UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

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Educational Experiences of Occupational Therapy Students from Non-Traditional Academic Backgrounds

by

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Abstract

Occupational therapy (OT) pre-registration education in the United Kingdom (UK) stands at the intersection of the fields of higher education (HE) and professional practice. It is subject to various government agendas including an ongoing commitment to widening participation in HE and to diversifying the health and social care workforce to reflect modern cultural diversity. Both have contributed to a changing profile in the OT student population and in 2005, 67 percent of the intake was mature (College of Occupational Therapists, 2007b), and increasing numbers are entering with 'non-traditional' academic backgrounds, an umbrella term which subsumes a variety of entry qualifications. The early weeks of study in HE can prove challenging to students as they settle into the new learning environment and begin to comprehend the expectations held of them (Yorke, 2005). It has been suggested that those from non-traditional academic backgrounds may find this transition, particularly the need to take a high level of responsibility for their own learning, difficult as a result of the skills, experiences and expectations accumulated throughout their pre-entry education (Sambell and Hubbard, 2004). While small-scale studies suggest that OT students from such backgrounds are as academically successful as traditional school-leavers at graduation (Howard and Jerosch-Herold, 2000), there is little evidence offering insight into how they actually experience and negotiate the demands of their programme.

Recognising that learning and teaching are embedded within the milieu in which they occur, this longitudinal research adopted a case study methodology to capture complexity and understand the issue within its natural context (Yin, 2003). In an instrumental single-case design (Stake, 1995), a neither unique nor extreme undergraduate OT programme became a vehicle for exploring the educational experiences of students with non-traditional academic backgrounds. Thirteen volunteer participants were drawn from a single cohort in one of the UK's research intensive universities. Data were collected via initial focus groups exploring pre-entry educational experiences and expectations of studying in HE, reflective diaries recording educational experiences that participants considered significant or meaningful, and one-to-one semi-structured interviews conducted towards the end of participants' first and third years of study which focused on exploring their learning experiences. Supplementary and contextual data were provided by analysis of institutional, school and departmental documents to provide insight into the culture and practices of the learning context and a progression routes study which considered the entry qualifications, progression and exit awards of four cohorts of OT students from a range of educational backgrounds.

The nature of students' entry qualifications or academic background were found to have no statistically significant impact on whether they passed at Level 4, 5 or 6, or achieved a 'good' (upper second or first class) honours degree, although male students and those from amongst the lower socio-economic groups had significantly poorer academic outcomes at all levels of analysis. Theoretical thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) of qualitative data underpinned by Bourdieu's (1990b) theory of practice highlighted that students' educational experiences were much less influenced by the nature of their academic backgrounds than by the congruence of individual dispositions or habitus, born out of social provenance, with the dominant culture of the particular field of HE they had entered. Emerging codes converged to represent themes suggesting clusters of shared experience amongst some participants, while examination of each individual dataset revealed varying positional tendencies and trajectories within the field. This research highlights the important roles played by academic, linguistic, social and practice-oriented capital in the way that students developed a feel for and learned to play 'the game' and present knowledge and understanding in the form 'legitimated' by the field. Juxtaposing the nature and expectations of the new field in relation to those previously occupied by individual participants and the established habitus each brought with them helped to illuminate the situation and adds a new dimension to understanding individual experiences of learning in HE.

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Declaration of Authorship

I, JOANNA WATSON, declare that the thesis entitled 'Educational Experiences of Occupational Therapy Students from Non-Traditional Academic Backgrounds' and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

- none of this work has been published before submission

Signed:

Date: 11th October 2010

Acknowledgements

Chapter 1: Introduction

The origins of the inquiry

In February 2002, I moved from practicing clinically as an occupational therapist in the National Health Service (NHS) to working as an academic in higher education (HE) where, while focusing primarily on occupational therapy (OT), I continue to contribute to the pre-registration education of a range of allied health professions. One of my earliest responsibilities was to contribute to the anatomy and physiology syllabus that ran across the first year of all of the pre-registration programmes in the School I had joined. In the years to come, I was to take the lead in this aspect of the curriculum. Within a few months of starting my academic career, it became evident that OT students, apparently to a greater degree than others in the School, struggled with the anatomy and physiology. A high proportion of those voluntarily withdrawing from the course cited it as a particular area of difficulty prompting their decision, and involuntary withdrawals associated with academic failure at the end of the first year were skewed towards this aspect of the curriculum.

Local perceptions were that these patterns of difficulty were associated with the greater diversity of educational backgrounds amongst OT students compared to other groups in the School. I was therefore asked to set up and run an eight day 'Summer School' to introduce OT students from non-traditional academic backgrounds to the fundamentals of anatomy and physiology and to the academic requirements of HE. The Summer School, which led straight into the standard University induction period, was well received by those students who attended it and generated a lot of interest amongst others who subsequently heard about it and emphasised its relevance and potential for *all* students. A small-scale evaluative study indicated that although Summer School was perceived as an effective induction that helped the small number of participating students feel familiar with and welcome in the School, it had no discernable impact on their academic performance in anatomy and physiology (Watson, 2005b). It was as a result of my involvement with the successes and limitations of Summer School, and my involvement in debates around the academic performances of OT students with non-traditional academic backgrounds, that my interest in the government's widening participation agenda developed.

Widening participation and non-traditional academic backgrounds

Given renewed political impetus by the Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NICHE) 1997), widening participation involves actively encouraging successful engagement in further and higher education by members of under-represented

and disadvantaged groups. These groups are highlighted as including mature students, those from less privileged socio-economic groups and ethnic minorities, those with disabilities and those with non-traditional entry qualifications. In the context of my new role as an academic, my sense of fair-play meant that I supported the philosophy of encouraging students from all walks of life to enter HE should they wish to do so. I was, however, troubled by what at the time was an emphasis on raising the aspirations of students from under-represented groups and the apparent assumption that it was these students alone who were required to adapt in order for widening participation to succeed.

Given my early experiences as an academic, I was particularly interested in widening participation from the perspective of students with non-traditional entry qualifications or academic backgrounds. This group is certainly not homogenous and encompasses students from both genders of varying ages and from varying social, ethnic and educational backgrounds. The defining characteristic is that they are not traditional 18 year-old school leavers holding traditional academic A-level qualifications, but bring with them alternative educational experiences such as General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), Access Diplomas, Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC) qualifications, Advanced Vocational Certificates of Education (AVCEs), Higher National Certificates (HNCs) or Diplomas (HNDs), or even A-levels achieved as mature students (aged 21 years or over). Many are also likely to be first-generation entrants to HE. During my encounters with students falling within this broad group I saw evidence of the significant personal risks encountered by those who, having accepted the invitation to enter HE, found themselves in a foreign, sometimes critical and unforgiving learning environment, and I was deeply uncomfortable with what I perceived to be the moral dilemmas associated with failing to adequately support and facilitate those whose aspirations had been raised.

An occupational therapist's perspective

OT enables people to achieve as much as they can for themselves in order to help them to get the most out of their lives (College of Occupational Therapists (COT) 2008b). With a knowledge-base derived from medical and social sciences and the moral treatment and arts and crafts movements (Duncan, 2006) the profession values 'occupation' in its broadest sense: encompassing all of the activities that contribute to an individual's identity and acknowledging the complex integration of physical, cognitive, psychological, social, environmental, creative and spiritual components with past experiences and future aspirations. OT is underpinned by an understanding that people are individuals who are inherently different from each other, that occupation, or the engagement in individually meaningful activity, is fundamental to maintaining health and well-being, and that where performance has been interrupted, occupation can be used to acquire, maintain or restore valued life roles and activities (Turner, Foster and Johnson, 2002).

Occupational therapists (OTs) work with people of all ages who have physical, mental or social problems and within a range of health and social care and community settings (COT 2008b). Rather than focusing on an individual's limitations OTs make creative and therapeutic use of everyday activities and tasks to achieve goals that are determined collaboratively with that person. OTs aim to empower people to be competent and confident in their daily lives, to achieve a balance between the occupations that are associated with self-care, contributing to their social and economic environments and the fulfilment and enjoyment of life, and therefore to minimise the effects of dysfunction or environmental barriers (Duncan, 2006; Turner et al., 2002).

My OT's perspective is not something that I discarded when I entered academia. It clearly remains central to my role in educating the OTs of the future, but elements of it also resonate strongly with fundamental aspects of my identity and world view. There is much to learning that students can only achieve for themselves, but my perspective as an OT contributed to my unease regarding policies that had the potential to grant admission to educational programmes, only to allow it to be followed by what at times may be preventable failure (Watson, 2005a). From my perspective, the supportive, facilitating, empowering and enabling philosophies of OT were (and still are) as relevant to my role as an educator as they are to clinical practice, especially when it seemed that students from non-traditional backgrounds were potentially encountering social and environmental barriers to success within HE. It further seemed incongruent, if not hypocritical, to encourage OT students to promote inclusion if these values were not being embodied and enacted in their education.

Rationale for the research

During the early stages of developing this research I wrote a narrative representing my initial understanding of some of the issues facing OT students from non-traditional academic backgrounds studying at the School in which I am employed as an OT lecturer (see Appendix 1.1). It is a composite based on and woven out of student voices that I had heard during the course of informal discussions, more formal encounters in my capacity as a tutor and lecturer, in an exploratory focus group, and through early reading of relevant literature (Ellis and Bochner, 2003; Kiesinger, 1998). While I made an effort to construct a story that is as authentic as possible, it is not based on the findings of in-depth research into the educational experiences of these students, which at the time of its writing was yet to come, and it unavoidably reflects my own perspectives (Kiesinger, 1998). Despite its limitations, my aim in producing the narrative was to construct an evocative portrayal that would illustrate my initial understanding of the lived experience of OT students from non-traditional academic backgrounds and thus position, in part, the rationale for my research.

Students with non-traditional academic backgrounds studying in HE are a relatively new social phenomenon, although one that is becoming increasingly common. At the time that I began contemplating my research there was increasing recognition that widening participation incorporated issues of retention and progression, not simply recruitment (National Audit Office, 2002), the introduction of top-up tuition fees was beginning to take shape and students as a whole were increasingly being viewed as 'consumers'. This shift in perspective emphasised the onus on higher education institutions (HEIs) to not simply recruit more diverse student populations, but to support them toward successful completion of their chosen course of study. Concurrent government initiatives also aimed to expand the health and social care workforce (Department of Health (DH), 2000a; 2000b) and similarly emphasised the need for the sector to provide high quality learning experiences capable of meeting the needs of diverse student groups.

Initial exploration of the educational literature in OT revealed an emphasis, albeit limited in volume, on quantitative measures of student achievement focused on those who managed to graduate, with a paucity of in-depth research pertaining to students' educational experiences. Within the generic literature associated with widening participation and student experiences, it was also evident that previous research had rarely focused solely on the experiences of those from non-traditional academic backgrounds as one of the identified groups within the widening participation agenda.

To appreciate how to effectively support and enhance the educational experiences of students from non-traditional academic backgrounds, it is necessary first to develop some insight into and understanding of their experiences within the HE environment, where approaches to learning and teaching may be substantially different from those previously encountered. This, therefore, was the overarching aim of my research and I adopted a case study approach to address the primary question: How do OT students from non-traditional academic backgrounds negotiate the learning requirements of the HE environment?

Organisation of the thesis

To examine what is currently known about key factors influencing student retention, performance and experience in HE, Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of relevant literature, identifying knowledge gaps which provide further rationale for the investigation. I consider evidence drawn from both the generic educational literature and that relating to education of the health professions. I have found the work of Pierre Bourdieu invaluable to understanding student experiences and Chapter 3 provides an overview of his theory of practice which provides a theoretical framework for this research.

Chapter 4 moves on to highlight the overarching methodological approach upon which this case study research is based, the ethical considerations associated with the investigation and details of how the research was designed and undertaken. Chapter 5 provides a descriptive account of the specific context in which the research was undertaken, highlighting major external influences and drivers as well as the practices and cultures specifically associated with the case study site.

As outlined in Chapter 4, there are two empirical studies contributing to this research: a quantitative survey of student progression routes and a qualitative exploration of the experiences of students from non-traditional academic backgrounds. Chapter 6 presents the statistical analysis of the progression routes study and, informed by the data presented in Chapters 5 and 6, Chapter 7 develops the case study by presenting the analysis of student experiences. Finally, Chapter 8 draws the thesis to a close by considering the implications of the research findings together with their limitations and possible directions for further investigation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Successfully recruiting and enrolling a diverse HE student population is only one aspect of 'widening participation'. What subsequently becomes critical is supporting students to fulfil their potential and maximise their achievements on their chosen paths. The sector can make no claim to have widened participation, as opposed to a narrower concept of access, until it can demonstrate that students recruited under this banner are enabled to succeed (Bamber, 2005; University of the Arts, 2003). Student retention, satisfaction and outcomes are now high on national policy agendas and are considered to be important performance indicators of institutional success (Clegg, Bradley and Smith, 2006; Liang and Robinson, 2003; Wallace, 2003).

This chapter will explore some of the complex and multi-factorial issues noted in the literature as having an influence on HE student retention, performance and experience. Woven inextricably together, each influencing and being influenced by the other, it is difficult to neatly dissect these issues into discrete matters. The literature at times takes a generic view, but also considers issues in the context of particular student groups. Students with non-traditional academic backgrounds have seldom been the sole focus of previous research, but often share commonalities with other groups (e.g. mature students and those from lower socio-economic or minority ethnic groups) which do receive attention in the literature.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the complexity of the relationships between many of the factors that will be considered in this chapter. Attention will initially focus on key generic issues associated with student experiences, retention and progression in HE as illustrated in the lower element of the figure, before turning to consider them in the context of specific student groups as indicated by the figure's upper element. The limited evidence regarding student experience, retention and performance specifically in OT education will be examined along with the insights available from other healthcare related programmes of study. The chapter will finally consider how the culture of the HE environment might influence student experience.
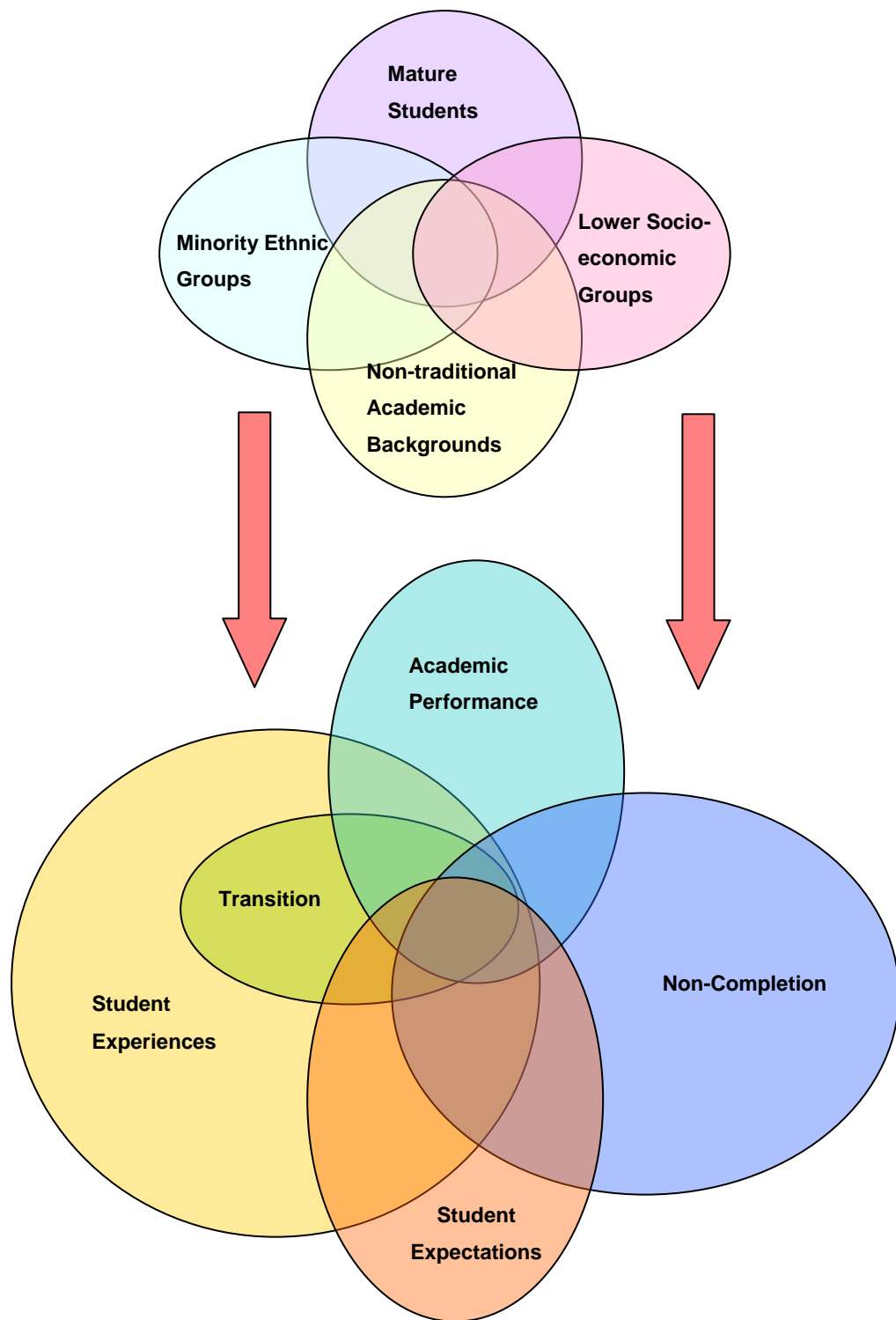
Figure 2.1: Relationships between the factors influencing student retention, performance and experience in higher education

Motivation for entering higher education

As might be expected, motivations and rationale for entering HE vary considerably, but there is some evidence of commonality within particular groups of students. Hatt and Baxter (2003) suggest that A-level students are largely 'expected' to go on to university, and that many comply with that expectation without giving it much consideration or making a positive decision. This is differentiated from the deliberate decisions taken by Access students who, having undertaken their course specifically to gain entry to HE, were identified as highly focused, well-motivated, hard-working and keen to do well. Brooks (2003) identified similar characteristics in mature students which may reflect the considerable overlap between this group and those entering with Access qualifications. She also highlighted that for many mature students, HE entry was associated with significant life events, such as divorce, children leaving home or redundancy, and tended to focus on improving career prospects or changing careers, although learning for its own sake or for personal development should not be discounted. Along these lines, Leathwood and O'Connell's (2003) longitudinal study exploring student experiences of HE provides some evidence of gendered differences in motivation. While most participants cited a range of motivating factors, including a desire to make others proud, women were inclined to foreground interest in the subject and a desire to act as role-models for their children, whereas men were more likely to emphasise career or financial motives.

Student experiences in higher education

A consistent theme emerging from the literature is that the majority of student attrition in HE occurs during the first year of study (Cook, 2003; McClausland, Mavromaras and Theodossiou, 2005; Yorke, 2000). Early decisions regarding whether to withdraw or persist involve a more complex array of considerations than the academic issues that most readily come to mind, and a mismatch between expectations and experiences is recognised a major factor contributing to non-completion (May and Bousted, 2004; Select Committee on Education and Employment, 2001b). As such, exploring and seeking to improve first year student experiences has gained an increasingly high profile, not least in relation to the new fee-paying context.

Early research by Weil (1986) considered the experiences of 25 non-traditional undergraduate students studying in a range of departments and faculties within a single, urban polytechnic. In a theme that will be pursued later in this chapter, the results alluded to the exclusive culture of HE, with reference to the impact of a 'hidden curriculum' operating against diversity, and the tendency for the formal and informal practices of staff to perpetuate disadvantage and patterns of inequality of opportunity and outcome. Weil highlighted the power of formal educational systems and of society to dictate who is deemed a failure and

who is recognised as successful, and questioned the ability of the education system to cater for the needs of non-traditional learners, suggesting that:

> When one is forced to learn and be a learner within a framework which is permeated by the dominant value system, one's identity as a learner, and one's capacity to learn within that system, may be put at risk (Weil, 1986 p.232).

Negotiating the transition into higher education

The early weeks of the first year of study in HE have been noted to present a particular challenge to students as they settle into the new learning environment and begin to understand what it requires of them (Hatt and Baxter, 2003). This period can be critical in determining whether students continue on their programmes of study or elect to leave (Roberts, Watkins, Oakey and Fox, 2003; Wallace, 2003), and has been likened to a disruptive culture-shock (Levy and Murray, 2003; Quinn, Thomas, Slack, Casey, Thexton and Noble, 2005) during which new students need to learn and understand 'the rules of the game' (Yorke, 2005 p.16).

It is widely acknowledged that in actively encouraging participation by a broader spectrum of students, those from non-traditional backgrounds may experience particular difficulties in negotiating the transition into HE as a result of differences between their skills, experiences and expectations and those of traditional entrants (Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) 2002; NCIHE 1997; Walker, Matthew and Black, 2004). Students can be surprised by the level of responsibility they are expected to take for their own learning and may find it difficult to adjust to this approach (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Sambell and Hubbard, 2004; Yorke, 2000), particularly where it is contrary to previous educational experiences. The degree of difference in effort required can be unexpected, denting confidence and leading to a perception of loss of control (Quinn et al., 2005).

Hatt and Baxter (2003) particularly note the pervading expectation that students will change the way that they engage with learning in order to meet the demands of the HE environment. They found that those who entered with BTEC qualifications, which focus on the development of vocational rather than academic skills, struggled in comparison with those holding A-level and Access qualifications and had higher rates of non-completion as a result. Similarly, Abramson and Jones (2001 p.35) describe the 'traumatic' nature of the transition from the 'nurturing' environment of an Advanced GNVQ into the culture of independent learning in HE, likening the differences between the two environments to those of two 'alien continents' (p.37). Focused within a single institution, this study noted a subsequent withdrawal rate of 36 percent for students holding Advanced GNVQ entry qualifications. Despite Hatt and Baxter (2003) highlighting a perception that Access students were relatively better prepared than

BTEC students, a separate study by Yorke (2001a) noted that they too may struggle with the sharp difference between the close-knit environment of Access and the relative impersonality of HE.

While the literature emphasises struggle amongst non-traditional entrants, Brooks (2003) identified that some A-level students experienced their first year in HE as less challenging than they had expected, highlighting a considerable degree of repetition of the A-level material already covered. Experiences such as these may be a function of the subject studied and seem less likely to be encountered by students registered on vocational courses such as OT which address the application of highly focused professionally oriented material.

Student expectations and preparedness for higher education

Students from diverse educational backgrounds enter HE with varying perceptions about what will be expected of them (May and Bousted, 2004). Exploring the experiences of students at the University of Surrey, Brooks (2003) noted that those from non-traditional academic backgrounds felt at times less well prepared for studying at university than they believed their A-level peers to be, and that they perceived their non-traditional qualifications to be viewed less favourably by the university. Elsewhere, however, it has been highlighted that school-leavers may be equally unprepared for the experience of HE (Yorke, 2001a).

The literature provides evidence of a perceived lack of key study skills considered essential for success in those students entering HE with non-traditional qualifications (Abramson and Jones, 2001; Maguire, 2001; Webb and Hill, 2003). However, from their perspectives and mirroring the perceptions of tutors on their pre-entry courses (Webb and Hill, 2003), students can feel let down by what they view as inadequate support from university staff (May and Bousted, 2004), and have been noted to actively request a greater level of support than that initially offered (Walker et al., 2004).

Preparedness to enter HE extends beyond academic issues and incorporates awareness of course content and future prospects, and understanding of the financial implications and demands of programmes (Cook, 2003). Dependence on inadequate sources of information, such as friends, parents and teachers, or on carefully constructed and potentially biased marketing material, have been identified as factors contributing to a lack of preparedness and the development of unrealistic expectations (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998). Students have also questioned the accuracy of the pre-entry course information, suggesting that it too can contribute to unmet expectations and dissatisfaction (Musselbrook, 2003; University of the Arts, 2003). The hasty decision-making required by Clearing entrants (who secure places in the flurry of activity just ahead of the start of the academic year) may further contribute to ill-informed expectations, and early withdrawal by this group has been associated with unmet

expectation in relation to programmes (May and Bousted, 2004; University of the Arts, 2003) and institutional facilities (Yorke, 1997). To more effectively prepare students for the realities they are likely to encounter, and thereby to promote retention, the provision of clear, detailed course descriptions which clarify the costs of study and the nature and availability of support and guidance is advocated (University of the Arts, 2003).

Un-met needs, in parallel with issues around student support, were found to be the primary basis of early withdrawal in a single-site study by May and Bousted (2004). Echoing similar themes in research undertaken by the University of the Arts, London (2003) and Quinn et al. (2005), mature students in this study were more likely to withdraw than their younger peers and felt that having made considerable financial outlays, they had a right to expect courses to be planned and organised to take account of their needs and existing commitments. With the introduction of top-up fees in the 2006/7 academic year and rising student awareness of competition between institutions to recruit, these sorts of perceptions are only likely to increase.

Non-completion in higher education

It has been suggested that the post-code funding premium received by HEIs acknowledges that compared to traditional students, those from under-represented and non-traditional backgrounds are more at risk of non-completion and may therefore benefit from a greater level of support (Webb and Hill, 2003). High levels of non-completion have indeed been noted in HEIs that admit a greater proportion of non-traditional students (Liang and Robinson, 2003; Wallace, 2003). Abrahamson and Jones (2001 p.34) even go so far as to suggest an inevitable link with their comment that, in part, the University of Central Lancashire 'pays' for its commitment to widening participation with high first year non-completion rates.

Adopting a similar position, a Scottish study proposed the existence of a 'trade-off' between accepting increasing numbers of students with 'low entry qualifications' and retention rates (McClausland et al., 2005 p.26). This study examined the data of over 8000 students drawn from four cohorts between 1994 and 1997 and found not only that the withdrawal rate during that period had increased from eight to twelve percent, but that academic failure accounted for less than twenty percent of withdrawals. Their results again highlighted that most departure occurs within the first year and that mature students were seventy to eighty percent more likely to withdraw than the very young. Entry qualifications, rather than age or gender, were identified as the driving force behind the differences noted, but without clear definitions of the 'low' and 'very low' entry qualifications upon which its assertions are based, it is difficult to fully appreciate the implications of this study.

In his model of student withdrawal, Tinto (1975; 1988; 1993) argues that individual attributes and characteristics, including family background, skills, abilities and prior education, influence intentions and levels of commitment to educational goals and to the institution joined. These intentions and commitments are reinforced or diminished according to the degree of integration or membership an individual is able to achieve in both the social and academic communities of the institution, which in turn is influenced by the degree of congruence between the culture and values of the institution and those of the individual.

To illustrate the model, it may be that a student from a low-participation neighbourhood has some desire to engage in HE and would be the first in the family to do so. Living at home to reduce costs may limit their participation in the institution's social environment and therefore the opportunity to develop a network of peer support. Socialisation, and indeed, studying might be further constrained by a financial need to maintain part-time employment. If the institution's learning and teaching practises do not actively encourage peer learning and therefore socialisation, and if the individual finds that their previous educational experiences have not equipped them for managing the educational demands of the new environment, they may find that their loosely held intention to gain a degree and their commitment to both the programme of study and the institution wane considerably. In the face of a lack of support from friends and family at home, who may not readily see the value of HE, the individual may be quite likely to withdraw. There are, of course, many more examples that could be used to illustrate how the model operates regarding decisions to withdraw, and equally, decisions to persist.

Despite Tinto's (1993 p.202) claim that 'student institutional departure is as much a reflection of the attributes of those communities, and therefore the institution, as it is of the attributes of the students who enter the institutions', Ozga and Sukhnandan (1998) suggest that with underlying assumptions about student conformity and adaptation to the institution, the model focuses excessively on the student as the source of the problem. They further question its applicability in the HE sector in the United Kingdom (UK) as its origins lie in the North American educational context.

Focusing specifically on non-completion in the UK HE sector, the work of Yorke (1997), which was commissioned by HEFCE to address a recognised knowledge-gap and to underpin policy development, has been held by other researchers in the field to be of considerable national importance. It was conducted in six HEIs in the north-west of England, although measures were taken to try to reduce any potential regional bias that may limit extrapolation of the findings to a national scale. The factors that this study identified as having the greatest influence on student withdrawal were: wrong choice of field of study, unsatisfactory experience of the programme, an inability to cope with the demands of the programme, problems associated with finance, dissatisfaction with institutional provision of facilities,

unhappiness with the locality of the institution, problems associated with relationships and health-related problems. The first four factors were most frequently identified as having a moderate to considerable influence over decisions to withdraw. Subsequent research in the UK highlights similar issues and emphasises that decisions to withdraw are both complex and multi-factorial (Mackie, 2001; Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998; Quinn et al., 2005). May and Bousted (2004) make a valuable contribution by suggesting that decisions to withdraw are not based solely on the accumulation of a number of negative factors, but occur when these negatives outweigh the positive reasons for persisting.

Commitment to study

It seems reasonable to anticipate that all students will face at least some challenges in adapting to the academic and personal demands of studying in the HE environment (Mackie, 2001). Initial commitment, along with the desirability and reputation of the course, have been shown to be as important to retention as experiences once the course had started (May and Bousted, 2004; University of the Arts, 2003). Commitment to the course is understood as a particularly important factor in the complex interplay of variables determining whether students ultimately decide to persist or withdraw in response to any problems they may encounter (Mackie, 2001; May and Bousted, 2004; Tinto, 1975; 1993). Having explored the withdrawal behaviour of students in a post-1992 UK Business School, Mackie (2001) suggested that the problems of those who withdrew are not specifically worse than those of students who persisted, but that the levels of motivation and commitment in withdrawers waned, making them less willing to overcome challenges.

Students, particularly younger, middle-class students, whose entry to HE is primarily motivated by parental expectation or acquiescence to a perceived natural progression in the absence of positive decision-making, may be less committed to and therefore less likely complete their studies (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1997; 1998; Yorke, 1997). Commitment and motivation may also be limited by the extent to which students feel that they are on the wrong course (Quinn et al., 2005). Departure from courses based on their unsuitability is concentrated within the first few months (Cook, 2003) and is a phenomenon not uncommon on vocational programmes such as OT, despite the fact that, as part of the application process, students are expected to demonstrate a sound understanding of the nature and characteristics of the profession. Yorke's (2000) study highlighted that the wrong choice of field of study and financial problems were more important issues than the quality of teaching, with younger students being more likely than their older peers to identify that they had made the wrong choice of course, an observation echoed by Ozga and Sukhnandan (1997; 1998). Parallel issues around lack of progression and academic difficulty with the course (which will be discussed below) were suggested to emanate from a lack of commitment associated with this incorrect choice (Yorke, 2000).

Mackie (2001) found that committed students had positive realistic expectations of university, a long term goal and were motivated and determined to stay despite any difficulties encountered. Conversely, poorly committed students spoke of a perceived lack of control over events and of feelings of helplessness. Mackie suggests that these students lacked confidence and may have experienced feelings of alienation, although in practice it could be very difficult to determine which of these factors constitutes the initial source of the problems. Mackie found that some students felt so powerless that they were unable even to make the decision to withdraw. She is clear that blame should not be levelled at students for their lack of commitment, suggesting that the failure lies instead with institutions who fail to exploit the potential of initial commitment and allow 'expectant hope' to crumble into 'fears realised' (Mackie, 2001 p.275).

Student support

Thomas (2002) highlights the need for students to develop new social networks to replace those that they may naturally drift away from as they become engaged in HE, or indeed, to compliment those that are retained. A lack of social integration has been identified as a source of dissatisfaction for students who already have doubts (Mackie, 2001), and although not necessarily the sole issue, the availability of support networks within the programme of study and student accommodation can be important factors in decisions to withdraw or persist (Parmar, 2005; Tinto, 1975; 1993).

While Mackie (2001) identified that accommodation, rather than the course, was the primary source of supportive friendships, it is arguably the case that this may vary with the nature of the programme being undertaken. Professional vocational programmes with patterns of high contact, such as OT, may generate a different result. Nevertheless, several studies have highlighted issues around social integration for those not living in academic halls of residence. Thomas (2002), for example, found that those not living in halls are more likely to feel marginalised from their peers, a finding mirrored by Quinn et al. (2005) who highlighted similar issues for those studying part-time or living at home. Theoretically, these students should be able to access supports closer to home, but in practice this may prove problematic for a variety of reasons, including instances where home support networks are unfamiliar with or do not value participation in HE (Quinn et al., 2005). Reporting similar issues, Cook (2003) found an increased likelihood of withdrawal for students living at home, while frequent returns to the family home by those living in halls have been identified as an indicator of increased risk of withdrawal (Mackie, 2001).

While the development of supportive social networks may be facilitated by collaborative learning and teaching practices (Thomas, 2002), relationships with and the level of support available from programme staff are also highly important. Students who perceive a lack of

staff support have been identified as more likely to withdraw (Cook, 2003), and a dominant theme in the data emerging from the study by Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) was a desire for a greater degree of contact with and support from academic staff. Beyond somewhat ambiguous conceptions of 'support', the nature of relationships between teaching staff and students seem fundamental to attitudes towards learning and coping with academic difficulties. Thomas (2002) revealed that where students felt that staff believed in them and cared about their achievement, they seemed to gain self-confidence and motivation, with notable improvements in performance. The study indicated that students felt valued and accepted if staff knew their names and offered signs of friendship and interest in students, treating them as equals. The converse seems also to be true in that poor relationships with staff and loss of confidence result in student reluctance to approach staff for support (Quinn et al., 2005). Potentially compounding this issue is evidence suggesting a general lack of awareness of the central support services available to students, and a reluctance to utilise these out of embarrassment, shame or a perception that the services are intended of other recipients (Quinn et al., 2005).

Academic struggle

As alluded to by Weil (1986), the methods of teaching, learning and assessment adopted in HE tend to reflect the hegemonic culture and are accompanied by an assumption that it is the student who needs to adapt and conform to the institution's expectations (Hatt and Baxter, 2003; Thomas, 2002). The workloads students encounter may prove higher than anticipated and more difficult to cope with (Walker et al., 2004), despite any advanced warnings that may have been issued (Quinn et al., 2005). Academic integration may be further inhibited by lack of feedback on performance and progress, uncertainty about expectations, a lack of support through the transition period and difficult timetabling (Mackie, 2001). Students may encounter problems adjusting to large class sizes, reinforcing feelings of being lost and faceless and making it difficult to approach lecturing staff for support (Quinn et al., 2005). After Semester 1, academic progress has been shown to contribute much more to decisions to withdraw than is evident earlier on (May and Bousted, 2004). Those experiencing problems with the academic level of study were amongst those more likely to withdraw from an Irish university studied by Cook (2003) and Quinn et al. (2005) posited that having struggled in their first year, students may doubt their ability to manage at higher levels of study in later years, or that they will be able to sustain the effort required to do so, making continuation a waste of time.

Competing priorities

The student role does not exist in a vacuum; it occurs alongside all of the other roles and responsibilities that individuals have, many of which cannot be sidelined to prioritise study. Although it may be an alternative source of friendship and support outside the immediate

educational environment and it may be a necessity to meet living costs, the concurrent pursuit of paid employment can be demanding of time and energy, compromising that available to dedicate to study (Davies and Williams, 2001; Quinn et al., 2005). Family responsibilities, particularly childcare, have been identified as having a negative effect on retention, especially for women and mature students (Quinn et al., 2005; Yorke, 1997). As Davies and Williams (2001) suggest, despite having made a decision to enter HE, mature students retain a sense that circumstances and priorities at home could change making it impossible to complete the course. Indeed, Ozga and Sukhnandan (1998 p.327) highlight that despite potentially making good progress in their studies, mature students in their research tended to be 'forced' into non-completion by external circumstances that required their presence at home or in paid employment.

Financial pressure

Of the student participants in a single-site case study by Thomas (2002), over 87 percent reported having financial concerns at some stage during their studies, with approximately half of these describing frequent financial concerns. The need to work to supplement income put pressure on students and many struggled with financial challenges which were, at times, more difficult than had been anticipated. Financial strain was significant, but the large majority of students in this study were resigned to poverty, debt and working long hours in poorly paid employment to support themselves through university, demonstrating a high level of commitment to long-term goals. Similarly, Quinn et al. (2005) found that few of their participants cited finances as the ultimate reason for withdrawal, despite it being an ever-present issue for most. Again, financial struggle through university seemed to be implicitly accepted.

Conversely, in considering the experiences of students from a working-class background, Bamber and Tett (2001) highlighted that financial difficulties and the pressure of having to work seriously undermined engagement with study. Reay, Davies, David and Ball (2001b) reinforced this point by identifying a strong inverse relationship between the number of hours worked and those dedicated to study outside classes. Yorke (1997) reported that working-class students are more likely to cite financial difficulties as a moderate to considerable influence on decisions to withdraw than their middle-class peer, although Forsyth and Furlong (2003) suggest that it is fear of debt, rather than debt itself, that acts as a barrier to the continued participation. Financial difficulties are also suggested to be worse for mature students who have dependants and other commitments such as mortgages, and that the need to sustain those commitments may outweigh the potential of financial gain in the longer term, resulting in the course being abandoned (Bamber and Tett, 2001).

Compatibility of choice

Ozga and Sukhnandan (1997; 1998) offer a somewhat different model for considering non-completion that has become quite influential in the literature. Whilst acknowledging many of the factors that have been discussed by other authors, they consider non-completion to be best understood as a complex social process in which both the student and the institution are actors, and student preparedness and compatibility of choice are the main contributing factors. They found that preparedness of students for their experiences within HE was associated with the sources of information that had been consulted regarding HE in general and the institution they attend in particular. Students in this study who had made 'reactive' choices based on implicit natural progression, and those who, as highlighted earlier, had relied on information provided by school or further education (FE) teachers, parents and institutional marketing materials, tended to develop unrealistic, stereotypical assumptions about HE (particularly about moderate workloads and exciting social lives) and to be poorly prepared for the reality they encountered. On the other hand, students who were well-prepared, notably mature students, tended to have taken a more pro-active approach in their decision making and information gathering, consulting widely with friends who had experience of and staff working within HE.

Ozga and Sukhnandan (1998 p.322) note that preparedness does not in itself determine the likelihood of completion, but must be considered alongside compatibility. They define compatibility of choice as 'the degree of match between students and their choice of institution and course, in terms of the extent to which students' choices fulfil their expectation and also the extent to which students fulfil the institutions' expectations'. In this study, students who gained their preferred university place were likely to experience a high degree of compatibility with the institution and the course and go on to complete. The importance of compatibility was highlighted as evident in the fact that for 46 percent of the completers, it had counter-balanced contemplation of withdrawal on the basis of feeling ill-prepared and struggling with the transition. Incompatibility with the institution tended to be related to the geographical location, social facilities and cultural environment, whereas incompatibility with the course was associated with lack of interest, issues with the content and structure of the course and its failure to meet the student's expectations. The study identified that factors such as finance, social experiences, academic issues and accommodation were secondary considerations that added weight to the recognition of incompatibility, and helped to generate what students considered to be an acceptable reason for withdrawing (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998).

Interpreting withdrawal

The current emphasis on retaining students at all costs equates retention and completion with success, and withdrawal with failure (Quinn et al., 2005). Yet, as has been discussed,

reasons for withdrawal are multi-factorial, involving issues that are directly linked to the educational experience and those that are quite unrelated, and it can be difficult to establish relative weighting of the various contributing factors (University of the Arts, 2003). Students may be reticent to reveal the 'real' reason for leaving courses, or be too stressed to articulate them, meaning that official Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reasons for withdrawal may actually offer little accurate insight into the reality of the situation (Parmar, 2005; University of the Arts, 2003).

The literature reveals ambiguity in terms of how students themselves perceive withdrawal. For most in a study by Quinn et al. (2005), withdrawal was a rational decision, taken carefully and thoughtfully, and based on a set of circumstances that made study in that time and place unproductive. While the experience of withdrawal was largely disempowering and associated with regret, there was also a sense of relief. Such relief was noted by Ozga and Sukhnandan (1998) to be evident even where students were unsure about future options. Similarly, for many in Hodkinson's (2000) longitudinal study of student experiences in FE, voluntarily withdrawing proved to be the best decision that could have been made at the time. It was seen as a solution rather than a problem and students were able to identify benefits from their incomplete educational experience. Likewise, Quinn et al. (2005) identified that positive learning opportunities emerging from unsuccessful engagement in HE helped students to move forward with their lives after withdrawal. However, reflecting the complexity of the situation, only a small proportion of the sixty students participating in a single-site study by Parmer (2005) identified their decision to withdraw as a positive one. For some it wasn't simply a personal failure, but incorporated a sense of having let down others, especially partners, family, loved ones and employers. There were mixed emotions of shame, dissatisfaction, anger and disappointment directed at both themselves and the institution.

Research also highlights that, for some students, withdrawal may not actually be the result of an active decision; it may emerge as a non-decision that students drift into through gradual disengagement with the learning environment, or that they initiate in preference to facing assessments or submissions they feel likely to fail (Quinn et al., 2005). It has further emerged that initial perceptions of withdrawal may change over time and following reflection: those who feel bad initially may come to realise that it was the right decision at the time and those who were initially relieved may later come to question their decision (Quinn et al., 2005).

Quinn et al. (2005) argues that persisting in HE despite any difficulties encountered is perceived to demonstrate virtuous personal characteristics of students, whereas for some observers, the positive, rational underpinnings of (some) withdrawal are overshadowed by connotations of failure and fecklessness, a propensity to quit and a lack of moral fibre. Evidence suggests, however, that such judgements are often unwarranted as many students who withdraw re-enter university at another time; they are not permanently lost to HE and

may in fact benefit from their initial experiences by being better prepared and clearer about their goals on a subsequent occasion (Cook, 2003; Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998; Quinn et al., 2005). It is equally important to recognise that, at times, no amount of student support will inspire continuation and that some attrition is unavoidable (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998; Quinn et al., 2005).

Student support and retention

HE is increasingly becoming a consumer-led market, with students considering various options to identify the institutions and courses that might best meet their needs (Wallace, 2003), particularly in return for the fees that they are now required to pay. This is likely to increasingly redirect at least some emphasis away from student responsibilities and place it firmly on what institutions, programmes and educators need to do to ensure that resources and curricula are responsive to student needs (Thomas, Quinn, Slack and Casey, 2002; Wallace, 2003).

Offering appropriate systems of support is clearly important and Wallace (2003) has suggested that those students who are better prepared, who know how to ask for assistance and who use the support systems available to them, are more likely to complete their courses. However, there is evidence to suggest that those deemed most in need of support services are least likely to seek them out or use them effectively (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998; Quinn et al., 2005; Thomas et al., 2002). More important, perhaps, is the suggestion that knowledge of the support systems offered varies (Parmar, 2005; University of the Arts, 2003), indicating that some students may in fact be unaware of the options available to them.

The uptake of support may, however, be more complex than issues of awareness. In a study undertaken as part of an institutional audit and focusing on how a diverse group of fourteen participants coped with the challenges they encountered, Clegg et al. (2006) found that help-seeking was problematic because it diminished individuals' pride in their own coping skills and capacities. Despite recounting stories of considerable academic and personal challenges, students' reluctance to seek help seemed to relate to a strong sense of self-reliance and ownership of the problem, a strong determination to succeed and a capacity to draw upon considerable personal resources as a way of overcoming difficulties. For both young and mature students in this study, there was a high degree of acceptance of the need to face life's challenges combined with a reluctance to see them as reasons to seek help (Clegg et al., 2006). In fact for some participants, being at university, regardless of the challenges faced, was a way of coping with issues in other areas of their lives. These participants, like the withdrawn students in a study by Parmer (2005), were more likely to seek support from family and friends than central university support services.

The variations in research findings reinforce the complexity of help-seeking behaviour (Clegg et al., 2006) and affirm that no single intervention, or collection of interventions, is likely to guarantee success in terms of student support and retention (Wend, 2004). In response to a wide-ranging exploration of student services across England, Thomas et al. (2002) emphasise the challenge presented by increased student diversity, highlighting that the responsibility to respond lies with all staff across institutions, not solely those operating within central student services. Other authors agree, identifying a need to focus on issues central to learning and teaching, with support integrated within good pedagogic practice, rather than being supplementary to it (Clegg et al., 2006; Srivastava, 2002), and Srivastava (2002) specifically advocates effective staff development to support this ambition. A pertinent point is raised by Clegg et al. (2006 p.105) when they remind readers that most HE students do succeed, even while dealing with the 'inescapably messy contingencies of being human' and that '…confronting personal and other difficulties is a normal part of undertaking any life project and not something that can be regarded as exceptional' (p.102).

Pedagogy and student diversity

Ecclestone (2006) identified a need for university staff to understand more about the ways in which previous experiences of assessment in particular shape students' expectations, attitudes and effectiveness when engaging with different methods and approaches they might encounter in HE. In looking back on earlier discussions about student expectations and academic struggle, particularly with regard to non-completion, it is evident that the same could be said for learning and teaching approaches in general, although this is an area that has received comparably little research attention (Hockings, Cooke and Bowl, 2010); there can be a tendency to individualise problems to students rather than to review pedagogic practices and examine the extent to which they are accessible to the increasingly diverse student population (Haggis, 2007).

Wend (2004) suggests that a major factor impacting on students' overall experience is the quality of teaching, although when exploring non-completion, Yorke (2001c) found that teaching quality only added a non-significant degree of variance beyond that already accounted for by social class and maturity, characteristics which were themselves strongly linked with non-completion. Although teaching quality is certainly likely to impact on student experience, it is not necessarily a primary reason for voluntary withdrawal.

As a result of various sector-wide issues, the level of support available in many HE contexts is perceived to have declined at the very time when significant numbers of those entering the environment are in need of more rather than less support with their studies (Sambell and Hubbard, 2004). Increasing diversity of the student population and with it, increasing variability in approaches to and rates of learning, renders the continued use of long-

established pedagogical approaches that target more traditional students open to question. Effective inclusion must involve the reconceptualisation of curricula and of learning and teaching strategies (Macdonald and Stratta, 2001).

Bamber (2005) found that non-traditional students, particularly in the early stages of their programmes, described initial feelings of uncertainty and at times, panic, in response to their studies; however, this was observed to reduce over time, perhaps as students became acclimatised to the new learning environment. The factors that the students identified as helpful and motivating were the use of 'plain language', making key points obvious and reducing pressure generated by curriculum design and course structure. Working-class students enrolled in a Russell Group university viewed the requirement to engage with literature, produce formal essays and comply with various other academic requirements, as unnecessary 'hoop jumping' (Bamber and Tett, 2001 p.12), indicating an unwillingness to accept these institutionally legitimised forms of knowing over their own, and perhaps some resistance to submitting to the unfamiliar culture.

Concurring with the observations made by Ecclestone (2006), Sambell and Hubbard (2004) suggest that non-traditional students need more guidance, more practice at tackling assessments and more feedback on their learning than is traditionally offered on many HE programmes. Yorke (2001a) also agrees, arguing that formative feedback is of critical importance to both student learning and retention, although he does acknowledges that UK resource constraints have had a significant role in the dilution of formative assessment and feedback opportunities. Notwithstanding such limitations, Yorke proposes that the critical first year requires a different approach, particularly as students may require longer than a single semester to come to terms with the demands of study and the pressures associated with learning in HE. He argues that formative assessment contributes to academic integration, particularly in the transition phase, and that its diminution in the light of modern pressures on academic staff is unacceptable or at best inadvisable in a climate of performance indicators. While acknowledging the responsibility of institutions to adapt and develop their learning and teaching approaches to more effectively meet the needs of their student populations, Yorke makes the pertinent observation that it is equally important to remember that students are active contributors to their own learning experiences, and that a degree of shared responsibility must be retained.

More recent research contributing to this discussion examined the way that teachers' and learners' identities influenced academic engagement across a range of disciplines in two different universities (Hockings et al., 2010). The researchers acknowledge the many complexities of learning and the challenges presented by increasing student numbers and by institutional and personal (staff and student) factors. However, to enhance the depth and breadth of students' learning, they advocate pedagogies in which staff build their knowledge

of individuals and create safe, inclusive, respectful and collaborative environments in which learning in all aspects of the curriculum can be grounded in and build upon the existing knowledge and experiences of individuals. A potentially very helpful feature of this research is its holistic, multi-faceted view of the 'diversity' of modern HE classrooms which embraces the richness and possibilities for enhanced learning that they offer.

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Having considered a range of issues associated with student experiences in HE in more general terms (and notwithstanding the aforementioned merits of a more inclusive approach) the focus of this chapter now turns to consider the issues emerging from the literature in relation to specific sub-groups of those considered to be non-traditional entrants.

Non-traditional academic backgrounds in higher education

Ninety percent of the 160 respondents to Booth's (1997) questionnaire exploring the expectations and experiences of students entering a history degree were traditional eighteen-year-old A-level entrants. Seventy-three percent of these students felt fairly well prepared for learning in HE and a further thirteen percent felt very well prepared. This contrasts sharply with the findings of Smith and Bocock (1999) who undertook a series of in-depth interviews with forty students on Access, BTEC and GNVQ courses in four contrasting FE colleges during the final year of their courses. These authors identified a lack of familiarity with the educational world, a lack of educational confidence and a fear of conventional assessments which were associated with failure, all of which constituted significant barriers to successful progression from FE into HE.

Ecclestone (2006) posits that teachers and students of academic and vocational pre-entry qualifications prioritise different educational goals, with achievement in vocational qualifications viewed in terms of personal development and achievement in academic qualifications construed in terms of progression in subject-related knowledge and understanding. She suggests that vocational students have a strong sense of being 'second chance learners' (Ecclestone, 2006 p.5) and work within their comfort zones; in contrast, academic students are suggested to generally set self-determined, individually appropriate goals and to perceive failure as a lower than expected grade. Ecclestone suggests that the prioritising by vocational teachers of personal development over subject knowledge and higher cognitive skills results in strongly directive formative feedback which may promote below-capacity working and instrumental compliance in their students. Highlighting the comparatively lower levels of completion and achievement when compared to other groups in their study, Hatt and Baxter (2003), however, suggest that it is the emphasis on developing

vocational rather than academic skills that underpins the struggles encountered by students entering HE with vocational qualifications.

An Australian study by Cantwell, Archer and Bourke (2001) compared the performance of over 8500 students from traditional and non-traditional entry qualifications in a single institution. Their analysis indicated that having a non-traditional entry qualification was not in itself a predictor of success or otherwise. Rather, they highlighted the relative success of mature students entering with non-traditional qualifications, compared with the relative failure of these same qualifications when combined with youth. While difference in the UK and Australian HE environments might limit the transferability of these results, similar findings emerged from a UK study by Hoskins, Newstead and Dennis (1997), although again, the scope of this study was limited to a single institution. A number of other studies have specifically demonstrated that where students from non-traditional academic backgrounds persist, they are able to match or even exceed the achievements of their A-level peers (Hatt and Baxter, 2003; Howard and Jerosch-Herold, 2000; Howard and Watson, 1998). These findings would tend to challenge any assumption that non-traditional entry qualifications are inherently problematic, suggesting that many students come to university with a range of strengths and qualities that are beneficial to learning.

Mature students in higher education

While there is comparatively little research focused specifically on the experiences of students entering HE from non-traditional academic backgrounds per se, there is a much greater emphasis on the experiences of mature students. The degree of overlap between these two groups is considerable though not absolute. The literature indicates that mature students are at least as successful, if not more, than their younger peers (Cantwell et al., 2001; Hartley, Trueman and Lapping, 1997; Hoskins et al., 1997; Johnston, 2003a), and more recently that mature students (who are disproportionately female) are more likely to achieve a first class honours degree (Vignoles and Powdthavee, 2010); yet, as discussed in relation to non-completion, with multiple roles and responsibilities often involving considerable emotional and financial burdens (Macdonald and Stratta, 1998; Osbourne, Marks and Turner, 2004), there is a wealth of evidence highlighting the complexity and delicate balance of mature students' decisions to enter and capacity to continue within HE. Indeed Thomas and Quinn (2003) highlight that mature students are twice as likely to withdraw from HE as their younger peers.

Mature students are not a heterogeneous group (Richardson and King, 1998) and the rationale for entering HE will naturally vary between individuals. Osbourne et al. (2004) identified several sub-groups of mature students in their study: delayed traditional students who were in their twenties, late starters who had experienced a life-transforming event, single parents, careerists wishing to progress within an existing career, escapees seeking

qualifications as a route out of 'dead-end' jobs, and those pursuing education for the love of learning. They found a blend of various factors influencing the decisions of different sub-groups to attend university, and their ability to persist once enrolled. Echoing the work of May and Bousted (2004), this study highlighted that the incentives to study for a degree were sufficiently strong for participants to tolerate hardships in the pursuit of their goals, but the trade-off between positive and negative influences was so finely balanced that even small changes in personal circumstances could be sufficient to reverse decisions and plans. Similar themes emerged from studies by Bolam and Dodgson (2003), Davies and Williams (2001) and Reay, Ball and David (2002), who all discuss the need for mature students to balance competing priorities in addition to focusing on studies.

Financial constraints

The financial pressures highlighted earlier regarding non-completion have a particular resonance for mature students. While the greater earning potential of a recognised qualification might be a motivating factor, it is juxtaposed against the more immediate costs associated with studying and meeting existing financial commitments such as mortgages. While most students face financial challenges during their studies, they are potentially worse for mature students who are more likely to have dependents and other commitments (Davies and Williams, 2001; Osbourne et al., 2004). The loss of a previous income and the costs associated with additional child care, travel, the purchase of books and other course expenses may raise concerns about debt, prompting some to increase the demands on their time by working part-time (Bolam and Dodgson, 2003).

Mature students are noted to experience strong feelings of guilt over their inability to make significant contributions to family finances (Bolam and Dodgson, 2003), and those who are parents are likely to feel particularly guilty about depriving their children of material resources (Osbourne et al., 2004). Bolam and Dodgson (2003) found that 46 percent of mature students, compared to 34 percent of younger students, had considered dropping out of their course, highlighting that it was more common for mature students to cite financial reasons and younger students to cite academic reasons. Osbourne et al. (2004 p.309) suggest that mature students may consider financial or family issues more 'acceptable' reasons for leaving a course than academic struggle or feeling uncomfortable in the HE environment, reinforcing the earlier suggestion that withdrawal statistics may be misleading (Parmar, 2005).

Family responsibilities

Family responsibilities generate competing priorities that have a particular impact on the ability of mature students to complete their studies and the levels of achievement that they attain. As discussed regarding non-completion, balancing the needs of children, spouses or

partners, elderly parents and the demands of study are often exacerbated by the need to work part-time (Bolam and Dodgson, 2003; Osbourne et al., 2004). The patterns of programme delivery and service availability in relation to child care issues (Davies and Williams, 2001) and inefficient timetabling that makes poor use of already limited time (Carey and McNeish 2005) add a further complicating dimension, and feelings of guilt are often associated with having less time to spend with children and family (Davies and Williams, 2001; Osbourne et al., 2004).

The need to earn an income, the need to meet family responsibilities and the desire to learn all vie for the limited time available. Personal and leisure time are frequently sacrificed as a result, and women in particular are likely to perceive study time as personal time depriving others of their attention (Reay et al., 2002). In prioritising competing demands, there is a sense that some aspects of life must be put on hold, and that the consequences of mature students electing to study are borne not only by themselves, but also by those around them (Davies and Williams, 2001). While some mature students may view themselves as role models to inspire their children (Osbourne et al., 2004; Reay et al., 2002), retention and attainment can be strongly influenced by changing relationships with, and support available from, family and partners (Bolam and Dodgson (2003).

Academic challenges

Mature students themselves identify that they face challenges that are different from, although not necessarily more numerous than, younger students (Carey and McNeish 2005). Having made significant life changes there is a high level of commitment from mature students who have been identified as more conscientious than their younger peers (Carney and McNeish, 2005; Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998). A love of learning and altruistic motives (Osbourne et al., 2004; Reay et al., 2002), recognition of 'untapped potential' (Osbourne et al., 2004 p.308), and economic and employment incentives (Davies and Williams, 2001; Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998; Warmington, 2001) provide strong rationale for entering HE, yet despite a desire to prove themselves, mature students may lack confidence in their capacity to meet their goals (Davies and Williams, 2001; Macdonald and Stratta, 1998; Osbourne et al., 2004).

Davies and Williams (2001) describe the fragility of mature students' identities as learners, suggesting that they are easily shaken despite success in pre-entry (non-A-level) programmes, reflecting students' perceptions of the greater legitimacy of A-levels in the context of HE. While mature students may anticipate that studying in HE will be different from previous experiences, the extent of the demands may not be fully appreciated, leaving students feeling overwhelmed and concerned about their ability to cope intellectually. Despite being more likely to be anxious about their academic and personal performance (Macdonald and Stratta, 1998), mature students may find it difficult to admit that they aren't coping (Clegg

et al., 2006) and may lack the confidence to approach staff to seek help (Bolam and Dodgson, 2003). In contrast, reflecting the highly individualised nature of experiences and perhaps the context in which they are learning, Macdonald and Stratta (1998) observe that the mature students in their study were more articulate, assertive, and more likely to contribute to group discussions than their younger peers, and that they perceived that their life and work experiences compensated for a lack of academic experience.

The perception of poorly developed study skills resulted in mature students in Carney and McNeish's (2005) study feeling disadvantaged and compelled to greater effort in the pursuit of positive results and perceived greater levels of stress as a result. While noting similar issues in their own study, Bolam and Dodgson (2003) also highlighted that confidence improved following the first round of assessments, which is presumably related to successful outcomes. It has further been suggested that the strengthened learner identities derived from academic success in HE may carry over into other aspects of students' identities, enabling them to confront other problematic areas of their lives (Waller, 2005).

While the potential benefits of returning to study may extend beyond gaining a qualification to include personal growth and development, the risks to be weighed when making decisions to enter or continue in HE are highly subjective and not necessarily static (Davies and Williams, 2001). In the midst of a delicate balancing act, it seems unsurprising that mature students can be forced into non-completion when responsibilities outside their educational experience became paramount (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998). Personal circumstances are complex, and the issues associated with being a mature student intersect with those associated with gender, marital status, ethnicity and socio-economic status (Reay et al., 2002).

The impact of gender

The home and the educational setting are both described by Macdonald and Stratta (1998 p.73) as 'greedy institutions' that make open-ended demands on individuals, particularly women. Female students are more likely to have and retain caring responsibilities which, together with household duties, may be perceived as priorities around which study must be fitted (Osbourne et al., 2004). Those women who are single mothers are potentially presented with an even greater challenge (Reay et al., 2002).

The demands of domestic and family responsibilities are likely to constrain the choices of women to readily accessible, local, often 'low status' universities (Franklin, 2006). Macdonald and Stratta (1998) also suggest, however, that women may have less secure identities than men, while Reay (2003) characterised particularly working-class women's experiences of education as incorporating a sense of past personal failure, of being disregarded and overlooked, unimportant, marginalised and unwelcome. While these findings could contribute

to Franklin's (2006) observations of low self-confidence and perceptions of the limited value of Access qualifications which lead women in his study to confine their applications to less prestigious institutions, it is inadvisable to assume that these findings are representative of the experiences of all women. Although experience and attainment are separate if related issues, women have been shown to outperform their male peers (Cantwell et al., 2001; Hartley et al., 1997; Vignoles and Powdthavee, 2010), while young men particularly have featured disproportionately amongst withdrawal figures (Smith and Bocock, 1999) and been found to be over one and a half times more likely to fail than women (Johnston, MacLeod and Small, 2003).

While men may find it easier than women to take advantage of the social opportunities associated with HE, this can work against them if they prioritise socialising over academic work, and young men in particular may find it harder to admit difficulties and may be reluctant to seek support for fear of being deemed 'an idiot' (Quinn et al., 2005 p.34). Although the impact of domestic pressures on men studying in HE are less evident in the literature, Osbourne et al. (2004 p.310) highlight that they do exist. Men may be more successful than women at keeping their domestic lives separate from the educational environment (Macdonald and Stratta, 1998), but Osbourne et al. (2004) found that men who saw themselves as family breadwinners were reluctant to enrol on full-time courses and experienced considerable stress in dividing their time between work, study and family.

Socio-economic status in higher education

HE is very much a 'classed' concept, with an overall dominance of the white, middle classes (Ball, Davies, David and Reay, 2002). The majority of entrants to HE have historically been young, white, middle-class, A-level qualified school leavers, and the educational provision of the sector has aimed at meeting the needs of this group (Hatt, Baxter and Harrison, 2003). While more people than ever before are now participating in HE, the nature of the educational experience on offer remains largely unchanged (Bamber and Tett, 1999). Students from non-traditional groups have often been expected to fit into existing educational systems with little effort being made to transform the system to accommodate the growing diversity of needs (Archer and Leathwood, 2003; Tett, 1999).

Initial efforts to fulfil the government's widening participation targets centred on expanding the number of mature students, but have since spread to include encouraging the enrolment of younger students from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially those from social classes that are under-represented in HE (Yorke and Thomas, 2003). Having overcome widespread low levels of educational aspiration (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003) and attainment (Vignoles and Crawford, 2010), Quinn et al. (2005) suggest that working-class students entering HE lack the

cultural and economic capital more commonly associated with it, which influences not only their experiences and success, but also the choices that they make.

<u>Exploring 'choice'</u>

Students applying to enter HE make very different choices based on the circumstances in which they live and the constraints within which they have to operate. The degree of 'choice' that each individual actually has is therefore variable (Reay et al., 2001b). Practical issues such as the time available to travel and its associated costs may become a geographical constraint limiting choice to whatever is locally available. Previous educational opportunities and the need to divide time and energy between studying and earning money may generate academic constraints limiting choice to those institutions willing to accept the qualifications earned (Ball et al., 2002; Forsyth and Furlong, 2003; Reay et al., 2001b).

An aspect of choice that has received particular attention in the literature is the desire to 'fit in' and feel comfortable in a learning environment. Ball et al. (2002) propose that aside from practical considerations, choices of where to apply are based on social/cultural issues which relate to how students socially classify themselves and universities, and cognitive/ performative issues which seek to match academic performance with entry requirements. They suggest that students self-select into homogenous groups and therefore perpetuate the differential social patterns of individuals and of institutions. Social class is noted to be the main indicator of which school a child attends and the GCSE results they attain (e.g. traditional 'academic' subjects tend to dominate in private schools, whereas 'new' subjects are more evident in state schools), factors which in turn Ball et al. found to be the main indicators of the status of the universities selected.

Working-class students studying in HE are atypical and may be acting contrary to the expectations of their peers, teachers and parents (Ball et al., 2002; Hatt et al., 2003). Having taken the decision to enter HE, Reay et al. (2001b) suggest that the desire 'fit in' to an institution populated by similar people leads some working-class students to immediately exclude a number of universities as viable options. Interestingly, they also note that while working-class students may be quite likely to apply for the more prestigious, traditional universities, middle-class students are very unlikely to apply for post-1992, 'new' universities, an observation which Ball et al. (2002) suggest is not so much based on active rejection of new universities, as a failure to even consider them an option.

The overall suggestion is that choices are not solely based on class or ethnic mix, or the ratio of mature to younger students, for example, but incorporate a complex interplay between race and class. It should not be assumed, however, that all working-class students will elect to attend post-1992 institutions; some are noted to deliberately seek to dis-identify with 'their

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own' in order to gain a more privileged position in the sector and in society (Reay et al., 2001b).

Working-class student experiences and achievement

There is some ambiguity in the literature regarding the relative achievements of students from differing socio-economic backgrounds. Johnston (2003b), for example, suggests that students from low-participation neighbourhoods appear to be just as academically successful as their more privileged peers. Similarly, socio-economic status did not emerge as a significant predictor of achievement in an Australian study considering the performance of over 8500 undergraduates at a single institution (Cantwell et al., 2001), although inherent differences in the HE systems of Australia and the UK cannot be excluded. Young students from low-income backgrounds in a study by Hatt et al. (2003) were found to be at least as likely to persist with their studies as those from middle-class backgrounds.

Quinn et al. (2005), on the other hand, suggested that working-class students experience material inequalities which make it more difficult for them to survive and prosper as students. They are more likely to spend long hours in paid employment (Reay et al., 2001b), limiting time available for study, participation in non-academic activities, socialisation and the development of support networks, which working-class students are noted to perceive less positively than their more advantaged peers (Cooke, Barkham, Audin, Bradley and Davy, 2004).

Despite the challenges highlighted, Quinn et al. (2005) argue that working-class drop out should not be construed as inevitable. The active decision to participate in HE, rather than acquiescence to a natural progression of early exit from education, may in fact make these students well-motivated and inclined to persist (Hatt et al., 2003). However, as previously discussed, there are a number of factors which may generate additional demands on time and energy and make it impossible or impractical to continue. Early withdrawal by working-class students is often underpinned by sound rationale, and most gain skills, confidence and valuable life experience as a result of their time at university (Quinn, 2005). The fact that most re-enter education at a later date belies the damaging and disillusioning 'inevitability' argument. Many use the experience gained to enable them to take a greater degree of control of their situation and to make more informed choices and re-focus of their efforts in a new direction (Quinn, 2005).

Supporting working-class students

HEIs vary considerably in terms of their student retention and completion rates. Yorke and Thomas (2003) examined the cases of six universities identified as the only ones to better

their benchmarks for the proportion of young entrants from working-class backgrounds and low-participation neighbourhoods, and for first generation, mature entrants. While at times it proved difficult for institutional managers to specifically identify the basis of their success in these areas and no firm conclusions were drawn by the study, several themes emerged. Institutional missions that unambiguously focused on high quality teaching and effective student support, together with a sustained commitment to and broad conception of a student-centred approach generated an environment in which each student was individually known and had a sense of belonging. Early pre-entry engagement with potential students helped to shape their expectations and preparedness in addition to developing a relationship with the institution. Reviewing educational provision and student support to ensure that it met the needs of the diverse student body was accompanied by recognition of the need for staff development to support widening participation and facilitate changes in practice, a strategy advocated by Srivastava (2002).

Financial concerns have been a recurring theme in the literature, and Yorke and Thomas (2003) identified that their case study institutions all provided information about the impact of financial issues and part-time work on studies, provided information and guidance on financial matters, provided direct financial support and facilitated, and where possible regulated, part-time work. Similarly, Hatt et al. (2003) found that additional financial support through the provision of bursaries made a difference to low-income students' chances of persisting.

One of the challenges of reviewing the literature in this area is the variability of terms used by different authors. While social class certainly incorporates a financial element, low income groups are not synonymous with working-class backgrounds (Hatt et al., 2003 p.24), and as highlighted by a participant in a study by Tett (1999 p.113), there is a danger in equating 'working-class' with deprivation. It would be equally inappropriate to assume that working-class students entering prestigious programmes (for example, medicine) and/or prestigious universities always struggle. Although Forsyth and Furlong (2003) found that students amongst this group consistently faced the most significant challenges (in terms of social, cultural and economic barriers) even where they were amongst the most academically able, more recent research highlights that working-class students with very strong learner identities may find in HE a degree of fit previously missing in their educational experiences and that in elite contexts at least, differences in social background can recede to a degree (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009).

Ethnicity in higher education

The ethnic background of students receives comparatively less attention in the literature and is often considered in conjunction with issues of class. Reay et al. (2001b) highlight the complex tensions that can emerge in selecting institutions to apply to: in the desire for a

degree of compatibility, students from minority ethnic groups were noted to make applications to facilities with already good levels of ethnic diversity amongst the staff and student bodies, which tends to centre on post-1992 universities. However, while 'fitting in' in this context, students may position themselves uncomfortably in relation to other background characteristics, such as class, and vice versa. The tension between wanting to fit in, wanting to avoid being stereotyped and discriminated against, and wanting to go to a 'good' university can prove very complex.

Once engaged in HE, Thomas et al. (2002 p.51) found evidence suggesting that students from minority ethnic groups perceive a barrier between themselves and white staff and students, even if no overt comment is made. Feeling isolated makes it challenging for students to find their place within the environment, and a lack of cultural awareness will make it difficult for staff to support students, even where there is a genuine willingness to do so. Thomas et al. caution against characterising those from minority ethnic groups as problematic, advocating that the knowledge and perspectives they bring should be respected and reflected in the curriculum, although it might be observed that the success of this sort of initiative is likely to be dependent on the pervading culture of individual institutions.

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Following the review of the educational literature exploring the issues associated with student experiences in HE, including the experiences of specific sub-groups of those considered to be non-traditional entrants, the chapter will now focus on considering what has emerged with regard to these matters in the field of OT education. It will put this into context by considering how the experiences in OT compare with those of other healthcare-related programmes.

Occupational therapy education

OT pre-registration programmes exist in a complex environment that straddles education and healthcare (COT 2003b). Alsop (2006) provides an historical account of the changes in OT education since its introduction to the UK in the 1930s, highlighting a gradual inflation of the minimum academic level required to achieve professional qualification (from early diplomas to the current honours degrees). She suggests, however, that in contrast to the United States and Canada, the UK is unlikely to progress exclusively to Masters degree entry levels in deference to the agenda of widening participation in health-related programmes.

OT is a career-path that is often less well-known to potential applicants than some other health-related professions, and it is evident that many OT students may have initially considered alternatives such as physiotherapy (Craik and Wyatt-Rollason, 2002). The recent

past saw a decline in the number of applicants for what was an increasing number of places on OT programmes (Craik and Ross, 2003). Efforts to fill these places and to diversify the professional workforce have seen the profile of OT students change in at least some respects. Having traditionally recruited predominately eighteen-year-old female school-leavers, the profession now sees over sixty percent entering as mature students, many with experience of working in the health and social care sector prior to commencing their studies (COT 2003b; 2007b; Craik, 2006).

The expanding diversity of students incorporates an increasing variety of entry qualifications (Hill, 1995) which may in part reflect the increasing numbers of mature students, although the proportions of men and those from black and minority ethnic groups remain very low (COT 2003b; 2007b; Lawson-Porter, 2004). A study by Canterbury Christ Church University College (2003) examined potential factors influencing the recruitment, selection and accommodation of under-represented groups. It suggested that beyond a general lack of awareness of the profession, those from minority ethnic communities may consider OT to be of lower status than other health-related professions such as medicine, and be further challenged by a lack of cultural awareness amongst colleagues and clients and by a paucity of role models from similar backgrounds. The dominance of women in the profession, career prospects and salary were suggested to serve as deterrents to men and, as previously highlighted, those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds were suggested to face barriers associated with fieldwork travel and accommodation costs, lack of familial support and lack of the required entry qualifications.

Amongst those who do gain entry to pre-registration OT programmes, attrition rates are noted to vary between zero and nineteen percent, with an average in 2005 of fifteen percent (COT 2007b), an increase on the ten percent noted in 2003 (COT 2003b). Reporting on earlier cohorts, Patterson (1988) identified a nation-wide drop-out rate in 1982 of just over fourteen and a half percent, and indicated that the primary causes of withdrawal between 1979 and 1983 were academic failure (36 percent) and wrong career choice (29 percent). With attrition at its highest in the first year, the most commonly cited reasons for withdrawal between 2001 and 2005 were health issues (although a figure was not provided) (COT 2007b).

The government recognises the need for effective support from within pre-registration programmes to keep attrition rates as low as possible (DH 2000a). There is, however, a tension between maintaining low levels of attrition, the quality assurance of academic standards and ultimately, public protection (COT 2003b). Nevertheless, the national contract between NHS Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) and HEIs incorporates an incentive/penalty payment component which accommodates regional variations but focuses on reducing attrition (Jeffries, 2006).

OT students are fortunate in that their tuition fees are met by their sponsoring SHA and that means-tested bursaries are available, both off-setting the costs associated with studying. It is nonetheless highly probable that students will be influenced by the fee-paying environment of HE and they are unlikely to be totally dissimilar to their peers on HEFCE funded programmes with regard to many of their expectations.

<u>Entry qualifications and academic performance</u>

There is limited evidence in the OT literature regarding any possible relationship between entry qualifications and exit awards. Howard and Watson (1998) analysed the records of 47 OT students from the first two cohorts to successfully complete their BSc (Hons) degrees at the University of East Anglia (UEA). They found no evidence of a relationship between traditional (which they defined as having identifiable GCSE and A-level scores) or non-traditional (no GCSE or A-level scores, or A-levels achieved in distant past) entry qualifications and the final degree mark achieved. They further identified that having A-level biology had no bearing on either the first year physiology mark or the exit award. This finding supported earlier work by Tyldesley (1986) which identified no statistically significant difference between the anatomy and physiology results of OT students with A-level biology and those with only O-level biology (although the results of students without either qualification were not included in data analysis).

