflective assignment. I was then able to regroup data, using keywords which were becoming clear, as I read and reread assignments. Once interpretation began constant ordering and re-ordering was necessary, re-defining the structure of the themes, an iterative and interpretive procedure identifying additional, sometimes new or alternative meanings, creating new and different versions of the reality I was examining (Denzin, 2009). Through immersion in the data, it has been possible to examine students' words and make my sense of the messages embedded in their words. I sought to identify the patterns of similarity, which hopefully helped me to transcend the individual views of students (Haggis, 2008) I began to group and combine students' data, their words, '*to form a pool of meaning*' (Cope, 2004: 6) for each key theme analysed and investigated. My process of interpretation and re-interpretation made me think, and then rethink, about the conceptions that began to emerge from my data (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009).

I sought understanding, within the hidden undercurrents of a student's social life (Marshall and Rossman, 1999), identifying comments relating to feedback but also seeking to identify other aspects of their early university experience which could

influence and impact on how a student acts and then reacts to and with feedback. Students' words enabled me to identify relationships between each of the different emotions and feelings they expressed such that my 5 themes, identified below, represent different ways students experience their first semester at university and combined they demonstrate feelings and emotions which impact on their learning, feedback and assessment. The complexity of these students' experiences lies in the fact that it is impossible to impose order or any hierarchically logical structure on their emotional experiences and not all students experience these emotions.

At all times I acknowledged the very complex nature of what I was working with (Byrne, 2005). However, I also must acknowledge that descriptions of these students' social realities must be viewed within the context of the purpose they serve, the people involved, and the overall circumstances that they describe. A pure objective reality will not be captured here (Denzin, 2010) as even as students' narratives were written their views may change as they received feedback on this specific assignment. This was, in part, what Marton (1981) describes as second order perspectives into the student world as I am using their words to describe their experiences of the world at a specific point in time. However, using this data combined with focus groups and other data collection methods enabled me to use an interpretivist approach to the data overall and thus to view the student data from different perspectives as a means of verification.

The initial 21 themes identified are shown in Table 5.4 below. These themes were finally grouped into 5 significant headings. The headings link, in part, to issues clearly identified in the literature over the past 30-40 years; issues that relate to transition and feedback for instance (Kuh et al., 2006). Independent learning is the only theme which also became a heading. The term independent learning was used to describe the philosophy being introduced in higher education in post-92 institutions just after these institutions were created. Self and identity reflect the language of some US focused educational research, but which can also be used to link many issues to a more personal and emotional reaction to educational experiences. Wellbeing, for instance, is an issue which is only now being

recognised as relevant in our understanding of students' experiences of education. The shading used below enables the combination to be viewed more easily.

Categories and initial Themes	No of students generating data under these heading	No of students' individual comments generating data under these heading ¹⁴	Headings used for Combined themes + total number of comments within this heading
Taking action	29	43	EXPECTATIONS At TRANSITION 307
Struggles	24	26	
Worry	14	17	
Disappointment	24	39	
Expectations	105	158	
Drawbacks	23	24	
Independent Learning	46	71	INDEPENDENT LEARNING - 71
Friendship	52	65	WELLBEING 352
Feelings ¹⁵	127	244	
Happiness/ Joy	31	43	
Fun	12	16	
Fairness	12	15	
Self-evaluation	109	190	SELF & IDENTITY 321
Self-esteem - self-worth	4	13	
Self-assessment	9	13	
Confidence	49	60	
Motivation	37	45	
Feedback	156	478	FEEDBACK & ITS IMPACT 609
Responding to &	30	37	
Learning from Feedback	67	94	

Table 5.4 Initial 20 nodes, identified through thematic analysis, shaded to identify clearly the final 5

¹⁴ Some students made more than one comment under a specific heading

¹⁵ Includes stress and anxiety

Even as this process of interpretation and categorization was underway it was apparent that different headings could be used to describe the student experience. However, the categories used here give an insight into the way students see some aspects of their first-year experience but also reflect generally accepted concepts that are evident in current and emerging literature. Words such as independent learning (Broad, 2006; Higher Education Academy, 2014), transition (Pratt, 2000) and identity (Stibbe, 2011; Henkel, 2005) are common in the literature relating to students' academic experiences but so also is emotion (Hochschild, 2012). Wellbeing (Feinstein et al., 2008) is now emerging as a theme which incorporates stress, anxiety, friendship etc. across the literature and while students did not use the term "stress" to describe their feelings, a range of other terms fall within this category in its everyday meaning. Some of the students' language is the result of assessment guidance provided (see Appendix 4a & 4b), but issues relating to confidence; motivation; friendship; feelings; self-evaluation and/or self-criticism, had not been discussed or hinted at. Using these terms, this language, is of itself, revealing: students felt the need to communicate their feelings. Overall the data revealed the presence of strong feelings and emotions, a complex mix of expectations, disappointments and views on starting university. They encountered new ways of being assessed; new and different approaches to receiving feedback; many were away from home for the first time; missing their friends; feeling different, and in need of support and understanding. The whole process is an emotional journey for all of those involved. Mann sees learning as embodied with '*excitement, fear, revelation, inspiration, anxiety, loss of confidence, hatefulness, stress, disengagement, dread*' (Mann, 2008: 33) revealing the possible constant emotional state of flux for a student.

5.5.2 Using the Student's Voice

Throughout the final 3 chapters (Ch 6, 7 & 8) students' words focus attention on the issues that are important to them. The themes which emerged from the data analysis (Table 5.4) revealed the issues which dominate students' views in their early months at university. These are almost always presented as group vignettes where individual

students' words are separated by quotation marks but using anonymous names constructed around typical real names that are common among our students. A small number of vignettes only use numbers as these were taken from anonymous feedback collected by the Business School as part of a range of student views collected at regular intervals by the institution. In all instances students' words, while selected from much longer documents, reflect verbatim students' words.

5.6 Reflecting on my role in this research - my bias

I have my own unique perspective on the world which is based on my prior life experiences, and this influenced not just what I wanted to research, but also the interpretation I give to the data collected. It was important that I reflect on my biases and my preconceived, ideas about the problem I was investigating (Savin-Baden, 2004), to ensure I do not write the end before I begin. I am aware that my own assumptions and bias can influence what I see and how I understand, what I see. I frame my research based on my own sociohistorical conditions and these effect what I see, perceive and understand (Blommaert, 2005), or as Amster pointed out:

Sociological inquiry is never undertaken in a vacuum, but is instead contextual, subjective, and, despite claims to neutrality, always biased. Indeed it might be said that a researcher without bias is either dishonest, disinterested, or dead'.
(Amster, 1999: 122)

My aim was to unpick, in as far as is possible, my own intentions and frames of analysis, to provide readers with a clear understanding of my purpose. This research represents '*my truth*' (Heikkinen et al., 2001: 9) as I set about internalising the experiences of students with feedback. I want to understand how they feel but this research is also a reflection of me and my beliefs, simply because higher education has had such an impact on the quality of my life, thus challenging and critically questioning my own discourses and my stance or position which often guides and informs my thinking is important. From

my perspective, once a young person walks through the door of the university it becomes our responsibility to recognise the personal and family sacrifice that is often necessary to facilitate learning and engender success.

There are many different lenses that focus us on different representations of the same situation so as I examined the data, which now seems to have been with me for such a long time, I recognise the need to examine regularly exactly how I situate myself in this research. At different times, and in different situations, I examine these data or these phenomena, from different perspectives and/or with different lenses. Initially, I hoped to find a quick and perhaps easy solution to the feedback problem within the written words of the student, later I began to appreciate and acknowledge that students wrote differently about the same experiences and reacted differently to the same words. I, like my students, saw the data differently depending on my frame of reference and my perspective at the time, and these changed as my knowledge base grew and because of what I was learning from examining the data produced by students. I soon realised that my interpretation of the students' narratives needed me to constantly rethink what I thought I was reading and interpreting. Thus, my interpretation needed to build on the students' conceptions while also recognising the problems they reflected (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009).

Students' writings in response to an assignment, form part of a social play created to meet differing objectives and involves linking together different social practices in pursuit of these objectives. For the researcher, the students' work is both an assignment to be marked and data to be processed, it is also practice in need of evaluation. For the student, the assignment is a staged piece of work product leading to an outcome, an unknown grade. Assessments which contribute to module grading carry risk: risk of failure, the risk of misunderstanding the task, the risk of being misunderstood and is often viewed by students as a high-stakes undertaking (Knight and Page, 2007). In this context, one must ask whether the information provided was a form of acquiescence, or social desirability (Watkins and Regmi, 1995) designed to please the person who holds power over their grading, the tutor now the researcher. This means that the relationship

between student and teacher can become problematic as the research might impact upon what students' feel able to say and write. It can be difficult to identify who is *in* the research.

Research data collected by a tutor as a researcher in her own classroom from a known subject or subjects will always be difficult to interpret and must be understood within the context in which it was created. This may, in part, explain why institutions across the UK with poor NSS scores are finding it so difficult to identify the real cause of students' dissatisfaction. The student assignment was a '*staged*' (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013: 410) piece of work which students could use to reveal what they thought I wanted to hear, while hiding what they felt or thought (Rambe, 2013) using a form of affective deviancy (Goffman, 1971) to consciously suppress their real feelings. What they chose to write would therefore never be completely neutral, but instead reflect a form of '*detached involvement*' (Stacey and Griffin, 2005: 2).

5.6.1 Neutralising my Bias

When selecting students' words for use in this research, only parts of a student's narrative was selected. The relevance and importance of students' words was based on their importance to my area of research or their links with known literature. These students were never given a chance to comment on how I used or interpreted their words. From the student perspective, they chose what to write and their work was produced in a specific context at a specific time. This is therefore, very much an interpretation by me, of students' sense making across a given programme of study. I must try to reflect in a valid way, the context of my students' story telling while acknowledging and recognising the dominant position of power I have had throughout, both in identifying the project, finding a way to use students work, analysing the data and writing up this research.

My selection of the data to use and my interpretation of that data, is probably biased by, and through my own history, but with approximately thirty years of practice to call on I believe that I am well positioned to have developed:

'the capacity to make wise and prudent judgements about what, in a particular situation, would constitute an appropriate expression of the good' (Carr, 2006: 426).

It would be foolish to try to pretend I was not present in this research at every turn, I could not bracket myself out, after all, I had a very specific and *'active role in constructing the very reality'* (Chia, 1996: 42) I was investigating. It is impossible to eliminate bias completely but being aware of its existence and being aware of the motivations involved in the writing of an assignment, and then using this assignment as the basis for a research project does make one careful. I was responsible for how the world would understand my students, and the role that feedback plays in their learning.

When others read my extracts or vignettes of the students' words they may not necessarily ascribe the same meaning as I do and thus the process of interpretation begins, as those reading the students' words reconstruct the world of the students, based on their own experiences and understanding of the situations being described. Interpreting the students' words involves one in constructing a specific account of the students' story (Edley, 2001). It also involves examining not just the meaning of the words used but considering the meaning the writer or speaker intended when the assessment was written or feedback was discussed (Von Glasersfeld, 1983). For this research, it is my interpretation and reconstruction of student's descriptions that form the basis of this work and therefore, brings with it certain responsibilities.

The data used was based on a sample of the total available assignments. The students' work was not anonymous to me and thus it could be construed that my own specific bias led to the selection of the assignments to use. However, as I used a simple and generally recognised sampling approach this was not possible. My bias is evident in the issues I choose to include in this research, issues to do with traditions of exclusion and failure in the profession, with class, with disadvantage and power: these issues do reflect my bias.

While it is not possible to provide definitive explanations of the nature of students' interaction with feedback, a large sample makes it possible to infer descriptive generalisations. The sample size, and the collection of data across several years should

also help to minimise distortion and bias caused by any specific motivations evidenced in students' reflections, but this will not, however, eliminate it.

When students are working on assessments, each word chosen has a social value, and must be seen in the context of what these students have chosen to suppress, or control, so as not to reveal too much of their true identity, they must save face (Goffman, 1971, Goffman, 2003) and sustain or even create an impression for me the reader. In addition, in writing for me many students will attempt to *'save face'* for me also and will not therefore give their true *'judgement'* (Goffman, 2003: 7) on their experiences or in relation to my feedback to them, as this could lead to embarrassment when next we meet. Goffman views this *'face-work'* (p8) as an attempt to avoid incidents, a form of dance learned early to avoid our own and others embarrassment (Goffman, 2003: 8). This assessment however offered students the opportunity to give generic comments, on other tutors' feedback, enabling them to *'save-face'* for each of us. Within this complex changing world that students are immersed in, they are also in the process of developing their own ability to be self-reflective as they attempt *'to deal with, anticipate and control others view on the self'* (Rochat 2009: 17) and create, or even re-create their identity as a student.

Individual experiences *'cut across many structures and casual groups in a chaotic fashion'* (Sayer, 1992: 250), thus generalisation may be as good as it gets. Seeking consistency or regularity in human behaviour is unrealistic (Sayer, 1992), since we all change our views, almost daily, about some aspect of our life and our understanding of life. So, one might ask, why bother with this quest? From my perspective, this research represents the development of a specific knowledge base which has enabled me to change and improve my practice, and in the process, I am able to share some of this *knowing* with colleagues and with my students. But it is also important to recognise that each of us is naturally subjective, where subjective means our views are loaded with personal perspectives, and this subjectivity effects our every act.

In the next chapter the student voice heard through their reflective assignments, focus groups and other data sources, demonstrates how the student who was introduced and described in chapter 3 feels and reacts to her early experience of university life. She discusses how well it has lived up to her expectations and examining the student life through her words allows us to eavesdrop on her emotional reactions to some of what has occurred.

Chapter Six

Interpreting the Student Voice: Findings

6.1 Introduction

Previous chapters have set out the theoretical and practical context within which a university operates. This is described at the macro level through an examination of the educational environment. At the micro level the role of feelings and emotions, the students' mind, their state of being, their age, experience, their cultural capitals and expectations all play a role in their overall experience of higher education.

This chapter presents some of the findings from this research. These findings are represented through reporting students' point of view across 4 of the themes identified in the data (Table 5.4) and should help us to understand how we can ease students' transition into university. The five themes identified were:

- (1) Expectations at Transition;
- (2) Independent Learning;
- (3) Wellbeing;
- (4) Self and Identity;
- (5) Feedback and its Impact;

The first four are covered in this chapter while the fifth theme is addressed in chapter 7. By dividing the themes in this way, I was able to examine the underlying but extremely significant issues which impact on and to some degree manipulate students' feelings and reactions to feedback. Many of the emotive events categorised by students under the first 4 themes above have their roots in past experiences. These often exist or are generated even before feedback is received for the first time at university. I use students' voices, their narratives, to illuminate their views and to identify and clarify the phenomena that impact them.

I examine students' first encounters with the university and making friends and consider how they viewed themselves and viewed the need to become independent learners, and generally settle into higher level work and meet the demands of their discipline. I also examine how they evaluate our response to their needs and how they settle into being a student as these early experiences can determine many of their long-term views of their learning experience.

6.2 Expectations and Transition

Being a student is difficult and settling into university revolves around making friends, building relationships and getting to know the academic staff. In a post-92 university, the number of students studying on a specific programme or module can be large and is usually over 200 in accounting. Meeting and mingling with so many different people can be daunting for young, shy, insecure, adolescents as they become aware of the difference, and the distance between themselves, their peers and their tutors. These students are often self-conscious; developing their own identity while creating, demonstrating and negotiating their own self-image through '*complex acts of self-presentation*' (Keller, 1998: 1).

It takes time for students to begin to understand what is expected of them at university, and general confusion in those early days leads to real *aloneness* and feelings of *isolation* and *confusion*; not knowing who from, or how, to get guidance, or even what that guidance means when it is received (Starling, 1987). All through childhood and early adulthood (adolescence) young people are treated in a particular way, by family and teachers. They are generally:

'held responsible for their words and deeds in ways that are different from the way we hold ourselves and other adults responsible and why we have certain special, paternalistic obligations toward them' (Helm, 2010: 215)

As soon as they arrive at university they are treated as fully-grown adults, when they are, in fact, in-between, being semi-dependent on someone or something as they have no

state support (Arnett, 2015) and must borrow or be supported by family. We expect these young people to have their own adult voice, a voice that finds the necessary motivation to survive in a new world. But where has this transformation come from, how did it happen, has it happened, we use the students' words, their voice to find out what they think. The student data allows me to explore and explain student behaviour by examining the relationships between the characteristics they define, or express, in relation to their university experience (Laurillard, 1993).

Students come to university with self-theories (Dweck, 2015; Dweck, 1991; Dweck, 2008), theories or beliefs about their own abilities and if their early experiences appear to undermine their belief in their own ability this may cause them to give up. Dweck investigated how students develop their self-belief systems and identified patterns of thinking which she described as self-theories. Some young people believe that intelligence is a fixed trait, Dweck called this an entity theory, which as a fixed trait cannot be changed (Dweck, 1988). These students will work to maintain a performance level to meet their own goals and thus will not expand as much effort as they could, and possibly never realise their full potential. Others believe that intelligence can be increased if they put in additional effort and Dweck called this an incremental theory (Dweck, 1986). These students appear more motivated and are willing to spend more time learning as they pursue their own goals but may also experience difficulties in university. What is not apparent, in Dweck's work, is whether more effort always results in higher grades (Harackiewicz et al., 1997). Simply transitioning into university may lead to increased stress and worry (Papier et al., 2015) which may impinge initial transition even further.

'When I was accepted and it was confirmed that I would be attending the University I was scared as I didn't know what to expect, whether I would fit in with other students on my course? Whether I would enjoy the course I had chosen? Whether or not I would adapt from the styles of A' levels?'

He then went on to comment on the need to be an independent learner and his lack of anticipation or preparation for this:

'When September came I found it hard to adapt to the change, as I felt the change from A' levels was bigger than first expected. This was shown when I missed one of my first assignments because I wasn't told about it and didn't realise how independent university was'

Understanding students' expectations are an important part of responding to students' needs because expectations are the foundation on which students' actual experiences sit.

'The students' perception of their own selves as well as the expectations from the university environment plays a very important role in their adjustment' (Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008: 32).

Beginning university can involve students in a transformational experience in an academic, social and intellectual sense (Kandiko, 2013) and being unprepared for this new experience can act as a demotivating catalyst, which can infect their overall view of their educational experience for at a minimum, their first few months, and at worst across the duration of their university experience. During this early period some students change their mind and withdraw (Braxton, 2009), or the seeds of failure are sown as they lose focus and objectivity. Many students find the task of adopting new and different social values very difficult and fail to integrate well (Yorke, 2004). In the US Tinto examined the role of expectations using nearly 50 years of research trying to explain and understand why some students leave or fail while others succeed (Tinto, 1993; Tinto, 2012a; Tinto, 2012b). Tinto concluded that much of the blame rested with the failure within institutions to fully accommodate the needs of their students. Here in the UK students arrive confused, often afraid and mainly unprepared and recognising students' difficulties with transition from one social culture to another is a starting point to solving the problem. Finding solutions must be the focus going forward.

The Neves & Hillman's (2016) and the Kandiko (2013) reports demonstrate that the most fundamental and basic requirement within an institution is initially to respond to student expectations and then over time manage those expectations. Meeting student expectations is identified as one of the strongest indicators of student satisfaction (Neves et al., 2016; Tinto, 1993). When students arrive at university we ask them to take responsibility for themselves and their learning, to take control of both their

personal, social and academic life (Lowe and Cook, 2003), in a new and complex environment for which they have not been adequately prepared. Student Yaqoob was clear about his understanding of what the university should be doing and, in many ways, provides a blueprint for what the first weeks should include:

'The university should provide students with further guidance on what is expected from students who have enrolled for Accounting & Finance. They should allocate time in the first few weeks for students to prepare and adjust for university life as well as allowing them to meet new people and explore the opportunities the university provide'.

Students struggle to fit in and know what to do to meet other people's expectations from them. Students Ayan and Alfie capture students' initial confusion, the degree of difference between university and school, their general expectations in relation to staff contact, the drawback of not getting as much support for assignments as expected and some general disappointment with grades reflected below:

'My first term at the University was difficult period for me, almost everything was confusing and it was a huge difference from school system how I was used to'. 'I felt that if we are given more hours of lecture every week it will be easier for us to engage ourselves more to the course',

Students Peter, and Agnes expressed the view that their work was not being fully acknowledged in the grades they received:

'I do not believe that the grades that I achieved are a reflection of my attendance in lectures or seminars'. 'All of my grades were not up to my expectations but the most important thing is that I passed. In next semester I plan to work harder and improve on my grades'

Tinto (2012) points out that students need academic and social support to succeed in college claiming that *'high expectations and support go hand in hand with student success'* (Tinto, 2012a: 24). Students see their initial problems as university failings as Wendy points out:

'My first term at university did not live up to expectations. I expected the university to make the transition from living at home to living alone to be as smooth as possible. This unfortunately wasn't the case for me'

By ignoring the backgrounds and prior educational experience of our students, we ignore the distribution of cultural capital in our society, assuming equal possession (Sullivan, 2002) and thus ignoring the basic needs of students as we impose our expectations on

them, unaware of the difference between their expectations and what we offer. Some students' expected university work to be more difficult and more complicated (harder), than what they were familiar with, yet still struggled to adapt, despite their expectations. Students Fern, Jasminder, Ayan, Christopher, and Amer wrote:

'my expectations of university were very different to what I have experienced in my first semester' 'I knew that university would be very different from sixth form and I had to set myself mentally to progress' 'Starting University I knew it was going to be a huge difference from normal school as it is harder academic work' 'I found it hard to adapt to change, as I felt the change from A levels was bigger than first expected' 'I was never prepared for university, as I had no idea on how it was going to be and what to expect'

Students Cherelee, Safia, Boskina, Ayan, Charlie, Hemanta and Tatenda felt the university had let them down, while also recognising how unprepared they were for so many aspects of being a university student, they clearly show their disappointment, worry and struggles with their new experiences reflecting again an issue with expectations and cultural capital:

'I don't think the university lived up to its expectations, however I would say that it more came as a shock to me because as I earlier said the teaching is completely different'. 'I did know that studying and adjusting to whole new environment and city was going to be a real challenge especially the fast pace of study at university' 'It took me 2 months to get used to university life. The reason it took me so long is that I wasn't prepared' 'Sometimes the workload can get to you and you may start to panic, such as leaving work till the last day' 'I feel that I struggled to keep up with the work load' 'I thought the lectures and tutors would tell students everything they needed to know such as guidance on assignments, deadlines and homework tasks by word of mouth but they posted it on Study Net instead'

This unpreparedness for, and underestimation (Tinto, 2012a) of, what is required while in university places big obstacles in the way of student learning, yet we ignore or forget that students need guidance on what exactly will happen during their time at university. From our perspective, we may feel that school, parents, friends and family should, or could, have provided the necessary preparation and this is not our responsibility. We fail sometimes to realise that for some students, their support networks are unable to offer guidance. Or is it that we believe that written guidance should meet students' needs.

