

Widening Participation in higher education: Capital that counts.

Jo Watson

Bourdieu and Geometric Data Analysis Symposium
International Classification Conference, University of St Andrews
14th July 2011

The UK field of higher education:

- Under-representation of those from less privileged backgrounds an enduring problem (Reay et al 2005)
- Most disadvantaged 7 times less likely than most advantaged to attend most selective HEIs (BIS 2011)
- The pattern of collective trajectories of those from less privileged groups differs sharply from that of traditional entrants (Reay 2006)
- Onus falls to students to adapt and fit in with established practices (Layer 2002, Burke 2005)
- Dominant culture of HE remains oriented towards traditional, white, middle-class population (Read et al 2003, Burke 2005)



Research outline:

- Exploratory, instrumental case study approach (Stake 1995)
- Context: undergraduate occupational therapy programme in research intensive UK university
- Focus: students with non-traditional academic backgrounds without prior experience of HE
- **3 year longitudinal study**
 - 13 participants from a single cohort
 - Focus groups at entry
 - Individual reflective diaries
 - Semi-structured interviews towards end of 1st & 3rd years of study
 - Demographic, personal and family background data
 - Documentary Analysis

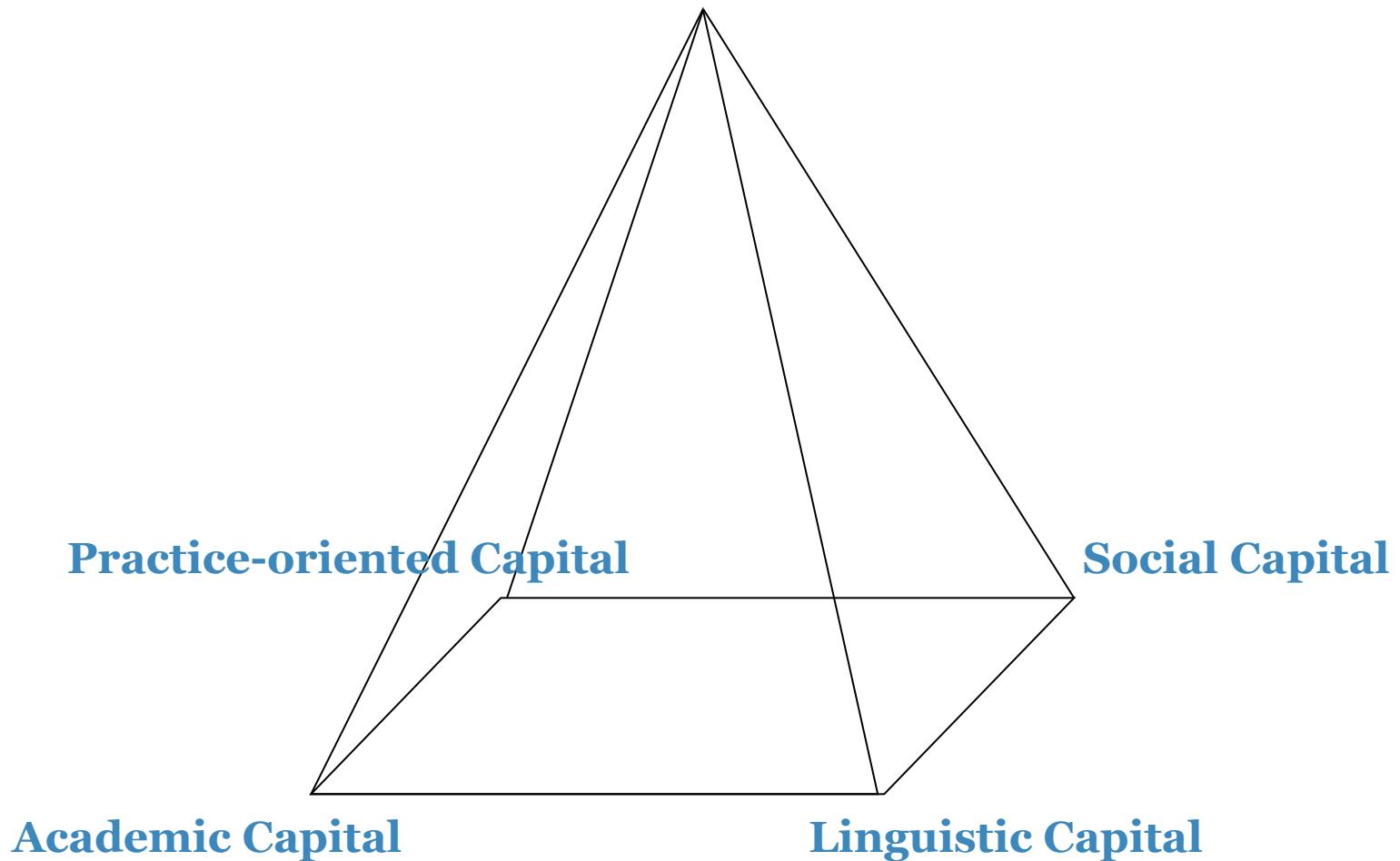
Playing the game:

- Individual fields have their own '**logic of practice**' or metaphorical 'game' reflecting the interests of the dominant group
- Entry into a field depends upon at least implicit acceptance of '**rules of the game**'
- A '**feel for the game**' emerges from experience of the game and the structures within which it is played.
- The '**rules of the game**' are largely implicit and partially internalised, shaping thoughts and actions according to the capitals valued by the field.



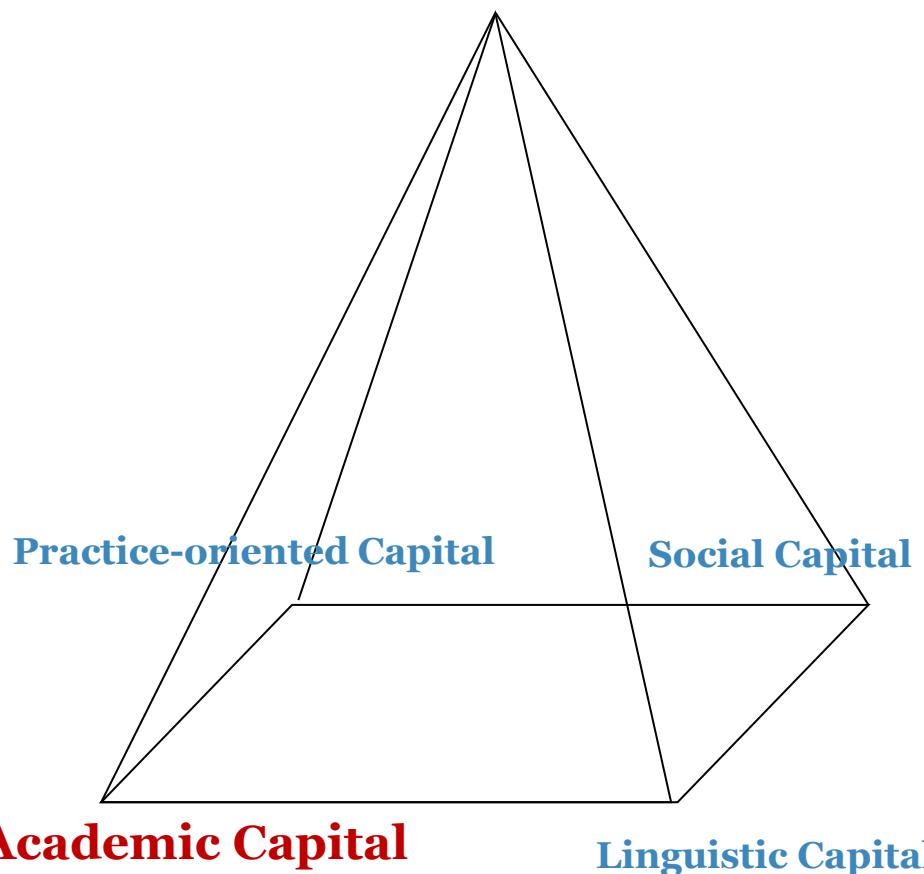
Capital that counts:

Feel for the game



Academic Capital:

Feel for the game



- the depth and level of disciplinary and related knowledge
- skills associated with searching for, accessing and critically appraising, integrating and synthesising knowledge sources
- ability to justify and substantiate ideas and arguments
- accurate use of appropriate referencing and citation conventions
- style and delivery of oral presentations and written work, including the structure and tone of academic writing

Gabby:

- 51 years at entry
- Lives in run-down rented farm-worker's cottage
- Wide range of pre-entry skilled/semi-skilled employment roles
- Partner a mechanic
- NVQ early years care & education
- Access certificate
- Experience as OT support worker

I probably thought that I would know more or do better than perhaps I did [...] Just because I worked in that field before doesn't necessarily mean I know stuff. I mean, I do know some stuff [laughs] but I might not know how to apply it properly

Gabby:

Understanding how to do assignments. There is a lot you have to learn before you start on all that. You have to learn about referencing. I didn't know about that. You have to learn to study things. You have to learn how to read books and how to apply yourself and how to write things

1st Interview

One of the most useful things I've found is speaking to my friends and saying, "What do you think about what I've written? Can you have a look? I'm not sure about this. I'm a bit worried that I haven't addressed this properly. What do you think?"