Howard and Watson's (1998) study was limited by the small sample involved and the fact that these numbers limited their capacity to differentiate meaningfully between the various sub-groups that comprised those with non-traditional academic backgrounds. A follow-up study by Howard and Jerosch-Herold (2000) considered the entry qualifications and academic and fieldwork performance of three successive cohorts who commenced their studies between 1993 and 1995. On this occasion, they examined the results of 79 OT and 89 physiotherapy students, reflecting the joint teaching in the programmes at UEA. In this study, non-traditional entry qualifications were differentiated into Access qualifications, previous degrees, BTEC qualifications and other 'miscellaneous' qualifications including International Baccalaureates, Irish Highers and Open University preliminary awards. Unfortunately, these qualifications were again collapsed during data analysis as the numbers of students in each category were too small to permit meaningful independent analysis.

This second study at UEA identified a moderately strong and statistically significant relationship between the academic and fieldwork performance of year three OT students (r = 0.525, p = .01), although these scores could not be predicted by A-level entry scores. OT students performed equally as well in terms of their final degree scores regardless of their academic backgrounds, although statistical significance in this regard was reached for physiotherapy students (p < .05). The performance of those students who already held

degrees before commencing their OT studies might be expected to exceed that of other students, including holders of A-levels, in at least some of the academic components of the curriculum. By grouping degree holders together with the non-traditional entry qualifications that are recognised alternatives to A-levels, this study may have failed to detect the confounding influence that degree holders potentially had on the results.

Both of the studies at UEA are limited by the fact that they were conducted within a single institution and that the OT programme there adopts a problem-based learning curriculum. This very specific educational approach is quite distinct to the modular approaches that are evident in some other OT schools, and there may be other characteristic features of the school that have influenced the results of these studies. The external validity and generalisability of the results must therefore be treated with caution.

A more recent study by Shanahan (2004) examined data collected from 425 OT students across eight schools around England and Wales. The main entry qualification of each student was explored in relation to final academic averages at graduation. No statistically significant difference in final academic average was noted between the A-level and Access students groups, although picking up on the point made about Howard and Jerosch-Herold's (2000) study, a statistically significant difference was noted between those students who held previous degrees and those who entered with A-levels ($p < .001$), and between previous degree holders and those who entered with Access qualifications ($p < .001$).

A factor limiting the three more recent examinations of the impact of entry qualifications on the academic achievement of OT students is that only those students who successfully completed their programmes were included. No attempt was made to account for any students who may have withdrawn voluntarily, or particularly, involuntarily, before completion of their studies. Their inclusion in the analysis of the data may have generated very different outcomes. As these studies examined only student records, they offer no insight into how students experienced their journey through OT education, regardless of the outcomes they achieved.

Mature occupational therapy students

Calls for the OT profession to reconsider educational programmes with the needs of mature students in mind are evident from the late 1980s (Strickland, 1987). In line with government policy that even then encouraged participation in the allied health professions and in HE generally through the admission of a greater number of mature entrants and those following less traditional routes, Patterson (1992) reported that in 1989, nineteen percent of OT students in Scotland, England and Wales were aged twenty to twenty-five, and 32 percent of students were aged twenty-five years and over. As highlighted earlier, more recent figures

now indicate that in excess of sixty percent of OT students are aged twenty-one years or over at entry; in 2005, the figure was 67 percent (COT 2007b).

A search of the literature revealed a paucity of studies focusing specifically on the educational experiences of OT students with non-traditional academic backgrounds. There were however, a small number that considered the performance and experiences of mature OT students. As previously indicated, the degree of overlap between these two groups is potentially considerable, suggesting at least some commonality of experiences.

While also considering entry qualifications, the 2004 study by Shanahan actually set out to establish whether age could be used as a predictor of academic success amongst OT students. Her findings revealed that mature students were more likely to be awarded a higher degree classification than their younger peers ($p < .01$). She also found that mature students were more likely to qualify with an upper second class honours degree, whereas students under twenty-one years of age at entry had a fairly equal chance of achieving either an upper second or a lower second class honours degree (Shanahan, 2004 p.443).

On excluding the datasets of the seventy mature students holding previous degrees (who, as noted earlier, were associated with statistically significantly better final academic averages than their peers), Shanahan (2004 p.444) noted that the differences between mature and younger students were no longer evident. Further statistical analysis confirmed the greater strength of entry qualification over age at entry in predicting academic attainment. That is, age at entry was not found to be predictive of academic success, which concurs with similar findings produced by Howard and Watson (1998). Both these results contradict what has been regarded in the generic literature as a fairly consistent pattern of mature students performing as well as or better than their younger peers.

Factors motivating mature students to select OT as a career were investigated by Craik and Alderman (1998) in a small-scale survey of second and third year students aged over thirty years and studying at Brunel University. They identified that several respondents had worked in an OT service in an assistant or clerical capacity before commencing their studies, and 65 percent indicated that close contact with the profession had influenced their career choice. Job satisfaction was the primary incentive for considering OT, followed by the opportunity to help others, job security and the variety of work settings available.

As evident in the general educational literature, the most frequently cited reason for mature students in that study choosing to apply to Brunel was its proximity to home addresses, although there was also evidence of a lack of meaningful choice based on personal circumstances and failure to secure offers from alternative programmes. Again concurring with the generic literature, the study identified financial pressures and other family and time

commitments as factors that might deter mature students from entering or continuing their studies. With an average of approximately seven years between first considering OT and beginning the course, one third of respondents indicated that they would not have been emotionally ready for OT education had they entered straight from school, and 25 percent felt that their maturity would make them better practitioners. While the small-scale, single-site nature of this study is doubtlessly a limitation, many of its results resonate with findings that emerge from the generic literature, and it does offer some insights that are unique to the profession in terms of motivations and managing the educational content. It does not, however, offer in-depth insight into the experiences of mature OT students.

While Craik and Alderman (1998) observed that a number of their respondents had experience of working in OT departments prior to commencing their studies, anecdotal evidence suggests that those students who continue to be employed as OT assistants or technical instructors during their training experience considerable role conflict in trying to adapt their behaviour to whichever role (student or unqualified employee) they occupy in a given moment (Alsop, 1996). However, in describing the in-service training programme at Bristol, Douglas (2000) noted that although balancing work, family life and study took its toll on some OT students, they were able to establish enviable (although regrettably unspecified) coping strategies that enabled them to deal with significant life-changes and still manage to complete their course.

Shanahan (2000) took a phenomenological approach to gain insight into the lives of a small number of mature female students studying on healthcare programmes (four of the five participants were studying OT) at Oxford Brookes University. She sought specifically to shed light on why mature students lack confidence in their academic abilities despite meeting the entry requirements for their programmes. The study highlighted many of the themes identified in the more general educational literature, including seeing education as a catalyst for change in terms of the expansion of roles and identities and redressing dissatisfaction with previous careers or employment, the need to contend with competing roles and to make sacrifices (e.g. leisure activities abandoned and lost friendships mourned). The support of partners and family was an important factor in participants' capacities to sustain the juggling of roles required, while peer support was highly valued in dealing with stress.

Like respondents in Craik and Alderman's (1998) study, the participants in Shanahan's (2000) research identified their maturity as an advantage offering them insight that facilitated study in some areas of the curriculum, more life experience to draw upon during fieldwork components of the course, and a perception that transition into the workplace as a qualified therapists would be easier as a result of previous work experience. Despite this, there was also evidence of participants feeling inadequate in terms of their academic ability, with particular issues identified around understanding what was required of them. Feedback had the

potential to boost confidence at least intermittently, but a 'rollercoaster of confidence' was identified as a primary theme (Shanahan, 2000 p.158).

Shanahan's (2000) study highlighted that the emphasis placed by participants on changing their lives through engagement with education put them under considerable pressure to succeed. The need to compromise standards to sustain their multiple roles led to feelings of guilt that the author felt were often expressed as anxiety regarding their capacity to meet the academic demands of the programme. It could also be suggested that a lack of confidence may encourage students to feel they ought to invest even greater effort in their studies, compounding their perception of compromised standards and establishing a cycle that undermines confidence still further. Indeed, Shanahan (2000 p.160) highlighted the relationship between the length of time her participants had been enrolled on the course and the intensity of their perceptions of '…being pulled in many different directions'. The themes emerging from the study were resonant with, and included several of those identified in the broader literature. Although the experiences of any individual are not necessarily representative of others in similar situations, this study is able to contribute some much needed insight into the experiences of at least one group of non-traditional students studying on OT programmes.

Further insight is provided by Ryan (2000; 2001a; 2001b; 2001c) who undertook a phenomenological study focusing on newly qualified OTs. Ryan aimed to compare the clinical reasoning and creativity generated by undergraduate programmes adopting either a traditional modular or problem-based learning approach. Data were collected over eighteen months immediately post-graduation during which participants related stories about their educational and initial qualified clinical experiences. A sample of fourteen participants was recruited, all of whom, coincidentally, had been mature students (Ryan, 2001b).

Drawing on data from questionnaires, in-depth story-telling sessions, individually audio-recorded participant reflections, critical incidents, feedback on scripts, participants' reflective letters and informal telephone calls, Ryan (2001a; 2001b; 2001c) evokes educational environments in which participants' strengths and prior experiences were unrecognised and their anxieties unsupported. A lack of congruence between the learning and teaching philosophies of pre-entry Access courses and the HE environment for which they purported to prepare students was evident, as were perceptions of the stifling of creativity, innovation, and the expression of personal perspectives. Participants discussed being required to adopt theoretical frameworks that were inadequately conceptualised within programmes and of the need to comply with lecturers' expectation and personal theories in order to pass.

Ryan's findings concur with those of Shanahan (2000) and with generic literature in highlighting that for some mature students, full-time study generates considerable pressures

that are felt in other areas of their lives. She suggests that this is compounded by the complexity of being socialised into the profession in parallel with learning new ways of being and developing thinking to higher levels, and identifies a moral imperative to consider the varying needs of students entering OT from different backgrounds (Ryan, 2001b). Salvatori (1999) makes a similar point by drawing parallels between the concepts of client-centred practice and student-centred education and challenging the OT profession to practice its underlying philosophical principles in the educational as well as the clinical field.

While Ryan's work demonstrates a robust approach and raises some very interesting observations about the experiences of mature OT students that mirror many of the issues highlighted in the general educational literature, they arise out of a retrospective study and it is difficult to ascertain the surrounding context and the impact these experiences had on learning at the time. While participants unmistakably held some vivid memories, it is conceivable that the passage of time may have dulled or elaborated recollections in some respects. As with other work in the field of OT education, Ryan (2000; 2001a; 2001b; 2001c) focuses on the experiences of students who have successfully managed to navigate their way to graduation and does not consider the experiences of students who fail to complete their studies. She highlights herself that the findings presented focus on participants' 'critical voices' and do not offer a balanced view of participants' educational experiences (Ryan, 2001b p.540).

'Non-traditional' occupational therapy students' experiences

A small number of other studies in the OT literature report on issues associated with 'non-traditional' students and adopt interpretations of 'non-traditional' that potentially encompass a range of sub-groups. For example, in response to changing demographics in the student populations, Graham and Babola (1998) conducted a study considering the financial, family, educational and psychosocial needs of non-traditional students. They distributed a questionnaire that included both quantitative and open-response questions to a purposive sample of students who were studying at one of five OT or eight physical therapy programmes in Texas and were aged thirty years or more at entry, pursuing their studies as a second career, or were a parent of dependent children. Participants were therefore potentially mature or from the younger group (as parenthood cannot be presumed restricted to older students), from traditional and non-traditional academic backgrounds, and with and without prior experience of HE.

Graham and Babola (1998) received 196 completed questionnaires from students studying at various levels in their programmes, however there is no indication of the number of questionnaires that were distributed or the response rate achieved, raising questions about the validity of the results presented. The study highlighted that although 65 percent of the

respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their overall needs were being met, a number of areas gave cause for concern, many reflecting themes raised in the general educational literature. Financial issues generated significant levels of stress and many personal relationships with partners had come under strain, with most parent-respondents prioritising time with their children over time with their partners. Respondents were also concerned about the adjustments required to adapt to the student role, and perceived that courses were oriented towards school-leavers and failed to provide adequate systems of support for non-traditional students. This latter point would tend to suggest that mature students dominated the sample, although it is not a certainty.

As a cross-sectional 'snap-shot', Graham and Babola's (1998) study is unable to indicate how perceptions might change across the student life-cycle and again considers only those students who have remained on their programme. While the multiple-site nature of the study is somewhat of a strength and although some useful qualitative data were collected, it does not provide in-depth insights into student experiences. The identification of issues that mirror those in the broader literature suggests that the lack of distinction between the experiences of OT and physical therapy students is likely to be unproblematic, but as the research was centred on pre-registration education in the United States, the findings will not necessarily generalise directly into the UK context.

Wheeler (2001) undertook a related study in the UK which aimed to identify factors in the student experience that pertained to attrition, with particular reference to the needs of non-traditional entrants who might be perceived as being at risk of failure to complete. He formulated a questionnaire on the basis of literature existing at the time, focus group discussions with students and computer-mediated interviews with community leaders of minority religious and racial groups. The questionnaire incorporated quantitative items and free-text response opportunities and was distributed to 365 students from four cohorts of a single institution at the conclusion of their studies. Responses were received from 186 students aged seventeen to 41 years, giving a 51 percent response rate.

Analysis identified that nearly twenty percent of respondents had seriously considered leaving the course at some stage and, reflecting the primary risk period identified in the broader literature, the majority had considered leaving during the first term. The most commonly cited reason for ultimately deciding to continue was 'a dogged determination to join the profession' (Wheeler, 2001 p.112). Respondents indicated that the workload was the least favoured aspect of their programme (53 percent), whereas they most enjoyed their fieldwork experiences (59 percent). There was no evidence of a statistically significant relationship between entry qualification, age or previous experience of the profession and the likelihood of having contemplated withdrawal. A statistically significant relationship was, however, evident between those engaged in paid employment during term time and those who had considered

leaving (p = .05), perhaps reflecting the now familiar tension between the need to supplement income and the need to dedicate time to study. Non A-level respondents reported no greater need for learning support and demonstrated a level of perceived competence and confidence to practice indistinguishable from their A-level colleagues.

While Wheeler's (2001) study offers some limited insight into the experiences of OT students, like many of the other studies centring on OT education, it was focussed in a single institution and considered only those students who had sustained their studies to completion. Although the questionnaire contained free-text response opportunities, the findings are not able to offer an in-depth understanding of student experiences and it is difficult to ascertain which student sub-groups, if any, might be particularly affected by the issues raised. Further, Wheeler (2001 p.115) concedes that the sample size involved in his study was not powerful enough to preclude a Type II error, or 'false negative', in some aspects of the statistical analysis.

Experiences from other healthcare related programmes

With limited insight into the educational experiences of students with non-traditional academic backgrounds emerging from the OT literature, the chapter turns briefly to contextualise the OT experience with those of other healthcare-related disciplines. It is important to note, however, that differences in the characteristics of various health and social care professions and the students they attract, and the content and delivery of pre-registration programmes, may limit generalisation from one professional group to another.

<u>Entry profiles</u>

Physiotherapy education is akin to that of OT in some respects, including the domination of white middle-class women in the profession, the reliance on NHS funding, and the straddling of HE and healthcare contexts. Unlike OT, however, physiotherapy programmes have historically been significantly over-subscribed. This situation has tended to be managed by increasing academic entry criteria, an approach which has created tension with widening participation strategies (Mason and Sparkes, 2002a). Reviews highlight limited representation within pre-registration physiotherapy programmes of mature students and those from minority ethnic groups, patterns which are attributed to the culture and stereotypes of the profession (Mason and Sparkes, 2002b; Sparkes and Mason, 2002).

Medical education has faced similar challenges, with under-representation of students from minority ethnic groups, students from sixth form and FE colleges and those from lower socio-economic groups. While it has been suggested that physiotherapy educators prioritise clinical over educational research (Sparkes and Mason, 2002), there is published evidence of efforts to diversify the medical student population (Angel and Johnson, 2000; Osbourne, Stephen

and Lumsden, 2003) and to recognise the value of the experiences that students bring to their medical education (Newman and Peile, 2002).

Academic performance

Exploring admission and progression trends, Green and Waterfield's (1997) survey of thirty pre-registration physiotherapy programmes in the UK and the Republic of Ireland secured a 53 percent response rate and identified a general increase in the numbers of students admitted with non-traditional academic backgrounds, a mature student intake of approximately 33 percent per annum and an attrition rate of approximately one to two percent. In considering the exit awards of 505 students, the study found no statistically significant difference between those awarded to students with non-traditional academic backgrounds (including Access, BTEC, overseas and 'other' qualifications, although not including previous degrees) and those entering with more conventional qualifications, results which mirror the findings of Howard and Watson (1998), Howard and Jerosch-Herold (2000) and Shanahan (2004) in OT education.

Non-traditional student experiences

A very small-scale survey exploring the characteristics and experiences of mature students who constituted a minority group studying physiotherapy in Dublin suggested that they were not dissimilar to mature students generally with regard to the challenges they faced. The rate of financial problems represented the most dramatic difference between mature and younger respondents in this study, and reflecting a now familiar theme, other responsibilities were noted to impact on the time mature students had to commit to studying (Woodbyrne and Young, 1998).

Trotter and Cove's (2005) qualitative exploration of the experiences of first year students on a single, unidentified healthcare programme focused on a cohort in which approximately eighty percent were mature students. This imbalance created a fractious environment in which, unusually, it was the younger students who found effective integration challenging and experienced a high rate of withdrawal. Although much of the literature has focused on the need to ensure that mature students are welcomed and provided for, this study emphasises that rather than privileging one group over another, the focus should be on ensuring that the needs of all student are recognised and accommodated to the greatest degree possible.

With a wide range of academic entry qualifications and diverse student demographics, attrition in nursing education is identified as a long-standing problem which can be linked to many of the issues raised in the general educational literature, and to some apparently more discipline-specific issues such as shift patterns (Taylor, 2005). A single-site questionnaire

survey of mature students studying for a nursing diploma identified that, along with issues related to childcare, personal relationships and sustaining household duties and hobbies, over 71 percent of respondents identified financial concerns as contributing to the difficulties encountered on their course. Of particular concern were those costs associated with fieldwork (Lauder and Cuthbertson, 1998), an issue also raised in the OT literature (Canterbury Christ Church University College, 2003). Respondents further identified that they found the course emotionally demanding, which the authors suggest may have been related to the financial, domestic and family problems faced, but which arguably might also be linked the very to nature of professional roles for which the respondents were being educated.

Like OT, nursing is numerically dominated by women, and Steele, Lauder, Caperchione and Anastasi (2005) suggest that continuing gender inequalities exacerbate the role conflict and competing demands faced by female students. Their qualitative exploratory investigation of the problems faced and coping strategies employed by mature Access to Nursing students, not unexpectedly, identified problems centring on financial and academic issues and the challenges of balancing the return to education with family and work commitments. Reflecting findings in the OT literature (Shanahan, 2000), a primary academic issue was participants' fear and anxiety about what was expected from them together with the demanding expectations they held of themselves. Similarly, Kevern and Webb's (2004) study of female nursing students' experiences highlighted the shock of academic and practical realities which were largely unanticipated and generally more demanding than students had expected. Participants in this study were highly motivated and endured significant changes to and challenges within their personal and social lives, but, as noted in the OT literature (Shanahan, 2000), their commitment to succeed in what they perceived as their 'last chance' also exacerbated their fear of failure (Kevern and Webb, 2004 p.300).

Students often need to negotiate the cumulative impact of multiple challenges (Kevern and Webb, 2004; Steele et al., 2005) presented by the academic and home environments, two equally 'greedy institutions' (Kevern and Webb, 2004 p.303; Macdonald and Stratta, 1998). Reflecting findings in the OT literature (Craik and Alderman, 1998; Shanahan, 2000), nursing students in Kevern and Webb's (2004) study considered their maturity an advantage, while Steele et al. (2005) were able to identify more specifically the benefits of time-management and organisational skills afforded by maturity and life experience. Like Shanahan (2000) in the OT literature, both of these studies highlighted the importance of emotional, financial, social and educational support from family (including children), friends, peers and tutors, although Kevern and Webb (2004) also reported participants' somewhat contradictory needs to rely on friends for often unreciprocated support and to distance themselves from friends to prioritise study. Other identified coping mechanisms were the maintenance of a positive attitude and acceptance of the trade-off between current difficulties and perceived longer-term benefits for

individuals and their families (Steele et al., 2005) and recognition of the personal growth achieved along the educational journey (Kevern and Webb, 2004).

Widening participation and the culture of higher education

It is evident from exploration of the literature thus far that for many students, getting to university is an achievement in itself (Clegg et al., 2006), and that while there is a lot to be gained, non-traditional entrants have to contend with a variety of significant challenges that can have a marked impact on their performance, retention and experiences. It is also increasingly evident that many of the challenges faced by students from non-traditional backgrounds stem from the pervading culture of HE, which remains very much oriented towards its traditional white middle-class student population (Read, Archer and Leathwood, 2003). HE as an institution has not changed a great deal even if its student demographics have, and its long-established culture and middle-class values effectively resist inclusivity (Burke, 2005).

In the move from elite to mass HE in the UK, it is mature students, those with non-traditional entry qualifications, from working-class backgrounds and from minority ethnic groups who have come to represent the 'masses' (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003). Although participation amongst the targeted eighteen to thirty year-old age group has increased, much of the expansion has been driven by school-leavers aged between eighteen and twenty-one years (Elliott, 2003), and by those from more affluent families (Franklin, 2006). Effectively, participation has increased to a much greater extent than it has widened (Gilchrist, Phillips and Ross, 2003) so challenges to the dominant culture have been slow to manifest and have had limited impact thus far.

With its origins lying in not only economic, but social justice imperatives (Naidoo, 2000; Osborne, 2003), widening participation is more complex than simply widening entry to HE. Tinto (1993 p.205) observes that:

> In accepting individuals for admission, institutions necessarily accept a major responsibility to insure, as best they can, that all students without exception have sufficient opportunities and resources to complete their courses of study should they wish to do so.

In the context of widening participation, the implications of offering non-traditional students access to HE do not end, but begin with the point of entry (Bamber and Tett, 2001; Osborne, 2003), yet the literature highlights that the educational environment students typically encountered can in itself present an obstacle (Sambell and Hubbard, 2004). Initiatives focusing on inducting students into the expectations and requirements, and therefore the

culture of HE (see for example, Maguire, 2001; Watson, 2005b) are doubtlessly well-intended, but arguably risk perpetuating the expectation that it is the student, not the systems and practices of the institution, that needs to change (Liang, Kuo-Ming and Robinson, 2005; Macdonald and Stratta, 2001; Tett, 1999). As a consequence, the power of the dominant culture tends to be reinforced as the new-comers are moulded into the required from.

With the literature suggesting that students from non-traditional backgrounds are likely to be poorly prepared to study in HE (May and Bousted, 2004; Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998; Yorke, 2001a) and that they both require and seek more guidance (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Thomas, 2002), it is easy to see how they have come to be pathologised and blamed for problems encountered. There is, however, evidence to suggest a growing recognition of the depth and complexity of the issue accompanied by a movement away from this deficit model towards greater recognition of the role played by institutions themselves in determining the success of their students (Greenbank, 2006b; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Sambell and Hubbard, 2004; Thomas, 2002).

Competing priorities of teaching and research

Funding mechanisms operating within HE in the UK draw a distinction between the functions of research and teaching and generally afford a higher status to research, indeed the standing of a university within the sector is dependent upon its research reputation. Together with the financial incentives offered by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), and in future, the Research Excellence Framework (REF), this generates a compelling call to prioritise research which is suggested to have a significant impact on the quality of teaching (Naidoo, 2000). Escalating demands on staff time, declining staff/student ratios, the need to perform well in the RAE/REF and the comparative lack of reward for teaching as opposed to research excellence, limit the human resources available to support students at the very time when numbers are increasing, as are the complexity and diversity of the issues students face (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Sambell and Hubbard, 2004; Thomas, 2002; Thomas et al., 2002).

The policy goals of maintaining world class research within universities and promoting widening participation would seem to be in tension (Jary and Jones, 2003; Naidoo, 2000). The sometimes profound changes to the culture of institutions that are advocated in order to fully embrace widening participation are unlikely to be easily or rapidly achieved (Thomas, 2002). The valuing of research over teaching, coupled with the requirement to demonstrate, via performance indicators, student success and progression in the shortest possible timeframe, significantly stifle the development of an environment in which HE can become more inclusive (Naidoo, 2000).

Accommodating the widening participation agenda

The literature suggests a broad distinction between 'elite' and 'mass' universities, with the 'old', prestigious universities having higher proportions of school-leavers and middle-class students, and 'new', post-1992 universities having higher proportions of mature and working-class students and those from other groups previously excluded from HE (Franklin, 2006; Osborne, 2003; Thomas and May, 2005; Yorke, 2001b). Within this two-tier system, non-traditional students and 'new' universities are ascribed lesser status than traditional students and 'old' universities (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003). Franklin (2006) found evidence that mature Access students were aware of this status hierarchy and that, despite often being sceptical about the value of new universities, most avoided institutions they considered to be 'too' prestigious. On the other hand, the non-traditional students in a study by Reay et al. (2001b) prioritised over league table positions the degree to which they felt they would 'fit' with existing student populations. The degree of fit was related to class, race and academic ability, which had the potential to generate tensions when individual and institutional characteristics were aligned on some, but not all, features. For those from minority ethnic groups and working-class backgrounds, it was new universities that often provided the greatest opportunity to fit in with others 'like them'.

The support requirements of non-traditional students may challenge the structure and organisation of institutions and programmes that assume their students will be relatively independent learners (Bamber and Tett, 2001). The time required to accommodate these needs may be viewed as limiting that available for staff to dedicate to research, which has the potential to impact negatively on not only the university's status and RAE/REF income (Naidoo, 2000), but on the performance appraisals of individual staff members. Highlighting the pressure imposed by the demands of research, teaching and other departmental duties, Thomas et al. (2002) identified that academic staff may feel frustrated by their inability to support students in what they consider to be an appropriate manner. Yorke (2001b) has identified that greater student diversity in new universities is often associated with increased rates of withdrawal, although it has also been suggested that the higher status afforded to teaching by former polytechnics may account for their better track records in both recruiting and retaining students from under-represented groups (Thomas, 2002). Failure to reward those universities that recruit large numbers of the targeted non-traditional students, competitive funding frameworks and variable fees and bursaries risk impeding equity and actually encourage stratification of the HE system (Brown, 2006; Naidoo, 2000).

HE will only become truly accessible to all when it develops a clear commitment to groups that have previously been excluded (Tett, 1999; Thomas, 2002). Responsibility for effectively supporting and responding to the widening participation agenda falls to the sector as a whole, to the individual institutions within it (Thomas et al., 2002), and to individual faculties and schools to ensure that an holistic, integrated strategy is developed (Thomas, 2002; Webb and

Hill, 2003). What is clear from the literature is that policies of inclusion and access will have limited impact if they ignore the broader issue of academic culture. Institutional variability with regard to culture, values and willingness to develop flexibility in approach is to be expected, but it is evident that where an institution-wide commitment to widening participation is adopted, the changes can be to the benefit of all students (Action on Access, 2003). Interestingly, the majority of the cases of good practice cited in this publication focused on the activities of 'new' universities.

With the introduction of top-up fees in the 2006/7 academic year, even greater priority has been attributed to student experiences as institutions enter the new competitive arena of recruitment and students become more consumer-oriented. It is suggested by Read et al. (2003) that this shift challenges the dominant culture and places students more centrally and influentially in the world of HE. It is equally true, however, that in the competition to attract students the market advantage gained by higher status is likely to perpetuate and increase barriers faced by non-traditional students, reducing policies designed to enhance choice to mechanisms which further narrow the 'choices' of disadvantaged groups (Franklin, 2006).

Summary of Chapter 2

The factors influencing the experiences, retention and academic performance of students entering HE under the auspices of widening participation are very complex, highly varied and often inter-related. While there is considerable overlap between the different student groups targeted by government policies and therefore potential commonality of experience to at least some extent, little attention has previously been given to explicitly exploring the educational experiences of those who enter HE form non-traditional academic backgrounds in particular.

Specifically, there is very limited insight available into the educational experiences of OT students who have non-traditional academic backgrounds. It is acknowledged that the OT student population is becoming increasingly diverse in at least some respects (COT 2003b; 2007b), and that there is no evidence of a correlation between the entry qualifications and exit awards of graduating students (Howard and Jerosch-Herold, 2000; Howard and Watson, 1998). However, while mature OT students and those with non-traditional academic backgrounds have been found to be equally as successful as school-leaver entrants (Shanahan, 2004), they are more likely than school-leavers to consider leaving the course at some stage (Wheeler, 2001). Further, there is evidence of a perception amongst students from non-traditional backgrounds that therapy courses are geared towards school-leavers and fail to provide them with adequate systems of support (Graham and Babola, 1998) and, alarmingly, that mature OT students with non-traditional academic backgrounds might at times feel that they have succeeded in spite of, rather than with the support of, their programme of study (Ryan, 2001b). A further point of note is that very few studies provide in-

depth exploration of OT student experiences during their pre-registration education, and none do so by following students through their entire engagement with their programme of study.

A theme receiving increasing attention in the literature focuses on issues surrounding the congruence, or otherwise, of the pervading culture of HE and those of the educational environments previously encountered by students from non-traditional backgrounds, the obstacles this can present and the deficit model that has evolved. The following chapter focuses on exploring the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who provides a theoretical framework which can help to explicate further issues of culture, background and the nature of experiences in varying contexts.

Chapter 3: Bourdieu - Tools for Thinking With

Introduction

My initial consultation and review of the literature provided me with a degree of insight into and a greater appreciation of some of the challenges faced by HE students targeted by widening participation policies. As Chapter 2 has highlighted, several common themes emerged, but I struggled to integrate what felt at times like a lot of phenomenological perspectives into a coherent whole. Initially, the role played by institutions was difficult to identify specifically although it was hinted at and the distinction between 'new' and 'old' universities was a recurrent theme. As my reading progressed, I began to catch glimpses of the theories proposed by Bourdieu and, resonating with my own intrinsic, if as yet poorly articulated views, I found them instantly appealing. Bourdieu provided me with a theoretical framework that enabled me to make sense of highly variable student experiences within the stratified HE sector in the UK.

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), a French social theorist, developed and employed a *theory of practice* that embodies a break with the binary philosophies of existentialism and structuralism, as represented by the work of his contemporaries Sartre and Lévi-Strauss, and the related epistemologies of subjectivism and objectivism (Grenfell, 2004). Bourdieu's extensive work spanned over four decades during which it evolved and was refined (Robbins, 1993). It is marked by the reciprocal relationship between his theoretical and empirical undertakings and by his re-conception and application of the notion of reflexivity (Grenfell and James, 1998; Jenkins, 1992).

Described as '…enormously good to think with' (Jenkins, 1992 p.11), Bourdieu's work focuses on the way that routine behaviour of individuals is largely determined by the history and structure of their existing social environment, and how their actions within their taken-for-granted social world unintentionally contribute to the maintenance of its existing hierarchies. Bourdieu is critical of conventional hierarchies of power and privilege and offers an explanation of the processes concealing and perpetuating the arbitrariness of social order (Wacquant, 1998).

Bourdieu's own social trajectory is relevant to the development of his theory. Born into a poor family in rural France, his mother's own (albeit limited) educational experience enabled her to recognise the importance of education and of leaving rural isolation to maximise life opportunities. Biographies describe Bourdieu as a bright student who progressed from a regional to a prestigious preparatory lycée (traditional State secondary school) in Paris before entering the École Normale Supérior, the peak of the academic hierarchy of French HE. He

graduated as an agrégé in philosophy before teaching in a lycée, then undertaking what was to be intellectually formative military service in Algeria. On his return to France, Bourdieu held various positions in HE, culminating in his accession to the Chair in Sociology at the Collége de France and later, the award of the highest accolade available to a French intellectual (Grenfell, 2004; Robbins, 2005).

This chapter will consider those aspects of Bourdieu's social theory that are particularly pertinent to an exploration of the educational experiences of students from non-traditional academic backgrounds studying within HE. In an attempt to remind readers of their significance, and following the lead of Grenfell (2004), I use italics to identify terms central to Bourdieu's theory but which potentially reflect meanings other than those more commonly associated with the individual words.

Epistemological break

Objectivism assumes that social reality is governed by sets of relations and forces or 'rules' imposed upon social agents, whereas subjectivism is founded upon individual representation of their experiences. For Bourdieu (1990b), the opposition between these two theoretical position is artificial and distorts the appreciation of social reality. His *theory of practice* offers an alternative approach recognising the dynamic interrelationship between social forces and individual dispositions and providing a means of breaking with the passive acceptance of society as it superficially appears (Grenfell, 2004).

Bourdieu's early work was based on his experiences and observations in Algeria and focused on the adjustments occurring between individuals' hopes, aspirations and expectations and the reality of their existing social situation (Jenkins, 1992). The model emerging proposed that realism about the future is prompted by the actuality of the present, such that what is attempted is principally that which is possible: 'subjective expectation of objective probabilities' (Jenkins, 1992 p.28). Bourdieu (1990b p.54) explains that:

> …the dispositions durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions…generate dispositions objectively compatible with these conditions and in a sense pre-adapted to their demands. The most improbable practices are therefore excluded as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable.

Higher positions within the social hierarchy of status and class afford a greater number and range of opportunities and possibilities, accompanied by elevated aspirations and an enhanced likelihood of their attainment.

Individual behaviour or practice is therefore organised and produced neither entirely consciously nor entirely unconsciously and, beginning in childhood, is linked to continuous learning about the usual patterns of social action and interaction. Bourdieu's use of a metaphor centring on a 'feel for the game' highlights the possibility of (sometimes less than conscious) strategising, based on individual skills and social competences, that reflects individual goals and interests (Bourdieu, 1990b). Thus, social interactions represent a mixture of constraint and freedom (Grenfell and James, 1998; Jenkins, 1992).

Analytical tools

Emerging from and underpinning Bourdieu's extensive work are some core theoretical concepts that are particularly useful for guiding the analysis of the issues underlying and influencing given social situations.

<u>Habitus</u>

Bourdieu uses the term *habitus* to describe the system of durable and transposable dispositions through which individuals perceive, judge and behave within and think about the world (Bourdieu, 1990b; Wacquant, 1998). It represents the unconscious patterns of being and perceiving that are acquired over the course of long-lasting exposure to particular social conditions which are shared by individuals who share similar circumstances. Robbins (2005 p.25) offers helpful insight by referring to *habitus* an individual's 'indigenous culture'. It is the filter through which the world is experienced and mediates between past and present experiences. It is structured by the patterns of the social forces that produced it and is simultaneously structuring in that it shapes individuals' behaviours, perceptions and expectations (Wacquant, 1998).

In Bourdieu's (1990b p.53) own words, *habitus* is defined as:

> …systems of durable transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.

A notable feature of *habitus* is that it is not fixed and inert, but dynamic, malleable and changeable, reflecting the influence of the social milieu, the socially constructed space, in which an individual is immersed (Grenfell, 2004; Jenkins, 1992; Wacquant, 1998). While embodying a degree of fluidity, *habitus* remains essentially durable and stable in that it establishes individual dispositions which tend to default to a range of largely unconscious responses in the face of external stimuli (Grenfell, 2004). Life experiences subsequent to the early years during which *habitus* is acquired prompt processes of adjustment between subjective experiences, *habitus*, and objective reality (Jenkins, 1992).

Field

Fields are bounded social spaces, the various spheres or arenas of life which form distinct social worlds encompassing the unique rules and established, taken-for-granted practices that are imposed, without necessarily being explicitly stated, on those who seek to enter or remain within them. While *habitus* informs actions or practice from 'within' an individual, the *field* structures practice from without by defining the range of possible and acceptable (or orthodox) actions and behaviour available to individuals operating within that *field* (Grenfell, 2004; Wacquant, 1998). *Fields* do not exist in isolation but are positioned alongside and in relation to each other, and it is at times possible to identify *fields* within *fields* (Grenfell and James, 1998), for example, the *field* of OT education within the broader *field* of HE.

An individual *field* is not, however, a level playing ground and not all 'players' within it hold equal positions. A *field* is therefore also characterised by the struggle between individual agents and institutions who seek to preserve or upset the balance of hierarchical power or distribution of *capital* within it (Jenkins, 1992; Wacquant, 1998); that is, who seek to maintain or improve their position within the hierarchy of the *field*. Like *habitus*, a *field* is not a static construct, but evolves and changes over time, on occasions resulting in an imperfect fit between *habitus* and *field* and forcing individual actions to be based on probability rather than certainty of acceptability (Grenfell, 2004). The capacity of a *field* to insulate itself from the external influences of other *fields* and to maintain a degree of autonomy may determine whether, during the course of its natural evolution, it thrives, diminishes or expires (Wacquant, 1998).

Grenfell (2004) describes the dynamic relationship and ontological complicity between *field* and *habitus*: a *field* is only realised by the expression of the *habitus* of those within the *field*, and individual *habitus* is based on the expression of the *field*. In this respect, *habitus* and *field* might usefully be thought of as two sides of the same coin and as Wacquant (1998 p.222) highlights, neither can independently determine social action. It is congruence between *field* and *habitus* that defines the legitimate thought and action of individuals operating within that social space, and 'when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a

"fish in water": it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world for granted'
(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 p.127).

Capital

Capital refers to any resource that holds symbolic value within a *field* and therefore acts as
the currency of that *field*, denoting the position of an individual within it or, more broadly,
within the hierarchy of society. *Capital* is classified into three primary forms: *economic*
referring to material and financial assets; *cultural* incorporating scarce symbolic goods, skills
and titles along with embodied dispositions such as accent, clothing and behaviour, and
social reflecting the resources accrued through membership of social groups and networks.
The significance of *capital* is its capacity to influence both social positions and trajectories by
virtue of its volume and composition (Wacquant, 1998). Crucially for this research, some
individuals will be endowed with *capital* relevant to a new *field* they enter (such as HE) as a
result the *habitus* they developed prior to entering that *field*, giving them an advantage over
others whose *habitus* is less congruent with the new *field* (Grenfell and James, 1998).

Just as the nature of the *field* evolves and changes over time, so too does the configuration of
capital valued within that field. For example, the original requirement that practicing OTs in
the UK hold a qualifying diploma was elevated in the mid-1990s to a Bachelor of Science
award, and subsequently uplifted to an honours degree. Even now, there is international
debate about the merit of demanding a pre-registration Masters degree (Alsop, 2006) as the
profession seeks to consolidate its position in the *field* of health and social care. *Capital* is
also noted to decline in value when it is more readily accessible and therefore more frequently
held (Bourdieu, 1990b p.136). It might be suggested that the uplifting of pre-registration OT
qualifications reflects just such a situation, but unmet demand and delays in meeting the
needs of service users within the scope of OT practice in the health and social care *field*
would suggest that abundance or saturation is not yet an issue.

Utilising Bourdieu's analytical tools

Capital is the medium of the *field* which is in turn actively related to *habitus*. The *field*
therefore becomes the critical mediating context between external factors and changing
circumstances and the *habitus* of individuals and institutions (Jenkins, 1992 p.86). Each
concept therefore only achieves its full analytic potential when considered in relation to the
others (Wacquant, 1998). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992 p.105) clarify the three levels of
analysis that are required in effectively utilising Bourdieu's theoretical concepts in research:

1. Putting the *field* in question into context by analysing its relationship to the dominant
   field of power within the society.

2. Analysing the structure of the *field*, the positions of the agents and/or institutions within in it and the competition for *capital* between those holding different positions within the *field*.

3. Analysing the *habitus* of agents within the *field* along with their trajectories and strategies.

Other key concepts

Central to Bourdieu's theory is the assertion that the world is *misrecognised* through an illusion that all social agents are equal. What occurs within the social world benefits some individuals at the expense of others without appearing to do so, and what is at stake is often obscured (Grenfell, 2004). *Misrecognition* refers to:

> …the process whereby power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 p. xxii),

such that the socially constructed form is taken for a naturally arising form.

Symbolic violence refers to:

> …power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 p.4),

therefore legitimising and reinforcing inequality (Wacquant, 1998). *Symbolic violence* is embodied within a *field* and is expressed through and influences individual *habitus (*Grenfell, *2004)*.

It has been noted that *fields* evolve over time, as does the configuration of *capital* valued within a given *field*. The effects of these changes on individuals operating within the *field* are not always positive, with inconsistent messages between *field* and *habitus* resulting in internal conflicts and contradictory actions or *double binds*. *Hysterisis* describes the situation where, perhaps as a result of a major crisis, the *field* changes significantly and moves beyond an individual's *habitus* such that their established dispositions are no longer able to respond appropriately to the reality of the evolved *field* (Grenfell, 2004 p.29).

Bourdieu and education

The sociology of (French) education was the primary focus of Bourdieu's attention over the course of his career (Grenfell and James, 1998). Grenfell (2004) provides an informative summary of the context of much of this work, outlining the reforms of the French education system that, in increasing access to secondary education and beyond (a notable change in the nature of the *field*), saw an increase in those able to demonstrate success through academic award (a form of *cultural capital*) and a subsequent relative decline in the value of that *capital* as represented by the prestige it held and the employment opportunities in conferred. Stratification of French educational institutions also became evident during this time. The offspring of the elite members of society were noted to draw upon their existing social, cultural and economic *capital* to apply themselves at the right time and to the right place to maximise the value of the *capital* accrued through HE, whereas the disadvantaged were left without knowledgeable support and guidance to act inappropriately, to fill vacancies in 'lesser' institutions, or to miss outright those opportunities that might have been available.

Echoing the concerns and observations underpinning the origin of the research presented in this thesis, Grenfell (2004) describes that with increasing access to educational opportunities in France, there were inevitably those whose level of academic attainment or cultural background would have previously excluded them, but who, under the new regime, found their aspirations and expectations raised, only to be dashed when they were deemed unable to fulfil established criteria for success. Bourdieu describes how the dominant culture represented in the HE *field* operated to favour those originating from social groups that already possessed, and whose *habitus* expressed, that culture (for example, the language, traditions, characteristics and beliefs) to the detriment of those, who through accidents of birth, were without it (Grenfell, 2004).

Inculcation through education

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) identify three forms of what they call *pedagogic action*: 'diffuse education' which occurs during interaction with knowledgeable members of a social group, 'family education' which occurs, naturally enough, within the context of familial units and 'institutionalised education' which occurs directly or indirectly via agents specifically mandated for this purpose. They state that:

> All pedagogic action is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the
> imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power (Bourdieu and Passeron,
> 1977 p.5).

Jenkins (1992 p.105) clarifies that in this context arbitrariness signifies that for Bourdieu, other than being of historical origin, culture cannot be interpreted in relation to any notions of

appropriateness or relative value. One form of knowledge or way of doing things is imposed and accepted as legitimate, even by those imposed upon, such that some members of the group come to be dominated by others, who may themselves be dominated within or between *fields* (Grenfell and James, 1998). In imposing and reproducing a cultural arbitrary, *pedagogic action* favours the interests of dominant groups and reproduces the power relations and therefore the social structure upon which it is based (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 p.11).

Pedagogic authority is the bestowed arbitrary power that underpins successful *pedagogic action* while remaining *misrecognised* by both its practitioners and recipients as legitimate (Jenkins, 1992 p.105). *Pedagogic work*, on the other hand, is the means of achieving *pedagogic action* and entails:

> …a process of inculcation which must last long enough to produce a durable training, i.e. a habitus, the product of internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary capable of perpetuating itself after pedagogic action has ceased and thereby of perpetuating in practices the principles of the internalized arbitrary (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 p.31).

A student's experience of *pedagogic work* provides the conditions in which the arbitrary nature of the dominant culture is *misrecognised* and taken for granted as natural and legitimate. As Jenkins (1992 p.107) summarises, 'pedagogic work legitimates its product by producing legitimate consumers of that product'.

The early years of life are the most important in the formation of *habitus* and the primary *pedagogic work* of 'family education' provides the foundation influencing how classroom messages are received, which in turn influences individual responses to all subsequent cultural and intellectual messages (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 pp.42-44). Within formal, 'institutionalised education' the dominant cultural arbitrary being inculcated is naturally reflected in definitions of academic success and achievement. Students whose *habitus* equips them with appropriate forms and volumes of *cultural capital* are therefore more likely to succeed than those whose *habitus* is further removed from and less congruent with the dominant culture of the *field* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 p.45-46).

Bourdieu and Passeron identified that any *pedagogic work* is characterised by the degree to which it is implicit or explicit. Whereas explicit pedagogy is methodically organised and articulated, implicit pedagogy involves the unconscious inculcation of principles manifesting themselves in a practical state (e.g. styles, behaviours, tastes) by virtue of the recipient identifying with the exemplar on the basis of their existing *habitus* and *cultural capital*, rather than following analysis of that which is modelled. Those whose *habitus* is less congruent with the *field* and who hold less of the legitimated *cultural capital* will therefore be less receptive to

implicit pedagogies (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 p.47) and will struggle with what is a hidden curriculum.

> An educational system based on a traditional type of pedagogy can fulfil its function of inculcation only so long as it addresses itself to students equipped with the linguistic and cultural capital – and the capacity to invest it profitably – which the system presupposes and consecrates without ever expressly demanding it and without methodologically transmitting it (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 p.99).

Language and education

Language is the medium of education and provides the mental structures which enable the development and manipulation of complex conceptual notions (Grenfell, 2004). Within academic discourse in the classroom there exists a tension between maximising the quantity and clarity of information conveyed. Differing social origins, world views and educational experiences (and thus *habitus*) between educators and learners, and even between learners, may be accompanied by differing modes of expression, which will further complicate this tension (Grenfell, 2004). The form (or structure) and content of language therefore become potential vehicles for cultural transmission which advantage or disadvantage individuals depending upon how closely their *habitus* mirrors that of the dominant culture evident within the *field* (Grenfell, 2004) and can therefore represent another means of domination.

Language is permeated by authority and the prescribed, legitimate meanings of the *field*, such that it can be seen as a discrete form of *capital* which highlights the distinction, or position within the social hierarchy, of the speaker (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Grenfell, 1998; Jenkins, 1992).The value of an individual's *linguistic capital* is measured by how closely it approximates the level of mastery demanded within the educational *field*; simple recognition of the standards of the dominant legitimate form does not guarantee its practical mastery (Grenfell, 1998). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977 p.110) observe that:

> …language can ultimately cease to be an instrument of communication and serve instead as an instrument of incantation whose principal function is to attest and impose the pedagogic authority of the communication and the content communicated.

Knowledge as capital

In the same way that language is recognisable as a form of *capital*, so too is knowledge. Knowledge about things and about how to do things, in terms of practically applied knowledge

and dispositional knowledge (e.g. how to think and talk), is a symbolic product of a social *field* (Grenfell and James, 1998 p.22). As with any form of *capital*, knowledge only holds value and power where it is recognised as legitimate by the *field* in which it is deployed, for example, where it enables individuals to recognise and identify with that modelled within implicit pedagogies. Again, as with any form of *capital*, knowledge valued in one *field* will not necessarily be equally as valuable should it be transposed into a different *field*.

Exclusion from the educational field

Bourdieu and Passeron identify examinations within the HE *field*, which are inextricably linked to dominant models of communication, as the clearest expressions of academic values and of the implicit choices of the system, adding that:

> …in imposing as worthy of university sanction a social definition of knowledge
> and the way to show it, [examination] provides one of the most efficacious tools
> for the enterprise of inculcating the dominant culture and the value of that culture
> (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 p.142).

Examinations structured to favour those students whose *habitus* is most congruent with the *field* and whose portfolio of *capital* holds greatest value is but one mechanism of reproducing existing social hierarchies by transmuting them into academic hierarchies. It is suggested that exclusion or censorship may be the most effective mode of *pedagogic action*, and further, that self-exclusion by the dominated classes is the most powerful (Jenkins, 1992 pp.105-107). Subjective expectations of the objective probabilities of using and succeeding within education generate differential disposition across social hierarchies (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Acceptance of the legitimacy of the judgements made by the educational *field* engenders perceptions amongst dominated groups that HE is 'not for the likes of us' which is evident in a propensity for self-depreciation, the devaluing of education and resigned expectation of failure or exclusion, and translates into lower levels of demand for access (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Jenkins, 1992).

The potential for transformation

Bourdieu has been criticised for being 'deterministic' (Jenkins, 1992 p.82) and might be perceived as ultimately pessimistic about the transformative potential of education, yet his own trajectory provides evidence to the contrary. Grenfell (2004 p.195) proposes that Bourdieu was able to effect personal transformation because his *habitus* changed in relation to the changes in the *field* structures in which he operated. Conceiving of *habitus* as responding mechanically to the 'rules' of the *field* is highlighted as both the commonest error in thinking with Bourdieu's tools and the very antithesis of his achievement, which was to

highlight the underpinning logic of practice operating in given social situations (Grenfell and James, 1998 p.157). As Wacquant (1998 p.218) highlights, Bourdieu's primary emphasis was on struggle rather than on straightforward, deterministic reproduction.

This term, 'reproduction', is referred to throughout Bourdieu's work and Grenfell and James (1998 p.12) draw a distinction between it and 'replication', suggesting that reproduction implies both variation and limitation, therefore allowing room for the potential for evolution and change. They offer further supporting evidence for this argument by highlighting Bourdieu's reference to both constructivism, relating to the dynamic reproduction of human activity in ever-changing contexts, and structuralism, the dynamic, relational link between objective and subjective human potential, in describing his method.

Bourdieu himself suggests that readers are mistaken to interpret *habitus* as a form of fate, highlighting that as an open system of dispositions constantly influenced by experiences, it is 'durable but not eternal' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 p.133). In earlier work Bourdieu and Passeron clearly identify the potential for change:

> …pedagogic work is an irreversible process of producing, in the time required for inculcation, an irreversible disposition, i.e. a disposition which cannot itself be repressed or transformed *except by an irreversible process producing in turn a new irreversible disposition* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 p.42, emphasis added).

They clarify, however, that:

> The specific degree of productivity of any pedagogic work other than primary pedagogic work (secondary pedagogic work) is a function of the distance between the habitus it tends to inculcate (i.e. the cultural arbitrary it imposes) and the habitus inculcated by the previous phases of pedagogic work and ultimately by primary pedagogic work (i.e. the initial cultural arbitrary) (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 p.43).

The suggestion therefore is that, while acknowledging the barriers to change presented by marked differentiation between individual *habitus* and the dominant legitimate culture evident within the *field* (as has been discussed in earlier sections of this chapter), the transformation of *habitus* remains a possibility where the degree of separation between the two is perhaps somewhat less pronounced. What remains unclear is how much difference is too much difference.

Grenfell (2007a) highlights that individuals always retain autonomy to make their own decisions, although the nature of structural homologies between *field* and *habitus* and the 'elective affinities' between circumstance and decisions predispose social structures to reproduce themselves within the context of ongoing dynamic evolution. Bourdieu speaks of 'the internalization of externality' allowing external forces to exert themselves within the logical practices of the individual. He explains that:

> As an acquired system of generative schemes, the *habitus* makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production – and only these (Bourdieu, 1990b p.55).

With the probability that experiences will tend to reinforce or confirm it (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), the potential to modify or transform *habitus* substantially therefore seems to be limited.

Deer (2003) suggests that recognition of the rapidly evolving practices of HE in the 1980s and 1990s led Bourdieu to clarify his understanding of the possibilities of social change. Despite earlier references to the 'anthropological fictions' associated with rational action theories (Bourdieu, 1990b p.47), Deer asserts that Bourdieu gradually came to concede that *habitus* and its relationship to *field* might, in certain circumstances, be superseded by principles such as rational and conscious calculation where, and only where, the social and economic conditions of an individual supported such possibilities. This point is also highlighted by Fowler (2006) who discusses Bourdieu's notion of a 'margin of liberty', which acknowledges the possibility of transformation, again, within a narrow margin. The suggestion seems to be that there is a distinction between 'seeing the game' and an individual having the capacity to actively play it to their own advantage, which relates back to their portfolio of *capital*.

Nash (1990 p.434) is critical of the lack of recognition and inadequate discussion of the nature of agents or the self in Bourdieu's theory, but does not perceive this as a necessarily fatal flaw. He proposes that in a literate society, individuals have access to ideas beyond those of their cultural community, which has the potential to raise subjective aspirations beyond those that are immediately objectively probable, or perhaps, to extend their vision of what might be achievable. To this, it might be contended that Bourdieu would counter with an observation that the reading of books (which was the focus of Nash's comment) reflects a certain *habitus* that might already make those aspirations a possibility, even at a degree of stretch. However, in considering the vast array of popular lifestyle magazines and the 'cult of celebrity' currently evident within western society, it seems not unreasonable to wonder whether this would actually constitute an entirely convincing explanation.

It is notable that the discussion around transformation to this point seems to assume a desire to change, to 'up-grade' *habitus* to fit more comfortably within new *fields* and to advance in the social hierarchy. Beyond interpretations echoing the theme of 'subjective expectations of objective probabilities' and the rejection of that which is already unattainable, there may, in fact, be examples which illustrate a player's ability to 'see the game' and yet refuse to play it beyond the limits of their own terms.

The relevance of Bourdieu to UK higher education

Learning and teaching are inextricably linked and are embedded within and influenced by the particular context and environment in which they occur (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999). An immediately attractive feature of the theoretical framework offered by Bourdieu is that it so effectively facilitates exploration of student experience within context, although it is fair to say that his conceptions of 'context' go beyond those immediately referred to by Prosser and Trigwell. With my own research particularly in mind, Bourdieu's theories also link very effectively with the goal of case study to capture the complexity of a particular context and so add meaning to the investigation's findings.

The context within which Bourdieu's theory of practice was developed, however, clearly centre on French class relations, the French education system and HE in particular. While Jenkins (1992) suggests that this undermines the general relevance of Bourdieu's arguments, Robbins (1998 p.38) highlights that his analyses of the underpinning principles and strategies of social differentiation were always offered as potentially, rather than actually, universal. Grenfell (2007a) observes that in 'The State Nobility', Bourdieu offers an implicit invitation for those in other national contexts to undertake similar analyses on their own academic *fields*, and Bourdieu himself advocates the reading of 'Homo Academicus' as a 'programme of research of *any* academic field' which would inform the understanding of the experiences of academics in other international contexts (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 p.75, original emphasis).

Reflections of Bourdieu in UK higher education research

Underlying Bourdieu's work are concerns about fairness, equality and democracy in education and a belief that the offspring of dominant social groups within society should not always be favoured (Grenfell, 2004), a concept mirrored, at least in part, in the widening participation agenda of the UK government. A number of UK-based studies and papers considering various aspects of widening participation have raised issue that resonate with Bourdieu's theories without explicitly referring to them.

A review paper by Burke (2005) highlights that HE is still very much oriented towards the middles classes (from a Bourdieuian perspective: valuing and legitimising their *capital* and reflecting their *habitus*). It is highlighted that securing access does not, in itself, negate the cultural barriers encountered by students entering under the auspices of widening participation (the potential mismatch between individual *habitus* and the dominant culture of the *field*), yet HE expects those from working-class backgrounds to 'fall in line' (Burke, 2005 p.556) and acquire more middle-class characteristics (adapt their *habitus* to more closely resemble that expected within the *field*) as a result of their educational experiences (the effects of *pedagogic action*).

Similarly, Layer (2002 p.7) expresses concern that unless universities develop strategies to recognise and work with the (limited) expansion in diversity of the student population, HE '…is merely allowing people to join a club within which they are not really welcome and in which they are unable to perform to their full potential'. This point again echoes Bourdieu's discussions about mismatches between individual *habitus* and the dominant culture of the *field*, and about the maintenance of social hierarchies via *pedagogic action*. Like Burke (2005), Layer highlights that the onus falls to students to adapt to and fit in with the established practices of HE (i.e. adapt their *habitus* to meet the demands and expectations of the *field*).

Earlier work by Macdonald and Stratta (1998) highlighted students' struggle to identify the 'rules' (the implicit, taken-for-granted practices of the *field*, which are likely to be more recognisable to those with more congruent *habitus* and appropriate portfolios of *capital*) in the early stages of their college experiences. Notably, this was followed by a sense of powerlessness as students subsequently moved into HE and sought to identify and establish behaviours appropriate to that environment, which is perhaps indicative of experiencing a further mismatch between an already adapted *habitus* and the new dominant culture in another new *field*.

In exploring working-class drop-out from HE, Quinn (2005) discusses the attitudes and judgements of some commentators who view such early departure as a foregone conclusion, and highlights the negative impact this has, not only on the expectations and actions of individual students, but on those of their home communities. Such observations are not entirely divergent from Bourdieu's concept of subjective expectations of (perceived) objective probabilities.

Along similar lines, Franklin's (2006) study explored the impact of the status of UK universities (hierarchies of prestige and status within the HE *field*, each representing potential *fields* within a *field*) on the choices made by mature Access students. He found that participants were well aware of the hierarchy and tended to avoid making applications to those institutions that they

considered too prestigious. Interestingly, Franklin also highlighted that participants were often sceptical of the quality of 'new' universities positioned at the lower end of the hierarchy. These points may be interpreted from a Bourdieuian perspective as indicative of students' awareness of their status within the 'game' and of their limited capacity to accumulate high status *capital* within it, the net result of which is the perpetuation of existing inequalities and maintenance of the dominant cultural arbitrary.

Explicit use of Bourdieu in UK higher education research

Research that is informed by Bourdieu's theory of practice has the potential to offer insights and understanding not readily achievable using other approaches (Grenfell and James, 1998 p.2). Beyond the examples of work that fit comfortably with a Bourdieuian perspective, there is an established body of work drawing directly on his theoretical framework in the context of exploring issues around widening participation in UK HE.

Describing a study considering mature undergraduate student experience, teaching and research, James (1995; 1998) highlights that a Bourdieuian approach was chosen to facilitate the interpretation of qualitative data related to student experiences specifically because of its capacity to connect the concepts of structure and agency without losing sight of either, and therefore to overcome the perceived limitations of objectivist and phenomenological approaches previously adopted in the area, just as Bourdieu had intended. Along similar lines, Longden (2004 p.121) drew on Bourdieu's work to provide a 'useful and alternative conceptual framework' to Tinto's (1993) interactionist model in the investigation of early departure from HE.

Deer (2003) uses Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *field* to develop a deep understanding of social changes in the structure of HE in a comparative study between France and England. Focusing specifically on the dilemmas involved in widening participation at an elite university in the UK, Bamber and Tett (2001) utilised Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *capital* to consider how working-class students position themselves in relation to HE, to explore their experiences in relation to the environment and to the reactions of their family and friends once they entered the elite institution.

Read, Archer and Leathwood (2003) on the other hand, utilise a Bourdieuian theoretical framework as they focus their attention on understanding data collected from a 'new' university. They propose that students who enter HE despite self-identifying as 'other' (that is, recognising at some level the incongruence between their *habitus* and *capital* and the dominant culture of the HE *field*) can be viewed as resisting the dominant discourses of academia. In choosing to attend a new university with a significant proportion of students 'like them', the authors further suggest that students are actively selecting options that mitigate

their position as 'other'. A Bourdieuian perspective that they fail to adequately emphasise is that these 'choices' reflect the limited access these students already have to the higher echelons of the *field*; subjective expectations of (and aspiration to) objective probabilities and the disregarding of that which is likely to be unavailable (or at least very uncomfortable) and therefore implicit acceptance of the imposition of a dominant cultural arbitrary broadly within the *field*.

This reality of degrees of choice is picked up, amongst other issues, by Reay and colleagues in a number of papers (Ball et al., 2002; Reay, 2003; Reay, David and Ball, 2001a; Reay et al., 2001b) that draw heavily on Bourdieu's theories in their analysis of non-traditional students' access to HE. Reporting on how a Bourdieuian perspective facilitated the exploration of mothers' involvement in the primary schooling of their children, Reay particularly argues that Bourdieu helps to keep concepts of social justice to the fore (Reay, 1998 p.71). It is interesting to note that there seems to be a reinterpretation or extension of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, in that it is applied to institutions, as institutional *habitus*, to reflect how organisations mediate the impact of individual *habitus* (Reay et al., 2001a).

Thomas (2002) and Yorke and Thomas (2003) also work with Bourdieu in considering HE student experiences, and again, they adopt the notion of institutional *habitus*. This is not, however, an interpretation that is universally accepted and personal communications with Grenfell in March 2007 highlighted disagreement with *habitus* being linked to institutions, suggesting that what is really evident is analysis of the *field*. Staying true to Bourdieu's definitions of *habitus* and *field*, and recalling the ontological complicity between the two, it seems likely that 'institutional *habitus'* might actually refer to the expression of the *habitus* of key players within the *field,* reflecting and maintaining the dominance of their own culture. An institution, after all, does not act of its own accord; it functions only through the actions of the players within it. My own research and reading prompts me to question what 'institutional *habitus'* offers that an analysis of the logic of practice of the *field* does not, and therefore what value it brings to understanding social phenomena.

Reflexivity: Objectifying objectification

A distinctive feature of Bourdieu's social theory is his insistence that the researcher continually turn the instruments of his or her investigation, the concepts of *habitus* and *field* particularly, back on themselves (Bourdieu, 2003; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This style of reflexivity is a very different concept than that conventionally associated with western scientific endeavour and is advocated to minimise representational distortions of the researched that may reflect the personal identity of the researcher and their location within the intellectual *field*, which in turn are likely to influence the type and manner of research undertaken or censor data analysis and interpretation (Bourdieu, 2003; Grenfell and James,

1998; Wacquant, 1998). Essentially, Bourdieu's concept of reflexivity recognises that researchers are entangled within and cannot be separated from the world they study and that the relationship between the researcher and the object of study is itself worthy of consideration (Grenfell and James, 1998).

Bourdieu's approach to reflexivity offers a method for individuals to understand and objectify the social position from which they construct their research, with his conceptual tools acting '…as a kind of epistemological structural mirror which can be held up not only to the individual but to the world as a whole' (Grenfell, 2004 p.199; Robbins, 1998). Having initially stepped back from the situation under investigation to achieve what is conventionally considered researcher 'objectivity', a second step back from the act of observation itself is advocated to subject the practices of the researcher to the same critical and sceptical gaze as those of the researched (Jenkins, 1992).

> Social science must not only, as objectivism would have it, break with native experience and native representation of that experience, but also, by a second break, call into question the presuppositions inherent in the position of the 'objective' observer who, seeking to interpret practices, tends to bring into the object the principles of his relation to the object (Bourdieu, 1990b p.27).

Grenfell (2004 p.185) highlights that this approach to reflexivity is not a 'bolt-on' exercise in self-awareness to be undertaken 'at some stage', but that reflexivity and the thinking tools of *habitus*, *field* and *capital* should be absorbed fully and internalised into the *habitus* of those undertaking scientific enquiry.

Summary of Chapter 3

At the conclusion of this chapter, it is evident that Bourdieu is, indeed, potentially very good to think with (Jenkins, 1992 p.11) in understanding the experiences of individuals within varying aspects of the social world. There is evidence that his core theoretical concepts of *habitus*, *field* and *capital* have been used to provide some new insights into the experiences of students in UK HE, although there is a paucity of longitudinal research which might afford the opportunity to consider if and how incongruent *habitus* is able to adapt to become more akin with that demanded of a new *field*.

By considering individuals and context, dispositions and social forces, Bourdieu's theory of practice also present a framework which fits comfortably with the case study approach of this research. His conception of reflexivity reinforces the centrality of the researcher in qualitative approaches (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998; Janesick, 2000) and the need for researchers to systematically seek to identify their own subjectivity to recognise its influences on the

research (Peshkin, 1998). The next chapter focuses on outlining further the methodology and principles underpinning the research and how the investigation was undertaken.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Design

Introduction

Exploration of the empirical literature suggests that factors influencing the experiences, retention and academic performance of students who enter HE under the auspices of widening participation are highly complex. While there is some evidence indicating that OT students from non-traditional academic backgrounds are equally as successful at graduation as their A-level counterparts (Howard and Jerosch-Herold, 2000; Howard and Watson, 1998; Shanahan, 2004), there is very limited insight available into the actual educational *experiences* of these students.

Apart form the need for educational providers to maximise the return for investments in widening participation from the public purse and to develop the health and social care workforce, it is recognised that the value and potential of education is not limited solely to its outcome in terms of academic award. With suggestions that OT students from non-traditional backgrounds may perceive inadequate systems of support (Graham and Babola, 1998), are more likely to consider leaving the course (Wheeler, 2001) and might feel they have succeeded in *spite* of their course (Ryan, 2001b), there is clearly a need to develop greater understanding of students' educational experiences. As much of the statistical evidence suggesting equivalence of outcomes emerged from problem-based programmes of study (Howard and Jerosch-Herold, 2000; Howard and Watson, 1998) and not all pre-registration OT programmes are so organised, there is a parallel need to ensure that student experiences are considered in the context of achievement data drawn from programmes that reflect their educational experiences.

Recent literature reveals that increasing attention is being given to the influence that the culture of HE, and of individual institutions, has on the experiences of students from non-traditional backgrounds. In providing a framework that considers the interrelationship between the structuring forces of the social world and individual dispositions and experiences, Bourdieu's theory of practice offers considerable potential to illuminate educational experiences within the long-established hierarchies of power and privilege that pervade HE.

This chapter will clarify the research question central to this thesis and highlight the underpinning principles and overarching methodology employed to address it. It will consider the ethical issues associated with the inquiry and provide details about how the research was designed and undertaken, including the recruitment of participants, the sources of and approaches to data collection and the processes of data analysis relating to the two empirical

studies informing the research. The chapter will finally discuss the trustworthiness, dependability and authenticity of the research findings and the nature of the contribution that they can make to existing knowledge. To acknowledge the centrality of the researcher to the research process, the discussion continues to incorporate the use of a first person perspective (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002).

Research question and aims

There is a paucity of literature providing in-depth insight into the educational experiences of OT students from non-traditional academic backgrounds, and particularly, little evidence of research capturing the experiences of those who do not successfully complete their programmes of study. With students increasingly being viewed as 'consumers' in a fee-paying environment, the onus is on HEIs to move beyond focusing simply on the recruitment of more diverse student populations, to taking active steps to provide students with a good quality experience and to support them to successful completion of their chosen course. To appreciate how to support students from non-traditional academic backgrounds, it is necessary first to develop some insight into and understanding of their experiences within the HE environment. Without such insight, any effort to enhance student support or the student experience in a focused and meaningful way is likely to be significantly hampered.

Research question

The research presented in this thesis therefore focused on the primary question:

How do OT students from non-traditional academic backgrounds negotiate the learning requirements of the HE environment?

Research aims

To address the research question, the programme of investigation was designed to:
1. Illuminate the experiences and achievements of undergraduate students with non-traditional academic backgrounds studying within a single HEI for awards granting eligibility to register as OTs.
2. Explore how the culture, nature and nuances of the HE environment influence these students' experiences.
3. Consider if and how these students' experiences change during the course of engagement with their programme of study, and what factors influence the nature of any such changes.
4. Identify lessons that might be learned from the research findings regarding facilitating the participation in HE of students from non-traditional academic backgrounds.

Although focusing on OT, it was considered likely that the research findings would offer useful insights applicable to the educational programmes of other healthcare professions and more broadly across HE.

Ontological and epistemological framework for the research

The nature of the research question, which focused on attempting to make sense of and to gain insights into experiences within a given context, called for a humanistic, interpretive, naturalistic stance to the inquiry. Such a qualitative approach facilitates the open, holistic exploration of lived experiences and individual perspectives in depth and in detail (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research holds that life is inherently complex and that the single, objective, absolute 'truth' of a situation that might be sought within the positivist paradigm fails to acknowledge that life is also inevitably experienced and filtered through the biographical, cultural and historical perspectives of each individual, including the researcher (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). As such, the paradigm accepts the existence of multiple realities or perspectives and the socially constructed nature of reality (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982).

Acknowledging the contextualised nature of experience, qualitative research takes place within the natural setting of the phenomenon concerned (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). No attempt is made to manipulate the naturally unfolding phenomenon and no prior constraints are placed on the outcomes of the research. Change within natural contexts is considered a normal and inevitable aspect of human experience and is therefore expected and accommodated, rather than controlled or considered a confounding variable within the research process (Patton, 2002).

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) explain that the many variants categorised as qualitative research share to some degree the ambition of developing an understanding of the focus of the research form the perspective of the individuals involved. Research strongly oriented towards such a phenomenological approach emphasises the subjective aspects of individuals' behaviour and the meaning they construct around events in their lives. Other traditions, such as ethnomethodology, lean towards a more structural stance, focusing on the implicit or unconscious rules and structures that govern action and behaviour (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Finlay, 2000).

In isolation, neither of these positions was likely to fully capture the complexity, nor provide a well-rounded account, of the social situation under investigation in this research. There are, however, areas of overlap and compatibility between them (Finlay, 2000) and in this regard, the epistemological break proposed by Bourdieu's theory of practice (as outlined in the previous chapter) offered the opportunity to recognise the interrelationship between social

forces and individual dispositions (Grenfell, 2004) and therefore, the possibility of a more comprehensive exploration of the research question. While a Bourdieuian approach is guided by a particular philosophical perspective and emphasises the centrality of his primary analytical tools, it is not prescriptive in terms of methodological approach (Grenfell and James, 1998). It does, however, fit very comfortably with the qualitative methodology of case study.

Case study: an overarching empirical approach

To establish an in-depth understanding of the educational experiences of OT students from non-traditional academic backgrounds, it was essential to consider the nature and nuances of the learning context. A case study methodology offered an over-arching empirical approach to the research question and a means to actively capture the complexity of the issue within its natural context and so add meaning to the findings of the investigation (Bassey, 1999; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

Case study offers a naturalistic approach to enquiry characterised by a depth of investigation and description which '…retain[s] the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events' (Yin, 2003 p.2). The aim is to capture the complexity of situations in order to understand the uniqueness of the case (Simons, 1996). In exploring the uniqueness of a particular case, the aim is to not only to describe what happens, but to try to discover *why* it happens, and therefore to contribute to a theoretical understanding which illuminates the issue (Bassey, 1999). The underlying philosophy of a case study approach fitted very comfortably with the stated research question, taking full account of the multiple drivers influencing learning on OT programmes in the modern HE environment, and with the application of a Bourdieuian framework to guide analysis.

<u>Selecting the case</u>

The nature of the learning environment varies considerably between OT schools, influenced by such issues as the philosophy underpinning and the structure and format of the programme, the design of assessments, student workloads, the learning and teaching philosophies of staff and the pervading culture of the institution, whether the institution and/or school perceives itself to be a 'teaching-led' or 'research-led' facility, the degree of tension between teaching and research output, and any aspiration to increase the national or international standing of the school or institution. It therefore becomes very apparent that no two schools will be exactly alike, but equally, that there are likely to be certain parallels that are recognisable across schools and universities.

Case study, like other qualitative methodologies, does not ask the researcher to try to 'control' variables in order to produce universally applicable generalisations in the manner seen within the positivistic paradigm. Clearly, there are so many variables in the context of HE that any attempt to control for them would be futile. On the contrary, case study embraces what is particular and unique to the case: highlighting it, exploring it, providing rich and vivid descriptions of it to facilitate unique and universal understandings (Simons, 1996).

The methodology embraces single-case or multiple-case designs (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995), although the associated trade-off between in-depth inquiry and comparison across sites is highlighted (Sturman, 1997). To capture the depth of understanding I sought to achieve, a single-case design was considered most appropriate. Within the constraints of a doctoral studies programme, there existed little scope to engage the team of researchers that would have been necessary to capture the nuances of the various contexts of multiple sites, nor would it have been feasible as a single-handed researcher to gather and analyse that amount of data independently.

There is some argument in the methodological literature that single cases in particular should be selected on the basis of being either an extreme or atypical case, or a representative or typical case (Yin, 2003). The underlying principle supporting this argument is that the rarity or commonplace nature of the case will generate understanding of particular interest. While extreme or unusual single-case studies are not ill-suited to disciplines such as medicine where opportunities to investigate rare clinical events may be few and far between, this rationale did not resonate with the ambitions associated with this research, nor the stated research question.

The concept of identifying a 'typical' case, on the other hand, had overtones of the positivistic paradigm with an emphasis on representativeness and generalisability. The capacity of case study research to contribute to the body of knowledge will be discussed later in this chapter, however the issue of 'typicality' prompted some interesting questions, not least, typical of what? With the wide range of issues contributing to the learning environment, it seemed unlikely that a single school or institution would ever be 'typical' on all counts. Simons (1996) in fact warns against compromising the case study approach by attempting to accommodate positivistic principles and instead advocates embracing the uniqueness of individual cases as a vehicle to understanding the complexity of the human experience. Similarly, Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1980 p.51) argue that '…case studies are *always* unique, and uniquely embedded in their real world situations' (emphasis added).

As a university lecturer employed within a school providing pre-registration OT education, a pragmatic decision based on ease of access was taken to focus the case study within that context. Hereafter, the school will be referred to as 'the Neville School', and the institution in

which it is sited as 'Mackellar University'. The decision to anonymise the School and the institution will be discussed later in this chapter, along with the complexity, drawbacks and benefits of being an insider-researcher.