Students' expectations are formed before they come to University (Kuh et al., 2006) and can sometimes prevent them from progressing as successfully as they might have done. Students can have pre-conceived ideas about what they will experience on arrival and how much work or effort they need to put in, suffering from cognitive dissonance, when real events conflict with their pre-existing personal beliefs and understanding (Boyce and Greer, 2013: 105).

This raises questions about the process of transition into university, and the need for focused, structured, socialisation; an issue raised in the literature for some considerable time (Tinto, 1993; Tinto, 2012b; Pascarella, 2006; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1976; Yorke, 2002; Yorke, 2004), but which now seems to be a growing problem. It is essential to find a way to enable a safer and more satisfying transition for students in their first semester. This transition period needs to be better managed for students, but so far little improvement has been evident since this data (2005/6/7) was initially collected. Kandiko (2013) reporting to the QAA on students' perceptions of the quality of their learning experiences and the academic standards of their programme of studies found:

'the profound sense of how important and life-changing higher education can be for many students. Students put a lot into their higher education experience, in terms of time, effort, energy and finance, and as a result have justifiable expectations of the environment that institutions provide and the support offered for learning' (Kandiko, 2013: 21).

This report went on to identify gaps between student expectations, and what is delivered as was made very clear in this statement:

'these related to expectations of higher education being shaped by the 'campus' discourse of the university, content and structure of courses, difficulty of work, availability of opportunities and degree of independent learning' (Kandiko, 2013: 21).

Expectations work in two directions: we are beginning to examine what students expect from us, however we fail students by not demonstrating and expressing more clearly, our expectations from them. *'What students expect of themselves and what they need to do to be successful determines in part what they will actually do'* (Tinto, 2012a: 10). The way that students structure and interact with the world, the metaphysical systems they construct to make sense of the world, depends on the meaning they give to what is happening socially and within their physical environment (Molden and Dweck, 2006). We are in a problematic situation, where what we want to give to our students, and what we expect from them, is not well matched. Students' expectations can become a deterrent to some forms of behaviour:

'serving as a filter through which students compare what is unfolding with what they think should happen and decide whether certain activities are appropriate, meaningful, relevant, and worth their time, and what opportunities and activities to ignore' (Kuh et al., 2006: 36).

Kuh went on to say that students often overlook, and thus do not join, events that are a key part of being a successful student because these activities did not form part of their initial expectations. This research identified examples such as *doing research* or *joining events* or signing up for study abroad. It is possible that our students can be reluctant to read certain types of materials, simply because they were not expecting to be required to, and these expectations have shaped their behaviour (Feldman, 1981). Over time most students learn to accept, or at least acknowledge, what is expected from them and adapt their learning behaviour accordingly, remaking their identities as they absorb some new ideas and reject others - as they begin to learn (Scott et al., 2014). Others will struggle through the 3 years of their study, never quite coming to terms with what is required of them (Bandura, 1986a), and remain detached, uninvolved, separate, experiencing a form of social isolation (McInnis, 2001).

6.3 Independent Learning

As was indicated in section 6.2 above, students' expectations play a significant role in how they experience their first year at university and independent learning featured there. Even those students with some insight into what to expect when they arrive at university can experience problems. Some were not quite prepared for the onslaught of work, and the need to be independent learners, and struggled trying to cope. Many students expected to be passive listeners, passive learners, and suffered anxiety when they realised they need to become independent learners. Their struggle with the newness and strangeness of higher education (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1999) was clearly reflected in their words and demonstrates again how unprepared students can be:

Ayan wrote:

'University is more independent learning, depending on how much you as a person want to learn, everything is up to you and if you need help you have to seek for help unlike school where you have got teachers telling you what to do and is looking out for you' he goes on to add 'it is frightening at first, but once I get used to it I will be more independent'

Tatenda added:

'I knew I was expected to learn independently but I thought it was going to happen in steps with the lecturers helping me with everything during the first few weeks then gradually leaving me to do things with little/no help'

Another student, Kazi put it clearly:

'When I started I realised university life was different in comparison to college, as the work was more intense and continuous from one topic to another. The teachers/lecturers were helpful in explaining the work but most of it was down to private study and research I also realised that, teachers/lecturers would not chase after you about concerns to your work and private study, and that it was your own personal gain and benefit. My attendance most probably shows the negative side throughout the semester, as I have not been attending very well. Expectations are different and work is purely of personal gain and benefit'.

Some have a vague notion of what to expect, but are still very surprised:

Ayan wrote:

'Starting University I knew it was going to be a huge difference from normal school, as it is harder academic work and also as a student you are expected to be more responsible of your workAt first coming to X University it was a bit confusing for me and it was also so different from school, even way more than I expected '

Michael put his views succinctly. He recognised his need to come to terms with independent learning:

'This first term at university has been an interesting experience. It has been different to what I first imagined it to be. The course involves a larger proportion of Independent learning than I had previously expected, as we use lecture notes and relevant study books to piece together knowledge, which can be discussed within seminars. This is a completely new method of learning to me, but is generally effective'

But while many expected, and welcomed, independence from home and school, they had not anticipated the impact of that independence, in terms of their responsibility and work load and what it meant for their learning. Recognising and accepting their responsibility for their learning can be difficult and takes time. Limited access to staff is also seen as an issue. Student Jesicka, Ennis and Lyndon point out:

'contact hours are minimum and access to staff is limited' 'I just feel we aren't getting our money's worth, at the least the lecturers should have more time per module teaching' 'I would say the work load is immense at times I feel like we should have been taught more by the lecturers'

Students perceived lack of staff contact time or staff access confirms earlier research (Rhodes and Nevill, 2004) and this creates feelings of isolation but can also create feelings of abandonment (Bohrer, 2004), of being overwhelmed (Oswalt and Riddock, 2007), all leading to stress.

In their first days, weeks and months, students encounter multiple assessments, most of which are high stakes. They will constantly face time pressures to be in class; to be at a tutorial to prepare for a presentation; while worrying about friendships; relationships; and their social standing within a class; and within and across different groups. Many students when considering and examining their new environment, will find it taxing, or even feel that it is '*endangering his or her well-being*' (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984: 19).

Ali, Dannie, Cherelee, Ayan, Margaret, and Dipin, all echoed the requirement for the need to be independent learners while adding comments on the amount of study time required and their own lack of preparation.

These student's views are expressed in the short vignette below:

'At the beginning of this course I did not realize we need to study a lot of hours by our own and we are going to move this fast in our topics. I think my problem is that I was not familiar with the rules of the universities and must keep in mind that I am not in school any more', 'the most key thing was that it wasn't like school where teachers were there to help me whenever I needed them, it was a lot more self-study', 'I have come to realise that studying in university is more individual learning as you are given work and just sent to do it'.

'It is frightening at first, but ones I get used to it I will be more independent'. 'I was warned of the little help given to you and the importance of independency'. 'The only difference is that university is much more independent and also you don't get as much help from your teachers as you're lecturers are busy so it is difficult to communicate with lecturers one on one for help. Before coming to university I didn't have a clear idea of what the whole experience would be like. I think that I wasn't prepared enough for university and I didn't imagine the vast amount of work in the first term.'

These student's views give a mixed message. Some are unprepared while others expect university to be different but are still surprised by the degree of independence expected. Starting a university degree represents aspiration built around expectations and pre-conceived ideas or ideologies. The reality for many is that they are now faced with a new academic culture, new conventions (Bowl, 2003), and a range of rules associated with behaviour and regulatory requirements, and for some these appear to be barriers to success or to progress. Aspiration alone is not sufficient to overcome the barriers that students experience even when they consider themselves to have been prepared. This is reflected in their surprise at the volume of work expected. Students Charlie, Alfie, Dipin, and Yew Bon felt that:

'Sometimes the workload can get to you and you may start to panic' 'I didn't know anybody that had come to university previously therefore I had no one to tell me about the hard work that you had to put in' 'a bit too much work for first year students who have just got into the rhythm of university life'.

Students' surprise is exacerbated because of perceived lack of access to staff, which is different to their school, or college, experiences: Here students Tatenda, Peter, Sanjay, Neil O', Mustafa and Bhatt wrote:

'I also thought I could see my lecturers whenever I felt the need but to my surprise I had to see them during their office hours or write them e-mails'

'When help is needed at a certain time that tutors are not available, students cannot be accommodated, as tutors are not there to help them'.. 'The most notable disadvantage of University life is the small amount of interaction you receive from tutors'.

'I was shocked at first at the little assistance given for each piece of coursework specifically, while there was general help there wasn't specific help for each topic'.

'one downside of my first term at the University is the office hours allocated to each lecturer or tutor....University is more of being independent and doing everything on your own rather than being spoon fed by teachers but as being first year students we should have been given more help and guidance with assignments rather than being left there to struggle and understand the requirements of the subject.'

'when I had work to do and I emailed the lecturers asking for help some of them would never reply'.

What is evident across the student reflective writing is their general unpreparedness for starting university and thus their lack of knowledge and understanding about what to expect. This must surely be both our biggest problem and one we can solve if we take a different approach to their first semester in university.

6.4 Wellbeing

Being confused over what is required (Starling, 1987) can heighten students' nervousness and uncertainty, leading to worry and even stress (Ross, 1999; Churchman and King, 2009). Many early university experiences and activities are recognised as *student stressors* and US research specifically mentions examinations, demands on time, and a lack of financial resources (Kuh et al., 2007; Kuh et al., 2006; Pascarella et al., 2013). However other events which can lead to feelings of isolation include challenging social/academic encounters in the classroom, the lecture theatre and the university bar. The greater the difference in new versus old experiences the more stressful they can be (Yan, 2013; Robotham, 2008; Ross, 1999). Simply deciding where to sit can be a stressor as students consider; *should I sit on this seat or will s/he think I fancy them? or if I sit here will I appear not to have friends of my own?* When students begin to receive feedback and grades stress increases. Students question their own cognitive skills as they begin to compare their performance with that of others and see themselves lacking. Some have high, often misguided, expectations of themselves and their ability

to achieve academic excellence (Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008). The Emotional Curve Figure 4.1 demonstrates some of the feelings that students can experience and more of these feelings are captured in chapter 7 when students discuss feedback, assessment and exams.

Worry about settling in and building friendships and relationships is one of the major concerns of new students and a key transition essential. Loneliness is not uncommon for these students (Bourne, 2016, Kuh et al., 2006) and despite often appearing in control and relaxed, most students worry about making friends. These new students are going through a transition while at the same time family bonds are being loosened (Kuh et al., 2007). During this time students *'begin to interact in new ways with the members of the new group into which membership is sought'* (Tinto, 1993: 93). Building new relationships and making friends is a core expectation on arrival at university, as this enables students to fit in, to feel comfortable with their surroundings and to see themselves as belonging. Friends provide the means and opportunity for fun and a social life. New students are often experiencing their first real independence from parents and family and seek, and need, social support from peers as surrogates and this is a time when lifelong friendships are forged (Hall-Lande et al., 2007). Making new friends is a source of positive emotions and this often requires help from tutors, facilitating communication as Asish and Joan wrote:

'Another way that this module has helped to better me was on the very first day to partners us up with another person from the different background. I did that and I met Micha. When talking about ourselves we realised we live in close proximity with each other at home and at university. This was able me to gain a very good friend for life and has helped me to have the confidence of talking to another person to become good friends' 'I have realised working with others is a key in success when at university and surviving at university as you learn from each other'.

Creating opportunities for students to get to know others is an important role for the institution and for tutors as this is one way that friendships can form and as student Sonu points out:

'Making friends here in uni has been very easy and an important factor as the uni is very large and you can feel very isolated and lonely all on your own'.

Or as Vimal wrote:

'I found that everyone including myself use to leave a gap in seats because you wouldn't feel the need to go and sit next to someone you don't know. This is understandable as students can be shy, but out of all the lectures I first attended, Tutor X was the only lecturer to close the gap between every seat and get students talking. I found this helpful as it makes it easier for students to communicate'.

Another student Zairah pointed out that:

'In the first week of university I felt quite depressed because I did not have all my friends around me and was finding it hard to adjust to the way things work like at a higher education facility'.

But Mohammed found that:

'working together was a good way of developing friendship with someone who I had not previously known'.

Austin was of the view that he:

'wanted to be happy socially, and meet people whose company I would enjoy, in order to provide the all-important balance required in University life',

but when taking part in a group presentation he found that:

'when it came to the presentation itself, despite having memorising what I had to say thoroughly, I froze in the environment of public speaking. I dismantled the fluidity of our presentation but was able to recover to some extent after being helped out. I felt as if I had negatively affected our group's performance with my recital, but was reassured by group members in a supporting manner'.

While Austin was grateful for the support of his classmates he was very critical of his own performance and this can lead to feelings of unhappiness, of stress and sometimes even of failure.

While loneliness is an issue for some students, it can be difficult for students to identify fully the relationship between different factors impacting them and their overall wellbeing. Creating opportunities for students to meet, make friends, and get to know their peers, is an important aspect of *becoming* a student. Students recognise the role that relationships play in who they are. Michael C and Asish particularly demonstrated how important friendships are:

'Making friends within my course has helped me through the first couple of months at university, as it gives me people to relax, socialise and share my experience with. This makes the whole new experience of university a bit easier to deal with' 'I have

realised working with others is a key in success when at university and surviving at university as you learn from each other and are able to make good friends'.

Building relationships can be very difficult for students who are strangers to each other, yet so very easy for tutors to facilitate. Simply pairing 2 people together to undertake a task resulted in the following comments from students Matthew E, Laura, Aniq, Michael and many others:

'When working in pairs I felt that on the whole I coped well and made a good friend through doing this'. 'As a consequence of being partners, we have formed a good friendship and I can see us being friends for the rest of our first year'. 'Group and partner work, gave me the courage to get to know my peers and become quite good friends'. My work partner, Neil, and I share similar interests and therefore became friends quickly'.

Students Amar P, Mitten, Jade and Agnes added their views:

'I met a lot of new friends' 'I've made new friends this term from both my course and with people on other courses and I am happy about this', I do think I made a good friend which can be difficult'. 'We became good friend inside and outside of university, which help us both a lot in different ways'.

Access to, and interaction with, tutors is often seen as another important university relationship and lack of access seems to add to the degree of loneliness felt at leaving home. Tutors are often seen as parental figures who then fail to meet expectations. Kerrie pointed out her specific disappointment in the relationship, or not, with teachers and her resulting loneliness:

'with my expectations that teachers would always be on hand if help was needed. This vision was soon destroyed as email contact seemed common and a one to one person contact rare, meaning the feeling of isolation and loneliness was common'.

Dipin and Baghdad felt that:

'you don't get as much help from your teachers as you're lecturers are busy so it is difficult to communicate with lecturers one on one for help' 'I was also hoping to get support from the staff and teachers when I thought I needed help'.

Research evidence suggests students want staff to be enthusiastic (NSS 2005 - 2016), knowledgeable, and approachable, and in addition staff/student relations play a key role in the direction that a student's journey through a degree can take (Kuh et al., 2006; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1976; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005), as their perceptions of

staff can guide their module selection, their specialisation, and many other aspects of their study choices. As academics, we hold positions of power (Kerfoot and Knights, 1994: 70; Molloy, 2013) and trust (Molloy, 2013), and are perceived as belonging to a caring profession: teaching. Students want to feel that staff are supportive, and understand their problems, even when they know these problems cannot be resolved.

Students Bagdat, Nur, Michael, and Robyn found staff supportive:

'I was also hoping to get support from the staff and teachers when I thought I needed help, which became true', 'the lecturing staff have been supportive and provided sufficient materials online for us to work through', 'the university staff did well at helping us settle in, and getting started', 'I really like all the tutors and staff here because if I have problem, I can contact them quickly and the respond from them is very good', 'I have found the staff extremely approachable and understanding when I have been faced with child care problems for my daughter, they have helped me to overcome these and also been extremely supportive'.

Both the NSS (2006-2017) and the SAES (2016) indicate students are generally happy with the support they receive from staff in UK institutions. The student's words above indicate similar satisfaction in this institution. Student satisfaction is essential as the research indicates that the first year is very important to the overall success of their total experience of being a student (McInnis, 2001). Those that struggle with building friendships and tutor relationships find their early university experiences difficult. Students Matthew E and Khushal found it easier than many others to make friends and thus find settling in easier:

*'I met a lot of new friends throughout the first term which was my main concern about going to the university as I hardly knew many people that were coming here'.
'I was fortunate enough to meet new friends within the first week making the first few months a lot easier'.*

Not all students need the same level of support when they arrive, some come with strong emotional resilience and a positive mental attitude and the evidence from Unite (Neale et al., 2016) and other sources (Bandura et al., 2001; Dweck, 1983; Henderson, 1990), suggest that these students are less likely to suffer from, or report feeling any form of, mental problems, or stress. But for some *"being a student is to be in a state of anxiety"* (Barnett, 2007: 32). Barnett acknowledges the link between assessment, results, and

life chances, and discusses the concept of *'being'*: being a student and being human (p28) while also being *'fragile'* (p29) or brittle and at the same time enduring. Helping students to endure is our objective.

6.5 Self and Identity

Enrolling at university is a risky decision as the potential to fail, to expose failures, and open oneself up to constant and persistent academic judgement (Ellis and France, 2012), takes courage especially for those who may not have enjoyed 'good' feedback at school. Students do not want to expose their ignorance (Sullivan, 2002), their lack of understanding of our expectations in the classroom and thus they remain quiet, look disinterested, avoid eye contact, and generally work to protect their identity and to save-face or save front (Goffman, 1971) and avoid exposure to their peers and this may be interpreted as disengagement and can eventually become how they are seen in the classroom. Many simply lack the experience or confidence to speak out and seek help to ensure they know what is expected of them: Alfie wrote about his failure to seek help when he was confused:

'With this new module and information which I was having trouble with, instead of seeking help, it de-motivated me and make this module suffer as I didn't want to do anything related to this module'.

This could reflect face saving behaviour and a need to avoid exposure in some way. While another student, Zhang could see the value in seeking help:

'The most important thing for me is that, if I cannot understand, I should not pretend that I already get what the tutor just said. I ought to be honest about my study and ask question actively. Studying is for myself, not for the teachers or even my family'.

Student Lyndon did not see the value in some of what he was being taught and wrote:

'I cannot say that I enjoyed this module, as I found it quite irrelevant in the early stages and couldn't find good enough reasons to want to excel in this subject. This lead to a great fall in motivation, which then meant I wouldn't attend as many lectures as I probably, should have'.

This reflects students' preconceived ideas about what they should be taught, i.e. again reflecting some misguided expectation, but this in turn impacts their motivation and then their performance. Other students do appear to understand the role of motivation, student Jon U, for instance, comments on his own motivation:

"I'm the sort of person that needs motivation but university is about motivating yourself. I'm glad the first term wasn't as easy as I thought otherwise I would have been too laid back for the next term"

Students have many different feelings about their initial university experience, the modules they study, the friends they make or don't make. This provides a brief flavour of what it is like being a first-year student in a post-92 university.

Ahmed admitted to a lack of confidence:

'I wasn't able to talk clearly enough, there were a few ideas I wanted to put forward to the group but I was scared that they weren't going to adopt them so I didn't say anything'.

While Shital admitted that he gets shaky and nervous but will cope:

'Presentations, do make me shaky and nervous but I know I have to get used to it as it is going to help me in the future when working as an accountant..... I was so shaky and really nervous that the piece of paper I had with me to guide me fell down'.

Asish and Vu identify an issue with speaking in front of others:

'I was a person who had difficulty when presenting information with an audience as I used to get nervous and as a result I would stutter as I would be explaining points within the presentation', 'I was very confident as a person but sometimes I get nervous and I do not get my point across'.

While we recognise and seem to accept that students can be intimidated by having to speak in front of tutors and peers, some of us fail to recognise that students fear other aspects of their role as student such as handing in work, being judged and graded.

Student Kerrie advised that her first semester was:

'a daunting and challenging experience and the fear of the unknown has made many tasks difficult'.

Student Anon 3 advised that:

'your own personal approach is what differentiates students who will pass from those who will fail their first year, my learning techniques are poor and need improving'.

Students can be very self-critical, often blaming themselves for their inability to deal with the time demands of reading, study and assessment, the need to be independent learners, the ability to understand what tutors want and how to interact with tutors (Bowl, 2003: 88). Not all students are satisfied with their own performance. In the HEPI/HEA report, 37 percent of students feel that their expectations were not met because they had not put enough effort in themselves (Neves et al., 2016: 12). How students' handle events after this depends on their self-efficacy, i.e. how well they believe they can improve their output by hard work, a belief that effort equals outcomes (Bandura, 2006). Consider the views of these students: Farah, Ryan, Cherelee and Delicia who wrote:

'I feel that I could have improved my preparation and research before attempting the work', 'my work in the other modules have still been to a good standard, and I'm satisfied with the grades I've been achieving' 'Overall I don't think that I am doing too badly, but personally I know I can do better so I will do better' 'My attendance is without a doubt magnificent'.

Self-evaluation and self-assessment can be experienced in response to receipt of grades, and then students can begin to consider their own role in poor results. Some students berate themselves for not attending classes more often.

Fennyl, James G, Ayan, Taiwo, reflect students' ability to take a degree of responsibility:

'slowly after a few weeks, my attendance started to fall considerably.... After first few lectures of Microeconomics, I hardly went to any which has resulted in me struggling to be prepared for the exam coming up'. 'I feel that the modules I have excelled in are the modules I have given the most time to' 'My attendance this semester is not satisfying' 'I feel I could have put a bit more effort into attending my tutorials' 'overall the first semester did not go as planned, I attended a large percentage of my tutorials and lectures in the beginning of the semester, however towards the end I began missing some of my lectures, especially skills for accountant's lectures as well as quantitative methods. Missing out on those lectures will definitely decrease the grade that I possibly received if I had attended the lectures'.