2nd Interview

Frances:

- 41 year old mother of two teenagers
- Husband works in emergency services
- Seeking career change from insurance industry
- Access certificate
- One year of Foundation Degree

*the expectations are so very much higher at Uni and
the way things are done are so different*

Reflective Diary

I was pleased with what I'd got, but [sighs] I just get baffled on how other people seem to get 70s and I think, "Well what have they done that I haven't?"

2nd Interview

Frances:

We were saying on the way down, actually...we still don't quite know how the marking criteria fit in and the learning outcomes all fit together. It's always a bit hit and miss whether you've written about what you're supposed to write about

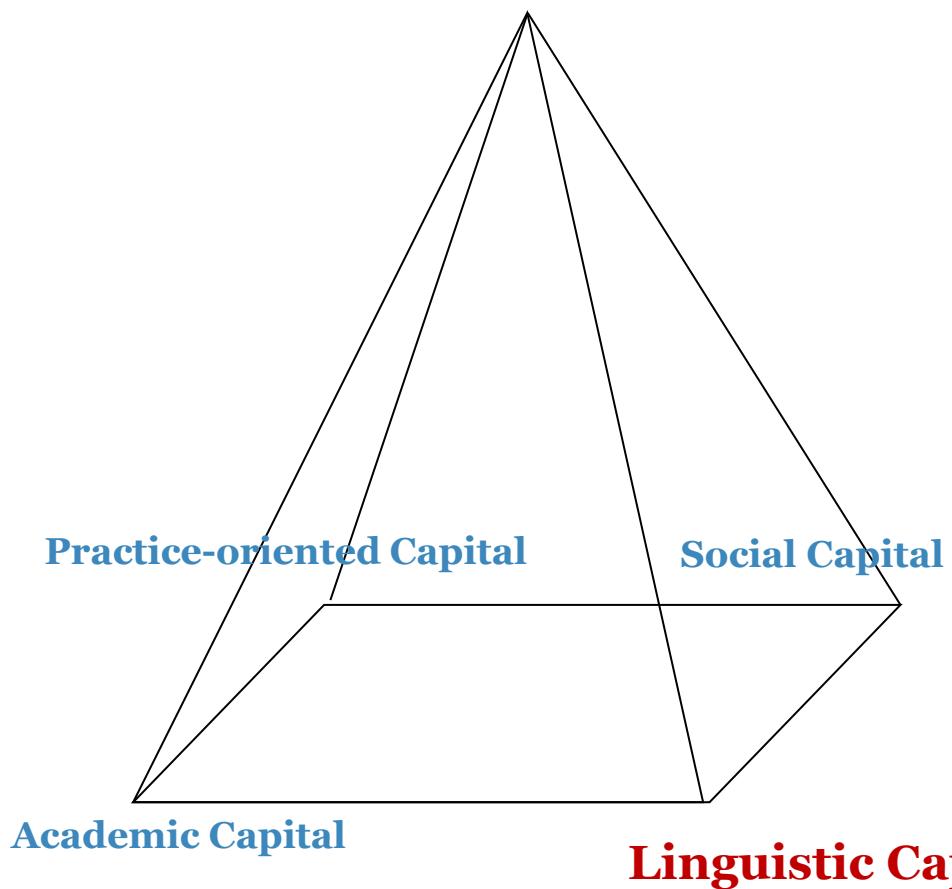
2nd Interview

...whether they are looking for something that isn't written down or [sighs] I don't know. I just get baffled. I never know what marks I'm gonna get. I think sometimes I've done a really good job; I've worked really hard. I've done masses of research or whatever, and then I'll get...a pretty mediocre mark.