Classifying the case

The methodological literature identifies a variety of descriptions and conceptions of the forms that a case study might adopt. Bassey (1999), for example, identifies theory-seeking and theory-testing case studies in which the focus is on a particular issue rather than on the case itself, and story-telling and picture-drawing case studies which provide narrative and descriptive analytical accounts respectively in order to facilitate interpretation. In Bassey's terms, this study initially represented an example of a theory-seeking case study which aimed to understand student experiences within the given context, but as it progressed, it shifted in focus towards theory-testing, in that it employed a Bourdieuian perspective in an attempt to understand and explain student experiences. Arguably, it might simultaneously be described as a descriptive case, in that it has provided in-depth insight into a phenomenon about which little was previously known.

Yin (2003) describes exploratory case studies which aim to develop questions or hypotheses to be addressed in subsequent studies, and explanatory case studies which seek to examine operational links between the 'how' and 'why' of the situation. There is a degree of overlap between these definitions and Bassey's (1999) theory-testing and theory-seeking, with this research initially providing an example of what Yin would describe as an exploratory case study before shifting towards endeavouring to explain student experiences.

Stake (1995) conceives of case studies as instrumental, in which the research focuses on the particular case as a vehicle to understanding a certain issue, or as intrinsic in which situations are studied because they are inherently interesting. The investigation presented here could be deemed simultaneously to reflect both of these categorisations. It was in this very context that I first became aware of and interested in the challenges encountered by students from non-traditional academic backgrounds, which lends itself towards Stake's 'intrinsic' definition. However, my objectives developed beyond looking closely at something of innate interest, to incorporate a desire to constructively use the insights gained to develop my capacity to facilitate the participation in HE of students from non-traditional academic backgrounds and to share the findings with others who might be in similar positions. The case could therefore also be described as instrumental, particularly as there were other case study sites, for example other schools in other universities, which might have been selected to achieve the same end.

Authors such as Bassey (1999) and Simons (1980) also identify evaluative case studies which focus on judging the worth of educational policies, programmes, projects or systems.

While this research aimed to provide insight that might, in future, inform decision making regarding educational practice within the particular and similar contexts, it was not focused on evaluating any aspect of the programme, rather on exploring the experiences of the students.

The categories suggested by different authors provide various complementary perspectives of this research and illustrate the initial aims and subsequent progress of the investigation presented. Stake (1995) helpfully addresses earlier concerns surrounding the call to identify a 'typical' or representative case by not only highlighting the dilemmas associated with selecting typical or atypical cases, but emphasising that the researcher's primary obligation to maximise what can be learned from that one case. He argues that a good quality instrumental case study is not contingent upon the researchers' ability to defend the typicality of the case.

Defining the boundaries of the selected case

A characteristic feature of a case study approach is that the case in question is conceived of as a focused, integrated, bounded system (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995) which defines the singularity or focal point of the research. These boundaries are conceptual rather than purely physical and are closely related to the research question. They are necessary to ensure that a sufficiently full understanding of the case can be achieved without the researcher being overwhelmed by potentially limitless sources of data that might detract from the heart of the matter.

The case considered in this research centred on a specific cohort of students with non-traditional academic backgrounds who were studying on the full-time undergraduate OT programme in the Neville School at Mackellar University. It is considered to be neither a typical nor extreme case and incorporated:

- Students who met specific inclusion criteria (as outlined later in this chapter), with the aim of including those who withdrew or suspended from the programme.
- A specific focus on the *educational* experiences of these students as they engaged with their programme of study.
- A temporal component, in that a longitudinal approach was taken to follow students through the entirety of their pre-registration educational experience.
- Exploration of a range of policy, operational and marketing documents produced by the Neville School and Mackellar University that illustrated how they conceive of and represents themselves and that guide their educational practices and decision making.

Despite focusing on a bounded system, a case study offers a degree of flexibility to enable the researcher to focus on emerging key issues (Adelman et al., 1980; Stake, 1995). Early

conceptualisations of the likely boundaries of the case do not preclude the possibility of boundaries shifting somewhat in the light of insights gained during the study, while still maintaining a focus on the critical essence of the case. This concept fitted very comfortably with the exploratory nature of this research; in considering an area that had received scant attention in the literature, it was always conceivable that a limited understanding of the issues faced by students had been developed at the outset, making the value of such flexibility quite self-evident.

An appealing characteristic of a case study methodology is its ability to capture multiple perspectives of the issue under investigation (Simons, 1996). As will be outlined in the following chapter, early ambitions to directly incorporate the perspectives of policy makers, policy implementers and/or educators in addition to those of individual students proved impossible to fulfil as a result of substantial structural and organisational changes that occurred within the Neville School during the time the research was being undertaken. However, as in any educational setting, the perspectives of key staff associated with the case clearly have a marked effect (whether directly or indirectly) on the learning experiences of students and are therefore reflected in the data collected via other sources.

Stake (2005) exemplifies the potential of diagrammatically representing the case to help to conceptualise its nature. Figure 4.1 illustrates the bounded case examined in this research together with key surrounding drivers and influences that impact upon it. Many of these have been outlined in preceding chapters, and will receive further attention and explication in the chapter that follows.
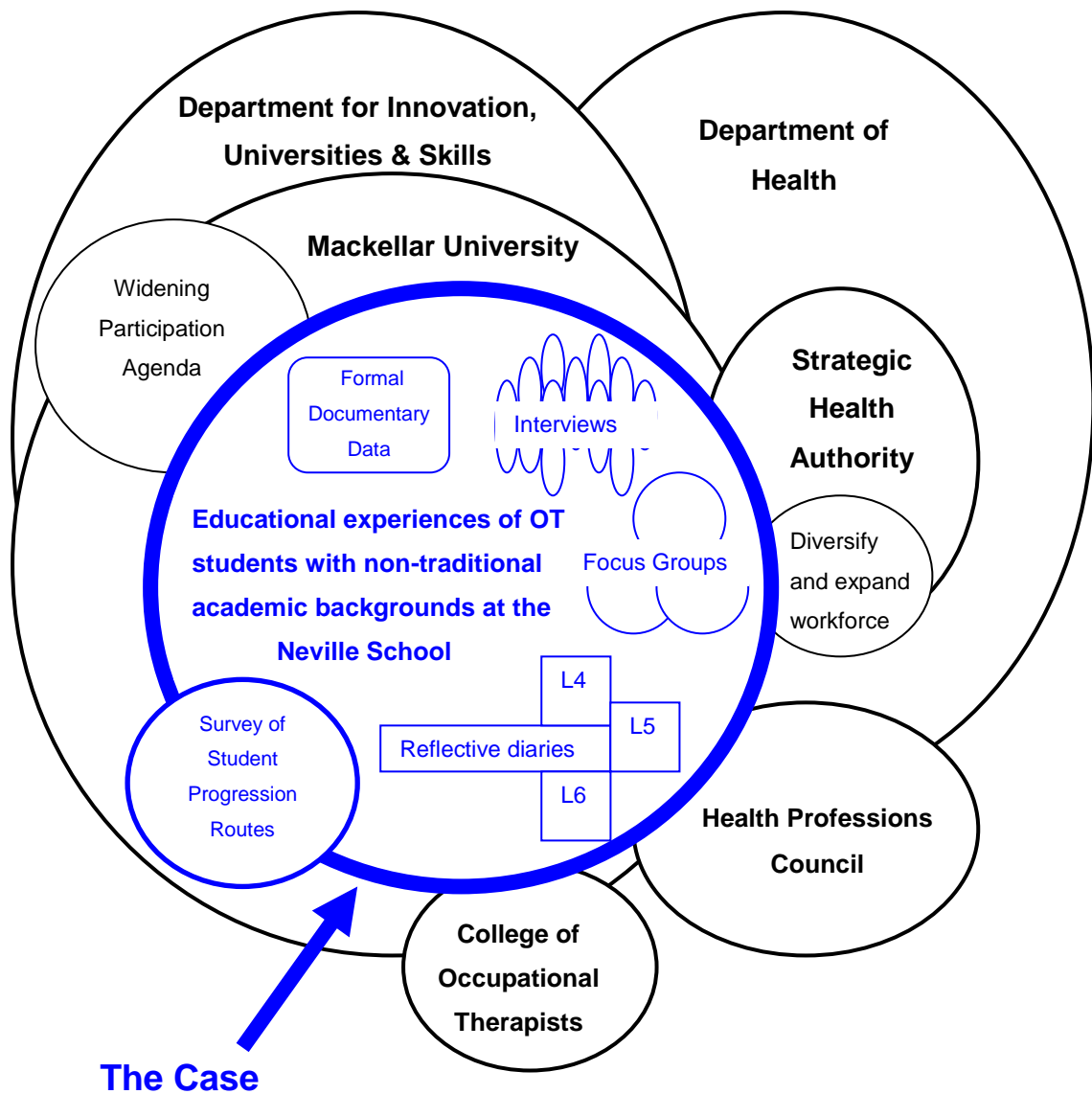
Figure 4.1: Defining the Case

Figure 4.1 also highlights the sources of data that informed the case study which will be outlined in more detail in the sections below, although it is appropriate to clarify the role of the 'Survey of Student Progression Routes'. Not only does this arm of the research add to current knowledge by offering insight into patterns of student progression and achievement in a modular programme (unlike those of Howard and Watson (1998) and Howard and Jerosch-Herold (2000) which pertained to a programme centred on problem-based learning), but it provides the case study with additional contextualising information by:

1. Examining trends in the general demographic characteristics of students commencing the full-time undergraduate OT programme in the Neville School at Mackellar University.

2. Examining trends in the number of students with non-traditional academic backgrounds commencing the programme.
3. Examining the progression routes and exit awards of OT students with non-traditional academic backgrounds compared to those of traditional A-level students.

As the progression routes study involves data from students from traditional and non-traditional academic backgrounds, this aspect of the research straddles the boundaries of the case in Figure 4.1, but nonetheless provides important information that adds to the depth of understanding.

Gaining access and ethical approval

Permission to approach the staff (although this was not subsequently taken up) and students involved in the full-time undergraduate OT programme in the Neville School at Mackellar University was sought and granted by the Director of Education and Head of OT (see Appendix 4.1).

Ethical approval was granted for the research by an internal ethics committee at Mackellar University in two parts: a survey of OT student progression routes and a study of non-traditional OT students' educational experiences (see Appendices 4.2a and 4.3a). Mackellar University subsequently granted both studies sponsorship under the terms of the Department of Health Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care (2001) (see Appendices 4.2b and 4.3b) and professional indemnity insurance (see Appendices 4.2c and 4.3c).

Subsequent sections of this chapter will identify where they relate specifically to either one of these arms of the research.

Ethical considerations

Gaining ethical approval for the two studies comprising this investigation did not, in itself, ensure an ethical approach to the research as it subsequently unfolded, sometimes in unpredictable and unexpected ways; ethical considerations were an ongoing feature of the research (Bramley and Chapman, 2008; Sin, 2008). In contemplating and addressing a variety of ethical concerns relevant to this research, decisions were frequently guided by the COT's Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (2005), Professional Standards for Occupational Therapy Practice (2007a) and Research Ethics Guidelines (2003a), and by the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004). However, ethical considerations are more than abstract procedural issues and the relevance of situated ethics extends well beyond the boundaries of

research or even professional guidelines. In the context of this investigation, ethical considerations were very much embedded within the relationships that informed the research. The fact that I was positioned as an 'insider-researcher' is an important feature of this research and how its findings should be interpreted. This fact raised a number of challenges and dilemmas which, along with additional ethical issues pervading the research, will be considered where appropriate in other sections of this chapter and those following. It is, however, appropriate to highlight some major considerations at this point.

<u>The relationship between the research and the researcher</u>

The methodological literature regularly highlights the centrality of the researcher to the research process in which they effectively constitute the main instrument of data collection and analysis (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998; Coffey, 1999; Janesick, 2000). As a researcher's subjectivity or the essence of who they are can never be removed, discarded or contained, the data that are sought and gathered and the way they are analysed and understood is always filtered through the lens of their individual values, belief systems and the amalgamation of their own life experiences. With this in mind, Peshkin (1988) argues that individual researchers must systematically seek to identify their own subjectivity to know who they are and what they bring to the research. There is a need to be aware of the extent to which personal experiences, values and beliefs enhance the capacity to understand and how far they may colour interpretations and risk impoverished analysis (Kiesinger, 1998). As the subjectivity of the researcher has the potential to influences the choices made at every turn, it is important that self-awareness be developed from the outset of research rather than after the event (Peshkin, 1998).

As illustrated and discussed by Bochner (1997), we all inhabit multiple worlds (e.g. my academic, professional/clinical and personal worlds) through multiple, complex and often contradictory fragments of our identity (King, 1996). While the presence of these multiple selves allows the possibility of viewing my research, amongst other aspects of my life, from multiple perspectives (Holly, 1993), this was only achievable if, as part of the initial break with the object of research discussed by Bourdieu (1990b p.27), I was able to develop a level of self-awareness that identified and understood the many selves within me. Peshkin (1998) encourages the development of enhanced personal insight in this regard through formal and systematic monitoring of the self. My attempts to do so have been enlightening, and I have come to recognise how different aspects of my self may serve both as strengths and potential limitations in my undertakings.

Aware that it is important not only to recognise and understand, but to explicitly articulate how my values, perspectives and selves interact with my research (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994; Richardson, 2003), I discuss and reflect upon my position within my research and my

experiences of undertaking it at relevant points in later chapters. From my own perspective, the aim of such reflexivity was to better understand where and how I was situated and the perspectives that I brought to the research, and in so doing to identify where my self and the research are intertwined, not to 'eliminate' subjectivity but to manage it and avoid muting the voices of participants in the research (King, 1996; Peshkin, 1998). In keeping with the adoption of a Bourdieuian perspective and as outlined in Chapter 3, my reflections incorporated turning the tools of my investigation back on myself to consider my own *habitus* and its relationship with the *field* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Reflections are intertwined with later chapters to foreground my position and enable readers to make independent judgements about how subjectivity may have influenced the research and therefore how findings might be interpreted and applied (McKeever, 2000; Richardson, 2003).

The researcher and issues of power

As an OT Lecturer within the Neville School, I possessed a priori insight into the culture and nuances of the School that facilitated and informed the research. As a member of academic staff, I did not hold a significant position of power within the hierarchy of the School, but certainly would be perceived to have held a position of power in relation to student participants in both arms of the research (Sin, 2008), which necessitated careful consideration regarding how potential participants in the research were to be approached and subsequently engaged with.

Recruitment to the *student experiences study* was undertaken during the period when university places were being accepted by students who were to enter the School as a new cohort; a period when students may be particularly vulnerable and keen to be viewed as willing, enthusiastic and motivated. In upholding the ethical principles of justice and individual autonomy (Sin, 2008), it was important that potential participants were presented with information regarding the study in a way that genuinely enabled them (to the greatest extent possible) to make independent decisions regarding participation without feeling coerced or morally obliged to participate. Initial contact with in-coming students was therefore made on my behalf by the School's OT admissions tutor as an intermediary already known to potential participants and not directly involved with the research.

The admissions tutor (a) identified potential participants according to explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, (b) forwarded them an information pack regarding the study and (c) hosted an information session held for those who expressed an initial interest in the study. Details of the inclusion/exclusion criteria, the information pack and information session will be outlined in more detail in the participant recruitment section of this chapter. Avoiding making direct approaches to potential participants myself meant there was more scope for those who were uninterested to simply not respond to the invitation without perceiving negative repercussions;

indeed, of the 26 students who were invited to participate, only sixteen responded, and of those, only fourteen ultimately participated in the *student experiences study*.

The *progression routes study* considers data drawn from four consecutive cohorts of OT students at the Neville School. This study was introduced separately to each cohort by the Head of OT at the beginning of a timetabled session. I was available outside the room with the intention of entering only at the students' request to answer any specific questions that emerged, but in the event, did not actively contribute to any of these introductory discussions. Following each discussion, the Head circulated a group e-mail to the cohort to ensure that those students who had not been in attendance were aware of the study and how to become involved in it should they so wish (see Appendix 4.4a). Although it may be perceived that the Head wielded even more power over students than I did, the process of recruitment employed (which, again, will be outlined in detail in the relevant section of this chapter) made it possible for students to elect not to participate without ever having to directly deal with me or the Head, an option which some chose to take up.

Potential participants in both arms of the research were categorically assured that their participation or non-participation would in no way influence the manner in which they were treated within the School. I took active steps to ensure that none of the potential participants of the *student experiences study* were allocated to me as personal tutees and worked hard to consciously identify and delineate when I was involved with a participant as a lecturer/tutor, and when I was involved with them as a researcher. It was important to me that I treated all students as equitably as possible, that I neither privileged nor disadvantaged participants in my research, which at times involved conscious reflection and deliberation before actions were taken. I intentionally conducted all episodes of face-to-face data collection outside the School to facilitate the distinction between my dual roles by moving the research component to physical environments less synonymous with my role as lecturer. As a member of academic staff in the Neville School, I was and am inevitably heavily involved in assessments across all three levels of the full-time undergraduate programme, although the standard assessment practices of the School safe-guard students against preferential or discriminatory treatment in this area. All written assessments are marked blind against a specified marking criterion and are subject to random double-marking and presentation-based assessments are, where possible, marked by a pair of assessors who are further moderated by the relevant module coordinator. I took steps to ensure that I was never in a position in which I was solely responsible for marking presentation assessments given by participants in the *student experiences study*. Despite these efforts, I remained (and remain), as Bourdieu would have it, a powerful 'consecrator' of students' achievement (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

<u>Consent</u>

Although as a lecturer in the Neville School I have access to student records for educational purposes, to abide with the requirements of the Data Protection Act (1998), explicit consent was gained from students still registered with the School to allow me to access their records for the purposes of extracting data for the *progression routes study*. Where students had already left or suspended from the programme and were therefore unable to provide or decline consent, the ethics committee gave approval for another member of School staff, who in the course of their normal duties had access to student records, to extract anonymised data from individual files on my behalf. Ultimately, I employed a member of the administrative staff to undertake this anonymised data extraction.

Students who agreed to participate in the *student experiences study* were also asked to provide explicit consent, which included the granting of permission for focus groups and interviews to be audio-recorded, before the study commenced. A number of strategies were employed to try to ensure that participants were clear, to the greatest extent possible (Mason, 2002), about what being a participant in the study would involve, including the provision of a detailed information sheet and an invitation to attend an information session prior to the study commencing which are outlined in the participant recruitment section of this chapter.

As discussed by Sin (2008) and powerfully illustrated by Bramley and Chapman (2008), participants in research do not always fully appreciate the impact that participation may have on them, and researchers do not always know in advance exactly how data will be interpreted, utilised and represented, which renders the validity of 'informed' consent given at a single point at the outset of a study questionable at the very least. This point has particular relevance to the *student experiences study*. Although the longitudinal nature of the investigation and the need to approach participants regarding involvement in the various phases effectively meant that negotiation of consent was ongoing, the issue of participants fully understanding and giving consent to the way their data was used and represented is complex and is discussed in the participant engagement section later in this chapter. In all cases, however, those who had provided consent were free to withdraw it, and therefore to withdraw from the relevant study, at any stage without being required to explain their decision; every approach made to participants regarding engagement with the next phase of the research reminded them of their choice in agreeing to do so. Two of the participants in the *student experiences study* who left without completing the programme were unresponsive to and therefore deemed to have declined requests for discontinuation interviews, and consequently to have withdrawn consent to continue to participate.

<u>Anonymity</u>

The identities of individual students involved in the *progression routes study* have been protected by identifying individual cases solely on the basis of student numbers that are not linked to the discussion of results or any related publication. Efforts have been made to protect the anonymity of participants in the *student experiences study* by identifying them, and all data associated with them, only by pseudonyms which participants were given the opportunity to select for them selves. The pseudonyms selected for the school and institution associated with the case were associated with my home country and therefore truly unrelated to the site, and headed paper has not been used in the presentation of any of the appendices.

While further efforts were made to protect the identity of individuals and the research site by avoiding, to the greatest degree possible, the inclusion of information that might make them identifiable by others, Walford (2003) suggests that such strategies are often in vain. He argues that the use of pseudonyms to protect participant anonymity is unlikely to effectively do so in relation to others involved in the research and that anonymisation of the research site is pointless when a determined or knowledgeable reader of subsequent publications will quickly identify it.

Although it is certainly true that sufficiently motivated readers of research will undoubtedly uncover the site's identity (a key point in this investigation being my insider-researcher status, which will require careful consideration regarding future publications), it is nonetheless deemed incumbent upon researchers to make every possible effort to protect identities, individual sensibilities and reputations (BERA 2004). Individual participants in the *student experiences study* may recognise each other in publications, as may some staff and cohort peers who were cognisant of the study; they may therefore to be able to guess at individual identities, but I have taken care with the presentation of personal information to limit this possibility and the cohort from which participants were drawn has not been identified.

Questioning whose needs it most effectively serves, Bramley and Chapman (2008) argue that a balance must be established between anonymity to afford participants the freedom to talk and anonymity to provide a researcher's freedom to write. Like Kelly (2009), they caution against allowing the latter to dilute researchers' sense of accountability and sensitivity to potential upset that might be caused. Rather than reflecting an attempt to conceal how I had handled their stories, my ongoing efforts to protect anonymity (combined with caution about how my emerging, incomplete analysis and understanding might be received by and influence *student experiences* participants who were still registered in the School) dictated that early conference posters associated with the research were not displayed in the School as would be the usual practice. Bramley and Chapman's discussions reiterate issues of power between the researcher and the researched, the equivocal nature of truth and the constructed nature

of representation (Fontana and Frey, 2005), reinforcing the enduring quality of ethical dilemmas in research and the need for ongoing sensitivity and reflexivity on my behalf.

Supporting participants

The ethical principle of beneficence requires researchers to protect the well-being of participants by entirely avoiding harm where it is possible to do so and by minimising harm where risks are unavoidable (Christians, 2005). Having addressed risks of exposure through sustained efforts to promote anonymity, the in-depth exploration of educational experiences in the *student experiences study* stood out as the most likely source of additional risks and the need to potentially support participants was clear from the outset. Of particular note was the possibility of adverse psychological responses to 'uncalled for self knowledge' (Sin, 2008 p.279).

The longitudinal nature of my research meant that in some instances, I knew more about the lives of some of the participants and developed closer relationships with them than I did with many of their peers. These relationships facilitated my research, particularly the degree of disclosure that participants felt comfortable with, however, there was always potential for conflicts of interest. I recognised that as a result of discussing and considering their experiences, participants might feel they would benefit from additional support and guidance, whether personal or academic. It was also conceivable that participants may have viewed episodes of face-to-face data collection as akin to a counselling or academic support session, or, having raised issues that they were dissatisfied with, that they had informed the School, via me, of a complaint or appeal.

Information sheets about the *student experiences study* made it absolutely clear that the research aimed to understand participants' perspectives regarding their situation and experiences, and offered neither a formal complaint mechanism nor a counselling/support element. This point was reiterated at the outset of all face-to-face episodes of data collection when, to maintain a distinction between my research and lecture/tutor roles, participants were advised that where appropriate they would be directed towards, and if necessary assisted to make contact with, appropriate support mechanisms such as individual personal tutors, central study skills and other support services. Although the situation did not arise, participants would also have been directed to appropriate mechanisms for registering complaints or appeals were that relevant to them.

During the course of data collection there were occasions when the provision of a small piece of information had the potential to quickly resolve uncertainty or minor questions and there were moments when I needed to make rapid decisions about whether to answer such questions on the spot (e.g. questions during a focus group about how practice placement

locations were allocated in relation to those who had caring responsibilities for children). In these instances, I made decisions to provide the information where it was a relatively straight-forward matter and where I felt it unreasonable to withhold the information as it was causing the participant unnecessary angst. On other occasions where anxiety was not evident but the issue could be readily resolved, I forwarded relevant information to the participant after the episode of data collection (e.g. identifying where to access referencing guidelines). For more significant issues or queries, participants were advised about how to access other appropriate sources of information and/or support (e.g. contacting the Learning Differences Centre regarding access to a Disabled Student Allowance). However, there was still tension between my researcher and lecturer roles when, for example, a participant asked to discuss feedback I had provided on a written assessment that I had marked (blind). Although initially disconcerted, I resolved that I would normally readily agree to such request were the student not a participant in my research, so there was no reason to do otherwise on this occasion provided I was mindful of the duality of our relationship.

Generally, face-to-face data collection did not present any significant issues regarding the need for immediate student support. On two separate occasions when different participants became distressed, I immediately stopped audio-recording to allow them time to recover and decide whether or not to continue. While on both occasions the participants were happy to do so, had this not been the case, they would have been given the opportunity to decide whether or not the data already collected during that session could be used.

Security of data

Hard copies of academic records consulted during the *progression routes study* were examined only in the School's secure record room. All data associated with both arms of the research were kept in locked storage to protect the anonymity of individual participants and no actual names were associated with any of the data collected. Raw data was accessible only to my research supervisors and myself and following completion of the study, is stored in accordance with the University's current policy.

Recruitment of participants

Having identified the case and defined it as the unit of analysis (Patton, 2002 p.228), it was necessary to recruit to the individual studies comprising and informing the research.

Progression routes study

The need to obtain explicit consent to access information in individual student files was instrumental in deciding the number of cohorts included in the progression routes study, as

was the need for each of the cohorts to have completed, or had the opportunity to complete, their three-year programme of study. On this basis, four cohorts were invited to participate.

With the study aiming to explore patterns of recruitment in the Neville School and any differences in achievement between students from different academic and demographic backgrounds, it was appropriate to invite all students in each cohort to participate. Students were advised that no active participation on their part was required and that investigation would centre solely on data drawn directly from their student files (e.g. entry qualifications, age at entry, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background, any points of failure, suspension or withdrawal, final degree mark and exit awards – all of which will be clarified later in the chapter). Students who, after a period of contemplation, were willing to allow data in their files to be included in the study were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix 4.4b). Following the invitation to participate, which, as previously outlined, was issued by the Head of OT at the start of a timetabled session, any signed consent forms were left with the lecturer running the session who later passed them on to me. Alternatively, they were passed directly to me after a period of time sufficient for individuals to have made a decision regarding willingness to participate.

Student experiences study

The purposive sampling utilised in this arm of the research was designed to identify information-rich participants whose characteristics and inclusion would illuminate the research question (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002). All students entering the full-time undergraduate OT programme with the identified cohort were invited to participate in the student experiences study on the basis of the following criteria:

Inclusion criteria:
- First year students aged eighteen years or over, with
- Non-traditional academic backgrounds (e.g. AVCEs, HNCs and HNDs, BTEC qualifications, Access Diplomas, Foundation Degrees, etc.), or
- A-level qualifications achieved as a mature student (i.e. aged 21 years or older).

As non-school leavers, this last group are also considered by the literature to have non-traditional academic backgrounds.

Exclusion criteria:
- Students meeting the above criteria but repeating all or part of year one of their programme at recruitment.
- Students meeting the above criteria but with previous experience of studying in an HE environment.

- Students meeting the above criteria who were foreign nationals.

The two initial groups identified for exclusion would have at least in part encountered the transition to and experience of learning within the HE environment, which would be likely to influence their perceptions and experiences on a subsequent occasion. The latter group might encounter particular challenges when entering a foreign education system and, potentially, a very different broad cultural context.

While any sample recruited on this basis would be homogenous in the sense of all coming from 'non-traditional academic backgrounds' (Patton, 2002), I was very aware that, as became evident in the literature review, shared characteristics on one measure provide no guarantee of commonality on others. Mindful of the risks associated with mistaking the inclusion of participants with a range of relevant characteristics for statistical concepts of representativeness (Mason, 2002), I was aiming, where possible, to include participants with a gender mix reflecting the ratio evident in the cohort, a variety of the entry qualifications regarded as non-traditional, and a variety of age ranges, incorporating those aged 18-21 years (the more traditional age for entering university), 21-25 years ('young' mature students) and those over 25 ('older' mature students). The rationale for these aims was based on acknowledging the complexity of the factors influencing student experiences and my desire to consider the experiences of students with non-traditional academic backgrounds in a broad sense. However, I took no active steps during recruitment to formally stratify the sample (Patton, 2002), which may have been a more realistic option were there a bigger pool of potential participants to draw from.

This study did not employ theoretical sampling as it is understood in the grounded theory tradition, with ongoing recruitment of participants who might most usefully inform the research as it progressed (Charmaz, 2000). I did, however, use the more general conception of theoretical sampling, what Patton (2002 p.238) calls theory-based sampling, in an attempt to ensure that recruitment was theoretically meaningful and built in characteristics and criteria relevant to the research question (Mason, 2002). In keeping with the relatively small sample sizes typical of in-depth qualitative research (Patton, 2002), I aimed to recruit to this longitudinal study a minimum of eight to ten participants. This figure represented approximately one third of the number of potential participants that, based on figures from previous cohorts, might typically be expected to register on the programme.

Based on the above criteria, invitations were issued to potential participants in the student experiences study by the School's OT admissions tutor via information packs sent to their home address after they had accepted a place on the full-time programme. The information packs comprised a covering letter introducing the study, an information sheet outlining the nature of the study and what was involved, a reply slip which potential participants were

asked to complete if they were interested in being involved and a stamped, addressed envelope for return of replies (see Appendix 4.5a-c). Returned reply slips were addressed to me to minimise inconvenience to the admissions tutor.

Students who returned the reply slip indicating their interest in participating were invited to attend an informal meeting hosted by the admissions tutor. I was present to provide an opportunity for potential participants to meet me and to have any queries about the study addressed. At this meeting, details of the initial focus groups (i.e. the focus of the discussion, the times, locations and approximate duration of a number of possible focus groups) were made available. Towards the end of the meeting, I left to allow potential participants to make independent decisions regarding whether or not to participate in the study. Those who were willing to do so were asked to sign consent forms (see Appendix 4.5d) and to provide an indication of which of the focus groups would be most convenient for them to attend. Consent forms and focus group preferences were collected and returned to me by the admissions tutor. Interested students who were unable to attend this meeting were offered an alternative, more convenient time to meet with the admissions tutor and I, or to ask questions before making a decision about whether or not to participate in the study.

Sources of data and approaches to data collection

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) highlight that while no specific method or practice available to the qualitative researcher is privileged over another, the value of utilising multiple methods is. There are no prescribed data collection methods or approaches to analysis unique to a case study approach (Bassey, 1999) and although it is located within the qualitative paradigm, the methodology encourages the employment of an array of tools deemed most appropriate to answering the research question, regardless of the tradition from which they originate (Simons, 1996; Yin, 2003). Indeed, Yin (2003 p.8) proposes that 'case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence'. To answer the research question explored in this thesis, prolonged engagement with the case throughout the three years of the undergraduate programme was supported by multiple data sources and multiple data collection methods.

Focus groups

Focus groups are described by Wilkinson (2003) as informal group discussions between a small number of people, normally four to eight, which are 'focused' on a particular topic or set of issues. Patton (2002) argues that it is a mistake to conceive of focus groups as anything other than *interviews*, but agrees that they offer a flexible method of data collection which is not fixed to a specific theoretical framework. I selected focus groups for the early phase of data collection in the *student experiences study* to help orient me to the expectations that I

considered likely to influence participants' experiences (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas and Robson, 2001), including rationale and motivations for entering HE and for studying OT, previous educational experiences and how confident and well prepared participants felt as they commenced their studies. The use of focus groups in this phase also served to aid the development of interview schedules used in subsequent phases (Flick, 2002).

The researcher's role in focus groups is that of a facilitator posing questions, encouraging discussion and participation by all those involved, not controlling, leading or directing (Bloor et al., 2001; Wilkinson, 2003). Discussions between focus group participants serve to trigger memories, stimulate debate, facilitate disclosure and generally encourage more comprehensive accounts of the issue than might be possible in one-to-one interviews (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005; Wilkinson, 2003), without the need to reach any sort of consensus of opinion (Hollis, Openshaw and Goble, 2002; Patton, 2002). While focus groups might be perceived to inhibit free expression of (particularly divergent) opinions, in this instance I did not consider the subject matter contentious and felt there were potential benefits associated with disclosure amongst participants with similar backgrounds and experiences of education (Hollis et al., 2002; Patton, 2002) and in relation to the creation of an environment which de-emphasised my role (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005) at the early stages of the inquiry.

The literature informed the topic guide that I developed to facilitate group discussions, the escalation of ideas and the eliciting of diverse views (Flick, 2002; Hollis et al., 2002) (see Appendix 4.6a). Each focus group opened with a commentary focused on setting the scene, outlining the purpose and establishing the tone of the discussion. Ground rules were established which included agreement that personal details and any sensitive material would not be discussed outside each group (Hollis et al., 2002; Wilkinson, 2003). Language used in the guide was selected carefully to avoid jargon or overly-complex words, and key, open-ended, non-directional, single-dimension questions were supported by various probes to prompt richer detail in discussions (Flick, 2002; Hollis et al., 2002). The topic guide was designed to funnel the discussion from more general towards more specific issues. It was not used rigidly, but served as an aide memoir to ensure that all areas of interest were addressed while allowing the development of a relaxed environment in which participants might feel able to talk freely. To draw each focus group to a close, participants were each asked to highlight their key message for me, before I provided an overview of the course of the discussion, thanked participants for their time and contributions and provided information about follow-up subsequent to the group (Wilkinson, 2003).

Recognising my need to practice and develop skills in facilitating focus groups and the need to test the appropriateness of topic guide developed (Hollis et al., 2002; Wilkinson, 2003), a pilot focus group was run with volunteers drawn from the preceding cohort at the end of their

first year of study. This timing necessitated a somewhat different focus to the discussion as participants were looking back over their experiences rather than focusing on their expectations. It did, however, eliminate the need to reduce the pool of potential participants for the full study and allowed time for careful reflection on the experience and the feedback received from the participants to help develop my questioning and probing skills in particular.

Focus groups were aligned with the commencement of the programme to try to capture expectations that were, to the greatest degree possible, uninfluenced by initial experiences. Originally, I had aimed to recruit sufficient participants to populate three focus groups to permit analysis of commonalities and differences amongst the groups, while avoiding the potential for polarisation of opinions that may occur if only two groups are convened. Ultimately however, recruitment warranted only two focus groups. The first was held before participants commenced their studies, but a family bereavement necessitated that I delay the second until the day after formal teaching had begun.

Each participant attended only one focus group and to avoid the environment most commonly associated with participants' roles as students and my role as a lecturer, both were held in a private, pre-booked room on the Mackellar University campus, but outside the Neville School. The rooms were arranged so that we sat around an appropriately sized table and other furniture was moved to the sides. A range of light refreshments were served in an effort to help create a relaxed atmosphere and as a small gesture acknowledging that participants had volunteered to give up their time to speak to me. At the beginning of each session, participants were asked to provide some demographic information (see Appendix 4.6b). To gain an understanding of the usual patterns of employment and education in individual networks, participants were also asked to diagrammatically represent their immediate family (e.g. parents, siblings, partners, children and extended family if relevant), indicating the level of formal education each had attained at that point and the nature of their employment, if any (Bloor et al., 2001). I reminded participants that they were in control of the nature of and how much or how little information they chose to provide, and that providing any information at all was entirely voluntary. I elected to gather this information in a written format to reduce the number of questions posed during the groups (Flick, 2002) and because I believed it would help to orient the participants to the focus of the groups by encouraging reflection on their own situations. In fact, both activities served well as ice-breakers that prompted early discussion and comparisons between the participants of each group.

Neither of the focus group lasted longer than one hour and forty minutes and, with participants' consent, both were audio-recorded. A research assistant (a role fulfilled by fellow research students), who sat separately from the main table, recorded non-verbal behaviour and participant interactions to help me identify individual speakers when I later transcribed the

recordings in full and to help contextualise the analysis of these transcripts (Patton, 2002; Wilkinson, 2003).

Reflective diaries

Recognising that reports of incidents, or reports of responses to or thoughts about incidents, provided some time after the event do not necessarily correspond to the version that might be formulated at the time (Clayton and Thorne, 2000; Patton, 2002), I asked participants to maintain reflective diaries during the course of their involvement with the *student experiences study.* As their programmes already involved a substantial workload, the diaries were not intended to be an onerous task, but to provide a mechanism for contemporaneously capturing accounts of any educational experiences that participants perceived as somehow significant or meaningful to them. Reflective diaries served as an independent source of data and, having read them ahead of interviews, they enabled me to formulate individually relevant prompts to remind participants of experiences since resolved and how they felt at the time.

In the period shortly after the focus groups, I provided each participant in the *student experiences study* with a bound, hard-covered notebook to use as their diary if they chose, although some elected to maintain electronic versions. I emphasised that diary entries could be as frequent or infrequent as individuals felt appropriate and that they were free to choose what or what not to include (as recommended by Clarke and Iphofen, 2006). Participants were advised that entries might focus on anything that was of importance to them, including achievements and challenges, highlights and lowlights and anything in between that *they* considered relevant and/or important. Examples of the sorts of entries that were recorded included how participants felt about settling into their studies, how they felt about preparing to submit their first essay or to sit their first exam, the experiences they had while on practice placements, how they felt about receiving assessment feedback, and how becoming an HE student had impacted on other aspects of their lives.

Participants made their diaries available for me to copy (or forwarded them to me electronically) at regular intervals throughout the study: just prior to their first one-to-one interview, at the conclusion of semesters one and two in their second year, and just prior to their second one-to-one interview towards the end of their third year of study. I typed verbatim (or formatted) all diary accounts into a consistent electronic format to enable them to be analysed with the assistance of appropriate software packages.

Semi-structured interviews

While it is possible to observe behaviour, it is not possible to observe feelings, thoughts or how people understand or organise the world. Patton (2002 p.348, emphasis in original)

highlights that '[t]he fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing is to provide a framework within which respondents can express *their own* understandings in their own terms'. I chose individual semi-structured interviews for subsequent episodes of face-to-face data collection in the *student experiences study* as they permitted individual experiences and perspectives to be considered in the context of personal circumstances and in much greater depth than would have been possible via focus groups or periods of observation. It was assumed that the perspectives of participants were meaningful, knowable and held significance and reality for them beyond the interviews, although I also acknowledge that meanings were negotiated within the socially situated context of the relationship between me as the researcher and each individual participant (Fontana and Frey, 2005; Mason, 2002; Smith, 1995).

The choice of semi-structured interviews reflects my understanding that participants are more likely to freely express their viewpoints in relatively open, rather than highly structured interviews (Flick, 2002), while wishing to retain more of a focus on the area of interest than I might have gained from an open, unstructured interview (Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews ensured that while all relevant areas are explored, participants had the opportunity to introduce issues I had not previously considered, enabling them to provide a full account of their experiences, while I, on the other hand, retained freedom to follow up particularly interesting information that emerged (Flick, 2002; Mason, 2002; Smith, 1995).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at two points during the participants' studies: over a two month period towards the end their first year (April/May), and over a two month period towards the latter part of their third year (March/April). I selected these timings to afford the opportunity for the maximum interval of experience to be considered without negatively impacting on participants' preparation for end-of-year assessments. The interviews focused on exploring experiences of learning in the HE environment, considering how expectations and experiences compared, how participants negotiated the transition to studying in the new environment, the various factors influencing their experiences, and how they addressed the educational demands made and expectations held of them. To avoid extending the interview time unduly, ahead of each of the second interviews, participants were sent and asked to complete a template providing some additional background and personal information (see Appendix 4.7a) to aid the development of a stronger picture of their social context and dispositions outside the immediate educational environment (e.g. school attended and age of departure, previous and current employment, any participation in clubs or societies, hobbies and social and leisure activities). Participants were again reminded that they were in control of the nature of and how much or little information they chose to reveal and that providing any information at all was entirely voluntary.

Where participants discontinued their studies, I invited them to participate in a semi-structured interview to explore their experiences leading up to their suspension or withdrawal (whether

voluntary or involuntary) from the programme, how they perceived the situation and how they viewed the future. The need to be sensitive to the nature of participants' experiences and their individual responses to withdrawal or suspension was paramount in all contact with them. Two participants discontinued their studies, but neither responded to contact nor returned to their studies.

All interviews were again conducted in private, pre-booked teaching or meeting rooms on the Mackellar University campus, but outside the Neville School. With participant consent, all were audio-recorded and I later transcribed recordings in full. I arranged interview rooms so that I sat adjacent to the participant at either side of a table corner to allow the audio equipment to be appropriately placed without introducing physical barriers between us. Again, a range of light refreshments were offered and I sought to develop a relaxed environment in which rapport might be further developed and participants might feel able to talk freely. Interviews lasted between approximately one hour and one hour and forty-five minutes and were guided by interview schedules (or guides) I had developed with reference to appropriate literature and analysis of data collected during previous phases of the study. During the interviews, I made notes for the purposes of recording particular points of interest, questions to return to at a later point, key phrases or comments from the participant, their body language, and any thoughts or ideas that came to mind during an interview (as recommended by Patton, 2002). At the beginning of each interview, I advised participants that I might make some notes and explained that their primary purpose was to aid my memory. I made no attempt to conceal any notes from the participant but was mindful of what I wrote and how it might be interpreted.

The preparation of the interview schedules necessitated giving careful consideration to their focus, the generation, phrasing and sequencing of questions, the prioritising of areas to be pursued in greater depth and how I could make the best use of the valuable time volunteered by participants (Smith, 1995). I opened all interviews with preliminary comments intended to set the scene, outlining the purpose of the interview and establishing the tone of the discussion. As for the focus group guide, the language used throughout was selected carefully to avoid jargon or overly-complex phraseology. The interview schedules funnelled the discussion from more general towards more specific issues, but I used them flexibly to accommodate exploration of pertinent issues emerging from the reflective diaries of individual participants and to respond sensitively to the natural course of each interview (Flick, 2002; Mason, 2002; Smith, 1995). The questions posed were open-ended, uni-dimensional and neutral to maximise their clarity and to provide participants with the opportunity to express their own perspectives in their own words. Questions were supported by various prompts and probes to help deepen my understanding of individual experiences and perspectives (Flick, 2002; Patton, 2002). At the conclusion of each interview, participants were given the opportunity to add anything they felt was important but had not previously had a chance to

say, before I provided a summary and overview to check that I had understood the essence of their experiences and finally thanked them for their time and engagement. The interview schedule utilised in each round of interviews can be found at Appendix 4.7b-c.

In recognition of the skills required to maximise the success and effectiveness of semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection (Flick, 2002; Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002) and to trial the initial schedule I had developed, a pilot interview was undertaken prior to the first round of interviews. To maximise the extent to which the pilot might reflect the actual data collecting scenarios, a volunteer was sought and secured from amongst those students who had been invited but elected not to participate in the student experiences study. I took time to reflect carefully on the pilot experience and the feedback provided by the volunteer participant which proved fruitful in highlighting practical issues (such as printing the interview schedule on two pages rather than one to allow simultaneous, unobtrusive scanning of both pages) and in developing my interviewing skills (such as how information was mirrored back or summarised for participants throughout the interview to avoid introducing new language that they subsequently adopted).

Documentary data

Documents constitute a rich source of information about organisations and programmes (Patton, 2002) that can offer valuable contributions to case studies (Merriam, 1998; Prior, 2003). In this instance, documents offered insights that would otherwise have been unobtainable within the resource limitations of this research. Some authors discussing the use of documents as research data hold that 'documents' include a wide variety of sources, including transcripts of interviews and focus groups, even reflective diaries (Mason, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Prior, 2003). References to documents contributing to this case study are understood more narrowly and refer to those selected from the range formally produced by the Neville School and Mackellar University because they illustrated how each conceive of and represent themselves (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007) or because they represented 'working' documents that guided educational practice and decision making. While the majority were available in the public domain, documents were accessed with the permission of the Director of Education and Head of OT, and included:

- University/School mission statements
- University/School strategic plans
- University/School marketing material
- University Widening Participation Strategy
- Student Entitlement Declaration
- Academic Regulations and Assessment Guidelines
- Programme validation documentation

- OT programme specification
- OT programme admissions criteria
- OT programme timetables
- Individual module profiles

I reiterate that the case study was not evaluative, so the documents were not used in this sense. It is also clear that an entire study could reach beyond even rigorous content or discourse analysis and be centred on in-depth analysis of how these documents were socially constructed and situated, the relationship between their production, consumption and content, the manner in which they are used (Gomm, 2004; Prior, 2003). However, in relation to this case study, a more diffuse, non-quantified content analysis was employed to complement other methods of data collection by providing background information which helped to develop insight into and evidence of the context in which participants' experiences were located (Merriam, 1998).

Although documents cannot contribute 'biased' input to the study in the sense of actively seeking to respond according to anticipated research agendas in a way that might be true of participants, it cannot be assumed that documents are transparent representations of the School or the University as they are all produced with a particular audience, purpose and context in mind (Mason, 2002; Prior, 2003). Many will have be drafted several times involving input from several people (Gomm, 2004), they may or may not be complete and/or accurate (Patton, 2002), and there is a need to acknowledge the potential disparity between documented assertions or aspirations and practical reality. Nonetheless, providing representations and images (Mason, 2002) of the School and the University, documentary data offered insight into their pervading cultures, values and assumptions (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007) and some of the practical experiences of students and participants and contributed strongly to the development of the following chapter.

Progression routes data

Within the OT educational literature is a small body of evidence suggesting that the academic achievements of students from non-traditional backgrounds are not statistically different from those of more traditional students (Howard and Jerosch-Herold, 2000; Howard and Watson, 1998; Shanahan, 2004). It is noteworthy, however, that the majority of this evidence has emerged for a programme centred on problem-based learning which represents quite a different educational approach to the modular programme offered by the Neville School. The stated aims of this naturalistic case study inquiry clearly focus on the exploration of student *experiences* during their education, but in recognising that experiences and academic outcomes are related although different constructs, I felt it appropriate to support and contextualise the qualitative data (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003) with a broader overview of

academic performance and achievement that reflected more accurately the educational experiences of the research participants.

Johnston (2003a) highlights that examinations of the performance of students entering university under the auspices of widening participation should not be undertaken in isolation, but in the context of the performance of *all* students. To achieve this, a survey of the background characteristics, academic entry qualifications, progression routes and exit awards of full-time undergraduate OT students at the Neville School was undertaken. Such a quantitative approach is appropriate for considering patterns of enrolment and withdrawal, and the relationship between variables such as entry qualifications and exit awards (Barbour, 1999). As previous research of a similar nature has failed to take into consideration those students who fell short of graduating (Howard and Jerosch-Herold, 2000; Howard and Watson, 1998; Shanahan, 2004) it was central to this study that data from such students be included.

Four cohorts of student records were examined to maximise the representativeness of the data considered (Hicks, 2004). With individual students' consent, I retrieved and examined their academic records. Where it was not possible to seek consent as students had already withdrawn from or suspended their studies, anonymised data was extracted from student records on my behalf by an administrative assistant already employed within the Neville School. Where consent was not forthcoming from students who were still active within the School, their records were not consulted and their data was not included in the survey. Information extracted from student records was recorded on a template (see Appendix 4.8) which was prepared following consultation with a medical statistician and included:

- Student identification number
- Year of entry
- Age at entry
- Gender
- Entry qualifications
- Any academic or clinical failures during the programme
- Details of any periods of suspension or withdrawal
- The final degree mark (where appropriate)
- Any exit award received

Data regarding socio-economic classifications and ethnicity was not held on student records within the Neville School, but was extracted from centrally held files on my behalf (in an anonymised format where appropriate) by central information management services at Mackellar University.

Data were collected on an ongoing basis over a period lasting approximately three and a half years, with data relating to progressing students updated following examination boards held in the Neville School during this period. Extracted data were quantified and coded according to a scheme developed with the guidance of a medical statistician and entered for analysis into the software package SPSS14.0 (© 2005 SPSS Inc.), which was subsequently upgraded to SPSS16.0 (© 2007 SPSS Inc.).

Data analysis

Analysis was not an activity undertaken solely at the conclusion of data collection, rather, it was an ongoing process underpinning the entire longitudinal case study (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Qualitative data were analysed following each point of collection in the *student experiences study* in order to inform subsequent episodes of data collection, and each period of data analysis built on, elaborated and developed the analysis previously undertaken. Patton (2002) highlights that such an approach reflects both the fluid and emergent nature of naturalistic inquiry and potentially enhances the quality of data collection and analysis, provided that initial interpretations do not confine future analytic possibilities. He further observes that no universally agreed 'rules' guiding the process of qualitative data analysis exist, save the need for the researcher to 'do [their] very best with [their] full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study' (Patton, 2002 p.433).

The processes that guided the analysis of data gathered in both the student experiences and progression routes inquiries during the course of the case study are outlined below. Once data collection had ceased, the analyses of qualitative and quantitative data were drawn together (taking full account of the specific context of the case as will be outlined in Chapter 5) to integrate them into a meaningful account and analysis of the educational experiences of OT students from non-traditional academic backgrounds in the specified case study setting.

Analysing data from the student experiences study

I transformed all of the data emerging from the various stages of the student experiences study into consistent text-based formats that were passed to individual participants (as soon as possible after each data collection episode) to verify that they faithfully represented their recollection of focus group or interview discussions or the reflective diaries they had made available to me. The process of listening to and transcribing audio recordings or reading and transposing diaries offered me an early opportunity to become immersed in and familiar with the data, which built on the impressions and insights derived during face-to-face data collection and marked the initial phase of data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002).

The textual data I produced was uploaded into the software programme NVivo 7 (© QSR International Pty. Ltd.) which offers a system of computer assisted qualitative data analysis that facilitates the management of large volumes of data, and the coding and retrieval of individual segments from within it, in a much more efficient manner than might be possible by hand (Bazeley, 2007; Mason, 2002). In this way, NVivo 7 *assisted* rather than drove or dictated data analysis, enabling me to readily move between data sources, whether within the dataset of a single participant, across the dataset associated with a particular period of data collection, or across the corpus of qualitative data associated with the study.

Via NVivo 7, the textual, qualitative data were read interpretively (Mason, 2002) and analysed thematically, an approach that aimed to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within the data. Echoing the observations of Patton noted earlier in this section, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that although thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research, there is no clear agreement about what it is or how it should be undertaken. They do, however, highlight that its flexibility and freedom from pre-existing theoretical frameworks mean that it has the potential to provide a detailed and complex account of the data, to reflect participants' experiences of reality and/or to reach beneath the surface of 'reality'.

Bourdieu's theory of practice, particularly his core concepts of *habitus*, *field* and *capital* provided the framework within which data were examined and which sensitised me to particular patterns, categories and themes (from amongst a considerable range) that were evident. The approach to thematic analysis employed in this research was therefore not an example of purely inductive analysis, which relies solely on discovering patterns and themes existing within the data, but neither was it rigidly deductive in the application of an imposed theory, as it also sought out unexplained or unexpected patterns and emergent understanding (Patton, 2002). The sensitising concepts of *habitus*, *field* and *capital* were used neither to construct a pre-determined coding framework nor to dominate analysis, but to examine how Bourdieu's theory of practice might lend meaning to participants' experiences of studying as non-traditional students within the HE environment. In this regard, Braun and Clarke's (2006) concept of 'theoretical' thematic analysis, which they use to describe analysis driven primarily by the researcher's theoretical or analytical interests, offers a more fitting description of the approach taken in this research.

The process of thematic analysis involved sustained engagement with and immersion in the dataset, which enabled me to fully appreciate the depth and breadth of its content and to look behind the data for significant features that contributed to developing explanations and meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Locke, 1998; Patton, 2002). Episodes of data analysis were undertaken following each phase of face-to-face data collection. Individual participant datasets were analysed before turning analytic attention to considering the cross-section of

datasets associated with each phase. The volume of data increased incrementally as the research progressed until ultimately, the entire corpus of data was considered in the final analysis.

In the early phases of analysis, textual data were read with the aim of identifying topics or particular points of interest. These data segments were organised into meaningful groups or chunks through the allocation of initial codes, which Miles and Huberman (1994) and Merriam (1998) similarly describe as tag/labels and short-hand designations, which were assigned to various features of the data that were of particular interest to aid their retrieval. Subsequent readings and re-readings focused on applying and refining these codes in a systematic fashion across the data available at each point while I looked both for patterns in the data and for vagaries, uncertainties and ambiguities (Patton, 2002). During this phase the identified codes were examined and reformulated against original data to ensure that they genuinely resonated with the data and were not being imposed upon it. In vivo or emic codes, derived directly from terms used by participants (Bazeley, 2007; Patton, 2002), provided insight into how participants interpreted, understood and made sense of their experiences and helped to firmly ground analysis in the data, although my own interpretations are also clearly emphasised (Mason, 2002).

Clear definitions of codes and sub-codes were developed as analysis progressed and the data were revisited time and again as these definitions become more and more refined to ensure that they were applied consistently (Mason, 2002; Miles and Huberman, 1994). In reading and re-reading the data several times, I moved backwards and forwards between it and the research question, creating an interactive, iterative process to the production and development of codes that both reflected the data and addressed the primary focus of the research (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Mason, 2002; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Analysing the accumulating corpus of data as the study progressed helped to establish essential or key codes and to create a comprehensive index of related and unrelated codes and sub-codes for the purpose of further analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002).

Braun and Clarke (2006 p.82) define a' theme' as a concept that captures an important aspect of the data in relation to the research question and represents a level of patterned response or meaning within the data. To progress the analysis and to identify relevant themes and any sub-themes, each of the codes, and the coding scheme as a whole, was interrogated to identify significant points of connection or dissonance, convergence and divergence. Codes were at times cross-classified to facilitate logical analysis, and visual schema and concept maps were employed to help generate new insights (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). The identified themes and sub-themes were then held to the fore while the available data were re-visited to facilitate refinements and developments, and ultimately, to ensure coherence when revisions were no longer adding value to the analysis

(Braun and Clarke, 2006). The analytical process of gradually becoming more focused and moving from describing the data to identifying interpretive constructs and clearly defined themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Mason, 2002) enabled me to develop a deep understanding of the content and meaning of the data that moved beyond description, paraphrasing and summarising (Patton, 2002). An illustrative summary of the development of the analysis can be found at Appendix 4.9.

Patton (2002) suggests that qualitative analysis ultimately depends on the skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, diligence, analytical intellect and style of the analyst. In recognising the complexity of meaningful data analysis, I elected to initially 'practice' and start to develop the necessary skills by analysing the data collected during the pilot focus group. The experience proved immensely valuable in terms of understanding the processes involved in coding data ahead of employing the assistance of NVivo 7.

Analysing data from the progression routes study

Over a three and a half year period I collected and collated the quantitative data contributing to the progression routes study from 239 OT students who joined the Neville School in four consecutive cohorts between 2003 and 2006. With the full dataset entered into SPSS 16.0, I carefully checked that all variables for all cases were represented with a valid code, and analysed the normality of continuous variables. Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests revealed that the final degree marks, $D(195) = 0.04$, $p = .20$ (not significant), were approximately normally distributed, but with an entry threshold of eighteen years, age at entry is inevitably skewed and significantly non-normal, $D(239) = 0.25$, $p < .001$.

I analysed that data descriptively before proceeding to inferential and regression analysis, which was focused on the successive outcomes, or dependent variables, of passing at Level 4, Level 5, and Level 6 and finally the award of a 'good' (upper second or first class) honours degree. Each of these variables was measured on a dictomous categorical scale (yes/no). A further dependent variable, as utilised by previous research in OT education, is final degree mark which is measured on an interval scale but, unlike the others, captures data only for those cases reaching the threshold for award of a BSc (Honours).

To meaningfully compare mean final degree marks and to avoid violating assumptions associated with expected frequencies in logistic regressions (Field, 2009 p. 274), it was necessary to collapse some independent variables. The full range of entry qualifications was collapsed into a dictomous variable according to the principles outlined in Appendix 4.10, while individual age at entry and socio-economic background were each collapsed into three ordinal categories. Data on ethnic background was excluded from further analysis it was heavily biased towards 'White British' entrants and could not be meaningfully collapsed. The

predictor, or independent, variables I therefore utilised were:

1. Maturity at Entry: under 21 years (school leaver entrants), 21 to 25 years (young mature entrants) and over 25 years (older mature entrants).
2. Gender: male and female
3. Entry Qualifications: traditional and non-traditional
4. Socio-economic background: upper, middle and lower socio-economic groups.

Following convention, the threshold for statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. Having met the relevant underlying assumptions, sensitive and robust parametric independent t-tests were utilised to compare the mean final degree marks of students from traditional and non-traditional academic backgrounds and those of male and female students. With the assumption of equal group sizes violated (Field, 2009 p.360), it was not appropriate to use one-way ANOVAs to compare the mean final degree marks of students from the three categories associated with maturity at entry and socio-economic background; instead, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test, which is premised on the ranking of data rather than individual scores, was employed.

Rather than looking simply at correlations between individual independent and dependent variables, binary logistic regression analysis was identified as a means of determining whether the successive categorical outcomes could be predicted on the basis of the categorical predictor variables (continuous predictors could also be used in this approach), and to rank the relative importance of meaningful predictors. With no previous research considering passes at successive levels of study, a stepwise likelihood ratio approach was appropriate for this exploratory analysis (Menard, 1995 p.54). To minimise the possibility of Type II errors (in this case, failing to detect a significant effect that might be evident only when another variable is held constant) a backwards stepwise method, which commences with a model populated by all of the predictors, was utilized (Field, 2009; Menard, 1995). Non-significant contributors are subsequently removed in an interative process. Following each removal, the model is tested to ensure that it continues to adequately fit the data until a point is reached where no further amendments are appropriate.

Following the recommendations of Field (2009 p.216-219), individual cases with larger than three times the expected leverage statistic for each model were individually scrutinised. All were central to the models in that they represented male students and marked the extremes of possible outcomes across the entire programme: achieving a 'good' degree or departing without securing any award at all. All four models were examined for outliers using studentized residuals and all were found to be within acceptable tolerance limits. Cook's distances and individual DFBeta values for each case in each model were examined and no cases were identified as exerting undue influence on, or biasing, the models. Further

diagnostic procedures confirmed that the assumptions underpinning logistic regressions (i.e. linearity, independence of errors and multicollinearity) had been met in all of the models.

With the reasonable sample size involved in the study, the stepwise results should be relatively stable and therefore reliable beyond the sample. If the individual cohort sizes in the sample were larger, it would have been possible to split the data and cross-validate each model against each individual cohort to confirm the consistency of the models and therefore validate the findings for generalisation (Field, 2009 p.221). An alternative approach would be to utilise an automated bootstrapping procedure (not available in SPSS 16.0), which effectively treats the sample as a population from which hundreds of smaller, random samples are drawn. Each analysis could be repeated with each of the new samples to test the stability of the models and therefore establish their generalisability (Field, 2009 p.163).

Trustworthiness, dependability and authenticity

In qualitative research, '[t]he researcher's insight [is] the key instrument for analysis' (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982 p.27) and the setting aside or 'bracketing' of the researcher's subjectivity that is urged by some traditions (e.g. phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994 p.60) and objectivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000 p.513)) is arguably extremely difficult for any human being to achieve in entirety. Research is an interactive process that is shaped and influenced by the researcher's personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), or as Bourdieuian perspective would have it, by the researcher's *habitus*. While the possibility of achieving the complete objectivity so highly valued by the positivistic paradigm is in itself questionable, and while I recognised that there is no single interpretive truth, there was a need to guard against simply discovering that the findings of my qualitative research confirmed the political hopes, beliefs and ideologies that I brought to the investigation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Patton (2002) reminds readers that the criteria used to judge the value of qualitative research needs to reflect the philosophical underpinnings and theoretical orientations of that research. Rather than automatically judging research undertaken in the qualitative paradigm according to the positivistic concepts of validity (truth) and reliability (consistency or replicability) (Silverman, 2000), the emphasis is placed on alternative concepts that more closely reflect and are relevant to the nature of qualitative research (Finlay, 2000; Flick, 2002). Patton (2002) goes so far as to distinguish alternative sets of (related and at times overlapping) criteria reflecting different perspectives and different philosophical frameworks operating within the qualitative paradigm. Pertaining to the constructivist and interpretive perspectives, he highlights criteria of trustworthiness, dependability and authenticity.

<u>Procedural strategies</u>

The criteria identified by Patton (2002) highlight the need for methodological rigour in qualitative research. A number of strategies to enhance the quality of the research reported here permeate its design and the methods employed throughout, including prolonged engagement with the case, and thorough explanation of the methodological underpinnings of the research and the methods of data collection and analysis. Additional strategies included:

- Attending appropriate training and practicing skills via pilot studies ahead of episodes of data collection and practicing analytical skills using data generated by the pilot focus group.
- Endeavouring to create an open, honest, safe and trusting environment in which face-to-face and participant-written data was collected, which aimed to minimise the possibility that participants might consciously or unconsciously construct a biased version of their experiences that did not accurately reflect their own truth (Flick, 2002).
- Audio-recording all focus groups and interviews to avoid reliance on memory or scribbled notes to capture participants' comments and enable the generation of a full transcription of these episodes of data collection.
- Setting aside time at the conclusion of each focus group and interview for reflection, observation and evaluation in an effort to learn from each experience (Patton, 2002).
- Constantly testing and comparing analytical themes and interpretations against the entire data corpus as it developed and actively seeking examples which did not conform to developing understanding and alternative perspectives or explanations to help develop and refine themes and interpretations (Mason, 2002; Silverman, 2000).
- Regular meetings with supervisors not directly involved in undertaking the research provided valuable opportunities to be challenged and to discuss methodological decisions, theoretical positions and developing interpretations (Flick, 2002; Merriam, 1998).
- Providing a rich description of the context of the case and the *field* and illustrating interpretations with excerpts of raw data, providing readers with the opportunity to make their own judgements about the veracity of the explanations given the data collected (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2000).

<u>Triangulation</u>

Silverman (2000 p.177) defines triangulation as 'the attempt to get a 'true' fix on a situation by combining different ways of looking at it'. Triangulation in the context of qualitative research is not as straightforward as simply using a variety of methods to point towards and confirm a single reality (a notion at odds with the multiple perspectives conception that underpins much of the paradigm) (Mason, 2002). With its logic premised on an awareness that no single

method will ever adequately resolve the issue of rival explanations, triangulation therefore focuses on exploring the research question from a variety of angles in a rounded, multi-faceted way, seeking and presenting multiple perspectives through the use of multiple methods and approaches (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002). Richardson (2003 p.517) proposes adopting the concept of 'crystallisation' in preference to triangulation as a means of more adequately reflecting the multi-dimensional, complex, situated and partial understanding developed in research.

Bringing together data from several phases of collection, different types of data and that emerging from several sources reflects the efforts made to crystallise an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under consideration in this study; it represents a strategy to add depth, richness and trustworthiness to the research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Flick, 2002). Different kinds of data potentially yield somewhat different results as a consequence of different sensitivities, so the aim was not to blindly seek convergence of findings, but to test for it and to seek to understand any inconsistencies (Patton, 2002). In pursuing Richardson's (2003) analogy, crystallization incorporates recognition that what is seen in the 'crystal' depends on the researcher's orientation to it (which, from a Bourdieuian perspective, relates to the researcher's *habitus* and *field* position), reinforcing the centrality of reflexivity in any qualitative research.

Participant engagement

'Participant validation' or 'member checking' refers to the practice of going back to research participants with tentative results and refining them in the light of participants' reactions and responses (Merriam, 1998; Silverman, 2000). Mason (2002), however, questions the rationale for privileging participants' views of the validity of the researcher's interpretations, suggesting that there is no reason to assume they will be familiar with or interested in the social science conventions, operations and interpretations employed. While participants in this research had developed some insight into research approaches through their undergraduate education, it was considerably less likely that they would be familiar with Bourdieu's theory of practice, which is arguable quite complex. I was concerned that viewing interim findings and interpretations might prove personally challenging for participants, who, without a thorough understanding of Bourdieu, might misconstrue summaries as critical of or judgemental about them as individuals. Therefore, rather than asking participants to validate my interpretations, I asked them to engage in a narrower conception of participant validation by checking the accuracy of the transcripts that were relevant to them (i.e. the transcript of the focus group they were involved in, typed versions of their reflective diaries, and transcripts of their individual interviews) (Flick, 2002; Mason, 2002). Some participants responded to this request with additional comments, reflections and observations which, where relevant, were

incorporated into their data sets and subsequent data analysis, but none disputed or corrected the accuracy of the transcripts.

<u>Reflexivity</u>

Patton (2002 p.546) describes 'authenticity' in qualitative research as relating to a researcher's reflexive consciousness of their own perspective, the perspectives of others and fairness in presenting the constructions that underpin them. Reflexivity constitutes a way of undertaking qualitative research rather than simply reflecting upon it after the event (Mason, 2002). In this sense, reflexivity refers to a researcher's practice of thinking critically about what is being done and why, of confronting and challenging their own assumptions, and recognising how thoughts, actions and decision shape the research and their perception of it. Understanding and clarifying how a researcher's own experiences, background, worldview, and theoretical orientation influence engagement with the world and the research are important to establish from the outset (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Richardson, 2003).

My dual roles as researcher and member of academic staff in the Neville School afford the benefits of a priori insight into the educational environment, but may equally be deemed by some as a significant source of bias. Beyond this, there is an intimate relationship between any researcher and what they choose to study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) which needs to be examined. My initial position in relation to the research presented in this thesis is explored in the opening chapter. Viewed not as a failing, but as an essential element of understanding (Stake, 1995) and even as a resource (Finlay, 1998), my subjectivity, perspectives and relationship with the research were subject to ongoing monitoring through conscious, critical and committed reflexivity (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994; Peshkin, 1998) that was recorded in a research journal. Constantly reflecting on, questioning and evaluating the research process and acknowledging, observing and challenging my subjectivity recognised my central position in the research process (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). In keeping with the Bourdieuian perspective outlined in Chapter 3, this included employing the conceptual tools of *habitus*, *capital* and *field* to consider my own social position and the influence it had on the way I constructed and interpreted my research (Bourdieu, 2003; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and helped me to identify new understandings and useful insights (Finlay, 1998). As previously noted, elements of my reflections are included at pertinent points throughout this thesis to offer the reader insight into my perspectives and position and therefore to form their own opinion of the trustworthiness of this research.

Contribution to knowledge

By their very nature, qualitative findings are highly context dependent (Patton, 2002), but concern has been expressed by Yin (2003) about the capacity of a single-case approach,

such as that adopted in this research, to provide generalisable insights as they are understood within a qualitative paradigm. This assertion is strongly contested by others such as Simons (1996), who, while highlighting the tension between the study of the unique and the need to generalise, argues that through in-depth study of the essential singularity of a case, it is possible to reveal universal concepts by virtue of very deep understanding.

Within the qualitative paradigm, the aim is not to produce universally applicable generalisations with quantifiable degrees of certainty as expected within a positivistic framework. There is consensus amongst authors describing the case study methodology that a key feature is the portrayal of the case via rich, vivid accounts of the context (Schofield, 1993; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). The premise is that in so doing, the researcher enables readers to draw on their own experiences and innate knowledge to make judgements about the veracity of any conclusions drawn. Further, such accounts enable readers to reflect upon similarities with their own circumstances, facilitating judgements about the extent to which any findings might be applicable to that situation (Schofield, 1993; Tripp, 1985).

Although Stake (1995) suggests that single case study designs are not as strong as some alternatives for generalising, he highlights that much can still be learned. The everyday lives of most people are filled with examples of generalisations made from non-randomly selected real-life situations and from which much can be learnt (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). Insights drawn from different situations accumulate to inform the development of knowledge and understanding. A well-illustrated description of a case study that facilitates readers' vicarious experiences of that situation expands the experiences and insights from which 'naturalistic' generalisations (Stake, 1995) can be made by those individuals. It is further argued that case studies add to the body of knowledge by contributing to professional discourse in education, highlighting that they therefore have the capacity to influence teaching practice and inform policy development (Bassey, 1999).

The case study discussed in this thesis sought to illuminate the educational experiences of OT students from non-traditional academic backgrounds, including those of students who were unable or unwilling to continue their studies. The following chapters paint a vivid picture of the context and circumstances from within which data has emerged and interpretations have been made. This will enable readers to identify with the case and make comparisons with their own (or other) institutions and programmes, and therefore potentially reflect on and develop their own practice. It is not appropriate in these circumstances to seek to make absolute generalisations to all other OT programmes around the UK as the context and circumstances of these programmes will all be unique in their own way. The myriad variables that determine what occurs within a learning context render certainties and formal generalisations inappropriate (Bassey, 1999).

Summary of Chapter 4

Case study methodology offers an approach to qualitative research that embraces complexity through the way it identifies, collects, analyses and interprets data and reports findings. The methods used within this case study investigation draw upon both the qualitative and quantitative traditions, but the distinguishing characteristic of the approach is the underlying belief that the complex phenomena of human experiences are the result of multifarious interactions and interdependencies that must be considered within any effort to understand those experiences (Sturman, 1997). The in-depth, holistic perspectives developed from a rigorously conducted case study investigation offers the opportunity of unique understandings of the singularity within its context and more widely applicable universal understandings of the human experience (Simons, 1996). The next chapter focuses on describing the context and circumstances of the case.

Chapter 5: Illuminating the Case; Exploring the Field

Introduction

A case study methodology was employed in this research to capture the nuances of the environment in which participants were engaged in their pre-registration OT education. Experiences are inevitably linked to the specific and complex natural contexts in which they occur, so to generate meaning within and maximise the understanding of an exploration of participants' learning experiences, context is critical.

Bourdieu highlighted the centrality of context in his description of *fields* as the bounded spaces of social life that impose often unspoken 'rules of the game' upon the (individual or institutional) 'players' who operate within them. From Bourdieu's perspective, *fields* structure the behaviour, actions and practices, or *habitus*, of those who seek to enter or remain within them, and simultaneously reflect the *habitus* of the dominant players operating in that *field* (Grenfell, 2004; Wacquant, 1998).

This chapter will provide a descriptive account of the specific context of the case or bounded social space in which this research was undertaken. It will draw on Bourdieu's concept of *field* to illuminate the context further by conceiving of the case as a specific sub-*field* or microcosm of OT education. In keeping with the centrality of context, the chapter will consider the major external influences and drivers directly impacting upon the case. Discussion will initially focus on the broader *field* of HE in the UK and the external influences on it before shifting attention to the professional and governing bodies that influence the *fields* of OT practice and education. As far as it is possible to do so while safeguarding anonymity to the greatest degree possible, the chapter will then provide rich, detailed descriptions of the practices and cultures of Mackellar University and the Neville School to enable readers to more fully appreciate the educational experiences of participants. Further to the aim of safeguarding anonymity, institutional documents that have informed the chapter have been described but not cited in the conventional manner.