While Gugulethu, Natalie and Wendy W added:

'I also found that after having missed a lecture, I was not sufficiently prepared for the task that needed to be completed within seminar, and therefore my participation was very limited'... 'it makes seminars extremely difficult to understand, as you are already behind students who attended, after having missed a lecture.. I was not sufficiently prepared for the task that needed to be completed

within seminar, and therefore my participation was very limited' 'Due to lectures not being compulsory, my attendance has been lower than I originally intended it to be'.

Each student is an individual, each is different and when they come to university they are joining a club, an institution, an organisation, and a bureaucracy. This club has an old well-established history and its own ideology, where *'ideology is a structure – a structure of collective belief'* (Barnett, 2003: 57). University is an ordered world, a *'bounded space'* (Henkel, 2005) of rules and regulations, many self-imposed, but more imposed externally, to ensure our ability to provide information for performance based metrics as evidence of accountability (Alexander, 2000). Most academics continue to enjoy a degree of insulation from the *real world* (Wilson, 2006; Tse, 2014; Hanley, 2016) but the modern student in a new university lives, generally, in a very different world, a world where individual expectations are more fluid, more uncertain, less stable with less established futures (Tomlinson, 2013). This is a time when students must begin to consider what they want from their educational experience and thus consider career choices. But this is also a time when they begin to recognise that their future opportunities are bounded and limited.

The first semester is also a period of transition, filled with excitement and opportunities to make new friends while looking forward to *'becoming other'* (Cisney, 2014: 55), breaking out of old habits, navigating or being reborn into new and different habits, constructing oneself anew, working towards *becoming a student*. This process also involves looking back and comparing past and current experiences and finding difference. In this early process of adapting, changing, and adopting a different identity, there is evidence of disappointment as students struggle to fit in. University learning is an encounter with the unknown. Students arrive with lots of expectations. Some see education as a *rite of passage*, for others it is the acquisition of credentials, or the acquisition of technological skills which will enable them to get a good job. Most of our students are adolescents in the process of finding themselves, finding their *self*. As people, we are able *'to take ourselves as an object'* (Brown, 1998: 2), and then examine this object. We can look at ourselves as if through a mirror and reflect on what we see (Brown, 1998). Our

interpretation of our *self*, our *self-concept* (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003) is limited to what we know about the world, our perceptions of ourselves, and is formed through our backgrounds and our social capital. Perhaps we know what we can do, but not what we are capable of? Being a student can be a road to self-discovery, the forming of an adult identity, but students are still fragile, vulnerable and uncertain about their identity, their *self*, they are at a developmental stage where they are still negotiating their identity.

If, as some claim (Swann and Bosson, 2010), our identity is constructed within the social institutions we occupy and the relationships we develop (Henkel, 2005) then the role of the university, its culture, its staff, and its physical spaces impacts and colours each student's identity over the 3 or 4 year period they are with us. Students are in the process of creating a new identity. Identity is a process which develops through '*self-other*' talk (Ybema et al., 2009: 299), and through social interaction. As individuals, we use a range of '*inter-textual identification processes to develop an ongoing sense of the 'self' and the 'other'*' (Ybema et al: 2009: 300) as we interact with our social environment and construct our identity. Academics are generally secure in both their professional identity and their academic identity (Henkel, 2005), but students' lives are not so clear cut. Students who achieve good grades, for instance, will see their identity vested in the myth of their success (Hildebrand, 2004), while those achieving poorer grades, will do the same but in a far more painful (Haines, 2004) and immobilising way:

'The self is to be a subjective being, it is to aspire to autonomy, it is to strive for personal fulfilment' (Rose, 1996: 151).

People generally engage in some form of self-appraisal, we regularly compare aspects of our lives with that of others, our students' compare grades, try to ascertain their position within a class and many seek regular feedback from their tutors. Self-appraisal can lead to stress but when coupled with tutor feedback and grades it can influence students' perceptions of themselves and can impact their ability to adjust to university (Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008). Students can have high, often unfounded, expectations

of themselves and be very hard on themselves while trying, to be honest when identifying their actual achievements. We are generally very selective about the aspects of our identity on which we stake our self-worth (Crocker and Luhtanen, 2003). Students, however, when they decide to attend university, give up control of part of their self-worth, as it is the academics who decide on their grades:

'The grades that I achieved were mediocre and there is an extremely large room for improvement in all aspects of the skills that I received from this module' 'I myself am a very lazy person' 'I have let myself down this first semester as I did not really pull my weight as I know I am capable of producing higher quality work and I allowed laziness to be one of my downfalls'.

'The marks given for assignments are justified considering the fact I tend to leave it to a week to the due date' 'I am not pleased with my progress. I do not believe I have done as well as I should have; the simple answer to this would be that I do not do enough work' 'I realize that because I was expecting university to be easier, I did not put all my effort and energy on my assignments, in which I failed myself' I don't participate in every class discussion or if I do then I don't contribute to very much. Also I find myself ill prepared for tutorials sometimes as I haven't done the set homework or done any research on it at all'.

'The grades that I obtained from the first set of exams for each module of my course were not at the level I was hoping to achieve. Realistically, I could not be too disappointed with the results, as I did not put much effort into researching and revising' 'my failure of this module being linked to my attendance to lectures'.

Many students recognised the adverse impact of poor attendance, which is often interpreted as a lack of engagement. However, as these are first-year, first-semester, students a lack of engagement may be tied into their initial expectations about many aspects of being a student, expectations which have not been managed or modified during these early weeks and months.

Students Ayan and Gugulthu had the following to say:

'My attendance this semester is not satisfying'. 'Overall the first semester did not go as planned, I attended a large percentage of my tutorials and lectures in the beginning of the semester, however towards the end I began missing some of my lectures'.

While some students clearly recognise their own responsibilities and recognise the possibility that not engaging the teaching may impact their results they continue to behave in the same way. Other students have the ability to self-regulate and self-manage

(Bandura et al., 2003) their learning, they have what is termed self-efficacy and this impacts their '*cognitive, motivational, decisional, and affective determinants*' (Bandura et al., 2003: 769). They can exercise control over aspects of their behaviour and see and understand the value of doing things differently (Bandura et al., 2001).

Bandura (1982) and Dweck (1988) both questioned why students in similar situations behave differently and concluded that their beliefs and attitudes to intelligence led some to either accept their own limitations as inbuilt and therefore unchangeable while others recognise the value and potential of hard work. Some students do not see themselves as capable and can give up before they have finished a given task (Bandura et al., 2001). Efficacy beliefs impact on whether people see and think about life from a pessimistic or optimist viewpoint and on the basis of their self-view and how they construe themselves, they choose courses of action (Bandura et al., 2003: Bong and Skaalvik, 2003).

Irrespective of our view of our own abilities most adults do not want to look foolish in front of their tutors and their peers and this is reflected in their sometimes-apologetic inferences about their performance. Many students are honest about their activities and recognise the connection between their attendance, class preparation, overall motivation and success, or at least appear to.

Students James G, M Farah, Kazi and Wendy W wrote:

'I feel that the modules I have excelled in are the modules I have given the most time to'. 'On the other hand, I feel that I could have improved my preparation and research before attempting the work'. 'I would not say I have achieved much this semester as my work is not to the best of my ability and potential' 'I have also learnt that no-one will force me to do work so self-motivation is key. I feel I have slightly failed myself with self-motivation because I am used to being told what to do and every piece of work being collected in 6th form The laid back attitude and low pass mark for year 1 have been partially responsible for the slightly lazy attitude I have adopted'.

Public speaking can be difficult for all of us so it's possible to imagine how such public acts, by students, can be compounded by self-doubt, lack of experience and a fear of looking foolish. But these students can also be very self-critical. Students Ashish and Shilin felt:

'as an individual I would get nervous within a presentation in front of an audience and this would be shown by me stuttering and leaving gaps in sentences followed by 'ERM' within the sentences' 'At the first time of the presentation, it was very nerve racking despite the fact that there were less than ten people watching me. I could not stop myself fidgeting, playing with my fingers and staring at the floor, every word seem to come out wrong even though I had practiced time and time again.'

Receipt of grades can be a major trigger for self-evaluation. Grades can undermine a students' self-perception as they, more than most other activities create and construct the student identity (Bernstein, 2000). Grades which students accept as authentic frames who students are, although Dweck (1986 & 1985) is clear that ability of itself is not what is important here, rather it is the individual's self-perception of their own ability which may be seen as adaptive or maladaptive (Dweck, 1986; Dweck et al., 1985). This individual's view of their own ability is confirmed by later UK-based research which indicates that students' self-confidence (self-concept and self-image) has a direct impact on how prepared students are to learn and how persistent they are in their learning (Abouserie, 1995; Barnett, 2007). Students' written reflections appear to provide them with an opportunity to come to terms with, or even excuse, their own performance even as they are very critical of themselves. Students Kazi, James O and Nawaz wrote:

'This first semester was a poor start in relation to the grades I have achieved My results from in class tests were not very satisfying and I was disappointed but regarding the issues of the lack of private studies and personal problems, I will and am going to focus more on my studies and put in my full potential towards my work'. 'I think my work may not have been up the required standards at first due to the amount of change that I had to adapt to' 'In this first semester I believe I have not achieved what I would have hoped to or what I believe I am capable of. My grades were just too ordinary'.

Attempts to promise themselves to behave differently in future demonstrates they recognise that their success is, to some degree, dependent on their own effort and their desire to succeed. Students' ability to succeed is linked to positive affect, and positive emotions, which generate a task-focused orientation which underlies motivation and is closely linked to achievement (Saklofske et al., 2012). Students Wendy W, Ahmed, Ryan, Monica, Amer P, Michael and Sophie wrote:

'no one will force me to do work so self-motivation is key' 'Even though I believe I failed in my presentation. I did feel very motivated to be the leader. I felt as I had the responsibility people were relying on my. This put me under extreme pressure which I think I didn't handle well'. 'B.D.A and Accounting Techniques are modules I am more interested in and involve my strengths, which make me more easily motivated to work as I find the subject enjoyable' 'I have also learnt to push myself. Self-motivation was something that I definitely achieved after the first month of university' 'I was motivated and ready to fully commit myself to work and study to accomplish my overall goal of the academic year in achieving a first' 'I need to increase my self-motivation, as I find it hard to read everything that we are asked to read by certain deadlines' 'I have learnt that you need motivation to be able to achieve desired grades'.

Umesh's view of accounting was very honest:

'I feel it necessary to inform you about my academic past. I was a very lazy student. I loved numbers and maths, and chose this pathway as it seemed the easier option and is very lucrative'.

6.6 Conclusions

The student voice identified in this chapter demonstrates the *'complex'* (Barnett, 2003: 42), *'lived experience'* (Marshall, 2006: 188) of students in a post-92 institution, focusing specifically on their first year of study as they begin to discover and create a new version of *self*, where *self* is a set of representations or mental maps one has about oneself (Swann and Bosson, 2010). They are creating a new *identity* in a new unfamiliar space, a space where they will be exposed to, and perhaps assimilate, an often different linguistic resource and learn to exist initially at least, in a divided habitus (Bourdieu, 1999, Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991), living with the *'wall in the head'* (Hanley, 2016 x). These students will experience a myriad of *'emotional states'* (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1999: xv) fuelled by new experiences, new ways of learning and the need to meet deadlines, deliver assessed work for judgement, receive feedback and wait in anticipation of further feedback. The significance of the role of feelings and emotions were identified in chapter 4 and are identified more fully here and in the following chapter as students' actual words are used to identify how they feel, their motivations, their fears and in the process, seek to uncover their *state of mind*. In this way the student is given a voice

through my analysis, examination, and interpretation of their words. In judging the students' mental *state of mind*, I try to take account of the broad and complex circumstances surrounding their words.

Students are not usually aware that university learning can be, and perhaps should be, dangerous and risky, as preconceived ideas are challenged (Lawy, 2006). Our role is to help students develop their thinking, their critical skills, and to help them to question the status quo and to do this they must be prepared to change, to be transformed. However, if students arrive unprepared from our perspective, then we have a problem of the same magnitude as the students. Our problems stem from our different perspectives and our different expectations. If we fail to recognise and acknowledge the importance of our habitus on what we expect from students and the role of the students' habitus on what they expect from us and from the university, we are mismatched and setting ourselves up to fail. This becomes a major expectations gap that we need to bridge through a successful transition programme for new students. Any proposed new initiative would need to be managed with a clear view that real change is very difficult to achieve when one is working with ideas formed over one's prior lived experiences, the lived experiences of both students and the different staff working in a university, not just academics in the classroom.

The role that students' expectations play in their overall success has received minimal attention, particularly in the UK focused literature, yet there is strong evidence from the 10 years of SAES reporting which demonstrates the recurring nature of students' areas of dissatisfaction, while also highlighting students' overall levels of satisfaction with their university experiences. The evidence from many of my students' reflections mirror evidence from the NSSE which also demonstrates the significant role of student expectations in influencing student behaviour (Kuh et al., 2006). This is because it is students' initial expectations that focuses attention on some things, while leading them to ignore other aspects of what is happening around them, these expectations determine what they see as '*appropriate, meaningful, relevant and worth their time*' (Kuh et al., 2006: 33), what to attend to and what to ignore. This does not mean that what they do is in

their best interest, people do not always behave optimally (Bandura, 1982: 122) because they act on memory and prior experiences (Cantor and Mischel, 1977) responding to their own patterns of behaviour (Dweck, 1988) and unlearning these patterns is not an easy task. As was pointed out earlier unlearning requires dissonance (Stewart et al., 2016) and often a reworking of our pasts.

In the next chapter, I will continue to examine the student voice through their words, feelings, actions and reactions, but this time in relation, specifically, to the complexity of feedback and its impact on being a *student*.

Chapter Seven

Interpreting the Student Voice on Feedback.

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 has demonstrated the feelings and frustrations students experience when they begin their university studies. The evidence indicates that this is, in part, the result of pre-conceived expectations, and unpreparedness, which can reflect their prior experiences. However, some students admit they fail to use the resources provided for them and recognise and acknowledge their responsibility in making a successful transition to university. Institutions must accept some of the responsibility however for poor transition experiences.

In this chapter, I will examine what the data reveals about feedback. However, to fully appreciate students' reactions to feedback, particularly as evidenced by NSS results, one must see these reactions, these feelings, in the context of the student's whole experience. As I began this research journey I wanted to understand why feedback and assessment had become such an issue in higher education. Feedback only arises after students complete some form of assessed work. Assessment and feedback are believed to sit at the very heart of learning (Black et al., 2007; Ellery, 2008; Knight et al., 2014) but both activities are areas of dissatisfaction with students as evidenced by the NSS (2006-2017) and the Student Academic Experience Survey (Neves et al., 2016). Additional evidence can be found in the report on Students Expectations and Perceptions of Higher Education (Kandiko, 2013). Given the evidence of a relationship between students' feelings and reactions to feedback and assessment, it seems appropriate to also consider how the students who informed this research on feedback, felt about their assessments. What I have found is that to be able to understand or explain students approach to feedback and assessment we must consider their total, holistic, experience and their state of mind as they work and write. The

previous chapter examined students' expectations, their approach to learning, their overall wellbeing and the role of self and identity. Here I examine and explain what the data from the students' assignments reveal about students views on feedback but also review the information collected using a small number of focus groups examining feelings about assessment. The data collected on assessment was very specific and related to how they felt as they were working on a piece of assessment or an exam. This does not however provide any data or evidence about how students feel about assessment once they receive a grade or feedback on that assessment.

7.2 Feedback, Feelings and Emotion

For the average student, emotion plays a key role in how they react and use feedback (Molloy, 2013; Falchikov and Boud, 2007). As teachers we use '*surface acting*' (Hochschild, 2012: 36) to control our actions, and reactions, to student work, students' words and student behaviour. We try to be fair, and not show anything that might be interpreted either as favouritism or criticism. As teachers, we are '*emotional labourers*' (Hochschild, 2012: 106) whose overall success in our role depends on our ability to maintain a neutral, preferably smiling, reaction to events that unfold daily in our dealings with students. Of course, many, if not most of us enjoy our role as teachers, the emotional feedback and satisfaction we get sustain us, even as we need to use our acting skills, our *artificial face* to hide our real, sometimes negative emotions. Students also literally play (act) their part in this emotional dance. On the surface they act in a very similar way to teachers, hiding their true feelings in class, when they receive feedback, or grades, or comments, on their work. The students' rationale for hiding their emotions run deeper than that of the teacher (Saklofske et al., 2012). The student can find herself caught in quicksand where assessment causes stress (Aherne, 2001; Papier et al., 2015) leading to poor performance and thus to lower grades (Saklofske et al., 2012; Struthers et al., 2000) (Putwain, 2007) and then even greater stress, often leading to poor health (Rawson et al., 1994; Vedhara and Nott, 1996). One can understand how, in these circumstances,

some students would need to develop avoidance practices and develop safety seeking behaviours (Salkovskis, 1991; Thwaites, 2005).

Receipt of feedback and grades is steeped in emotional anxiety because of fear of failure and potential disappointment with self and thus can impact the choices students make about their use of feedback (Burkitt, 2012). Our purpose, as university teachers in providing students with feedback, is fairly clear, it is designed to be supportive, helping students improve their future performance (Molloy and Boud, 2013) enabling them to achieve better grades. Students' view assessment, grades, and feedback from the perspective, or expectation that the setting and marking of assessment offers an objective process for accurately measuring their performance (Iversen et al., 2005) and ignore the human and often judgemental nature of the individuals who undertake the process (Brookhart, 2012; Allal, 2012; Elton and Johnston, 2002). Additionally, students are often unaware of the nature of the training and examination system their tutors have engaged with and how this can impact their view of a student's performance. Students assume that those marking will be fair and without bias. Institutions have in place a series of processes designed to moderate and evaluate first the setting of assessments, then marking and moderating students' work internally and finally a quality assurance system involving external examiners, all designed to ensure process compliance, and thus from a performative perspective ensure standards are maintained, and the system is fair.

Student Jason's words below would satisfy most academics. A student reading and appreciating the possible value of his feedback for the future:

'Over the past couple of weeks I received a range of feedback on which in my eyes was negative, but I took it in a positive way because I know that I could of spent more time on each one of my assignments and overall could have done better on every one of my task, assignments and modules. Looking back on everything now, everything that was set in the first semester has been straight forward. One of the different types of feedbacks was presented to us on paper which I felt was helpful. Another type of feedback was done in person, straight after my group and I presented our presentation. I found this more helpful the first feedback that I highlighted previously because I found it easier to take the feedback on board because not only did it come from a teacher, but also came from my colleagues.'

All of the feedback I have gained from all of the assignments I have found very useful and will try to use this information to better my studies. In conclusion I have taken all kind of feedback and will try to use it in a very positive way during the new semester. Not only will I try to attend every class and complete all assignments, but I will also made sure that I am fully engaged with this subject and most importantly do better in this new coming semester’.

He appears to understand the purpose of feedback but may not have used it yet, however, he is making promises to himself to do better next semester. As tutors, we are involved in helping students learn, particularly learning how to learn effectively, and part of that process is giving useful feedback but getting students to read and act on feedback can be difficult. One or two poor experiences with feedback can impact students’ future interaction with feedback.

An anonymous 2nd year student reports that:

‘some tutors are fantastic at giving feedback and helping with assignments but there are still some tutors who make students feel as though talking to them is wasting their time and don’t give any feedback’

This impression that students get that they are wasting a tutor's time is genuine to them. Academics may have other priorities, may not recognise students that need more support than others, or quite simply not have the time to provide the detailed individual support that some students require, and this can make it seem that they are being ignored. Students want academics teaching them to be attentive and available when required. In the current environment of higher education student satisfaction is a priority. Access to staff and students’ perception of the approachability of staff can be a measure of their overall satisfaction with their experience. US research indicates that students’ perceptions of tutor's level of interest and concern with students learning is an important satisfaction indicator (Paswan and Young, 2002).

Student Hemanta, referring to tutors’ availability says:

‘The only times they are seen are either at lecture time or at seminars’

Boateng was very clear when she wrote:

‘The only way I feel the university failed me is with lecturers and seminar teachers as I feel they didn’t provide us with the right amount of help we needed’

Feedback should involve some degree of conversation, or communication (Higgins et al., 2001), preferably with someone who knows the student. The failure of feedback may simply be the result of a failure to build appropriate forms of communication and relationship, in fact, to acknowledge and accommodate the emotional aspects of the learning process through human interaction.

Students offered mixed views on the value of feedback. Dipin wrote:

'the feedback that I have received is good but have realised that you don't get as much feedback as you would in college' and 'the feedback that is given is in general and not in much detail'

Anbreen on the other hand wrote:

'The feedback given from our assignments was too basic and was just not enough to tell us where we had gone wrong. However, I did take the advice from our first assignment about the problems with our referencing and used it to produce our second assignment to try and improve our marks in the referencing section'

This student was also concerned that she

'had not had practise at university criteria and how to write in university structure to have been given assignments to do with little guidance in the first term. Maybe we should have had practise beforehand like a few practise essays to get it right and then get given assignments that will go towards our actual grades'

Enis wrote:

'I don't believe the amount of feedback I got amounted to feedback at all because it was so small and did not help me correcting my mistakes only alerting me I was doing something wrong. I found it difficult to feed from the feedback as it was mainly in general what I had done good or bad of, and not how I could correct the mistakes next time'.

Students appear clear about the purpose of feedback. It should correct errors, offering an evaluation on performance and then demonstrating or explaining how they might do better.

Bipin and Matthew E found feedback to be useful:

'the feedback that I got in my writing skills was the feedback which made me realise that there is a totally different style of writing in university to previous assignments' 'It became clear to me at the start that it was in fact attention to detail that was my area of weakness. I was completing some of the seminar tasks without paying

enough attention to what was being asked of me and sometimes I was not completing the work correctly'.

while students Fahad acknowledged and acted on the feedback he was given:

'the feedback received was my grammar and sentence structure was poor, and the introduction in my letter was weak. To improve on this skill I have enrolled on a workshop offered next semester'.

Kerrie, on the other hand, felt her feedback was of limited use:

'some of the feedback I did get from my other modules was not so helpful, as they only told me where I went wrong. What I would like is for the feedback to not only tell me where I went wrong, but also what I could have done to make it right or correct the error, to prevent me from making the same mistake again.