2nd Interview

Linguistic Capital:

Feel for the game



- grammar
- linguistic repertoire
- forms of phraseology
- tone and mode of written and verbal expression or expressive style
- Relationship between linguistic and academic capitals
- Influences accessibility of various learning activities and assessment tasks

Betty:

- 34 year old mother of teenage daughter
- Newly married to self-employed mechanic husband
- Ex-beauty therapist and call centre manager
- 'very working class' [1st Interview]
- NVQ beauty therapy
- 9 year study gap
- Access certificate

*I remember a lot of note-taking. I remember a lot of...the thing that sticks in my mind is this, writing down words. I didn't have a clue what they were, I just wrote them down...[laughing]...Not just medical words...just normal...language. Sometimes some of the words that we used, I was thinking, I don't know. I haven't got a **clue** what that means, so I'll write that down and I'll look it up when I get home...[laughs]*

Betty:

...on placement, I tend to do it with medical terms, which I think everybody does [...] but in university, it just can be a word. One of the girls, she's great for telling me words. We'll sit and have a chat and I'll go, "Whatever are you talking about?" [laughs] She's great at explaining and just giving me a definition of words..."OK; and how would you use that in a sentence?" [laughs]

2nd Interview

Amanda:

- 30 years at entry
- Seeking career change from hairdressing
- Single
- Access certificate
- Study gap of 8 years

I had such a problem with the actual reading [...] because there are just all these words and I was trying to make notes on them because I didn't know the words [...] I'd only read, like, four pages and I'd got all these notes I'd tried to look [them] up and I just, you know, I couldn't decipher which was the most important, because I didn't know it...I didn't know any of it

Amanda:

You think you've got some of it in your head, and then they stand there and they show you all these things on the slides and they talk about all this stuff and you go home and you read things, and suddenly you think: OK, what the hell's that about! You've got all these extra words and you think, oh, God! So it's actually quite different. It's like a foreign language.

1st Interview

I mean they do flow in a sentence, stuff like that, but they use certain words and things that I'm not quite sure about...

1st Interview

Amanda:

I need to be concise...I need to be a bit more professional about writing [...] It's just the standard is totally different.

It's stuff like that. Little things...and maybe tone of expression. Try and make the sentences stand alone and not babble.