As a reminder of the various influences and drivers impacting upon the case, and to help orient the reader to the discussions in this chapter, the diagrammatic representation of the case that was introduced in the preceding chapter is re-presented here.
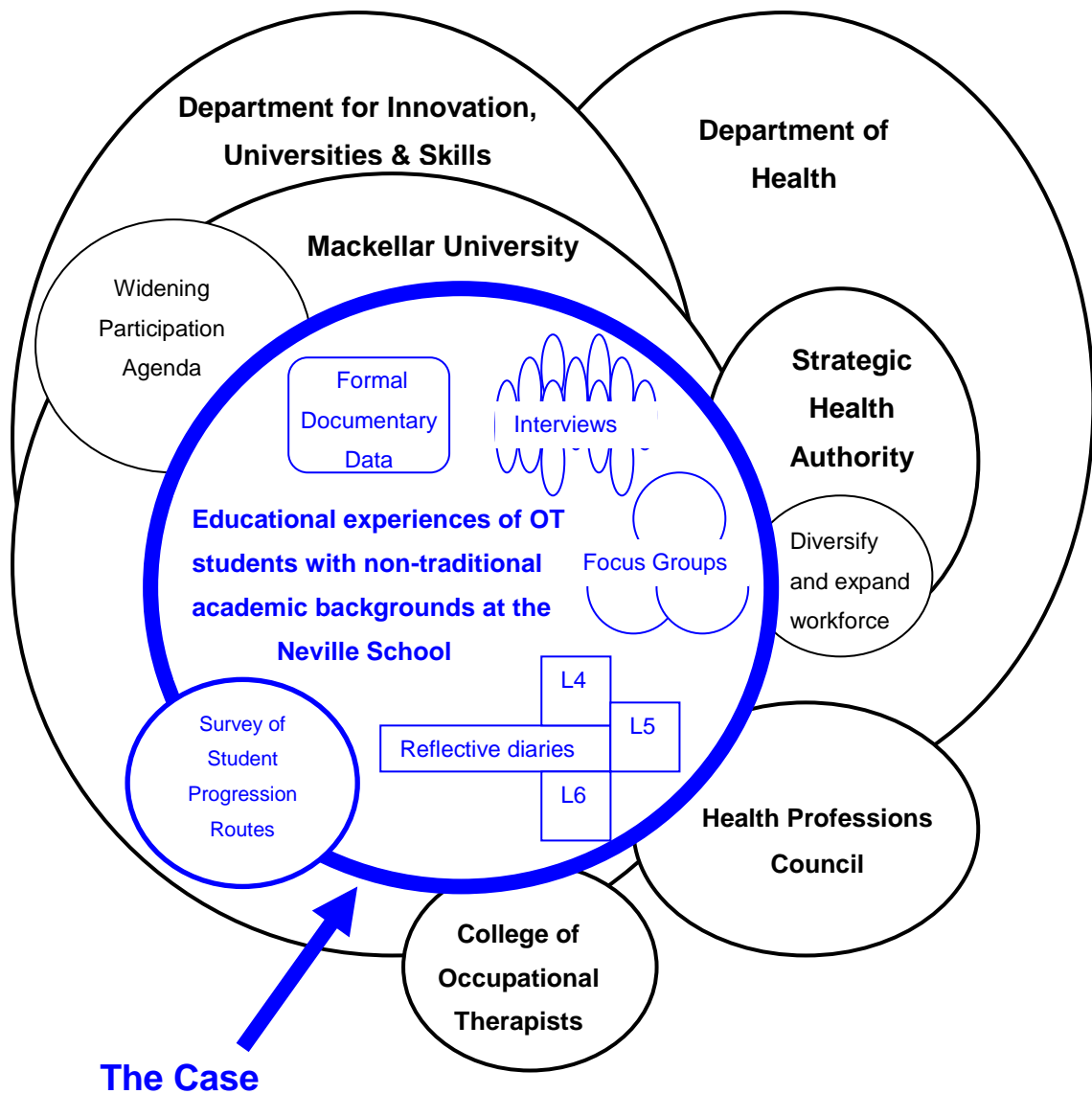
Figure 5.1: Defining the Case

Higher education in the UK

UK universities established prior to 1992 operate under a Royal Charter which outlines their overall constitution and statutes, amendments to which must be approved through the Privy Council. However, the Higher Education Act 1992 directly empowers the Privy Council to grant degree-awarding powers (Section 76) and the title of university (Section 77) to HEIs according to specified criteria (Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) 2004). The HE sector in the UK is therefore comprised of 'semi-autonomous institutions which largely define their own purpose or purposes', but the level of public investment in the sector makes it reasonable that the government seeks some clarity about what is expected in return (Select Committee for Education and Skills, 2006 p.1). Policies are developed and imposed on the HE *field* by the political *field*, specifically through what was at the time the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and its agents, the Higher Education Funding

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Councils (Layer, 2002). Naidoo (2000) and Osborne (2003) discuss the emergence of the 'knowledge' or 'information' society and the expectation that HE will contribute to developing the nation's competitive edge in the global economy, logic which incorporates the desire to increase the proportion of the population engaged in HE. They also highlight political awareness of the need to simultaneously facilitate and enhance social cohesion and equality (that is, avoid further advantaging and distinguishing those sections of society already most advantaged) and the additional role that HE could play in such a mission.

Although expansion in admissions to HE had already been in evidence for a number of years (Greenbank, 2006a; Layer, 2002; Maringe and Fuller, 2006), it was the 1997 Dearing Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NICHE) that provided the impetus for the development of the then Labour government's widening participation agenda, which was explicitly underpinned by both social justice and economic rationale (Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 2003a; 2003b). The deficit model adopted by the report suggested that the failure of students from lower socio-economic groups to access HE was based on poor qualifications, low aspirations and flawed educational decision-making (Maringe and Fuller, 2006; NICHE 1997), and its recommendations placed an emphasis on the initial aspects of engagement, in terms of the raising of aspirations and achievement, and issues associated with applications and admissions (Greenbank, 2006a). The Dearing Report became the starting point for a succession of policies and performance indicators (Naidoo, 2000) and was later followed by declaration of the Labour government's ambition to increase participation in HE towards 50 percent of those aged eighteen to thirty by 2010 (DFES 2003a; NICHE, 2005). Although considerable progress towards this ambition has been made, it is not equally reflected in all parts of the HE field, particularly within the most selective universities (BIS 2010).

Since the publication of the Dearing Report, policy developments have seen the introduction of the more holistic student life-cycle model preferred by HEFCE, which incorporates attention to issues of retention and employability in addition to the earlier aspects of engagement highlighted by Dearing, alongside recognition of the need for HEIs to move away from their traditional patterns of operation to accommodate students from a wider variety of backgrounds (Greenbank, 2006a; HEFCE, 2001; 2002; Select Committee on Education and Employment, 2001b). Mirroring these changes in emphasis, Greenbank (2006a) traces the allocation of HEFCE funding from institutional widening participation strategies and action plans (which really only constitute ambitions or aspirations), to institutional recruitment data and numerical performance indicators focusing on the proportion of students from low-participation neighbourhoods, state-education and lower socio-economic backgrounds (data which in themselves give a narrow view of institutional success in supporting these student groups), to rewarding the potentially more challenging issue of student retention.

A confounding influence on widening participation policies was bought to bear by the introduction of variable tuition fees in 2006-7, which was first suggested in the government White Paper 'The Future of Higher Education' (DfES 2003a) and made possible by the passing of the 2004 Higher Education Act. The policy of charging variable fees reflects the market values regularly espoused by the Labour government and its view that participation in HE embodies an economic investment generating a future return (Greenbank, 2006a; Naidoo, 2000; Select Committee on Education and Employment, 2001a). Despite the fact that efforts have been made to off-set the impact of this policy on the poorest students via bursaries, it is seen to sit in considerable tension with the earlier commitment to encouraging participation by those under-represented in HE, particularly those from the least privileged backgrounds.

The relationship between the *field* of HE and the broader political *field* of power appears not to be a straightforward one. While the political *field* may seek to exert its power and impose its political will on the *field* of HE in the form of policies, benchmarks and performance indicators as illustrated above, it is evident that HE also has the capacity to exert considerable influence over the political *field*. For example, Greenbank (2006a) highlighted that in the face of opposition from the majority of HEIs, the government quickly dropped its proposal that admissions be based on potential as well as achievement, and the remit of Office For Fair Access was curtailed in light of complaints that it impeded institutional autonomy.

Furthermore, the apparent lack of coherence in government policies creates space in which individual institutions can select to which policies they prioritise their attention as they negotiate their place within the *field* according to their own priorities, aspirations and strategic goals. In fact, HEFCE (2004) has acknowledged the choices to be made by institutions seeking to maintain or establish positions of distinction within the differentiated HE *field*, particularly with regard to the tension between the uptake of additional funding via tuition fees and maintaining a commitment to the philosophies of widening participation. Similarly, while highlighting the importance of the provision of high quality academic support and pastoral care to students, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds entering under the auspices of widening participation, the Labour government endorsed the rights of individual institutions to decide how much they invest in student support services (Select Committee on Education and Employment, 2001a). This situation may be interpreted alternatively as allowing institutions to concentrate on 'what they do best', or as maintaining the established patterns of power, prestige and status within the *field*.

Stratification and positioning in the higher education *field*

Clearly illustrating Bourdieu's observation that not all players hold equal positions within any given *field*, the UK *field* of HE has been differentiated for some time. The development of the polytechnic sector from the 1960s offered vocational and technical alternatives to university

education, but the binary divide between the two was dissolved in 1992 (Osborne, 2003), creating a single, stratified *field* marked by 'old' and 'new' universities with divergent reputations and functions.

Formed in 1994, The Russell Group represents a distinct sub-*field* within the broader HE *field* in the UK. The Group is seen, and in fact identifies itself, as representing the 'elite' universities, and is an association of twenty 'old' research-intensive universities whose stated aims and objectives centre on the promotion of 'the interests of universities in which teaching and learning are undertaken within a culture of research excellence' (The Russell Group, no date). The Group identifies in itself the qualities and strengths it deems necessary to compete successfully in the international marketplace for research and teaching, and therefore distinguishes itself and its members from other university players in the broader HE *field*.

In response to the formation of The Russell Group, and a further illustration of differentiation in the *field*, was the development of a coalition of nineteen smaller research intensive universities known as the 1994 Group. The 1994 Group describe themselves as 'internationally renowned, research intensive universities' who 'seek to promote their common interests in higher education' and 'respect and support [their] members' particular traits and traditions' (1994 Group, no date). It struggles for distinction and position in the *field* alongside the more prestigious Russell Group by emphasising that its members also play an important role in research in the UK.

To represent and distinguish the role and position of 'new' universities in the HE *field*, the Million+ Group that emerged in November 2007 was a re-branding and re-focusing of the Coalition of Modern Universities (CMU). CMU was formed in 1997 and was open to all post-1992 universities, although not all institutions chose to join and therefore form part of a further, non-aligned, group of universities. The Million+ Group 'pride themselves on diversity, flexibility and opportunity' and highlight that their members 'meet the challenges of our changing society, offering the flexibility and support that are necessary to broaden participation and add value to the economy'. The Group highlight that part of the rationale for choosing their new name was that it 'reminds people how influential [they] are' (Million+, 2008), a clear indication of their desire to both distinguish themselves and to challenge their reputation for holding lower status than other groups in the *field* by foregrounding the importance of their primarily social (as opposed to research) role.

These self-formed groups attempt to distinguish and advance their positions within the *field* by defining their functions differently and arguing the significance of that function. This situation is illustrated by Yorke's (2001b) examination of benchmark performance data for 2000 which highlighted a tendency for old universities to draw a greater proportion of their students from school leavers and those with higher A-level point scores, while new universities had a larger

proportion of mature students and those from the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, a distribution pattern that has changed little in recent years (BIS 2010). The Russell Group and the 1994 Group both emphasise the role of research in their mission/objective statements as markers of differentiation and distinction, and as Yorke (2001b) highlights, these old universities are better resourced than their new counterparts by virtue of greater research income, a highly valued form of *capital* within the *field*.

The RAE (which ran for the last time in 2008 and is to be superseded by the REF) represented a competitive, market-driven approach to achieving research excellence in HE through the concentrated allocation of public funds to a small number of universities (Naidoo, 2000), and the more prestigious universities such as those from The Russell Group had greatest success in winning these funds (Yorke, 2001c). The dominant *field* positions of members of this group are sustained by high levels of economic *capital* and their ability to attract and retain high quality researchers, which in turn positions them to perform well in the RAE and so maintain or extend their portfolios of valued *capital* and sustain their dominance in the *field*. The status of, and the incentives for, research activity over teaching is signalled by the fact that quality assurance processes linked to teaching were managed separately from the RAE by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and carry no additional funding. The incentives for research activity and the additional costs, including time, associated with supporting non-traditional entrants to university underline the tension and potential conflict between government ambitions to create and maintain world class universities and promote widening participation, fair access and social justice within HE. Jary and Jones (2003) and Naidoo (2000) both suggest that the likely outcome is an increasingly differentiated and unequal HE *field*, just as Yorke's (2001c) analysis would indicate, and the reinforcing of established patterns of power, prestige and status and the dominant position of The Russell Group within the *field*.

Occupational therapy in context

Pre-registration OT education is perhaps best described as a *field* marking the intersection of the *fields* of HE and professional practice (Gunter, 2002). As such, it is subject to the impositions of both of these broader *fields*. Turning now to consider the *field* of professional practice, it is evident that bodies such as the Department of Health (DH), the Health Professions Council as the regulatory body, and the College of Occupational Therapists as the professional body have a marked influence over its practices and structures.

Influences of the Department of Health

The practice of OT occurs largely, but not exclusively, within publicly funded health and social care services, and the *field* of practice is again strongly influenced by government policies,

particularly those of the DH, emanating from the political *field.* As part of the wide-ranging reforms of the NHS that commenced in the late 1990s, the then Labour government acknowledged a shortage of the human resources required to deliver its programme of modernisation (which restructured the health and social care *field*) and made an initial commitment to expanding the workforce (DH, 2000b; 1998; 2004). To meet this objective, the government called for a wider recruitment base to reflect society's cultural diversity, along with more responsive and flexible educational programmes and the provision of more effective support to reduce attrition amongst healthcare students (DH, 2000a).

The responsibility for workforce planning and development, commissioning of educational programmes and funding of education and training (for nursing, midwifery and the allied health professions) was devolved to newly established Workforce Development Commissions (DH, 2001) and later reorganised and absorbed into existing Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) (DH, 2002). Again, returns on investment from the public purse hold sway and the issue in this instance was the explicit link between expenditure and the requirement to sustain and develop the healthcare workforce by ensuring that as many students as possible graduated from the studies they registered on. To this end, the political *field,* via the DH, exerted power over the sub-*field* of healthcare education by commissioning and publishing guidance on the management of attrition (amongst nursing and midwifery students in particular but highlighting its relevance to all healthcare students) (DH, 2006) and then developing standards, including the need to demonstrate 'a commitment to promoting diversity, inclusion and equal opportunity for all' against which commissioners of healthcare education programmes could monitor the quality of provision (Skills for Health, 2007 p.14).

Influences of the regulatory body

The Health Professions Council (HPC) was launched in 2002 and replaced the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine as the regulatory body governing, amongst a list of twelve (and later thirteen) other professions, the practice of OT (HPC, 2003a). The opening of the HPC Register in 2003 meant that, for the first time in the UK, the titles used by the professions, including OT, were legally protected. The remit of the HPC includes the safeguarding of the public through maintenance and publication of a public record of appropriately qualified members of the professions, establishing and upholding standards of education, training and professional practice and the investigation of complaints made against members (HPC, no date).

Through the publication and monitoring of standards of conduct, performance and ethics which are applicable (as far as possible) to all registrants (HPC, 2003b; 2008), and individual standards of proficiency for each of the professions, including OT (HPC, 2003c; 2007), the HPC exerts a great deal of power over the structure and practices of the health and social

care *field* and the behaviour of individual professional players within it. In keeping with its remit for monitoring standards of education, the HPC also publishes and validates standards of education and training (HPC, 2005; 2009) which influence the level of qualification required to enter the Register, the admissions procedures, management and resource standards expected of educational programmes, along with curriculum, practice placement and assessment standards. Focusing largely on ensuring the fitness of graduates to practice safely within individual professions, the standards also identify the need for equal opportunity and anti-discriminatory policies in relation to students (HPC, 2009 p.6 and 10). As a result, large sections of the *field* of healthcare education are reliant upon the HPC to, in Bourdieuian terms, consecrate their programmes of study before a single student can register on them.

Influences of the professional body

The practice and pre-registration education of OTs in the UK is clearly also a matter of significance to the professional body, The College of Occupational Therapists (COT). Amongst its other roles and functions, COT works in collaboration with the DH and other bodies to promote the roles of OTs and to develop the workforce and service provision in line with identified health and social care needs (COT, 2008c). COT's (2004b) Strategic Vision and Action Plan for Lifelong Learning clearly outlined strategies that echoed and responded to the call from the DH for increased diversity in an expanded workforce of qualified and support staff. This document, and the earlier Position Statement on Lifelong Learning (COT, 2002), made explicit commitments to supporting and endorsing inclusivity and widening participation. These strategies and policies have a direct influence on the design, delivery and validation of educational programmes. Like the HPC, the College sets standards for pre-registration education for the profession (COT, 2004a; 2008) which cover such issues as programme management and resources, the curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment, and quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms. Unlike the HPC, there is no statutory requirement that programmes be approved by COT and in this regard, the HPC exerts greater overt power over the provision offered by HEIs. However, the standing and reputation of an individual programme of study and its graduates within the *field* of practice (and with potential students) would be significantly undermined by failure to achieve accreditation by COT, so the need to secure consecration from the professional body is ultimately no less significant.

The initial calls from both the DH and COT to expand and diversify the workforce coincided with a UK-wide decline in the number of applications for pre-registration OT programmes (Craik and Ross, 2003). Consequently, the recruitment net continued to be cast increasingly broadly and over the last decade there is evidence of a marked change in the profile of the UK students population (COT, 2003b), with 67 percent of the 2005 intake aged twenty-one years or older and classified as mature (COT, 2007b), and increasing numbers entering with non-traditional academic backgrounds. However, as has been acknowledged in earlier

chapters, successful expansion and diversification of the OT workforce in the UK is contingent upon not only amending recruitment processes to diversify the student population, but providing mechanisms that support and facilitate these students through to graduation. In 2005, the average attrition rate across the increasingly diverse pre-registration student population in the UK was fifteen percent (COT, 2007b), an increase from the ten percent reported for the period from 1996 to 2002 (COT, 2003b).

Although initial commitments to expand the workforce as part of the reforms of the NHS (DH, 2000b) have been tempered by more recent financial constraints in the sector (Newman, 2007; University and College Union, 2008), there is continued recognition of the need for a wider recruitment base in health and social care, and in OT, to reflect the cultural diversity evident in UK society (Fryer, 2006; Taylor, 2007).

Delivery of pre-registration education

Pre-registration OT programmes are accredited and validated, or in Bourdieuian terms, consecrated, by COT, the HPC and by the QAA, which has responsibility for overseeing the quality of academic standards (QAA, 2001). They also need to meet the requirements of their associated SHA as a key stakeholder representing the political *field*, and meet individual institutional standards. Pre-registration programmes are offered by thirty awarding universities in the UK. Although part-time, accelerated and four-year full-time routes are also available, 22 universities, including Mackellar, offer three-year full-time BSc (Hons) awards, and only three of these are situated within prestigious Russell Group Universities (COT, 2006). As indicated in the literature review, tuition fees are met by students' sponsoring SHA, which also offers means-tested bursaries.

Applications to full-time undergraduate programmes are made via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and applicants are required to demonstrate what in Bourdieuian terms is a baseline portfolio of *capital* relevant to the sub-*field* they seek to enter: minimum educational qualifications, knowledge of the *field* of practice gleaned from visits to OT practice areas, valued skills, and personal qualities or dispositions (*habitus*) compatible with the profession as evidenced in a personal statement (COT, 2006). At the time relevant to the entry of participants in the student experiences study, the various three-year undergraduate programmes on offer in the COT Careers Handbook demanded a wide variety of minimum entry qualifications, reflecting the different positions of individual programmes and institutions within the educational *field*. Five General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) passes were commonly stipulated as base-line requirements, often but not always at grade C or above, and in some cases, with a requirement to include a specified range of subjects. In addition, the expectations for more traditional students included A-level studies amassing UCAS tariff points that ranged from a minimum 180 to a much higher 300 points.

Alternative acceptable entry qualifications included an Access qualification, NVQ Level 3, BTEC/Higher National Diploma or Certificate, advanced GNVQ, AVCEs at Level 3, Scottish Highers, Irish Leaving Certificate, International or European Baccalaureate, Open University Foundation, and a lower second classification in a previous degree. In all of the statements of entry requirements, 'mature students' were commented upon separately and requirements again varied widely between institutions. Some indicated that mature students would be admitted 'on merit', while others stipulated recent academic study, including a range of those entry qualifications previously highlighted.

Entry criteria reflect both an individual programme's culture and values, or the logic of practice in that particular sub-*field*, their historical capacity to attract applicants, which may reflect (although not exclusively) their reputation and prestige, and potentially institutional directives which may relate to their struggles to maintain or gain position in the broader HE *field*. Although, as noted earlier, Russell Group universities are considered to hold the highest status in the UK *field* of HE, it is not necessarily the case that they alone demand the highest entry qualifications for three-year OT programmes, indicating that the prestige of the programme is at times distinguishable from the prestige of the institution.

Mackellar University

Mackellar University is a pre-1992, research-intensive university that typically demands high UCAS points totals for entry. To preserve its anonymity to the greatest degree possible, neither its association with a particular group within the HE *field*, its positions in university league tables nor ranking in RAE outcomes will be identified. It is, however, relevant to note that although recognised as an institution of good-standing in the *field*, Mackellar University is ambitious and always keen to improve its national and international reputation and to further enhance its position within the *field*.

In the years shortly after the millennium, an internally released document outlined the University's vision of its future and the strategic direction it proposed to take over the forthcoming decade. This document acknowledged the policy tensions within the sector and the need to make decisions about where and how Mackellar wished to position itself; research excellence on an international scale across the board was very high on the agenda reflecting the high value status of this form of *capital* within the *field*. The document envisioned that by 2010, the majority of students would consist of traditional 18-22 year olds living away from home, although it also anticipated diversity in the student population and clearly articulated a strong and active commitment to widening participation activities, including encouraging those from non-traditional backgrounds in the local area to attend the University. Amongst the stated core values was an ambition for excellence and inclusiveness through which all staff, prospective and registered students could achieve their full potential.

The University's future educational portfolio was predicted to reflect its research strengths such that it would be able to provide high-quality research-led education to all those students who could benefit from it. In this way, Mackellar is seen to respond to the changing demands of the political *field* while continuing to position itself amongst the dominant players in the HE *field*.

Many of the key points raised in this document were subsequently published in the University's corporate strategy, lying at the heart of which (according to this strategy), is its educational mission. Mackellar' s focus on enhancing its position in the *field* is evident in the most recent learning and teaching strategy which reiterates aspirations to global recognition as a provider of top quality research, education and enterprise activities. Reflecting the political emphasis on the quality of student experience, amongst the stated core values underpinning the strategy are an appreciation of diversity, equality of opportunity and the engagement of individuals on their own unique learning pathways. The document describes an integrated learning community in which staff and student work cooperatively to facilitate active and deep subject learning alongside personal development, but within which students are also expected to take responsibility for their own learning and to become independent, life-long learners. The strategy explicitly identifies an organisational culture which recognises individual rights, responsibilities and diversity of needs and a 'distinctive' student-centred, research-led approach to educational provision designed to facilitate student learning that is as close as possible to the research experience. The emphasis on research again serves to foreground the value of this form of *capital* and the institution's stocks of it. The declaration of student entitlement, described as underpinning the development of a 'truly student-centred' organisational culture and reiterating the ethos of scholarship through which students are supported to fulfil their potential, highlights a commitment to the provision of high-quality education as another form of *capital* valued in the field.

Mackellar has linked the widening participation strategy which the political *field* demands it produce to its learning and teaching strategy, and uses it to outline institutional efforts to raise aspirations, encourage applications and effectively support students throughout their engagement with the University, highlighting activities focused specifically on students from non-traditional backgrounds and those aimed at improving the learning experiences of all students. The widening participation strategy reaffirms the University's position in the *field* as a research-intensive institution and openly acknowledges the high entry standards that it sets, while also articulating a desire to attract students from backgrounds under-represented in HE. Amongst a range of other initiatives, the University has developed a Compact Scheme under which students recommended by partner FE colleges, and who meet specified criteria, are considered as special cases for admission.

The strategic focus of the University's widening participation activities is oriented towards building the professional workforces in areas prioritised by the political *field* (such as education and healthcare) and specific programmes have been developed to facilitate the entry of non-traditional students into established undergraduate programmes in these areas. Having chosen to apply the maximum permissible tuition fees to the majority of its programmes and therefore to maximise this aspect of its economic *capital*, the widening participation strategy identifies the bursaries and scholarships which the University is required to offer to off-set the financial cost of studying for students from low income groups. Although at the time of this research the proportion of additional fee income dedicated to these funds was identified in *Times Higher Education* (THE) as approaching only thirty percent of the proportion offered by the most generous institution, Mackellar University was short-listed by THE for a sector-wide award for the financial support packages available to students from low-income families, those who represent the first generation in their family to attend university and those from disadvantage backgrounds.

The Neville School

The Neville School occupies purpose-built accommodation on the main campus of Mackellar University. It opened in the mid-1990s and soon expanded to incorporate pre-registration education for a small range of allied health professions and related post-registration opportunities. As this chapter has described, the educational activities of this micro-*field* are strongly influenced by the policies, standards and directives of the *fields* within which it is embedded (Mackellar University as a sub-*field* of the broader HE *field*), and the *fields* by which it is surrounded (the political and practice *fields* whose influences are imposed via the DIUS, QAA, DH, local SHAs and the HPC). For the OT pre-registration programmes, the COT can be added to the list of influences and, reflecting the nature of a vocational programme of study, key stakeholders also include local clinicians acting as practice placement educators and local service managers in their capacity as potential graduate employers. Although a small school within Mackellar, recent programme revalidation documentation produced by the Neville School highlighted its position in the discipline specific sub-*field* of HE by describing its strong reputation amongst its competitors and local employers, and its strong performance for a school of its type in terms of research output.

Full-time undergraduate programme structure and delivery

A comprehensive Definitive Revalidation Document for the full-time undergraduate programmes run by the Neville School was produced in the years immediately preceding the commencement of this research and provides a clear outline of the School's culture and educational approach. The full-time undergraduate programmes are described as modular and comprised of a series of free-standing units of study which link together to form a

coherent package of learning in which knowledge, intellectual, professional and transferable skills are said to be developed in a progressive manner. All of the undergraduate programmes on offer incorporate elements of both profession-specific and inter-professional learning, the latter designed to enhance communication and working relationships within the multidisciplinary teams that students will work within once qualified. A wide range of methods are reportedly utilised to support learning and teaching, including the more traditional large group lecture (at times including up to approximately 170 students), expert-led, experiential, practical, and experimental sessions, small group work, peer presentations, case studies and guided and self-directed learning activities. One third of each programme is dedicated to learning under the supervision of practice placement educators in professional practice environments. This meets the requirements of the regulatory and professional bodies and is highlighted as reflecting the School's endeavours to facilitate the integration of theory with practice and the cross-fertilisation of learning undertaken in both the academic and practice contexts.

The physical space occupied by the School offers lecture theatres, seminar rooms, a variety of practical rooms appropriate to the development of practical professional skills, a human performance laboratory, a biomechanics laboratory and computer workstations which are available for student use. In addition to the usual range of centrally provided resources such as libraries and social spaces, the School has access to Mackellar's human morphology laboratory to support learning of anatomy and physiology. Timetabled sessions not requiring specialist physical spaces may be allocated to learning spaces available within other University buildings. The most recent QAA report on their major review of the Neville School's pre-registrations educational provision indicated that, mirroring the trend across the HE sector, it makes increasing use of electronic learning resources, including the development of remote access to these resources.

Assessments and awards on the full-time undergraduate programmes

The Revalidation Document and the Neville School's assessment guidelines and academic regulations describe the manner in which students' knowledge, understanding and performance in the academic and practice contexts are assessed or, in Bourdieuian terms, legitimated by staff (including me as an insider-researcher) as representatives of the *field*. Assessments are linked to the learning outcomes of individual modules of study and are identified by the School as having a role in encouraging deep rather than superficial learning, monitoring student progress, evaluating academic and professional competence and the provision of meaningful feedback to enhance learning. Formative assessment tasks are used to provide students with feedback about their progress in individual modules, and to help them prepare for final summative assessments in each module. To promote transparency, the marking criteria against which summative assessments are graded are made available to

students at the beginning of each module, or as soon as possible thereafter. The School states that it requires that assessments are valid, fair and reliable. Reliability and double marking exercises and anonymous marking of written submissions are standard practice, and all assessment procedures and outcomes are scrutinised by internal and external examiners.

Assessments are said to be designed to be incremental and sufficiently demanding that they become increasingly challenging over the three years of full-time undergraduate programmes. The pass mark for all assessments is forty percent. Those relating to academic performance are undertaken in a variety of ways (including unseen written examinations, oral and poster presentations, practical skills assessments, and written case studies, essays and research projects) to acknowledge differing approaches to learning and relevant professional competencies and are said to aim to reinforce the integration and transference of knowledge and skills and the contextualising of their relevance to practice.

The Neville School's assessment guidelines highlight that assessments undertaken throughout the undergraduate programmes reflect the minimum standards of professional practice required to demonstrate competence and gain access to the *field* of practice. Level 4 assessments do not contribute to honours degree classifications, but must be successfully completed to progress to higher levels of study. Students are expected to show knowledge and understanding of material related to specified learning outcomes, to begin to apply it to appropriate situations, and to demonstrate proficiency in taught clinical and practical skills with some guidance. Level 5 assessments contribute towards one third of the honours degree classification and students are expected to apply their knowledge and understanding, to being to evaluate material appropriately, to demonstrate a greater appreciation of their professional role and to perform taught clinical and practical skills with less guidance. By Level 6, when assessments contribute towards two thirds of the honours degree classification, students are expected to evaluate and synthesise theoretical concepts, to justify arguments and courses of action, and to demonstrate internalisation of professional, moral and ethical values, proficiency in taught clinical and practical skills and a capacity to independently vary clinical skills to suit practice situations.

Failed assessments are redeemable and students have the right to one re-sit for any failed assessment (whether academic or practice-based), although this is flexible where mitigating circumstances exist. Where a student is unsuccessful in a re-sit examination and there are no extenuating or mitigating circumstances, the student's programme of study is normally terminated. The exit awards offered by the undergraduate programmes include a Certificate in Allied Health for those leaving the School (voluntarily or involuntarily) who have accrued 120 credits and a Diploma in Allied Health where 240 credits have been secured. The professional groups represented within the Neville School require an Honours Degree (equating to 360 credits) as the threshold for professional registration with the HPC and entry into the *field* of

practice; however, where a student is unable to attain this standard in their Level 6 studies, a BSc in Allied Health may be awarded if 300 credits have been secured.

Widening participation in the Neville School

In line with the policies of Mackellar University, the Neville School's Learning and Teaching Strategy espouses a philosophy of research-led learning and teaching, which incorporates research-informed educational approaches, research-informed educational content, and exposure to and engagement with research processes. This document highlights how the School addresses, and works towards addressing, the University's vision, strategies and associated policies, and therefore how it supports the maintenance or enhancement of Mackellar's position in the *field* of HE and its own position in the discipline-specific sub-*field*. In 2002, the policy highlighted the School's '…inclusive approach to widening participation' and its commitment to 'providing a friendly, receptive, supportive and enabling environment in which all students are able to achieve their potential', although at the point where the full-time undergraduate programmes were being revalidated, it was acknowledged that there were challenges within the School regarding the retention of students from non-traditional academic backgrounds (as discussed in Chapter 1).

Pathways exist between a Foundation Degree in Healthcare run by Mackellar and the full-time undergraduate programmes on offer in the Neville School, and separate part-time undergraduate programmes were added to the School's portfolio subsequent to the commencement of this research. Both of these routes are presented in the Revalidation Document as contributing to the School's response to the widening participation agenda, although additional work has focused on increasing the diversity of applications to and students registered within the School, specifically with the view to enhancing ethnic diversity, the number of mature student and the number of students with disabilities. Data compiled by Mackellar University at the beginning of the 2007 academic year highlighted a rapid growth in overall Neville School student numbers (predominantly drawn form the home rather than international market) during the period preceding and including the commencement of this research. The staff-student ratio in the Neville School was identified at that point as being one of the highest amongst similar schools. It awarded a very high proportion of first or upper second class honours degrees, and despite the nation-wide decline related to financial challenges within the health and social care sector, had a very healthy graduate employment rate reflecting the value of Mackellar degrees in the *field* of practice.

Student support and engagement in the Neville School

In addition to a comprehensive range of services offered centrally by the University and the support and guidance available from the coordinators and staff teams associated with

individual modules of study, students are supported by their own individual personal tutor, with whom they are invited to meet formally at specified junctures throughout the programme, and upon whom they are free to call as and when the need arises. Reflecting a commitment to enhancing educational experiences, student representatives identified for each module at each level of study on the various programmes act as a focal point for ongoing dialogue between students and staff leading that module. Additional student representatives identified for each cohort of each programme are asked to retain an overall perspective of student experiences within the School during a particular level of study, and are invited to represent their peers at Student Reference Group Meetings, Programme Committees and School Board.

The School's assessment guidelines explicitly state that it places a 'high value' on good quality relationships and openness between staff and students. The Revalidation Document alludes to some of the academic and practice-oriented *capital* valued by the School when it describes a commitment to educational processes that develop students as '…independent, intrinsically motivated thinkers with a capacity for reflective and critical analysis of their own and other's professional practice'. The most recent QAA major review consecrated the pre-registration programmes offered by the Neville School, highlighting that the reviewers had 'confidence' in the academic and practitioner standards achieved and that the quality of the learning and teaching, student progression, and learning resources and their utilisation were 'commendable'.

The full-time occupational therapy programme in focus

The full-time OT programme is firmly embedded as a core activity within the structure, organisation and functioning of the Neville School. The programme specification document relevant to the period during which this research was undertaken states that the programme was designed to be completed in three years, with each academic year lasting approximately thirty weeks and divided evenly into two semesters. The specified educational aims of the programme include the provision of the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for a career in OT and development of a capacity for life-long learning. The programme is said to aim to provide a curriculum that is responsive to service changes and national and local developments, and particularly focusing on the development of students' practice-oriented *capital*, to cultivate competent clinical and professional skills, those skills required to underpin autonomous practice and team-working, and the critical and analytical skills required by users and/or creators of research evidence in the professional *field*.

The QAA major review report identifies that the programme had recently been validated to offer 75 places on an annual basis and that, at that point, six applications were typically received for each place. Students are admitted to the programme through UCAS and are

effectively required to demonstrate threshold stocks of *capital* relevant to the *field*. At the time when participants in the student experiences study were applying, the entry requirements for the full-time OT programme at the Neville School, as outlined in the programme specification document and the COT Careers Handbook, were:

1. For those under the age of twenty-one years: five GCSEs including English, maths and a science subject at grade C or above, and one of the following:
   a. 300 UCAS tariff points from 18/21 units; 160 of these points to be from two A2 subjects. One subject to be science or science related, and General Studies did not contribute towards the points required.
   b. A twelve unit AVCE in Health and Social Care plus one A-level or two As-levels in a science or science related subject
   c. A six unit AVCE in Health and Social Care plus two A-levels, one of which needed to be a science or science related subject
   d. A BTEC National Diploma in Science (Health Studies) with no fails in year one and five distinctions and a merit in year two, or 300 tariff points
   e. An International Baccalaureate at 28 points
   f. An Irish Leaving Certificate comprising six subjects, all at grade B
   g. Scottish Highers comprising at least four B grades and one C grade.

2. For those over twenty-one years of age:
   a. Prospective students were considered on merit rather than solely on the basis of academic qualification
   b. Prospective students were advised that they were considered to be likely to do well on the programme if they were able to provide evidence of (preferably recent) academic study such as:
      i. A relevant Access course with a pass at 75 percent or equivalent
      ii. An Open University Science Foundation Course
      iii. One A-level or two As-levels at grade C or above (totalling 80 points)
      iv. A relevant honours degree classified at 2:2 or above.

Students were also effectively required to provide evidence of the compatibility of their established *habitus* with the *field* of practice and of baseline stocks of practice-oriented *capital* in the guise of a personal statement outlining their knowledge and understanding of the profession, the possession of relevant skills and the personal qualities that they believed they would bring to it. As OTs work with physically and psychologically vulnerable people, all offers of places on the programme were, and continue to be, subject to satisfactory outcomes of an extended Criminal Records Bureau check and health screening. All students who secure places on the programme are also required to ensure that relevant immunisations are up-to-date prior to going on practice placement.

Undergraduate OT students are taught by staff drawn from all of the professional groups represented in the School, although modules focusing on profession-specific skills development are lead by staff who themselves are qualified OTs. Each ten credits attributed to an academic module of study represents an estimated 100 hours of student effort, which is divided between face-to-face contact time with staff and personal study. Each module is supported by its own descriptive outline which highlights the learning outcomes, syllabus content, approaches to learning and teaching and assessments associated with that period of study. In line with the requirements of the regulatory and professional bodies, students are required to have undertaken, to a threshold standard, 1000 hours of practice placement experience (COT, 2007a) which are spread out across all three levels of the programme.

Level 4 studies on the full-time occupational therapy programme

During the academic year relevant to the student experiences study, timetabled contact with academic staff during Level 4 studies ran to approximately 15.8 hours per week in semester one and 17.5 hours in semester two, figures which are generally considered within the School to represent a higher level than the 'average', non-vocationally oriented undergraduate programme. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 provide general overviews of students' timetables and the Level 4 modules studied (formally validated module names have not been used in a further effort to protect anonymity).

Incorporating two OT-specific academic modules of ten and forty credits each, the Level 4 curriculum concentrated on the following points (which also allude to some of the academic and practice-oriented *capital* that students were expected to possess or develop to succeed within the *field*):

- understanding the structures, regulations and policies governing and guiding professional practice,
- learning fundamental communication skills and how to apply them effectively in practice and collaborative scenarios,
- learning about the roles of other health and social care professionals and how to work effectively and collaboratively in teams,
- understanding the basic structure and organisation of cells in the human body and mechanisms of tissue repair,
- understanding the structure, organisation and functions of the musculoskeletal, neurological, cardiovascular and respiratory systems and the effects of common disorders on these systems,
- recognising the influence of psychosocial theories on understanding individual experiences and how to apply and draw upon these theories effectively in practice scenarios,

- learning about the core theoretical principles that underpin OT and some of the principle practices employed by OTs,
- learning about the biomechanics of normal human movement and how to select and safely use appropriate moving and handling techniques and equipment,
- the provision of opportunities to observe and practice clinical, interpersonal and self-management skills appropriate to the level of training within practice settings under the direction and close supervision of a qualified OT placement educator.

At the end of semester one, assessment and legitimization of knowledge and understanding was undertaken in the form of extended matching questions in an unseen examination for anatomy and physiology, an oral presentation and examination regarding professional practice issues, a video-taped interview and reflective essay focusing on communication skills, and an essay focusing on core theories and models underpinning OT practice. At the end of semester two, assessments included a practical assessment of moving and handling skills, a further unseen examination based on extended matching questions for the second anatomy and physiology module, and an essay focusing on the utilisation of psychosocial theories to explain the health beliefs, attitudes and experiences expressed in an appropriate narrative. With submission dates outside the prescribed assessment periods, summative assessment of the module focusing on team-working and collaborative learning skills involved demonstration of active engagement in the module and submission of a reflective essay discussing what had been learnt. Practice placements were undertaken in settings relevant to OT practice and were assessed according to criteria appropriate to the level of training and based upon the practical skills and behaviours demonstrated during those placements.

In the absence of relevant academic and practice-oriented *capital* relevant to the *field*, and the presentation and demonstration of knowledge and understanding in a form legitimated by the *field*, successful assessment results would be difficult for students to obtain.

Following the completion of all Level 4 modules of study, students had a ten-week summer break. Where necessary, students required to complete deferred assessments or re-sit/re-submit failed assessments generally prepared to do so during this period with submission or examination dates concentrated around a two-week period late in the summer period.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 0				Induction Sessions	Induction sessions
Week 1		Professional practice		Anatomy & Physiology (1)	
	Basic OT skills	Basic OT skills		Communication Skills	
Week 2		Professional practice		Anatomy & Physiology (1)	
	Basic OT skills	Basic OT skills		Communication Skills	
Week 3		Professional practice		Anatomy & Physiology (1)	
	Basic OT skills	Basic OT skills		Communication Skills	
Week 4	Introduction to inter-professional team-working and collaborative learning skills				
Week 5		Professional practice		Anatomy & Physiology (1)	
	Basic OT skills	Basic OT skills		Communication Skills	
Week 6		Professional practice		Anatomy & Physiology (1)	
	Basic OT skills	Basic OT skills		Communication Skills	
Week 7		Professional practice		Anatomy & Physiology (1)	
	Basic OT skills	Basic OT skills		Communication Skills	
Week 8		Professional practice		Anatomy & Physiology (1)	
	Basic OT skills	Basic OT skills		Communication Skills	
Week 9		Professional practice		Anatomy & Physiology (1)	
	Basic OT skills	Basic OT skills		Anatomy & Physiology (1)	
Week 10		Professional practice		Anatomy & Physiology (1)	
	Basic OT skills	Basic OT skills		Anatomy & Physiology (1)	
Week 11	CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY PERIOD				
Week 12					
Week 13					
Week 14	Placement Prep	Professional practice	Basic OT skills	Anatomy & Physiology (1)	Basic OT skills
	Basic OT skills	Basic OT skills			
Week 15	Assessment preparation week				
Week 16	Assessment week				
Week 17	Practice Placement (observational)				

Table 5.1: Overview of Level 4, semester one timetable

☐ OT specific modules

☐ Joint modules with other groups in the Neville School

☐ Inter-professional modules with a range of professional groups

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 18	Moving & Handling Skills	Moving & Handling Skills	Basic OT skills	Anatomy & Physiology (2)	Basic OT skills
	Psychosocial: theory & applied			Communication Skills	Basic OT skills
Week19	Moving & Handling Skills	Moving & Handling Skills	Basic OT skills	Anatomy & Physiology (2)	Basic OT skills
	Psychosocial: theory & applied	Moving & Handling Skills		Communication Skills	
Week 20	Moving & Handling Skills	Moving & Handling Skills	Basic OT skills	Anatomy & Physiology (2)	
	Psychosocial: theory & applied	Moving & Handling Skills		Communication Skills	
Week 21	Introduction to inter-professional team-working and collaborative learning skills				
Week 22	Moving & Handling Skills	Moving & Handling Skills	Basic OT skills	Anatomy & Physiology (2)	
	Psychosocial: theory & applied	Moving & Handling Skills			
Week 23	Moving & Handling Skills	Moving & Handling Skills	Basic OT skills	Anatomy & Physiology (2)	Basic OT skills
	Psychosocial: theory & applied	Moving & Handling Skills			
Week 24	EASTER HOLIDAY PERIOD				
Week 25					
Week 26					
Week 27					
Week 28	Moving & Handling Skills	Moving & Handling Skills	Basic OT skills	Anatomy & Physiology (2)	Basic OT skills
	Psychosocial: theory & applied	Moving & Handling Skills			
Week 29		Anatomy & Physiology (2)	Basic OT skills	Anatomy & Physiology (2)	Basic OT skills
	Psychosocial: theory & applied				
Week 30		Anatomy & Physiology (2)	Basic OT skills	Anatomy & Physiology (2)	
	Psychosocial: theory & applied				
Week 31				Anatomy & Physiology (2)	
		Placement Prep		Placement Prep	
Week 32		Anatomy & Physiology (2)		Anatomy & Physiology (2)	
	Placement Prep				
Week 33	Assessment weeks				
Week 34					
Week 35	Practice Placement				
Week 36					
Week 37					
Week 38					
Week 39					
Week 40					

Table 5.2: Overview of Level 4, semester two timetable

OT specific modules

Joint modules with other groups in the Neville School

Inter-professional modules with a range of professional groups

Level 5 studies on the full-time occupational therapy programme

As depicted in Tables 5.3 and 5.4, the Level 5 studies undertaken by participants in the student experiences study were marked by periods of intense academic work interspersed by periods of practice placement. Early in semester one, students had approximately 18 hours of timetabled contact with staff per week and there were several 6pm finishes, which at the time were unusual in the Neville School. Contact time during academic study periods dropped to an average of fourteen hours per week at the end of semester one, but increased to over 16 hours per week in semester two.

In Level 5, two 25 credit academic modules focused on the development of OT clinical skills, knowledge and understanding, while all other, smaller academic modules were undertaken on an inter-professional basis. Again reflecting the academic and practice-oriented *capital* expected of students, the overall curriculum concentrated on:

- developing the knowledge and skills to justify professional practice in legal, managerial and ethical terms and to appreciate the potential conflicts which may arise between these frameworks and the options for action in such circumstances,
- understanding and implementing all key aspects of the research process and the development of critical appraisal skills,
- learning about the theories of health promotion and education and understanding associated professional roles,
- further developing skills in inter-professional team-working, and learning how to negotiation effectively and how to undertake audits,
- developing skills and clinical reasoning related to client-centred OT engagement with people of varying ages who have (i) predominately physically oriented conditions and disabilities and (ii) learning disabilities and/or predominately mental health problems,
- opportunities to integrate theoretical studies with practical experiences, and to refine clinical, interpersonal and self-management skills appropriate to the level of training within practice settings under the supervision of a qualified OT placement educator.

The modes of summative assessment of student achievement and legitimization of Level 5 knowledge were again varied. Practice placements continued to be assessed at the times that they were undertaken, and focused on the skills and behaviours demonstrated during those periods. Similarly, the module focusing on inter-professional team-working, negotiation and audit was summatively assessed outside defined assessment weeks and involved the submission of a written project report prepared collaboratively by teams of students who shared placements and individual reflective essays exploring experience and learning during that module.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week -1		OT Skills Mental Health		OT Skills Mental Health	
		OT Skills Physical Health		OT Skills Physical Health	
Week 0		Placement debrief		OT Skills Mental Health	OT Skills Mental Health
		Introduction to Research		OT Skills Physical Health	
Week 1		Introduction to Research		OT Skills Mental Health	
	Health Educ^n & Promotion	Introduction to Research		OT Skills Physical Health	
Week 2		Introduction to Research		OT Skills Mental Health	
	Health Educ^n & Promotion	Ethical theory & practice		OT Skills Physical Health	
Week 3		Introduction to Research		OT Skills Mental Health	
	Health Educ^n & Promotion	Ethical theory & practice		OT Skills Physical Health	
Week 4		Introduction to Research		OT Skills Mental Health	
	Health Educ^n & Promotion	Ethical theory & practice		OT Skills Physical Health	
Week 5					
Week 6					
Week 7			Practice Placement		
Week 8					
Week 9					
Week 10					
Week 11					
Week 12			**CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY PERIOD**		
Week 13					
Week 14		Introduction to Research		OT Skills Mental Health	OT Skills Physical Health
	Health Educ^n & Promotion	Ethical theory & practice			OT Skills Physical Health
Week 15		Introduction to Research		OT Skills Mental Health	
	Health Educ^n & Promotion	Ethical theory & practice		OT Skills Physical Health	
Week 16			**Assessment preparation week**		
Week 17			**Assessment week**		

Table 5.3: Overview of Level 5, semester one timetable

☐	OT specific modules
☐	Joint modules with other groups in the Neville School

	Monday	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**
Week 18		OT Skills Mental Health		OT Skills Mental Health	Ethical theory & practice
		OT Skills Mental Health		OT Skills Physical Health	
Week19		OT Skills Mental Health		OT Skills Mental Health	Ethical theory & practice
		OT Skills Mental Health		OT Skills Physical Health	
Week 20		OT Skills Mental Health		OT Skills Mental Health	Ethical theory & practice
		OT Skills Mental Health		OT Skills Physical Health	
Week 21	Ethical theory & practice	OT Skills Mental Health		OT Skills Physical Health	
		OT Skills Physical Health		OT Skills Physical Health	Ethical theory & practice
Week 22					
Week 23	Inter-professional team-working, negotiation and audit skills				
Week 24					
Week 25	EASTER HOLIDAY PERIOD				
Week 26					
Week 27					
Week 28					
Week 29	Practice Placement				
Week 30					
Week 31					
Week 32					
Week 33					Ethical theory & practice
Week 34	Assessment week				

Table 5.4: Overview of Level 5, semester two timetable

OT specific modules

Joint modules with other groups in the Neville School

Inter-professional modules with a range of professional groups

At the conclusion of semester one, Level 5 students were required to submit a written research report, a written case study considering the needs of someone with mental health problems, and to produce and submit a theory-based leaflet or poster addressing a clinically relevant area of health promotion or education accompanied by a written commentary explaining and justifying the decisions taken in the development and production of that leaflet or poster. Semester two summative assessments comprised an essay applying legal and policy frameworks and ethical theories to an incident identified from practice placement experiences, a written case study focusing on OT interventions at three points in the lifespan of an individual who has primarily physical needs, and the oral presentation of a case study focusing on OT interventions with a person who has learning disabilities or who is experiencing mental health problems.

At the conclusion of Level 5 studies, students had a fifteen-week summer break. As was the case in the previous year, students required to complete deferred assessments or re-submit/ re-present failed assessments generally prepared to do so during this period to meet the submission or examination dates concentrated around a two-week period late in the summer break.

Level 6 studies on the full-time occupational therapy programme

At Level 6, the timetable experienced by participants in the student experiences study involved fewer contacted hours, reflecting the expectation that students would be learning in a more independent and self-directed manner by that stage. Each student experienced a slightly different pattern of attendance depending on which one of a range of ten credit modules focused on specialist practice areas they chose to study in each semester, as is evident in Tables 5.5 and 5.6. In semester one, the average timetabled academic contact time was approximately ten hours per week during the first seven weeks, while in the final four weeks of semester two there were an average of nine contact hours per week.

The Level 6 OT curriculum again incorporated elements of profession-specific and inter-professional learning, and in this final year, introduced some degree of choice in the modules studied. It was directed towards:
- understanding individual responsibilities regarding ongoing professional development, service improvement and the management of change,
- exploring the theory and practice of commonly used talking therapies and developing skills in utilising verbal and non-verbal components to enhance the therapeutic value of dialogue,
- opportunities for students to make choices from a range of modules focused on the development of advanced understanding and skills in specialist areas of OT practice, all of which emphasised critical engagement with appropriate literature to underpin evidence-based practice and clinical reasoning,
- developing the skills required to prepare a comprehensive and viable research proposal capable of answering a clinically relevant research question,
- learning about effective inter-professional team working and problem solving, changing professional roles and boundaries and the impact of professional and organisational cultures on service delivery and developments,
- opportunities to integrate theoretical studies with practical experiences, to work effectively with the evidence base in practice settings and to work towards independence in clinical, interpersonal and self-management skills in practice settings under the supervision of a qualified OT placement educator.

At the end of semester one, Level 6 students submitted an in-depth critique of a specific aspect of the therapeutic use of dialogue which integrated and critically debated relevant theoretical perspectives and, relating to the chosen advanced OT skills module, gave an oral presentation which was associated with a viva examination. These presentation assessments required students to engage critically with literature to explore a specific issue relevant to the specialist area of practice and were also used in relation to similar modules in semester two. Additional semester two summative assessments were a reflective account of an aspect of individual professional development written in a style appropriate for inclusion in the continuing professional development portfolios required of qualified clinicians and submission of a comprehensive research proposal. In keeping with the established pattern, performance on practice placement was assessed at the time it was undertaken. The module focusing on inter-professional team-working was assessed in a number of ways, including a presentation and submission of a project report at the time of the first study block, and the submission, outside established assessment periods, of a reflective essay drawing together experiences of inter-professional working across the programme.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week -1	Advanced OT skills (A)			Advanced OT skills (B)	
				Talking as therapy	
Week 0	Advanced OT skills (A)	Talking as therapy *		Advanced OT skills (B)	Research skills in action
	Talking as therapy *			Talking as therapy *	Research skills in action **
Week 1	Advanced OT skills (A)	Talking as therapy *		Advanced OT skills (B)	Research skills in action
	Talking as therapy *	Professional practice & management		Talking as therapy *	Research skills in action **
Week 2	Advanced OT skills (A)	Talking as therapy*		Advanced OT skills (B)	Research skills in action
	Talking as therapy *	Professional practice & management		Talking as therapy *	Research skills in action **
Week 3	Advanced OT skills (A)			Advanced OT skills (B)	Research skills in action
		Professional practice & management		Talking as therapy	Research skills in action **
Week 4	Advanced OT skills (A)	Talking as therapy *		Advanced OT skills (B)	Research skills in action
	Talking as therapy *	Professional practice & management		Talking as therapy *	Research skills in action **
Week 5	Advanced OT skills (A)	Talking as therapy *		Advanced OT skills (B)	Research skills in action
	Talking as therapy *	Professional practice & management		Talking as therapy*	Research skills in action **
Week 6	Inter-professional team-working, professional & organisational cultures, change and service development				
Week 7					
Week 8				Placement prep	Research skills in action
		Professional practice & management		Talking as therapy	Research skills in action **
Week 9	**Assessment week**				
Week 10	Time dedicated to completion of Inter-professional module assessment tasks				
Week 11					
Week 12	**CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY PERIOD**				
Week 13					
Week 14	Practice Placement (continues into semester two)				
Week 15					
Week 16					
Week 17					

Table 5.5: Overview of Level 6, semester one timetable

▢ OT specific modules

▢ Joint modules with other groups in the Neville School

▢ Inter-professional modules with a range of professional groups

NB: Students attend either Advanced OT Skills A or B, not both; * Students attend only one session per week;

**   Action Learning Sets with 20 minutes staff facilitation

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 18					
Week19					
Week 20			Practice Placement		
Week 21			(continued from semester one)		
Week 22					
Week 23					
Week 24					Research skills in action
Week 25					
Week 26			EASTER HOLIDAY PERIOD		
Week 27					
Week 28					
Week 29	Advanced OT skills (C)	Advanced OT skills (D)		Advanced OT skills (C)	Advanced OT skills (D)
				Professional practice & management	Research skills in action
Week 30	Advanced OT skills (C)	Advanced OT skills (D)		Advanced OT skills (C)	Advanced OT skills (D)
				Professional practice & management	Research skills in action
Week 31		Advanced OT skills (D)		Advanced OT skills (C)	Advanced OT skills (D)
				Professional practice & management	Research skills in action
Week 32	Advanced OT skills (C)	Advanced OT skills (D)		Advanced OT skills (C)	
Week 33			Assessment preparation week		
Week 34			Assessment week		

Table 5.6: Overview of Level 6, semester two timetable

    OT specific modules
    Joint modules with other groups in the Neville School
    Inter-professional modules with a range of professional groups

NB: Students attend either Advanced OT Skills C or D, not both

The summative assessments at this final Level of study provide perhaps the clearest insight into the academic and practice-oriented *capital* that is ultimately valued in students by the *field*, at least in so far as they are represented in explicit documentary form. Table 5.7 provides a summary of a review of the A-grade classifications in the marking criteria used at Level 6 which exemplify the forms that these *capitals* take, although it should be noted that academic and practice-oriented *capital* might best be conceived of as overlapping rather than being entirely distinct forms.

Academic capital inferred in academic marking criteria	Practice-oriented capital inferred in practice placement marking criteria
• Highly ambitious work undertaken in an engaging, thoughtful, polished and imaginative manner • Excellent structure of work with a clear, concise focus and attention to supportive detail • Fluent, confident and well-paced verbal delivery • Extensive and articulate vocabulary and a fluent academic writing style • Highly professional standard of oral presentation supported by very capable use of supportive equipment and/or materials • Thorough critical analysis, integration, application and discussion of a wide range of theory and literature in the justification and substantiation of independent ideas and new concepts applicable to innovative professional practice • Outstanding understanding of complex and current issues and an ability to recognise and reconcile informational inconsistencies • Engagement with the evidence base to support an excellent level of insightful and critical reflection • Clear, relevant and consistently accurate approach to referencing	• Effective and flexible communication skills that take account of context and individual needs while maintaining professional boundaries • Development of therapeutic relationships that respect individual rights and dignity and enhance motivation • Development of constructive working relationships with OT and inter-disciplinary colleagues • Employment of appropriate teaching strategies that effectively meet the needs of different individuals and groups • Highly proficient presentations appropriate to the level of understanding of recipients • Selection of appropriate, valid and reliable assessment tools and accurate interpretation of findings to identify and prioritise key problems • Collaboration with individuals to formulate overall goals and treatment/action plans • Justification and implementation of appropriate, cost-effective interventions that demonstrate sensitivity to individual needs, dignity and privacy • Accurate, valid and reliable evaluation of interventions, modification of plans as required and identification of appropriate points of discharge in relation to initial goals • Maintenance of comprehensive and accurate records • Effective and constructive time management and acceptance of responsibility for and coordination of the care of individuals with others involved • Acceptance of responsibility for the development and active integration of professional knowledge and skills while being aware of own limitations • Understand the implications for practice of relevant legislation, policies and procedures and acting accordingly • Presentation of a professional attitude, manner and appearance and performance in a highly proficient and skilled manner

Table 5.7: Academic and practice-oriented capital inferred from Level 6 marking criteria

The final assessment results and, where applicable, degree classifications of the cohort associated with the student experiences study were released just over a month after the assessments were completed, and in keeping with custom, involved a great deal of celebrating amongst staff and graduands in the foyer of the Neville School one afternoon in the early summer. The Neville School recognises the desire of many students to graduate with their original cohort, and where it does not disadvantage students, deferred assessments, re-submissions or re-examination of failed Level 6 assessments are offered at appropriate times throughout the year ahead of the established re-sit period during the summer. However, this is not an appropriate, desirable or possible option in all circumstances, and when results are released at the conclusion of semester two there are generally a small number of Level 6 students who have more work to do before the re-sit period at the end of the summer. For those who have successfully negotiated all of their assessments, and representing what Bourdieu would describe as consecration by the *field*, the formal graduation ceremony provided by Mackellar University is preceded by a reception for graduands and their families hosted by the Neville School at which prizes are awarded to high-achieving and most-improved students. Students who successfully complete the last of their assessments at a time later than the rest of their cohort have the option of participating in the graduation ceremony and celebrations the following year.

Shifting sands

Wacquant (1998) provides a useful reminder that the capacity of any *field* to insulate itself from the external influences of other *fields* and to maintain a degree of autonomy has a bearing on the course of its natural evolution. This chapter began by illustrating the considerable influence exerted by other powerful *fields* on the Neville School and, as a result of some of these influences the recent past has witnessed extensive changes in the structure and organisation of the School. Significant drivers for this change centred on financial challenges within the NHS (overseen by the DH). This precipitated the removal of the ring-fence protecting training and education budgets held by SHAs to try to support shortfalls in clinical areas (University and College Union, 2008). The resultant reduction in contracted student places in turn precipitated substantial reductions in the number of academic and support staff, and a prolonged period of internal instability within the Neville School as extensive structural and organisational changes were introduced. In Bourdieuian terms, the School entered a period of *hystresis*; the structure and logic of practice in the *field* was rapidly and profoundly disrupted and the long-established *habitus* of staff players within it no longer corresponded comfortably with the demands that were emerging from the changed *field* (Hardy, 2008).

With fewer academic staff remaining in the School, and those who did remain struggling to adapt to the changed and changing structure of the *field*, students encountered reduced face-

to-face contact time with staff (both inside and outside timetabled sessions), fewer facilitated small-group learning opportunities, and a greater emphasis on large lectures and self-directed learning. These changes did not go unnoticed by the students, including those who participated in the student experiences study who said, for example:

> Obviously there's loads of fall-out about the cuts at the School as it seems apparent that many of the tutors are in total shock – we'll have to see how it all plays out. [Sarah, reflective diary]

> Obviously, it's going to get worse next year. That's my big worry that with the loss of lecturers there's got to be more multi-group teaching. If that's the case, I really don't like that, because I don't feel I can interact at all. I'll never, ever put my hand up and if I [can't] get involved, I'll just be sitting there making notes and I won't really be involved. [Frances, first interview]

> …it's been a bit, sort of, maybe we'd have practical session, umm, with no guidance. And whether it's just because of a shortage of lecturing staff. It might be. I'm not saying that anybody's doing it deliberately. But if you have, say, practical things going on in four rooms with one lecturer, then that person can only be in one place at one time, and if the rest of you don't know what you're doing, there's not much point in being there [laughs]. [Sarah, first interview]

> …we've felt that we haven't really wanted to utilise lectures as much as what we probably would have done because we know how much pressure you're all under so we wouldn't have asked you for extra help because you're all so busy all the time! Even though you've never said it, you can just tell. Yeah. I do think the *lack* of lecturers in the second and the third year… [George, second interview]

Analysis of data emerging from the University's Final Year Student Experience Questionnaire completed by the Neville School cohort associated with the student experiences study illustrated lower levels of satisfaction in areas relating to support than had been evident in previous years. However, the percentage of OT students that were happy to recommend the School to friends or relatives mirrored the very high figure of previous cohorts.

It was in the light of the initial staffing cuts that occurred during participants' second year of study that a decision was taken not to pursue an anticipated arm of the research that was to consider staff perspectives of how students from non-traditional academic backgrounds manage on the full-time OT programme. Staff morale was sorely shaken by events and individual workloads increased considerably. I considered it inappropriate to burden

colleagues further by requesting that they participate in my research and felt it likely that anything they may have been able to contribute would be strongly coloured by the pervading circumstances. The subsequent and ongoing upheaval associated with the restructuring and reorganisation of the Neville School confirmed that this decision should stand.

Summary of Chapter 5

This chapter has provided a rich illustration of the context within which the educational experiences of a group of OT students with non-traditional academic backgrounds can be understood. In drawing upon documentary evidence to provide insight into the cultures, values, structures and educational practices of the Neville School and Mackellar University, it is important to note the potential discrepancies between what is espoused and what is practiced and between what is required and what is achieved. Nonetheless, this chapter provides a vivid portrayal of the learning environment and generates insights which contribute to the theoretical understanding of student experiences. It allows readers to more effectively draw their own interpretations about the meaning and significance of the research findings (Patton, 2002; Simons, 1996; Stake, 1995) which are presented in the following chapters, and facilitates the potential for naturalistic generalisations to be made (Stake, 1995).

Chapter 6: Progression Routes and Exit Awards

Introduction

The primary focus of this research was the educational experiences of OT students from non-traditional academic backgrounds. The employment of a case study approach emphasised that context is understood to be an integral aspect of developing insight into and understanding of experiences. Context in this instance was significant not only in terms of the educational environment within which students were learning, but in terms of their academic achievements.

Academic award is a blunt outcome measure of development and achievement in HE. Attainment in an academic domain is potentially accompanied by personal and, in the case of programmes such as OT, professional development and the learning path is inherently complex, incorporating uncertainty, conflict and struggle, none of which are necessarily clearly reflected in the academic award individuals achieve. Nevertheless, academic progress and attainment do contribute to the overall picture and add to the context within which student experiences might be understood.

A small body of existing evidence suggests that the final marks dictating degree classifications are indistinguishable for OT students holding traditional and non-traditional entry qualifications (Howard and Jerosch-Herold, 2000; Howard and Watson, 1998; Shanahan, 2004), however there are limitations associated with this research. The small samples of the first two studies were drawn from the same problem-based programme which may limit the degree to which the findings generalise to other similar programmes, much less those such as the Neville School's which are based on a modular structure. This is less of an issue for Shanahan's (2004) much larger sample of 425 students drawn from eight OT schools across England and Wales, although the structure of the programmes she studied were not identified. All three studies focused solely on the attainment of students who successfully graduated from their programmes; those who left prior to completion were not considered.

Following Chapter 5's descriptive account of the specific context of the case and the environment within which participants in this research were learning, this chapter presents the results of analysis of the quantitative data emerging from the progression routes study. This element of the research adds to the existing body of knowledge by offering insight into patterns of student progression and achievement in a modular programme, including those of students who do not complete the programme. It also provides important information that

adds depth and richness to, and helps to clarify, the uniqueness of the case within which student experiences are to be considered in the chapters that follow.

This chapter is structured on the basis of the aims of the progression route study. To reiterate, these aims were to:

1. Examine trends in the general demographic characteristics of students commencing the full-time undergraduate OT programme in the Neville School at Mackellar University, including:
   a. The gender ratios.
   b. The proportion of mature students.
   c. The ethnic diversity of students.
   d. The diversity of socio-economic backgrounds of students.
2. Examine trends in the number of students with non-traditional academic backgrounds commencing the programme.
3. Examine the progression routes and exit awards of OT students with non-traditional academic backgrounds compared to those of traditional A-level students.

Profiling the sample

Data were collected from 239 OT students who joined the Neville School in four consecutive cohorts between 2003 and 2006. Table 6.1 summarises the distribution of these students across the cohorts, highlighting that nearly 87 percent of those registering on the programme during this period consented to their data being included in the study which enhances the representativeness of the findings within the context of the Neville School.

Year of Entry	Actual cohort size	Number recruited	Percentage recruited
Oct 2003	72	56	77.78%
Oct 2004	77	69	89.61%
Oct 2005	66	60	90.91%
Oct 2006	61	54	88.52%
Total	276	239	86.59%

Table 6.1: Recruitment from each cohort to the progression routes study

Gender ratios

Reflecting the typical gender ratios of the profession and undergraduate populations (COT 2003b; COT 2007), women students comprised 89 percent of the sample and at least 80 percent of each cohort (see Figure 6.1). Across the four cohorts, there was the suggestion of

an overall pattern of declining numbers of male students commencing the programme but ratios would need to be considered over a longer timeframe to ascertain the longevity of this trend.
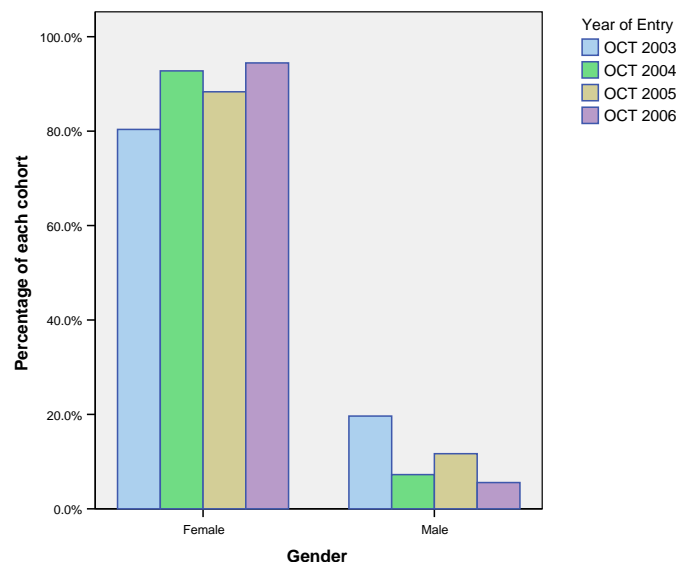
Figure 6.1: Gender ratios across cohorts

<u>Age at entry</u>

The box and whisker plot in Figure 6.2 provides a visual summary of the ages of students entering the programme with each of the cohorts. Each of the boxes highlights the inter-quartile range, within which the middle fifty percent of the ages for each cohort fell. The horizontal line across each box represents the median age for that cohort, while the 'whisker' projections define the outer age ranges. With a programme entry threshold of eighteen years (COT 2006), marked in three of the four cohorts by the lower end of the inter-quartile range, age at entry data is inevitably skewed, as confirmed by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic: $D(239) = 0.25$, $p < .001$. The two circles on the plot marked '40' and '120' represent outlier cases, aged 40 and 42 years respectively, who were 'unusually' mature compared to others in their particular cohort, but rather less so within the context of the sample as a whole, there being a 50 and a 51 year old who registered with the 2006 cohort.
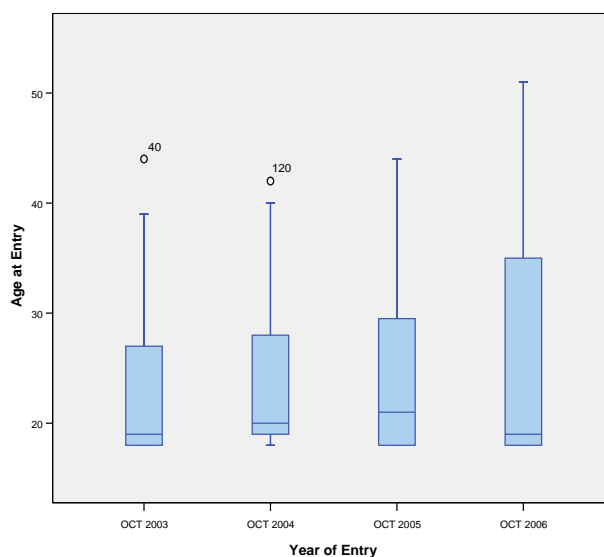
Figure 6.2: Age at entry across cohorts

Although the ages of the mature students who entered the programme steadily advanced, with means of 23, 24, 25 and 26 years for each successive cohort, the proportion of mature students comprising each cohort was less consistent. With data coded to distinguish between those who entered at approximately school-leaver age (under 21 years), and those who commenced as young mature (aged 21 to 25 years) and older mature (aged over 25 years) students, Figure 6.3 highlights that while the proportion of young mature students remained relatively stable, the proportion of older mature students showed more variability. It rose steadily between 2003 and 2005, with mature students as a whole dominating the 2005 sample, but declined again in 2006 when younger students were again in the majority.
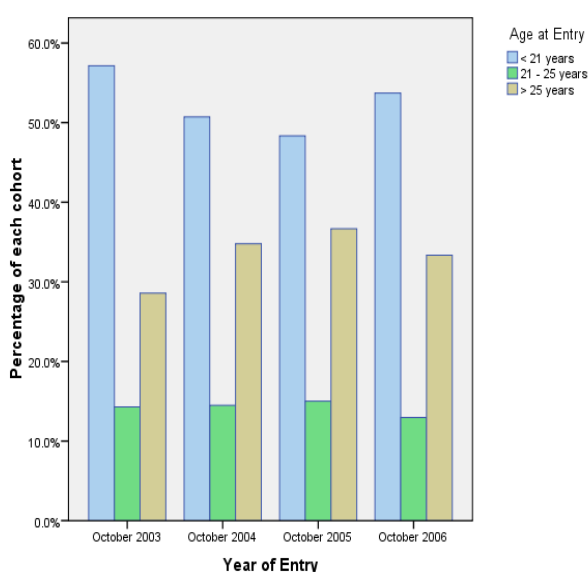
Figure 6.3: Percentage of mature student entrants across cohorts

Although not all students registering with Mackellar University volunteered information regarding their ethnic background, it is evident that there was very little ethnic diversity within the Neville School, with 94 percent of the sample self-classifying as White British (see Table 6.2). The most recent data from COT (2007b) reports that, across England, the percentage of new students from black and minority ethnic groups stood at seven percent and twelve percent in 2004 and 2005 respectively, highlighting the limited diversity within the profession. With the 'other' category in this data including those from black and minority ethnic groups as well as those of European and Australasian descent, the ethnic diversity of the Neville School falls below national averages. It is likely that the geographical location of Mackellar University, particularly the fact that it is outside the London area, and regional patterns of diversity, have some bearing on the recruitment of students from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Further, limited existing diversity may discourage future expansion where students seek institutions with already good representation from minority ethnic groups (Reay et al., 2001b).

		Year of Entry				
		OCT 2003	OCT 2004	OCT 2005	OCT 2006	Total
Ethnicity	White British	54	66	56	49	225 (94.1%)
	White Irish	0	1	1	0	2 (0.8%)
	British Indian	0	0	0	3	3 (1.3%)
	Other Asian background	0	1	0	0	1 (0.4%)
	Mixed - White & Asian	0	0	1	0	1 (0.4%)
	Other Ethnic background	1	1	0	0	2 (0.8%)
	Not known	0	0	1	1	2 (0.8%)
	Information refused	1	0	1	1	3 (1.3%)
	Total	56	69	60	54	239

Table 6.2: Ethnic backgrounds of students across cohorts

Diversity of socio-economic background

Data on the socio-economic backgrounds of new OT students are not available from COT, but anecdotally the profession is perceived to be dominated by the white middle classes. Notwithstanding the small upward trend in the numbers of students who were 'not classified', Table 6.3 generally supports this perception. While the proportion of different socio-economic

backgrounds varies across each of the cohorts, there is a degree of consistency in that those from higher managerial, professional, intermediate and semi-routine backgrounds dominate all four cohorts and the sample as a whole. The relatively high proportion of semi-routine backgrounds amongst the sample (16.3 percent) may be associated with the number of students who move from employment as unqualified OT support workers to studying for professional qualifications. This, however, is conjecture as there is no evidence available within the data to support the claim.

		Year of Entry				
		OCT 2003	OCT 2004	OCT 2005	OCT 2006	Total
Socio-economic background	Not classified	8	11	10	11	40 (16.7%)
	Higher Groups					
	Higher managerial & professional occupations	6	13	10	4	33 (13.8%)
	Professional occupations	16	17	16	19	68 (28.5%)
	Middle Groups					
	Intermediate occupations	9	14	9	6	38 (15.9%)
	Small employers & own account workers	3	0	4	3	10 (4.2%)
	Lower Groups					
	Lower supervisory & technical occupations	3	0	2	2	7 (2.9%)
	Semi-routine occupations	8	14	9	8	39 (16.3%)
	Routine occupations	3	0	0	1	4 (1.7%)
	Total	56	69	60	54	239

Table 6.3: Socio-economic backgrounds of students across cohorts

Non-traditional academic backgrounds

A key premise of this research was the perception of a growing number of students entering the OT programme with non-traditional academic backgrounds or entry qualifications. For the purposes of this analysis, 'traditional' entry qualifications were deemed to be A-level qualifications achieved by school-leavers under the age of twenty-one years, while the range of 'non-traditional' entry qualifications was broad and incorporated A-levels achieved by mature students. Table 6.4 provides a summary of the range of entry qualifications recorded across the four cohorts. Within the 'other' category were: one NVCE recorded along side A-levels, one Irish Leaving Certificate, four certificates in HE (equivalent to accruing 120 credits

at Level 4), ten Bachelors degrees (at a minimum lower second class), one MPhil and one Associate Degree in Rehabilitation Therapy Technology (similar to a Foundation Degree).