Assessment and feedback involves teachers making judgements about students' work and in most instances also involves giving grades which become a permanent fixture for each student. Research however, indicates that assessment and marking are context dependent (Geisenger, 1982) and tutor dependent (Branthwaite et al., 1981) and may well have little to do with what the student actually writes. From the student perspective feedback involves being judged and having to accept that judgement. They can complain and say it is unfair but are then informed of the regulations and the internal and external processes which are used to ensure fairness and consistency (Gibbs, 2006b).

At school, students may experience stress in relation to assessment and passing exams because of the possible consequences of failure on their prospects (Gallagher, 1996) and they bring these feelings with them to university. Even in primary school, children are exposed to encoded meanings of inclusion and exclusion in relation to tests and exams (Hall et al., 2004), and as a result can be seen and treated as differently able (Benjamin et al., 2003), and again bring these emotions with them to university. Students often receive grades within weeks of arriving in university which can bring back the emotional memories of earlier experiences. These feelings can become obstacles or blockers to reading and then using the feedback which accompanies grades and thus limiting learning.

Students Mohammed and Kerrie pointed out the need for more support:

'I had higher expectations I was disappointed but nevertheless everyone else had obtained similar marks', 'More guidance and information needs to be available on these skills, as many students still struggle with it, which affects marks given even if the content is strong'.

Yew Bon on the other hand was disappointed in her and her partner's failure to improve between two assignments, but they did not try and assign blame:

'overall disappointment was the difference in marks from the first and second essay, as we were both a little disappointed in ourselves that we did not improve as much as we may have thought we would have'

Level 5 (second year) students appear to be more willing to complain and make their views known. Some feel that marking is, or can be, unfair. Students 0116, 0216, 0316, 0416, 0516, 1216, & 1316 making anonymous comments on the internal MFQs, wrote as follows:

'Almost all my feedback has been unhelpful, I will gain between 60% -70% and the comment box will say 'good introduction' or 'check spelling' with no indication of how to achieve higher', 'I believe that my work has not been fairly marked in some cases', 'On one of the assignments, I believe that the comments I received from the marker were completely unfair' 'Feel like I am given positive feedback but also feel like no one receives higher than 70% on any marked work' 'if lecturers when marking could give more reason to why they gave certain marks would be helpful. Also have noticed that most mark schemes are down to how the marker thinks you have done not based on a mark for certain aspects being covered', 'I find some lecturers marking to be unfair despite having sent my work previously for feedback to another lecturer on the module say its fine', 'marking has been harsh and unfair at times'

A summative grade can feel to the student like an indictment of their personal worth, their skills and abilities, their *'self where that self 'is a mental construction'* (Barrow, 2006: 358) of the student being judged. This experience of being judged, irrespective of the grade is emotional (Falchikov and Boud, 2007). We are all adept at hiding feelings; this human action is natural to us as people, but as tutors we may fail to be sensitive to students' needs because most hide their emotional reactions and thus we do not see or

fully understand the impact of feedback on their self-adequacy (Combs et al., 1976) or identity (Brown and Wang, 2013).

To be useful, feedback must be understood while providing a clear indication of what was incorrect and how to put it right. Feedback must have meaning to the student, but many students do not understand what is written as feedback on an assignment (Higgins, 2000). If feedback is not understood it has no meaning, it may be that students are unable to engage with the language used either because it is discipline-based and academic, or it is cryptic using terms such as *could do better*, or *meaningless*, which prevents students being able to link the comments on their work with the task they were undertaking and thus what they have written. But the real significance in relation to feedback is not what we do or what we say or write, it is how the student perceives what is said or written. The students identify and view of self (chapter 3) as measured by their self-esteem, impacts on their perceptions of the grades they receive differently depending on the level and direction of their self-esteem even when students' grades are actually the same (Young, 2000). Young (2000: 411) working with young adults found a vast difference in reactions to feedback which was clearly linked to self-esteem. He pointed out that assessing students was a '*delicate balancing act*' in which we need to be concerned with protecting '*psychologically vulnerable students and foster positive self-esteem*' (Young 2000: 409). Or as Knowles (1988: 88) points out:

'nothing makes an adult feel more childlike than being judged by another adult; it is the ultimate sign of disrespect and dependency, as the one who is being judged experiences it'.

Students' feelings about feedback can change across their 3 or 4 years at university, and for some may become a negative aspect of their overall experience as they move up through the years of study and their performance results have more long-term consequences (Brookhart and Bronowicz, 2003). These feelings are in part a function of students' prior feedback experiences, their year of study, their most recent feedback and their experience with, and feelings about tutors on their most important modules. In effect the context within which feedback is provided appears to frame that feedback for the student. Irrespective feelings of inadequacy and distress caused by poor grades

or unsatisfactory feedback leads to negative emotions which can then become linked to all feedback, possibly creating long lasting *'conditional fear'* (Falchikov and Boud, 2007: 146). In these situations, students react emotionally, and this can be negative (Young, 2000). Students' prior experiences, at all levels of education, play an important role in determining how students react and feel to a new piece of feedback or a new grade.

Giving and receiving feedback, is a delicate balance (Young, 2000) of competing motives: the need to provide a grade; the need to maintain students' feelings of worth and self-esteem; (Higgins and Kram, 2001) for the purpose of certification; and for external ranking (Delandshere, 2001) and quality assurance. Criticism, however well meant, often invokes memories of painful prior judgements: from teachers, people in authority and parents. Providing students with opportunities to learn from formative feedback, not related to high-stakes work, could overcome some of these types of problems: but finding the time to fit this into our current system is difficult. Feedback should be very different to judgement, but in our system and within the understood framework of our social relations with our students, feedback is judgement (Delandshere, 2001) even when there is no evidence of this in the written or spoken word and even when they value that has been written or said. And as Harlen (2012: 100) points out *'all assessment involves judgement and will therefore be subject to some error and bias'*. It is often this, and only this, that students see or hear.

Second year students, also writing on MFQs, demonstrate a degree of dissatisfaction with feedback and uncertainty over tutors' fairness. Students' 0716, 0816, 0916 & 1016 point out:

'some of my lecturers have given me feedback on my work which I can improve from, however, some are very generic and make it very hard to improve on in the next task', 'I did have an exam paper where I have the exact answers I had been advised to give and the score given did not reflect the level of detail in my answers ... other students I had spoken to have the exact same answers but had received much higher marks for the same questions', 'Feedback is what I look for in regards to improvement, as someone who suffers from dyslexia I think its's really important I get a detailed response back', 'Most of the time the assignment would be marked by one teacher and the comments are very general and do not go into depth in order to improve future assignments'

While students may be unaware of the subjective nature of some forms of assessment marking (Ellis and France, 2012), they still appear generally to accept our judgemental role, despite the high levels of anxiety and worry experienced as they submit work for marking (Ellis et al., 2004). When grading and giving feedback, it is imperative to examine and see beyond students submitted work and try to understand and appreciate their potential, usually hidden, internal emotional reactions and write feedback with these emotional reactions in mind.

7.3 Learning from Feedback

Not all feedback is useful, or helpful, for a wide range of reasons, but many students welcome any source of feedback, even when it is not directly for them, provided it helps them understand how to improve the quality of their assignments. Student Gagdas wrote:

'I personally really liked where the tutor was going through fellow students work in the seminars, as we were all making very similar mistakes. By doing this, I was making fewer mistakes as I knew what mistakes I was making. This feedback was very useful as it helped me improve my writing in my other modules such as: micro-economics'.

She went on to say:

'The presentation feedback was also very helpful, because we got the feedback there and then; therefore the feedback was quick and simple. I am hoping the feedback will help me in the future with other presentations. In addition, I also felt that the tests feedback was very useful as you knew straight away if u were right or wrong, also it was very simple and straight forward.'

Here we see a student recognising the many ways that feedback is, or can be, provided and being able to evaluate and value it. This specific example refers to the practice of correcting written anonymised work and giving advice on how to improve it to the whole class. As these students progressed through year two and three, many would point to this practice as one of the most useful forms of formative feedback, in so far as they could see how to apply some aspects of it to their current writing.

Not all feedback is perceived as useful as James O wrote:

'I can't say that feedback has had a huge impact on the work that I have submitted'

while Sabrina was clear that her feedback was not helpful:

'I rarely gained 100% in assignments, it hasn't helped me learn from mistakes. For instance, the letter writing task, I was marked at 7/10, but only given one piece of criticism, so I am still not sure how I can raise my mark by 30%'

Other students see the potential benefit in feedback but recognise that they do not always use it effectively. Sophie pointed out:

'The marks are higher than what I expected in some assignments and for others I expected more than what I achieved and with regards to the report I do feel disappointed not to have completed the work but will use this experience for future assignments to ensure I do not make the same mistake again The feedback received in our assignments I did find useful and used it to identify the necessary areas of improvements with our essay, presentation and report writing although I do feel I could have used the feedback more effectively to achieve higher marks in the assignments and to improve on the areas that was indicated. In general the feedback is useful in knowing the areas of work that needs to be improved for guidance in future assignments and tasks'

This student could articulate a problem many students experience, our expectations that students are prepared for the quantity and level of work required at university Sophie's point is clear:

'I was disappointed with the lack of awareness and support of assignments as I felt they was not explained to my understanding furthermore at times felt that I was expected to all ready know and fully understand the tasks given. I found this particular area difficult to complete but have learnt I need to do more research with regards to this course and regularly check study net to be aware of any tasks so I can seek the necessary help within plenty of time of the deadline'

Fan wrote:

'After a series of unsatisfied results, I finally recognised the significance of good timing, so I decide to be a more organised person, and then attempt to complete the assessments in advance, so that more time can be used in revising the writing, and it will offer me a break from the pressure of time'

Olat wrote:

'Throughout semester A we was given feedback on all the work and tests that we done. I found these very helpful and some of them were new to me such us the voice recording feedback. Most of the feedback was very accurate and helped me improve some of my key skills such as writings skills, information skills and how to correctly use Harvard referencing. When we were given assignments from the seminars, I always completed these tasks but when I collected it back during the following seminar I noticed there was a lot of feedback given. At first I ignored this but I started reading them and taking the advice given. I started noticing improvements as my feedback was getting better and my lecturer acknowledged that I took her advice which she was very happy with'

Feedback is initially simply information and if it does not mean something to the student reading it is not feedback. We need to recognise that feedback is a *'process of communication'* (Higgins et al., 2001: 270) with our students and they need to understand the language we use to communicate. Students, historically have demonstrated, over, and over again, their desire for information on the gap between their performance and tutors' expectations (Lizzio and Wilson, 2008). Tutors are often asked for the right answer even as we assure students that there is no right answer. Students want good grades and expect feedback to explain and demonstrate how they might achieve this. Academics try to provide useful and usable feedback but often fail to engage with students. The feedback puzzle remains constant, even as we try to rework, reword and restructure our advice and feedback such that it becomes more useful, or is it more palatable. What is certain is that we still do not know enough about what constitutes successful feedback to be able to *fix* the problem (Kluger and DeNisi, 1996; Lizzio and Wilson, 2008). Even if we *fix* feedback we must recognise that good and useful information on performance of itself does not mean that there will be an improvement. Improvement can only occur if a student processes and then uses the information given as feedback (Molloy and Boud, 2013).

In many instances the student has little or no incentive to make use of feedback about their past failures when it has become impossible to change that failure or to use the information for the next assignment because of timing issues. The overall timescale often leaves no room for closing the loop, for facilitating feed forward to the next assessment because that next assessment must be written before the arrival of feedback.

Anonymous Students 1, 2 & 3 had the following to say:

'feedback on the coursework was ridiculous as it arrived after we had taken the exam so individuals were unsure of how well they understood the module leading to a failure in the exam'.

'if the feedback on coursework was given in time we could have had a better understanding'.

'If we had received our coursework back before the exam it would have allowed us to reflect on what we could improve on and also give us an idea of how we were doing so far in the exam'.

Feedback, in these circumstances, is left hanging in a vacuum where it never gets used because students save their energy for the next assignment or next exam and ignore late feedback.

7.4 What Students Want from Feedback

Research over many years (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Hattie and Jaeger, 1998; Hattie et al., 1996) indicates that feedback makes a significant difference to students' achievement and Hattie (1998 & 2007) found feedback had the single biggest influence on student performance. Hattie and Timperley (2007) using meta-analysis identified exactly what type of feedback had an impact, finding that feedback which *involved students receiving information feedback about a task and how to do it more effectively*' (Hattie and Timperley, 2007: 84) proved the most useful. They found however, that offering students praise, reward, or punishment had little impact on their behaviour.

Many of the students' views expressed here make clear that students have some strong ideas about what they expect from feedback. This picture was recreated very clearly when a focus group (Sec 5.4.4) event led to them being asked directly what they thought feedback was for, what they wanted to see changed and done differently. Using the methodology described in Sec 5.4.4, students selected the following points as indicative of their views:

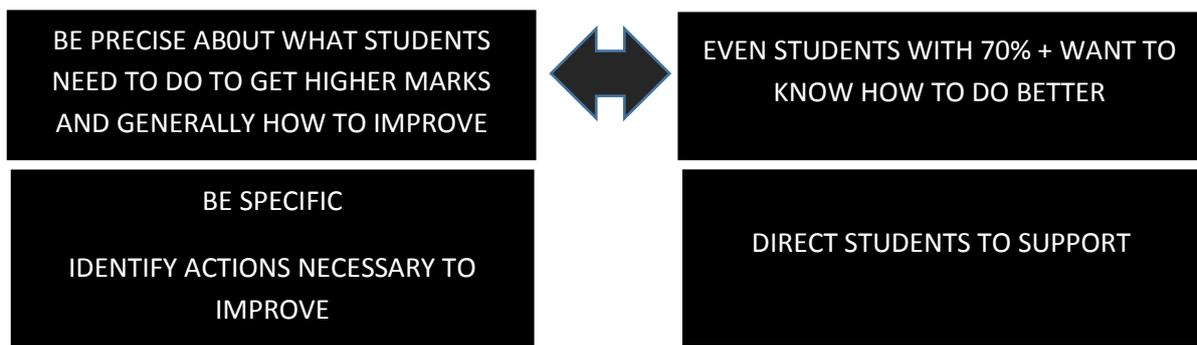
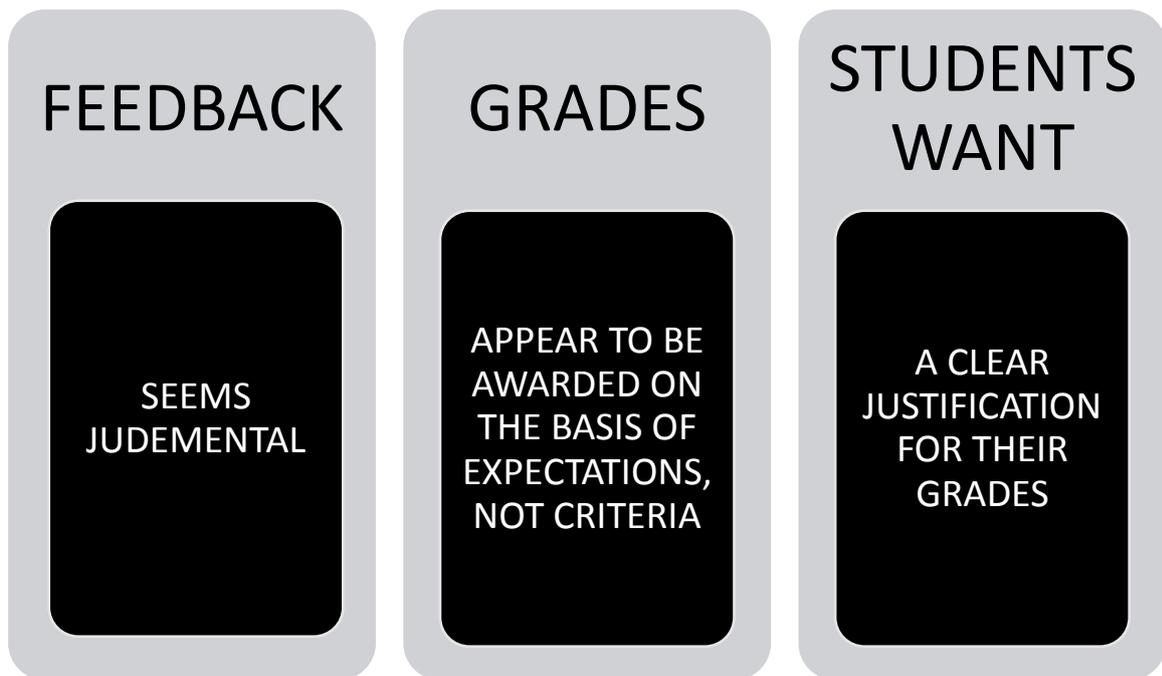


Figure 7.1 - Students feeling about feedback and what they want from feedback

Students place great value on receiving specific advice on how to improve their work, as student Degerimnci explained:

'More one to one time with teachers for them to give feedback which will even more help us produce better quality work. From feedback I would like it to be more specific and detailed about my work so I can improve it'.

While Fennyl wrote:

I found the written feedback much more useful and easier to understand as most of the times it would be written right next to where it was concerned'.

but this student also:

'felt that the feedbacks the teachers gave us should be typed up as it was difficult to understand what they were trying to say as you could not really read what they had written'.

while at the same time admitting he:

'just felt that they could tell me where I went wrong in more detail'.

The students' views above indicate that they have specific expectations from feedback and value "good" feedback. Students want an indication of what was good and bad in their work, and then guidance on how to improve in relation to that assessment task. They found generic advice difficult to apply, while specific advice on their work, gave context and thus meaning to that advice. Students wanted an explanation which included justification for their grade.

7.4.1 What Staff believe Students want from Feedback

A staff focus group was asked to discuss and identify what they believed students wanted and needed from feedback. These staff discussions began however, with expression of general dissatisfaction with students' use of feedback, staff believed most feedback was ignored. Staff views on what students needed from feedback can be demonstrated as follows:

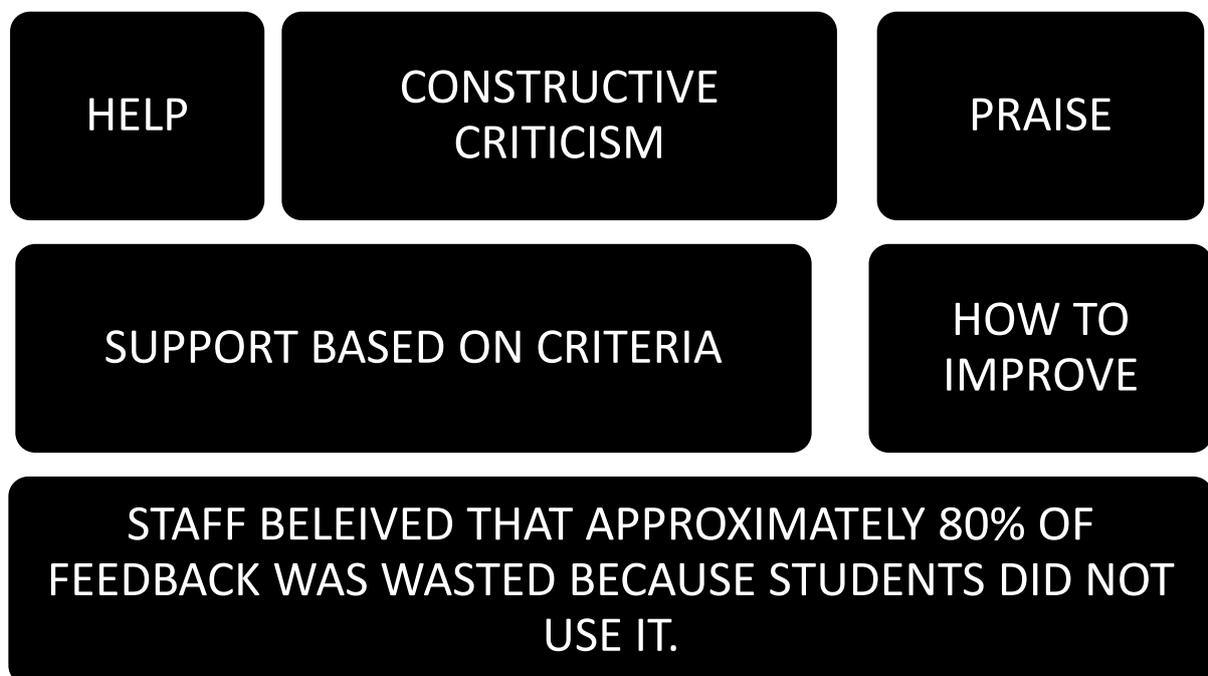


Figure 7.2 Staff views on what students need from Feedback

Colleagues had some clear views on feedback with many believing that much of what they wrote as feedback was ignored, never read or seen, and generally they were of the view that as much as 80 percent was wasted and unused and research evidence also recognises this as a problem area (Wojtas, 1998; Higgins, 2000; Higgins et al., 2001). Many are disheartened by the apparent failure of students to engage with feedback. Some wanted a simplified, shorter, standardised approach to feedback given that it represented a waste of their time. Colleagues reported that their feedback is ignored and not picked up by students, errors are repeated as students pay little attention to the advice and feedback that is given. Many see the feedback problem as a student problem, where student failure to collect, read and interact with feedback is perceived as wilful and purposeful. They see students making a choice to disengage from learning not recognising that often students choosing not to read feedback is a form of self-protection or coping strategy where they simply do not want to deal with negative information or negative emotions. Colleagues did not however, recognise or acknowledge that perhaps the problem lay in students' failure to understand feedback (Chanock, 2000).

Academic staff clearly recognised the value and potential of feedback and discussed different ways of getting students to use their feedback more effectively but also acknowledged and recognised the problems associated with the timing and return of feedback. The gap between what staff believe students want and what students say they want appeared quite small when analysing the focus group data collected here. Each were keen on using clear criteria, each saw advice on how to improve as important whether this was called *constructive criticism* or *being precise about what was needed*. Perhaps we could dismiss this in terms of self-selection bias both on the part of staff and students. Staff with an interest in meeting the needs of their students choosing to join the discussion because they want to provide good feedback and meet the needs of their students. Students participating because they want their voices heard and are willing to join a focus group discussing assessment and feedback to communicate their views. But the involvement of those with an interest in feedback demonstrate a degree of common understanding which we must build on.