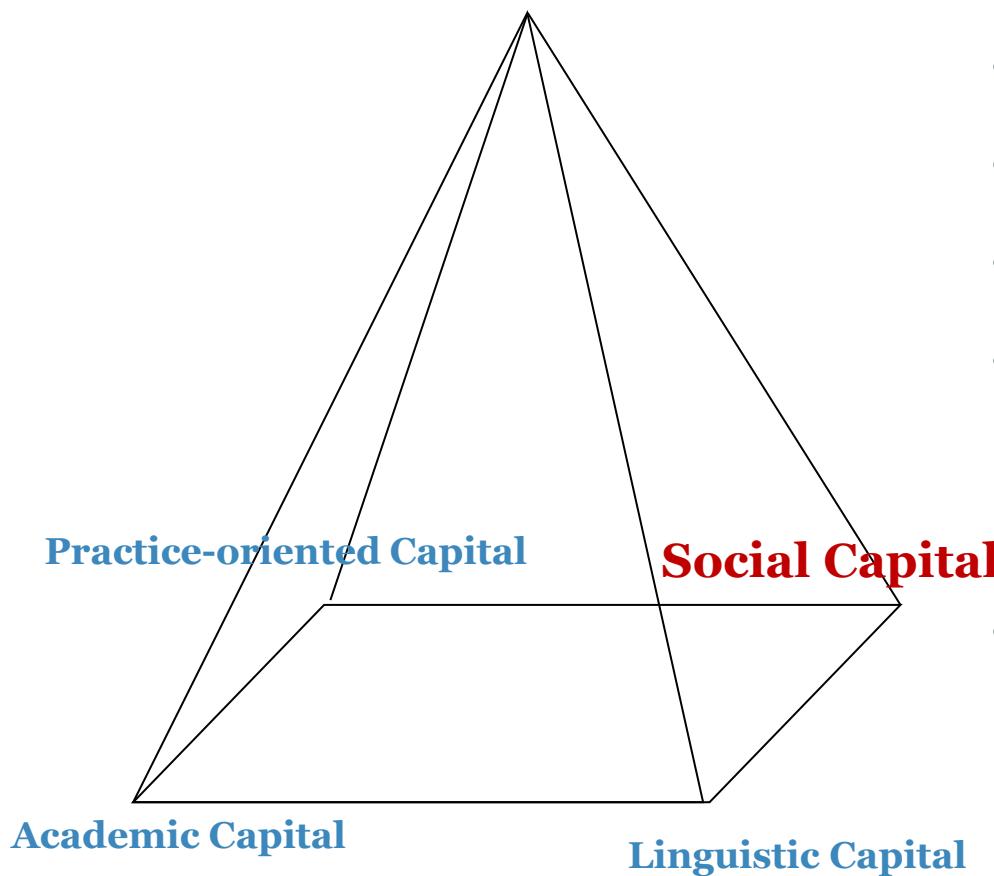
1st Interview

I've had to try and rely on, well, not rely on the network, but talk to them more and use the facilities and use people resources that are there [...] I'll try and do stuff and then go to people and meet up and say, "OK, we've got this essay, this is my interpretation of it, do you concur?"

2nd Interview

Social Capital:

Feel for the game



- access to collaborative study groups
- peer-review of draft submissions
- sharing of resources and skills
- practical and emotional support
- 'multiplier effect' (Bourdieu 2006 p.110) facilitates acquisition of other capitals
- Social capital derived from different social networks is unequal

George:

- 33 year old mother of two young children
- Previously a human resources officer then held various un/semi-skilled roles
- HND Hospitality Management
- 11 year study gap
- Human Biology A-Level

...learning in groups, that's definitely the key as well. We use a lot of study groups and we find so long as you've got like-minded people and they're on the same wavelength...

...I think you need to be a little 'cold' and strategic and find people with good understanding of subjects and people on similar wavelengths.

Reflective diary

Amy:

- 39 year old mother of two teenagers
- Previously a retail then NHS clerk
- Married carpenter husband end of 1st year
- 22 year study gap since leaving school
- Access certificate

I do have my circle outside; one particular person that's very supportive as well [...] but [...] sometimes it's difficult to actually... 'cause you know when you get talking you go into Uni mode and I start saying things that probably, she wouldn't understand, so sometimes it's best to talk to somebody that does...

1st Interview

Amy:

*They **don't** understand. I can't talk to my husband and say, "Alright, I'm preparing for this presentation..." [...] I can't say to him, "What do you think of that?", because he hasn't got a clue! He doesn't understand.*

2nd Interview

*I think it's been **hard**; but I think it's been harder because I've been isolated. When you don't have a buddy that you can talk to...For the whole, effectively it's my third year, when you have nobody to talk to, when you've got nobody to discuss, 'Oh, I've come up with this idea; what do you think?' When you've got **absolutely** nobody, that's **damn** hard...*

2nd Interview

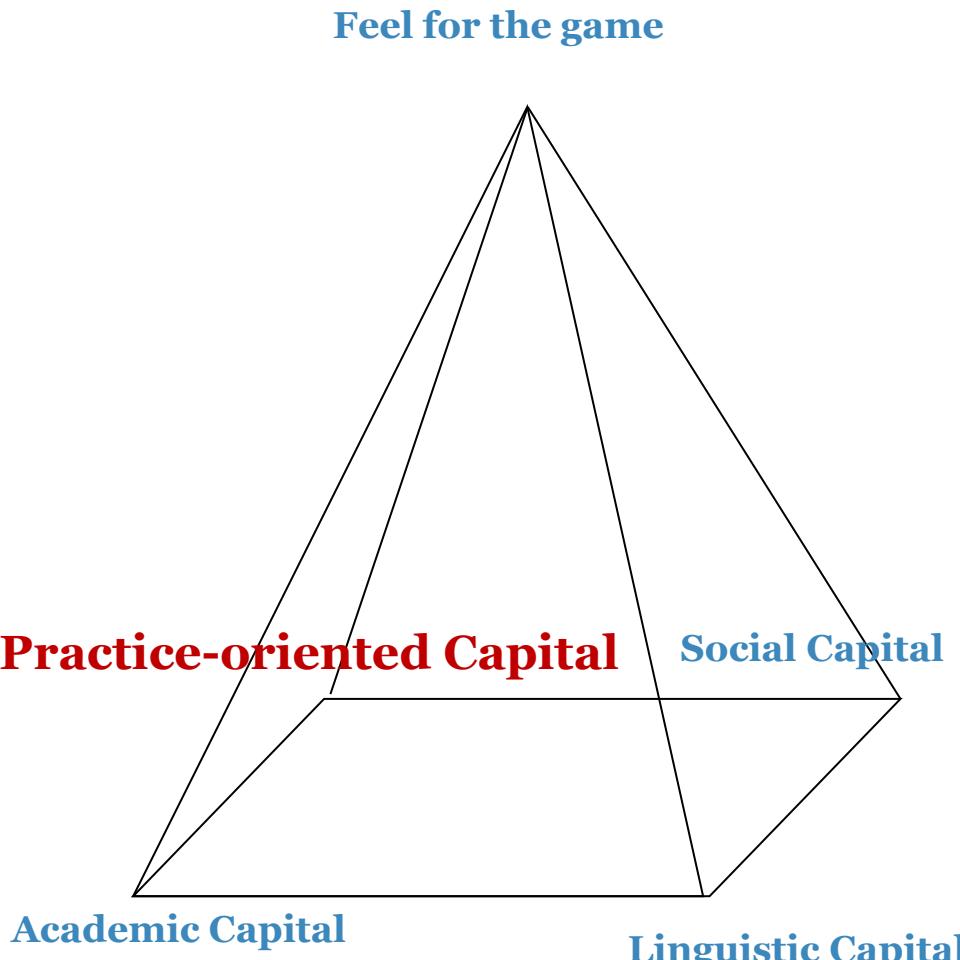
Tracey:

- Single parent to two 'quite needy' [focus group] sons
- Previously employed as a beautician and as a part-time veterinary assistant
- 44 years at entry
- Access certificate

If I go back [home], there is no university there...you don't normally speak to anyone like that. You're a chamber maid or a shop assistant and there's a lot of, well, "Why? Why would you wanna go to uni?"

1st Interview

Practice-oriented Capital:



- Related to but distinct from academic capital
- depth and breadth of knowledge appropriate to the practice context
- suitably professional disposition and appearance
- enactment of core underpinning values and skills
 - e.g. client-centredness, EBP, CPD, reflective practice, communication and team-working skills, personal and caseload management skills
- proficient execution of the OT process
 - including assessment, prioritisation, planning, implementation, evaluation and revision of interventions

Jocelyn:

- 38 years at entry
- Spent much of her pre-entry adult life working in an office environment
- Remote, rural upbringing
- Left school at 16 with 5 O-levels
- A level Psychology entry qualification

*I can see an improvement in my writing and my research skills and search strategies. I've got the hang of looking for articles and **knowing** how to do it, what I need to know and getting that information.*

2nd Interview

...you take control of your learning on a placement...

...I really feel as if that's my job. And I'm there to actually work, rather than learn [laughs]. I don't know [...] Maybe I'm just very much, when I get a new job, I go straight in and try really hard and want to learn.

2nd Interview

Jemma:

- Left school at 16
- Followed sister into accounts management [focus group]
- Seeking changes in employment and her life
- A level Biology entry qualification
- Single
- 25 years at entry

I thought it would be a lot harder, and I don't know whether I've just adapted as I've been going along, or what, but I seem to be coping as opposed to feeling drowned by it all

1st Interview

Jemma:

*I struggled quite a lot and [...] my supervisor was brilliant, but she did expect...I was expected to **do** things. And that real test of your knowledge really made me think, you know, "Well, bloody hell, I really just don't know what I'm doing." And I did feel like a fish out of water on that one.*

2nd Interview

*I just get engrossed into **that** world and how they do things and their systems and their reasoning behind doing things. I mean, the knowledge is there from lectures, but I think I tend to just conform to how **that** service or that setting does whatever they do. [...] [T]hey tell me, 'Well, this is how we do it here' and I just sort of say, "OK. That's fine."*

2nd Interview

Key Points:

- ‘Rules of the game’ largely implicit
- Habitus can and does shift (variably) upon entry to unfamiliar fields
- Congruence of habitus with the dominant culture of a field influences the portfolios of capital accrued and the ‘affinities, convergences and divergences’ (Grenfell 2007 p.138) experienced



Moving forward:

- Translatability of academic, linguistic, social and practice-oriented capitals to other professional programmes and more broadly across HE
- Use of multiple correspondence analysis to investigate further the nature and exchange value of capitals profitable to students in the HE field.
- Can we reduce the opacity of ‘the game’ to facilitate students’ achievement, ‘success’ and experiences?



Acknowledgements:

My grateful thanks are extended to:

- **All of the participants** who generously gave up their time to make this research possible.
- My doctoral supervisors, **Dr Alan Borthwick**, **Professor Melanie Nind** and **Professor Debra Humphris**, for their guidance, support and encouragement.
- **Professor Michael Grenfell** for helping me (begin to...) find my way with Bourdieu.