Entry Qualifications	Year of Entry				
	Oct 2003[a] (n = 56)	Oct 2004[b] (n = 69)	Oct 2005[c] (n = 60)	Oct 2006[d] (n = 54)	Total (n = 239)
A-levels <21 years at entry	29 (51.79%)	29 (42.03%)	20 (33.33%)	26 (48.15%)	104 (43.51%)
A-levels Mature at entry	3 (5.36%)	12 (17.39%)	7 (11.67%)	7 (12.92%)	29 (12.13%)
Access	15 (26.79%)	17 (24.64%)	20 (33.33%)	14 (25.93%)	66 (27.62%)
HND	0	1 (1.45%)	0	0	1 (0.42%)
GNVQ	1 (1.79%)	0	0	0	1 (0.42%)
AVCE	2 (3.57%)	11 (15.92%)	8 (13.33%)	3 (5.56%)	24 (10.04%)
BTEC	2 (3.57%)	0	2 (3.33%)	1 (1.85%)	5 (2.09%)
Foundation Degree	0	1 (1.45%)	0	0	1 (0.42%)
OU Science Foundation	3 (5.36%)	2 (2.90%)	3 (5.00%)	0	8 (3.35%)
International Baccalaureate	0	0	1 (1.67%)	1 (1.85%)	2 (0.84%)
Other	3 (5.36%)	5 (7.25%)	5 (8.33%)	5 (9.26%)	18 (7.53%)

NOTE: Some cases recorded more than one entry qualification: (a) one mature student recorded Access and A-level qualifications and one younger student recorded A-level and AVCE qualifications (b) 10 younger students recorded A-level and AVCE qualifications (c) Six younger students recorded A-level and AVCE qualifications (d) Two younger students recorded A-level and AVCE qualifications, while another recorded A-level and 'Other' qualifications

Table 6.4: Entry qualifications across cohorts

With very small recorded numbers for some entry qualifications and to establish more clearly the overall patterns of traditional and non-traditional entry qualifications the data were collapsed into a dictomous categorical variable according to the principles outlined in Appendix 4.10. Cases recording a minimum BA/Sc (Hons) were excluded from this variable and further analysis as the experience of previous successful engagement with HE is likely to substantially influence progression and achievement in subsequent Bachelors awards, rendering it inappropriate to classify them as either traditional or non-traditional.
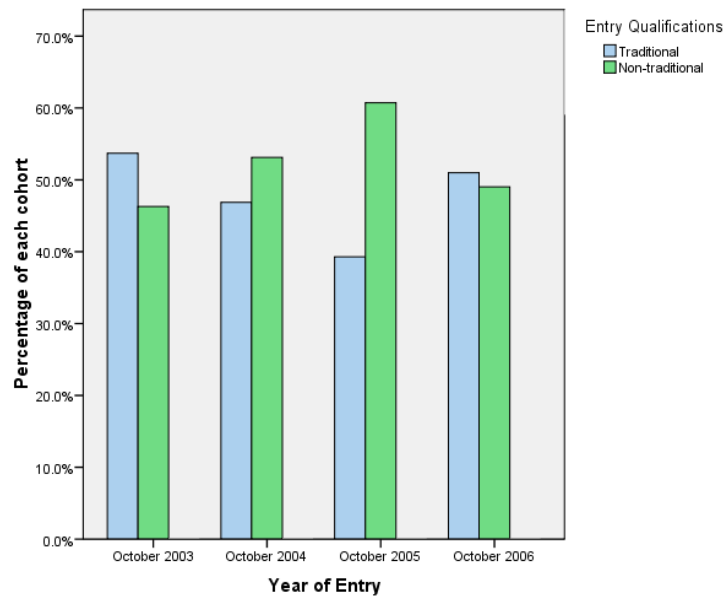
Figure 6.4: Percentage of traditional and non-traditional academic backgrounds

Mirroring the pattern of mature student entry, Figure 6.4 illustrates that the percentage of students entering with non-traditional academic backgrounds rose steadily between 2003 and 2005, before declining again in 2006. Figure 6.5 demonstrates the relationship between maturity at entry and the nature of individual academic backgrounds, with younger students continuing to enter largely, although not exclusively, with A-level qualifications.
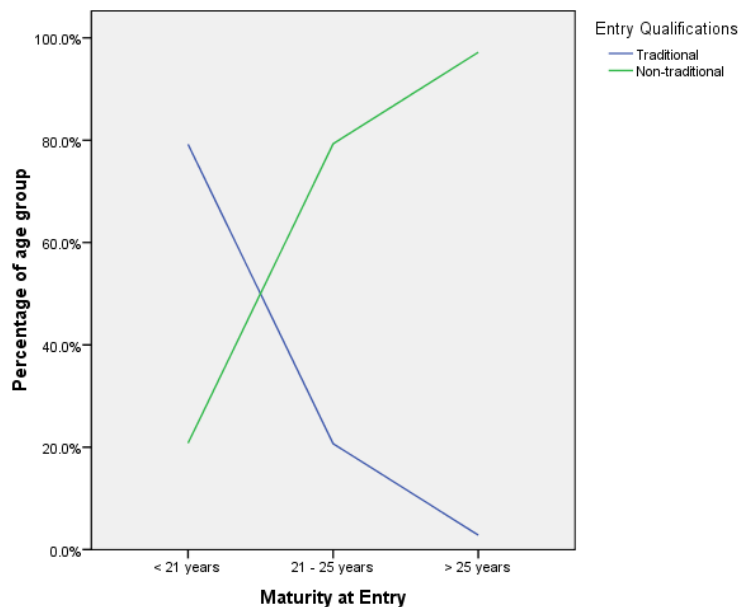
Figure 6.5: Entry qualifications according to maturity at entry

Progression routes and exit awards

The progression routes and exit awards of students from traditional and non-traditional academic backgrounds, based on the successive outcome measures of passing Level 4, passing Level 5, passing Level 6 and finally the award of a 'good' (upper second or first class) honours degree, are summarised in Table 6.5. A key aim of this element of the research was to consider the academic outcomes of all students, not simply those who completed the programme. As such, Table 6.5 includes a summary of the exit awards associated with each stage of progression through the programme, which, for clarity, is further illustrated in Figure 6.6 (Appendix 6.1 provides a summary of the thresholds for various awards).

| | | Entry Qualifications | |
		Traditional (n = 107)	Non-traditional (n = 118)
Passed Level 4	**Yes**	97	98
	Min award: Cert Allied Health	(90.65%)	(83.05%)
	No	10	20
	No award	(9.35%)	(16.95%)
Passed Level 5	**Yes**	95	97
	Min award: Dip Allied Health	(88.79%)	(82.20%)
	No	12	21
	Max award: Cert Allied Health	(11.21%)	(17.80%)
Passed Level 6	**Yes**	94	90[a]
	Min award: BSc (Hons) 3rd class	(87.85%)	(76.27%)
	No	13	24[a]
	Max award: BSc Allied Health	(12.15%)	(20.34%)
Good Degree	**Yes**	83	77[a]
(1st or 2:1)	*Min award: BSc (Hons) 2:1*	(77.57%)	(65.25%)
	No	24	37[a]
	Max award: BSc (Hons) 2:2	(22.43%)	(31.36%)

a: 4 students from the 2006 cohort have yet to complete Level 6 and are not included in these figures

Table 6.5: Progression routes of students from traditional and non-traditional academic backgrounds

It is clear from Table 6.5 and Figure 6.6 that, as previous research has found (see for example, Cook, 2003; see for example, Yorke, 2000), the majority of students making early departures from the programme do so in their first year. While the 'unsuccessful' category at each stage of progression in Table 6.5 incorporates departures that are voluntarily and involuntarily (due to academic failure), it is noteworthy that when compared to those from

traditional academic backgrounds, students from non-traditional academic backgrounds are nearly twice as likely to leave the programme without an academic award (having been unsuccessful in completing their Level 4 studies), are more likely to leave the programme with sub-honours awards and are less likely to achieve a good honours degree.
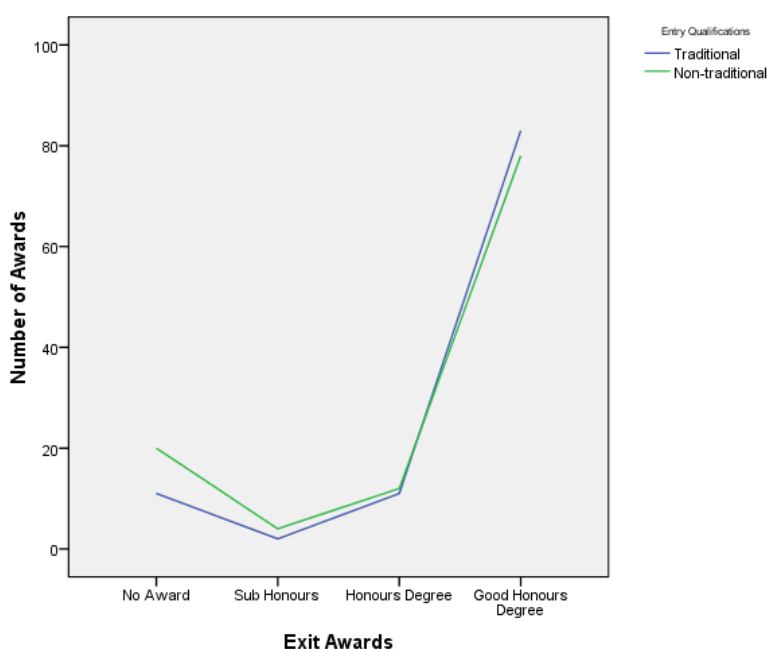
Figure 6.6: Exit awards made to students from traditional and non-traditional academic backgrounds

Students from traditional and non-traditional backgrounds are not homogenous in terms of other characteristics such as maturity at entry, gender, socio-economic backgrounds (SEC) or ethnicity. A series of stepwise binary logistic regressions therefore examined the impact of these variables on progression routes and exit awards, although ethnic background was not incorporated as the data were heavily biased towards 'White British' entrants and the categories of this variable could not be meaningfully collapsed.

Table 6.6 summarises the variables identified as significant predictors of outcome in each of the regression models representing points of progression through the programme. Those predictors not reaching statistical significance (including maturity at entry and backgrounds from the middle socio-economic groups) are not included (see Appendix 6.2 for full details). A key point to note is that despite apparent patterns in the descriptive analysis, the nature of academic background was not influential at any stage. There was, however, a consistent pattern of male gender and backgrounds from lower socio-economic groups acting as significant predictors of poorer outcomes at each level of analysis. Each of these predictors was important over and above the effect of the other in each level of the analysis; that is,

each had a significant influence even when the effect of the other was held constant. Male gender was the stronger predictor of a poor outcome at Level 4, while a background from the lower socio-economic groups was the stronger predictor of poor outcomes in all other models.

Level of Analysis	B (Std Error)	Significance	95% Confidence Interval for Odds Ratio		
			Lower CI	Odds Ratio	Upper CI
Pass at Level 4					
R^2 = .09 (Cox & Snell), .18 (Nagelkerke). Model x^2 (4) = 18.27, p = .001					
Constant [a]	-2.90 (0.44)	.000	.	.06	.
Gender (male)	1.77 (0.58)	.002**	1.88	5.84	18.15
SEC (lower groups)	1.56 (0.54)	.004**	1.66	4.78	13.77
Pass at Level 5					
R^2 = .09 (Cox & Snell), .17 (Nagelkerke). Model x^2 (4) = 18.61, p = .001					
Constant [a]	-2.86 (0.43)	.000	.	0.06	.
Gender (male)	1.65 (0.58)	.004**	1.69	5.22	16.11
SEC (lower groups)	1.67 (0.53)	.002**	1.88	5.32	15.06
Pass at Level 6					
R^2 = .11 (Cox & Snell), .19 (Nagelkerke). Model x^2 (4) = 21.64, p < .001					
Constant [a]	-2.72 (0.41)	.000	.	0.07	.
Gender (male)	1.72 (0.56)	.002**	1.85	5.58	16.82
SEC (lower groups)	1.74 (0.51)	.001***	2.11	5.71	15.47
Good Degree					
R^2 = .08 (Cox & Snell), .12 (Nagelkerke). Model x^2 (3) = 15.63, p = .001					
Constant [a]	-1.65 (0.28)	.000	.	0.19	.
Gender (male)	1.30 (0.51)	.011*	1.34	3.67	10.04
SEC (lower groups)	1.22 (0.41)	.003**	1.53	3.39	7.50

a: constant or baseline model in which all predictor variables are omitted and it is assumed that all cases fall into the outcome category with the highest frequency (i.e. 'yes' in all levels of analysis); * p < .05; ** p < .005; *** p = .001

Table 6.6: Significant predictors of progression through the programme

To summarise the (rounded) findings represented in Table 6.6:
1. The odds of a male student failing to pass Level 4 are nearly six times higher than for a female.
2. The odds of a male student failing to pass Level 5 are more than five times higher than for a female.
3. The odds of a male student failing to pass Level 6 are over five and a half times higher than for a female.
4. The odds of a male student failing to secure a good degree are over three and a half times higher than for a female.

5. The odds of a student from the lower socio-economic groups failing to pass Level 4 are approaching five times higher than for a student from a higher socio-economic group.

6. The odds of a student from the lower socio-economic groups failing to pass Level 5 are more than five times higher than for a student from a higher socio-economic group.

7. The odds of a student from the lower socio-economic groups failing to pass Level 6 are over five and a half times higher than for a student from a higher socio-economic group.

8. The odds of a student from the lower socio-economic groups failing to secure a good honours degree are more than three times higher than for a student from a higher socio-economic group.

Final degree marks

Narrowing the focus to only those students who successfully completed the programme, as previous research in OT has done, the average final degree mark (upon which classifications are based) achieved by students from traditional academic backgrounds (M = 63.37, SE = .45) was almost indistinguishable from that achieved by students from non-traditional academic backgrounds (M = 63.14, SE = .47). It was unsurprising therefore that the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant t(182) = .39, p > .05 and that the size effect was close to zero r = .03. These findings are consistent with those of Howard and Watson (1998) and Howard and Jerosch-Herold (2000) and having excluded students holding previous degrees, can account for the significant findings of Shanahan (2004).

Although the odds of male students failing to pass at each level of the programme were significantly higher than for female students, the achievements of those male students who progressed to the end of the programme were comparable with those of their female counterparts. On average, the final degree marks achieved by women (M = 63.44, SE 0.32) was only marginally higher than those achieved by men (M = 62.49, SE = 1.26), the difference was not statistically significant t(193) = .83, p > .05, and the size effect was again close to zero r = .06. Neither socio-economic background, H(2) = 1.98, p > .05, nor maturity at entry, H(2) = 1.40, p > .05, had a significant impact on final degree mark. This latter statistic is consistent with the results of previous research in OT education that has considered this relationship (Howard and Watson, 1998; Shanahan, 2004), but those with gender and socio-economic background have not previously been examined

Summary of Chapter 6:

Analysis of the quantitative data highlights that the OT programme at the Neville School, like the UK profession itself, continues to be dominated by female students and those from white British backgrounds. While the percentage of young mature students (aged 21-25 years at entry) remained relatively stable during the period under examination, the percentage of older mature students (aged over 25 at entry) rose fairly steadily between 2003 and 2005 until in 2005, mature students as a whole dominated the sample. The percentage of older mature students declined in 2006, returning younger students to the majority. This shift may reflect the 2006/7 introduction of top-up fees (it cannot be assumed that all students understood they were not applicable to OT programmes), but there is no evidence in the data to support this speculation.

Access, A-Level and AVCE awards were the most commonly recorded entry qualifications amongst the sample. Older mature students were strongly associated with non-traditional academic backgrounds, even after excluding those who held previous degrees. There was a steady increase in the proportion of students entering with non-traditional academic backgrounds between 2003 and 2006, such that in 2004 and 2005 they were in the majority. Mirroring the reduction in 2006 of mature student numbers, the percentage of students from non-traditional academic backgrounds declined in this year to a figure approximately equal to, although slightly less than, the percentage of students with traditional academic backgrounds.

Monitoring of student demographics would need to be undertaken over a longer timeframe to review these patterns and examine the manner in which they develop. In the shifting sands of the Neville School and the HE sector as a whole, the patterns that have emerged between 2003 and 2006 may bear little resemblance to those of subsequent years.

The findings of this research highlight that while the nature of students' entry qualifications or academic background have no significant impact on the identified outcomes of passing at Level 4, 5 and 6 and achieving a 'good' honour degree, male gender and a background from amongst the lower socio-economic groups have emerged as significant predictors of poorer outcomes at all levels of analysis. Male gender was the stronger predictor in relation to passing Level 4, while a background from the lower socio-economic groups was the stronger for the other outcomes. The size effects of each of the significant statistical models is small to medium, highlighting that, as educators might hope, there is more to academic achievement in HE than individual demographic characteristics. Nevertheless, previous research considering student attainment on OT programmes (Howard and Jerosch-Herold, 2000; Howard and Watson, 1998; Shanahan, 2004) has not considered socio-economic background or gender, and has not considered students who failed to graduate from their programmes of study, so these findings represent a significant contribution to the current body of knowledge.

Chapter 7: Student Experiences

Introduction

With Chapter 5 describing the educational environment encountered by students studying on the undergraduate OT programme in the Neville School and Chapter 6 profiling the student population at the time of this research and analysing their academic progress and attainment, Chapter 7 develops the case study by presenting the analysis of student experiences. While the majority of the data presented to support key points are drawn from the various components of the student experiences study, my interpretation of them has been informed by data presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

To recap, the student experiences study gathered data via:
1. Two focus groups aligned with the commencement of the programme;
2. Reflective diaries maintained by participants throughout the three years of this longitudinal study;
3. One-to-one semi-structured interviews conducted towards the end of the participants' first and third years of study.

Additional background data were provided by participants at the time of the focus group and the second interview.

The dataset pertaining to each participant was transformed into a consistent text-based format and theoretical thematic analysis of it was informed by Bourdieu's theory of practice. Individual datasets were analysed before turning attention to the cross-section of data available at each phase of the study. When the full corpus of data was available and codes and sub-codes had coalesced into key themes and interpretive constructs, I wrote a summary of the analysis of each dataset and the experiences of each individual participant (presented later in this chapter and in Appendix 7.1) before bringing the entire body of data together to consider the case study as a whole.

Profiling the participants

Fourteen volunteer participants with non-traditional academic backgrounds were recruited from a single cohort of the full-time OT programme in the Neville School at Mackellar University. One individual voluntarily withdrew from the programme prior to the first round of planned interviews and did not respond to requests for a discontinuation interview. The only data available from this individual was her contribution to an initial focus group; I felt that this was insufficient to contribute meaningfully to the level of analysis undertaken and have

therefore excluded it. Table 7.1 provides a brief introduction to the thirteen remaining participants and summarises some of their characteristics which are pertinent to this study. Reflecting the typical gender imbalance and limited ethnic diversity of the OT profession as a whole (COT, 2007b) and the student population in the Neville School (as evidenced in Chapter 6), all of the participants were women from white British backgrounds. However, illustrating that 'non-traditional academic backgrounds' potentially encompass the entire adult life-span, participants ranged in age from 18 to 51 years (average: 36) at entry, and experienced a study gap of up to 31 years (average: fifteen years) prior to commencing their pre-entry educational qualifications. Demonstrating that holding non-traditional academic qualifications also potentially transcends social background, participants represent virtually the full spectrum of socio-economic classifications and only a minority had absolutely no vicarious exposure to HE.

Chapter 6 highlighted that when compared to those who entered via traditional academic routes, students from non-traditional academic backgrounds were nearly twice as likely to leave the programme without an academic award, were more likely to leave the programme with sub-honours awards and were less likely to achieve a good honours degree. Regression analyses, however, clarified that the nature of students' entry qualifications or academic background was not, in fact, a statistically significant predictor of poorer outcomes, although male gender and a background from amongst the lower socio-economic groups both were. The (female) participants in the student experiences study came from a range of social backgrounds, and although most (including those from lower socio-economic groupings) were very successful in that they achieved a 'good' (upper second or first class) honours degree, this fact reveals very little about their experience of reaching that point. The qualitative data gathered via the student experiences study revealed a range of educational experiences amongst participants, highlighting that their unanimous assertions of affinity with the profession provided no guarantee of affinity with the HE *field* they had entered.

Analysis framed by Bourdieu's theory of practice highlighted that individual *habitus* born out of varying pre-entry social contexts, together with the nature and volume of existing and developing portfolios of *capital*, influenced congruence with the dominant culture and taken-for-granted practices of the *field* and therefore the nature of individual learning experiences within it. To secure a legitimate position within the *field*, participants needed to have or develop a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990b p.66) such that they could conform to its 'rules' and 'logic of practice', and demonstrate and/or accumulate *capital* valued by the *field*. Focusing analysis of the data on the extent to which, and how, participants were able to achieve legitimacy in the *field* offers new insight into student experiences.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age at Entry	Pre-entry employment/roles	Pre-entry Education	Study Gap (Years)	SEC* given at entry	Parents' or partners' occupations	Closest HE exposure
Amanda	F	30	Hairdresser and real estate sales negotiator	Access	8	7	Mum: hairdresser Dad: not discussed	Only sibling holds Masters degree
Amy	F	39	clerk	Access	22	X	Husband: self-employed carpenter	Sister-in-law holds degree
Betty	F	34	beauty therapist, then call centre manager	Access	9	2	Husband: self-employed mechanic	None
Frances	F	41	underwriter	Access + Yr1FdSc	15	3	Husband: fire fighter	Brother-in-law holds degree
Gabby	F	51	courier, then OT assistant	Access	31	6	Partner: mechanic	Only sibling holds degree as mature student
George	F	33	human resources officer, then various un/semi-skilled jobs	Human Biology A level	11	5	Husband: computer technician	Only sibling holds degree
Jemma	F	25	accounts analyst	Biology A level	0	3	Mum: classroom assistant Dad: government & inland revenue roles	Mum and friends hold Bachelors degrees
Jocelyn	F	38	office administrator	Psychology A level	21	X	Mum: various un/semi-skilled jobs Dad: self-employed painter and decorator	Small number of friends hold degrees
Katrina	F	18	college student	AVCE Health & Social Care	0	1	Mum: nurse Dad: naval architect	Small number of friends currently in HE
Lizzie	F	46	school cook	Access	26	6	Husband: builder	1 of 2 siblings and own children hold/studying for degrees
Lynne	F	21	call centre work	NVCE** + earlier A levels	1	2	Dad: naval engineer	Mum holds Diploma. Friends hold degrees or currently in HE
Sarah	F	43	banking IT, then home-maker & Citizens' Advice volunteer	Access	25	X	Husband: ex-RAF, now information technology departmental director	Acquaintance holds degree as mature student
Tracey	F	44	veterinary assistant, then beauty therapist	Access	26	X	Mum: home-maker Dad: lorry driver	1 of 5 siblings holds degree, as does close friend

Table 7.1: Participant characteristics

Note: *Socio-economic Classifications - 1: Higher managerial and professional occupations; 2: Lower managerial and professional occupations; 3: Intermediated occupations; 4: Small employers and own accounts workers; 5: Lower supervisory and technical occupations; 6: Semi-routine occupations; 7: Routine occupations; X: data not provided at registration and therefore not available. ** Likely to refer to AVCE, but was the term used by the participant.

Differentiating positions within the field

All participants were intellectually challenged by their educational encounters as is fitting, but some felt much more comfortable than others within the *field*. Based on an overview of each participant's data, Figure 7.1 provides a diagrammatic representation of their experiences or relative positions within the *field* towards the end of their first year of study and then after three years of study. The horizontal axes represent the 'degree of fit' or congruence of the *habitus* of individual participants and the vertical axes represent participants' experiences within the *field*. Individual positions have been overlaid with an indication of experience clusters that were identified at each point of analysis, with the overlaps reflecting the complex reality of student experiences particularly during the early stages of their transition into the *field*. To further illustrate that the non-traditional academic backgrounds of these participants were, in themselves, insufficient to explain experiences or individual ability and/or willingness to adapt to the demands of the *field*, entry qualifications were superimposed over the individual positions in Figure 7.1 to create Figure 7.2, which reveals no clear pattern of clustering of similar pre-entry qualifications.

Having noted that the majority of participants achieved 'good' degree classifications, these figures begin to differentiate between the experiences of achieving that end by highlighting that while the majority were able to successfully inhabit the *field*, for many, it was from the margins. The established *habitus* of a small number afforded a congruence that enabled them to move into the *field* with comparative ease, but for most, the demands of the *field* and their struggles to develop a feel for the game highlighted the incongruence of their established *habitus* with the dominant culture of the *field*. The achievement of a good degree classification in these circumstances would suggest that it was not necessary for participants to be the 'fish in water' that Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992 p.127) describe, to 'fit' completely or indeed comfortably within the *field*, in order to achieve a degree of success within it.
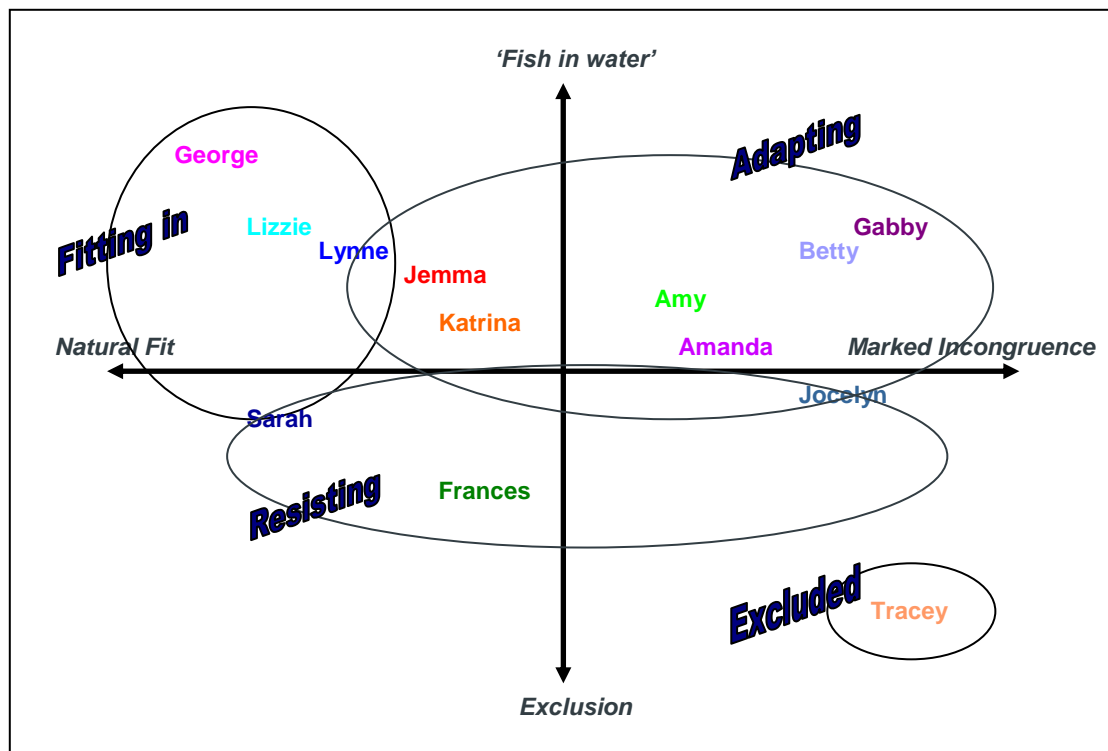
After one year
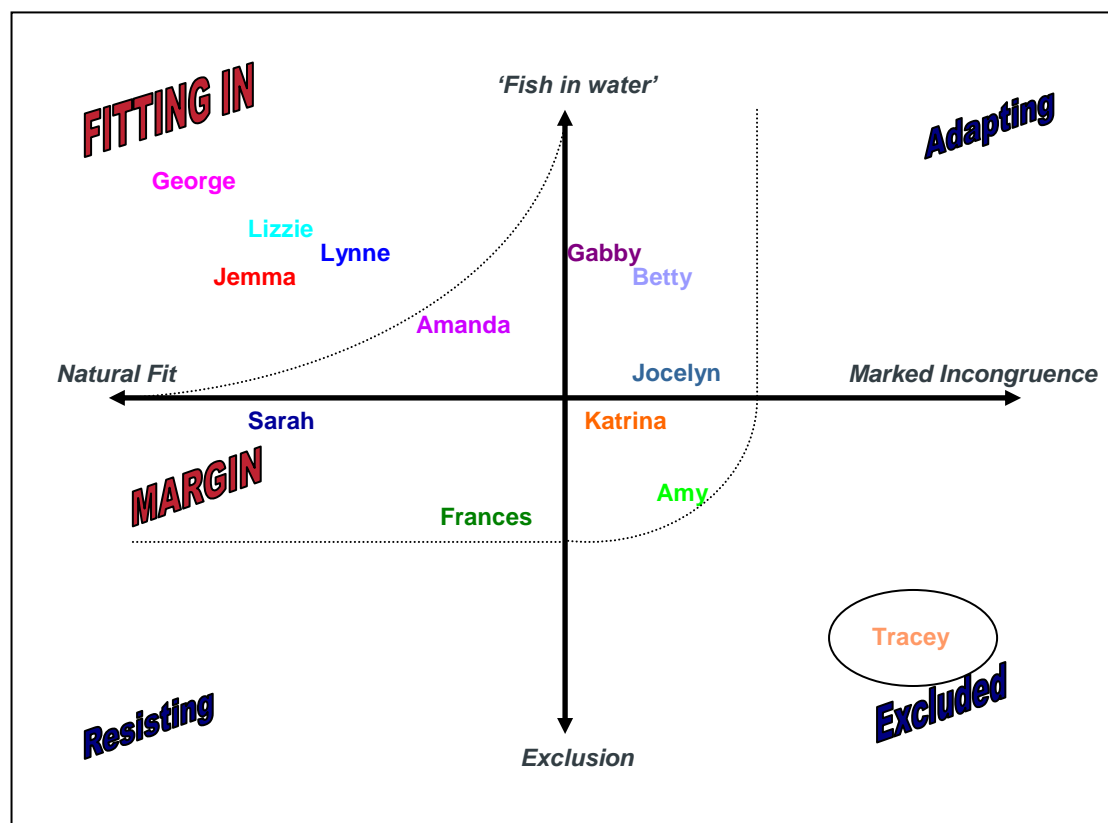
After three years

Figure 7.1: Participant's experiences of position within the field

After one year

After three years
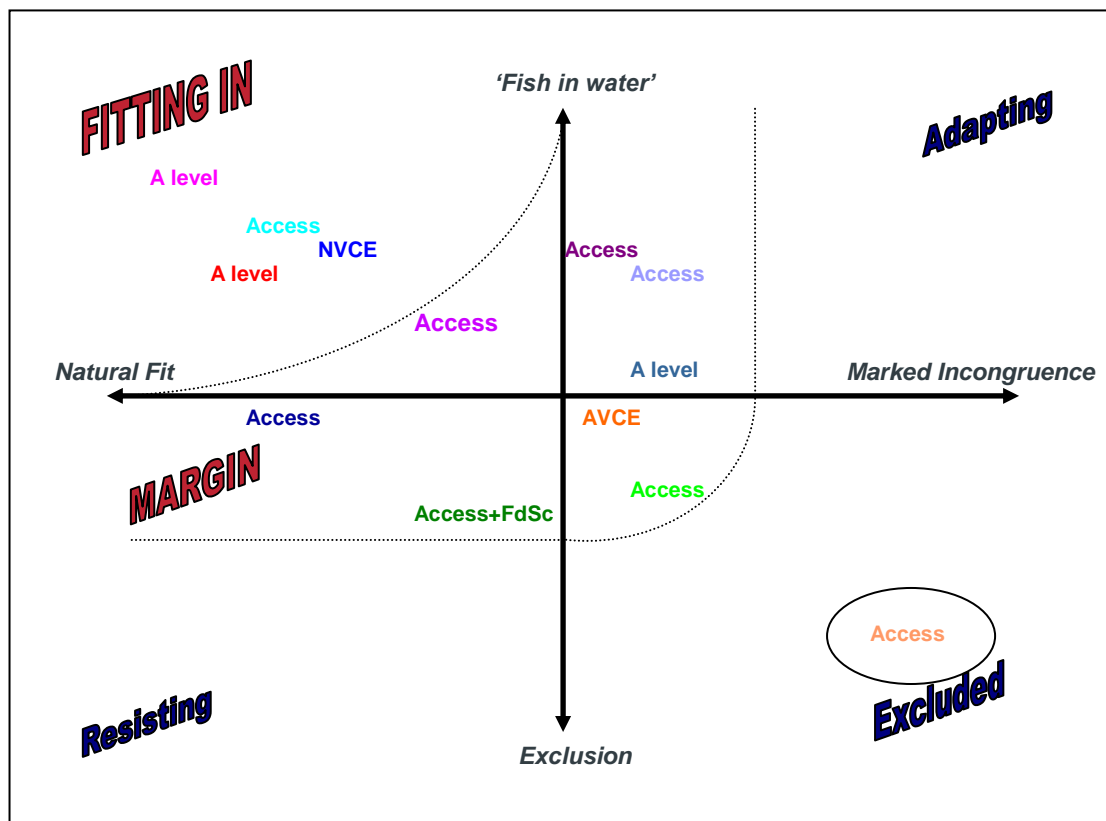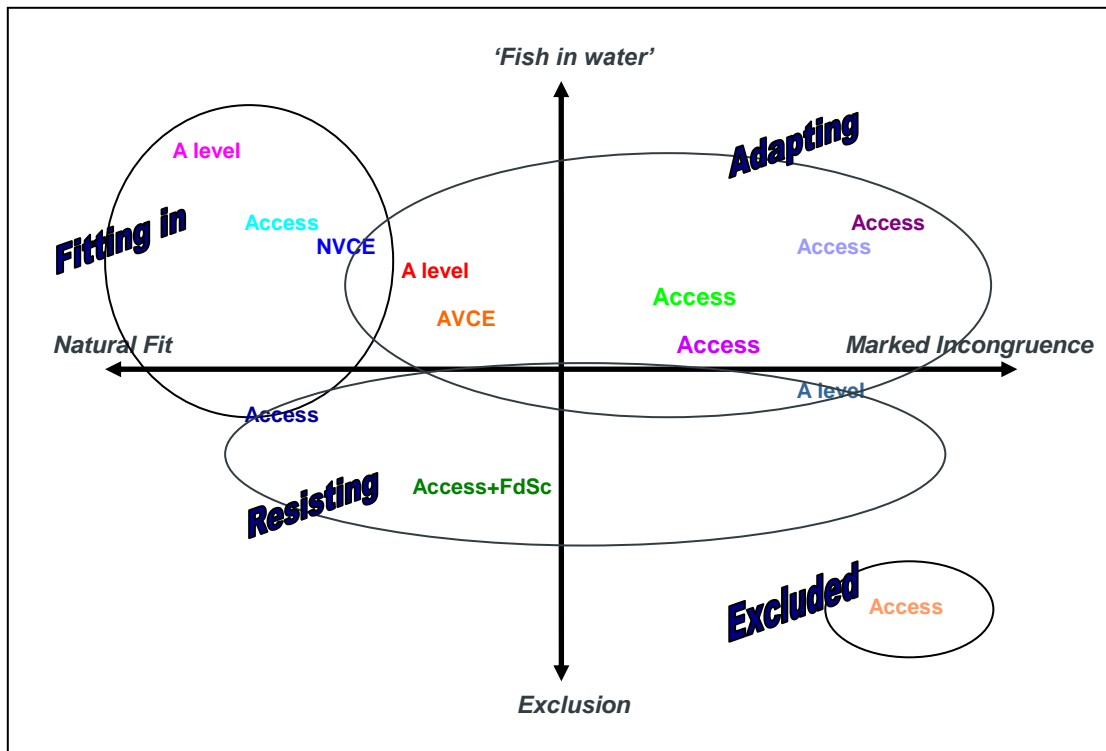
Figure 7.2: Participant's experiences of position within the field by entry qualifications

Experiencing the game

Participants' data highlighted variations in individual *habitus*, portfolios of relevant *capital*, both existing at entry and as developed during engagement with the *field*, and in educational experiences within the *field*. To exemplify participant experiences, there now follows a selection of participant experience summaries which are based on analysis of the data and illustrate differential positions and movements within the *field* (the remaining student experience summaries can be located at Appendix 7.1). These summaries illustrate the forms of *capital* necessary to underpin a feel for the game and the ability to engage productively with the logic of practice of this particular *field*. Reinforcing the notion that *capital* begets *capital* (Bourdieu, 1988), the data illustrate the extent to which participants were able to draw upon existing stocks of *capital* to facilitate the development and extension of other relevant forms, and the volume and composition of individual portfolios of *capital* were, in keeping with Bourdieu's premise, reflected in the different positions and trajectories of participants within the *field*.

George: A 'fish in water'

George left school at seventeen with a single A-level qualification. She moved from the mainland to a UK island when she married and, prior to starting a family and with an HND in European Hospitality Management, worked in human resources in the hospitality industry. Acknowledging that she had chosen the wrong career, it took time to identify that what she really wanted to do was OT, which demanded an honours degree qualification. In the interim, George started a family and left full-time employment to work in various jobs which she described as 'just crap really' [first interview]. Having concluded: 'I've got to do it. Bite the bullet. […] it was now or never' [focus group], and with educational opportunities on the island limited, George completed an A-level through correspondence in just seven months while caring for a toddler and a new baby. The family relocated to the mainland so she could enter university, aged 33, in a location that was close to her family and supportive of her husband's employment prospects. George's father had been an engineer and her mother a teacher, and although she: 'wasn't expected to go to [university] at all. It wasn't really mentioned' [focus group], there was a wall of graduation photos in her grandmother's house that she, her cousins and her brother 'aspired to' [family education/employment map], and upon which all ultimately achieved representation.

Fitting in with the HE *field* was a strong theme throughout George's data. Unlike some other participants, she had moved to a position of greater congruence between her established *habitus* and the pervading *field* than was previously the case. Describing the development of relationships with her peers in HE, George said: 'For me it was brilliant because I'd been bringing up kids and working part-time for […] three years, so my friends [on the island] were

very much housewives with kids. All they used to talk about was shopping and housework and my brain just felt like it was seeping out of my ears! So to finally come and be around people who had a bit more to say for themselves [laughing] other than that sort of thing, was brilliant. It's like meeting a load of like-minded people' [first interview].

Having relocated, economic *capital* was not in rich supply and George's husband, who worked as an IT support specialist, took on extra work in the evenings to supplement the family's finances. In parallel to full-time employment, this private work led to her husband establishing his own business which he intended to develop further once George was employed as an OT [second interview]. George also had to work extremely hard to juggle the competing demands of her life at home and studying, but unlike some other participants, there wasn't a sense that these two *fields* were incompatible or that the *habitus* required to flourish in each was incongruent, and George moved freely between the two social spaces. If anything, George tended to somewhat prioritise her study, which was understandable given all that had been invested, practically and emotionally, in the venture and her 'new life' [first interview], but this did not make her immune to feelings of guilt. George was constantly very busy and needed to make the most of limited and somewhat unreliable childcare and both of these factors caused her considerable stress and contributed to a home-life that was 'hellish at times' [second interview]. She described her experiences as an emotional 'roller coaster' [reflective diary] which often reflected how her children were coping at the time.

George had initially misunderstood the extent of the demands that study would make of her, but once they became apparent, she accepted the situation and adjusted her expectations and working patterns accordingly. Despite the competing demands on her time, George was thriving in many respects. Naturally, she needed to learn new skills and develop *capital* relevant to the new *field*, but her established *habitus* was much more closely aligned with it than was the case for some other participants. The congruence between George's *habitus* and the *field*, her 'feel for the game' and just how clear the (explicitly stated) 'rules of the game' were to her were clearly illustrated when, early in her programme, she discussed the requirements of assessments she had encountered: 'these people who say it wasn't laid out correctly for them, and people who failed saying "oh, we weren't told what to do"…and I'm going, well, we were. It's *right there*, you know!' [first interview]. Although these assertions do not hold true to the same extent in her final year, when she conceded that: 'I have found it a little bit harder with the marking criteria where it has been so open and a bit wafty and I don't really know what has been expected' and that it was 'a complete mystery' why her submissions achieved higher marks than those of others [second interview], George continued to be very successful in the *field*.

A striking feature of George's data was that she seemed to be very *capital* conscious (described in her terms as being strategic) and took active steps to accrue and deploy to her

advantage various forms of *capital*. Social *capital* played a particularly significant role in her engagement with the *field*. In her first interview, George commented: '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 wave length...' The concept of 'like-minded people' was repeated throughout George's data and she was clearly discriminating about who she would work with: 'I think I need to be a little 'cold' and strategic and find people with good understanding of subjects and people on similar wavelengths' [reflective diary]. George's approach had the effect of ensuring that she developed high value social *capital* that afforded the greatest benefit.

> jdw: So that's your core team of people that you work with?
> George: Yep, and who we'll bounce ideas off. And we always use [peer] as,
> she's our kind of guru for extra ideas, so we always ask her for back-up [laughs]
> because we always see her as just knowing everything…Poor [peer]…Yeah, and
> we just work really, really well together. We've all got different skills, and we all
> recognise that we've got different skills.

Reminiscent of Reay's (1998) observations of middle class mothers, George further illustrates her awareness of the value of social *capital* or networks in other aspects of her life when she commented on the adverse effects for her children of not having established herself as part of the 'cliquey groups' [reflective diary] that had developed at the school gates: 'I haven't got the same sort of group of friends with kids that I used to. That really bothered me for a while…not having the network of the mother-friends with the kids; I've got a couple. Just so I could go out in the afternoons with the kids and they could play together, because I want the kids to have their own network of friends…so I have to work on that a bit' [first interview]. George went on to join the Parents' Association at her children's school.

The centrality of social *capital* to George's engagement within the HE *field* was further captured in a comment she made during her second interview: 'So we've *needed* each other to gee ourselves on. With everyone else, we would get together quite often and just debate ideas and definitely bounce ideas off each other a lot.' It was also evident that social *capital* was extremely valuable to her during challenging times, such as the failing health of her father and a further house-move in her second year: 'I couldn't have done it without their help. And also last year when I was moving and I had [two assessments] to hand in and it was just *hellish*, they really helped me. They were like sending me journal [articles] and things like that, proof reading…' [second interview].

Language was scarcely mentioned in George's data which suggests that she naturally possessed a repertoire of linguistic *capital* appropriate to the *field*. While she was excited by extending and developing her academic skills and achieving academically (accruing

academic *capital*), when she felt that theoretical learning wasn't directly relevant to her practice as an OT, she disengaged and had the confidence to adopt a very strategic approach: 'but in a subject like Ethics, I just couldn't be bothered. And when it came to the assessment, I literally did the bare minimum to scrape through and knew that I had. [laughs] I just didn't enjoy that one. I kind of just thought, "What's the point of this?" really. I could see the point, but not the point of having so many lectures on it, especially when I thought we could be doing so much more in other areas' [second interview].

George's data suggest that her efforts were focused on the development of practice-oriented *capital*, and it was again clear that George was strategic and proactive in this regard:

> Whenever I've been on Placement, if I've wanted to do something, I've said, "Can I do this?" or "Can I try this?" And they've always said, "Yeah! Do it!" And a lot of people [peers] have said, "Oh, you got to do *so* much!" and I was like, "Yeah, well it's because I *asked* if I could do it." [second interview]

> wherever I've been, I've just tried to grab resources of different kinds of treatments and interventions […] Whenever I can I get hold of any kind of interventions that have been done, just to try and get those ideas. [second interview]

> if I found out that there was an activity on somewhere that I thought was interesting, and not within the service, then I would go out and spend an afternoon. And quite often, later on in Placement, I would wind up referring someone to that and I generated a lot of ideas from different things that I'd seen. [second interview]

George clearly attributed the development of practice-oriented skills and understanding (*capital*) to both the academic and practice contexts of the programme: 'The place where myself and friends feel inspired and truly learn about OT is at Uni from you guys. All the wonderful lectures show and inspire me as to what I want to do with the role and what OT truly is – I just hope that it remains with me and I don't fall into the 'rut' that physical hospital OTs seem to be in! […] What I would give to have one of you lecturers as my supervisor on placement!' [reflective diary]. Although she reported having worked with some 'awesome' OTs, she was critical of some that she worked alongside who she felt had 'fallen into a very narrow and blinkered role' [reflective diary]. George was also openly critical of academic aspects of the programme, for example: 'I think I watch too many films, I was expecting to now and again go into a lecture and really be *blown* away by a lecturer and to really, really…well, they have inspired me, don't get me wrong, but to really blow me away. I haven't had that yet. [laughs] Not in the style of teaching, I just mean about a subject. Something

where I'd go, "*Oh my God!* That's amazing!"' [first interview]. George wasn't averse to challenging the *fields* of HE or practice, which may be related to the apparent confidence she had in her position within both.

The overwhelming themes emerging from George's data were of fitting in and of gathering *capital* – most often, very strategically. George was very much a 'fish in water' from the outset and remained so throughout her engagement with the *field*. She was awarded a first class honours degree and even before she graduated, was contemplating a Masters degree.

Betty: 'Growing' and 'changing'

Betty was one of the participants whose established *habitus* was least congruent with the new *field*. In conflict with the data she provided at entry (which put her into socio-economic classification 2) Betty self-identified as 'extremely working-class' [first interview] and highlighted that university was never mentioned by her parents when she was growing up. She left school at fifteen and described a varied employment history which included working as an insurance clerk, bar maid and manager, bank clerk, receptionist, driver, cleaner, beauty therapist, recruitment consultant, support manager for a holiday company call centre and a care-support worker. During the focus group, Betty described living as the single parent of her daughter on a council estate for a number of years. In her early twenties, she studied for an NVQ prior to working as a beauty therapist; even then knew she wanted to be an OT but circumstances precluded it as a possibility at that stage. Having completed an Access course the previous year, Betty eventually commenced her undergraduate studies at the age of 34, weeks after marrying her self-employed mechanic husband who provided her with the practical and financial support to facilitate her re-entry to education.

Personal development was always part of Betty's project, but, like some of Archer's participants (2003), she clearly valued her established identity and was very quick to emphasise that her overarching aim wasn't to *change*, but to grow: 'I'm not going to become somebody that I'm not. You know, I'm very…I want to remain quite grounded and I don't want to lose myself along the way. This is going to help me grow' [first interview]. The strength of Betty's assertion, which came at the end of her first year in HE, hinted at resistance to the often unspoken demands that individual *habitus* align harmoniously with the expectations of the *field*, in this case to, as Burke (2005) suggests, become more middle-class, but there is simultaneously evidence of some insecurity regarding her position within the *field*. When discussing her reaction to an academic's comment highlighting the dominance of the middle classes in HE, Betty described herself as: '[e]xtremely working-class…Yeah […] I thought to myself: Maybe that was my own insecurities. It made me feel a little bit "Well, does she think that people like me shouldn't be here?"' She went on to explain: 'I don't think it made *me* think that I shouldn't be here…But I know how hard I've worked to get here…And it probably made

me a little bit more determined, actually.' With middle-class *habitus* the form legitimated by the *field*, it is noteworthy that Betty's self-reliance, drive and determination, features of her established *habitus* born out of a largely working-class social context and her sometimes difficult prior experiences and circumstances, proved useful to her within the new *field*, an observation also made by Reay and colleagues (Reay et al., 2009).

Betty was ambitious to do well in the *field* and in her first interview, spoke of having 'adapted to what's expected of [her]'. A marked feature of her dataset was its power to illustrate the role and value of linguistic *capital* in the *field*, and of the impact of having limited stocks of the particular *form* of language that was valued. Echoing the findings of Archer (2003) and speaking during her first interview about her early experiences in the *field* she said: '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…' The development of language skills (and through them, linguistic *capital*) was an ongoing and active undertaking for Betty which she differentiated from the need to develop discipline-specific language, saying: 'on placement, I tend to do it with medical terms, which I think everybody does; you know, you're finding out about different things that were mentioned, 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]' [second interview]. Betty indicated that in her third year of study she continued to look words up and to spend time actively searching the dictionary and thesaurus for new words to use in her written submissions.

Betty attributed the 'maturing' [first interview] of her writing skills to her active efforts to engage in a lot of academic reading and was pleased to be earning higher marks, which would suggest that her outputs were already beginning to conform more closely with the dominant practices of the *field* (see, for example, Lillis, 2001). However, Betty also recognised limits to this development, commenting in her second interview: 'I don't think I'm that academic, as in my writing and…just how I put things down' and, 'I think I plateaued […] I think I've improved, but only slightly [laughs]. It doesn't come naturally to me. I am definitely more of a practical person…' This latter insight seemed to be born out, or perhaps informed, by the overall difference between her academic and practice placement assessment results.

Betty felt that her life experiences prior to entering the *field* were 'invaluable' [second interview] to her. Her established *habitus* incorporated effective communication and inter-personal skills and although she struggled for a time to understand why they featured on the syllabus, they stood as another example of (in this case, practice-oriented) *capital* born out of

her existing *habitus* that was valuable within the new *field*. Of these skills she said: 'I couldn't quite work out what I was being taught. I found that quite strange actually until the penny dropped and I thought "I *do* this"' [first interview]. Betty's increasing reflexivity enabled her to maximise her learning on placement, and through it to gather additional practice-oriented *capital*; she said: 'I think you gather pieces of people really, and this is what I was saying about learning from all your experiences. Even if it was a negative experience it made me think "'Well, that's *not* how I think. That shouldn't have been done." And "Why don't I think it should have been done that way?" Or if you see bad practice, you just think "Well, that's not how I want to be. When I'm in practice, that's not how I want to be." And you just take a little piece of that and then when you see good things and you think "Yeah, I like that" and "I understand why she did that or why he did that"' [second interview]. Adding further to this aspect of her portfolio, in her second and third years Betty volunteered as an independent advisor at a national disability aids and equipment exhibition attended by health and social care professionals and the public: 'because it was so *relevant* to OT, it was almost a *test* of your knowledge' [second interview].

Betty's data also exemplify the role of social *capital* within the *field*. As noted earlier, Betty actively used social networks (or the social *capital* accrued from them) to help her progress and gather *capital* within the *field* (e.g. learning new words and how to use them correctly), but unlike others, she was unwilling and unable to dedicate herself entirely to the social network that she became associated with; she explained: 'I don't wanna live in their pockets and I don't want to spend my whole life with them. And I think some of the group that I became part of, they did a lot socially. And because I was like "Oh, no sorry, I've got something on" or, you know…I kind of was left out of the loop a bit' [second interview]. Betty felt that her personal preferences in this regard, together with the physical distances and practicalities of her life, did limit her opportunities to access support. She said: 'sometimes you really do value the social network, but there have been quite a few times where I've felt quite isolated…Because I'm away; I'm in a different town. I *haven't* got people around me with a similar sort of experience or even who have gone through Uni themselves…' and, 'I think because I sort of almost wasn't in that little clique, when you are sort of struggling a little bit with your academic work, you think "I could have done with that", you know, just to sort of bounce ideas off. But you can't pick people up and then leave them. They wanted that whole, every week get together thing and I just couldn't do it' [second interview]. Ultimately, Betty was able to draw on social *capital* derived from a small social network that she developed with 'a couple of people who are very similar to me, in the fact that they've just got a lot going on in their own lives and they've got…they're quite happy with their own lives and…they're quite happy with somebody phoning them up every now and *again* to say "Oh, I'm struggling a bit with this; can you help?"' [second interview].

Despite her assertions that: 'I don't feel that I'm changing. I feel like I'm growing' [first interview], there was always some tension or conflict associated with Betty's distinction between change and growth, and with her ambitions within the *field* and her aversion to letting go of her established identity. In her first interview she observed: 'I think you grow because you want to adapt to the society that you're in as well. Because I want to do well in this. I don't want to just pass my degree or pass my exams, I want to do *well* in them. So…I've had to sort of change my language, change my terminology and just fit in here at university.' This shift in *habitus* to meet the expectations of the new *field* generated tensions and was incompatible with that expected within her home environment (or usual *field* of practice) which manifested itself in a number of ways. At the end of her first year of study, Betty was aware of the impact on her family and said: 'I'm still looking up words [laughs] but not as many and I find, it's quite funny actually, because my husband looks at me sometimes and says "What was that you just said? I haven't a clue what you're on about there!" [laughs] And I'll come out with a word and [my daughter] will just look at me and then just walk off [laughs]. So, it's quite funny that my language and my way of explaining things is a little bit different, and my way of talking' [first interview]. The language that Betty had begun to adopt to fit into the *field* of higher education was met with scepticism and incomprehension by players in her usual *field* in an apparent reversal of Betty's own initial experiences. Later, she described the way that she and her brother-in-law were gently mocked by their respective spouses (who were siblings) for their enthusiasm for learning and their sharing of a 'word of the week', adding: 'We wanna broaden our horizons, we wanna…"I don't wanna know just a little bit about that; I wanna know more about that", you know…Whereas my husband is like "Ohh! I'm quite happy with what I'm doing…" and that's it!' [second interview].

Betty's ambition to grow but not change as a result of her engagement with HE was always likely to be difficult to achieve (Lynch and O'Neill, 1994). At the opening of her second interview she remarked: 'I think I've matured as a person; changed as a person'. In exploring this further it became apparent that from Betty's perspective, her personal journey had centred on learning to understand and accept why she is the *way* she is, rather than on fundamentally changing *who* she is, but her experiences still gave her some pause for thought and she said: 'it's something that I do need to sit and talk to my husband about. Because I don't want to have *changed* too much [laughing]. Sometimes I say things and he'll say, you know, "What are you talking about?" But I…I can't discuss a lot of my Uni stuff with [my husband] because he just doesn't really get it; he really doesn't. And that's been quite difficult, not having somebody to talk things over with' [second interview].

The lack of congruence between Betty's existing social environment and the HE *field*, her desire to keep her established identity in tact, her commitment to putting her family before study (arguably an enactment of established *habitus*) and her 'really limited' [second interview] social network meant that Betty experienced HE from the margins of the *field*.

Reflecting the observations of Crozier and colleagues (David, Crozier, Hayward, Ertl, Williams and Hockings, 2010a), she said: 'It's a huge pool, isn't it, that you step into and you're up to your neck rather than up to you knees. And I think I did not have enough time to put in to gain the most back from it. I had to step on the side of the pool, delve into what I *needed* to get me though, rather than get in, immerse myself with it…which would have been great and a whole lot more beneficial, but I just wasn't able to do that' [second interview]. Betty's data highlights that she was nevertheless able to develop a balanced portfolio of *capital* relevant to the *field*. She was ultimately awarded an upper second class degree, and prior to graduation had been offered a job as an OT in social care, which she considers a '*great* place' to start [second interview].

Amy: Learning in the outer margins

Amy's father was in the RAF and the family had moved location, with Amy and her two brothers changing schools, every three years. Compulsory education was not generally a happy experience for Amy and she, like her brothers, left school at 16 [family education/ employment map]. Following a twenty-year break from formal education Amy reports beginning to feel that the administrative job she had held for seven years in the retail sector was getting 'really stale' and 'wasn't mentally stimulating' [focus group], so with the support and encouragement of her new partner, she moved into the NHS as a discharge clerk. This new role introduced her to a range of health professions, highlighting further possibilities and she subsequently enrolled on an Access course with the view to studying OT.

Amy clearly indicated that prior to starting out on what was a very personal journey, she had believed that University was not, in Bourdieu's (1990b p.56) terms 'for the likes of [her]'; that it was 'only the intelligent people that went to University' [first interview] and 'those well-to-do people' [second interview]. It was her partner, a carpenter who left school with O-levels, who persuaded her to set aside that 'old fashioned' notion, to recognise her own potential and believe in herself [focus group]. He had a different perspective perhaps as a result of his sister having successfully attended university. Aged 39, Amy entered the HE *field* excited and nervous, and with a clear aim of 'finding [her] identity' and emerging a 'slightly different [person]' [focus group].

A strong theme throughout Amy's data was incongruent *habitus*. Like many mature students, managing the competing demands of family and study was a significant challenge for Amy. Her eighteen-year-old daughter left home at about the time Amy entered the *field*, and although she felt her fourteen-year-old son was becoming more independent, Amy clearly prioritised home and felt that her studies had to 'fit […] into [her] normal routine' [focus group]. But more than this, Amy perceived home (her established social *field*) and (the *field* of) HE as totally distinct: 'It's a different lifestyle. A completely different lifestyle…' [first interview]. When

operating in each of the two *field*s, she felt that she herself was different: 'When I come here [to university] I'm a different person' [first interview].

Incongruence was very much evident in terms of Amy's educational *habitus* and the demands, expectations and practices of the new *field*. At the outset she expected a difference between her pre-entry educational experiences and those she would encounter in HE, but she was optimistic of adapting: 'I understand that it's a different type of learning coming to university, and it's just getting to grips with […] how [the university] want things to be presented. You know, the referencing thing may be a bit of a challenge, but once we've got to grips with it I think we'll be *fine…*' [focus group]. By the end of her first year, Amy was very clear that '[t]he experience is completely different' from college and 'obviously it was at a much higher standard' [first interview]. She perceived the demands of the *field* to be absolute: 'You're required more of…To me, it feels like that because [in a hushed, urgent voice] you've got an assessment! You've *got* to hand this in! It's *got* to be right! [Returning to a normal voice] It's got to be at the right level. Your references have got to be correct'; 'If you want to get this degree, you've *got* to pass this. Forty percent. You've *got* to do it!' [second interview].

Amy was always very willing to learn from feedback, particularly when she judged her own performance to be below par: 'I can learn from it. I'm looking forward to the feedback when it comes back, and then I can just say, "Well, hang on a minute, I need to look at these areas". There are probably a couple of areas that I need to look at, but I'll find out that…' [first interview]. She came to recognise it as a way to enhance her understanding of the demands that were being made of her: 'OK. What are they wanting from me?' [second interview], but also highlighted that ill-timed feedback could serve to obscure even explicitly stated 'rules of the game' by denying timely access to guidance regarding how to more effectively meet requirements and expectations: 'Perhaps if it was structured slightly different, a bit more apart, then we could have the feedback, correct yourself and then get a more positive result, slightly higher than what you've done' [first interview].

Challenges around linguistic *capital* were evident in a number of references in Amy's data to her ability to deploy language in the form legitimated by the *field*. In her first interview she said: 'I have to think about what I'm doing and make sure my grammar is correct', 'I think I need to *think* about how I structure my sentences to make it more professional and academic', and: 'I think at University, they need you to be straight to the point. No waffle. Put your quote in and that's it. Then go on to the next bit, and I think I'm grasping that. I'm getting there'. This last quote also illustrates Amy's efforts to develop a 'feel for the game' in a broader sense. Of marking criteria she said: 'I don't think they are necessarily straight-forward, personally. But I think, because now I have a mentor [from central University services] who gives me the support and we've worked a way of looking at the criteria and I now go and highlight things, what is needed within that.' [second interview].

A powerful theme throughout Amy's data was her desire to fit in to the *field*; she herself said: 'I try to fit it in [laughs] I've always been the same' [first interview]. Amy made concerted efforts to understand and deliver what was expected of her by the *field* and tried to downplay the incongruence of her *habitus*, choosing instead to focus her attention on fitting in, trying to develop a 'feel for the game' and justifying her position within the *field*. There was always a sense that Amy was somewhat fragile and vulnerable to the risk of being excluded by the *field* that she was trying so hard to establish herself within. At one point in her first interview I sensed that she may have felt as though the interview was part of a judgement about how well she was fitting in, and for a short time she became quite unsettled and seemed to be trying very hard to provide me with the 'right' answer and to give me what she thought I was 'looking for'. Having settled she later highlighted anxiety about how she was perceived by the *field* when she said: 'I'm putting the effort in, but I'm not meeting my potential. I have got more in me, but I don't want the University…I do have concerns that the University probably doesn't think I've *got* it' [first interview]. Amy clearly loved the 'new me' [first interview] that she felt was emerging as a result of her engagement with HE. Acceptance within the *field* was particularly precious to her as she had and continued to invest a great deal to be a part of it and with personal validation and transformation a strong feature of her project, her sense of identity was closely bound to succeeding within it.

Amy and her family went through a very difficult period during the decline and ultimate death of her mother-in-law. It left her feeling torn between the two distinct *field*s she inhabited and although for a time she sought refuge from the trauma of her home life within her studies, she probably had unreasonably high expectations of herself in the circumstances. Amy withdrew from and deferred her first assessed placement and failed three academic modules at Level 4. Having passed her re-sits and married her partner over the summer she rejoined her cohort the following academic year for Level 5 but struggled throughout. A regular theme in her reflective diary in her second year was doing things 'the hard way'. In all probability there was a combination of issues for Amy at this time, including a deterioration in her mood associated with the bereavement, but she spoke of feeling squeezed out of a previously established social network and described returning to her second year as 'quite isolating' [second interview]. Amy failed a Level 5 academic assessment in the first semester before suspending. She returned to complete Level 5 the following academic year and passed the failed assessment at the third attempt.

Social *capital*, or a lack of it, became a highly significant issue in Amy's data. Reflecting the lack of congruence between home (as her established social *field*) and the HE *field* she observed: 'I do have my circle outside; one particular person that's very supportive as well. So I've got support from friends at home and Uni, 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…that is familiar with things and how I'm dealing with things' [first interview], and 'They *don't* understand. I can't talk to my husband and say, "Alright, I'm preparing for this presentation…" which I've just recently done, "I'm preparing for this…" I can't say to him, "What do you think of that?", because he hasn't got a clue! He doesn't understand' [second interview]. To manage this situation, Amy initially suggested: 'You tend to have different friends…different types of friends. You have Uni friends. You have home friends and you have close friends…And you have to adapt. I have learnt that I have to adapt' [first interview], but this became more problematic as she progressed through her course and it became evident that she did not establish a supportive social network, and therefore the possibility of social *capital*, within either of the cohorts she studied alongside. Without people to discuss her academic work with, Amy struggled. She often spoke of 'misinterpreting' instructions, marking criteria, advice, etc [second interview] which suggests that even the explicitly stated 'rules of the game' remained very difficult for her to identify and understand. In lieu of social *capital* amongst her peers, Amy relied on the advice and guidance of a learning mentor that she was able to access as a result of her personal issues, who she described as 'a friend as well' [second interview].

Amy drew a distinction between her practice placement experiences and those in the academic context, and clearly felt more comfortable in the *field* of practice: 'Placement experience has been the most wonderful time that I could…Do you know what I mean? I always excel […] I'm always a B [grade] student. I always excel in what I do; I'm a people person. I can engage with them and I think, on comparison, although my academic stuff, you know…wasn't probably up to the standard that it *may* be or potentially could be, I think when you're on Placement it's like a different world' [second interview]. Her vulnerability and perception of her position in the HE *field* as tenuous is evident: 'You don't think you're worthy, but when you go on to Placement you can…It's like you set that aside. "I'm going to Placement"; you put your uniform on, you put your hat on, and it's a completely different thing. You don't feel under pressure. It's natural; it's a natural way of working' [second interview].

Amy's symbolic reference to her 'OT hat' seemed very much part of her much-coveted new identity and was a way of describing the practice-oriented *capital* that she was gathering. She explained: 'I have my OT hat on and keep filling it with lots of new experiences, ideas, knowledge, which are the foundations for when I qualify as an OT' [reflective diary], and: 'My OT hat is what I take with me and it will be with me forever. It's my learning hat. Everything I take from whoever I work with […] and everything from every Placement I've been to, everything goes into this hat and it makes me […] it will help me to develop as an individual OT' [second interview]. With the majority of her academic results in the D grade band, and the majority of those below 45 percent, Amy described herself as 'naturally probably more of a practical person' [second interview] and reinforced the validity of her place within the *field* via her practice-oriented *capital* and its translation into practice placement results: 'I *know* that

throughout Placement, I can achieve a B…And I'm proud of that. I'm really proud of how I've done on Placement. I'm proud…' Amy added to her stock of practice-oriented *capital* and the content of her OT hat by being accepted as a volunteer for a brain injury charity: 'when I got told that I could start next week, it was one of the proudest feelings […] It will allow me to develop my knowledge even further and understanding it from their perspectives; how they're feeling, you know, what can I do? And it will prepare me for when I'm an occupational therapist' [second interview].

Vulnerability and fragility dominate Amy's data. In her second interview, however, she asserted that she 'fit University life completely. It's me. I'm the natural learner.' She insisted: 'I love the whole experience of the lectures and coming to University is a wonderful experience, it's *just* the isolation for me', but there remained a very strong sense that Amy wanted to fit into the HE *field* to a much greater extent than she actually did and her vision of what it would be like to go to university seemed to have been very much at odds with her experiences. Doubtless, she had limited stocks of academic and (to perhaps a lesser extent) linguistic *capital* relevant to the *field* which contributed to her difficulty in developing a 'feel for the game', but one of the most abiding messages from her data was the potentially crucial role of social *capital*: '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…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; really hard' [second interview].

At the conclusion of the study Amy had yet to successfully negotiate her Level 6 studies and her position within the *field* had moved to the outer margins.

Tracey: Excluded by the field

Amongst the study's participants, Tracey's established *habitus* was one of those least congruent with the demands and expectations of the HE *field*. She observed that: '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?"' [interview]. Tracey described her mother as being 'interest[ed] in politics and history, but unable to go to university or get a better education due to raising six children alone and having to work' [family education/employment map]. Her father, listed separately from the rest of the family on the map, was recorded as a long-distance lorry driver, while she had an employment history which included work as a beautician and a part-time veterinary assistant. Only one of her five siblings, an older sister, held a degree (in sociology and politics), and Tracey was never expected to go to university, although two of her friends had done so.

Tracey was a single parent to two 'quite needy' [focus group] sons who remained living in her small home town (the youngest with his previously estranged father) which was several hours travel away from where she relocated to attend university at the age of 44. She had a tumultuous relationship with an ex-partner, but was often forced to rely on him for financial support. Describing an experience during her first year, she said: 'my ex come down, he did help me out financially, but of course he blew a storm! Oh, it was just horrendous, because, you know, being one of those people who was screaming his head off in Halls. It was…it was horrible' [interview]. Tracey described being 'very embarrass[ed]' when she eventually tried to explain her complex circumstances to her personal tutor because, as she put it, 'here [at university], I don't think many people have that problem, so I felt a bit of an outsider…' [interview].

Tracey observed more than once that she had always enjoyed studying, treating it 'as a hobby' [focus group and interview]. She had gained an Access qualification to secure her place in the Neville School and described herself as uncharacteristically nervous about entering the new *field*, '[p]robably because I want to do it so much…that I can't imagine…what would happen if I didn't…' [focus group]. Her fondness for study was not enough to provide her with a comfortable position in the *field*, and with limited stocks of economic, social and cultural *capital* relevant to it, Tracey began to encounter challenges almost immediately. Early in her first year she moved between three different Halls of Residence until she was allocated to one that was affordable, which, together with the late arrival of bursary payments, resulted in the accumulation of a '*huge* debt' [interview]. She explained that 'for the first three months I only had this little blanket, this little fleece. I couldn't afford to buy sheets or anything [laughs] until Christmas', and she described at one point living in 'a flat alone in this block of post-grad students, but it was mostly male and they were quite wealthy and I remember feeling quite out of that, you know. I had this piddly blanket on the bed, [laughs] no pillows…I felt ever-so different from them…' [interview].

While Tracey did go on to find affordable accommodation where she was '*lucky* to have met some really nice, really good friends' [interview], her data, and my own observations as an insider-researcher in the *field*, highlighted a lack of harmony between her perspectives and disposition, ultimately her *habitus*, and that of other students on her programme of study, which contributed to social exclusion and at times to what she described as 'bullying' [interview]. Tracey did eventually make some friends, but it was with students who were themselves marginalised by the broader cohort. In this study, social *capital* has been identified as a resource that could facilitate the achievement of a legitimate place in the *field*; Tracey's experience was one of those which highlighted that not all social networks are equal and not all social *capital* affords equal benefits.

Although Tracey described working in a study group comprised of her social network, it did not assist her in clarifying or meeting the demands of the *field*. She worked hard to try to identify and fulfil what was required of her but she consistently struggled. Tracey's data highlight that her *habitus* was incongruent with the dominant culture of the *field*, she lacked relevant linguistic and academic *capital*, and the 'rules of the game' were very much obscured and remained so. When speaking about her efforts to work at the level required she said: 'I'm still trying to work out what it is I think to be perfectly honest. I mean, I don't feel it's beyond me comprehension-wise. I understand it all. I really *like* it […] I'm not quite sure what they want. You know, what I *think* they want isn't what they want' [interview]. Asked how, apart from assessment results, she could tell if she was on the right track, Tracey replied 'Do you know what, I don't know' [interview], and she was clearly alarmed by the limited opportunities to succeed: "I just think it's more restricted. Apparently, there's no room for error…sort of thing. This is what I feel about university. It's like, you've got to get it right…more or less first time…I mean that's what scares me' [focus group].

While dyslexia complicated Tracey's experiences, she did take active steps to engage with the appropriate support services available within the *field*. She perceived that dyslexia had not represented a barrier on her Access course, so felt it was unlikely to be the only issue influencing her ability to meet the expectations of the new *field*. She recognised a difference in the requirements (or nature of the game) in these two settings and said: 'I did Psychology and I got a good mark for it [on my Access course] so I'm just wondering *why* is it not working now? That's what I don't really know. It must be really different…' [interview].

Tracey's dataset is littered with examples of the incongruence between her established *habitus* and the practices and expectations of the HE *field*, but her established *habitus* included a tendency to 'think differently from other people' [interview] and to be, perhaps, a little unconventional, so this may have afforded her some resilience to cope with the challenges and barriers she encountered in the *field*. She commented of her life: 'I *have* had it hard. I think I've always had it hard, but nothing good at the end. Whereas like, now, I'm gonna have it hard *and* something good at the end [laughs]' [interview].

Tracey wasn't thriving academically and lacked confidence in this regard. However, despite her experiences of failed assessments and some very difficult social encounters with peers [interview], her personal confidence was, after a time, soaring. Tracey felt 'very proud' and 'really *important*' [interview]; she was thrilled to be at university, something she never thought she would achieve. She relished the fact that she was an OT student, describing feeling as though she 'was born to do this' [interview]. She *felt* as though she was becoming established in HE, and like Archer's (2003) participants, she recognised that this afforded opportunities for her and her children to change their circumstances and prospects, effectively, their positions in the broader social *field*. In her interview, she observed that: 'Everything that I wanted

[coming to university] to achieve, it has achieved. The type of people, the type of friends, the conversations I'm having now, do you know what I mean? I'm absolutely loving it! It's what was missing in my life before…I'm *not* giving it up!'

There was indeed a lot to gain for Tracey if she had been able to find a legitimate position in the *field*. Like Amy, she had very high expectations of what coming to university would do for her and her life, and for the lives of her children. Like Amy, she was endlessly optimistic, positive, determined and committed despite significant struggles, challenges and setbacks. However, while Tracey seemed to tolerate her struggles with greater resilience, her ambition to become established in the *field* and therefore to reap its benefits in terms of cultural and social *capital* seems to have been untenable from the start, for Amy, it may yet materialise.

Unlike others initially positioned towards the incongruent end of the spectrum, Tracey struggled to achieve a tolerable degree of fit or sufficient leverage to secure a legitimate place within the *field*. She was very much a 'fish out of water' from the outset and the overwhelming theme emerging from her data was struggle linked to incongruent *habitus* on many levels. There was little evidence of her gathering *capital* relevant to the *field* despite her ambition to do so. With inadequate economic *capital* to sustain her and a practice placement re-sit yet to be successfully negotiated, the University refused Tracey re-registration for second year studies as a result of outstanding debts and so formalised her exclusion from the *field*. Tracey did not respond to a letter requesting a discontinuation interview.

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These participant experience summaries (together with those available in Appendix 7.1) illustrate the early positions and subsequent trajectories of individuals within the *field* and the degree to which their *habitus* was or became congruent with the dominant culture of the *field*. Common to and underpinning each summary were the concepts of academic, linguistic, social and practice-oriented *capital*, portfolios of which were held in variable configurations and volumes by each participant. Individual experiences within the *field* and participants' ability to develop a feel for the game that they encountered reflected their portfolios of these identified forms of *capital*. The relationships between these concepts will now be considered in more detail.