7.5 Using Feedback

My personal experience of students using feedback opportunities show that first year students often fail to make good use of formative feedback opportunities, often leaving completion of an assignments until the last 24-48 hours before the submission date. As they move through the years this changes, and final year students are very keen to obtain and use formative feedback. They learn as they progress through their years of study. Even in their final year, when many seek and receive formative feedback, students appear to believe they have not received enough feedback and one can see this by examining the NSS scores for areas such as fine art where students are given verbal critiques of their work, almost daily, and yet when completing the NSS have given low scores to questions relating to feedback.

Higher education can be seen as a '*field*' in the context of Bourdieu's habitus; '*a social field, a multi-dimensional space*' (Bourdieu, 1985: 723) with particular properties holding different types of power or capital. For our students, the power can be real: i.e. the institutional rules and regulations hold power while academics exercise power when they grade and pass or fail a student. Additionally, students perceive power in the fabric of the buildings, the quantity of books and computers, the size of a lecture theatre or the intimacy of a tutorial with just a few other students sharing a space where one can be noticed, and they feel lonely and alone in this place (Cashmore et al., 2011; Bennett et al., 2007). And then there is the cultural and financial capital of other students which can be seen and imagined by their accents, their cars, their clothes etc. and of course the cultural capital of academics which can intimidate (Bourdieu, 1985).

The nature of the social field is defined by the accumulated capitals of the people involved, which can define the state of the power relations, which gives individuals their social status (James and Bloomer, 2001). For some students, class inequality and the power structure and associated power relations make their early days at university a struggle as they experience a sense of not belonging (Reay, 2012). For others, their identity and self-worth will be challenged when they compare their assets with those of

some of the people they encounter while in university: their peers and academic staff (Reay 2012; Ahier and Beck, 2003). Being a student can be a lonely existence (Ostrove and Long, 2007). Finding a supportive set of friends (Kuh et al., 2006), a social network to rely on (Cashmore et al., 2011), is the beginning of creating new social capital at university and is essential to success. For many students building relationships with staff can be just as important (James, 1998).

One of the single most *uncontrollable* aspects of a student's life is receiving grades and feedback. Knowles (1988) argues that receiving grades is contrary to the very nature of adult development. This explains why Young (2000) found that students interviewed for research into assessment all reported feeling anxious when handing in an assignment. Attitudes to assessment are usually based on students' self-esteem and overall expectations; expectations build on their own goals. Students' goals determine *'the framework within which they interpret and react to events'* (Dweck, 1988: 256) and thus how they react to grades and feedback. Most students regularly hand in their assignments online at the very last moment, which can reflect either a need to continually review what they have prepared right up to the last moment, or students who complete their work at the very last moment as evidenced by hand in data across the institution's VLE. The compilation below gives a feel for the mix of expectations and feelings that come from and through feedback for some students, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and self-criticism. Enis wrote:

I found it difficult to feed (sic) from the feedback as it was mainly in general what I had done good or bad of, and not how I could correct the mistakes next time. I don't believe the amount of feedback I got amounted to feedback at all because it was so small and did not help me correcting my mistakes only alerting me I was doing something wrong'.

While Anbreen wrote:

'The feedback given from our assignments was too basic and was just not enough to tell us where we had gone wrongHowever, I have not had practise at university criteria and how to write in university structure to have been given assignments to do with little guidance in the first term. Maybe we should have had practise beforehand like a few practise essays to get it right and then get given assignments that will go towards our actual grades'.

Lyndon points out:

'My grades are considerably lower than I expected, I see myself as a B/C grade student but my grades are lower than that and I cannot say that I'm impressed by this. I can't blame this on anybody but myself..... I must admit that I only showed up to a few lectures and the ones that I did attend, I felt where a waste of time I found it almost impossible to motivate myself '.

and Michael believed:

'that in my assignments my grade can and possibly should be better than what I have currently received. I feel especially in the marks and Spencer's assignment my grade did not reflect the effort I put in and I have had numerous discussions with the person that marked it and we've reflected and through that I have been shown how to improve my work for future submissions which would be a great benefit on my behalf and improving my overall grade. I also feel that my grade doesn't reflect my overall attendance but this could be down to my own doing as possibly I don't give my optimum performance in every lecture and pay attention throughout the whole duration of the lecture.'

Feedback is necessary to enable correction, diagnosis of issues, reinforcement of learning, self-regulation and overall student development (Price et al., 2010; Butler and Winne, 1995), thus must be received in time to impact that next assignment (Brookhart, 2008; Nicol, 2007), must be understandable.

7.6 Assessment

Assessment and the ability to measure outcomes appears to be '*a defining characteristic of educational systems*' (Broadfoot, 1996: 168), a quality control mechanism for external observers, governments and funders (Palfreyman and Tapper, 2014; Alexander, 2000; Alderman, 2009) and for those taking an accounting degree, a potential gateway to entry to a profession but also a means of limiting entry (Hamilton and Ó hÓgartaigh, 2009). Overall, assessment provides a form of social control (Ainley, 2003), an insider/outsider view of the individual (Hoecht, 2006). More importantly, however, is the control that assessment exudes over teachers and students alike, creating a backwash effect whereby students learn to the test and teachers teach to the test (Jensen et al., 2014) and this limits choices for all those involved. This very limited view of assessment, as the

reproduction of knowledge, ignores the constructivist paradigm of knowledge construction and co-construction (Shepard, 2000). Traditional assessment processes and procedures, learned at university, help to create the identity of the individual as a student (Barrow, 2006; Brown and Wang, 2013) as the language we use to assess and then to give feedback determines how students view themselves within the social context of the university. Students compare performance and create an identity around their abilities as measured in their assessments (Gipps, 1994).

The data from this research revealed that *feelings* and *emotion* are a key aspect of students' interaction with feedback but in addition play a significant role in how students perceive assessment. Given the role of assessment, grades, and feedback in the creation of the students' identity and their self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 2001), who they are and how well they are doing, one can see why it is an emotive subject. Student Jenny writing in 2016 felt:

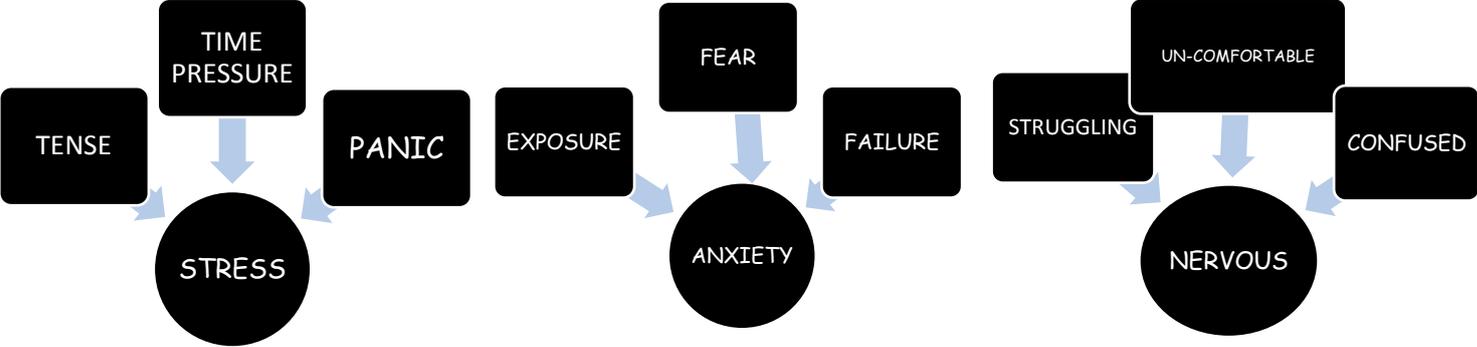
'a lot of stress when it came down to starting the first assignment in Semester A. Psychologically, coming to university was a big step. From being spoon fed by teachers, to having to find and research our own resources was a huge jump. Physically, I was ready for university, but mentally I was not'

We are all different and experience events differently, each from our own context but each as part of society; we are society (May, 2011). As humans, we are programmed to seek positive emotions which make us feel better (Hammond, 1990). Young people today, constructed by the language of the market economy now find their education provided within a market framework where they must make informed choices. Giddens (1994) saw a connectedness between our specific purchasing decisions and global events, but we can also see this connectedness between students' educational (consumer) choices and their future identities (Williams, 2016; Reay, 2004). At the same time students, while in university, may also remain marginalised by their class and ethnicity because of the intangible consequences of what we believe to be our social norms and ways of seeing the world (Young, 2005; May, 2011; Reay, 2004; Reay, 2001). They can find it difficult to recognise any positive emotions or feelings connected to their education. New students

can face a range of fearful moments as they begin university, fearing being alone, being lonely, and not making friends (Kuh et al., 2006), but as soon as students face preparing, and submitting, an assessment (coursework or exam) they feel a different type of fear, often approaching panic, they become distressed, and can feel inadequate, and unprepared. Students may even feel that the demands the assessment places on them are unfair in some way (Falchikov and Boud, 2007), as the process links or merges with prior assessment experiences, which may blight students' ability to evaluate their university experience, independently from their prior experiences.

To highlight the pressure of assessment which then becomes a grade with feedback, this section will look at feedback on assessment collected using several focus groups (sec 5.4.4). In the following section I detail the results of each focus groups views. One group were asked about their feelings in relation to assessments at the point when they were about to sit down and begin to write, and again when they finished an assignment. Their views are represented below in Fig 7.3 demonstrating the words students used to describe how they felt at the start of an assessment task and again at the end of an assessment task. Fig 7.4 relates to how they feel when about to sit and exam and how they feel when they finish that exam.

FEELINGS AT THE START OF AN ASSESSMENT TASK



FEELINGS AT THE END OF AN ASSESSMENT

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Figure 7.3 Students' feelings at the start and end of an Assessment Task

The words used demonstrate the degree of emotive feelings and sheer fear generated simply by thinking about writing an assignment or exam.

Another group were asked to identify and discuss feelings in relation to exams only and provided the following expressive words to describe their feelings before and during an exam:

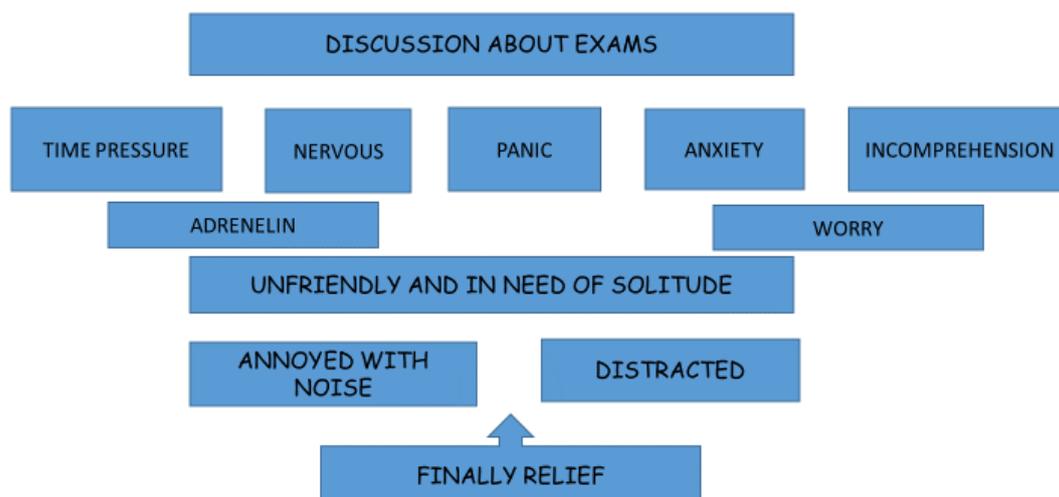


Figure 7.4: Students' feelings before and after sitting an exam

A third group were asked to focus specifically on what they could remember about their feelings while in the middle of writing an exam. These students added to the collection of descriptive words and what these demonstrate is two distinct types of response. Some clearly locked themselves in their own world and wrote their exam, while others felt frozen and sick and struggled to write. This latter group was clearly suffering from a form of panic and stress. While I have no evidence on actual performance in these exams, one must feel some sympathy for those individuals who freeze and/or panic when they must write exams, which often simply rely on memory, and do not always represent ability or levels of knowledge. One Group reported mixed views, which float in and out, as they sit down, begin to read, and think and then begin to write, they felt:



Figure 7.5: Students' Feelings when Locked into the moment of writing

Figures 7.4 and 7.5 vividly demonstrate the feelings of panic, fear, stress and worry generated by assessment, as well as excitement and some enjoyment. The Focus Group data shown above demonstrates the emotional state of students at exam time and one can thus imagine the degree of emotional turmoil some students suffer as they await their grades and any associated feedback.

7.7 Feedback, Assessment and Learning

People learn in pursuit of a goal (Claxton, 2002), but when students' goals are focused on the assessment, their approach to learning may no longer be about exploration and experiment. Instead, students want to be filled with the necessary knowledge to pass assessments. They seek direction and guidance towards achieving their required grade, substituting structure for agency (Reay and Wiliam, 1999), motivated by extrinsic values (Ahmad et al., 2012) but also because this was, often, how many were taught, or is it directed, within the school system as *'teaching to the test'* (Copp, 2016: 1) grew in importance as schools, like universities, strive to deliver on the metrics which are used to create their image. Students can also be locked into inactivity through fear of being challenged in class, because being wrong can be interpreted as a kind of exposure, and many students do not have the resilience to withstand exposure and accept, and face the

challenge (Allal, 2002) of taking part. I recently used an in-class voting system, with first-year, first-semester students, to provide them with regular quizzes to test their understanding, but more importantly to facilitate self-testing and feedback. 200+ students collected their voting handsets, each week I used 3 or 4 sets of multiple choice quizzes to enliven my lectures. On average, approximately 18 students voted each week. After 6 weeks, I advised students that they could return their voting handsets, as I could see no value in continuing. Students asked me not to stop. When questioned they advised that while they were unwilling to commit themselves (even though it was completely anonymous), they liked seeing how others answered, even though the numbers were too small to be in any way representative of the group. Assessment, of any sort, even formative, might reveal one's knowledge or expose one's lack of knowledge of the subject matter, it is revealing and thus personal and emotional.

When it comes to completing formal *high-stakes* assessment, the first tests students encounter will be particularly worrisome as they occur as students are trying to make the transition into university and must, at the same time, deal with new landscapes, new spaces and a new culture. Much of the data used here was part of an assessed piece of work. When marking and assessing students work academics have multiple, often conflicting roles: we assess, we evaluate, we measure, we criticise, we encourage, we offer support and we give feedback. It can be very difficult to be both supportive and encouraging while offering criticism. We often fail to live up to one of the basic tenants of human communication, showing empathy, compassion and understanding, and instead see our role, defined in our status as a teacher, giving us licence to be critical, when it may be possible to achieve the same result through support. Our encounters with students are power based social interactions and it is proving difficult, for both parties in the relationship to forget this, or to move outside of it, irrespective of any good intentions, and in some ways impossible in a subject area linked to professional exemptions.

7.8 Linking Feedback and Assessment

Given that there is a clear link between assessment and feedback one must question whether the core of the problem with feedback lies with the assessment and students' perception of fairness (Sambell et al., 1997). We recognise and accept the role of assessment as the driver of learning (Sambell and McDowell, 1998) but give little thought to the consequential impact of assessment on how students learn (Dochy, 2008, Boud, 1995). When feedback is provided on summative assessment tasks it is, at one level, easy to understand why students' reactions to receipt of grades together with feedback, serve to elicit an emotional response. Here emotion is a signal to the self, a warning in the form of an embodied signal (Ellis and Tucker, 2015), outside the control of the self but which brings to the fore memories and feelings of prior experiences of grades and feedback and reminds the student again, of other life sentences. Consequently, students can fail to value or see the use in feedback, it will not change the sentence and its link with feeling bad is far too strong. Reaction to the actual grade silences, in the student's mind, the words given as feedback even when supportive (Race, 1995). Even where few, if any negative memories exist, feedback can fail because it does not elicit any follow-up action (Laurillard, 1993). If students fail to see a direct relationship between feedback and a future assessment why would they spend time on it when more pressing assignments await their attention?

The process of marking assignments and exams and giving feedback is rather mechanistic and one sided, we write feedback, we give a grade and rarely get to discuss its meaning or its impact. We receive, we mark, and we give feedback, often using an institutional, managerial format. We forget that for students' assessment is their most focused activity. Whether preparing and writing a piece of coursework or revising for exams this is when students are most focused and place the greatest emphasis on working hard. Academics, on the other hand, can approach feedback from a mechanistic stance' trying to get through the pile of scripts and wanting to get it over with within the short time frame provided. This can leave some markers ignoring the enhancement role that feedback should, or could, play in learning and future academic performance and thus do

not give it the attention it deserves. Hence students' 2016 MFQ comments indicate how it appears to them: Students 1116, 1416, 1516, 1616 pointed out:

'feedback is sometimes vague', and/or difficult to read in places where marking has been one on hard copies', 'didn't get very helpful information on some of my assignments, no information how to improve', 'the marking feedback that I have received.. did not cover a lot of detail especially for a piece of coursework which I was unable to score my perceived marks'.

Some students appear to be unsure of the role of feedback while expecting and even demanding that feedback. When they then fail to make use of it, to understand it, or even misunderstand it, academics lose heart. Misunderstanding and misuse of feedback occur, partially because it does not have a clear and well-understood meaning (Price et al., 2010) but also because when accompanied by summative grades it bears the connotations and emotional entanglements that grades foster (Yorke, 2008).

The current paradigm of higher education, where the students are consumers providing feedback through the NSS annually, has led to a range of new institutional initiatives designed to enhance feedback and assessment. We appear to be doing a lot more, and a lot differently, and still we fall short, because many fail to recognise that the interaction of students with feedback and assessment can be *'so negative that it has an emotional impact that lasts many years and affects career choices'* (Falchikov and Boud, 2007: 144). Most institutions generally attempt to examine assessment and feedback as separate problems, in need of separate solutions, when in fact any discussion on feedback is a discussion on assessment. As has been demonstrated earlier discussion around these two aspects of a student's educational experience is full of emotional associations (Joughin, 2008). Boud (2006) believes that *'assessment probably provokes more anxiety among students and irritation among staff than any other feature of higher education'* (Boud, 2006).

7.9 Learning for Assessment

To learn effectively the learners must make a conscious effort to engage with the learning process and to do this they need to develop skills and strategies that enable them to become effective learners (Francis, 1995), once acquired these skills will remain with the student during their lifetime. But many of our new students have '*learned how to be taught*' (Francis, 1995: 1) and quite often their learning is even more focused as they learn to control and confine their learning to what will be assessed. This, then, becomes their *learning mode* but this is not the same as learning how to learn. Student agency is slowly being eroded as they seek to be *filled up* with the necessary knowledge to pass assessments without recognising the need agency, an element of choosing and a degree of human activity or effort on their part. They struggle to find the resources we provide because they have not learned to judge what matters, while at the same time appear unwilling to engage with learning how to judge and evaluate. As measurement, for benchmarking purposes, becomes the driving force behind changes to assessment and feedback, it seems that institutions are willing to accept learning for assessment, provided the students are satisfied, and in the process concern with quality of learning may be lost.

Students arriving at university in the 2nd decade of the 21st century know all about assessment, but little about constructivist learning. To date we have not had any serious discussions about the needs of a modern student. Students today are different and need a new and different approach to their first-semester, first-year, of study at university. These connected, social media savvy, young people are expecting to be led and we must begin by changing this. In 2015 research indicated that 39% of the UK 16-24 age group were using Instagram, 37% of the population use twitter and 16-24 year olds spend on average 27 hours online each week (OFcom, 2015). This study found that people spend over 8 hours per day on media or communication activities: these are today's students.

From a policy and institutional perspective, the ability to quantify learning, to measure and calculate student progress is desirable, if not essential as a quality measure. This

measurement process and the subsequent comparison of results between institutions, between stratified institutions in fact, is not actually a measure of quality as it ignores the personal circumstances and characteristics of each student and each institution. Further, this process approach to quality obfuscates teaching as it forces teachers into circumstances where, to meet objectives and targets, they end up with students *learning for assessment* instead of being able to use *assessment for learning*. Students' perception of what constitutes learning colours their understanding of their early university experience, and their expectations when they arrive at university. The evidence from this research clearly indicates that students' struggle on arrival at university, they find it difficult to adapt, finding their initial experiences very different to school. Students are unprepared, while at the same time they hold their own clear, if misleading, expectations about what *university life* should be like.

Over time, students reflect on their own initial expectations and these can change and be remade by the institution they attend and its faculty, and the friends they make. These young people can only become university students when they arrive here. Becoming a student is a social accomplishment and students must negotiate what it means to be a member of a social community of students and academics (Wenger, 2007) and to achieve this they need help in their first months. They, only slowly, become integrated into ways of knowing, of doing and being a student, in a similar way we learned to be academics (Shulman and Shulman, 2004). As most of the students reflecting here were in fact just at the end of their first semester of study they were still negotiating their way into friendship groups, social groups, learning groups, perhaps even ethnic or religious groups and thus an on-going shaping and reshaping and constructing of their identity was occurring (Lawy and Bloomer, 2003).

7.10 Conclusions

The analysis in this chapter, reveals through students' own words the emotional impact and potential damage to a student's wellbeing and identity that can result from feedback. At an institutional and national level and across the vast array of research, learning,

feedback and assessments are treated as separate, almost unrelated issues when they should be fully integrated. If there were no assessment, we would not need feedback as currently practised and our regular interaction with students would involve teaching and in accounting, opportunities for practice. If assessment was not difficult, confusing, and often unclear, we probably would not see the same level of dissatisfaction with feedback. We must learn to treat the student's learning, assessment and feedback from a holistic perspective. While it is important to recognise that there is room for improvement in our approaches to feedback and how we write feedback (our language), the fundamental problem needs to be addressed in a variety of different ways and these will be identified in the concluding chapter 8.

Stress impacts on students' overall wellbeing and this will affect their motivation, their independent learning, their reading etc. These students often need further, and different, support and some institutions appear unable to meet and respond to these students' specific, often emotional needs. We might dismiss some early university experiences as transition problems, as reflected in much of the literature or assume these are overcome through better induction. Alternatively, we can acknowledge that transition is a simplistic term which disguises a range of different, complex and often emotional problems and expectations and learn to deal with these.

Chapter Eight

Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This thesis contributes to the growing body of literature on feedback by identifying and exploring both its emotive nature and its holistic roots. My aim was to explore and uncover students' interaction with their assessment feedback in a post-92 institution. The research set out to identify the source of student dissatisfaction with current feedback and assessment practices and to identify what it is they seek from feedback. I sought to understand and explain the interaction between students' social backgrounds, their habitus and the English educational system and highlight whether these hindered students learning and exacerbated disadvantaged students' progress through university in a post-92 institution.

The analysis of the students' experience in chapter 6 and 7, using their narratives, proved rich and varied but by no means exhaustive. The data provided strong evidence of students' feelings across a long period of time; the first data being collected in the academic year 2006/07 and the final quotations are taken from students in 2016/17. The evidence makes clear that as an institution we often fail to meet our first-year students' expectations of university but that dissatisfaction with feedback is evident across all years. Education is built around the beliefs and mental models of policy makers, policy implementers and institutional management, each with their own idiosyncratic aims, objectives and concerns. However meaningful their intentions when new policy is implemented, these students vividly construct pictures of loneliness, confusion and of being unprepared for university experience as they seek out new friends, new communities and new relationships with the people who they perceive will be central to their success, the academics around them and their peers.

This research examined undergraduate accounting and finance students' interaction with their assessment feedback. In this the final chapter I review my study and consider its findings, its outcome, and its implications for practice and for institutions. This research contributes to our understanding of academic feedback given to young university students from diverse social and economic backgrounds. This research was undertaken with *'the practical intention of changing a situation to make it more educationally worthwhile'* (Elliot, 2009: 28) and to extend our knowledge and understanding of feedback.

Feedback is often treated as something which needs fixing. We have a crisis of confidence in our feedback process which is often seen as a teaching issues because teaching is often perceived as a technique which can be managed, tweaked and changed where necessary. The NSS has focused institutions attention on the measurement of a range of issues, including student satisfaction with assessment and feedback, rather than the meaning or success of learning (Wenger, 1999). This ignores the fact that teacher commitment, enthusiasm and love of subject can be far more important than many other aspects of a student's educational experience (Neves, 2016). The SAES (Neves, 2016) confirms findings from US research that the role of teaching staff and their relationships with students are significant contributors to overall student satisfaction. This is not necessarily acknowledged within institutions when reviewing NSS scores. Institutions *'are bound by an authoritarian belief in numbers. This is the scholarly culture of our times.'* (Horton, 2008: 3) and as we respond directly to the metrics, we seem to ignore the voices of the students and fail to solve the feedback problem.

From a student perspective, a history of over-testing means students have significant pre-formed emotional expectations and feelings about assessment and feedback (Boud and Falchikov, 2007). They cannot easily overcome these ingrained views, particularly as constant judgement of an individual's worth, whether through praise or criticism, can undermine their self-worth (Kamins and Dweck, 1999). Students' prior experience of assessment and feedback will colour their expectations and feelings now (Boud and Falchikov, 2007), and more importantly will prejudice their feelings about these activities, even before their first university experience such that when feedback or a

grade is received they will often, without intending to, draw on earlier emotional memories of receiving grades and feedback to evaluate what they receive. These emotional histories are in turn encoded into students' NSS scoring because they complete the questionnaires during the most stressful and anxious period of their university life. It may be that as they complete the assessment and feedback sections students are seeing grades received and anticipating grades yet to come during the remaining three or four months of their university education. In their final year additional and probably far more pressing problems and concerns will weigh on students' opinions of their university experience. Students will already have received around 80 percent of their assessment results and thus are beginning to extrapolate to their final classification. Final judgement is approaching and **must** dramatically affect how students complete their NSS questionnaire.

The consequence of the NSS is that many institutions use NSS results to shape goals, objectives, sometimes staff appraisals and can influence approaches to teaching, learning, and most noticeably to feedback (Nicol, 2013). New systems and procedures have been put in place in many institutions in an attempt to overcome the issues, systems and procedures which management believe will *fix* the problem through giving students more feedback, in essence, more of the same (Molloy and Boud, 2013). At the same time, we have no real evidence on what constitutes *good* feedback, if such a concept actually exists. It seems that it is more likely that, like learning generally, the quality of the feedback, as perceived by the student, is a complex matter not easily explained, as each student will react based on their individual experiences and even if all students were given the same feedback and the same grade one would still see different reactions.

The NSS shapes and, more and more, controls our lives as teachers and academic. The NSS, on the other hand, gives students an outlet for their frustrations, confusions, disappointments and most importantly their stress and anxiety as they realise their degree programmes are nearly over and overall, the die is cast.

8.2 The Educational Environment in the 21st Century

The environment of higher education is growing ever more competitive. We now operate in a marketplace where institutions sell a service and students' buy that service. Our student selection system is managed through data generated from a barrage of school tests, designed to inform us of the readiness of students for university and communicated finally as a simple score, or points, and we select. Just as we make our selections based mainly on numeric values given to students' prior academic performance, so also students are being asked to make their university selections based on simple numbers. The marketisation of education has reframed students as consumers (Williams, 2012; Ball, 2009) of a private good (Molesworth et al., 2010; Hall, 2015) however, one with no real price setting mechanism yet. Through marketisation, education is commodified (Hall, 2015), subject to the rules of supply and demand, influenced by marketing, by branding and by rating agencies and appears to have little to do with choosing the most appropriate institution and course for a young student. As with any commodity students must choose between competing products. However, product differentiation is not often evident, and price discrimination is determined in a monopolistic fashion, a system set up and controlled by government policy.

Many people's buying choices are highly influenced by branding and while some educational institutions have always carried their own brand, these were for groups of institutions with a similar pedigree; and rarely for a single institution. All universities, in some way, must now adopt a marketing and branding approach to their reputation and slowly have learned to behave as if part of the commercial service industry (Chapleo, 2010) and thus reputation becomes particularly important, but it is no longer clear what creates that reputation. The use of rating metrics and rating agencies to differentiate institutions based on measures of student satisfaction and performance are perceived to offer a form of accountability while supporting choice. Accountability is desirable but multiple simple metrics as a proxy for quality and for accountability can distort the quality of education by focusing attention, and thus expenditure, on specific aspects of

the student experience while ignoring other important aspects. In addition, one must fear scenarios where young people view education as a commodity in the same way as they would a pair of jeans or a phone and purchase based on the brand rather than suitability. The issue of quality and standards have been removed from the debate and have not been examined in the literature

Customer satisfaction dominates commercial marketing priorities and has now become a central tenant of higher education, but customer satisfaction is rather abstract, varying between individuals often in unexplainable ways (Munteanu et al., 2010) and within higher education may be an invitation for conflict. Satisfaction is a pleasurable emotional state of being where expectations play a central role and where expectation is based on some initial standard against which one makes a comparative judgement (Oliver, 1980). This is the crux of the problems we face in respect of students' initial expectations about, and from university. Their expectations are formed around prior educational experiences, by their habitus and even as we recognise how ill-informed those expectations can be, we appear unable to manage those expectations and thus influence and ease students' transition into university. Munteanu et al (2010: 125) define student satisfaction:

'as an evaluative summary of direct educational experience, based on the discrepancy between prior expectations and the performance perceived after passing through the educational cycle'

Munteanu et al (2010) explain that satisfaction is a psychological state and thus very difficult to measure and where measured subject to a range of caveats; but nevertheless, policy makers believe a range of metrics can provide sufficiently stable measurement to facilitate informed choice on the part of students. The competitive nature of the higher education environment means that institutions today must be accountable to society, meet the demands of employers while also paying attention to how students *feel* about their educational experience.

8.3 The Research

My sources of data, my methodology, my methods and my data analysis were varied and have already been discussed in detail in chapter 5. The richness and variety of the students' reflections allowed me to construct the students' stories around some key themes and to highlight a range of students concerns, emotions and sheer confusion as they travelled through their early months at university. This data, together with my readings of the literature, enabled me to identify 5 key themes which frame this research. The themes were:

1. Expectations at transition
2. Independent learning
3. Wellbeing
4. Self and identity
5. Feedback and its impact.

As the data were analysed, my three questions set out in section 1.3 which link closely with my research objectives enabled the themes to be identified, analysed, developed and interpreted. What soon became apparent was the interconnectedness of each of the themes. It is essential to see the experience of a student holistically and recognise that no aspect of being a student is separate from the other. In recognising the interconnectedness, one can begin to plan a future educational experience which can, at least, ease the journey through university for some students.

8.4 Reviewing my Thesis

In the context of an educational environment undergoing unprecedented change, I set out to test my own beliefs and understanding of my role as teacher and in the process change and improve my pedagogical practice (Elliott, 1996). I immersed myself in the literature and in parallel I re-engineered my practice and experimented with my approaches to providing students with academic feedback. I began to develop this

feedback through asking students what worked for them while also reading and re-reading their reflections and adjusting my views as I learned. Slowly my objectives became:

- a) *identifying students' expectations from their feedback and their expectations of the university while examining how feedback, in the domain of accounting, impacts upon students' attitudes and behaviour in relation to their academic experience;*
- b) *Exploring the nature of accounting and finance students' identity and how this relates to their attitude to assessment and feedback;*
- c) *identifying and linking students' dissatisfaction with their feedback experiences, to a range of internal and external factors which might impact upon their behaviour;*
- d) *Examining the role of adolescent feelings and emotions, together with student stress and anxiety on their perspective on their university experience.*

Leading directly to a series of 3 questions (sec 1.7) which I believed would enable me to understand the lifeworld of a modern accounting and finance student in a post-92 university. These questions were:

1. *What impact do students' prior social, cultural and academic experiences, including those with assessment and feedback, have on their expectations while at university?*
2. *How does the context in which feedback is provided in a post-92 university play a role in students' interaction with, and response to academic feedback?*
3. *How do different phenomena, including emotion, academic identity, power relations, initial expectations and relationships with academics' impact upon students' interaction with feedback?*

To be able to meet these aims and objectives, I explored multi-disciplinary literature and examined historical and current policy documents to enable me to locate my research both in its historical context and within the national and political context of higher education in the 21st century. The analysis in chapter two provides insight into the impact

of history and modern educational policy on universities policy focus today. Current changes in institutional behaviour and focus in areas such as the REF, TEF and NSS are because of the convergence of a range of different of policy changes. These include the decision to widen participation and remove the binary divide. The imposition of a new, revised, quality assurance regime and a more bureaucratic, managerial and controlling regulatory framework led to a new form of accountability requiring constant and repeated measurement using benchmark metrics to evaluate the quality and worth of each institution, its staff and to some degree its students. Finally, the introduction over several years of fees, leading eventually to full-cost fees and when combined with metrics and accountability led to our current marketised and commodified version of higher education in England.

It was important to recognise the nature of the discipline within which feedback is being examined. In many ways, the management process which has been developed to enable the measurement of metrics as evidence of quality and compliance emerged from accounting practices. Chapter two examined the nature and impact of the accounting profession on the expectations of students when expectations are the underlying force impacting on students' attitudes to feedback. Bernstein (2000), discussing symbolic control and identity, recognised the potential for a form of '*state controlled instrumentality*' (Bernstein, 2000: 61) as more and more centralisation has led to a much more divided higher education provision. Policy changes change institutions differently, as each institution functions within its own culture and ways of doing things (Thomas, 2017) and within its own habitus (Bourdieu, 1977b). Examining the accounting profession's role in the development of both accounting professionals and the modern university accounting curriculum draws attention to the controlling influence and demands placed on educational institutions of traditional professional associations and societies. These traditions and these demands in turn impact those teaching accounting and their expectations from new accounting students.

8.4.1 The Student as Complex Individual

To understand feedback and interpret its impact one must recognise the complexity of the many variables involved in learning, assessment and feedback. Chapter three introduces the complex context within which the individual student functions. The student data identifies some of the multiple variables or phenomena at work as people learn, examining the role of habitus, culture, class, student identity and social justice. These many variables connect and interact in dynamic but causal non-linear ways resulting in a system where the relationships created when factors interact rarely results in effects which are proportional to their cause (Radford, 2006).

Assessment involves giving students grades and feedback, and while students expect, and often demand feedback, many ignore it (Smith and Gorard, 2005), and this seems illogical given the status students appear to give feedback. This led to an investigation of who students are, examining their backgrounds and what they expect or need from university. Students' reflections revealed their expectations when they arrive at university and pointed out our failure to meet these while we also appear not to provide the information they need to understand what we expect from them as students. Students come with their own identities, but identities constantly changing and evolving and thus one will always be up against complex moments when trying to understand and explain these non-linear adaptive systems. Cause and effect are simply not identifiable because they are linked but also changing at the same time.

8.4.2 Habitus and Class

An examination of the impact of widening participation policies on education led to an examination of the ideas of Bourdieu (1974, 1986, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1997); ideas to do with class, with habitus, with social, cultural and economic capital and consideration of the influence and impact of these on student choice and opportunity. Habitus offers a theoretical explanation for some aspects of students' expectations, their choices and

their perceptions of opportunity. But it also may explain why some institutions find it so difficult to change and respond to students' needs, locked as they are in their own institutional, middle-class habitus (Thomas, 2002). Institutional habitus, over time, creates a culture whereby we believe the way we act is the only way to act and our belief in our dominant position reaffirms, legitimises and maintains our position of power. At the same time, our views of our students reaffirms their position and facilitates our continued dominance. Our curriculum is designed around traditional middle-class university ideas, often foreign to our students. We use performative systems to protect against claims of failure and as a substitute for relationships. Relationships are a crucial aspect of the student experience while in university (Adcroft, 2011).

We like to think of higher education as a place of equality where all students have an equal chance of success, able to access a degree of advantage which can lead to better jobs and long-term income; the reality can be that institutions, in fact, construct, maintain and re-create inequality (Stephens et al., 2012; Lucas, 2001). Yet new universities have passively accepted a pre-set, instrumental policy agenda which has, over the past 30 years, changed the very nature of the role of the university (Smith and Webster, 1997) without any change in the class structure or equality of opportunity.

Institutions and staff can be possessive of their unique positions of power bestowed by history (Willmott, 1997), by age, by reputation for selectivity, where that power and position has been created by the development of systems which objectify formal credentials in such a way as to sustain inequality (Bourdieu, 1991) and thus not always support a social justice agenda. It became evident that UK education had evolved within the bounds of a well-established class system built on privilege, a system which excluded a large percentage of the population from higher education. However, number growth over the past 30 years is the result of an economic imperative for a more skilled workforce and thus higher education expanded. As the economy grew so did demand and new universities were created to meet demand but these new post-92 universities are, for the most part, locked into their prior position as second-class citizens in higher education today. At the beginning, I was keen to understand why feedback was

problematic, but over time it became obvious that feedback was a symptom, and not necessarily the illness.

Examining class and social justice in the context of the widening participation agenda revealed a failure to incorporate into educational research on higher education a comprehensive understanding of diversity and disadvantage and how these interact with and are often mirrors of class. There is a long history of failure in Government's efforts to overcome the social and class barriers created over time (Sutton Trust, 2012; Sutton Trust, 2011; Francis, 2013). These barriers are evident in our tripartite school system made up of private schools, selective schools and non-selective comprehensives schools. While education should be a source of social justice, historically it has served to reproduce social divides and post-92 institutions seem doomed to sit near the bottom of the 'Pyramid of Prestige' identified below in Fig 8.1 & 8.2 (reproduced from Fig 3.1 and 3.2).

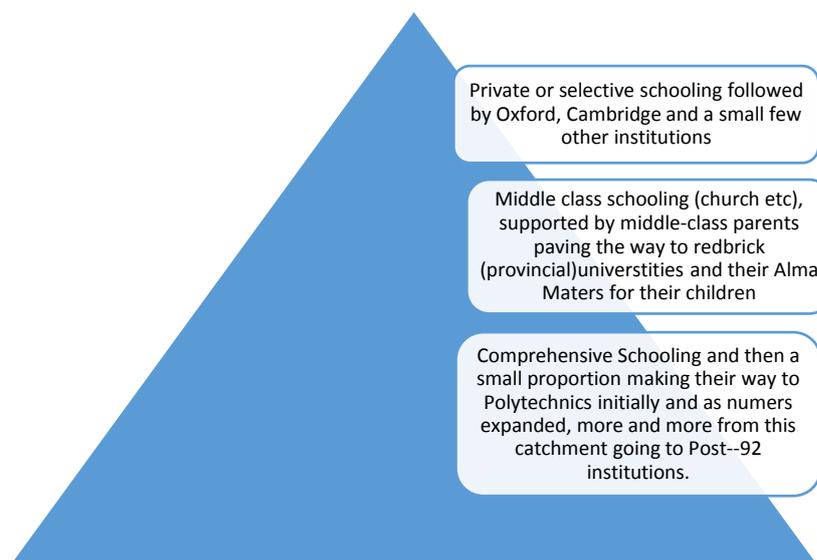


Fig 8.1 Pyramid of Prestige at University (based on ideas from Halsey 1961)

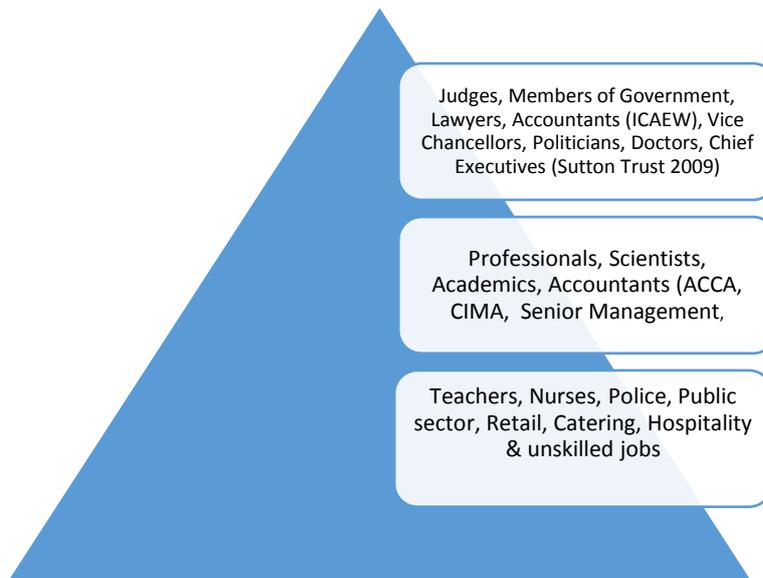


Fig 8.2 Pyramid of Prestige at work (based on ideas from Halsey 1961)

We are caught up in an ideology which ignores the social and economic reality of our society and thus ignores the impact that class and habitus has on students' prior academic experiences as evidenced across the statistics in section 2.6. The data in chapter six identifies students' expectations from higher education and highlights the gap in their expectations of us and our expectations of them. Institutions, management, and academics have accepted the ideology of economic exigency and the rhetoric of the performative regulatory regime. At the same time, we appear to ignore or pretend that disadvantage does not exist even though its impact can be recognised across every aspect of learning, teaching, assessment and feedback.

Education is, in effect, a 'positional good' or status symbol and graduates are ranked, as much by the institutions they attended, as they are by the degree classifications they attain so that class follows them because of their individual habitus but also because of the habitus of their university. The introduction of the NSS, and other metrics and now the TEF are all supporting, through poorly differentiated rankings, the further stratification of higher education. This leaves poorer, less privileged and less prepared young people eager to access advantage through attending university. They then choose or are chosen by, a post-92 institution where financial spend per student is much lower than it would be in an elite university even though the student fees can be the same. Elite

institutions are often historically endowed with large sums from wealthy alumni; these same institutions which now attract more government funding, particularly for research using a funding mechanism which can be altered without a rational explanation (Palfreyman and Tapper, 2014). Perhaps the irrational nature of some of the funding decisions made have more to do with those making the funding decisions given the dominance of the wealthy class in key government agencies and positions of power (SuttonTrust, 2009c). The system of measurement and ranking simply ignores the inherent financial divide that exists between the old elite institutions and the new less well-funded institutions. Using ranking metrics simply ensures that the flow of funding continues to rise to the top. More successful institutions to whom the bulk of research money flows often have the better metrics since those metrics often ignore institutional wealth and the composition of their student body. While the rhetoric suggests that student when selecting a university would make decisions based, in part, on reported metrics this implies they understand their significance and make rational choices, but 17-18-year-old adolescents make emotive choices based on their known world and some will not be aware of the consequences of their choices. Students go to university hoping for greater advantage, but many find more, but different limitations and obstacles placed in their way. Middle class families know that the real advantage of the old universities lies in the overall cultural capital of the student body.

8.4.3 Feedback and Assessment

Having placed the student within a specific context which examined what it is like being a student in a post 92-university, chapter four brings feedback and assessment into the mix. My data makes it clear that assessment and feedback, from the student perspective, are more about emotion than any other academic or educational objective. Emotions are activated during assessment or when receiving and reviewing feedback and occur irrespective of, but in conjunction with, other variables such as the student's family role, their social economic and cultural identities, their tutors, their friends, their

work groups, whether they travel to university or not or whether they work part-time. Fig 8.3 provides an overview of a typical student's learning experience drawing together some of the many variables which are interacting at any moment in time.

Assessment and feedback are closely linked in the minds of students and as Falchikov and Boud (2007) wrote:

'in some cases the interactions between the learner and the assessment event is so negative that it has an emotional impact that lasts many years and affects career choices, inhibits new learning' (p144)

For some, a poor grade or negative feedback which fails to meet their expectations can have emotional consequences that can influence the students' attitudes, emotions and behaviour in the future (Ilies et al., 2007). Students' reactions can confuse the feedback message and fail to lead to improved performance. The thoughts, reactions and emotions experienced when receiving feedback together with a grade, inform the meaning given to the grade and feedback by the student. Those giving feedback must recognise that feedback is a social process and part of the human relationships that students and staff are creating together (Adcroft, 2011).

Students' perception of the quality and usefulness of feedback, is bound up in their pre-formed expectations about what constitutes feedback, how staff should behave and how they should be treated at university. Fee paying students also expect to be treated as consumers with specific needs and demands including, for some, a need to be flattered or placated but not to be challenged (Williams, 2016); many also feel that marking and thus feedback is unfair. Our media savvy young people spend considerable time exposing their daily life on social media and revealing those aspects of their life they consider interesting and exciting (Agger, 2012), however, a poor grade reveals some form of failure and will disappoint, even when students recognise they made no effort. Being locked into that feeling of disappointment can lead students to consider ways to avoid future disappointments; Students may choose to quit university or ignore or reject the subject or module which led to those feelings, or perhaps to work much harder in future; irrespective they have an emotional reaction.