The logic of practice

Habitus is not fate and Bourdieu's theory of practice is not rigidly deterministic (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). My data revealed variable shifts in the *habitus* of some participants as a result of their engagement with the new *field* and thereby exemplifies the manner in which

habitus may be transformed or restructured by experiences subsequent to those in which it was initially acquired. *Habitus* underpins and generates varying manifestations of cultural *capital* (Reay, 2004), which in turn reflect the generating principles or the logic of practice in a particular *field* (Grenfell, 2008). Key forms of *capital* were identified in my data as being of particular relevance to the *field* under consideration. As would be expected, participants did not all hold or accumulate equal proportions or combinations of these *capitals*, and their different positions and movements within the *field* reflected the volume and composition of their individual portfolios of *capital* (Wacquant, 1998) and the degree to which their *habitus* was, or became, congruent with the *field*. The fact that most participants were very successful (in terms of degree classification) emphasises the role of a balanced and mixed portfolio of *capital*, rather than necessarily high stocks of all forms. Figure 7.3 provides a model or conceptual framework which illustrates the key forms of *capital* highlighted by the data as underpinning a 'feel for the game', or the productive engagement with the logic of practice of the *field*, and the securing of a legitimate position within it.
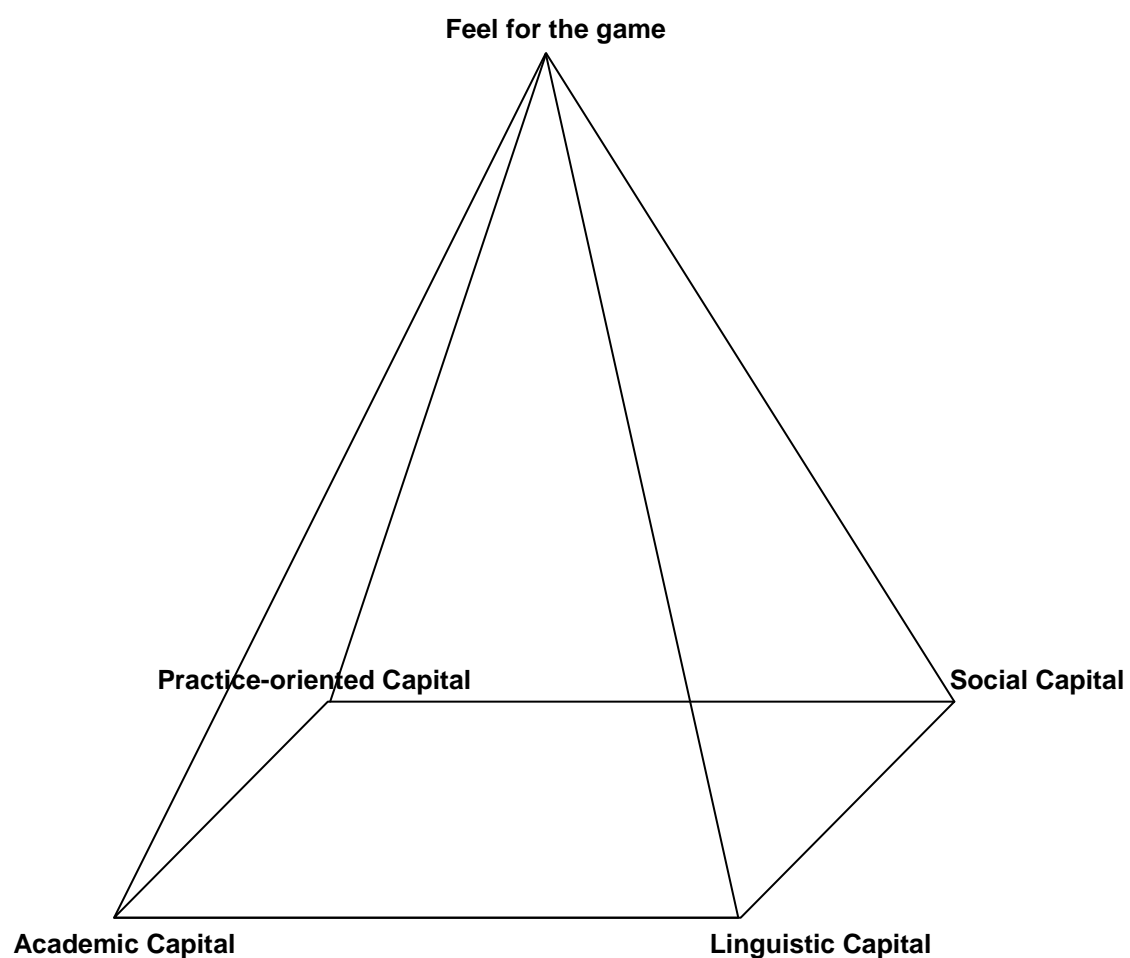
Figure 7.3: Model of the key forms of capital valued by the field

<u>Feel for the game</u>

Bourdieu (1990b) explains that a 'feel for the game' implicit in social *fields* emerges from experience of the game and the structures within which it is played and that this 'feel' provides a sense of meaning for those who take part in the 'game'. He describes the feel for the game developed as a native member of a *field* as akin to the acquisition of the mother tongue when a child learns simultaneously to speak and to think in a language as a result of being exposed to and surrounded by it. He proposes that non-natives who enter a *field* cannot achieve this state consciously or through will alone, only through a slow process of co-option or initiation. As Grenfell (2007b p.56) succinctly describes, 'the logic of practice of a *field* is partly internalized by individuals passing through it, and thus shapes their thoughts and actions in the *field* in order to profit from it'. Individual *fields* have their own particular 'logic of practice' or 'game', the governing principles of which reflect the interests of the dominant faction within that *field*, and entry into a *field* is dependant upon at least implicit acceptance of the 'rules of the game' (Grenfell, 2007b). These rules of the game, or the regularities which define the ordinary functioning of the *field*, are not explicit or codified (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). 'Orthodox' ways of doing and being within a *field* are largely implicit and while the rules and principles of the game are not consciously held in the heads of players, they are evident in the *capitals* valued by the field (Grenfell and James, 1998).

While it is inherently difficult to render the implicit explicit in its entirety, in the context of this research the established practices, expectations and requirements of the *field*, or the 'rules of the game' included, for example, how to behave, take responsibility for and manage learning, access and utilise support appropriately, and present knowledge and understanding in the required or legitimated manner (only some of which are made more or less explicit via learning outcomes and marking criteria, and academic and programme regulations). Conforming to the 'rules of the game' is pivotal to attaining a legitimate position and succeeding within a *field*, so a 'feel for the game' was positioned at the apex of the pyramidal model. With individual practice the result of the complex interrelationships between *habitus*, position within the *field* as defined by individual portfolios of *capital* and the state of play in the *field* at a given time (Maton, 2008), the model highlights that the degree to which participants had or were able to develop a feel for the game within the Neville School was underpinned by their stocks of the *capitals* that were revealed to be of value in this particular *field*.

<u>A portfolio of capital</u>

Capital is not uniformly distributed amongst players within a *field* (even where they share aspects of *habitus* born out of membership of a particular social group) and portfolios of *capital* vary both between and within social groupings (Moore, 2008). *Capital* is profitable in terms of its practical consequences rather than as an inert product of a *field* (Grenfell and

James, 1998) and it takes on a variety of forms reflecting the logic of practice of a particular *field*. Unlike economic *capital*, which has the potential to be rapidly acquired through, for example, a winning lottery ticket, cultural *capital* is only accumulated over time and in relation to exposure to and development of *habitus* within a particular *field* (Moore, 2008).

The *capital* portfolios held by students might reasonably be anticipated to differ from those held by academics in the *field* under consideration, although they potentially represent different positions on a single spectrum. Students are not vying for power and high status within the *field* in the way that academics might, but they are, at least initially, seeking to secure a legitimate position or acceptance within it. The base of the pyramidal model in Figure 7.3 reflects the forms of *capital* suggested by my data to exert a substantial influence on the varying experiences of participants within the *field*. Each are now outlined in turn.

Academic capital

In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu (1988) uses the term 'academic *capital*' in relation to academic staff and to reflect graduation from the École Normale Supérior (which stands at the peak of the academic hierarchy in French HE (Grenfell, 2007b)) and the age at which an individual passed the aggrégation (a highly selective national examination leading to prestigious teaching positions (Grenfell, 2007b)). He later indicates that the concept also incorporates 'the production of intellectual instruments', including 'lectures, textbooks, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, etc' (Bourdieu, 1988 p.98) and uses 'educational *capital*' to refer to the options studied or grade awarded in the baccalauréat (Bourdieu, 1988 p.168). As evident in Figure 7.3, academic *capital* was found to be a form of cultural *capital* that held particular relevance and value in the context of this research. Here the term is used in a manner that is distinct from, but related to, Bourdieu's use as outlined above. Reflecting the spectrum of *capital* that might be expected of students and academics, my use of the term in the context of this research might be seen to serve as (the early elements of) a bridge between Bourdieu's educational and academic *capitals*.

Academic *capital* as represented in Figure 7.3 encapsulates the particular forms of academic skills and knowledge valued in students by the *field*, which ultimately translated into academic attainment. It was expected to develop over the period of a students' engagement with the *field* and included, for example, the depth and level of disciplinary and related knowledge, skills associated with searching for, accessing and critically appraising, integrating and synthesising knowledge sources, the ability to justify and substantiate ideas applicable to professional practice, the accurate use of appropriate referencing and citation conventions, and the style and delivery of oral presentations and written work, including the structure and tone of academic writing. Marking criteria provided some insight into the characteristics of the academic *capital* profitable within this *field* (see, for example, Table 5.7), but even these were

open to interpretation and much of its nature remained (and despite my efforts to ground it, remains) implicit.

Linguistic capital

For Bourdieu, language represents much more than an unproblematic instrument of communication, 'it provides, together with a richer or poorer vocabulary, a more or less complex system of categories, so that the capacity to decipher and manipulate complex structures, whether logical or aesthetic, depends partly on the complexity of the language transmitted by the family' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 p.73). Alongside *habitus*, individuals develop a repertoire of language that reflects the logic of practice of the social *field* in which they are immersed, with the initial familial social *field* having a strong primary influence. As a medium of cultural transmission (Grenfell, 2007b), the understanding and use of language is unevenly distributed across society and can be understood as a specific form of cultural *capital* - linguistic *capital* (Bourdieu, 1991), the form or style of which potentially differs greatly between fields (Grenfell, 1998).

In the context of this research, linguistic *capital* encompasses aspects of the form and content of language valued within the *field*, including, for example (and drawing upon Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and (Bourdieu, 1991)) grammar, linguistic repertoire, forms of phraseology and tone and mode of written and verbal expression or expressive style. The data suggest an important relationship between linguistic and academic *capital* that manifests in a number of ways and illustrates the impact of linguistic *capital* on the efficiency of verbal or written 'pedagogic communication' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Linguistic *capital* influenced the accessibility of various learning activities, particularly when that deployed by staff (representing more dominant voices within the *field*) was markedly different from that held by individual participants. It was central to the interpretation of learning outcomes, marking criteria and feedback, was critical to the capacity to present knowledge and understanding in a form legitimated by the *field* and to the ability to think using language and therefore to manipulate, interrogate and develop concepts and ideas.

Social capital

Bourdieu describes social capital as 'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 p.119). In the model in Figure 7.3, social *capital* was drawn primarily from social networks developed within the *field* and had the potential to confer benefits in the guise of, for example, access to collaborative study groups, peer-review of draft submissions, the sharing of resources and skills, and practical and emotional support. Reflecting what Bourdieu

(2006 p.110) called its 'multiplier effect', social *capital* had the potential to serve as a powerful mechanism to aid the development of a 'feel for the game' and to facilitating the acquisition of linguistic and academic *capital*. My data illustrate that social networks, and the social *capital* derived from them, are unequal. Perhaps reflecting what Grenfell (2007b) describes as a degree of social solidarity, networks developed amongst marginalised students did not afford the same *capital* value as networks including students who fitted more comfortably within the *field*, because, as Bourdieu (2006) explains, social *capital* depends not only on the size of the network of connections that an individual can mobilize, but also upon the portfolio of *capital* possessed by each of those with whom the individual is connected.

Practice-oriented capital

Cultural *capital* reflects the logic of practice of a *field* translated into 'physical and cognitive propensities expressed in dispositions to act in particular kinds of ways' (Moore, 2008 p.111). It incorporates (amongst other things) knowledge and skills (Bourdieu, 1991) and in the context of this research, practice-oriented *capital* emerged as a valued form of cultural *capital* which encompasses those aspects of students' skills and knowledge that are particularly focused on the practical, enacted aspects of professional OT practice. Practice-oriented *capital* is related to academic *capital*, and while each has the potential to enhance the other, the data highlight that they are independently identifiable, although they are best conceived of as overlapping to some extent.

Practice-oriented *capital* as represented in Figure 7.3 includes, for example, depth and breadth of knowledge appropriate to the practice context, a suitably professional disposition and appearance, effective and flexible communication and team-working skills, enactment of collaborative, client-centred practice, proficient execution of the OT process (incorporating appropriate assessment and prioritisation of problems and effective planning, implementation, evaluation and revision of interventions), application of evidence-based practice and the ability to justify and substantiate interventions and comply with relevant legislation, policies and procedures, effective and appropriate personal and caseload management skills and active engagement with reflective practice and continuing professional development. Like academic *capital*, practice-oriented *capital* was expected to develop throughout students' engagement with the *field* and its most profitable form was partially characterised within marking criteria (see, for example, Table 5.7). In the vocationally oriented programme under consideration, a distinctive feature of practice-oriented *capital* is that it proved equally as profitable as academic *capital*; it too translated into attainment, this time in relation to practice-placement results, and some participants were able to deploy it to off-set limited stocks of academic *capital*.

Summary of Chapter 7

Employing Bourdieu's theory of practice has provided valuable insight into the educational experiences of students with non-traditional academic backgrounds as they make or have made their way through the pre-registration OT programme at McKellar University. The summaries of participants' experiences (as presented in this chapter and in Appendix 7.1) highlight that their encounters are and have been much less influenced by the nature of individual pre-entry academic backgrounds than they are by the congruence of *habitus*, born out of social provenance, with the dominant culture of the *field*. The summaries depict a range of what Grenfell (2007b p.138) refers to as 'affinities, convergences and divergences' between *habitus* and the logic of practice of the *field* that influenced individuals' positional tendencies within the *field* and clearly exemplify the key findings: the relationship between having or developing a 'feel for the game' and having or developing a mixed and balanced portfolio of academic, linguistic, social and practice-oriented *capital*. Identifying the forms of, and relationships between, *capital* profitable to student engagement in this particular microcosm of the HE *field*, and the potential this has to inform other sub-*fields* of health and social care education and the broader *field* of HE itself, represents a new contribution to the current body of knowledge informing the understanding of student experiences.

Chapter 8: Employing the Findings to Facilitate Participation

Introduction

In the research presented in this thesis I set out to explore how OT students from non-traditional academic backgrounds negotiate the learning requirements of the HE environment. Adopting a single case study design centred on a pre-1992 research intensive university, the specific aims of the research were to:

1. Illuminate the experiences and achievements of OT students with non-traditional academic backgrounds.
2. Explore how the culture, nature and nuances of the HE environment influence these students' experiences.
3. Consider if and how these students' experiences change during the course of engagement with HE, and the factors influencing any changes.
4. Identify lessons that might be learned from the research findings regarding facilitating the participation in HE of students from non-traditional academic backgrounds.

The academic achievement element of the first aim was addressed in Chapter 6 which focused on analysis of the quantitative data emerging from the progression routes study. It highlighted that the nature of students' entry qualifications or academic background had no statistically significant impact on whether they passed at Level 4, 5 or 6, or achieved a 'good' (upper second or first class) honours degree. At all of these levels of analysis, it emerged that male gender (strongest at Level 4) and a background from amongst the lower socio-economic groups (strongest at all other levels of analysis) were significant predictors of poorer outcomes.

The second research aim was addressed in Chapter 5 which considered the stratification of the UK *field* of HE together with the nature of, and influences on, the sub-*field* of OT education. The chapter drew on a wide range of documentary evidence to provide rich descriptions of Mackellar University and the Neville School which offered insight into the cultures, values, structures and educational practices that students encountered.

The small to medium size effects of the significant statistical models presented in Chapter 6 reinforce that academic achievement in HE is based on more than individual demographic characteristics. Addressing the student experiences element of the first research aim and the entirety of the third aim, Chapter 7 explored this point by focusing attention on illuminating the experiences of thirteen students studying over a three-year period within the context portrayed by Chapter 5. Analysis underpinned by Bourdieu's theory of practice highlighted that these students' experiences in HE were much less influenced by the nature of their pre-

entry academic backgrounds than by the congruence of individual *habitus*, born out of social provenance, with the dominant culture of the *field*. Analysis of the corpus of data illustrated varying positional tendencies and trajectories within the *field* which were based on having or developing a 'feel for the game' and having or developing a mixed and balanced portfolio of academic, linguistic, social and practice-oriented *capital*.

This final chapter addresses the remaining research aim of identifying lessons that might be learned from the research findings regarding facilitating the participation in HE of students from non-traditional academic backgrounds. I draw the thesis to a close by considering the implications of the findings, along with their limitations and possible directions for further research.

Subjective expectations of objective probabilities

Bourdieu suggests that, based in the 'internalization of externality' (Bourdieu, 1990b p.55), individual aspirations and expectations are conditioned by *habitus* (which is itself structured by the patterns of social forces that produced it) such that individuals are inclined to aspire to what is achievable and to make a 'virtue of necessity' by excluding as 'unthinkable' the practices to which they would anyway be denied access (Bourdieu, 1990b p.54). In response to government agendas such as widening participation, the social messages about HE, particularly regarding what it is for and to whom it is open, have changed (and continue to change). Accompanying these changes are shifts in recognition of, or at least increased ambiguity about, 'what is and is not 'for us'' (Bourdieu, 1990b p.64), and progress into the HE *field* (generally, if not in relation to all of the stratified sub-*fields* of it) is promoted as a viable next step for the many, not just the elite few.

This rhetoric has contributed to the changing expectations and aspirations of individuals who might otherwise not have considered HE; what previously appeared impossible might now be deemed possible, even if not resolutely probable. However, the dominant culture and practices of the *field* are slower to change than policy (with dominant *field* factions resisting shifts in the logic of practice and the loss of power and prestige potentially associated with it) and HE continues to be a far from level playing *field* (Reay, David and Ball, 2005). There are a limited number of widely dispersed institutions offering undergraduate OT education in the geographical vicinity of Mackellar University. While competitors recognise Mackellar and its OT programme as being of good standing, the limited regional alternatives potentially constrain the options of prospective students and the differentiated choice-making patterns observed by Reay et al. (2005; 2001b) in students from different social backgrounds are diminished. All those participants who, for what ever reason, wished or needed to stay in the immediate area were obliged to enter a research intensive environment. Even for Tracey, whose family lived several hours drive away, Mackellar was the closest available option.

To a greater of lesser extent, the hands of several participants (and potentially other students) had effectively been forced regarding the type of HEI they entered, contributing to the diversity of the OT student intake in a research intensive environment, and to the diversity of the backgrounds of participants in this research. It is not possible to determine how students' experiences might have differed (or not) in the learning environment of an institution differently positioned within the UK *field* of HE, but my research does suggest that when students whose *habitus* is not naturally homologous with the *field* they have entered establish a position within it, that position is likely to be on the margins.

For some, this marginal position was in part the product of necessity and myriad competing priorities as previous literature has suggested (see for example, Bolam and Dodgson, 2003; Davies and Williams, 2001; Quinn et al., 2005), but the primary issue seemed to centre on a lack of affinity between individual *habitus* and the dominant culture of the *field* and limited ability or willingness to bridge the gap between the two. From the perspective of the HE *field* as a whole, the marginalisation of non-traditional students, particularly working-class students, has long been recognised (see for example Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2003; Reay et al., 2005) and was inferred as ongoing in a recent report which highlighted that amongst the groups specifically targeted by government policies, participation is unevenly distributed across the sector, particularly within the most selective (and prestigious) institutions (BIS, 2010).

Shifting habitus

The alignment of *habitus*, whether naturally (as experienced by those who were more akin to 'fish in water', such as George, Lizzie and Lynne) or more often as a result of shifting *habitus,* and the accumulation of *capital* relevant to the *field* were key to participants in this research developing a 'feel for the game' and establishing even a marginal position within the *field*. While *habitus* is generally understood to operate largely unconsciously, Bourdieu (1990b) highlights the possibility that individuals might consciously reach the same decisions that *habitus* would have unconsciously generated and further, that within limits, *habitus* may be not only transformed by a social trajectory leading to altered material conditions of living, but 'controlled through awakening consciousness and socio-analysis' (Bourdieu, 1990a p.116). However, it remains the case that with early experiences afforded primacy, *habitus* is slow to transform and as Maton (2008 p.59) eloquently suggests, 'our dispositions are not blown around easily on the tides of change in the social worlds we inhabit'.

Disruption between *habitus* and *field*, occurring as the result of a *field* changing abruptly around players whose established dispositions require time to adjust to the new conditions or when a player enters a new *field* markedly different from the one to which their *habitus* was attuned, is referred to in Bourdieuian terms as *hysteresis* (Hardy, 2008). The incongruence of

habitus experienced by several of my participants in relation to their entry into the HE *field* is a prime example of the *hysteresis* effect, and it is this that often precipitated the observed shifts in *habitus* by generating introspection and raising *habitus* to consciousness permitting as Reay (2004) suggests, agentic deliberations and the development of new aspects of the self. Conscious reflexivity as the product of such dissonance is evident in the participant summaries of, for example, Betty, Amy, Amanda, Tracey and to a degree, Jocelyn. Deliberate efforts to change disposition were also evident (and no less significant) in the data of Jemma and Lizzie, but these were related to notable events in their home-lives and not specifically a response to entering the new *field*.

The data illustrate that the duration of the OT programme was sufficiently long to permit the *habitus* of a number of participants to adapt to more closely align with the new *field* and therefore to take advantage of the opportunities it presented. As also suggested by the data, the process of adapting to a new *field* and accumulating *capital* relevant to it can result in dislocation from the *field* of origin, generating tensions, ambivalence and contradictions (Hardy, 2008). Bourdieu's (1999 p.511) description of 'a habitus divided against itself' in such circumstances is evident in participant summaries such as those of Frances, Amy, Betty and to a lesser extent, Gabby. While Reay et al. (2009) found this less of an issue, their findings reflect the very strong academic dispositions of their working-class participants who had already established an ability to move freely between their social and learner identities and therefore to operate comfortably in both their *field* of origin and the elite HE sub-*field* they entered.

Hysteresis does not necessarily stimulate conscious reflexivity and my findings do provide examples, such as with Gabby and Katrina, of *habitus* shifting on the basis of somewhat less conscious submission to the 'rules of the game'. Bourdieu does, however, highlight a further possibility: resistance. He says '*The dominated, in any social universe, can always exert a certain forc*e, inasmuch as belonging to a field means by definition that one is capable of producing an effect in it (if only to elicit reactions of exclusion on the part of those who occupy its dominant positions)' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 p.80, original italics). The suggestion is, therefore, that even for those with dispositions inclined to resist, the dominated seldom escape their domination, especially where they have a vested interest in remaining within a particular game. This situation is best illustrated in this research by the experiences of Frances and Sarah, whose resistance and frustration did not diminish their need to play the game in order to derive the benefits it afforded – institutionalised cultural *capital* (Bourdieu, 2006) in the form of an academic qualification granting entry to the *field* of OT practice.

While being a fish in water was a positive experience both personally and educationally for some of my participants, Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2010) identify that this is not always the case, suggesting that fitting in can also result in academic complacency, less-than-optimal

educational challenge and, ultimately, less-than-optimal achievement. Incongruence with the HE *field* is therefore not necessarily a bad thing. A question posed in Chapter 3 regarding the extent to which Bourdieu embraces the potential for transformation was how much difference between *habitus* and *field* is too much difference to bridge? My research has reinforced and illustrated to me the very large extent to which the rules of the game and the logic of practice of the *field*, and the nature of valued *capital* and even *habitus*, are implicit. If these constructs are largely intangible and unquantifiable, it is not possible to specify in advance how much difference is too much difference; this can only be revealed by examination of individual experiences in specific *fields*. As this research has shown, *habitus* can and does shift to varying extents, and the academic achievements and gains in cultural *capital* that accompanied many of these shifts will position participants well for entry into the *field* of OT practice.

'Success' within higher education

There is a need to be cautious about developing a narrow view in which success is equated with participation in, or more precisely, graduation from, HE. The literature highlights an implicit assumption of deficit in language focused on aspiration raising (Archer, Hutchings, Leathwood and Ross, 2003), that neither participation/non-participation (Fuller and Heath, 2010) nor withdrawal/non-completion (Quinn et al., 2005) are fixed and final states, and that the desirability of HE participation does not hold universally, even amongst those with the qualifications necessary to gain access (Fuller et al., 2008). While my research does focus solely on student experiences within HE, it makes a positive contribution to understanding by drawing a distinction between academic achievements in terms of exit awards and students' experiences of achieving those ends. Life is lived and experienced in a context so it makes sense that 'success' also be understood in context and recognised as potentially a highly personalised concept defined, for example, according to individual starting points and goals. Such liberal views are not always reflected in the practicalities of life or in the logic of practice of *fields*, and the acceptance of one student's 'getting through' (David et al., 2010a p.187) as a version of success equally as valid as another's 'good' (upper second or first class) degree is also dependant on context.

In Bourdieuian terms, success is linked to holding or accumulating *capital* and securing or maintaining a dominant (or at the very least a legitimate) position in the *field*. For dominated factions, success is also linked to an upward social trajectory. The logic of *fields* mean that the chances of succeeding in an educational environment are biased towards those whose *habitus* is most closely aligned with the dominant culture generally, and specifically with the culture of that *field* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Although academic award might therefore be perceived as no more than an indication of the extent to which an individual was able to demonstrate the practices legitimated by, and the *capital* valued within, a particular academic

field, the government's emphasis on educational credentialism (David, Hayward and Ertl, 2010b) ensures that this form of cultural *capital* will not diminish in importance. With the value of *capital* linked to its relative scarcity, and with competition for employment likely to increase during the current economic downturn, the emphasis on a 'good' degree is, in fact, reinforced and attention is likely to increasingly turn to gaining higher degrees as a marker of distinction.

Participation in the 'game' implies tacit agreement that it is worth playing (Bourdieu, 1991 p.180). The vast majority of my participants had entered the HE *field* because it was the only source of the cultural *capital* (the academic and professional qualification) that would grant them entry into the *field* of OT practice. That, and for some (most notably Sarah, Frances and Jocelyn), only that, is what made the game worth playing. In the face of such an imperative, how does the nature and/or quality of the journey relate to perceptions of success? My data highlight that success in terms of academic award does not pre-suppose complete assimilation into the *field*. It was possible to be 'successful' in terms of achieving the professional/academic qualification that was sought, and often to be highly successful by securing a coveted 'good' degree, without necessarily feeling immersed or even comfortable in the *field*. If students are able to (more or less) develop a feel for the game and accrue the requisite *capital* to enable them to achieve this end, does it matter that they do so from the margins? With a reluctance to surrender established identities, from the perspective of people such as Gabby, Betty, Sarah and Frances who were still able to derive personal satisfaction, maybe not, but those such as Amy and Amanda, whose identities were more closely linked to acceptance within the *field*, may have a different view.

Reflections on the role of the researcher

I was a 'traditional' undergraduate student. I completed my secondary education in a private girls' school and progressed straight into university. While I was fortunate to be supported financially, practically and emotionally by my parents, I did some part-time work largely, but not exclusively, with the view to gathering what I now recognise as practice-oriented *capital*. I also represent the archetypal OT: female, white and middle-class. There is very little on the surface that marks me out as 'non-traditional' apart, perhaps, from the fact that I live on the opposite side of the world to my place of birth (travelling, but not staying, in Europe is a very traditional thing for young Australian (middle-class) adults to do).

There was always considerable potential for my experiences and perspectives, my *habitus*, to be quite different from those of the participants whose experiences of HE I was exploring, although there was equally likely to be a degree of commonality that drew us all to the same profession. The disparity may have served to hinder the research, making it more difficult form me to recognise and understand issues raised and making it hard for participants to be comfortably open with me, although this did not seem to be the case. On the other hand, my

knowledge of the context provided a degree of common ground and my lack of familiarity with participants' perspectives helped prompt me to probe more deeply to gain clarity and avoid too many assumptions. Throughout the research I was mindful of these issues and of my dual lecturer/researcher roles and the conflicts and challenges presented, particularly by my insider-researcher status. I worked hard to cultivate respectful, non-judgemental and open relationships with my participants and to make considered decisions whenever questions or dilemmas arose. There is a strongly reflexive element to my established *habitus* that I feel has served my research well.

I am, no doubt, very privileged, but would suggest that I am rarely positioned as a dominant and powerful player in *fields* in which I am engaged. The private school I attended was populated by many from the moderately affluent suburbs of Melbourne, although I was from a background positioned at the more modest end of that spectrum. At my specialist university for the health sciences (which did not incorporate medicine, which was studied at a more prestigious neighbouring institution), you weren't anybody unless you were studying physiotherapy. OT is certainly not a powerful or prestigious profession in either the *field* of health and social care or HE, so my enrolment on doctoral studies is arguably a strategy to accrue additional cultural *capital*, primarily to enhance my position within the HE *field*, but also, perhaps at some level, the social *field* more broadly.

Regardless of my perception of being positioned at the margins of various fields, students and participants will not share this perspective. Their understanding of HE may be more narrowly prescribed than my own, and as a member of academic staff, I hold a powerful position in the sub-*field* that is the Neville School at the very least. In Bourdieuian terms (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 p.5-54), it is *symbolic violence*, *misrecognised* in the *pedagogic action* of the institutionalised education to which I contribute, that defines and confers legitimacy, and I have a powerful role in consecrating the dominant culture.

Surrounded by an aura of ethics and justice emanating from my parents' strong moral principles and personal integrity, my upbringing was both liberal and constrained, and my perspectives are both inclusive and demanding (mostly of myself). It is this aspect of my *habitus*, with its influence on how I perceive the world and the expectations I have of my own and others' behaviour, which bought me to the focus of my research. I recognised the structural and cultural barriers to participation in HE that were familiar to my therapist-self via the social model of disability. My sense of fair-play is at odds with my role as consecrator. Perhaps ultimately, my research reflects my desire to enable, and my struggle to legitimate and bestow value upon even marginal *field* positions.

Limitations

Throughout this research journey, I have travelled paths I could never have anticipated at the outset. With hindsight, I wonder at the apparent naivety of my starting position. Having encountered Bourdieu and to a large extent internalised much of his approach, particularly the concepts of *habitus*, *field* and *capital*, it seems now that entry qualifications or academic backgrounds, whether 'traditional' or 'non-traditional', were potentially nothing more than a façade diverting my attention from deeper sociological issues. In retrospect, it would have been beneficial to design a study of student experiences that included a greater diversity of participants, including a male perspective (although as men are under-represented on OT programmes this was always likely to be challenging), a greater number of younger students and those with 'traditional' entry qualifications so that I could explore more fully the impact of diverse *habituses* on experiences in the *field*. I am fortunate, however, that the participants that I did recruit comprised those from range of social backgrounds, even if this was not a fundamental aspect of the research design.

Operationalising the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participants that I originally developed was itself problematic for a number of reasons, particularly my limited grasp of the nuances of the wide range of 'non-traditional' entry routes, incomplete participant background information available at the time, and the need to rely on the Admissions Tutor to interpret the (imperfect) criteria when deciding who to invite to participate. However, while Frances and Sarah both had a degree of exposure to the HE learning environment, and Lynne is perhaps best viewed as one of the delayed traditional entrants described by Osbourne et al. (2004), their inclusion did not adversely affect the research and actually contributed to the diversity of backgrounds and circumstances explored.

A key ambition had been to incorporate into the research consideration of those students who were, for whatever reason, unable or unwilling to complete their degree. This was achieved within the examination of progression routes and achievement (although the findings do not discriminate between voluntary and involuntary withdrawal) but was more difficult in the context of exploring student experiences. 'Davina' withdrew voluntarily for personal/family reasons ahead of the final examination period at Level 4 (having contributed only to an initial focus group, her data was not included in analysis) and Tracey was denied the opportunity to re-enrol for her second year due to an unresolved debt owing to the university. While the study did benefit from Tracey's participation throughout the first year, neither participant responded to letters sent to their home addresses inviting them to take part in a discontinuation interview and, sensitive to the mixed emotions that their departure might have generated, I felt it inappropriate to pursue the matter. While the absence of the perspectives of discontinuing students in the research is regrettable, it is tempered by the fact that the majority of my participants were able to achieve their goals of qualifying as an OT.

Implications for educational practice

The course of this investigation has raised a pertinent question regarding the extent to which it is genuinely possible to define a binary divide between 'traditional' and' non-traditional' entry qualifications. The proliferations in qualifications of the recent past make students' options many and complex, not least because of the potential to combine traditional academic A-levels with newer vocationally oriented qualifications such as AVCEs (Ertl, Hayward and Holscher, 2010), and because A-levels now include more applied and vocationally oriented options (a distinction not made in the examination of progression routes and achievement). Notwithstanding the question of how long it takes for a 'tradition' to be established, the contestable distinction between traditional and non-traditional entry qualifications marks the holders of the latter as 'other', and implicitly 'lesser', in a way that potentially masks behind concepts of meritocracy the more intractable issue of the imposition of a dominant culture and the perpetuation of advantage to the already most advantaged via the 'royal road' (David et al., 2010b p.175) into HE - traditional academic A-levels.

Conceptions of widening participation have changed since I first encountered it and the literature highlights that the achievements of government policy are inadequately represented by simply measuring student entry into the *field* (see for example, Elliott, 2003; Longden, 2004; Quinn, 2005; Reay et al., 2005). Even graduating from HE, as Bourdieu observed (Bourdieu and Champagne, 1999 p.423), seems not to be equally beneficial to all individuals in all circumstances (see for example, David et al., 2010b; Ross, 2003). *Fields* are slow to change and social mobility is not easy to achieve, so if the ambition of government policy is genuinely to enhance social inclusion and mobility (as opposed to foregrounding national economic prosperity), it must be pursued by successive governments (regardless of their own ambitions for distinction) over protracted timeframes. Further, consideration must be given to 'success' not simply in terms of completion or even academic award, but to the *capitals* that students are able to accrue and the degree to which they hold their value and are transposable into other *fields*.

Students' personal circumstances and material conditions will naturally have an impact on their experiences. As other authors have highlighted (see for example, Hutchings, 2003; Reay et al., 2005), adequate stocks of economic *capital* afford greater opportunity to, for example, secure childcare, purchase learning materials making them readily accessible, travel freely between home and university and avoid (or at least minimise) the need to displace study time with paid employment. Bourdieu (2006) argues that in this manner, as a prerequisite for the investment of time, economic *capital* underlies all other forms of *capital*. Government policy regarding tuition fees therefore does much to undermine widening participation as a social policy (Reay et al., 2005), particularly given that lack of familiarity with the *field* amongst the targeted population may limit knowledge and understanding of the possibility of bursaries (Hutchings, 2003) or in the case of pre-registration OT, the non-applicability of fees.

The histories that pre-date individual entry to HE are highly variable and individualised; they are often complex but they do not necessarily dictate ability to benefit from HE (Haggis, 2007). Neither is it necessarily the case that closely matching the aspirations and circumstances of students and the culture of HEIs provides the most profitable option; for those who are able to adapt, a degree of incongruence affords greater possibilities for transformation and development, as opposed to continuity and comfort (Brennan and Osbourne, 2008; Reay et al., 2010). A perspective that my OT-self finds appealing and helpful is the holistic, multi-faceted view of 'diversity' offered by Hockings et al. (2010), which embraces the possibilities for enhanced learning afforded by modern HE contexts. Diversity brings a richness of perspective to the learning and teaching environment that is valuable to all (in every aspect of the HE *field* (see for example, Reay et al., 2009)), but perhaps particularly to programmes, including those that are health-related, where graduates will be working with the full breadth of society.

Inviting diverse student groups into the *field* is a start, but this needs to be supported by inclusive pedagogies that facilitate productive engagement with the logic of practice of that particular *field*. Rendering the 'game' completely transparent is not achievable, but Bourdieu highlights the possibility of reducing its opacity through the awakening of consciousness, and active reflection has been identified as fruitful in my research and that of Reay et al. (2009), so it is here, perhaps, that attention is best focused. Building on the brief and generalised points made by Ertl et al. (2010) and Crozier, Reay and Clayton (2010), and on the suggestion of Haggis (2007 p.532, emphasis in original) to prioritise 'learning how to *do* learning in *that* subject', my research suggests that (to the extent that it is possible to do so) educators need to demystify and make more explicit the rules of the game, be more aware of and reflective about their own and institutional practices and let students in on the nature of the game rather than assume that failure to grasp what is required reflects individual (or even collective) deficits of some description.

Inclusive, collaborative pedagogic practices embedded throughout programmes need to focus on facilitating the development of the requisite *capitals* for all, while capitalising on the richness of experiences and perspectives offered by student diversity. With limited research focusing on this aspect of widening participation, the perspectives of Haggis (2007) together with the empirical work of Hockings and colleagues (2010; 2009), who advocate personalised approaches to learning supported by inclusive, student-centred and culturally aware pedagogies, provide a very useful starting point. Contributions to the academic literacies debate by Northedge (2003a; 2003b) seem convergent with these ideas and could also be usefully explored.

My findings have implications not only for government policy and broad educational practice, but more specifically for the policies and educational standards of the College of Occupational Therapists. For OT education in particular, there would be an appalling paradox in the profession valuing diversity in the populations it serves and endeavouring to dismantle structural, cultural and environmental barriers to active participation in life, while inadequately acknowledging or addressing the challenges to facilitating diversity amongst its own ranks.

Contributions to knowledge

My research highlighted that while the nature of students' entry qualifications or academic background had no statistically significant impact on whether they passed at Level 4, 5 or 6, or achieved a 'good' (upper second or first class) honours degree, at all of these levels of analysis, male gender (strongest at Level 4) and a background from amongst the lower socio-economic groups (strongest at all other levels of analysis) were significant predictors of poorer outcomes. Undertaking a broader progression routes study across OT programmes in a number of HEIs to (a) increase the number of cases (including male cases where possible), (b) reduce the need to collapse data and (c) repeat regression analyses would further develop this work, but as previous research into OT student attainment has neglected to consider gender, socio-economic background and students who failed to graduate from their programmes, these findings represent a significant contribution to the current body of knowledge.

Other research centred on students' experiences of HE, notably that of Reay and various colleagues (see for example, Crozier, Reay, Clayton, Colliander and Grinstead, 2008; Reay, 2003; Reay et al., 2002; Reay et al., 2009; 2010; Reay et al., 2001b), has also adopted a Bourdieuian perspective but has generally taken a broader view with a particular emphasis on the impact of class. My research, in contrast, has considered in much closer detail specifically *how* student experiences of studying in HE are influenced by the practices and culture of the particular sub-*field* they enter. It has reinforced and illustrated the very large extent to which the rules of the game and the logic of practice of the *field*, and the nature of valued *capital* and *habitus*, are implicit, and it has demonstrated that *habitus* can and does shift to varying extents. My research has identified the *capital* valued in and underpinning the logic of practice in a specific sub-*field* of (OT) education and vividly illustrates the impact of the congruence of individual *habitus* with that *field* in terms of the portfolios of *capital* participants were able to accrue and the 'affinities, convergences and divergences' (Grenfell, 2007b p.138) they experienced.

The case study approach I adopted enabled me to provide a vivid account of context and an in-depth study of students' academic achievements and experiences within that context (Simons, 1996; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). In so doing, readers are enabled to draw upon their

own experiences and innate knowledge and reflect upon similarities with their own circumstances, facilitating judgements about the veracity of the findings and the extent to which they might be applicable to other situations (Schofield, 1993; Tripp, 1985). Although derived from an OT context, the research findings offer useful insights applicable to the educational programmes of other healthcare professions and more broadly across HE. The concepts of linguistic, academic and social *capital* are readily translatable, although individual disciplines and *fields* will naturally have their own logics of practice which define the specific nuances of academic and linguistic *capital* particularly. There exists a substantial number of professional or vocationally oriented HE programmes, both within and outside the health-related disciplines, and with an increasing emphasis on enhancing the capability of HEIs to deliver the highly skilled graduate workforce demanded by employers (HEFCE 2009), the relevance of practice-oriented *capital* across the sector seems only likely to increase (again, in forms determined by the logic of particular *fields* and the practices of specific disciplines). The experiences of law students Mary and Jenny in research undertaken by Crozier et al. (2008) serve nicely to illustrate this point.

Future directions

There are a number of areas in which future research could usefully build on these findings to further advance knowledge and understanding, notably:

- Investigating the extent to which the conceptual framework derived in this research is applicable in other settings and for other disciplines;
- Examining learning and teaching approaches and how they might be used to facilitate participation and the development of *capitals* and to inform curricular development and reform;
- Investigating if and how *capitals* accrued in the HE context are transposed into other *fields*, whether or not students graduate from their studies;
- Illuminating the influence of disability on the development of *capitals* relevant to the HE *field;* and
- Exploring how the conceptual framework might contribute to or be informed by understanding of academic literacies.

With a paucity in existing literature of the level of examination undertaken in this research, the development of a conceptual framework modelling the forms of, and relationships between, the *capital* profitable to student engagement in a microcosm of the HE *field* represents a new contribution to the body of knowledge informing the understanding of student experiences.

Appendices

Appendix 1.1: Student voice narrative

"I really don't know who on earth I thought I was kidding…" I tell her. "I don't know what made me think I could do this…"

"Oh I'm sure it's not as bad as all that Di…They'd never have let you in if they didn't think you could do it, would they? Remember that interview you had before you started? You said that went really well…"

  I know she means well, but even my best friend can't help me on this one…she really doesn't understand what it's like.

"I know," I say, "… but maybe they thought I was better than I am. None of the others seem to be struggling as much …I don't know; maybe I'm just not that clever…"

  …That hurts…It's quite an admission… I've never said it out loud before; I've hardly even admitted to myself that it's what I really think.

"But you were one of the top on your Access course…"

  I don't let her finish…she really has no idea…

"This is nothing like Access. You don't get any support or help; they just leave you to it. It's impossible to see my Tutor and when I do she just says I'm supposed to be an 'independent, self-directed learner' like it's the easiest thing in the world…Half the time I've got no idea where to begin, and there is just so much work to do I'm never going to keep up…"

  I'm not going to cry.
  I refuse to cry.

They all said it would be difficult...said there was a lot of work to do...but I really had no idea they meant it would be like this. I thought I could manage. I've always been able to manage and God knows life hasn't exactly been a bundle of laughs up until now...but it's so much harder than I could ever have imagined...

"What does Brian think?" Claire asks, interrupting my thoughts.

"I haven't really told him", I confess.

He didn't really want me to do this in the first place...

"Why on earth not? I thought he was all for supporting you going to Uni?"

"He was to begin with Claire, but without my wage and the extra childcare ...we're really struggling. Brian has to do loads of overtime just to try to make ends meet..."

The tears come now... but I try not to let it show in my voice.

"I feel really guilty," I say down the telephone. "He's always so tired and now I'm not even sure it's worth it..."

"Are you doing any Bank work at the Hospital?"

If only...

"They'll stop asking if I don't do some work soon. They keep offering me shifts but I've had to do so much study for this anatomy module that I haven't dared take time out to work."

I'm stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea...If I don't pass I'll get chucked off the course, and if I don't bring some money in God only knows what will happen...Brian's fed up and I've only done one semester.

"It was always going to be tough Di. It'll be worth it in the end though won't it?"

I don't know. I just really don't know…I don't think I passed that exam today. I was alright when I went in…I thought I'd be OK. I'd done so much work but I didn't even understand some of those questions…I was just guessing most of the time…Once they see that, they'll know I shouldn't be there…there'll be no hiding it now…

"Hang in there Di. Think what a great role-model you'll be for Alice."

Bless her. Claire always tries to see the positives.

"I don't even know if Alice is speaking to me. I promised her that I'd take her to see a movie this afternoon; but I got so caught up with what I was doing in the library that I didn't realise the time and we missed it *again*. Brian did his nut…"

He thinks I'm being really selfish…Sometimes I think he's right….The only time I spend with Alice these days is nagging her to do her homework or shouting at her to get ready for school. She thought it was going to be such fun doing our homework together… and I can't remember the last time Brian and I had some time to ourselves… just the two of us. We've taken such a risk and given up so much so that I could go to Uni…I don't know if we'll last three years even if I do manage to pass that exam…

"Why don't I have Alice over Easter and you two go off few days' break?" offers Claire.

"Thanks," I snuffle, "…but we can't…we just can't afford it and besides, I'll probably need the time to catch up so that I don't get too far behind before the next lot of exams."

"You can't study *all* the time Di!" she laughs, "…you'll go mad!"

…And that's my point really…I do have to study all the time, just to try and keep up…The others seem to manage…so it must be just me…I'm not clever enough to do this…Maybe I should just quit now…

Appendix 4.1: Access permission letter

Email:
Secretary:

Jo Watson
Lecturer
School

25th July 2005

Dear Ms Watson,

Re: Widening Access to Occupational Therapy Education

Thank you for giving me sight of your proposal to study the issues surrounding widening access to occupational therapy. This promises to be a very interesting study and one that will be useful to all providers of occupational therapy programmes.

I confirm that I give permission for you to access students and staff of the occupational therapy programme to collect data for your research, subject to its full ethical approval.

I further give permission for you to access student records to collect necessary background data accumulated by the School over the period of its existence.

Permission to access practice placement educators will be given by the managers of the services in which they are employed.

I hope this is helpful and wish you every success in your research study.

Yours sincerely,

Head of OT / Director of Education

Appendix 4.2: Progression Routes study authorisations

<u>a: Ethical approval</u>

27 January 2006

Ms Jo Watson
School
University

Dear Jo

Submission No: SO6/01-01

Title: Survey of OT students' academic progression routes

I am pleased to confirm **full approval** for your study has now been given. The approval has been granted by the School
            Ethics Committee

You are required to complete a University Research Governance Form (enclosed) in order to receive insurance clearance before you begin data collection. You need to submit the following documentation in a plastic wallet to Dr   in the Research Support Office (RSO, University   ,   , .
         ,   ):

- Completed Research Governance form (**signed by both student and supervisor**)
- Copy of your research protocol (final and approved version)
- Copy of participant information sheet
- Copy of   Risk Assessment form, **signed by yourself and supervisor** (original should be with   )
- Copy of your information sheet and consent form
- Copy of this   Ethical approval letter

Your project will be registered at the RSO, and then automatically transferred to the Finance Department for insurance cover. **You can not commence data collection until you have received a letter stating that you have received insurance clearance.**

Please note that you have ethics approval only for the project described in your submission. If you want to change any aspect of your project (e.g., recruitment or data collection) you must discuss this with your supervisor and you may need to request permission from the Ethics Committee.

Yours sincerely

Dr
Chair,   Ethics Committee
Enc.

b: Research Governance sponsorship

Ref: RSO 4130   REC (if available) SO6/01-01

Ms Jo Watson
School
Building
University

21 March 2006

Dear Ms Watson

Project Title: A survey of OT students' academic progression routes

I am writing to confirm that the University   is prepared to act as sponsor for this study
under the terms of the Department of Health Research Governance Framework for Health and Social
Care (2001).

The University   fulfils the role of research sponsor in ensuring management, monitoring
and reporting arrangements for research.

I understand that you will be acting as the Principal Investigator responsible for the daily management
for this study, and that you will be providing regular reports on the progress of the study to the School
on this basis.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind you of your responsibilities under the terms of the
Research Governance Framework for researchers, principal investigators and research sponsors. These
are included with this letter for your reference. In this regard if your project involves NHS patients or
resources please send us a copy of your NHS REC and Trust approval letters when available.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any additional information or support. May I
also take this opportunity to wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr
Research Governance Manager

cc.   File

            Supervisor/s: (if applicable)
                    Dr
                    School
                    Building
                    University

<u>c: Professional indemnity insurance</u>

From:		**To:**	Jo Watson
Ext:		**Dept:**	School
E-mail:	hrm@	**Date:**	21 March 2006

Reference: HRM/GFT/4130

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Project No: S06/01-01

    Survey of OT Students' Academic Progression Routes

Thank you for forwarding the completed questionnaire and attached papers.

Having taken note of the information provided, I can confirm that this project will be covered under the terms and conditions of the above policy, subject to written consent being obtained from the participating volunteers.

Insurance Services Manager

Appendix 4.3: Student Experiences study authorisations

a: Ethical approval

28 April 2006

Jo Watson
School
University

Dear Jo

Submission No: S06/04-01
Title: Non-traditional OT students' Educational Experiences

I am pleased to confirm **full approval** for your study has now been given. The approval has been granted by the School
Ethics Committee

You are required to complete a University Research Governance Form (enclosed) in order to receive insurance clearance before you begin data collection. You need to submit the following documentation in a plastic wallet to Dr   in the Research Support Office (RSO, University   ,   , Bldg.
,   ):

- Completed Research Governance form (**signed by both student and supervisor**)
- Copy of your research protocol (final and approved version)
- Copy of participant information sheet
- Copy of   Risk Assessment form, **signed by yourself and supervisor** (original should be with   )
- Copy of your information sheet and consent form
- Copy of this   Ethical approval letter

Your project will be registered at the RSO, and then automatically transferred to the Finance Department for insurance cover. **You can not commence data collection until you have received a letter stating that you have received insurance clearance.**

Please note that you have ethics approval only for the project described in your submission. If you want to change any aspect of your project (e.g., recruitment or data collection) you must discuss this with your supervisor and you may need to request permission from the Ethics Committee.

Yours sincerely

Dr
Chair,   Ethics Committee
Enc.

b: Research Governance sponsorship

Ref: RSO 4394   REC (if available) SO6/04-01

Jo Watson
School
Building
University

09 May 2006

Dear Jo

Project Title: Non-traditional OT students' educational experiences

I am writing to confirm that the University   is prepared to act as sponsor for this study under the terms of the Department of Health Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care (2001).

The University   fulfils the role of research sponsor in ensuring management, monitoring and reporting arrangements for research.

I understand that you will be acting as the Principal Investigator responsible for the daily management for this study, and that you will be providing regular reports on the progress of the study to the School on this basis.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind you of your responsibilities under the terms of the Research Governance Framework for researchers, principal investigators and research sponsors. These are included with this letter for your reference. In this regard if your project involves NHS patients or resources please send us a copy of your NHS REC and Trust approval letters when available.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any additional information or support. May I also take this opportunity to wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr
Research Governance Manager

cc.   File

        Supervisor/s: (if applicable)
                Dr
                School
                Building
                University

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<u>c: Professional indemnity insurance</u>

From:	**To:**	Jo Watson
Ext:	**Dept:**	School
E-mail: hrm@	**Date:**	9 May 2006

Reference: HRM/GFT/4394

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Project No: SO6/04-01

Non-Traditional OT Students' Educational Experiences

Thank you for forwarding the completed questionnaire and attached papers.

Having taken note of the information provided, I can confirm that this project will be covered under the terms and conditions of the above policy, subject to written consent being obtained from the participating volunteers.

Insurance Services Manager

Appendix 4.4: Recruitment to the Progression Routes study

Hello All,

I am writing to let you know about a study that Jo Watson is undertaking in the School, and to invite you to participate in it. Some of you may already know that her particular interest is around considering whether previous academic experience has an influence on how students progress through the undergraduate OT programme. Some of you may also have been invited to participate in a parallel study looking at the educational experiences of OT students with 'non-traditional' backgrounds. To try to understand this issue further, this current study involves extracting anonymised data from student files and analysing it to see if any patterns emerge.

The sorts of data that would be extracted from files includes broad demographic information (e.g. age at entry, gender), entry qualifications, any episodes of failure or suspension of studies during the programme, and the final degree mark and exit award achieved. No student names will be recorded in relation to any of the data collected for this study; and no individual student will be recognised in any report or publication that might result from the study.

The information held on your individual student files cannot be utilised for research purposes unless you have specifically given your consent for it to be used in this manner. If you are interested in allowing information held in your student file to contribute towards this study, and you haven't already done so, please do contact Jo (ph xxx xxx xxxx or e-mail jdw@xxx.ac.uk) so that she can address any queries that you may have and formally seek your consent. Please note that the Student Experiences study and this study are completely separate. If you are participating in both, your consent will need to be formally recorded twice: once for each study.

Many thanks for any help you may be able to offer.

b: Progression Routes consent form

Ethics Number: SO6/01-01

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: OT Students' Academic Progression Routes Survey.

Investigator: Jo Watson

Please initial each box to indicate agreement.

1. I agree that information about me held in my student file in the School
    at the University   may
    be used in an anonymised form for research purposes in relation to the above
    study.

2. I understand that my name will not be used and that I will not be identifiable in
    any reports or publications associated with the study.

3. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions regarding how my
    information might be used.

4. I understand that the information gathered for research purposes will be retained
    by the University   for fifteen years in line with University policy.

5. I understand that I can withdraw my consent for my information to be used for the
    purposes of this research at any time, without giving any reason; and without my
    legal rights being affected.

Name of Student ....

Signature .... Date ....

Name of Investigator ....

Signature... Date ....

one copy for participant & one copy for researcher
(Version 1: 27th February 2006)

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Appendix 4.5: Recruitment to the Student Experiences study

a: Covering Letter

DATE

Dear [NAME],

Congratulations on gaining a place on the Occupational Therapy Programme. My colleagues and I look forward to meeting you in a few weeks' time.

Over the course of the next three academic years Jo Watson, who is a member of the occupational therapy team here at the School XXXX, will be undertaking a research study considering the educational experiences of students on the OT programme. With the permission of Ms XXXX, Head of Occupational Therapy and Director of Education at the School, I am writing to you to introduce you to the aims of the study and to invite you to participate in it.

You may be aware that students studying on the OT programme come from a wide range of academic backgrounds, not just from the traditional A-level route. Research tells us that the achievements of OT students are not influenced by the nature of their academic backgrounds. Jo, however, is particularly interested in understanding how students from these different backgrounds manage the academic demands of studying at university and what their educational experiences are like. Her aim is to help educators understand the challenges that students face, and therefore to inform curriculum design and enhance student experiences. The study has received ethical approval from the School XXXX Ethics Committee (Ethics Number: SO6/04-01).

Please take a moment to read the enclosed Information Sheet that Jo has prepared to give you more details about the study. If you feel that it is something that you might be interested in participating in, please complete the attached reply slip and return it in the envelope provided by [Date].

For those who are interested in the study, Jo and I will hold an informal meeting at the School to give you an opportunity to meet her and to address any questions that you have, which may help you to make a final decision about whether or not to participate. This meeting is scheduled during the forthcoming induction period on Monday 2nd October at 10am in room xxxx within the School. Please note, however, that participation in the study is on a completely voluntary basis. The decision whether to participate is entirely your own, and you will not be penalised in any way should you decide that it is not for you.

Yours sincerely,

XXXX
Occupational Therapy Admissions Tutor

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET.

Educational Experiences of OT Students with Non-traditional Academic Backgrounds.

My name is Jo Watson. I am a member of the occupational therapy staff team in the School   at the University   ; and I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study. This information sheet has been sent to you by   , the Occupational Therapy Admissions Tutor at the School, who has identified from her records that you have an academic background that is of particular relevance to this study.

Before you decide to participate in the study, it is important that you understand why the research is being undertaken and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information. If something is not clear or if you would like further information, please feel free to contact me at the address given above; or raise your queries at the informal meeting about the study which will be hosted by   on Monday October 2nd at 10am in room   in the School; where you will also have a chance to meet me.

What is the purpose of this study?

Recent government and professional efforts to increase and diversify the student population in general and the occupational therapy (OT) workforce in particular have seen an increase in the number of mature students and those with non-traditional academic backgrounds commencing OT courses. Research that has been conducted in the past indicates that students' academic achievements on OT courses are not influenced by their previous educational experiences; however, there is little evidence providing us with insight into what students experience along the way.

I am very interested to understand how students manage the academic demands of the OT course: how effectively their previous educational experiences prepare them to study OT, how different learning tasks are negotiated, what sort of difficulties are encountered, what strengths are identified, and what strategies and support systems are employed along the way. The insight that is developed by this study will help the designers of OT courses to more fully appreciate the various experiences and needs of their students; and enable them to develop courses that reflect and accommodate the diversity within their student body in order to assist even more students to embark on careers as occupational therapists.

Why have I been chosen?

You are being invited to participate in this research because you come from one of the range of 'non-traditional' academic backgrounds that are increasingly bringing students into university. These backgrounds include Access courses, HNDs, AVCEs, BTec Diplomas, GNVQs, and Foundation Degrees amongst others. This study is particularly interested in understanding your educational experiences as you make your way through the OT course.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study or any aspect of it. If you decide that you are interested in the possibility of participating, you are invited to attend an informal meeting hosted by the OT Admissions Tutor,   , where you will have an opportunity to meet me as the researcher and to seek further information or ask any questions that you may have. This meeting may help you to make a final decision about whether to participate in the study. Either way, your decision will in no way influence the manner in which you are treated as a student within the School.

If you do decide to participate, you will have this Information Sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form. Even if you initially decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw from the study at any time in the future without giving a reason. Your decisions regarding whether or not to participate in this study, or whether to subsequently withdraw from the study, will not in any way influence the way that you are treated as a student in the School.

What will happen to me if I take part in the study?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will initially be invited to participate in a focus group discussion with up to seven other first year OT students. This discussion will last approximately 2 hours and will be held in a pre-booked private room on the   campus. The focus of the discussion will be your motivation for starting the OT course, your previous educational experiences and your expectations as you commence the course.

Later in your first year, you may also be invited to participate in a series of individual interviews which will focus on exploring your actual experiences as you make your way through the course. These interviews will be spread out over the three years of the course in order to understand your experiences at different points in the programme; and will involve a maximum of three interviews. If it should emerge that you at some stage withdraw from the course for whatever reason, you will be invited to participate in an interview that will seek to understand the issues that have led to this decision.

All interviews will be arranged at a mutually convenient time; and will be conducted in a private pre-booked room either on   campus or at a location close to where you are on practice placement (should that be relevant at the time), which ever is the most convenient for yourself. With your permission, all focus group discussions and interviews will be audio-recorded so that I can later transcribe them and carefully review what has been said. To help me identify who is speaking on the recordings from the focus groups, a research assistant will be present during these sessions to take notes. You will be given the opportunity to both review the transcripts for accuracy and to comment on my analysis of them.

During the study you may also be invited to keep and share with the researcher, a reflective diary in which you record significant educational experiences during the course, the circumstances surrounding them and how you felt about them. This is in no way meant to be an onerous task; rather a way of recording events as they happen and to help capture them clearly at the time in order that they can also inform the study.

What are the possible benefits or disadvantages of participating?

There are no immediate individual benefits to taking part in this study. It is not an opportunity for individual academic support or guidance. You may, however, find it useful to reflect on your educational experiences as you progress through the course. The information gathered from this study will help to advise OT Educators about how to cater for the diverse range of educational needs of students in the programmes that they develop in the future.

If you agree to take part, I will do my best to keep any inconvenience and disruption to a minimum. I will endeavour to arrange meeting times that are convenient for you and in a location that is convenient for you. I will also try to avoid periods in your timetable that are particularly busy.

The research is interested in understanding and exploring your individual experiences, so you should not feel under pressure to provide the 'right' answers. It may be that during some of the discussions you may become upset by issues that are troubling you. If this is the case, we will stop the session to allow you to settle yourself and decide whether or not to continue. I will be able to offer advice about the most appropriate sources of information or support that are available to you to help you address the issue of concern.

If you have any concerns about any aspect of the study, please do contact me at the address on the front of this Information Sheet or on the details given below.

What happens when the study stops?

When the research is complete, all audio-recordings, transcripts of focus groups and interviews and any other data collected during the course of the study will be retained in a secure location by the University   for a period of fifteen years in line with current policy. At the conclusion of the study I will provide you with a summary of the key findings of the research.

What happens if something goes wrong?

In the unlikely event that you are harmed by taking part in this research, or if you have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of the study, the normal University complaint mechanisms are available to you. If you wish to make a complaint, please contact Dr   (Research Supervisor) on

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. All information and participant research data will be kept in secure locked storage in accordance with the University   current guidelines and will be accessible only to the researcher and her research supervisors. Your name will not be attached to any information collected from you; and it will not be possible to recognise you in any of the reports or publications that emerge from the study.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been given ethical approval by the School   Ethical Committee (Ethics No: SO6/04-01).

Contact for Further Information:

If you have any further queries about this study, please contact Jo Watson on telephone: or e-mail: jdw@   . Alternatively, please raise your queries at the informal meeting about the study on October 2nd as outlined on page 1 of this Information Sheet.

Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet.
If you feel that you might be interested in participating in this study, please complete the attached Reply Slip and return it in the envelope provided at your earliest convenience.

Ethics Number: SO6/04-01   (Version 2: 7th April 2006)

c: Reply slip

REPLY SLIP

I am interested in participating in the study entitled:

Educational Experiences of OT Students with Non-traditional Academic Backgrounds.

Name: ....

Date: ....

Please include your term time contact details so that I can contact you regarding the study:

Address: ....

....

....

Telephone Number/s:...

Please tick the relevant box to indicate which of the following apply:

☐ I will be attending the informal meeting about the study on Monday 2nd October 2006 at 10am in room   in the School.

☐ I will not be able to attend the informal meeting, but would like another opportunity to meet the researcher & ask any questions before deciding whether to participate.

☐ I am not able to attend the informal meeting, but I understand what the study is about and would like to participate. Please forward details about the focus group discussions so that I can decide which would be the most convenient to attend.

Please return this reply slip in the stamped, addressed envelope attached.

Thank you for your interest,
Jo Watson

d: Student Experiences consent form

Ethics Number: SO6/04-01

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Educational Experiences of OT Students with Non-traditional
Academic Backgrounds.

Investigator: Jo Watson

Please initial each box to indicate agreement.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Information Sheet dated 7th April
   2006 for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at
   any time, without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected.

3. I understand that all information and data collected from me as part of the study
   will be retained by the University   for fifteen years in line with
   University policy.

4. I agree that the focus group discussions and/or interviews that I may participate
   in can be audio-recorded.

5. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Student ....

Signature .... Date ....

Name of Investigator ....

Signature... Date ....

one copy for participant & one copy for researcher
(Version 1: 8th March 2006)

Appendix 4.6: Student Experiences focus groups

a: Focus group topic guide

Focus Group Guide

Introduction:

- Welcome and thanks for participating.
- Outline of the purpose and focus of the session:
    - Understanding why you chose to come to Uni to study OT
    - Understand a bit about your experiences in education before you start the course
    - Explore your expectations of studying at Uni over the next three years

- All views are valid and helpful.
- There is no right and no wrong.
- It's quite OK to agree or disagree with someone's perspective.
- I expect that you will have differing points of view; and I'm interested in hearing all of them.
- There is no need for anyone to defend or justify their position.
- All views are equally valid.
- There is no need for the group to reach any sort of agreement or conclusion.

- Remind that the session will be audio-recorded, clarify why....
    - Don't want to miss any of your comments
    - No names will be included in any report
    - All comments will be anonymised
    - If anyone is uncomfortable with that please say so and, of course, you are free to withdraw before we begin
- Clarify purpose of note-taking by researcher:
    - To capture any ideas or questions that are triggered by the discussion
    - Note down any points to follow up
- Clarify purpose of observer:
    - Takes notes to capture key issues just in case the recording fails
    - ...and to help interpret the audio-recording once it is transcribed.
    - Records the flow of the discussion to help Identify individual speakers on the recording

- Just as interested in negative as positive comments.
- Please feel free to follow up on something someone else has said; or to agree or disagree.
- Don't feel that you have to respond to me all of the time...feel free to have a conversation with each other about the issues that come up.
- I'm here to ask questions, to listen and to make sure that everybody had a chance to discuss their opinion.
- To help with dealing with the audio-recording later; it would be really helpful if we could avoid speaking over each other.

- Are there any questions?

- One last point is that we need to agree that what is discussed during the discussion remains confidential and is not to be discussed outside the group once we finish today.

...is every one happy with that?

Version 3: October 2006   Ethics Number: SO6/04-01

<u>Opening Question:</u>

To help us to get started it might be useful if we go around the group and introduce ourselves. Tell us who you are, where you are from, and what you most likely to be found doing when you're not studying...

Ask each person to respond briefly in turn...to get everybody talking and help to settle any nerves and develop the focus of the discussion, etc.

<u>Introductory Questions:</u>

When did you first decide that you wanted to study at University?

What were the circumstances that lead up to that decision?

Why occupational therapy in particular?

Why   ?

Did you consider any other courses or Universities?

Introduce the topic of discussion and encourage folk to think about their connection/experience.

<u>Transition Questions:</u>

One thing that we know about the OT course here at   is that people start from all sorts of different study backgrounds. What sort of study did you do to gain your place on the course here?

Before then, how long had it been since you had studied?

Moving on to the key questions driving the focus group...allow increasing time for responses.

<u>Key Questions:</u>

What was it like returning to study?
        ...in terms of changes in lifestyle
        ...personally?
        ...for family/partners?

What sorts of things did you need to do to successfully complete that programme of study?
        ...in terms of the academic tasks
        ...also more personally, in terms of how you managed personally

How did you come to understand what the requirements for successfully getting through the course were?...what it took to pass?

What sorts of issues have been challenging for you to manage in terms of studying so far?

It seems that some courses offer their students lots of support and guidance, but others expect you to get on with it on your own. What was your experience on the course you took?

> ...did you use any of the support that was available?
> ...what sort of support was most useful?

What do you think it is going to be like studying at University?

> ...how have you formed that opinion?
> ...have you spoken with others about it?
> ...have the experiences of friends and/or relatives influenced you?

How do you feel about starting the OT course?

How well prepared for studying at University do you feel?

Ending Questions:

I want to make sure that I really understand how you feel about starting Uni and the nature of your experiences of studying up until now...so I'd like to ask each of you in turn to tell me: of all of the things that we have discussed, which point do you think is the most important for me to take away?

> *Addressed to each person in turn.*

JDW to provide a brief summary of what has been said during the session (~2-3 mins).

How well does that capture what has been said here?

Is there anything that I have missed?

Is there anything that you came wanting to say that you haven't had a chance to say?

Closing:

- Thank everyone for their contributions
- Offer summary of outcomes when they are available
- Choose pseudonyms

Ethics Number: SO6/04-01

b: Student Experiences demographics form

Motivation, Prior Experience & Expectations Focus Group

To help me to put your comments into context I would be grateful if you could please complete the following information. **If there are any questions that you would prefer not to answer, please leave them blank.**

Please tick the relevant box.

1. Are you… ?   Female…. ☐   Male…. ☐

2. Age at entry to   18-20 years…… ☐
    OT Programme: 21-25 years…… ☐

                           26-30 years…… ☐

                           31-35 years…… ☐

                           36-40 years…… ☐

                           41-45 years…… ☐

                           > 45 years…….. ☐

3. Academic qualifications that brought you to University:
    (Please tick all those that apply to you)

    A level/s (inc. <u>Biology</u>)……….. ☐   A level/s (<u>no</u> Biology)………… ☐

    As level/s……………………. ☐   Access Course……………… ☐

    Higher National Diploma…….. ☐   GNVQ……………………… ☐

    AVCE………………………. ☐   BTec Diploma……………… ☐

    Foundation Degree…………. ☐   OU Science Foundation…….. ☐

    International Baccelaureat…… ☐

    Other (please specify) ……………………………………………………

    ……………………………………………………………………………

4. Did you gain your place through 'clearing'?   Yes…. ☐   No…. ☐

Please turn the page over.

5. If you returned to study and came to University after a break from education, what were you doing during that time? (e.g. raising a family, working, travelling, unemployed, etc.) Please outline briefly.

....

....

....

....

....

6. If you had a study break, how long was the gap between leaving compulsory education and commencing the study that gained you a place in University? Please briefly explain.

....

....

....

THANK YOU

Appendix 4.7: Student Experiences interviews

a: More About You template

More about you...

*To help me to put your comments into context I would be grateful if you would please complete the following information. **If there are any sections that you would prefer not to answer, please leave them blank.** Please write any additional thoughts, comments or observations on the reverse side. THANK YOU.*

Age you left school?

Schools you attended?

Qualifications to date?

Reading for pleasure? Books, magazines, newspapers, other? Particular titles &/or varieties/styles?

Going out &/or staying in: e.g. DVDs? Cinema? Particular TV shows? Theatre? Pub? Cafes? Meals Out? Take-aways? Visits to/from friends &/or family? Trips out? Days in?…examples? Other?

When not studying, most likely to be found doing what?

Home: e.g. City? Town? Rural? Flat? Room? House? Bungalow? Other? Semi/ detached? Rented? Private?

Pseudonym Inserted

Job/s before coming to Uni?

Any voluntary/paid work while at Uni? What, where & when? (briefly)

Member of any clubs, societies or organisations? Which?

Any particular activities or hobbies you enjoy?

Anything you used to enjoy that you've had to set aside while at Uni?

b: First Student Experiences interview schedule

First-Round Student Interview Guide

Prior to each interview, the researcher will read each participant's reflective diary to gain some initial insight into their individual experiences so far. The interview schedule will be used flexibly as a guide while allowing pertinent issues emerging from the diaries to be explored where appropriate.

Introduction:

- Thanks for agreeing to participate
- Present previously signed copy of consent form
- The purpose of this interview:
  - To explore your actual experiences of studying and learning on the course
  - To consider how your expectations compare to your experiences
  - To explore how you have managed the transition into learning and studying at Uni
  - To explore the factors that influence your learning on the course, including those things that present challenges and those that support and enable your learning.
- There are no right or wrong answers and I am just as interested in negative as positive comments. I'm simply interested in hearing about and trying to gain some insight into your experiences of studying on the course and in a university environment. I will aim to let you talk as much as possible.
- In the School and in classes I'm a lecturer, but today I'm here as a researcher. If particular issues come up, I will ask you to speak to your Personal Tutor or someone else who might be appropriate. It is not that I'm not interested, just that it wouldn't be appropriate to address those issues within the context of the interview.
- With your permission, I will audio-record our discussion so that I don't miss any of your comments. As with the focus group, I will transcribe it later and send you a copy of the transcription to confirm its accuracy before starting to analyse it on its own and along side the transcripts of interviews with other students.
- I might also jot down some notes from time to time – perhaps where you have raised a point that I want to come back to later or to capture any ideas or questions that are triggered by our discussion.
- Do you have any questions that you'd like to ask?
- Are you happy to proceed?

Interview Questions:

- **For those who did not participate in Focus Groups:**
  What motivated you to become a student?   (Motivation)
  Why OT?
  Why   ?

                                                            (Transition/Culture)
- How did you find settling in to learning and studying at university in the first few weeks?
  - o   Finding way around
  - o   How do early expectations compared to experiences
  - o   Developing relationships with peers and staff

- How have you found managing the academic requirements and learning on the course since then?
  (Experiences/Culture)
  - o   Preparedness – study skills, learning environment
  - o   Volume and level of work
  - o   Availability of guidance and feedback on learning
  - o   Utilising learning support resources
  - o   Coping with assessments
  - o   Routine?

- How have you managed being a student along side other aspects of you life?   (Roles/Identity)
  - o   Competing roles/priorities
  - o   Travel, finances, etc
  - o   Employment
  - o   Relationships with family and friends – their perceptions of you as a student
  - o   Self-perception

- If you have a problem with anything, who do you go to for help/support?   (Support)
  - o   Perceptions of support available via the university? (Personal/Course tutors, Library staff, central services such as LDC, Counselling, Student Services, etc)
  - o   Used any? Helpful?

- How do you feel about your decision to study occupational therapy now that you are actually on the programme?   (Commitment/Motivation)
  - o   Commitment to the course do you feel at this stage?
  - o   Has this changed since you started?
  - o   Have you ever thought about leaving the course?
  - o   If yes…What prompted those thoughts?
  - o   If yes…What made you stay?
  - o   What are your expectations of what lies ahead on the programme?

- Is there anything else that we haven't spoken about regarding your experiences of learning on the programme that you think are important or that we should have talked about?... or any thing else that you want to say?

- **jdw to provide a brief summary** of what has been said during the session (~2-3 mins).
  - o   How well does that capture the essence of what you have been telling me?
  - o   Is there anything that I have missed or anything else you'd like to add?

Second-Round Student Interview Guide

Prior to each interview, the researcher will read each participant's reflective diary to gain some initial insight into their individual experiences on the programme. The interview schedule will be used flexibly as a guide while allowing pertinent issues emerging from the diaries to be explored where appropriate.

Introduction:

- Thanks for ongoing participation in the study
- Present previously signed copy of consent form

- The purpose of this interview:
  - To explore your experiences of studying on the course
  - To further consider how your early expectations compared to your actual experiences
  - To explore the factors that influence your learning on the course, including those things that present challenges and those that support and enable your learning
  - To explore how you have tried to address the educational demands made and expectations held of you.

- There are no right or wrong answers and I am just as interested in negative as positive comments. I'm simply interested in hearing about and trying to gain some insight into your experiences of studying on the course and in a university environment.
- With your permission, I will audio-record our discussion so that I don't miss any of your comments. As with the focus group and previous interview you participated in, I will transcribe the recording and send you a copy of the transcription to confirm its accuracy before starting analysis.
- I might also jot down some notes from time to time – perhaps where you have raised a point that I want to come back to later or to capture any ideas or questions that are triggered by our discussion.

- Do you have any questions that you'd like to ask?
- Are you happy to proceed?