Feedback remains at the heart of learning (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Lizzio and Wilson, 2008; Hounsell, 2007) but also remains problematic (Hounsell et al., 2008; Nicol, 2010; Nicol, 2013; Boud, 2015). It is essential that we learn to see feedback as a complex and emotional event (Schutz and Pekrun, 2007; Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano, 2014), which must be undertaken with empathy and understanding while offering students the opportunity to learn, use, and grow from the process.

8.5 The Research Themes

The data generated across this research was derived mainly from accounting students and as such my conclusions reflects their views and their voices. These views may, in many ways, be generalisable across the Business School however, I make no claims in respect of other areas of higher education. However, the empirical research data generated here did reveal a series of key themes which provide a useful road map for identifying some of the key phenomena interacting in the daily life of students. These phenomena then affect their engagement and satisfaction with their academic experience. To begin at the beginning of a student's learning journey at university it seems reasonable to begin when they arrive at university and as such I used the data to extract students' views on their early experiences linking these directly with most of my initial aims. These views are now explained below:

No 1 Expectations at Transition

I sought to identify and understand the impact of students' expectations from university and from feedback on their attitudes and behaviour. This research identified and confirmed the views expressed in the literature that students find it difficult to transition into university. The significant factor is the role that expectations play, not just in the initial transition into university, but in many of the events which occur while a student. What new students bring to their studies is their own well-formed views, expectations and misconceptions, wrapped in excitement, deep worry, fear and/or

anxiety about this phase of their life. Some of the expectations students possess can become barriers to satisfactory transition into higher education; expectations or beliefs about the role of tutors, access to tutors, relationships with tutors, the ease with which they will be able to make good friends, the levels of support on offer at the institution. Additionally, some students bring a habitus which has not fully equipped them for the demands of settling into and fitting into higher education. This is not their fault, but we often treat them as if it is, and can leave them floating in a sea of confusion when we could develop better support systems to help them transition more effectively. It is essential to recognise and accept the need to build relationships between students and staff and students and their peers (Bowl, 2003). We must create the space for this to happen and in the process, start an early dialogue which each individual student.

Academics today may also be a little confused by the changes occurring across higher education making it difficult to play the role students expect. This confusion in the mind of academics in a Business School is often a reflection of the duality of their own identities both as professionals and as academics and to a degree their own memories of their initial university experiences and their professional training; academics bring their own habitus, their own expectations and these need to be explored in future research.

No 2 Independent Learning

Most students come through a highly formalised, directed and exam focused, school system. These students often have little conception of independent learning and it takes them some months, or even years, to grasp what is required. Students initial lack of understanding of the demands of higher education can impact a wide range of other experiences including leading them to question their identity and causing stress and anxiety.

Independent learning has a different meaning for different people and can be different across disciplines. By the time most students recognise what we expect and demand, their experience may already have been damaged, and their transition stunted. Providing them with a clear explanation of what we expect from them as students in accounting

involves demonstrating and explaining the volume of independent work required. This independent work enables students to acquire additional knowledge on their own, over and above what is explained to them by tutors (HigherEducationAcademy, 2014) and over time students can learn and accept that learning is, to a great extent, their individual responsibility.

No 3 Wellbeing

There are a variety of different events which students encounter during their early university experience, all of which can impact their overall wellbeing. The role of wellbeing or the students' mental state is now receiving a great deal of attention in the press and on TV. Wellbeing refers to a range of emotional, social, and health related issues which are initially exacerbated by the disappointments caused by our failure to meet students' expectations during transition but also by their difficulties in making friends, their early experiences with feedback and the impact of normal adolescent fears and anxieties. Anxiety is further caused by our expectations that they will be fully independent learners. Students' however, have spent 13 years being told what to learn, when and how. The evidence from this research suggests students are slow to realise their own role in their future learning and the success of that learning. When the realisation sets in that each student is responsible for identifying and then meeting deadlines for assessment and for submitting work on time and in the correct way, life can appear daunting.

During these early university experiences students are also attempting to build relationships with their peers and with the academics they encounter, adding to their emotional upheaval and their confusion. As students begin to think about preparing, writing and submitting assessments some find it difficult to organise their thinking and to plan. The expected arrival of feedback and grades may cause feelings of fear and anxiety leading to degrees of stress. Students' reactions to feedback, when received, can be destructive and impact all future behaviour at university. Learning is an emotive experience and it is only very recently that it has become possible to examine elements

of emotion as a distinct part of the neural system. However, our understanding of emotion remains rudimentary (Adolphs, 2002). We continue to rely on visual and auditory signs of emotion: being happy, sad, crying, angry, pleased - but our recognition of these signals relies on a degree of cultural understanding and often fails to take account of the framing of our emotions which most of us undertake as we function daily. We are adept at hiding our feelings, so are our students, and some individuals are better equipped to "*read between the lines*" when communicating with another individual demonstrating good emotional intelligence as defined by Maul (2012). Each participant involved in human interaction use pervasive but subtle skills to aid their communication but our understanding of how this works is limited (Aranguren, 2015) making the role of an academic working in an emotional environment that much more difficult.

No 4 Self and Identity

What has been demonstrated through this research is the variety of recurring emotional, and inward focused, themes which students engage with when they become university students. The degree of student loneliness was a major feature of a 2016 BBC documentary called '*the age of loneliness*' where young students admitted that being at university can be a lonely experience. The evidence from this research shows that students do not expect to be lonely, instead, they see university as an opportunity to make lifelong friends, and this can be one of their early disappointing experiences. Students expect to be mentored, and some even hope to develop friendships with their tutors and again can be disappointed. But it is heartening to see that many students starting university are prepared to meet the challenges that this significant, and life-changing event, can impose.

Some students see their initial *settling in* problems as their responsibility, as evidenced by the data reported here. Across the students' reflective assignments, admission of their own failings is evident; failing to attend classes; failing to read the required materials; failing to engage; failing to meet deadlines, but the other side of this is a view of some academics who can dismiss students as uninterested, unprepared, unmotivated

and generally unengaged in learning. Our practice, and with it some of our thinking, is visible in our interaction with students and they recognise when they are being dismissed or ignored. They interpret the pervasive but subtle cues evident in our visual communication - cues many of us are unable to hide.

Students are mainly adolescents in the throes of hormone development, with all that this means for the development of their identity, the development of their perception and understanding of self and their emotional development. This is a period in their life when they are forming themselves and feedback can play an important, sometimes destructive role, in that formation. What this research demonstrates is the interrelated nature of assessment, feedback, learning and *self*, and thus it can only be examined and understood within the social world of the student. This world is an entangled jigsaw of history, culture, space, family, time, prior learning experience, expectations, past and present teachers, technologies and objects. This entangled jigsaw is the world of every student and its complexity has resulted in little holistic attention being given to students as individuals.

Students in the process of daily life do not feel and interpret their university educational experience, or their experience of a single moment, as something separate, sitting outside their body and mind. Their experiences of events are continuously acting upon each other creating new knowledge (Fenwick et al., 2011) but also impacting on their view of feedback and assessment. Institutions must find the power to unmake and reframe expectations.

No 5 Feedback

Despite many years of study many students have little knowledge of the subjective nature of marking and giving feedback yet often feel that it is unfair. However, when marks are challenged, academics and institutions rely on their quality assurance processes to protect our institutional and individual reputations but also recognising the subjective nature of most marking. Research, indicates that marking and feedback can vary between different academics. Differences are evident in the time taken, the speed

with which student work is read, examined and then marked, the consistency within and between markers, all leading to unreliability (Broadfoot, 1996; Branthwaite et al., 1981), yet many academics believe in their own infallibility and do not want to be challenged. As Broadfoot (1996: 14) points out *'assessment is fundamentally an interpersonal exercise which cannot be divorced from human subjectivity'*.

Students begin their university experience by placing their trust in the institution and its staff. Here, trust is a belief that both the institution and its academics, will be honest, open, and reliable and have the students' best interest at heart (Carless, 2012) and of course this is generally true. All participants in the provision of higher education; teachers, support staff, counsellors, management, librarians and all others generally have good intentions, but many are constrained by routinisation. Routinisation refers to our reliance on repetitive day-to-day activities which in turn demonstrate the reliability and trustworthiness of our activities, but this often leads to a failure to see the consequences of our actions (Aranguren, 2015) and can mask the emotional anxiety which is often part of the educational experience (Giddens, 1984).

The real intentions in any feedback interaction are difficult to understand whether we are giving or receiving it, as giving and receiving feedback is a delicate balance (Young, 2000), but even this is a simplistic view. Assessment is not simply a measurement of learning nor is it about correcting errors and omissions, it is an emotive, judgemental process which can affect students approach to work, their self-belief and their identity. Broadfoot believes that assessment is not working and that *'we have produced a Frankenstein that preys on the educational process'* (Broadfoot, 2008: 213). Any feedback we offer students will be received and evaluated, not wholly on the words written or the grade provided but also on the back of the assessment experience. Additionally, much of the feedback provided to students is provided in written format and thus quite often read alone. But feedback should be a social process where the human relationship between academic and student is central (Adcroft, 2011).

Evidence from our level 5 students using a methodology like that of the NSS provided a range of feedback on feedback. These vignettes while all anonymous, do provide a clear

indication, that even after years of adjusting and changing our approaches to assessment and feedback students are not convinced we provide sufficient useful feedback to meet their learning needs. These vignettes indicate the continuing sameness in what students perceive as the feedback problem:

'More feedback from the module leaders and advise on what to do to achieve good grades would be helpful'. 'More help should be given in terms of feedback, so we can improve on the future assignments. More help to write very good essays, feedback is always useless' 'if lectures when marking could give more reason to why they gave certain marks would be helpful'. 'The feedback on my course has been weak, partially with the timing as well as for the lack of helpful comments'.

Of course, some students have their own personal mental model of the value of the work they submit as is evidenced below, again from the recent Level 5 students' comments:

'I believe that my work has not been fairly marked in some cases'. 'Also have noticed that most mark schemes are down to how the marker thinks you have done not based on a mark for certain aspects being covered'. 'I did have an exam paper where I have the exact answers I had been advised to give and the score given did not reflect the level of detail in my answers. I often achieve over 70% and this grade was below 50 - other students I had spoken to have the exact same answers but had received much higher marks for the same questions' 'Marking has been harsh and unfair at times'.

If a student believes that feedback is unfair or inappropriate they have an emotional reaction (Adler and Adler, 1989). Individuals self-conceptions are a product of social interactions, a form of looking glass self as we react to how others view us (Cooley, 1902). It is important to remember that as students complete the NSS it is the feelings that feedback generated, together with how they feel about how well they met their own expectations that are activated as they respond to the relevant questions.

While NSS scores for feedback and assessment remain lower than other areas of the NSS why attempts to fix feedback are perceived to be failing. But consider the evidence from the Arts; this suggest that students have little understanding of what constitutes feedback. Arts students receive weekly and often daily feedback, yet their NSS scores are like those of other disciplines. One can conclude it is not the overall quantity of feedback, nor is it the regularity of feedback that is problematic, but something else. In part, the failure of feedback rests in failure to recognise what it is that feedback is

supposed to do and how it should be created and used by academics and students. Boud (2013 698-699) referring to the engineering idea of the feedback loop noted:

‘that for feedback (or homeostasis) to be said to occur there must be some identifiable influence on the system that is the recipient of the feedback’

Feedback always has a context: who is giving the feedback, are they important, is this an important assignment, what percentage of the marks does it represent, how long did I work on it, do the marks I received, and the written feedback reflect the amount of effort I put in? These are important issues to the student, but invisible to the person giving feedback, but that person has a responsibility to try and maintain students' feelings of worth and self-esteem (Higgins and Kram, 2001) by providing constructive and useful feedback and following up on poor performances to examine more closely the cause, and act according to information gained in this way rather than relying on opinion formed through a brief read of a piece of work. Treating each student as an individual will, in many instances change their approach to learning and their use of feedback.

8.6 Recommendations

This research has identified a need to address a wide and disparate range of issues relating to the student experience if we are to begin to change students views on feedback. We need to develop a holistic approach to the student as a human, often adolescent, young person. The 5 key themes identified from the data and discussed above point to a two-pronged approach to solving some of the problems associated with students' interaction with feedback, but both need to be considered within the context of the personal and emotional needs of students.

No1: Helping students through transition

Learning is a complex human event and cannot simply be designed by experts, it is an adaptive process, a self-organising system occurring invisibly through dyadic ties¹⁶. We can support it, but we cannot control it. The more we formalise what we do the more we limit the self-organising systems which underpin learning. Expecting students to arrive as independent learners is not feasible in our current environment. We give students more and more information, using all the different media outlets available to us, and in the process, we are drowning them, when what they want is a simple *how to*. When one gives, or tries to give, feedback to students already drowning, arms flying in a pool of information, it is almost impossible to catch their attention, never mind get them to pay attention and listen to feedback.

The first semester at university needs to be simplified, and more time needs to be spent on helping students become independent learners. We need to create opportunities for students to learn, to work together, in an unthreatening way while ensuring students are made aware of the volume of independent work required. During this period students need help, through organised events, to make friends. Students who recognise their own level of unpreparedness, can be disruptive, feel stressed and this can lead to thoughts of an early exit. However, students' mental models, while accurate in relation to past experiences, will rarely represent what will happen at university. So, a large number are feeling stressed, even if they do not show it or admit to it.

No 2: Responding to expectations

In chapter three a quote from Adcroft (2011:406) was used to point out that it is people's '*underlying assumptions and beliefs that determine interpretations and behaviour*'. This together with the evidence collected and analysed across this research make clear the need to identify the underlying assumptions and expectations held both by staff and

¹⁶ Dyad means 2, Dyadic ties refers to the interaction between people with some common interest – (a minimum of 2 but many more can be involved)

students. These can be used to create a dialogue and build a bridge between students and tutors. Some form of student-tutor dialogue should be part of a student's educational experience. This dialogue will facilitate the building of relationships and make communication easier.

This research has made clear that when students' expectations are not met. Students can become confused and close off from what is happening around them, failing to engage. The data here and data from SAEA (2016) indicates that meeting students' expectations provides the strongest indication of students' levels of satisfaction. Considerable years of research in the US and evidence during the past 10 years from the UK also confirms the need to recognise and respond to students' expectations. Institutions are thus correct in placing great importance on students' levels of satisfaction however an initial transition period devoted to managing expectations at each level of study could overcome or even eliminate some elements of the pre-conceived views held by students.

No 3: Independent Learning

During their first semester and throughout their first-year students' need clear and precise instructions and guidance, they need initially to be led. We should view students' first few weeks as a form of boot camp or training regime which includes the skills we know they need; how to write essays, how to create reports and how to make a presentation all within the specific context of their own discipline. Tasks which mimic assessment tasks must be set, evaluated and lead to feedback. These assignments or tasks could then form the basis of a 1 to 1 meeting with a tutor where a discussion on expectations could take place. Demonstrations of how to produce an assignment, examples of good and bad assignments, clarity over what we expect in relation to presentations, these are all simple but important to the student. Demonstrations on how we mark, by marking an assignment in class, and talking out loud over the process can be very effective. Students need help, support and guidance, on how to read materials, how to study, how to collect and maintain relevant and useful material and how to use these skills to become independent learners.

Support systems already offer many, if not all, of the above but students treat them as optional and often believe they do not need these. It is our responsibility to find a way to integrate this type of support into students' normal work load and to find a way to monitor and ensure engagement. One of the problems in higher education is our desire to use invisible pedagogy to provide an affective and motivational learning experience to all students (Bernstein, 2004) but students need initially a form of visible pedagogy (Bernstein, 2004) where visible pedagogy involves revealing the specific criteria, the rules and expectations we have for our students as they embark on assessments and progress during their first few months. Through visible pedagogy, we can begin to change their behaviour and can acknowledge and respond to the differences in expectations, while our invisible pedagogy can later provide the framework within which students learn to become independent learners and thinkers

No 4: Supporting students' wellbeing

Students are in a dependent position with their teachers when they arrive at university (Hoecht, 2006) and thus there must be trust. But if students' trust is undermined, stress can be the result. Trust is an important component of good relationships but often, in modern large institutions the trust relationship is not '*embedded in personal relations*' between individuals but rather we rely on a form of '*impersonal trust*' (Hoecht, 2006: 544) guarded by a range of verification systems including regular audit. While regular audit and verification systems, including the wide range of metrics now in use, may be designed as a methodology for building trust they are also a form of ritual not unlike the witchcraft of old, a respectable science so long as we believe (Gambling, 1987). Perhaps this is enough for institutional trust, but good interpersonal relations help to minimise stress and where possible a supportive student-tutor relationship can facilitate students' in creating a learning and friendship community which will, in turn, reduce their feelings of loneliness and help to reduce stress levels.

To ease the initial worry, confusion and stress experienced by the modern, young, often disadvantaged, overworked adolescents, we need to create a welcoming, friendly,

encouraging and supportive environment. We should acknowledge their commitments; to travel, to family; and to work while helping them settle. Failure to provide support can undermine students' wellbeing as they try and juggle their lives. This can be the starting point for improving their overall levels of satisfaction with their university experiences.

In building strong relationships with our students, we build a support structure, a ladder they can climb across their 3 years of study. However, in our current marketised higher education environment we are trying to build a form of commercial relationship where students are our clients (Ball, 2010).

No 5: Responding to the Feedback Problem

Management of the feedback issue in recent years does not appear to have eliminated the perceived problem identified by the NSS. Students expect, want, and believe they need specific feedback and we must listen to their message, and use it to guide us, such that as part of meeting students' expectations we provide specific, directed, advice on how to improve work, this is what they believe their learning needs. But we also must find a way to change students' perception of what higher education is and help them to recognise and accept their role in the process. Feedback should be a conversation or communication between individuals conducted in the full knowledge that judging another human being is an emotional undertaking. Learning is emotional, and feedback is part of learning such that we can only demonstrate our effectiveness in giving feedback by monitoring its uptake, i.e. by closing the loop (Boud, 2013). The evidence makes clear that students seek, and expect, a relationship between the words used in feedback and the grade they receive, i.e. if we say a piece of work is excellent then students expect grades to be very high, after all, what else can you do if your work is excellent.

Transformational learning occurs when feedback leads to a qualitative change in what a student knows (Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano, 2014). All advice given needs to be specific, to be understandable, and relevant to the work being examined but also, where possible have relevance for future work. In turn, students must be helped, right from the beginning to engage with feedback, to use feedback and to see its value. Our

responsibility is to make sure it has value and facilitate and support its use, but good feedback must sit on the back of sound forms of assessment.

To have value feedback must be timely, usable and used. This requires further review of our assessment regime, the timing of assessment, the role and focus of feedback, its purpose and if our objective is to provide a transformative educational experience then we must all accept and believe that feedback is worth giving, worth receiving, and that it serves learning well; for both parties to this conversation there can be doubts. Feedback should be an intentional interaction between student and tutor, a communication given with care and respect. Within institutions, any discussion about feedback and any attempt to respond to students' criticisms on feedback must be undertaken as part of a discussion about assessment. Seeking to separate them simply moves the problem back and forth between the two failing to acknowledge that students views on the fairness of the assessment must impact their views on the quality and usefulness of the feedback (Sambell et al., 1997). But a great deal of assessed work is not measured within any recognisable concept or theory of measurement but is instead judged on some invisible concept of achievement, but according to Knight (2007) achievement is not epistemologically measurable. There is also evidence of the negative effect of assessment or any form of testing on the quality of teaching (Black and Wiliam, 1998c; Flodén, 2016) and of course testing drives and directs students' learning through the hidden curriculum (Snyder, 1971; Sambell and McDowell, 1998) because students learn to work towards the assessment and not on the basis of the overall curriculum. Yet in spite of this much of the growing body of assessment research has concentrated on how best to effectively measure students' performance (Broadfoot, 1996), or alternatively on evaluating the reliability and validity of testing methods (Gipps, 1994; Haertel, 1999) such that we appear to be operating an instrumental system (Torrance, 2007) while ignoring the real spirit of assessment (Reimann and Sadler, 2017).

8.7 Performativity

Successive UK governments have problematised education as a means of control and manipulation. During this discourse of problematisation, Government has been able to move freely and quietly to refocus education to serve the economic needs of industry (Glynos and Howarth, 2007), rather than the academic needs of students. Change was introduced in the context of economies of scale, as numbers were expanded, and we moved to a massified and commodified system. We, the academic's involved in teaching and researching have silently gone along with the changes that have taken place, each concerned with protecting ourselves, by maintaining a *'disgraceful silence in these matters'* (Howie, 2005: 7). We are now faced with a performative system of higher education steeped in metrics designed to measure and evaluate performance based on simple numbers.

Performativity is about stage managing performance across the rituals, routines, metrics and rankings of higher education such that students and staff are *'desocialised'* (Ball, 2004: 152) becoming objects to be measured and perhaps fixed if they do not measure up? Students are positioned within a system of official rules, regulations, resources, spaces, structures of agency and social structures, which between them create their learning environment and within which they must develop their identity as a student (Scott et al., 2014). Individuals are complex biological systems who self-organise, but the more we formalise *the system* and formalise what we do, the more we limit the self-organising systems which underpin learning for both the student and academics and in the process damage that which is central to what we do: learning. The long-term consequences will be the creation of an educational system which is nothing more than job training in corporate institutions which will in time find new ways to create additional income to increase the compensation packages of management just as commercial organisations do today through short-termism. Short-termism involves maximising profits today at any cost, ignoring long-term sustainability for the organisation (Hughes,

2014). How long before we see advertising hoardings on campus, or have I simply missed them?

Years of change and austerity together with an audit and measurement mentality has impacted our ability to offer students a learning environment which supports their construction of knowledge. As students become familiar with institutions need to satisfy external metrics, they will also become adept at playing the game, and use their evaluations of teaching as a tool to extract better grades, mirroring aspects of the US system. We, in turn, will begin to self-censor our role and stop challenging our students (Williams, 2016). We will capitulate to institutions' concerns with external ratings and metrics, rather than attempting to provide students with the learning opportunities they need to grow and evolve. As students have learned to behaving more like customers, there is evidence of curriculum change occurring to please students and thus enhance NSS scores.