Interview Questions:

- I wonder if we could start with you telling me what it has been like for you learning on the OT programme since we last spoke at the end of your first year?

- When did you start to feel like you really were an OT student (fitting in)?
  - What helped/hindered?

- What have been the strongest influences on your experiences of learning on the OT programme?
  - Financial, social/familial support, competing roles?
  - Approaches to learning and teaching, access to learning resources, volume and level of work, coping with assessments, availability of feedback and guidance, etc?
  - Anything else?
  - *How* have these factors influenced your experience of learning? What *sort* of influence have they had?

- What aspects of your experiences over the last three years have had the most impact on you?
  - Any critical/defining incidents that have coloured/framed experiences?
  - Don't ask why (they don't need to justify themselves)
  - Ask for further explanation of what happened, where, when, how they felt, what impact it had, etc

- How do your experiences of learning at Uni compare to your experiences of learning on placement?

- How would you describe the way that you feel about learning on the OT programme?
  - Immersed/detached in the Uni environment &/or practice placement environments?
  - Sense of belonging in either environment?
  - 'utilitarian' engagement? Means to an end?
  - What has influenced that perception? (re: generating &/or subsequently changing them)
  - e.g. making friends, or managing academically/intellectually/clinically or what?

- Could you describe for me any influence that coming to Uni to study OT has had on you and your life?
  - What do your family and friends think about it?
  - Do you feel that your relationships with your friends and family outside Uni have been influenced in any way?

- Now that you are nearly at the end of your undergraduate studies, do you feel like an OT?
  - What has helped to you feel that way?
  - Have you ever thought about leaving the course?
    - If yes...What prompted those thoughts?
    - If yes...What made you stay?
  - What do you think it takes to be a good OT?

- Suppose I was a new first year OT student – what would you tell me about how to do well on this programme?

- What should I have asked you that I didn't think to ask? Is there anything else that you'd care to add?

- One final question: has participating in this research had any influence on you?
  - In terms of how you manage or think about your learning?

- **jdw to provide a brief summary** of what has been said during the session (~2-3 mins).
  - How well does that capture the essence of what you have been telling me?
  - Is there anything that I have missed or anything else you'd like to add?
  - ASK FOR HOME ADDRESS TO SEND TRANSCRIPT TO

Appendix 4.8: Progression Routes data extraction template

OT Student Academic Progression Routes Survey

Investigator: Jo Watson
MPhil/PhD student:

Date File Reviewed ___/___/___

1. Student ID Number: ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

2. Year of Entry: _____ *(mmm/yyyy; e.g. Feb/2006)*

3. Age at entry: _____ years

4. Gender: ☐ female ☐ male

5. Academic Entry Qualifications:

i.	A Level/s (inc **Biology**)	☐ Yes	☐ No	Grade: _____ *(Biology only)*
ii.	A Level/s (**NOT** Biology)	☐ Yes	☐ No	
iii.	As Level/s	☐ Yes	☐ No	
iv.	Access Course	☐ Yes	☐ No	College: _____
v.	Higher National Diploma	☐ Yes	☐ No	
vi.	GNVQ	☐ Yes	☐ No	
vii.	AVCE	☐ Yes	☐ No	
viii.	BTec Diploma	☐ Yes	☐ No	
ix.	Foundation Degree	☐ Yes	☐ No	
x.	OU Science Foundation	☐ Yes	☐ No	
xi.	International Baccelaureat	☐ Yes	☐ No	

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6.   Yr 1 Academic Failures*:

     Subjects: _____

                    _____

     * If old programme, count BioSc1 & BioSc 2 separately   **TOTAL: ☐
       Include IPLU from 2003 entry cohort only

7.   BioSc or Foundation Sciences Unit 1:   ☐ Pass   ☐ Fail

8.   BioSc or Foundation Sciences Unit 2:   ☐ Pass   ☐ Fail

9.   Yr 1 Clinical Failures:

     Placements: _____

                                                       ** TOTAL: ☐

10. Yr 2 Academic Failures*:

     Subjects: _____

                    _____

                                                       **TOTAL: ☐

11. Yr 2 Clinical Failures:

     Placements: _____

                                                       **TOTAL: ☐

12. Yr 3 Academic Failures*:

     Subjects: _____

                    _____

                                                       **TOTAL: ☐

13. Yr 3 Clinical Failures:

     Placements: _____

                                                       **TOTAL: ☐

** enter '0' if there were no fails in this area

14. Periods of Suspension? ☐ n/a for this student

   Date first episode: ___/____ *(mmm/yyyy e.g Feb/2006)*

   Reason for suspension 1   ☐ 1. Health   ☐ 2. Financial

   ☐ 3. Personal   ☐ 4. Other

   Describe 'other': _____

   Length Suspension 1: _____ weeks

   Date second episode: ___/____ *(mmm/yyyy e.g. Feb/2006)*

   Reason for suspension 2   ☐ 1. Health   ☐ 2. Financial

   ☐ 3. Personal   ☐ 4. Other

   Describe 'other': _____

   Length Suspension 2: _____ weeks

15. Withdrawal?   ☐ 1. Involuntary   ☐ 2. Voluntary

   ☐ 88. n/a for this student

   Date of withdrawal: ___/____ *(mmm/yyyy e.g. Feb/2006)*

16. Reason for withdrawal:

i.	Academic Failure	☐ Yes	☐ No
ii.	Other Termination	☐ Yes	☐ No
iii.	Wrong Career Choice	☐ Yes	☐ No
iv.	Health Reasons	☐ Yes	☐ No
v.	Personal Reasons	☐ Yes	☐ No
vi.	Financial Reasons	☐ Yes	☐ No
vii.	Other	☐ Yes	☐ No

Describe 'other': _____

17. Degree Mark:

_____._____   ☐ n/a

18. Exit award:

☐ 1st Class	☐ 2:1
☐ 2:2	☐ 3rd
☐ Cert. Allied Health	☐ Dip. Allied Health
☐ BSc Allied Health	☐ n/a

Appendix 4.9: Summary of development of qualitative data analysis

a: As at 13th February 2007

Early Themes	Early Sub-themes	Sources	References
Challenges		2	39
	Financial challenges	2	6
	Fragility & vulnerability	2	7
	Guilt	1	3
	Juggling roles & responsibilities	2	39
	Previous educational hurdles	2	10
	Sacrifices & compromises	2	13
Choice		0	0
	Expedience	2	11
	First choice	2	9
	Not for me	2	9
'Confidence'		2	16
	Lack of confidence	2	10
	Recognition of own potential	2	21
'Eureka!' - Finding a Niche		2	20
	Caution	1	3
	Developing identity as an OT	1	5
	Fulfilling destiny	1	6
	Regret	2	3
Expectations		2	35
	Advantages of maturity	2	5
	Preparedness	2	10
	Uncertainty	2	18
Gaining entry		2	11
	Learner support	2	16
	Strategies for educational success	2	22
	Support of family, friends & peers	2	24
	Value of pre-entry course	2	27
Motivation		1	4
	Altruism	2	5
	Ambition	1	4
	Love of learning	2	14
	'Means to an end'	2	8

	Personal challenge	2	2
	Pursuit of career	2	11
	Support from profession	2	3
Timing		1	9
	Changing personal circumstances	2	6
	'Now or never'	1	4
Transformation		1	5
	Changing direction	2	14
	Determination	2	27
	Identity	2	9

NB: 'Sources' relates to the number of documents to which the code applied; 'References' relates to the number of times throughout those sources that the code was applied.

Developing Themes	Developing Sub-themes	Sources	References
CAPITAL		0	0
	Capital - Academic	15	53
	Capital - Cultural	2	4
	Capital - Deploying	8	21
	Capital - Economic	13	45
	Capital - Gathering	15	179
	Capital - Language	12	32
	Capital - Questioning	10	31
	Capital - Social	15	100
Challenges		6	49
	Financial challenges	14	57
	Fragility & vulnerability	13	77
	Guilt	7	23
	Juggling roles & responsibilities	15	177
	Previous educational hurdles	4	13
	Sacrifices & compromises	11	63
CHALLENGING THE FIELD		0	0
	Questioning the Course	13	97
	Unmet Expectations	9	34
'Confidence'		12	47
	Lack of confidence	12	51
	Recognition of own potential	5	26
CONGRUENCE WITH FIELD		0	0
	Exclusion	4	34
	'Fitting In'	13	143
	'I'm a Stranger'	6	10
Emotional Responses		0	0
	Apprehension	10	33
	Disappointment	8	38
	Frustration	10	105
	Injustice	3	10
	Optimism	9	42
	Overwhelmed	9	32
	Thriving	6	28
	Uncertainty	9	34

'Eureka!' - Finding a Niche		5	24
	Caution	2	8
	Developing identity as an OT	7	22
	Fulfilling destiny	4	11
	Regret	3	4
Expectations		10	59
	Advantages of maturity	8	28
	Preparedness	9	28
	Uncertainty	5	27
EXPERIENCING THE CHALLENGE		0	0
	Academic Struggle	14	118
	Being Stretched	12	53
	Collaboration	15	58
	Commitment	13	56
	'Get On With It'	13	106
	Personal Insight	11	45
	Recognising Development	9	33
Gaining entry		2	11
	Learner support	15	15
	Support of family, friends & peers	15	15
	Value of pre-entry course	9	9
HABITUS		0	0
	Habitus - Changing	12	50
	Habitus - Educational	15	158
	Habitus - Established	13	88
	Habitus - Incongruent	15	305
Motivation		4	9
	Altruism	2	5
	Ambition	4	14
	Love of learning	8	26
	'Means to an end'	5	14
	Personal challenge	7	8
	Pursuit of career	9	25
	Support from profession	2	3
RULES OF THE GAME		0	0
	Learning rules & expectations	14	134
	Obscured rules	11	71
TRANSFORMATION		0	0
	'A new me'	10	48

	Changing direction		6	22
	Determination		9	54
	'Identity'		9	43
ZZ - Choice			1	1
	Expedience		3	13
	First choice		2	9
	Not for me		4	12
ZZ - Parked			0	0
	Leisure		2	8
	Security		2	10
ZZ - Timing			2	10
	Changing personal circumstances		3	9
	'Now or never'		3	6

NB: Themes that were emerging as important are capitalised in the table. Those marked 'ZZ' had effectively been 'retired'

	FITTING the new field	ADAPTING TO the new field	RESISTING DEMANDS of new field	EXCLUSION from the new field
Participants	George Lynne Lizzie	Jemma Amy Betty Gabby Katrina Amanda Jocelyn	Sarah (able to be strategic) Frances	Tracey
Major Codes	**Fitting In** **Learning rules & expect[ns]** **Gathering capital** **Social capital** Deploying capital Collaboration Academic capital Being stretched **Get on with it** *Being stretched, not academic struggle.* *Rules clear not obscured.*	**Incongruent Habitus** **Juggling roles** Established Habitus **Obscured Rules** **Academic struggle** **Get on with it** **Language as capital** **Learning rules** **Changing habitus** **Gathering capital** Academic capital **Fitting in** **New me**	Questions Course Unmet expectations **Incongruent Habitus** **Juggling roles** **Obscured rules** *Get on with it not really in evidence.* *Changing habitus is definitely no in evidence.*	**Incongruent Habitus** Exclusion **Obscured rules** **Academic struggle** **(not really) fitting in** **(lack) social capital** (lack) academic capital (lack) economic capital **(lack) language as capital** **(not) changing habitus** *Struggles rather than being able to get on with it.*
Other Relevant Codes	**Juggling roles** **Incongruent habitus** **Language as capital** **Changing habitus** **New me** *Little change in habitus required*	**Social Capital** Collaboration Being stretched Questioning course	**Learning rules** **Academic struggle** Being stretched **Language as capital** **Gathering capital** **Social capital** Exclusion I'm a stranger **Fitting in** **New me (F only – ambition in tension with resistance)**	**Juggling roles** **New me (as an ambition)** **(struggling to) Learn rules** **(not) gathering capital**
Other thoughts…	*An element of 'coming home' to the new field. Habitus valued here is embraced and spread to other parts of their lives.*	*Efforts to adapt to demands of the new field are largely strong; although there is also an element of trying to hold on to existing habitus as well: trying to maintain a foot in both camps*	*Incompatible lives: Sarah's emphasis is on home & Frances's is on Uni. Their issues aren't about academic success, but about the culture of the field & their willingness to submit to it. There is a tension b/w wanting to find a new me (esp Frances) or direction and not wanting to change habitus.*	*Tracey's optimism, efforts and commitment weren't enough. She was excluded both by the field and by fellow student players within the field* *.*

Mature Themes	Mature Sub-themes	Definition	Sources	References
CAPITAL			0	0
	Capital - Academic	Relates to and illustrates academic skills and success as a form of cultural capital relevant to the field. It includes that initially possessed on entry to the field and that subsequently accrued. Also illustrates challenges of insufficient stocks of academic capital.	34	247
	Capital - Cultural	Relates to scarce symbolic goods, skills and titles, and embodied dispositions such as accent, clothing and behaviour - OTHER THAN academic & language capital which are listed separately.	10	34
	Capital - Deploying	Illustrates when and how participants have deployed their (usually) newly acquired capital with success and to their advantage.	20	54
	Capital - Economic	Relates to and reflects the material and financial assets participants bring to the field, including the challenges they face when resources are limited. It also relates to goals to accrue economic (esp financial) capital as a result of engagement in field.	26	87
	Capital - Gathering	Illustrates the gathering of various forms of capital relevant to the new field: both unconscious & very strategic, both pre-entry and current, individuals' feelings about desirable capital & its value for them & their families.	27	236
	Capital - Language	Identifies and reflects the value of language skills as a form of cultural capital in the academic environment and highlights the challenges encountered where stocks are low. Associated with the obscuring of rules & academic capital.	23	54
	Capital - Practice-related	Relates to and illustrates therapeutic skills, attributes and values as a form of cultural capital relevant to the field of OT practice. It is distinct from, but at times related to, the academic capital that is valued in the HE field.	33	396
	Capital - Questioning	Relates to the questioning of various aspects of capital relevant to the field, as well as other versions of capital, especially academic and cultural capital, accrued/encountered elsewhere.	13	42

	Capital - Social	Relates to and reflects the resources accrued through membership of social groups & networks & their value. Includes those related to the new field & those associated more directly with previously more familiar fields, & problems with lack of social capital.	39	310
Challenges			6	49
	financial challenges		15	58
	fragility & vulnerability		16	82
	guilt		8	24
	juggling roles & responsibilities	Identifies a need to juggle competing roles and responsibilities. Challenges specific to multiple roles. Issues around time management, the need to prioritise & compartmentalise. At times, one role cannot co-exist simultaneously with another.	39	276
	previous educational hurdles		4	13
	sacrifices & compromises		12	64
CHALLENGING THE FIELD			0	0
	Questioning	Relates to instances of expressed dissatisfaction with the course, challenging rationale, organisation, etc. Both direct and indirect, e.g. in highlighting the perceived excessive expectations of the course. Associated with unmet expectations.	29	196
	Resisting	Illustrates examples of annoyance at the demands that are being made, particularly where demands are viewed as unreasonable or unwarranted.	2	6
	Unmet Expectations	Highlights specific examples of where expectations of the course and of HE have gone unmet. Related to questioning of course.	16	58
'Confidence'			12	47
	lack of confidence		15	53
	recognition of own potential		5	26
CONGRUENCE WITH FIELD			0	0
	Exclusion	Illustrates where some sort of 'ticket' to, facilitator of integration or access to capital relevant to the field has been denied or obstructed in some way, with both short & longer term effects. Relates to obscured rules & incongruent habitus but personal.	10	50
	'Fitting In'	In vivo code from Betty. Relates to individuals' perceptions of how they fit with the new field, including recognition of lack of fit and at times a yearning to remedy this. Relates to, but more diffuse than, learning rules and expectations.	33	249
	'I'm a Stranger'	In vivo code from Frances. Closely related to fitting in & incongruent habitus, but highlights feelings of anonymity within the new field, particularly in relation to those holding power (staff). Can be both problematic & unproblematic	9	16

	On the fringe	Provides examples of participants' experiences of not being fully immersed in the field; sometimes more consciously aware than others.	11	31
Emotional Responses			0	0
	apprehension		13	38
	disappointment		12	52
	Frustration		22	145
	injustice		5	20
	optimism		10	44
	overwhelmed		14	50
	thriving		7	29
	uncertainty		15	47
'Eureka!' - Finding a Niche			7	26
	caution		2	8
	developing identity as an OT		9	25
	fulfilling destiny		4	11
	regret		3	4
Expectations			10	59
	advantages of maturity		8	28
	preparedness		9	28
	uncertainty		5	27
EXPERIENCING THE CHALLENGE			0	0
	Academic Struggle	Highlights challenges faced in meeting the academic demands of the programme, including those that are very particular to the individual & those that relate more to the culture of the field. Often associated with learning rules & incongruent habitus.	31	216
	Being Stretched	Highlights personal and academic developments that, whilst at times uncomfortable when in progress, generally result in some sort of positive outcome.	27	94
	Collaboration	Highlights the impact of working with others to achieve the academic requirements of the course, both in terms of positive and less than positive results.	37	164
	Commitment	Illustrates the extent of the commitment that participants feel for and invest in meeting the demands of the programme and fulfilling their goals to become OTs. Associated with 'Get on with it', but tends to be more general in nature.	17	61

	'Get On With It'	In vivo code from Lynne. Illustrates participant's willingness to take responsibility and tackle the tasks that are required of them and any issues or challenges they might face. Associated with learning rules & gathering capital & changing habitus.		21	133
	Personal Insight	Illustrates examples of self-awareness regarding existing traits and patterns, individual performances and personal and academic developments. Relates to various other codes such as those within habitus and others within Experiencing the Challenge.		24	84
	Recognising Development	Highlights where participants are able to recognise positive changes and developments in themselves since commencing the programme. Relates to various other codes such as gathering capital, changing habitus, learning rules, confidence, etc.		21	56
	Strategising	Illustrates examples of conscious, deliberate decision making focused on pragmatic, tactical courses of action with a specific goal in mind.		18	87
Gaining entry				2	11
	learner support			15	74
	support of family, friends & peers			16	107
	value of pre-entry course			9	47
HABITUS				0	0
	Habitus - Changing	Relates to instances where individuals describe the changes they are witnessing in their patterns of engaging with their lives.		27	164
	Habitus - Educational	Illustrates established habitus that relates particularly to the educational context - participants preferred or familiar ways with dealing with the academic demands of educational fields.		31	224
	Habitus - Established	This code provides examples of established or existing habitus (in a broad sense) for individual participants.		32	230
	Habitus - Incongruent	Illustrates where existing habitus is incongruent with the new field - whether consciously recognised by the individual or not. Also incongruence b/w their changing habitus & that of others in their old field, & b/w their habitus & others in new field.		36	472
Motivation				4	9
	altruism			2	5
	ambition			4	14
	love of learning			8	26
	'means to an end'			5	14
	personal challenge			7	8

	pursuit of career		9	25
	support from profession		2	3
RULES OF THE GAME			0	0
	Learning rules & expectations	Highlights efforts made to become familiar with the rules & expectations (in terms of what's expected of students) and legitimate practices of the field; inc evidence of achieving & failing to achieve the same. Links to gathering capital - esp academic.	37	309
	Obscured rules	Highlights how the rules & expectations of the field can be obscured by practices within it, making it v.difficult for those new to the field to adapt their habitus or even to recognise a mismatch. At times, it forces them to simply 'hope for the best'.	27	136
TRANSFORMATION			0	0
	'A new me'	In vivo code from Amanda. Illustrates perceptions of changing & developing who they are as a result of participating in HE. Associated with personal development. Relates to 'Identity', but emphasis is on changing, not establishing/confirming identity.	20	89
	Changing direction		6	22
	Determination		9	54
	'Identity'	In vivo node from Amy. Highlights the importance of confirming or establishing individual identities for the participants…confirming or establishing who they are.	13	50

NB: Definitions are provided only for those sub-themes that were significantly informing the analysis. These items are shaded for ease of identification.

Appendix 4.10: Coding Principles of dictomous entry qualifications variable

With some entry qualifications unrepresented within individual cohorts, and only minimally represented in the entire sample, this element of the data was collapsed into a dictomous categorical variable to allow more effective exploration of overall patterns. Re-coding was undertaken on the following basis:

- A-levels and Irish Leaving Certificates achieved by students aged 21 or less at entry were deemed traditional. Under this definition, it is assumed that even those students who were aged 21 at the time of entry had studied for their A-level qualifications before the age of 21 and therefore before they were classified as mature students.

- The case that recorded both A-level and NVCE qualifications was classified as traditional as there were sufficient A-level credits to gain entry without the NVCE, which had been undertaken during a gap year.

- Where school-leavers gained access on the basis of a combination of A-levels and AVCEs, they were classified as non-traditional because they have relied on vocational qualifications to enable them to meet the entry criteria.

- Non-traditional entry qualifications also include: A-levels achieved by mature students, Access, HND, GNVQ and BTEC awards, Open University Foundations and Foundation degrees, International Baccalaureate.

- The 10 cases holding Bachelors degrees and the single case holding an MPhil were excluded. The research undertaken by Shanahan (2004) clearly identified the biasing influences of such cases the analysis of academic performance by entry qualifications.

- The four Certificates in Higher Education were excluded as, along with some experience of and success within the higher education environment, there is no evidence of the entry qualifications that the holders offered to gain entry into their previous degree courses.

Appendix 6.1: Exit Award Thresholds

Award	Threshold
Certificate in Allied Health studies	120 credits
Diploma in Allied Health studies	240 credits
BSc (Allied Health Studies)	300 credits
BSc (Hons) Occupational Therapy	360 credits
3rd Class	Final degree mark of 40
Lower second class (2:2)	Final degree mark of 50
Upper second class (2:1)	Final degree mark of 60
First class	Final degree mark of 70

Appendix 6.2: Stepwise binary logistic regressions

a: Pass at Level 4

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	20.962	6	.002
	Block	20.962	6	.002
	Model	20.962	6	.002
Step 2[a]	Step	-.596	1	.440
	Block	20.366	5	.001
	Model	20.366	5	.001
Step 3[a]	Step	-2.092	2	.351
	Block	18.274	3	.000
	Model	18.274	4	.001

a. A negative Chi-squares value indicates that the Chi-
squares value has decreased from the previous step.

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	119.265[a]	.104	.200
2	119.860[b]	.102	.195
3	121.952[b]	.092	.176

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because
parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

b. Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because
parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95.0% C.I.for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1[a]	Mature			2.084	2	.353			
	Mature(1)	.696	.777	.800	1	.371	2.005	.437	9.202
	Mature(2)	-.358	.748	.229	1	.633	.699	.162	3.028
	SEC2			6.648	2	.036			
	SEC2(1)	.341	.679	.251	1	.616	1.406	.371	5.324
	SEC2(2)	1.396	.561	6.204	1	.013	4.041	1.347	12.126
	Gender(1)	1.825	.604	9.120	1	.003	6.204	1.898	20.282
	EntQual(1)	.535	.685	.610	1	.435	1.707	.446	6.530
	Constant	-3.129	.525	35.587	1	.000	.044		
Step 2[a]	Mature			2.269	2	.322			
	Mature(1)	.985	.686	2.062	1	.151	2.678	.698	10.272
	Mature(2)	.043	.561	.006	1	.939	1.044	.347	3.134
	SEC2			7.034	2	.030			
	SEC2(1)	.320	.678	.224	1	.636	1.378	.365	5.200
	SEC2(2)	1.425	.558	6.515	1	.011	4.157	1.392	12.417
	Gender(1)	1.788	.597	8.968	1	.003	5.977	1.855	19.263
	Constant	-3.000	.486	38.155	1	.000	.050		
Step 3[a]	SEC2			9.358	2	.009			
	SEC2(1)	.310	.672	.212	1	.645	1.363	.365	5.092
	SEC2(2)	1.564	.540	8.393	1	.004	4.778	1.658	13.765
	Gender(1)	1.765	.578	9.320	1	.002	5.843	1.881	18.149
	Constant	-2.895	.438	43.617	1	.000	.055		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Mature, SEC2, Gender, EntQual.

Model if Term Removed

Variable		Model Log Likelihood	Change in -2 Log Likelihood	df	Sig. of the Change
Step 1	Mature	-60.634	2.004	2	.367
	SEC2	-62.950	6.636	2	.036
	Gender	-63.863	8.462	1	.004
	EntQual	-59.930	.596	1	.440
Step 2	Mature	-60.976	2.092	2	.351
	SEC2	-63.434	7.008	2	.030
	Gender	-64.069	8.278	1	.004
Step 3	SEC2	-65.636	9.320	2	.009
	Gender	-65.225	8.498	1	.004

b: Pass at Level 5

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	20.415	6	.002
	Block	20.415	6	.002
	Model	20.415	6	.002
Step 2[a]	Step	-.198	1	.657
	Block	20.218	5	.001
	Model	20.218	5	.001
Step 3[a]	Step	-1.613	2	.446
	Block	18.605	3	.000
	Model	18.605	4	.001

a. A negative Chi-squares value indicates that the Chi-squares value has decreased from the previous step.

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	127.548[a]	.102	.188
2	127.746[a]	.101	.187
3	129.358[a]	.093	.172

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95.0% C.I.for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1[a]	Mature			1.767	2	.413			
	Mature(1)	.587	.763	.591	1	.442	1.798	.403	8.026
	Mature(2)	-.381	.735	.269	1	.604	.683	.162	2.886
	SEC2			8.398	2	.015			
	SEC2(1)	.556	.637	.762	1	.383	1.743	.500	6.074
	SEC2(2)	1.565	.549	8.124	1	.004	4.785	1.631	14.040
	Gender(1)	1.729	.596	8.426	1	.004	5.637	1.754	18.122
	EntQual(1)	.296	.660	.201	1	.654	1.344	.369	4.900
	Constant	-2.954	.496	35.507	1	.000	.052		
Step 2[a]	Mature			1.710	2	.425			
	Mature(1)	.749	.673	1.241	1	.265	2.116	.566	7.909
	Mature(2)	-.156	.545	.082	1	.774	.855	.294	2.491
	SEC2			8.676	2	.013			
	SEC2(1)	.545	.636	.734	1	.392	1.724	.496	5.999
	SEC2(2)	1.583	.548	8.355	1	.004	4.868	1.665	14.238
	Gender(1)	1.710	.592	8.340	1	.004	5.529	1.732	17.645
	Constant	-2.888	.468	38.100	1	.000	.056		
Step 3[a]	SEC2			10.505	2	.005			
	SEC2(1)	.553	.632	.766	1	.382	1.738	.504	5.997
	SEC2(2)	1.671	.531	9.895	1	.002	5.316	1.877	15.057
	Gender(1)	1.652	.575	8.245	1	.004	5.217	1.689	16.113
	Constant	-2.862	.433	43.662	1	.000	.057		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Mature, SEC2, Gender, EntQual.

Model if Term Removed

Variable		Model Log Likelihood	Change in -2 Log Likelihood	df	Sig. of the Change
Step 1	Mature	-64.629	1.711	2	.425
	SEC2	-68.069	8.590	2	.014
	Gender	-67.685	7.823	1	.005
	EntQual	-63.873	.198	1	.657
Step 2	Mature	-64.679	1.613	2	.446
	SEC2	-68.301	8.857	2	.012
	Gender	-67.734	7.722	1	.005
Step 3	SEC2	-70.045	10.731	2	.005
	Gender	-68.459	7.559	1	.006

c: Pass at Level 6

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	24.292	6	.000
	Block	24.292	6	.000
	Model	24.292	6	.000
Step 2[a]	Step	.000	1	.986
	Block	24.291	5	.000
	Model	24.291	5	.000
Step 3[a]	Step	-2.656	2	.265
	Block	21.636	3	.000
	Model	21.636	4	.000

a. A negative Chi-squares value indicates that the Chi-
squares value has decreased from the previous step.

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	137.060[a]	.122	.211
2	137.060[a]	.122	.211
3	139.716[a]	.109	.189

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because
parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95.0% C.I.for EXP(B) Lower	95.0% C.I.for EXP(B) Upper
Step 1[a]	Mature			2.235	2	.327			
	Mature(1)	1.067	.748	2.039	1	.153	2.908	.672	12.584
	Mature(2)	.329	.723	.208	1	.649	1.390	.337	5.729
	SEC2			9.078	2	.011			
	SEC2(1)	.693	.599	1.341	1	.247	2.000	.619	6.464
	SEC2(2)	1.576	.526	8.978	1	.003	4.836	1.725	13.559
	Gender(1)	1.678	.576	8.482	1	.004	5.352	1.731	16.551
	EntQual(1)	.012	.671	.000	1	.986	1.012	.272	3.769
	Constant	-2.920	.480	37.069	1	.000	.054		
Step 2[a]	Mature			2.788	2	.248			
	Mature(1)	1.074	.644	2.778	1	.096	2.927	.828	10.353
	Mature(2)	.339	.500	.458	1	.498	1.403	.526	3.739
	SEC2			9.166	2	.010			
	SEC2(1)	.693	.598	1.341	1	.247	1.999	.619	6.459
	SEC2(2)	1.577	.524	9.052	1	.003	4.840	1.733	13.520
	Gender(1)	1.677	.575	8.500	1	.004	5.350	1.733	16.517
	Constant	-2.918	.462	39.808	1	.000	.054		
Step 3[a]	SEC2			12.229	2	.002			
	SEC2(1)	.662	.593	1.243	1	.265	1.938	.606	6.199
	SEC2(2)	1.743	.508	11.765	1	.001	5.714	2.111	15.471
	Gender(1)	1.720	.563	9.333	1	.002	5.582	1.852	16.824
	Constant	-2.721	.411	43.735	1	.000	.066		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Mature, SEC2, Gender, EntQual.

Model if Term Removed

Variable		Model Log Likelihood	Change in -2 Log Likelihood	df	Sig. of the Change
Step 1	Mature	-69.593	2.127	2	.345
	SEC2	-73.266	9.472	2	.009
	Gender	-72.549	8.039	1	.005
	EntQual	-68.530	.000	1	.986
Step 2	Mature	-69.858	2.656	2	.265
	SEC2	-73.306	9.553	2	.008
	Gender	-72.552	8.043	1	.005
Step 3	SEC2	-76.229	12.743	2	.002
	Gender	-74.250	8.784	1	.003

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	17.696	6	.007
	Block	17.696	6	.007
	Model	17.696	6	.007
Step 2[a]	Step	-.362	2	.835
	Block	17.334	4	.002
	Model	17.334	5	.004
Step 3[a]	Step	-1.709	1	.191
	Block	15.625	3	.001
	Model	15.625	3	.001

a. A negative Chi-squares value indicates that the Chi-squares value has decreased from the previous step.

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	199.461[a]	.090	.131
2	199.823[a]	.089	.129
3	201.532[a]	.080	.117

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 4 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95.0% C.I.for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1[a]	Mature			.366	2	.833			
	Mature(1)	.273	.641	.181	1	.670	1.314	.374	4.614
	Mature(2)	-.096	.537	.032	1	.858	.908	.317	2.601
	SEC2			6.792	2	.034			
	SEC2(1)	.563	.439	1.647	1	.199	1.756	.743	4.152
	SEC2(2)	1.089	.420	6.712	1	.010	2.970	1.303	6.767
	Gender(1)	1.266	.523	5.849	1	.016	3.547	1.271	9.894
	EntQual(1)	.497	.496	1.005	1	.316	1.644	.622	4.345
	Constant	-1.869	.335	31.098	1	.000	.154		
Step 2[a]	SEC2			7.444	2	.024			
	SEC2(1)	.569	.438	1.686	1	.194	1.766	.748	4.168
	SEC2(2)	1.124	.414	7.383	1	.007	3.076	1.368	6.917
	Gender(1)	1.246	.516	5.837	1	.016	3.477	1.265	9.556
	EntQual(1)	.467	.358	1.704	1	.192	1.596	.791	3.219
	Constant	-1.865	.335	30.967	1	.000	.155		
Step 3[a]	SEC2			9.040	2	.011			
	SEC2(1)	.533	.436	1.495	1	.221	1.704	.725	4.005
	SEC2(2)	1.220	.406	9.040	1	.003	3.386	1.529	7.500
	Gender(1)	1.299	.514	6.399	1	.011	3.667	1.340	10.036
	Constant	-1.649	.281	34.424	1	.000	.192		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Mature, SEC2, Gender, EntQual.

Model if Term Removed

Variable		Model Log Likelihood	Change in -2 Log Likelihood	df	Sig. of the Change
Step 1	Mature	-99.912	.362	2	.835
	SEC2	-103.183	6.905	2	.032
	Gender	-102.614	5.766	1	.016
	EntQual	-100.224	.987	1	.320
Step 2	SEC2	-103.705	7.587	2	.023
	Gender	-102.784	5.744	1	.017
	EntQual	-100.766	1.709	1	.191
Step 3	SEC2	-105.354	9.177	2	.010
	Gender	-103.916	6.300	1	.012

Appendix 7.1: Participant experiences summaries

<u>a: Amanda</u>

Having left school at 16 with three GCSEs and a BTEC Diploma, Amanda followed her mother's footsteps and went into hairdressing, later studying for related Level 1 and 2 NVQs. After a number of years she recognised that as a career path, it was failing to prove fulfilling, but with substantial financial commitments she felt the opportunities for changing course were limited. She worked for a while in a laboratory as a hair analyst and tried her hand as a sales negotiator in real estate, but realised that she still 'wasn't quite going in the right direction' [focus group]. When Amanda split up with her long-term partner, she invested considerable time in re-evaluating her options and identifying a path that she thought would suit her. When she discovered OT she felt an immediate affinity with it: 'This is just me all over!', and was 'hooked' [focus group]. Speaking of her childhood Amanda said: 'I was always more practical and I was never really pushed by my mum or my nana and granddad about sort of, being more, working at more [of] the academic side of stuff' [second interview]. Having initially considered him 'very brave' and excluding it as a possibility for herself [first interview], Amanda was inspired by her twin brother's success at university (he completed a Master's Degree during her undergraduate studies). She completed an Access Course and, based on a number of geographically accessible options, at the age of 30 chose to commence her OT studies at the Neville School at least in part because of its strong reputation [focus group].

An academic environment was a very new encounter for Amanda, and as her data highlighted, incongruous with her established *habitus*. She enjoyed studying on her Access course and worked hard to ensure that she stayed on top of things, even taking her 'homework' to complete during visits to family and friends [focus group]. She did, however, receive 'a bit of a shock to the system' when she encountered challenges with writing, spelling and grammar: 'it was just like…things that should be automatic: nouns, verbs, spellings, punctuation, all those sorts of things', essay structure: 'I was, umm, particularly concerned with my essay, sort of, plans, structures, my writing at the end, sort of thing. Just how it all mapped together', and referencing: '…referencing, and what is it? Havard [sic]?...or however you pronounce it … they didn't really *ever*…well, we got something to read, but we never really got that sorted, I don't think' [focus group]. Amanda was determined to improve her performance, so 'badgered' Access tutors, including an English tutor who was not involved with her course, to accept and provide feedback on draft assessment papers [focus group]. She had just one friend who had experience of studying at university, and she drew on this social *capital* to help her undertake research and access literature relevant to her final report for the Access Course. While she successfully completed her Access course, the challenges that Amanda had faced ultimately followed her into the HE *field* in the guise of limited stocks of relevant linguistic and academic *capital*.

Entering the HE *field* was 'scary' and 'quite a big thing' [first Interview] for Amanda, and it was linked with her desire for 'a new me' [first interview], the accumulation of cultural *capital* and changing the established patterns in her life: 'It's being given the chance, really I think. To be believed in that you can actually do something…and having support from people and encouragement', 'you know that you are going to have everything you need and you're gonna walk out with your head, sort of held high, and you're gonna know that you're gonna be able to do a job' [focus group]. A family bereavement meant that Amanda was absent for the first week of the programme [reflective diary] and having missed what she perceived to be a crucial opportunity to develop initial social networks, she felt marginalised and 'a little bit left out' for the first month or so [first interview]. She clearly recognised the value social networks and said she was: 'a bit concerned because obviously it is quite…you're either in or you're out, sort of thing, and obviously you need support because you're new and I don't know the area and stuff like that' [first interview]. To overcome this set-back, Amanda took control of the situation and deliberately stretched herself, behaving in a manner unfamiliar to her, in order to initiate and establish these important social contacts. In so doing, she described deliberately selecting and de-selecting those towards whom her efforts would be directed, indicating her

established inclinations about the types of people with whom she wanted to associate. For example, she said: 'I recognised and I just said hello to him. He seemed to be quite a clown so I just acknowledged and nodded to him but I didn't hang around with him' [first interview].

Missing that first week also meant that Amanda did not have access to a lot of information (e.g. campus maps, timetables, course and assessment handbooks, extenuating circumstances forms) and failed to complete a lot of essential tasks (e.g. enrolling on the virtual learning environment, completing course enrolment, meeting personal tutors, registering for an Athens password, etc), and she provided a vivid and emotional account of the extent to which this served as a barrier to her settling into the new *field* [first interview]. Crucial information was (unwittingly) withheld from her, which contributed to the obscuring of even the explicitly stated 'rules of the game' and practices of the *field* and left her feeling excluded despite her considerable personal efforts to remedy the situation. The impact of this circumstance persisted well into her first academic year and was compounded by a further eight-week absence from the *field* associated with injuries sustained in an accident during the Christmas break. Amanda described her experiences of trying to establish what she didn't know or have access to and the subsequent lack of clarity about what was being demanded of her as 'a nightmare' [first interview].

Notwithstanding these challenges, Amanda's established *habitus* lacked congruence with the new *field*. Even compared with her experiences of studying at college for her pre-entry award, 'everything was just so different' and she said: 'even though I'd done the Access course for a year, I still didn't feel that I was prepared enough, like for all the essay writing and being up to speed with referencing and everything seemed quite challenging' [first interview]. She was 'shocked' by the size of classes and disappointed by the level of support and guidance readily available and her data highlighted that throughout her studies she was frequently overwhelmed by the level, volume and pace of work, which at times left her tearful [reflective diary]. There were pervading themes of academic struggle and uncertainty in her data, and, highlighting her concern about fitting in, she worried that she was 'not approaching it [her studies] in the same way as everyone else' [first interview].

Amanda's data provided many examples of her struggles to identify and produce what was required of her by the *field*, including the following quotes:

> like the Harvard system, the actual system of referencing and things…Again, I thought that using the bibliography was like, the way forward. I didn't realise that you should have the references *and* that. So I was kind of like…Everything was just so different…So it was just like making sure you're checking and asking all the time [first interview]

> You normally get two pieces of paper, and they are kind of, a little bit conflicting in some ways. There's your normal marking criteria […] Then you've also get assessment guidelines maybe. And they do differ, and I have a problem interpretating [sic] what, you know…Well this says that, but that says something a little bit different here, so I think, "Well, do they want that? Or do they want that? Or do they want a little bit of both?" It doesn't often happen, but it yeah… [second interview]

> [marking criteria] have like the good, bad, indifferent and the bit better…But it's the same sort of thing […] it's re-worded all the way along. If you read it, say you take from the very bad, to the bit better to the very good, so you are reading what they expect and you are reading all these good, bad and the excellent bit[s], it does all sort of waver and change whenever I look at them. So that's a little bit like, well, which is it then? You know, I'll just go for that one and hope for the best [first interview]

Amanda's data revealed a great deal of self-doubt, but equally, a great deal of determination and personal fortitude; she suggested: 'being stubborn [...] has been helpful' [first interview]. She spoke of her concerted efforts as a 'constant battle' [first interview] but she was willing to take responsibility for herself and her learning. She actively sought individual face-to-face

feedback from tutors, access to annotated assessment scripts and study skills advice, and arranged a dyslexia assessment, although she was disappointed that: 'my results were not low enough to be categorised as dyslexic and I was therefore not able to have extra help even though she felt I was struggling' [reflective diary].

As highlighted earlier, Amanda clearly recognised language skills (her stock of linguistic *capital*) as deficient in the context of academic study and when she entered the HE *field*, she found that it presented a significant barrier in a number of guises. While there was doubtless some influence from unfamiliar disciplinary language, Amanda spoke of the difficulties she encountered in reading core texts: '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', but the effort involved seemed disproportionate because she added: 'I started doing that but then I just gave up. Trying to not only read it but pick out everything and then try[ing] to find out [what words meant] was taking far too long and [with] everything else, I just didn't…I just stopped reading after a while. I just thought: nothing was going in. I'm just wasting my time' [first interview]. It was clear that Amanda encountered similar issues in timetabled sessions: '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' [first interview].

Beyond the potential influence of discipline-specific language, Amanda's limited stocks of relevant (everyday) linguistic *capital* confounded her understanding of marking criteria and learning outcomes, which contributed further to the obfuscation of what was required of her: '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…' [first interview]. Linguistic *capital* also impacted significantly on her capacity to present her knowledge and understanding in the form legitimated by the *field*. As a researcher I found transcribing Amanda's data particularly challenging; she spoke very rapidly and in rather a lot of circles and incomplete sentences and I resorted to inserting words into transcripts in square brackets to try to more clearly reveal the meaning of her dialogue as I understood it at the time (Amanda was given the opportunity to review and revise all transcriptions and therefore to correct or amend my interpretations). Her discourse incorporated myriad *kind of like*'s and *sort of*'s which, in the light of her embarrassment on reading the transcript of her focus group and out of respect for her and her generous contributions to my research (Downs, 2010), I limited in further transcriptions. Elements of these characteristics perhaps appear in her written work as she observed: 'I need to be concise. I know I tend to…I need to be a bit more professional about writing. I can, kind of be…It's just the standard is totally different.' She explained that she meant 'professional' in relation to her style of referencing, use of literature and style and tone of writing: 'It's stuff like that. Little things…and maybe tone of expression. Try and make the sentences stand alone and not babble…because obviously, you've got to get quite a lot, you've got to answer the questions and I'm not doing that because I'm probably going off on a tangent maybe where I shouldn't be' [first interview].

Although she felt isolated in the early weeks of her programme, a proactive approach enabled Amanda to establish some social contacts and at the end of her first year she said: 'I'm getting into it, settling into it. I can't see how I stuck a nine-to-five job! [laughs] Typical student! ...Yeah, I really like it actually. And when I go home I kind of think I've got some nice, good friends here [at Uni] now and I kind of miss that in a way [when I go home]' [first interview]. The social *capital* that accrued from these networks paid dividends when Amanda was away from the university for eight weeks recovering from her accident. Her social network, and even the broader cohort, rallied to support her emotionally, practically and academically: 'People when I came back said they'd made notes and stuff. And they were trying to video things like Moving and Handling and all sorts. […] So yeah, I had quite a lot of encouragement from people and that kept me going really' [first interview].

Social *capital* became a very important source of support for Amanda. She utilised it to help her develop academic *capital*: 'I used to spend an absolute *decade* going around in circles. And if I'm really stuck, I'm not sure, it could go this way, it could go that way…Umm, you know, it's fifty-fifty sort of thing, then by just going and talking to people, you've cleared it up in sort of five-ten minutes and off you go again', 'So I start an essay, and then go back to the criteria and think, hmm, or I'll start talking to people. If they are not around then I've got a bit of a problem, so I'll do what I think and then I build on that' [second interview]. Social *capital* was also helpful to Amanda in developing a 'feel for the game', particularly as they related to the requirements of assessments: 'I've had to try an rely on, well, not *rely* on the network, but talk to them more and use the facilities and use people resources that are there because, umm, key words and thing, I'm trying to be a bit more attentive [to] those things myself. So I'll try and do stuff and then go to people and meet up and say, "OK, we've got this essay, this is how my interpretation of it, do you concur?"' [second interview]. Noteworthy is the use of the word 'concur' here, which is evidence of Amanda's growing linguistic *capital*.

The social *capital* that she had developed clearly enabled Amanda to develop a new approach to her academic work: 'using the support network and stuff and trying to read a bit more and trying to, you know, maybe start off and plan it, use that as my plan, maybe so that you can pick up key words and make sure you have got those incorporated into the essay and then, sort of, work around it. So you start off with those sorts of things and then build on that' [second interview]. After struggling so hard to adapt to the new *field* she had entered, Amanda's data highlighted evidence that she had expanded and developed her academic *capital* and adapted her educational *habitus*. Speaking about her academic writing skills she said: 'I feel like I'm now reading [my] stuff and it flows a lot better. I've been trying to make the sentences a bit better and go through my stuff a bit more to make sure that they are proper sentences and stuff like that', and 'I think it's vastly improved, thank god! Touch wood [whispered]! But I still have got lots and lots of improvement to do. I know I have. That's why I have to keep reading, keep working hard at things' [second interview]. She was delighted when she received affirmative feedback on a summative submission: 'one of the teachers had actually written…I've gotta think how I'm gonna frame it [laughs] "Really, really good sort of writing and clarity of expression" etcetera, and I was like, wow! I think I've hit the nail on the head there then' [second interview].

The extent to which Amanda's educational *habitus* adapted to the academic demands of the *field* was also evident. When discussing a peer support session she undertook with first year students towards the end of her final year she said: 'they had like referencing and different things involved in that. And I was just looking at their work and thinking, "Oh my gosh!" I could just easily spot all these different things, the things that I was making mistakes on [before] and they were making mistakes on. So I was like, wow, I obviously have learnt something!' [second interview]. While in her description a joint assessment submission, Amanda illustrated her strong sense of what was required in order to succeed in the *field* and some academic *capital* she had accrued to support her success, and she was not about to let others undermine her achievement by failing to come up to the mark: 'I just can't believe that it's *third* year stuff, I don't care whoever you are or whatever your profession, surely they should have been able to do, even if it's poor quality, like referencing: How can you do, like, fourteen pages of a research project and just three references in? And two of them were the same…And not even reference it properly. I was just thinking, oh god! We just *can't* hand that in. There is absolutely no way, you know, if I've got my name to that as well. […] I just thought it was horrendous…I can't…This is just not going to happen [laughs] So, that was like a long night! [laughs]' [second interview]

Adding to this increasing sense of fitting in was Amanda's stock of practice-oriented *capital*. She found learning in the practice context 'completely different' to working in the academic context, but when she noticed discrepancies between her theoretical studies and the practice she encountered, she automatically questioned the practice, and not the value or role of the theory: 'we've been working so hard for three years at University to learn about these sort of things and make it part of our work and then when you actually get out there and people clearly aren't doing that. And it's not just one placement. You talk to a lot of people, there's just so much of that going on I just wonder whether that is something that needs to be addressed and looked into. I don't know. I think it's worrying in some ways, because I'm

thinking, ohh, well if you're talking about using evidence-based practice and trying to use outcome measures and probably go a certain way. I mean obviously I know it doesn't hurt in some ways, but what else isn't being used? What else isn't being done?' [second interview]. Like Jocelyn, Amanda utilised her developing academic skills to enhance, support and develop her practice skills and even made a conscious effort to try to influence practitioners at times (e.g. highlighting the role of models of practice, frames of reference, and evidence-based practice). Moreover, there is evidence that she succeeded – following a professional debate Amanda produced an evidence-based argument in support of a particular intervention that subsequently proved highly successful and to which her supervisor responded: 'Thank you for doing that because this is what I've been trying to tell people. This has spurred me on. This is what I used to do and now I'm gonna go and do the same again' [second interview]. Such was her confidence in her practice-oriented *capital* that Amanda volunteered and was endorsed by the School to undertake her final practice placement in a *role-emerging* setting that had not previously employed an OT. This is a very challenging experience which is only offered to final year students who work with only *long-arm* supervision from off-site OT (although support is available from other on-site staff). Amanda earned an A-grade for this placement, and three-quarters of all her graded placements were awarded at least a B.

Amanda's established *habitus* was clearly not naturally congruent with the HE *field* when she entered it, but she sustained an incredible effort and was highly proactive in her attempts to understand and meet the requirements that were demanded of her. There was evidence of her accruing relevant *capital* and of her *habitus* adapting to become more congruent with the *field*. In moving to this position, Amanda drew heavily on her social and practice-oriented *capital* rather than relying on academic prowess, although this was clearly adequate (over 70 percent of her academic results were C grade or below, but she failed only a single assessment, at Level 5). Amanda absorbed an academic disposition even if it did not come easily to her and she put it to very good use in developing a highly professional, theoretically robust stance to her practice which was very much the disposition that the programme would wish to inculcate.

Amanda was clear that she has achieved the 'new me' that she had been aiming for when she entered the *field*, and her explanation of her reluctance to re-enter her original social *field* suggests that the shift in her *habitus* extends beyond the educational elements: 'I just don't want to be a part of that any more. It doesn't make me feel comfortable. It doesn't make me feel valued, and I think that's what I've learnt from University: to be valued….that's it in a nutshell.' She did, however, acknowledge that there would be a difficult period of adjustment and negotiation associated with her different disposition and outlook when it came to her relationship with her mother and brother who seemed to rely heavily on her and be expecting things to return to 'normal' at the end of her studies [second interview].

Marking the incredible distance she had travelled from worrying about nouns and punctuation [focus group] and feeling as though assessments had bought her to 'hell's door' [reflective diary], Amanda graduated from the Neville School with an upper second class degree.

For Frances, coming to university was part of a significant career change. Having left college with four A-levels, Frances pursued a career in the insurance industry during which time she earned accreditation as an Associate of the Chartered Insurance Institute. Having been made redundant on a second occasion, she thought: 'This is the kick I need to do something different' [focus group]. On the day she was made redundant, Frances contacted a local college who were running an Access to Nursing programme, which she started later that week. Initially considering physiotherapy, Frances took a job as a physiotherapy assistant, which in turn introduced her to OT, a 'eureka moment' in which she discovered: ''That's what I want to do!' I didn't know what I wanted to do for twenty years, and all of a sudden, I had a goal. I could go for it!' [focus group].

Frances was confused by the entry requirements for the OT programme: 'I looked at the criteria [and] I didn't think I had enough points to get in on my Access course…'cause it said 75 percent and I couldn't get sense out of anyone what this 75 percent was. I thought, "Well…that's not gonna be enough"' [focus group], so she enrolled on a Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care. Perceiving 'too many negatives' associated with the possibility of pursuing the established but limited pathway from the Foundation Degree onto the OT programme, Frances took her fate into her own hands and applied for a place through UCAS having completed the first year of the Foundation Degree.

Frances was the first in her immediate family to attend university. Her father had also worked in the insurance industry and studied part-time for professional accreditation, while her mother and both sisters finished school aged fifteen or sixteen. Frances' husband initially worked as a telecommunications engineer ahead of his own career change which took him into the fire service where he was then working as a watch manager. Frances' daughter followed in her mother's footsteps, entering university the year after Frances graduated, while her son envisaged a trade apprenticeship.

Frances started the OT programme aged 41 and with very high expectations of it marking a new chapter in her life: 'I wrote in my reflective diary last night, "Today is the first day of the rest of my life"…and that's how I *really* felt about things' [focus group]; even her friends had commented on the change in her demeanour as she set off on her new path. It was not, however, an easy path for her to negotiate. Frances' data highlighted that she was constantly a very busy woman who had to work extremely hard, but nonetheless struggled to manage the competing demands of her family and those of being a student. Reflecting normative gender roles, Frances took the lead in attending to the needs of her family and a menagerie of pets and, notwithstanding the fact that her husband worked eighteen-hour shifts, was frustrated that he was not more aware of and responsive to the need to support and facilitate activities other than his own within the family unit.

Frances described a marked distinction between her life at home (in her established social *field*) and her life within (the *field* of) HE: 'Sometimes I feel like I'm in a bubble – one at Uni and one at home, and the [A-road] is the thin line that divides them. When I cross a certain point I become the other person: Uni-[Fran] or Mum' [reflective diary]. She described how she straddled, and moved between, two 'quite, quite separate' contexts [second interview], but not without considerable effort and compromise. Like Sarah, she spoke of being forced to assume a 'split personality' in which the personas she assumed at home and at university were distinct and incompatible [second interview]. She explained: 'there's different things expected of me at each place…which can be quite difficult, because I have to be, like, all things to all people and…that can be hard sometimes […] So, it's been quite nice having that distance to actually change, sort of, personas on the way' [second interview]. Her husband wasn't really interested in university or what she was doing there and didn't want to meet or be involved with her university friends or activities, so Frances was forced to inhabit and manage her separate lives in separate *fields* on her own. She described, amongst other things, lowering her standard of housekeeping, completing the 'supermarket dash' in 10 minutes and withdrawing from roles on the school Parents, Teachers and Friends Association

and as a Cub Scout Leader [first interview]. As she reached the conclusion of her studies, she was pleased that: 'one of the bubbles is now floating away and it's just gonna be the one bubble to concentrate on, which is quite *nice*'; it represented an opportunity for Frances to reclaim some 'normality' for herself and her family: 'my daughter said the other day, "Are you going to be a real mum now?"' [second interview].

At the beginning of the OT programme, Frances noted that compared to her recent educational experiences: 'the expectations are so very much higher at Uni and the way things are done are so different' [reflective diary]. Although her pre-entry studies had enabled her to accrue relevant academic *capital*, including familiarity with the campus, library and virtual learning environment, this wasn't enough to make the transition easy for her. Frances' expectations and understanding of education, her educational *habitus*, was incongruent with the established practices of *field*. She struggled with the concept of self-directed learning even in her Foundation Degree year [focus group] and this continued into her first semester of the OT programme; she seemed to feel short-changed at not having been 'taught' enough [first interview]. She struggled to accept and accommodate the more impersonal and anonymous mass environment of the programme (compared to the much smaller cohorts of her recent experiences) and the lack of personal relationships between herself and her peers and the staffing group.

Frances indicated that she has always been highly ambitious academically: 'I always set myself up to fail…Always expect to be there [indicating with her hand a high level on an imaginary scale], but I'm *not* going to be there; never have been [...] You know, I'm expecting to get an A. I've never got an A' [first interview]; it is a feature of her established *habitus* that may, in part, explain the deep sense of frustration that pervaded her data. Of a Level 5 academic result she observed: '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?" [second interview]. She had clearly been discussing this as an ongoing issue with her peers, even on the brink of completing the course: '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…' [second interview]. Academically, Frances never moved beyond struggling to develop a 'feel for the game': 'I still don't think I've totally got to grips with the stuff, even at this stage of the game, which is a bit worrying, really' [second interview], but she did touch on the idea of a hidden curriculum: '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. And then other essays, I mean, my best mark was Communication, funnily enough, and [sighs] I was like, "Where's that come from?"' [second interview].

Adding to Frances' challenges and frustration were issues around linguistic *capital*. She was challenged by some aspects of disciplinary language which clearly made it difficult for her to achieve academically: 'It was almost like learning a foreign language and you don't know it [....] that's how *I* felt, because it was another language which I didn't know, didn't understand. I thought, perhaps I'm really stupid here, I can't think this is *beyond* me, but I don't know a way in. I found that really difficult; really awkward' [first interview], but she took considerable umbrage at direct criticisms of her own use of language. Having initially noted the issue in her reflective diary, she discussed it at length in her first interview: 'She said my spelling was wrong, and to this day I cannot find a spelling mistake in it. It came up on the, you know, on the [marking] criteria. It' says: spelling and grammar inaccurate and lots of mistakes and things. I can't, I can't find anything and I've asked other people to read it, you know, can you see why I've got this?…No…', and: 'She'd obviously interpreted it as the travelling won't be great as in marvellous: Too colloquial!...But if you read the whole sentence: "The travelling won't be great as it's a local team."…To me that made…I could see where she'd misunderstood it…Too Colloquial! I thought, OK. I should have said, "The travelling will not be too onerous", or too far or I could have used another word. I can see that now. But straight away: Too colloquial! When I saw that, I was just *so* cross.' Reflecting her depth of feeling about the issue, and continuing to challenge the authority of the *field* to define the legitimate use of language, Frances came back it when she was close to the end of the programme: 'I

was really, really upset about the feedback on that, and I was like, 'Well, that's one thing I didn't expect that I'd be picked up on that, maybe something else, but not that […]That was a year one paper and even now that *really* hurts' [second interview].

Like Sarah, Frances was not averse to being critical of the programme, but unlike Sarah, there were strong overtones of injustice throughout Frances' data, particularly regarding academic judgements of her work which challenged her own perceptions of her performance. Focusing this time on her deployment of a particular feature of academic *capital* she said: 'I was just like [sighs]'I don't know what I can do!…Don't know what I can do!' And then I get the [School's] guide to referencing, I follow it to the *letter*, and then I still get a C. It's like [sighs] I don't know what else I can do! You know, I've checked every comma, exclamation, dot. You know, is that underlined? Is that in bold? You know, I've literally spent more time checking how the references have been than everything else; and I'm still getting ranges of marks and [sighs] I'm just baffled' [second interview]. Returning to learning outcomes, Frances clearly articulated how challenging she found it to comprehend this explicit aspect of the 'rules of the game'; she said: '…[blows out through mouth] They all seem to say the same sort of thing…and I do try and cover what it says, but…obviously whatever point the marker's looking for, I've missed it [sighs] I don't know. I don't know what else I can do. On paper, they look quite clear and I think, because they're clear, that I've got the point, but I obviously haven't', and how unfair this feels to her: 'I've given everything, as much as I can do until I've…I can't give any more on them. My grades don't reflect that, but it's not from lack of effort; it really isn't. You know, the effort I've put in is…' [second interview].

Frances spoke of feeling '*so excluded* by the way of teaching' [first interview] and being reluctant to approach staff for support: 'I wouldn't know who to ask because they're strangers; I'm a stranger' [first interview]; 'I'm just a face in the crowd' [second interview]. Her desire to influence this may have prompted her taking on roles as Unit Representative at Level 5 and Year Representative at Level 6, but it is perhaps unsurprising that Frances' data highlighted the importance of social *capital* in her experiences. She emphasised the role of her social network saying: 'I couldn't have got through it without them' [second interview]. She observed: 'The only support and guidance I've had is from my peers and that's been brilliant, you know, chatting things through with each other. Sort of bring each other up and down, you know, "Look, you're doing OK." A few people have had a bit of a wobble somewhere, so it's like, "No, you can do it. Just stick with it. We'll work it through." That's been fine, but it's all just been from my peers' [first interview], and: 'I would say to a first year, make friends with your peers, big time, because they will get you through. Nobody else will. No matter how brilliant the lecturers are, or anything else, it's your peers that will get you through' [second interview]. Frances endeavoured to expand her social network (and therefore, potential social *capital*) by becoming a founding member and committee member of the Mature Students' Society [reflective diary], and like some other participants, there was evidence of her being quite strategic about the development and deployment of social *capital*; for example, she was highly strategic when working on group assessment tasks: 'I do try and choose people who are of similar mind-set' [second interview]. While Frances actively made use of her social *capital*, it was insufficient to overcome the challenges she faced in developing a 'feel for the game', particularly in the academic context, and there was limited indication in her data of her gathering academic *capital*.

Compared to her academic experiences, it is noteworthy that when Frances spoke about her practice-based experiences, including her part-time employment as a rehabilitation assistant, her tone changed dramatically and she became much more animated, positive and optimistic. Like Gabby, Frances considered her part-time work: 'the best study I could have because I'm seeing what I'm learning in practice and putting it into practice straight away' [first interview]. For her, working part-time was not based on a financial imperative, but on gathering social *capital* that she might later use to good effect when seeking qualified employment: 'I'm thinking in two years time, who am I gonna want a job from? [This] PCT. So that's who I'm working for…Foot in the door, you know, getting to know contacts' [first interview], and on the enhancement of practice-oriented *capital*. Frances perceived the benefits to include the development of communication skills, moving and handling skills, and the development of her knowledge and understanding of assistive equipment and devices and of clinical conditions.

Frances described herself as a 'kinesthetic learner so I *do* learn better by doing' [second interview] which may help to explain some of the injustice she perceived when learning material was considered and assessed theoretically before she had encountered it practically: 'the people who had done mental health placements were in a so much better position than me, because at least they'd seen one. So that was disappointing, because that obviously bought my grades down massively for year two then', and 'you're so dependant on what you've had on your placements; some people just sailed through it because they'd seen it, done it, whatever; and others were like [sighs] "I don't know where we're going with this"' [second interview]. For Frances, there was a strong relationship between practice-oriented *capital* and academic understanding, knowledge and performance.

France described an early decision to ensure that: '…whilst I was at Placement, I would make sure I had lots of away-days […] I made sure I tried to look at, not just where I was, but sort out-lying services. So, for example, when I was at Social Services, I went to the equipment store and I went to wheelchair services and I went out with the care managers and social workers and connected people, the sensory integration team. Different people within the organisation, to get a wider picture', adding: 'I think it's important to build these bridges. I like doing that, and that has given me a much more rounded view of what's out there, definitely' [second interview].

Frances became increasingly concerned about the development of her practical skills and experiences (which contributed to her portfolio of practice-oriented *capital*) as she proceeded through the programme. In her final year she was very focused on accruing the 'right' sort of experiences and spoke about how important the 'right' final year placement was going to be for securing the sort of job she wanted: 'It's only going for jobs now that I can see how *vital* that acute Placement is, and how, if you haven't had the right Placements, it can make a *massive* difference to what jobs you can apply for. I mean, as much as I hated my Social Services Placement, it's been, you know, a good thing to go on my placement [record] because it's a spread of services' [second interview]. Like her perception that an unblemished attendance record holds value within the *field* (as, for example, a form of academic *capital*) [second interview], Frances misinterpreted the significance of individual placement locations, misunderstandings that further reflect her difficulty grasping the practices and logic of the *field*.

Frances clearly prioritised practice-oriented over academic *capital*. She said: 'I think the Uni has given you… some of the ideas, but you learn so much more on placement' [second interview] and, like Sarah, openly questioned the value of some (non-OT specific) academic component of the course: 'The other stuff is there to make it into a degree. That is my perception of it. I think in the old days, you just did OT as a diploma, without your research projects and your ethics and all of your other stuff. To me, that's just making it into a degree. If we just concentrated on OT, I don't think we'd be any *less* of an OT, for having *just* done OT stuff. I don't think we need to do all this other stuff to be any better at the job, I really don't. It just makes up the numbers, as far as I'm concerned' [second interview]. Frances' desire to pursue a second career in OT forced her to engage with the HE *field*, but it was clearly not an environment in which she felt comfortable. With her ambition at odds with her perceptions of the value of academic *capital*, and her resistance to and incomprehension of various practices and expectations of the *field*, Frances' position within the *field* did not seem to change during the time she was engaged with it, and she continued to operate within its margins.

Frances secured an upper second class degree, and while that represents a high level of achievement, it will have disappointed her.

Gabby had a full and varied life before entering university at 51 years of age. She had various spells working as an office clerk, a receptionist, a van driver/courier and in factory and domestic employment, but also enjoyed lengthy overland motorcycle trips from the UK (first through Europe, the Middle East and Asia to Sydney, and later taking a circuitous route via Norway to Cape Town) and made visits to African refugee camps and United Nations food distribution centres. When she married him, her ex-husband was the president of a University Students' Union [first interview], while her current, long-term partner left school at sixteen and thereafter worked as a mechanic, including during two and a half years of Voluntary Service Overseas work in Africa. Gabby's employment history included a considerable amount of time working in caring and support roles, often with children with physical and learning disabilities, but immediately prior to entering university, she was working as an OT technical instructor in a psychiatric unit. It was her experiences in this setting that drew her to the profession in preference to pursuing qualifications in special needs teaching [focus group].

Both of Gabby's parents were retired, but for six months of the year, worked as specialised activity leaders for a large Mediterranean holiday company. She reported that her mother had had 'minimal education' as a result of prolonged periods of asthma-related hospitalisation during her childhood [family education/employment map]. Like their father, Gabby and her sister attended grammar school; Gabby emulated her father further by leaving at sixteen, although she thinks her sister stayed on to secure A-levels. Gabby's school apparently took a dim view of pupils who, like her, did not wish to immediately progress to university; she said: 'The school I went to you were expected to go to university. I remember going to the careers advisor and if you weren't interested in going to university, you just got sent on your way: "Off you go!" […] If you didn't want to go to university…that was it. They weren't interested in you. It was awful…' [focus group]. Years after leaving school, Gabby completed a Level 3 NVQ in early years care and education at the turn of the millennium, before secured an Access qualification and Maths GCSE to gain entry to university. Similarly, her sister returned to education to study for an archaeology degree as a 45 year-old mature student.

Gabby was undoubtedly one of the study's participants whose established *habitus* was least congruent with the new *field* she had entered, however, like Betty, her data consistently highlighted a *get on with it* theme and provided rich evidence of determination, self-reliance and self-discipline, which suggested that elements of her essentially working-class *habitus* were advantageous to her in the new middle-class *field*. In contrast to Betty, Gabby seemed to have little difficulty in moving between her established social *field* and the HE *field*, and her social and familial history suggested that traversing variable social terrain was not uncommon to her, and may have been an established feature of her *habitus*. Immediately before entering HE, Gabby seemed to simultaneously inhabit quite different social contexts: alongside her employment as OT technical instructor she built a social network in a professional environment and counted as friends many who had attended, or were at the time attending, university, but she was also strongly associated with another, distinct social network which had shared her overland motorcycle trips and ongoing love of classic VW campervans. She talked about her experiences at university with the former but not the latter group saying: 'It's, I don't know, outside their field of experience or it's something that's just not interesting to them' [second interview] and 'it sounds *really* horrible, but they probably wouldn't understand entirely what I'm doing […] I've done a couple of long overland trips on the bike and so they've seen me doing that and I say, well, it's a different journey, but it's a journey of the mind I'm doing now' [first interview]. Gabby was acutely aware of the differences between some of her experiences and those of other members of this second network whose friendship and support she 'value[d] a lot' [first interview]. She commented: 'I do have to be a little bit careful and make sure that I don't start going off on tangents that they don't understand' and 'I have to be careful that when I answer [questions about how the course is going], they know what I'm talking about' [second interview]. Gabby went on to explain that: 'I have to be a bit more careful with some of my friends because …they're my friends. I *can't* be patronising. I can't *behave* like I know more than they do. I've still got to be me' [second interview].

It is clear from her data that Gabby was very aware of the role and value of social networks in supporting her success within the HE *field*. It took time for her to develop such a network within the *field* 'because I don't live here, when lectures are finished, I go home. And I don't get involved in the social side of things, because my social life is with my partner' [first interview], but she was able to recognise that having limited social networks in the *field* could potentially be problematic. By her second interview, it was clear that Gabby had established a strong network and from it, drew a strong portfolio of social *capital* which she utilised to good effect in terms of assisting her learning via study groups and supportive collaboration, which in turn enabled her to gather additional forms of *capital* relevant to the *field*. She said: 'I've enjoyed working alongside my peers. That's been …really, really good. Being able to get on the phone and chat to somebody if you're not sure about something, or look at other people's work or say "Well actually, I've just found this and it might be useful to you" and "On my god, I don't know what I'm doing; help!" So all that kind of thing has been a massive help' [second interview]. Further illustrating her recognition of the potential and value of social networks, Gabby made an active point of ensuring that her networks extended beyond her immediate peers:

> Gabby: when you are on Placement, you have easier access to people who might be, might have a broader experience or different experiences and help out with things.

> jdw: It sounds like you keep in touch with those sorts of people?

> Gabby: Oh gosh yes! Absolutely.

> jdw: That sounds important.

> Gabby: I think it is. I keep in touch with people from my [first graded]…[second Level 5] Placement. Yes. And I meet them for lunch every so often, the OTs from the team…Partly because I get along really well with them. Umm, I had a really good Placement there, I really enjoyed it. I learnt a lot from them. They're a useful resource. [second interview]

She explained: 'I think it's really important to have that support network for information, for keeping up to date with what's happening in the big, wide world out there, because changes happen all the time' and 'I think it's useful to keep up-to-date with what's happening in the workplace as well, because people in a team in one place will still have an idea of national trends, if you like. So, it's quite handy in that respect; I think it's quite important. And also it means I get to go out to lunch quite a bit [laughs]' [second interview].

Gabby amassed, nurtured and utilised social networks (and through them, social *capital*) knowingly, capably and in a manner that was to her advantage in both the academic and practice placement contexts. A further advantage was the considerable portfolio of practice-oriented *capital* that she had already accrued (as a result of previously employment relevant to OT) and continued to build upon through part-time employment and practice placement experiences on the programme. Of her prior experiences she said: 'It's been really, really useful to put some of the things that I used to do in my job into perspective. In some ways, it feels like the wrong way around. Having worked as an OT Technical Instructor, I'm now seeing *why* I was doing the things I was doing [laughs]' [first interview], and: '[t]he fact that I've got previous work experience has been a *massive* help, I think. I probably got on better in some respects, in some areas than perhaps someone who hasn't got work experience would have done' [second interview]. While there was a strong financial incentive for her to work part-time as a domiciliary carer throughout the programme, she explained: '[i]t ties in really well with this course. I'm learning things from my job as well as from my course, and I can see things that I'm learning on the course in practice out in the community, which is really good' [first interview]. Gabby highlighted aspects of her practical experience such as time and caseload management, interpersonal, team-working and communication skills, knowledge of particular client groups and conditions and the impact these conditions have on individuals and their families as amongst those that had benefited her in academic and practice modules

and might therefore serve as concrete examples of elements of practice-oriented *capital* [second interview].

Gabby became aware in her first year that her prior experience (and existing portfolio of practice-oriented *capital*) did not, however, guarantee her success; she said: 'I probably thought that I would know more or do better than perhaps I did. I think it might also have affected the amount of effort I put in, because I thought maybe if I already knew it, I didn't have to work so hard. And [now] I don't think that's the case at all. I think I still need to work every bit as hard to do well […] 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' [first interview]. Gabby felt that her Access course helped her to 'cope' with learning in the HE *field* and recognised its contribution to the development of some relevant academic perspectives and skills (and therefore *capital*). She explained: '[u]nderstanding how to do the 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' [first interview]. Notwithstanding this preparation, Gabby had to work hard to try to develop a 'feel for the game', but from her second year of study, generally felt like she was fitting in. Unlike Sarah, who was greatly frustrated by the perceived lack of timely feedback, Gabby noted it, and the resultant lack of clarity about how she was performing, but was not perturbed by it. She just accepted the situation and said: 'I just had to think, well, I'll keep going and hope for the best' [first interview]. It was here, for example, that she put her social *capital* to particularly good use: '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?" And that's been really helpful' [second interview].

Language was mentioned in only very briefly in Gabby's data, which suggests that linguistic *capital* was not overly problematic for her. At the end of her first year of study, she illustrated the comparative ease with which she accommodated the form dominant in the *field* when she commented that: 'I'm finding it easier to read things. There was a time when I'd pick up a journal article or something and start reading it and I'd find it quite hard to read, quite boring, quite difficult to concentrate on. I'm *much* better at that now. I can sit and read things more, probably because I've got more understanding, and maybe because I'm more used to the styles of writing' [first interview].

Gabby's portfolio of social, linguistic and practice-oriented *capital* provided a platform to enable her to gather academic *capital* relevant to the *field*, even if that was not her strongest suite. She said: 'I'm really not a very academic person, although I sometimes do enjoy that aspect of it all' [reflective diary] and noted: 'I consistently get fifteen to twenty percent higher marks on Placement than I do for my written work. I know that I'm a much more practical person. I always have been…' [second interview]. Gabby's data provided clear evidence of her gathering academic *capital* in terms of developing relevant skills and understanding procedures, processes and developing a 'feel for the game'. She was aware of the subjective element to marking and recognised the need to play the game according to which academic was marking a particular piece of work; she said: 'one of the comments on the [failed] essay was "I wouldn't have applied this theory to this situation. It's not really relevant and it's not the easiest theory to use." When I went to see the [module leader] afterwards, to go through my essay, she said, "Actually, this theory is one that I would use, and if I was marking this essay, I wouldn't have marked it down on that, because *I* think that this is better." […] I thought, "OK…who's marking my essay this time around? Is it you? I'll go with that then." [laughs]' [second interview]. Gabby's discussion (in her second interview) of challenges she encountered in her final inter-professional learning module at Level 6 further illustrate her development of a 'feel for the game' and how frustrating it was to have her ability to meet the perceived demands of the *field* undermined as a result of working in an unfamiliar group over whom she could exert no influence.

Gabby did have a deeply uncomfortable experience throughout a practice placement where she felt: 'that perhaps [her] personality didn't fit in with them' [second interview]. She described feeling actively excluded: 'It was fine, as long as we were working in the light

workshop, they would speak to me, absolutely fine, no problem at all. The minute you went for a lunch break or tea break, nobody would talk to me…Even if I tried to get involved in conversations, people would just completely blank me. It was horrible. And it didn't help my confidence *at* all.' When discussing the reallocation of a ticket to a Christmas function Gabby observed: 'I saw the support worker indicate me and the other guy shake his head. And I thought "You don't do that in front of someone." [laughs] So they were a bit like that' [second interview]. In my capacity as researcher, I know that Lizzie also had a placement in this department during which she flourished and felt very much at home. While the influence of personality cannot be excluded, I can't help but wonder if the marked differences in their experiences might not be influenced, at least to a degree, by the congruence between the *habitus* of each individual and that particular microcosm of the *field* of practice which is headed by a therapist with a very conservative, middle-class *habitus*.

Gabby was very committed to her 'fantastic' and 'really supportive' partner [second interview] and to her life and relationship with him. She based her decision regarding which university to attend on geographical proximity to their rented 'disintegrating ex-farm workers' cottage', although she also recognised the Neville School's 'good reputation' [focus group]. While Gabby felt that being childless made things somewhat easier for her [focus group], she had to work hard to maintain a 'reasonable balance' [second interview] between focusing on her life with her partner, her paid employment and the demands of study. Ultimately, Gabby was able to achieve a relatively comfortable fit within the HE *field*, but, like many participants in Reay et al.'s (2009) study, she drew a distinction between the real world and the academic world, and described the experience as feeling 'a bit like you're in a bubble [laughs]. And I do feel like when I finish my course I'm going to go and join real life again' [second interview]. She went on to explain that the 'bubble' exists because: 'I'm doing something very, very different to what any of my friends outside Uni are doing…and my life has kind of gone like that, [with fingers extended, moves one hand in a straight, upward motion, while the other hand parallels this movement for a short while, then swings off at a right angle]'. In her reflective diary, Gabby commented: 'I feel I've nearly had enough of being at Uni and I'd like to get back out and join the real world. It's been a strange lifestyle, being at Uni...' and she was clearly keen to bring the path of her life back into alignment with those of her established networks outside the *field*: 'I think that when I get a job and I'm working more regularly, I'll have hobbies outside of work [laughs] and so I'll feel a bit more back on track with everybody else' [second interview].

The oldest participant in the study, Gabby said at the outset: 'I really feel it's my last chance in a way. So I've *got* to do it. And I've *got* to do it well' [focus group]. She maintained this commitment and determination throughout and felt in the end that it was 'a really positive experience for me. I think it's helped me, well obviously I've learnt a lot, but it's been a lot of personal development for me as well as educational and professional. So it's been a really, really good experience for me' [second interview]. Despite being able to relatively comfortably move between the different social contexts that made up her life, and achieving an upper second class degree, Gabby was keen to return her focus to her pre-entry social *field*.

<u>d: Jemma</u>

Jemma left school aged sixteen and, following some part-time retail work, almost unconsciously followed her sister into accounts management [focus group]. She described her father as having been employed in government and Inland Revenue roles, and her mother as a classroom assistant. Prior to entering the HE *field*, Jemma seemed to have reached a critical point in her life where she wanted change in terms of her employment role and in terms of the way she lived her life. During the focus group, she commented that, having felt like she had often 'been pushed in different directions', it was 'time to start thinking about what [she] want[ed]'. She had a conscious ambition to take control of and to change her life. To some extent at least, Jemma was actively seeking to change her way of being, her disposition or *habitus*, and it was this already changing *habitus* that bought her to HE at 25 years of age. Before starting her own undergraduate studies, the only people Jemma knew who had been to university were a single friend, who had since become a toy designer, and her mother, who studied 'some kind of physics/maths (?!)' [family education/employment map]. Her brother had commenced a university programme in music technology, but voluntarily withdrew after six months to pursue a career as an electrician. Despite her friends' suggestions, Jemma was very clear that she was going to university to focus on studying, not the social experience [focus group].

Jemma elected to study OT in preference to physiotherapy because of the greater variety she perceived it offered [focus group]. Her commitment to her undertaking was evident as she sold her flat to pay off existing debts and moved in with her sister and (then) two year-old niece. Despite describing the household as 'a bit manic', her sister was very supportive, ensuring that Jemma had uninterrupted periods for study, and Jemma found it easy to be disciplined, having no difficulty 'cutting herself off from everything' to be a 'complete swat in the week' [focus group]. Although it marked a departure form her previously numerically-oriented study and was therefore challenging, Jemma enjoyed the Biology A-level that she completed to gain entry to the OT programme. She found that the '*very* structured' syllabus with clearly defined learning requirements helped to focus her attention, establish a routine and organise her learning [focus group].

Jemma quickly recognised the differences between her previous educational experiences and what, during the early days of the programme, she gathered was expected of her, and she was initially worried about how she would manage in the HE *field*. She had been comfortable with the 'black and white' nature of her previous educational experiences and was greatly concerned by the concept of having to 'read around' subjects at university: 'it's just not how I'm used to working and studying', '[d]oing an A-level hasn't prepared me for coming here...and this style of learning' [focus group]. She described herself as nervous but excited, recognising 'all the different ways you're going to have to be tested…and the way you're going to have to adapt your learning to do it' and she said: 'I just wanna *know* how it's gonna be and how you're supposed to do things' [focus group]. Jemma's interview at the end of her first year of study was peppered by the phrase 'daunted' and provided a very clear message about how foreign the new *field* was for her. Although she did not perceive her prior experience as useful in terms of preparing her for *how* she would need to approach her learning in the new *field*, it did prove useful in terms of providing her with some established *capital* in the form of subject knowledge. How to put this theoretical knowledge to practical use and how to write essays were early examples of perceived deficiencies (and provide examples of the academic *capital* relevant to the new *field*); notably, however, there was no indication in her data of any challenges associated with linguistic *capital*.

Like Lynne, Jemma was a worrier and the unfamiliar often gave her cause for concern. Compared to the rigid structure and close support and guidance experienced during her A-level, Jemma initially found working with learning outcomes and unfamiliar assessment styles challenging, but nonetheless felt that the requirements were clearly established. She was proud of some very good assessment results in her first semester saying: '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' [first interview]. The early

incongruence between Jemma's established educational *habitus* and the expectations of the field were essentially manageable, and 'fitting in' and 'changing *habitus*' became strong themes in her data.

Previous experiences of bullying and torment in school had left Jemma lacking social confidence and she perceived establishing social networks to be one of the biggest hurdles that she would encounter in the new *field* and coming to university as a 'big personal challenge' [first interview] in this respect. Part of her project seemed to focus on exorcising the ghosts of past bullying and moving beyond being scared, anxious and lacking in confidence. Participating in the study, and particularly the focus group, was beneficial to Jemma in that it provided her with some early, controlled social contacts that were envied by other students she later met [first interview]. As she lived a considerable distance from campus, and with her previous social history within educational environments in mind, establishing social networks might otherwise have been more challenging for Jemma. While this represents a positive by-product of the study, it also underlines the extent to which participation in it may have resulted in somewhat altered experiences of the *field* than might otherwise have been the case. Despite developing social confidence in the new *field*, it was important to Jemma to maintain her established, pre-entry social network (and social *capital*) which continued to provide her with valuable support and encouragement. She described structuring her time to enable her to maintain her pre-entry network in parallel with, but separate from, the network she established within the HE *field*, although this did not reflect any sense of conflicting *habitus* between the two groups, certainly not in the way that was true for Gabby, for example.

Jemma's data indicated that the potential of the social *capital* she accrued within the *field* became evident to her over time. During her first year, she tended to work independently to maximise the efficient use of time and keep evenings and weekends free to maintain contact with her social network outside the *field* [first interview]. Diary entries during her second year reveal that Jemma was trying hard and consciously working with learning outcomes and marking criteria but not always achieving academically what she wanted to achieve. Working in groups on assessment tasks with her network within the *field* was described as challenging because the group didn't necessarily work well together despite being friends. By her final year, however, Jemma was talking about how *much* she relied on her social network within the *field* to help manage the demands of the course and address any queries or concerns, indicating that the social *capital* that she derived from the network was proving valuable. A particularly telling example of the value of more general collaborative working was the development of Jemma's academic writing style subsequent to working closely with a peer on a joint report at Level 6 [reflective diary]. Jemma highlighted that in so doing, she witnessed a different approach to writing and understood for the first time how to meet the expectations of the *field* in this regard, which was ultimately reflected in her grades (she achieved her first A-grade for a formal piece of academic writing at Level 6). Working alongside that particular peer helped Jemma to see beyond the feedback she'd received (which told her what the problem was, but not how to correct it [second interview], which effectively contributed to the obscuring of even the explicitly stated the 'rules of the game') and beyond what she and her social network had been able to collectively establish (which serves to highlight potential limits on the dividends paid by variable forms of social *capital* within the *field*).

In her first interview, Jemma described her perception that there were two sorts of people at university: people, such as herself, with 'scientific backgrounds' and those with 'practical backgrounds'. Moving from office environments into health care (in a manner similar to Frances) was a big change for Jemma. Her way be being and of understanding the world and the logic of practice in the different *fields* required a substantial shift on her part. Despite her initial anxieties, 'fitting in' with the academic environment was a strong theme emerging from Jemma's data; her very academic educational *habitus* (perhaps related to her 'scientific background') fitted comfortably with the nature of the research intensive academic *field* she had entered, although this is not to suggest that everything came easily to Jemma. While she perceived that she was adapting to and fitting in with the demands of the academic *field* (even to the point of describing lecture theatres as her 'little comfort zone' [first interview]) at the end of her first year, she was still concerned about her ability to fit in with, and have skills and experience (stocks of *capital*) relevant to, the *field* of practice.

Describing her first Level 5 placement experience Jemma said: 'I struggled quite a lot and I, you know, my supervisor was brilliant, but she did expect…I was expected to *do* things. And that real *test* of you 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' [second interview]. During her second interview, Jemma described essentially doing whatever she perceived to be required to fit in to the placements environments (as microcosms of the practice *field*) that she had been allocated to. She didn't question or challenge, just tried to work out what was expected of her, to deliver it and fit in. She said: '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. I think, just because I'm still in student-mode, they tell me, 'Well, this is how we do it here' and I just, sort of, say, "OK. That's fine" […] I've been very much, "Right, I'll just do what I'm told" [laughs]' [second interview]. This approach seemed more compliant than strategic and along with issues associated with unequal power in placement contexts, it may have been influenced by Jemma's prior experiences of bullying and her strong desire to fit into new environments, by the fact that she felt deficient in practice-oriented skills and experience (*capital*) or more broadly by the fact that her *habitus* lacked affinity with the practice *field*. Perhaps related to these last two points, there seemed to be some tension around how useful Jemma felt her academic skills and knowledge were to her in the practice context, so, financially compelled to work part-time to fund her studies and travel between home and university, Jemma quite deliberately sought work that would help her develop practice-oriented knowledge and skills, and therefore *capital* (e.g. an OT assistant post and a healthcare assistant post).

Jemma, like other participants, felt anxiety at the approach of the transition form student to qualified practitioner. She had shifted from being a rote-learner to having a strongly reflexive disposition which she put to very good use [second interview, reflective diary], but her data indicated ambivalence about whether her practical skills were sufficient to enable her to enter the job-market. It was evident throughout her data that Jemma's pre-entry *habitus* incorporated worry and lack of confidence, a disposition she retained despite her achievements on the programme. As the study ended and Jemma approached graduation, her *habitus* had doubtless shifted to become congruent with the demands and expectations of the HE *field*, but she was unsure whether she would actually pursue a career in OT and was contemplating further study in other medically related *fields*. I cannot help but speculate whether this decision might not be underpinned by the lack of natural affinity that Jemma generally experienced in the practice context compared to that which she experienced within the academic field. In fact, in her reflective diary Jemma wrote: 'I'm really proud I've nearly finished my degree, I never thought I'd actually do one having not done it when I left school. But as I come to end of this one I'll be honest - I'm already thinking what I can learn next! I wonder if I'll be a student forever??' [second interview].

Jemma secured a 1st class honours degree.

Jocelyn grew up in a small rural village and left school at sixteen with five O-levels; she started A-levels at a local college but dropped out after a year. A couple of her friends had been to the local polytechnic, but in her community a university education was largely unheard of and not something she had considered: 'It just wasn't mentioned in our house' [first interview]. Before retiring, her father was a self-employed painter and decorator and her mother worked in various unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. Jocelyn spent much of her pre-entry adult life working in an office environment and developed 'a little bit of a career' in human resources, but described it as essentially, 'just a job to earn money to travel' [first interview]. After years of voluntary work in the health and social care *field*, it was following a move to employment as a support worker of adults with learning disabilities that Jocelyn sensed that she 'could be doing more': 'I'd seen what the OT did in work and I thought, yeah, I'll have a go at that' [first interview]. She had completed a European Computer Driving Licence and various 'not very academic' counselling introductory courses in the recent past, but to gain the necessary qualifications to apply to an OT programme, Jocelyn undertook a Psychology A-level in preference to an Access course so that she could continue to work full-time. She was 'dead-chuffed' to achieve an A -rade and commenced the OT programme at the Neville School at 38 years of age, the first in her family to attend university.

Aversion to debt was a well established familial *habitus*. Jocelyn provided a vivid description of her father's incredulity at her intention to give up a secure income to go to university, describing him as '*terrified* of being in debt' [first interview]. Believing that his attitude had influenced her own ('That's where I get this thing with money from'), she said: 'three years without a job, without earning, was a major concern for me' and had it been possible to gain the qualifications to practice as an OT via any other route she would have pursued it [first interview]. However, another feature of Jocelyn's established *habitus* was to 'live quite simply. I don't go out an awful lot and spend a lot of money on *things*' [first interview], so she did some part-time work, largely in the holidays, and 'got used to' having a student loan, a situation made easier to tolerate by her strategic decision to pay it off at the conclusion of her studies using savings that had been earning a higher rate of interest.

At the age twenty Jocelyn had left her home and moved to England to escape the 'claustrophobia' of 'everyone knowing your business'. Without malice she illustrated the perspectives common in her native community: 'when I go home, my cousin, bless, is like, "Ohh…*I* went to England once". That's what he said…My bloke, he thinks it's dead-quaint. He said, they talk about England like it's somewhere, you know…"And one girl in my school has gone to work in London"…and [my bloke] went: "No! She hasn't, has she?" [And my cousin] said: "Yeah! She's working in a hotel in London. She's raking it in." She's probably a chamber maid in a hotel in London' [first interview]. Jocelyn explained her decision: 'I just felt there has got to be more. There's got to be something else…' [first interview]. She was a free, independent, self-contained spirit whose data clearly illustrated that she was not concerned about being viewed as unconventional and was not constrained by the security of familiarity; it was more important for her to be true to herself and to be her own person than to fit in. She provided a colourful description, for example, of the incongruence of her *habitus* in the prosperous and 'very, very conservative and horsey' southern English town that she initially moved to, but said: 'I settled in and I felt really at home there…And they got used to me down the pub and of course, having this funny accent, I took on a 'quaintness' that everybody liked' [first interview]. There is almost a sense that Jocelyn utilised this aspect of her cultural heritage to her advantage in an unusual way and without compromising her identity or *habitus* to any significant extent.

Aspects of Jocelyn's *habitus* were divergent from some of her family and from her original social *field*, although they do, perhaps reflect a latent aspect of her mother's disposition [second interview]. Her *habitus* was also markedly different from other *fields* she subsequently entered (initially at least), so a sense of not entirely fitting in was familiar to her. This did not, however, diminish the uncomfortable incongruence between her *habitus* and the HE *field* that she entered. Jocelyn felt that her A-level did little to prepare her for the 'totally

different' expectations of the new *field* [first interview]. Having been strongly guided and 'fed […] all the information you needed' in her A-level, Jocelyn spoke a lot about struggling to understand what was expected of her and struggling to develop the academic skills that she was expected to utilise and demonstrate: 'The looking through articles and books for references is a pain. I'm not used to doing that at all and I really struggle with that. It takes me for ever.' 'And my writing. I always thought that I wrote very well. I thought that was one of my strong points…It's very clear and concise and it very much reflects the way that I'm thinking. When I'm writing […] you can almost hear me [talking] in my essays…But when you've gotta shove references in, it doesn't flow. I can't do it…And I feel like every thought that I have, I have to back it up with some reference…If I didn't put any references in I think I'd get a higher mark…I don't know how to do it.' 'I really think that that is the hardest thing academically for me. I love reading, but …I don't know whether I'm supposed to be referencing just quotes, or ideas or theories…I don't really know…Because I've never had to do it before' [first interview].

A further issue for Jocelyn was the obscuring of the explicitly stated rules and expectations of the *field*. She found marking criteria could be ambiguous and open to interpretation:

> we all went up to the pub after we got our results […] and we were looking through it, some people had their assessment criteria with them and there were three different takes on what it meant, what was required [first interview].

> You don't know what they're looking for exactly, what the markers are looking for. Although you've got the assessment criteria, even with the essays, you know, you're not entirely sure… [first interview]

> Well I *thought*…I thought that they were quite good before I got my results…When I'm looking at the criteria and I'm looking at my Communication essay I met it!...And then I get 45 percent... [first interview]

The timing and nature of feedback contributed further to her difficulty in understanding what was required of her and Jocelyn was often forced to guess or experiment with her approach to try to resolve issues successfully. The challenges she faced are exemplified in the following quotes:

> I only got something like 45 […] I wrote it and *then* of course you've got to try and find the references to put in! So I think I've tried it from a different approach now. I've got the bits and now I'm writing around them, so we'll see how that works… [first interview]

> for the first essay we handed in I got 58 percent... I know I failed on the references, and I understood that, but I couldn't really see how I could have made up 42 marks, because it was very good, very positive feedback. Apart from the referencing and there was something about the objective that I did wasn't quite measurable, but otherwise, it was very good…But I thought, that's not going to be 42 marks for the references, surely… [first interview]

> I spend hours and hours and hours…days…wasting my time going round and round and round in circles because I didn't know what I was writing. And I've got no idea what they *wanted* me to write [second interview]

> I've really *shocked* myself with some things and come up with really good marks, and I think…ohhh…I still think it's all hit and miss [second interview]

At the end of her first year it was clear that Jocelyn wanted to improve her marks, but didn't know how. Her academic struggles continued throughout her second year and it wasn't until her final year that she had a breakthrough in understanding: 'I think one of the lecturers actually said … that is what they expect year three to be. Because they said, year two was this, and I thought, "I didn't realise that is what year two was, and it's gone! Could you not have told me that at the beginning of year two?" [laughs] Not at the end! And they said "Of course year three is totally different because it's this", and I just thought, "[Gasp], it's all

different! They are expecting different things this year", and it's like, "Oh, No!" Because I thought I'd got the hang of it, then [deep in-breath] and then they tell you that it's different'. She clarified this point further when she said: 'I mean, it's different in the third year, where you have to, sort of, *critique* work. And there's a lot of *evaluation*, whereas in the second year, you have to *justify* everything. I've only just cottoned on to that; the three different levels…after year two, so the beginning of year three and I've cottoned on to the fact that they expect different things in different years. So, that was quite an eye-opener really…' [second interview]. This issue seemed more about awareness of the incremental changes in the expectations of the *field* than misunderstanding that might stem from inadequate stocks of linguistic *capital*. Indeed, the fact that language was seldom mentioned in Jocelyn's data seems to indicate that linguistic *capital* was not particularly problematic for her.

With time, Jocelyn did accumulate some academic *capital*. She said: '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, rather than looking around everywhere and then just flukily finding it…which is what I kind of used to do', and her data were rich with evidence that she had also developed a strong affinity with reflective and evidence-based practice [second interview]. It was also very clear that Jocelyn became much more strategic in her efforts to meet the demands of the *field*. She described using the marking criteria to help structure her written work so that markers could clearly see that she has included everything that was required of her, and said of the research methods module: 'the whole other side is the eating disorders side… that really quite fascinates me [but] I'm trying to leave that to one side, because this module isn't about eating disorders; it's about doing the literature, the critiquing of the literature, doing your literature review, a critical review and then getting your research proposal up' [second interview].

Jocelyn's educational *habitus* adapted, not towards unquestioning compliance with the demands of the *field*, but she developed a 'feel for the game' and recognised that to succeed within the *field*, she needed to abide by the practices and rules of the *field*. For example, she said: 'sometimes it's difficult to see the relevance of what we're learning…And you just think, well, they just want you to do it, you've just gotta do it', 'I'm not a fan of headings, personally, so I don't put them in my work. I'm not quite sure what the use of headings…how that improves you marks…but if they are suggesting that I put headings in, I'm doing it!', and: 'I think I read around the topic a little bit more…but I start writing and then I find out that I don't know anything about that and then I'll go off and read about it. I'll specifically read up on topics…just to cover the criteria [laughs] It's terrible' [second interview].

There was little indication of voluntary collaboration with peers in Jocelyn's first interview. Reflecting her self-contained *habitus* she said: 'I wasn't really desperate to fit in. I don't mind sitting on my own in lectures and things, or sitting with people I don't know. You know, some people won't. They want to meet their friends outside and they are all on the phone: where are you? I'm outside. I've gotta meet you outside somewhere before we go in so that we can all sit together…Well, I don't really like that kind of thing for a start. I find I get very claustrophobic' [first interview]. It was 'very much' her preference to work on her own because, she said, she doesn't 'trust' people and by working alone she had confidence that she would address what she understood to be required [first interview]. Jocelyn did, however, establish a social network of peers whom she described as 'all very different from the guys in Halls' [first interview] in that they were all mature students who were not as focused on the social aspects of student life. This network provided Jocelyn with some social *capital* which she later drew upon to help her manage her learning. She said: 'The content, I'm still not sure about sometimes, I've gotta say. And talking [it] through with my friends helps. That peer support, I think, is quite invaluable, because you get a feeling for it you're *way* off mark…Luckily I haven't been, but it just helps to talk really' [second interview]. Demonstrating that she makes discerning use of social *capital*, Jocelyn also highlighted: 'I talk more now with my friends. I've worked out who it is that's on the same wave-length as me, and, you know, who I trust as friends to…Because some people that you talk to, you think, I'm not gonna…I wouldn't listen to some people on the course…Because I'm not sure what they are talking about [laughs] […] some people have totally missed the point, I think, sometimes' [second interview]. Jocelyn reported that she generally stuck with her 'small circle of friends', but

highlighted that she had encountered barriers when trying to engage with the 'cliquey groups' comprising the Hill-walking and Conservation clubs within the university [second interview].

Social networking as a means of developing social *capital* is a very interesting issue for Jocelyn; she could clearly see the value of it, particularly as it pertained to her professional practice, but she said: 'I don't know how to do it' [second interview]; it was not a natural feature of her very self-contained *habitus*. Explaining her uncertainty, she said: 'I've seen the benefits of it in other people who seem to *know*. Like some of my friends keep in touch with their supervisors, and …umm…I've never done that. I'm sort of a *closed* person sometimes. And other people seem to know…You know, we're going down to [nearby town] for part of [a] module I'm doing, and one of the girls on the course *knows* the woman in [that town], the OT down there. And I said, "Well, how on earth do you know her? You haven't done a Placement down there." And she's just been down there because she's interested in something, or she's phoned her up or something. I just think, "How do you know all these people?" You know, some people have been head-hunted for jobs already by people they know. And I like, "How do you know that person though?" It's just through contacts. I'm thinking, I've got none of that. I did actually send my last supervisor an e-mail to say hello, how are you doing, but I thought, what, you know…what am I doing this for? I'm really trying to network [laughs]' [second interview]. As a deliberate effort to adapt her *habitus*, Jocelyn resolved: 'I need to use networking more. That's something that I'm gonna try and work on, certainly when I'm out there practicing' [second interview].

Jocelyn clearly felt much more comfortable learning in a practice environment than an academic one. She highlighted that 'you take control of your learning on a placement' [second interview], explaining that she knew what she needed to learn because she felt the 'embarrassment' of ignorance or lack of knowledge, so she took control of it and addressed it. Doing so seemed to be easier in the practice than the academic context because she was not confounded by trying to fathom out what *they* want. Jocelyn had a very strong work ethic which revealed itself on placement in a way that is not evident in the academic context. The *field* of work was more familiar to her and perhaps resonated more closely with her established *habitus*: 'I really feel as if that's my job. And I'm there to actually work, rather than learn [laughs] I don't know…It's not as if the supervisors, or anything, have lead you into that. Maybe I'm just very much, when I get a new job, I go straight in and try really hard and want to learn' [second interview]. It was abundantly clear from Jocelyn's data that she was able to utilise her developing academic skills to enhance, support and develop her practice skills and that she had developed an approach to being an OT and related practice-oriented *capital* that was highly valued by the HE *field* (premised strongly on reflective, client-centred and evidence-based practice). Adding further to her portfolio of practice-oriented *capital* were her experiences in part-time paid employment within a rape counselling service and the extension of her history of voluntary work into a Homeless Prevention Team. A feature of Jocelyn's existing *habitus*, her willingness to stand out and to speak her mind, also proved a valuable asset to her in the *field* of practice. She had a vision of the possibilities of OT and was willing to make a stand for it and challenge what she perceived to be the limited perspectives and expectations of some other OTs and colleagues from related professions [second interview].

Completing the OT programme reinforced aspects of Jocelyn's innate world view and disposition, her *habitus*, but also changed, extended and refined it. She said: 'I seem to have been waiting all my life to be an OT' [second interview], and this proved a strong motivation to adapt to, or at times, tolerate, the demands of the *field*. She never really felt comfortable in the academic *field* and the greater congruence of her *habitus* with the *field* of practice was reflected in the greater consistency in her (high-achieving) placement results over her more variable academic results. Jocelyn questioned the value of aspects of the academic content of the course: 'I'm not sure how I can relate all of the learning and Uni and academic work to what I do as an OT. Especially when I've seen some of the supervisors that haven't got a *clue*…You know, they would really struggle here at Uni. So if they don't have a clue about all that academic side and they're doing the job wonderfully…' [second interview], but was very clear about the need to be strategic and deliver what was required in order to secure the qualification that she valued. While Jocelyn questioned the *field*, she did not resist it in the manner of Sarah and Frances; she was instead focused on 'playing the game' so that she could achieve her goal. In the prompt notes that she bought with her to the second interview,

Jocelyn had written: 'Vibrant and exciting atmosphere – not sure that I'm a part of it.' Jocelyn experienced her three years from the margins of *field*, and in many respects, that was acceptable to her.

Jocelyn was awarded an upper second class honours degree, and although she said she was willing to go anywhere to take any job that might be available, true to her established *habitus*, she wasn't enamoured by 'bog-standard' options [second interview] and did not feel constrained to work under the label of OT.

Katrina's interest in OT was prompted at age fourteen while witnessing the challenges encountered and care received by her uncle who became wheelchair dependant as a result of a brain tumour, but health care was a familiar theme as her mother worked four days a week as a nurse and her father was a Naval Architect who designed hospitals on board ships. Having completed an A-level in music and an AVCE in Health and Social Care, Katrina progressed straight from college to university at eighteen years of age. She secured her place in the Neville School through Clearing, having failed to meet the terms of the offer that had been made by another university. This situation is noteworthy because the normal entry requirement for her original programme of choice was 240 UCAS points, while for the Neville School it was significantly higher at 300 UCAS points.

Although Katrina's original intention had been to move away to go to university: 'so that I could get away from home and just see what student life was all about, have the independence and everything' [first interview], taking the place in the Neville School enabled her to stay living with her parents and younger sister within walking distance of the campus. Katrina said: 'I don't regret not going away […] Because at home…I get the independence of whatever I like, but then I get all the good things, like the car. There's always food there and I've got all my friends from college around' [first interview]. Staying at home also enabled her to continue regular part-time work as a theatre usher, holiday work as a nursery nurse assistant and to play regularly as a member of at least one orchestra. Katrina's parents were willing to finance her living in local Halls of Residence, but she declined: 'I don't think I was really ready for that', 'I don't think I could have coped with…just the whole living with different people I didn't know, having to do *every*thing for myself' [first interview]. Although Katrina entered a new *field*, she remained very much rooted within her established social *field* and many aspects of her life continued unchanged, providing her with some security and stability and an excuse for not staying out late: 'my parents think I should be home now' [first interview]. Even as she finished the programme, Katrina was predicting living with her parents for another year [second interview].

Although neither of her parents attended university, both engaged in ongoing training to enhance their careers and the familial *habitus* clearly valued education as a form of cultural *capital*: 'My dad has always said to me, since I was at school, education comes first, and then everything else' [first interview]. This was further emphasised by her parent's willingness to invest economic *capital* to support the gathering of educational *capital*: 'my parents are quite generous. They say that I only pay for [my social expenses]. I have to pay for food at Uni, but if I write it all down and keep an account of it, they'll pay me back. They are quite strict on receipts…' [first interview]. In addition to covering the majority of her living and all of her educational expenses, Katrina's parents purchased a car for her so that she could complete a much-coveted paediatric placement in her final year (on the understanding that she would repay them once she had secured a qualified post).

Amongst her established friends, it seemed that the norm included the possibility of going to university, but not the expectation that university would be a natural and automatic next step. Katrina reports that she 'wasn't like, stupid, but wasn't the cleverest' at school and suggested that she almost surprised herself and her family by going to university [second interview]. She had a small number of friends who had attended before her and from them had gained the impression 'that everything is all laid back, you don't do any work, you go out all the time, and university is the best thing that every happens to you' [first interview], but found that this was not the case on her programme.

Katrina described a college learning environment that was quite protected and carefully guided and controlled [first interview] and initially found the way she was expected to work in the new *field* very foreign and challenging, requiring adaptation of her educational *habitus*: 'I wasn't used to so much self-directed learning' [reflective diary]. She was unaccustomed to making decisions and choices and taking responsibility for her own learning and admitted finding it 'quite hard to settle' [reflective diary]. She noted that staff would not 'check your work

to make sure you are [heading] along the right lines' ahead of assessment submissions [first interview], but managed to replicate elements of the close support and direction of college in the relationship she established with her personal tutor, to whom she turned to resolve issues throughout her undergraduate programme.

With time, Katrina came to enjoy the freedom to pursue and investigate her own interests as part of her study, but remained concerned about meeting the demands of assessment tasks and struggled to use marking criteria as a guide: 'I wasn't used to the criteria, I wasn't exactly sure what I needed to put in…Although I kind of understood there was a brief down the left-hand side with what you needed to do, and as the grades went up, it explained that you needed a good justification of something or an excellent…But I couldn't understand the difference between 'good' and 'excellent'…what they were expecting for that' [first interview]. Even at the end of her final year Katrina described: 'endless discussions with friends, just trying to work out what some of them mean' [second interview]. With only a single specific reference to language in her data, this confusion seemed related more to understanding what was required of her in relation to these explicit examples of the 'rules of the game' than it did to linguistic *capital*, which was reinforced by her perception of the random nature of her results: '..you just have *no* idea how you're gonna do […] like the Ethics essay last year, I really didn't understand one bit, and then I still got 73 [percent]. And then something else…I can't think of anything off the top of my head, but then you just get a low mark for something else and you just think, "Oh!". Because, I think, yeah, my marks last year were really varied. I got 38 [percent] for one essay and then 87 [percent] for another [laughs]' [second interview]. In fact, at every level of the programme, Katrina's assessment results covered the full spectrum of possible grades; in addition to achieving A-grades, she was required to undertake at least a single academic re-sit each year.

Developing a 'feel for the game' and the practices of the *field* was not easy for Katrina, but she reported using social networks to help her develop the skills, knowledge and understanding that she needed: 'As I got to know more people they knew things. We shared information. If you weren't sure about something you could ask someone until you found someone who knew' [first interview], and 'I did [that particular] essay with [a friend]; we went to the library over the Easter holidays, collected all of the data together and research that we needed. We'd take bits of the marking criteria and we'd be like, "Oh, we think that means that" and then split the different topics between us and we'd go and find different theories related to things. And then we'd bring everything back together, explain what we'd found, photocopy everything and then share it between us' [second interview]. However, establishing social *capital* was not easy for Katrina and her initial impression that: 'everyone is very supportive and seems keen to help each other' [reflective diary] faded. In her second interview she observed: 'I've found that there are quite a lot of very cliquey groups within the OT sort of group', and: 'I *definitely* found that some people are very reluctant to help […] If you ask them a question, they kind of like, they'd give you the most limited information that they possibly could about something…Or if you phone them, then they'd ignore phone calls…' It is difficult to say whether Katrina relied less on social *capital* than some participants through choice or necessity, but her experience also highlighted that not all social *capital* is equal, or equally valuable in terms of facilitating success within, or the accumulation of other forms of *capital* relevant to, the *field*. As an insider-researcher I am very aware that Katrina's social network tended to comprise those who were themselves marginalised by the cohort and those who were not performing particularly well academically.

Katrina did find that, having worked as a carer and for a nursing agency prior to entry, she had a small amount of practice-oriented *capital*, for example experience of using different moving and handling equipment [first interview], but this did not have a significant influence on her experiences in the *field*. Although, like all students, she was clearly gathering practice-oriented *capital* throughout her programme, and particularly her placements, there was little sense in her data that she did so to a significant extent or that she took the highly strategic approach of some of the others. In fact, Katrina viewed failing a final year academic module as having: 'kind of worked out quite well' for her because she was '*dreading'* applying for a junior OT post and said: 'I still don't think I'm ready to be an OT' [second interview]. Like many students, Katrina was anxious about the forthcoming transition to qualified therapist, but uniquely, was seriously contemplating choosing to work as an OT assistant for twelve months

before applying for qualified posts. Katrina's perception that the step up from student to qualified practitioner was 'too big' for her was at least partly related to a perceived lack of appropriate experience. Reflecting a limited grasp on the logic of, in this case, the *field* of practice, Katrina completely failed to appreciate the extent to which this course of action would negatively impact on her degree as cultural *capital* and how damaging it would be to her CV.

Katrina was the youngest participant in the study, but compared to other undergraduate students of a similar age, she left me with the overall impression of being quite emotionally and practically immature and, with repeated reference to her parents throughout her data, still rather dependent on them. This aspect of her established *habitus* was quite distinct from the *habitus* of many of the student players in the *field* and may have contributed to her being somewhat marginalised within the cohort. Further incongruence with the *field* was evident in Katrina's approach to learning and established educational *habitus*. By the end of her first year, Katrina had the sense that she had 'adapted quite well' [first interview], and to a large extent she ultimately did, but having remained so strongly rooted within her protective, pre-entry social *field*, she operated in the margins of the HE *field*, even moving further out as her access to social *capital* changed. Having entered this robustly academic environment with considerably less academic *capital* than is usually minimally required, and despite being a late graduate, Katrina's upper second class honours degree was a significant achievement. Within two or three months, she came to see me to tell me that she had secured a junior rotational post at a local general hospital (where she had previously had a placement and therefore knew some of the interview panel, making it less 'scary') which allowed her to continue living at home.

When asked by a school careers advisor what she enjoyed, Lizzie highlighted cooking and maths and soon after found herself studying for an OND in hotel and catering administration ('similar to three A levels' [family education/employment map]). Attracted by the college location and the opportunity to 'get away' and 'have a bit of fun' more than the actual course, Lizzie said she subsequently 'never really took to the job' [focus group]. She married and started a family soon after the course ended and alongside raising her family worked variously as a food services assistant, assistant catering manager, a group tutor of adult basic skills classes, a child minder and teaching assistant in addition to providing secretarial and book-keeping support for her husband's construction business. Lizzie was very strongly oriented towards her friends and family and her established social *field*. She described regular Friday nights out or in with friends and being a member of a local sports club and film society. She and her family were also 'quite involved with the local rugby club' [focus group] and when she had more time available prior to attending university, Lizzie worked as a volunteer cooking match teas, working on the bar, assisting with special functions and organising weekend tours.

Lizzie, her husband and their youngest child (who was still at school) lived in a small town in a house that he built 21 years ago. Their four other children, who had completed or were enrolled on university programmes, lived in various locations around the country. As her family grew up and became more independent, Lizzie began to contemplate her own future: 'what *do* I want to do? And I wanted, not just to have a job, I wanted to have a career in something [...] that I think is worthwhile' [focus group]. She knew that she enjoyed working as part of a team and problem solving, but it took a few years to alight on OT. Lizzie studied for an Access qualification and although she was offered more than one option, was 'thrilled' to accept a place on the programme at the Neville School, which she commenced at 46 years of age.

There was an overall air of ease and comfortableness in Lizzie's descriptions of her early days in the HE *field* and a strong theme of fitting in throughout her data. In her first interview she observed: 'I think I've settled in quite well. I enjoy being here and I enjoy the environment' and later she described assisting on a mature student open day: 'It was just sat in the lecture [theatre] and just fe[lt] like, yeah, I belong, and I'm part of this. I'm not where I was less than a year ago…hoping that I *would* be part of it. And it's just a really good feeling' [first interview]. Again, in her final year Lizzie remarked of her experiences: 'There is a sense of belonging…' [second interview].

Although naturally 'fairly shy' [reflective diary], Lizzie was quickly able to establish a social network within the *field* and drew upon it for practical support and assistance in developing skills, particularly IT skills, that would facilitate the development of academic *capital* within the *field* [reflective diary and first interview]). This social network was evidently important to her because when she was distanced from it over the first Christmas period, she wrote: 'as the holiday went on my confidence dipped. Good to be back at uni and have the support of fellow-students' [reflective diary]. Lizzie very clearly articulated the benefits (or the value of the social *capital*) that she was able to draw from her social networks: 'Although it can be stressful working with other people, it can also be really useful because you can get feedback from them, you can ask questions, you're not on your own and if there is an area you're unsure of, somebody else might have input. It's not about taking it all on your own shoulders' [first interview]. In her second interview, Lizzie identified 'peer support' as the factor having most influence on her learning on the programme. In addition to the provision of moral support, she again described the benefits of (or social *capital* accruing from) her social networks: 'Well it helps to talk things through and to get different takes on your ideas. Umm…Some people can give you information that you might not have known. You can battle through ideas between you [...] And people, you know, everybody does help. If someone knows you are doing a particular area they'll say, "oh, while I was looking for mine I came across…such and such, and if you find this useful, have a look at this journal article."'

Lizzie felt that her Access course had equipped her with many of the skills required to succeed within the HE *field* and although she was being stretched academically she said: 'the actual work was more difficult, but it was interesting. I enjoyed it more. It was a step up, I think….starting to think *more* for yourself…Yeah, I did enjoy it' [second interview]. A new diagnosis of 'mild dyslexia' [reflective diary] confirmed her own observations but did not present a significant problem as Lizzie had already established a range of effective coping strategies - although she did consider her slow reading rate a hindrance [first interview]. While Lizzie encountered early occasional difficulties understanding the demands of the *field* in terms of assessments: 'Even with the marking criteria, it's not clear [for this module]. Any information that's been given has been confusing. It's like, we want you to back this up with theory, but we don't want too many theories. We want you to write about the person, but then we want you to write about theory – but we don't want big quotes from theory. It's just…I have *no* idea, to be honest' [first interview], by the end of her final year she felt that 'on most occasions…it's reasonably clear' [second interview]. She was comfortable enough in the *field* to be critical of the timing of feedback, illustrating the potentially negative impact it could have on the development of academic *capital*: 'It would have been a great help to have had it back to see the feedback of how we did referencing, you know, is the referencing I did appropriate? Is my style of writing appropriate? It's like we're going into the next essay and not had feedback from earlier' [first interview] and 'I've found it quite hard, because we don't get much feedback so it's quite hard to build on what you have done to know how to do things better or what really was, say, the problem with a piece of work, or the strengths of a piece of work' [second interview]. Lizzie was also critical of one particular area of the curriculum which she described as 'contrived' and demanding of a 'politically correct essay' based on 'what they want to hear': 'Everywhere else we're having to give different opinions, you know, on the pros and the cons and weighing it up and what's the best [evidence], and…And in that, you just feel you've got to toe the line, otherwise…you won't … you won't …get the marks if you don't… really say what they really want you to say' [second interview]. This situation, while very frustrating for Lizzie, highlights her 'feel for the game' - her understanding of, and ability to play by, the 'rules of the game'.

Lizzie perceived a need to actively extend her skills and understanding, particularly in the practice context (to develop practice-oriented *capital*) and in her reflective diary she wrote: 'I have to be proactive, aware of current political issues, look for opportunities to gain relevant experience' Her aim to use the summer periods to 'start gaining some experience/networking to improve my chances of getting a job in OT in two years time' was undermined by the slow processes associated with criminal record bureau checks which were only completed as she was about to commence the new academic year. Unable to contemplate taking on the additional demands of this type of work alongside her studies, Lizzie felt 'inadequate at times' when she compared herself to others who had a 'broad range of experiences and part-time jobs […] which are relevant and beneficial to their OT training' and wrote: 'it bothers me that I don't have the time or energy to do anything extra to go towards getting a job next year' [reflective diary].

Even in the absence of this type of experience, Lizzie's stocks of practice-oriented *capital* were, in parallel with her academic *capital*, clearly developing appropriately and she consistently acquitted herself well in the practice context. Speaking of her final placement she said: 'I felt really integrated into the team. It was community mental health and at the end other people were sort of saying, "we want a bit of OT input, have you got time to do it?"' [second interview], which illustrates not only her own perception of fit, but the extent to which other players in the practice *field* felt she fitted. It is particularly noteworthy that Lizzie described spending one placement in a location where Gabby had also undertaken a placement at a different time and at a different level of study. While Gabby felt thoroughly excluded by that particular microcosm of the *field* of practice, Lizzie felt very much at home and inspired [second interview]. The influence of personality cannot be excluded, but it is also possible that, as both women held comparable stocks of academic and practice-oriented *capital*, their experiences reflect differences in other aspects of cultural *capital* which underscored varying degrees of congruence between their individual *habitus* and the dominant culture of that microcosm.

Lizzie's project always included a strong element of personal development as she explained: 'I want to, like, develop as a person as well. It's funny stuff, but I feel quite closeted in my life. I've been quite happy, family, home. I knew my own environment. I want to stretch myself now' [focus group]. She felt 'something was missing' [first interview] and described feeling 'insignificant' and the gradual loss of confidence and self-belief: 'When I started university I thought everyone was more capable than myself. The feeling is gradually changing. I ~~think~~ believe I ha[d] reached a point in life where I almost couldn't be bothered to think. Being at university is like waking up' [reflective diary]. On a personal level, Lizzie's engagement with the *field* was transformative and throughout her data she related stories which illustrated her awareness of changes in herself and the insight that she developed [reflective diary, first and second interviews]. At the conclusion of her studies Lizzie said: 'I *am* more assertive and I *am* more confident' [second interview] and it was noticeable that her contributions to the second interview were freer and fuller than those made in the first interview and focus group. Having listed in her reflective diary some of the things she had learned during the programme, Lizzie observed: 'I have learnt more about myself than being an OT but that will make me a better OT.'

While her husband was 'very proud' of her [first interview], Lizzie felt he had no real conception of what she was doing or what was demanded of her: 'I think, in a way, things have passed him by. He can't relate to what I'm doing, because it's a completely different world to what he…to how he is. It's completely…it's *so* different from…So he can't…So we don't really discuss it or talk about…it at all…much, really. It's just like, "Are you in [University] today?" "Yes", "No" [laughs]' [second interview]. Education and engagement with HE was clearly valued by the family unit and there was no evidence of disruption in Lizzie's original social *field* as a result of her engagement with the HE *field*; while change was evident, it was more related to personal development than fundamental aspects of *habitus*. Lizzie's engagement with the *field* did, however, have an unanticipated impact on the family. Her need to step back from her previous roles within the family in order to meet the demands of her role as a student created space into which other members of the family grew in ways that developed their own independence and identities. She noted, for example: 'Stayed in bed with a cup of tea and my books. I could hear my son and [his] girlfriend in the kitchen discussing the best method of washing up (they'd cooked a meal last night and not cleared up) – normally I would get up early and do the washing up, but not anymore. Anyway, it sounded like they were having fun. Also, my husband was cooking a pheasant casserole – he'd been given some pheasants after beating and had prepared them – normally I would cook them. I left this for my husband to do. He was really proud of the result', and she wrote: 'Things are changing in our family. I'm not so controlling and the others are getting satisfaction being more involved around this house, so it's better all round' [reflective diary]. Even here, the feeling is of subtle evolution, rather than fundamental changes of *habitus* (on several fronts).

Her three years on the undergraduate programme were not entirely smooth for Lizzie. There were difficult family circumstances which actively competed for her time and energy particularly during her second year [reflective diary], although this aside, she generally felt able to manage her competing roles. She experienced uncertainty and was clearly stretched, but worked hard to provide what the *field* demanded of her and was confident enough to make strategic decisions about where to focus her efforts: 'it's getting the balance of not putting, well, this might sound wrong, but putting the effort in to what will pass or fail, to enable you to come back the following year, [rather than in] to work on something in class which is like a presentation' [first interview]. Lizzie entered with, and was able to develop and extend, stocks of *capital* relevant to the *field*. With limited reference to language in her data, linguistic *capital* does not seem to have been a particular issue for her, even as it was developing, as her reflective diary highlighted: 'I explained that I practiced, talked to other people, reflected (didn't use this word before the degree)' and 'I'm definitely a pragmatist (I didn't even know what that meant 3 years ago)'.

Lizzie's fit within the HE *field* was evident from the outset and, as her portfolio of *capital* developed, increased to a degree during her engagement with it. She had secured employment as an OT and had received very positive feedback in relation to another post that she applied for but was not offered [second interview], even before she had been awarded her upper second class honours degree.

Lynne progressed through her schooling and completed A-levels in Psychology and Photography, and although she was 'pushed' [focus group] to go to university (by her college, never her family [second interview]), she resisted. There was no familial history of engagement with HE; her father and brother both left school at sixteen to become engineers (her father via the Navy and her brother via an apprenticeship) and having left school at fourteen, her mother completed a diploma in counselling at an FE college in her mid-40s. Although a number of Lynne's friends attended university directly from college, she was not at that point ready to consider it. She was uncertain what she wanted to study and thought: 'Well there's no point going and just doing something for the sake of it', but the bigger issue seemed to be her underlying doubts about her ability to succeed: 'the amount of times I've thought, "I won't go to university because I'm not clever enough"' [focus group].

To earn an income Lynne worked in a banking call centre but was bored and restless so the next year followed her mother's lead and studied for an 'NVCE in counselling' [first interview]. She later did some voluntary work at a conductive education centre for children with cerebral palsy and throughout her undergraduate programme worked as a care assistant in a residential care home. Having identified OT as her chosen career path, and been encouraged and inspired by OTs she had met, Lynne entered the HE *field* at 21 years of age, the first in her family to do so. She was 'a little bit worried' and 'kind of excited about it as well…Nervous but excited…' [focus group].

Lynne's parents were recently divorced when she commenced her programme at the Neville School. Although she was single and lived with her mother and younger sister, she was not free from responsibilities outside studying. She said: 'money is a *big* thing at home' [focus group] and throughout her programme Lynne felt a considerable responsibility, and worked very hard, to contribute financially to support the household which could not otherwise have managed. Like many other participants, she was juggling roles and responsibilities throughout her programme.

Lynne's entry to the *field* of HE was tentative and marked by considerable self-doubt. The first things she spoke about in her first interview was her 'panic' when the collaborative study group and social network that she had very quickly established withdrew to undertake some private revision ahead of their first examinations in the *field*: 'we'd set up study groups so that we could learn it and then before the exams everyone went, right, I'm going and doing it by myself! I was like: No! Don't leave me!...'cause I'm not going to be able to do it on my own!' Ultimately, Lynne surprised herself with what she could achieve alone and she started to develop more independence. Another early concern was around her ability to write essays: 'my first essay, I was just like…*no* clue. I had to go 'round my dad's and my dad forced me to do it. I was like, I'd written all my notes and everything and he helped me, just wording things. You know, just how…Because I'd just *no* idea, and like with references and everything, I was just clueless' [first interview]. Her confidence quickly grew and she was delighted with positive feedback on her academic writing skills and in her second interview observed: 'it almost feels like I can't even [think] back to how I was, because it's like natural now…it's really weird.'

Despite her doubts and anxieties, Lynne settled to fit well within the *field*. Having viewed her first assessments as 'a test of how clever [she] was' [first interview], at the end of her first year she volunteered: 'I feel like I'm in the right place. I feel like I fit' [first interview]. Because she had 'expected it to be hard' and had 'doubts about [her]self' [second interview] she worked very hard and was very committed to her studies throughout her programme. She said: 'I think it does help that I'm really…that I *want* to do well. Some people go to university because it's going to university and that's just the next bit of their chapter, I suppose. But, because I've *chosen* to and I really, really *want* to and I really *want* to get through it, it's got me really fixated on focussing on what I need to do to get somewhere' [second interview]. Naturally she was academically stretched, but her stocks of academic *capital* grew incrementally and she was highly academically successful in the *field*. Like George, she generally felt the demands and expectations of the *field* were clear: 'I think the lecturers have made it quite clear what to

expect and what to do, really. So it's like, OK, I understand what I need to do from here […] I know that's not the case with everyone though. I know that a lot of people feel that it's not [clear] [laughs] But I think that it has been clear what you need to put in and how much theory that you need to include and what level you need to be at really' [first interview]. Summarising very clearly the extent to which she felt she was able to fit into the new *field*, in her second year she wrote in her reflective diary: 'Exam period was quite stressful as it's meant to be really. Although I definitely felt much calmer this time, than this time last year. Think I'm just getting used to the game really. My "just get on with it" attitude seems to help I think.'

Lynne did encounter some challenges in meeting the demands of the *field* when she perceived discrepancies between marking criteria and an associated sample essay: 'I felt like if I'd marked that, it probably wouldn't have passed [laughing] because I couldn't see where it fit the marking criteria at all, so…That was where it became really *un*clear', and when she encountered very open, 'wafty' marking criteria: 'It was just really, sort of confusing and it just didn't feel like very much structure. I think it was just not having the kind of structure that I would sort of want, I suppose' [second interview]. Throughout Lynne's data it was evident that she was very strongly focused on *doing it right*, whatever *it* happened to be at the time. She valued a high level of structure because it helped her to establish what was required: 'you're thinking, "What will they want when they're marking this? They'll want me to write about this" and it sort of is more ticking boxes just to get through' [second interview]. She really didn't appreciate the more open space available to senior students which allowed them to make choices about learning and assessments according to their own interests; that all seemed to feel a bit risky to Lynne.

The desire to fit in was a very strong theme that permeated Lynne's data. Speaking in her first interview she said: 'I remember trying to suggest [study groups] at the beginning, but I didn't want to sound like I was being controlling or trying to force people to do something that they didn't want to do, and as I wasn't sure if people were going to go "Oh God! What are you on about? Study groups! We're in out first year!" You know, that sort of thing; "Chill out!" So I remember thinking that when I first put it forward, but then […] a couple of other people were really keen for it as well, so we just sort of set it up really.' The pattern of working collaboratively with others in her social network extended throughout Lynne's experience on the programme and was refined over time so that she was working with people who had 'similar thinking…and similar purposes' [first interview]. She drew upon the social *capital* that derived from this network to provide her with 'scaffolding' [first interview] for support and to help her manage the demands of the programme. She explained: 'when we were doing projects that were similar, or you know, some of us were all doing […] the same case study, we did work together like that. And I think the final one… the presentations that we had to do for Mental Health; I don't think we could have done it without each other! We were like, "Right! OK! What do we need? We *all* need to talk about the model of whatever and we'll put that in and we need to talk about […] You know, we all like, what do we need?"', and 'Even brainstorming different interventions that we could do and stuff like that, you know, with case studies and stuff' [second interview].

Lynne's mainstay in this regard was George (another participant in this study) and Lynne was George's mainstay in return: 'Even if we're doing our essays, we'll just sit opposite each other doing different work but going, "Are you on Facebook? You better not be on Facebook!" [laughing] It's like a silly thing really and we sort of like, "Oh, I can't do it if you're not sitting opposite me now"' [second interview]. Despite an age gap of some ten years and differing personal circumstances, Lynne observed: 'we've got very, very similar backgrounds. Not just educationally, but all of our background is very, very similar, so we are very similar in mind and thinking' [second interview], which suggested, in fact, that they shared similar *habitus*. Notwithstanding that special relationship, the social *capital* that Lynne accrued during her programme was clearly beneficial to her. Referring to her final year she noted in her reflective diary: 'Definitely been a tough one and I think a great deal of peer support has managed to keep me going and sticking with it […] I went into proper stress mode doubting all my ability to complete the year. I'm not sure if I would have managed to be honest, if it wasn't for us all giving each other pep talks: "You can do it", "We'll get each other through!", "We're not letting you fail", etc.'

In addition to performing well academically, Lynne generally performed at a very high level in the practice context. She was highly constrained by a cautious supervisor on one placement, where she also apparently had some difficulty converting overwhelming empathy into practical and helpful interventions. Although she was awarded a high-C grade, Lynne was highly ambitious in the placement as well as the academic context and her confidence was severely dented, but the episode did highlight to her that she was 'not thinking like an OT' and she commented: 'I think that was probably a defining moment, where […] I probably did start to think, actually, about the practical things and more adaptations and equipment and changing the way you do things' [second interview]. Subsequent experiences demonstrated that she was developing a stock of very relevant practice-related *capital*, and that she could recognise it in some of the 'amazing' OTs that she worked alongside. Lynne's data strongly evidenced that her theoretical learning was underpinning the development of her practice-oriented *capital*, and she discussed occasions when she perceived discrepancies between what she witnessed in practice and her own understanding of what and how a good OT should be (an extension of *doing it right*).

Lynne was a complex character. Her fit with the HE *field* was far more harmonious than she had anticipated, which to a degree, transformed her self-perception. She described herself as 'a bit of a geek' [first interview] and was highly ambitious to do well in the *field*, but despite performing strongly, she never lost her fear of failure: 'It's just that worry of failing anything that I have. Even though I feel more confident now, there's still that fear of: Oh God! But what if…' [first interview], and 'I went into proper stress mode doubting all my ability to complete the [final] year' [reflective diary]. The fact that Lynne worked so hard to fit into the *field* suggests that she was not entirely a 'fish in water'. It may be that part of Lynne's experience reflected what Bourdieu (1991 p.63) described as 'hypercorrection', or a hypersensitivity to and rigid compliance with the 'rules of the game' experienced by those to whom they do not come naturally, but that is difficult to distinguish from clear evidence that worrying, sometimes excessively, was a natural feature of Lynne's disposition. She spoke of being described as a catastrophist [first interview] and indeed that seemed to be the case; a final comments in her reflective diary was: 'At the moment I'm just feeling really lucky, still thinking that everything is far too good in my life, something has to go wrong soon…'

Lynne engaged enthusiastically with the *field* and it clearly had an impact on her: 'I think you change your mind and the way that you *think* about things without sort of realising it. I'm sure of it' [second interview]. That which enabled her to fit into the *field* highlighted a loss of fit in a pre-entry social *field*. Even in her first year Lynne found it hard to be her student-self with her friends from outside university. Although they themselves had experience of HE, their approach had been very different to Lynne's and they teased her for her dedication and ambition. Lynne observed that in that social context: 'it's not cool to be clever' [first interview]. Initially she said: 'I just don't talk about it now. I've come to the conclusion that I'll just shut up about anything to do with how I'm working here and just talk about anything else so that I don't get stick for working too hard!' [first interview]. Ultimately, however, she withdrew from that particular social *field*: 'I don't even speak to them any more!', 'I think we've just grown apart and I feel like I can't say anything around them any more because it's like it's wrong […] I just thought, "I can't be bothered any more, with you telling me what I'm meant to be doing and stuff." So I've just lost those friends now…' [second interview], but the void was filled by her new social networks.

At the conclusion of her programme Lynne said: 'I think I've changed, a lot […] [University's] built up so much confidence and sort of, ability and insight into myself as well, I think, that I've gained' [second interview]. Any shift in her *habitus* it is likely to be the result of subtle evolution rather than a more substantial adaptation or change, but Lynne certainly developed and ably deployed stocks of *capital* that were very relevant to the *field*. Despite her initial misgivings about being 'clever enough' [focus group] Lynne was awarded a first class honours degree and although she was 'tired' and in all probability somewhat burnt out when she graduated, she was already considering that a Masters degree would 'definitely' be a likelihood for the future [second interview].

Sarah's parents left school at the minimum age, as did two of her three siblings; she was the first in her family to attend university. Following a gap year in a kibbutz after her A-levels, her initial attempt at university, aged eighteen, was driven my familial and school expectations but lasted only six months because her 'heart wasn't in it to start with' [focus group]. Having identified 'something that [she] would really *like* to do' [focus group] Sarah secured an Access qualification and returned to university as a 43 year-old mother of four once her youngest had started school. Her eldest child commenced and graduated from university in the same years as she did, and proved a useful sounding-board with whom Sarah could discuss shared experiences. Her husband, who continued to work long hours as a departmental director in a large multinational company, and younger children, who continued with their schooling, were largely unaware of the study she was undertaking.

Mirroring the experiences of many mature students in HE, Sarah juggled a number of roles alongside that of 'student'. While George struggled to balance the competing demands of her family and study, and tended to position study somewhat to the fore (and often felt guilty about the impact this at times had on her family), Sarah, perhaps more closely reflecting normative gender expectations, consistently prioritised her home life over her student role and made it very clear that these aspects of her life did not intersect. Sharing more in common with Betty in this respect, it was only after the needs of her family had been met that she dedicated whatever time and energy remained to study. Sarah emphasised that as it was *her* choice to enter to pursue a degree, she alone should deal with any challenges it introduced; they should not impact on her family. She said: 'you just have to, sort of, be a split person and just think…well, I'll do this then, and then I'll do that, and then I'll go back and do that…And it's quite, it's quite a juggle…really. And it is like, well, it is like a split personality because you can't be both of them at the same time' [first interview].

Although Sarah reported enjoying being a student and being committed to the programme, she was never hesitant about declaring her dissatisfaction with various aspects of it. She had anticipated a much less academic encounter; more of an apprenticeship model without the dominance of theoretical underpinnings. While even her early her academic record clearly demonstrated that she was capable of succeeding in the legitimated form, Sarah frequently questioned the established practices of the *field*, particularly whether the very academic approach was really necessary. In her first interview she commented: 'I mean I understand the theory; you need to underpin everything with theory. You need to know why…I'm doing that. Oh, that's *why* I'm doing it. But, I think there's been a *lot* of theory… particularly in the first semester there was an awful lot of theory and not a great deal of doing…' Her point was that 'for a job that is so practical, and it is so problem-solving, thinking on your feet, it does just seem quite of a mismatch, really'.

Sarah was naturally a practical, hands-on sort of person; describing her profile on the Honey and Mumford learning styles questionnaire, she says: 'I came out equally between a pragmatist and an activist …So, no surprises there [laughs]' [second interview]. She entered the HE *field* with a strongly established identity and did not question herself or her place within the *field*; she questioned the validity and value of some of the expectations and practices of the *field* and, in effect, the highly academic educational *habitus* it demanded to be deemed successful. Sarah was drawn to OT by professionals' use of creative problem-solving to allow different individuals to achieve similar end-goals via different approaches. She recognised and challenged the discrepancy between the underpinning philosophy of the profession and requirements of the educational route that she was taking to gain entry to it.

There is a clear distinction between Sarah's experiences of learning in the academic environment and learning in the practice environment, reflecting the fact that her established *habitus* resonated more closely with the *field* of practice than the HE *field*. Sarah was largely dissatisfied with her academic experiences throughout the course and her reflective diary revealed that it was only when she had the opportunity to move into the *field* of practice when on placements that she seemed happy and content, and that a sense of ' fitting in' emerged.

Sarah identified a perceived dissonance between the values of the programme and those of practice, a theory-practice disparity that is not unfamiliar to the profession, and felt that inadequate attention was given to teaching students practical skills: 'in an academic situation, you know, you can talk a good game, if you like, and I can demonstrate that I have taken it on board in an academic or an intellectual way, but when I'm actually there and I've got to actually do it, that's very different' [second interview].

Regardless of what she perceived she should be learning or focusing on, Sarah was keenly aware of the need to meet established requirements, to in effect 'play the game', in order to pass individual modules and achieve the desired qualification. During her second interview she observed: 'I think the course within university, I think it is *very* academic, and it is very much…umm…probably wouldn't automatically suit my learning style, and I'm not entirely sure that there is a great deal of movement around that really…in regards to what you have actually got to produce, if you like'. 'I still feel with a lot of things, it's almost like you've got to tick the right boxes…to pass, basically, and to get through the course. And there doesn't seem to be a lot of scope for maybe… […] I mean, you are always told to think 'outside the box' and to be a bit more lateral about it and to think of different approaches, and yet when it comes to handing in work, it's quite formulaic as to what's actually expected of you. And if you *don't* tick those boxes on that, then you're not going to do it. Even if you've written something which is…*marvellous*…but it doesn't actually adhere to those marking criteria boxes [tapping the table]…You know, if the right phrases and the right words aren't in there…It's not going to work for you' [second interview]. Sarah went on to provide an explicit example of this point: 'I think the worst essay mark-wise that I ever did, was in year one […] and I got a *horrendous* mark. I've *never, ever* got a mark that low, ever. And I failed it really dismally…But I still now think it was an absolutely, totally true account…It was supposed to be a reflective essay, and it was. It was a true account of exactly what had happened, and I look at it and I think, 'There is nothing actually wrong with that', but…it didn't actually tick the right boxes in respect of what they had on the marking criteria. And the second essay was nowhere near as reflective as the first one. It wasn't *my* experience, it was just feeding back the things that they wanted to hear from the marking criteria…And I still look at it now. The second one I got over eighty percent for, but it wasn't *my* reflection, it was the reflection on what they wanted to hear about' [second interview].

Sarah's engagement with the *field* was the most overtly strategic and instrumental of all the participants. Sarah clearly had some awareness of the value of different forms of *capital* (e.g. that accrued from studying at college and university, valuing the latter more highly [first interview]), but there was little evidence in her data of her actively seeking to amass *capital* that might be relevant to the *field*, nor was 'collaboration' a theme associated with her data. Her fundamental ambition was to secure the qualification required to pursue her chosen career (a form of cultural *capital*). Sarah recognised that she was able to benefit from engaging with the *field* of HE in this regard, but did not necessarily value the *field* itself, nor did her data indicate any desire to fully immerse herself within it (in a manner similar to that described by Archer and Leathwood, 2003 p.177). She did not compromise her established *habitus* to meet the requirements of the new *field* any more than she had to, feeling 'distanced' and 'a bit removed' from it particularly during her final year [second interview], and while there was perhaps limited distance between them, she did not experience tension between the demands of the new and existing social *fields* in the manner experienced by some other participants.

While Sarah's data suggest that she didn't *want* to be part of the HE *field* (and given her academic results, this is not an example of what Bourdieu would describe as subjective expectation of objective probability (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977)), she clearly did very much want to be part of the OT *field* of practice, and as such, was forced to engage with HE. She remained committed regardless of the frustration she sometimes felt because for her the venture was always a means to an end. Despite not always agreeing with them, Sarah was confident of her ability to meet course demands and was prepared to acquiesce to the extent that she must. Sarah experienced university life from the margins of the *field*, but was awarded an upper second class degree and before the end of her final year of studies had secured a job within the *field* of practice that she valued so highly.

Glossary and Abbreviations

1994 Group	A group of 18 'internationally renowned, research intensive universities' who 'seek to promote their common interests in higher education' and 'respect and support [their] members' particular traits and traditions' (1994 Group, no date).
Access to Higher Education Diploma (Access course)	A Level 3 qualification that offers a route into higher education for those who do not have the educational qualifications which are usually required for entry. Courses are geared towards specific subject areas to provide both the underpinning knowledge and the skills needed for studying at university (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2007).
Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE)	A Level 3 qualification that replaced the Advanced GNVQ in 2000 and aims to enable students to develop knowledge, skills and understanding in a vocational area as preparation for entry into work or higher education. A Double Award AVCE is equivalent in size to two A-levels (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, 2007).
Advanced Level (A-level)	A Level 3 traditional qualification available in a wide range of academic subjects and some applied or work-related subjects. A-levels are comprised equally of: (a) the Advanced Subsidiary As-level which constitutes the 'first half' of an A-level. Students may choose to end their study at this point or go on to (b) A2, which constitutes the second half of the A-level and deepens the knowledge gained in the As-level (HERO, no date).
British and Technical Education Council qualifications (BTEC)	A vocationally related Level 3 qualification that prepares students either for direct entry into employment or for progression into higher education (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, no date). BTEC National Award: a 6 unit award, broadly equivalent to one A-level. BTEC National Certificate: a 12 unit award, broadly equivalent to two A-levels. BTEC National Diploma: an 18 unit award, broadly equivalent to three A-levels.
Capital	A Bourdieuian term referring to any resource that holds symbolic value and therefore acts as the currency of a given field and denotes the position of an individual within it or, more broadly, within the hierarchy of society (Grenfell and James, 1998). There are three primary forms: economic capital referring to material and financial assets; cultural capital incorporating scarce symbolic goods, skills and titles along with embodied dispositions such as accent, clothing and behaviour, and social capital reflecting the resources accrued through membership of social groups and networks.

Clearing	A process through which students who have been unsuccessful in securing or had not applied for a place at university or college via the standard application process for the current academic year seek acceptance onto a course in an institution that has not yet filled all its places (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, no date).
College of Occupational Therapists (COT)	The professional body for occupational therapy staff (both professional and support staff) in the UK.
Department of Health (DH)	Government department providing health and social care policy, guidance and publications for National Health Service (NHS) and social care professionals.
Field	A Bourdieuian term denoting the bounded social spaces, spheres or arenas of life which form distinct social worlds and encompass unique rules and established, taken-for-granted practices that are imposed, without necessarily being explicitly stated, on those who seek to enter or remain within them (Grenfell, 2004; Wacquant, 1998).
Fieldwork	SEE PRACTICE PLACEMENT
Foundation Degree	An employment related higher educational qualification providing professional development in a wide range of vocational areas. Broadly equivalent to the first two years of a Bachelors degree, it is a Level 4 qualification that offers enhanced knowledge and skills for employment or progression onto a Bachelors degree (HERO, no date; Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, 2007).
Further Education (FE)	Encompasses the activities undertaken by colleges and institutions primarily concerned with post-compulsory learning. In England, this includes, for example: general colleges, sixth form colleges and specialist colleges. Throughout the UK, the Further Education sector offers work-based and community-based learning, as well as learning traditional associated with institutionally based courses and programmes (Lifelong Learning UK, 2007).
General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE)	The main qualification taken by 14-16 year olds, although open to anybody with an interest in a wide range of academic and applied or work-related subjects. When awarded grades of A*-C, GCSEs achieve Level 2 of the National Qualifications Framework, which is a prerequisite required for entry to higher education. Double Awards exist in vocational subjects and are equivalent in size to two GCSEs (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, 2007).

General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ)	A Level 1 or 2 vocational qualification targeting mainly 16 year olds in full-time education and aiming to provide a general introduction to various areas of work, these qualifications were phased out between 2005 and 2007 in favour of the growing range of alternatives. Advanced GNVQs allowed students to broaden their general education or deepen their understanding of a particular vocational area and were awarded at Level 3 (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, 2007).
Habitus	A Bourdieuian term denoting the system of durable and transposable dispositions through which individuals perceive, judge and behave within and think about the world (Bourdieu, 1990b; Wacquant, 1998). It represents the unconscious patterns of being and perceiving that are acquired through long-lasting exposure to particular social conditions which are shared by individuals who share similar circumstances.
Higher Education (HE)	Refers to the studying for qualifications such as Diplomas of Higher Education, Bachelors degrees (at undergraduate level), and post-graduate Masters and Doctoral degrees which is usually undertaken by students aged 18 and over at universities and university colleges (HERO, no date; Lifelong Learning UK, 2007).
Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)	The organization which distributes public money for teaching and research to universities and colleges in England.
Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)	The agency officially responsible for collecting, analysing and disseminating quantitative data about higher education in order to assist planning and development in the sector.
Higher National Certificate and Diploma (HNC and HND)	Level 5 BTEC vocational qualifications designed to equip students with knowledge, skills and understanding appropriate to current or future employment, or for progression to an undergraduate degree. The HND provides a wider breadth of study than the HNC (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, 2007).
Health Professions Council (HPC)	The regulatory body overseeing 13 of the health professions (including occupational therapy) whose titles are protected by law and which keeps a register of members of those professions who meet specified standards for training, professional skills, behaviour and health.
International Baccalaureate Diploma	An internationally recognised qualification for 16-19 year olds based on detailed academic study of a wide range of subjects, leading to a single Level 3 qualification (HERO, no date).

Involuntary withdrawal (Termination)	Describes departure form a programme of study prior to its completion that is imposed upon a student as a result of academic failure, breech of institutional regulations or an inability to satisfy the requirements of a fitness to practice panel.
Irish Leaving Certificate	The qualification aimed generally at 16-18 year olds representing the culmination of the Irish secondary school system which is comprised of at least five subjects, although students aiming at university admission generally take seven (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2004).
Mature student	Students aged 21 or older at the start of their course (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, no date).
Million+ Group	A group representing 'new', post-1992 universities in UK higher education which emerged in 2007 as a re-branding and re-focusing of its predecessor, the Coalition of Modern Universities (CMU). CMU was formed in 1997 and was open to all post-1992 universities, although not all institutions chose to join. The Million+ Group 'pride themselves on diversity, flexibility and opportunity' and highlight that their members 'meet the challenges of our changing society, offering the flexibility and support that are necessary to broaden participation and add value to the economy' (Million+, 2008).
Non-completion	Departure from a programme of study prior to its completion as a result of voluntary or involuntary withdrawal.
Non-traditional academic background	Refers to a range of educational backgrounds other than those experienced by traditional 18 year old university entrants holding academically oriented A-level qualifications, including, for example: Access Diplomas, BTEC qualifications, AVCEs, HNCs/HNDs, Advanced GNVQs, Foundation Degrees or A-level qualifications achieved by mature students.
Occupational Therapy Support Worker Including: Occupational Therapy Assistant Occupational Therapy Technical Instructor	Support workers have a hands-on role in facilitating and implementing tailor-made programmes that have been designed and agreed with individual clients by a registered occupational therapist. Prior to the restructuring of employment in the NHS associated with its modernisation, support workers were referred to as Assistants, or more experienced and somewhat more autonomous Technical Instructors.
Open University Science Foundation	The Neville School accepts two Open University Level 1 Foundation courses as entry qualifications: Introduction to Health and Social Care and Discovering Science. Most students taking this route study the former which is a non-residential programme aiming to establish essential subject knowledge and study skills, particularly

	independent study skills. A Certificate in Health and Social Care is awarded upon completion (The Open University, 2008).
Practice Placement	Periods of practical professional learning undertaken in a range of settings in which occupational therapists work or could potentially work. Learning outcomes and assessment criteria for these periods of learning are set by the university that an individual student is registered with, while the method of achieving these learning outcomes and the learning process itself is supervised by an appropriately qualified clinician who acts as practice placement educator and works in conjunction with the university and the student.
Pre-1992 institution	'Old' institutions which were regarded as having university status before the provisions of the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 came into force.
Pre-registration education	Educational programmes that lead to registration with regulatory and professional bodies such as the HPC and COT, which may include both undergraduate BSc (Hons) and MSc levels of study.
Post-1992 institution	'New' universities constituted following the implementation of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act and the associated dissolution of the binary divide between university education and the vocational and technical alternatives offered by the polytechnic sector of the 1960s.
Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)	A review process whose primary purpose is to produce quality profiles of the research activity undertaken in higher education in order to guide the allocation of research funding grants. The RAE will be replaced following its final round in 2008 by the newly formulated Research Excellence Framework (REF).
Russell Group	Formed in 1994, this Group identifies itself as representing the 'leading' universities in the UK. It is an association of twenty 'old' research-intensive universities whose stated aims and objectives are centred on the promotion of 'the interests of universities in which teaching and learning are undertaken within a culture of research excellence' (The Russell Group, no date).
Scottish Certificate of Higher Education (Scottish Highers)	The qualification aimed generally at 16-17 year olds in their fifth year at Scottish secondary schools which represents the minimum required for entry to university in Scotland and is considered equivalent to or slightly in advance of an As-level. Students may study five or more Highers in a year, and those aiming to gain entry into programmes for

	which there is a high level of competition take Advanced Highers over a further year of study (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, 2007).
Strategic Health Authority (SHA)	A key link between the Department of Health (DH) and the National Health Service (NHS) that provides local management responsible for planning improvements, monitoring quality, increasing capacity and meeting national priorities.
Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)	The organisation responsible for managing applications to higher education in the UK.
Vocational Qualifications	A range of qualifications accredited with the National Qualifications Framework that cover almost every industry sector and serve a range of purposes in different sectors and at different levels, and therefore vary in size, level and assessment arrangements (Qualifications and Curriculums Authority, 2004).
Voluntary withdrawal	Describes departure form a programme of study prior to its completion that is initiated by the student themselves, including situations where students are 'deemed withdrawn' as they have not responded to efforts by the university to contact them following, for example, lengthy periods of non-attendance or failure to participate in learning activities, or failure to return to studies following a period of suspension.
Widening participation	Involves actively encouraging successful engagement in further and higher education by members of under-represented and disadvantaged groups, including women, mature students, those from less privileged socio-economic groups and ethnic minorities, those with disabilities and those with non-traditional entry qualifications (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997).

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