From a personal perspective, over emphasis on performativity during the past decade has damaged learning and teaching by pushing teaching back towards a transmission of knowledge model, as we work to achieve learning outcomes while meeting a wide range of externally and internally driven metric demands. The forces of conformity are overactive within institutions as we use management control systems to deal with human issues. We seem no longer concerned with the pursuit of knowledge, but rather with the efficient and effective delivery of outcomes (Parker, 2002), trying to take the *human*, the *passion*, the *feeling* and the *love* out of teaching. These human attributes can't be measured so a love of teaching or a love of our subject has no value ascribed to it. Instead teachers are expected to behave rather like factory workers whose performance is measured by the number of units handled per hour, or the call centre worker required to take x number of calls per hour, performativity demands that teaching can be measured and evaluated using a fixed menu of characteristics. Performative educational systems, which limit and control what is possible, are unable to *transform* students. We, like school teachers, are now required to teach to the test, tests we are required to set well in advance of meeting our students and knowing them. In a strange way, it is disciplinary

control and disciplinary practice, which has the al power to ensure some degree of transformation as we develop and train students to be accountants.

8.8 Complexity Theory: Imagining the Future

Educational policy, educational management and educational research have generally been dominated by the need to identify and use predictive models to control learning and its outcomes. Simple, but often casual, correlations are used to generate concepts of "best practice" and then used to determine policy (Radford, 2007). An alternative view which is gaining momentum is the acceptance that education is in effect a complex system in which a large number of interacting components are at work and thus systems theory or complexity theory (Bertalanffy, 1969) can be used as a conceptual framework through which the behaviour of these systems can be analysed (Semetsky, 2008). The complexity map below (Fig 8.3) depicts some of the many variables which are part of the complex world of student learning.

Complexity theory and complex issues have been identified throughout this thesis with an explanation offered in section 4.2.2. The simple complexity map (Fig 8.3) below can be viewed as a holistic construal demonstrating just some of the factors or phenomena impacting on learning and feedback for the average student. Educational research needs a new paradigm, a new methodological approach which incorporates a holistic construction of the student. Students' construal of their world impacts their behaviour and our construal of our students' behaviour impacts on how we treat them. Already we have multiple, often opposing and often overlapping perspectives of a problem or issue with no adequate methodology for examining, measuring or fully interpreting them. Complexity theory provides a device for mapping the overlapping issues which are at work in students' progress through their daily life and their educational experiences.

Potential future research projects may enable us to identify and better understand the interplay between some of the many different personal phenomena depicted in the complexity map below but also the wider learning environment which includes a student's

school experience and the impact of the university environment. Complexity theory provides the foundation for a model which can be used to demonstrate the difficulties associated with trying to fix the *feedback problem* by focusing on the dynamics of interacting systems and recognising the de-centered, multi-factored causes of events (Haggis, 2007).

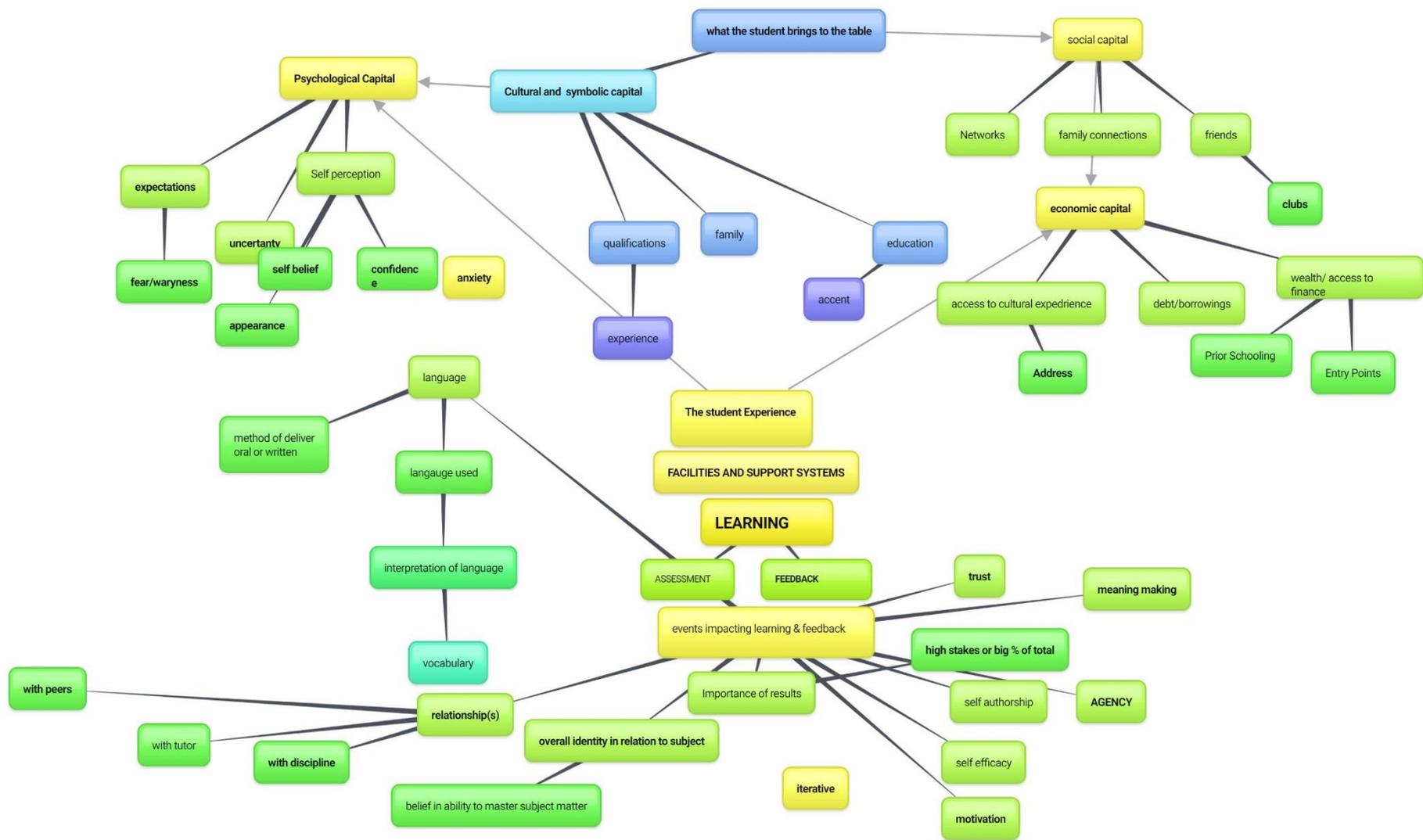


FIGURE 8.3 COMPLEXITY MAP

8.9 Personal, Professional Learning Arising from this Research

During my studies on this doctoral programme, most of what I initially believed has been challenged, reformed and reworked. I now see the world of being a student from a very different perspective. The questions I ask, and my interpretation of the answers have become much more caring and focused on the difficulties of being a student, rather than the failings of students. Knowledge gained through education and the experience of higher education should be transformative and not wholly about assessment, because, the author Michael Morpurgo pointed out in a lecture in September 2016, testing '*rocks confidence*' and '*ruins self-esteem*', he went on to say:

'When you fail it brings only a sense of worthlessness and hopelessness'.

'It brings fear and shame and anxiety'.

'It separates you from those who have passed',

When you fail a test: *'You disappoint yourself, disappoint others. You give up,'*
(Burns, 2016)

He was talking about repeated testing in the school system as a form of '*apartheid*' and things are not very different in a university setting. I have learned that we over assess but more importantly we over emphasise the role of assessment and grades, seeing this as the only way to measure learning and in the process, we shut off or shut down individual learning for learnings sake. We often have no explicit theory of assessment (Delandshere, 2001) yet institutions have instigated substantial change both in assessment practice and policy (Boud, 2006) in response to internal and external pressures; the NSS; increased accountability; external rankings; consumer demands; and quality assurance.

Through this research I have learned that assessment is an emotive word which often leads to considerable anxiety in students and staff, reflecting the words of Michael Morpurgo. Assessment is a form of judgement, judgement of students' knowledge, but also of their ability to overcome nerves. It is also seen as judgement of an academics' knowledge and ability to teach; their ability to be fair; their ability to maintain standards; and their ability to give good feedback. Grading and feedback are at the heart of what we do in a university rather than the learning and teaching and the personal and emotional aspects of feedback are often ignored, and are certainly undertheorised, in the determination of institutional policy. Institutions are required to maintain records of achievement; to differentiate in some way between performances; to certify or warrant successful students, and maintain an aura of quality and standards.

The history of social research is a history of critique, uncertainty, and in the Foucaultine sense of problematisation. The historical perspective which is described in this thesis represents a simplified view of the complex environment in which universities operate. It reflects the different and changing epistemological position that government and regulators have adopted during the past 70 years to legitimise new policies, strategies and claims to truth. But as Lakatos pointed out *'creative imagination is likely to find corroborating novel evidence even for the most 'absurd' programme, if the search has sufficient drive'* (Lakatos et al., 1978: 99).

It is time to move beyond imagination and recognise that feedback cannot be fixed because it is not a singular problem, instead, we need to reconceptualise it and look at it from a new and different perspective. Only when we are confident that we understand what we are doing, and why we do it, can we demonstrate to students its importance, and its role in their learning? This chapter is my reflection on what I have learned to date, but this is not the end of this story, it is simply a piece of the jigsaw. The quest in this research was to identify some of the many jigsaw pieces which impact on students use of, interaction with, and learning from, feedback.

I recognise that in undertaking this research I was working from a specific philosophical and educational position and others will wish to contest this view. I seek to begin a conversation, and not to close one down. Each time I review what I have written in the previous chapters, or read a new publication, or have a discussion with a student, or with a colleague, I gain new insights and understanding as I link what I read, or hear, to my own data and I find myself reinterpreting and refining my thinking. My perspective, just now, is reflected in these words: *'we travel on the surface of meaning, which slides a little further away with each step we take to approach it'* (Clastres, 1994: 36).

This tells me I am far from finished. It is important to listen to the students' voices and hear the hidden messages. We then need to explore our practices and beliefs in response to students' initial expectations and experiences. We must develop and use this knowledge to build an engaging transition programme. From a management perspective, university strategy must focus on the balance of spending and ensure that new initiatives do not increase further our staff: student ratios. We must ensure that there are sufficient academic staff to build successful learning relationships and stronger communities of learning.

8.9.1 Future Research

The world of the young student is growing more complex by the day. Today we are receiving into our universities Generation Z, or millennial. These young people are digitally aware, constantly engaging with social media, connected 24/7, and always clicking. Like alcohol or smoking, reading and receiving text messages, logging on to Facebook, reading tweets and other media communications can become addictive because they cause an emotional reaction in the brain in the form of dopamine (Berridge, 2007, Andreassen et al., 2012). This can leave young people constantly working out their relationship with the world and constantly distracted from everything else that is going on around them (Simon Sinek - YouTube 2017) as they seek the next fix from their handheld devices and spend more and more time engaged in this activity (Przepioraka and Blachnio, 2016). Teaching

these students and offering them feedback will demand even greater skills and understanding and provide a wealth of opportunity for further research in the complex area of assessment and feedback.

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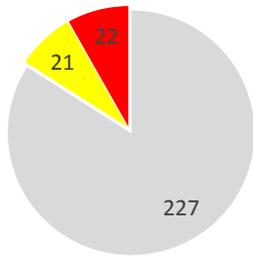
Appendix 1 - Accounting & Finance intake statistics (2014/15)

Appendix One – Student details			
Accounting and Finance students recruited Sept 2014/15 First Year Students			
Enrolled	295	%	
Average Tariff	270 approximately		
A level/ BTEC/GNVQ	199	67	
Other	71		
New to UH	233	79	
Repeating	34		
Continuing	28		
Home	239	81	
Overseas & EU	56	19	
Male	188	63	
Female	107	37	
Av age at entry	19		
Ethnic white	47	16	
Refused	4	1	
Ethnic other	244	83	

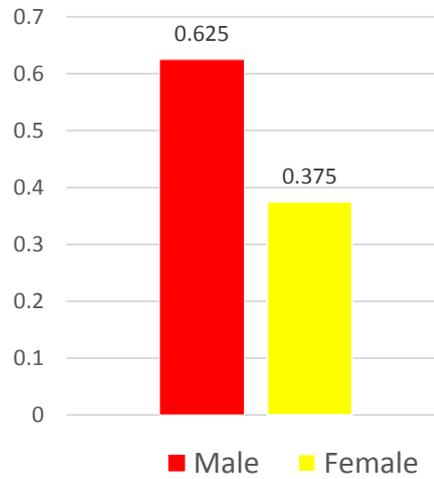
Source: Internal Analysis of Recruitment from Annual Monitoring Report

Appendix 2 L5 Accounting and Finance Cohort Analysis 15/16

Student Numbers



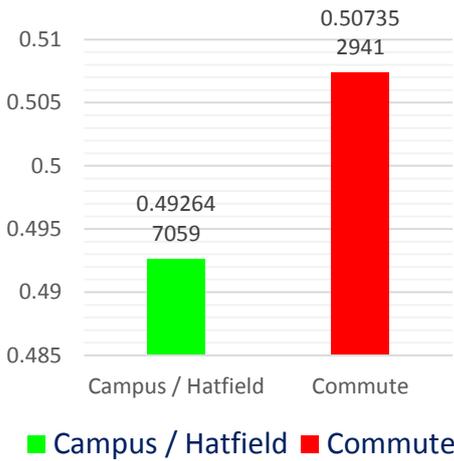
Gender



Demographics



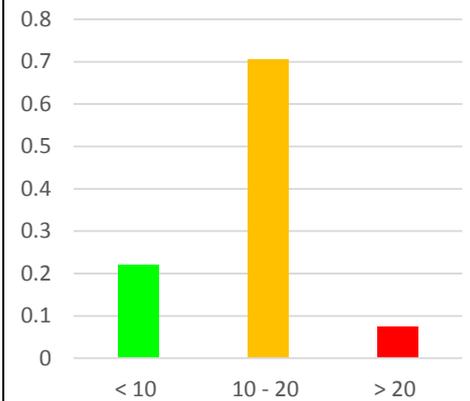
Location



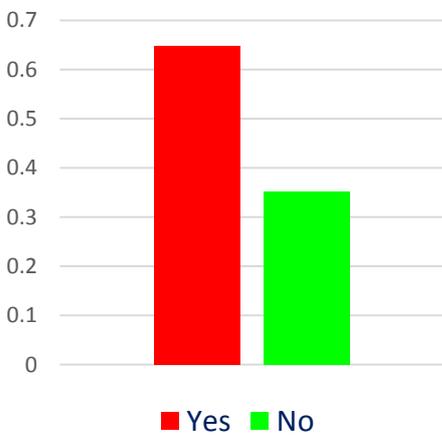
Commute



PT Work Hours per Week



Part-Time Job



Appendix 3 - Example of past Student Failure Rates

(Extracts from Internally Produced Subject Monitoring and Evaluation Reports (SMER))

MODULES WITH ANNUAL HIGH FAILURE RATES (i.e. failure rates above the accepted university level and thus requiring action. Acceptable fail rates for Level 4 = 25%, Level 5 = 15% and Level 6 = 10%).

Module Number	Module Name	Failure Rate	
		2003/04	2004/05
2 BUS 0021	Financial Accounting & Reporting	40.31 %	29.50 %
2 BUS 0040	Management Accounting	38.92 %	18.67 %
2 BUS 0150	Financial Management	40.74 %	33.95 %

SMER statistics 2003/4 & 2004/5

:

Module Number	Module Name	University Reporting Level	Actual Failure Rate	Comment
1 BUS 0072	Foundations of Management Accounting	25 %	41.18 %	See note 2 (below)
2 BUS 0021	Financial Accounting & Reporting	15 %	16.57 %	See note 3 (below)
2 BUS 0040	Management Accounting	15 %	17.27 %	See note 3 (below)
2 BUS 0122	Accounting for Management Control	15 %	27.22 %	See note 4 (below)
2 BUS 0150	Financial Management	15 %	21.28 %	See note 3 (below)
3 BUS 0095	Taxation	10 %	11.76 %	See note 5 (below)

SMER 2005/6

	2005/06	2004/05	2003/04
2 BUS 0021	16.57 %	29.50 %	40.31 %
2 BUS 0040	17.27 %	18.67 %	38.92 %
2 BUS 0150	21.28 %	33.95 %	40.74 % **

MODULES WITH HIGH FAILURE RATES ACROSS 3 YEARS

Module Number	Module Name	No of Students	University Reporting Level	Actual Failure Rate	Comment
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1 BUS 0146	Accounting Techniques	274	25 %	25.55 %	Note 2
2 BUS 0122	Accounting for Management Control	222	15 %	27.03 %	Note 3
2 BUS 0150	Financial Management	3	15 %	66.67 %	Note 4
2 BUS 0193	Financial Statements – 1	280	15 %	29.29 %	Note 5
2 BUS 0195	Cost & Activity Management	249	15 %	32.13 %	Note 5
2 BUS 0197	Financial Management	303	15 %	27.72 %	Note 6
3 BUS 0050	International Financial Management	70	10 %	14.29 %	Note 7
3 BUS 0095	Taxation	235	10 %	13.19 %	Note 8
3 BUS 0139	Financial Strategy	179	10 %	10.06 %	Note 8
3 BUS 0142	International Accounting - 1	55	10 %	14.55 %	Note 7
3 BUS 0143	International Accounting - 2	29	10 %	27.59 %	Note 7
3 BUS 0210	Business Finance	94	10 %	12.77 %	Note 8
3 BUS 0255	Advanced Corporate Reporting	225	10 %	15.11 %	Note 9

SMER 2006/7

Appendix 4a, Sample of Reflective Assignment with Guidance 2007/08

Students are required to produce a final, individual, essay - max 1500 words - titled REFLECTION ON "SKILLS IN ACCOUNTING" MODULE 1BUS031.

The objective here is for you to produce a piece of reflective work examining how well you have progressed through this module. You should begin the process in the following way:

- 1 Re-do the skills checklist and identify areas where your skills have changed (include as an appendix to your essay)
- 2 Include in your essay information on your initial skill deficit and any improvements which have occurred (might be a table or a short commentary) Most of all identify where improvement has not occurred.
- 3 Try and determine why, and comment on, the fact that some skills have not improved in spite of the fact that you had identified these at the start

This is the start of your reflection, it's the process of discussing and identifying improvements, shortfalls, what you have learned, why you have failed in some areas, how good your attendance has been, working with others, in a pair and in a group. Identify what more you need to do to ensure that other skills improve during next semester

What has it been like working with a pair, did you cope with it well? Did you make a good friend or not? What did you learn from the experience? If you are one of those who ended up working alone, you need to reflect on why this happened and how you might prevent it happening in the future. To support your reflection on this activity – complete and hand in week of the 26th November (at your seminar) the peer evaluation forms included in the handbook, one for peer and one for group

What was it like working in a group, what were the good and bad points, what did you learn?

How about your grades so far, are they a reflection of your own participation both in terms of attendance but also in joining in the process in seminars? Complete and attach as appendix 2 your final self-assessment – be honest

Finally, I would like you to comment on your first term at Uni, did it live up to expectations, were you prepared and how did we fail you?

Any other issue which causes you to reflect should also be included.

Good Luck

Appendix 4b. Sample of Reflective Assignment with Guidance 2008/09

Students are required to produce a final, individual, essay of a max of 1500 words - titled REFLECTION ON "SKILLS IN ACCOUNTING" MODULE 1BUS0192. 2008/09

The objective here is for you to produce a piece of reflective work examining how well you have progressed through this module and through your first semester at University.

You should begin the process now by reflecting on the following: Remember your views will change almost weekly)

<p>1. Begin your reflective essay with a 150- 200-word introduction setting out what you expected and hoped for as you joined the University last September</p>
<p>2. Redo the learning styles assessment which you did at the start of the module and identify (a) any changes/movement in your skills levels and consider how & why there have been changes and (b) ask what you're learning style tells you about yourself and how these may have impacted on your experience at university to date. Include in your reflection a commentary on your skills now, identifying strengths and weaknesses and identify how you hope to be able to build on your skills over the coming years. Identify where you think improvement is already occurring and areas you have not yet dealt with or ignored during semester A</p> <p>200 words</p> <p>Much of what is described here is the process of reflection, the 200+ words is then your analysis of yourself based on that reflection</p>
<p>3. 2 above is the start of your reflection, it's the process of discussing and identifying improvements, shortfalls etc. from a skills perspective. Test your skills online using this link: http://logos.herts.ac.uk/lskills/TLTP3/afterenter.html</p> <p>Now you need to examine what you have learned, why you have failed in some areas perhaps linking failure or success to attendance, engagement with the subjects etc. This reflection is not just about the Skills module but about your first semester. So ask yourself honestly:</p> <p>(a) how good was your attendance to date? (b) how effective have you been working with others, in a pair and in a group – when there were problems, how much of this was down to you. Complete the pairs and group evaluations forms and attach to this essay</p>

<p>(c) What has it been like working with a pair, did you cope with it well? Did you make a good friend or not? What did you learn from the experience? If you are one of those who ended up working alone, you need to reflect on why this happened and how you might prevent it happening in the future. If you are one of those that ended up divorced, then why did this happen.</p> <p>(d) Identify what more you need to do to ensure that you can make up for any skills deficits during next semester (skills deficit can include the ability to work effectively with others and in a team)</p> <p>(e) What was it like working in a group, what were the good and bad points, what did you learn? 300 - 350 words</p>
<p>4. What was it like working in a group, what were the good and bad points, what did you learn? How did your presentation go, did you do your best, do you think you met the requirements set out or simply completed the task 100 - 150 words</p>
<p>5. Comment on your first term at Uni, did it live up to expectations, were you prepared and how did we fail you? 150 -200 words</p>
<p>6. You will have received a range of different types of feedback throughout this module; beginning with your writing skills, then some in class tests, your report, and your presentation, how did this help you, if it helped you, what do you think of feedback, what do you want from feedback, what did you get that helped you develop your skills and abilities from this and your other modules. 300 words</p>
<p>Finally, I need your help. Some of you will get your feedback for your True and Fair essay in the form of a podcast sent as an attachment with your grade, you will I HOPE listen to this and get something useful from it, but whatever you think about this feedback we would like to know. I would like your permission to have someone call you to ask you about this experience. We here at the University are constantly looking for more effective ways of providing feedback. This will be the first time this method is used. We need to know if is useful</p> <p>If you are willing to give this feedback please provide your mobile number, by way of permission with this essay. The feedback will be given to a third party and will be anonymous. You will in fact be asked a series of predetermined questions. This would happen towards the end of January. I will be very grateful for your help. Only 15/20 students will be contacted, and these will be selected randomly from those giving their mobile number.</p> <p>Many thanks</p> <p>Mary</p>