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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

**FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES**

School of Education



**An Examination into the Attitudes of Staff in Higher  
Education towards Widening Participation**

by

**Tania Humphries-Smith**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education (EdD)

August 2004

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

**ABSTRACT**

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The expansion of Higher Education has a long history, however, the specific policy of widening participation in Higher Education to those who would not normally enter Higher Education, and in particular those from lower socio-economic groups, was emphasised by Dearing in his 1997 report. The policy and its implementation have produced much literature but little of this studies the perceptions of and responses to this policy. This study does precisely that and seeks to determine the attitudes of a range of staff in Higher Education, not just academics, to the widening participation policy as it has been articulated since 1997.

The study took an ethnographic methodology and focused on one group of staff within a post-1992 English university. Through an analysis of the related literature a number of themes surrounding the widening participation agenda were established. A combination of focus group, interviews, participant observation and documentary analysis were used to collect data which was subsequently analysed to determine themes arising. These themes were then compared to those that were derived from the literature review. Hence, the hypotheses presented were developed from the data analysis.

It is concluded that gap exists between the expectations of staff in Higher Education, particularly academics, and current Higher Education students, not necessarily from widening participation backgrounds. This gap takes a number of forms including differences in belief regarding the purpose and value of Higher Education. Taking Bourdieu's theory on habitus and cultural capital, a hypothesis is presented which explains many of the issues emerging from the data analysis in terms of a gap in the habitus and educational capital between academics and current students.

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## **Abbreviations**

ARCM – Annual Report on Course Monitoring

BU – Bournemouth University

BUSU – Bournemouth University Students Union

CPD – Continuing Professional Development

CTM – Course Team Meeting

DEC – School of Design, Engineering & Computing

DES – Department of Education & Science

DfEE – Department for Employment & Education

DfES – Department for Education and Skills

GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education

HE – Higher Education

HEFCE – Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEI – Higher Education Institution

LEA – Local Education Authority

LPN – low participation neighbourhood

LSC – Learning and Skills Council

NAO – National Audit Office

NEET – not in education, employment or training

NIACE – National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development

OLL – Office of Lifelong Learning

PACE – Partnerships, Access and Community Education

PCAS – Polytechnics Central Admissions Service

PG – post graduate

THES – Times Higher Education Supplement

UCAS – University Central Admissions Service

UCCA – University & Colleges Central Admissions

UG – under graduate

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

WEA – Worker's Educational Association

WP – widening participation

## **Chapter 1. Problem Statement**

### **1.1 Area of Study**

A review of recent developments in Higher Education (HE) indicates much significance is being placed on the policy of widening participation (WP). Briefly, this policy is intended to increase the number of people gaining some form of HE experience, and in particular, increase the numbers from backgrounds who, traditionally, do not enter HE. This is of particular interest to my own institution, Bournemouth University which as a post 1992 University sees WP as a means of growth. The University registered 12,892 students in academic year 2000/01. As a member of the management team of the School of Design, Engineering & Computing it is also of direct interest to me, as part of the Schools strategy is to use WP to increase student numbers particularly in the harder to recruit subject areas such as engineering. Design, Engineering & Computing registered 1,872 students in academic year 2000/01 and has 13 people recognised as manager, 87 as academics and 20 administrators.

The research was conducted within the HE institution of Bournemouth University. The University is a vocational University operating successfully in niche markets. It operates a highly devolved structure with budgets, courses, research and even, strategy, resting largely within the seven academic Schools of the University (from academic year 04/05 this will decrease to six with the merger of The Business School and the School of Finance and Law). The University student profile indicates a large under-representation of those students the Government is currently targeting as part of its widening participation/access agenda. The Bournemouth University Strategic Plan 1999-2006 specifically states

Bournemouth University will be an open community distinguished by its commitment to vocational education focused on the changing needs of society...ensure that all of our activities are accessible to people from all backgrounds...demonstrate a significant increase in the ratio of students from under represented groups and low participation neighbourhoods over the period of the plan.

The University has chosen to achieve this by developing a Lifelong Learning culture to encourage all members of the community to participate in education. The University uses four categories within its definition of WP: Low Participation Neighbourhoods (LPN's) as defined by post code, Disability, Maturity and Ethnicity. It does not directly record social class. Currently, different measures for WP are being considered such as, first time

entrants to University from their immediate family. A discussion and definition of lifelong learning/education/training and widening participation is provided later.

In 2000/2001 the location adjusted benchmark, as defined by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), for young full time undergraduate students from Social Class IIIM, IV and V<sup>1</sup> was 26%, Bournemouth University (BU) achieved 23%. The same benchmark for 1999/2000 was 25%, BU achieved 21% (dropping from 23% in 1998/99). It should be noted, however, that the data upon which these figures are based is taken from non-compulsory, self declaration on UCAS application forms<sup>2</sup>. The location adjusted benchmark for LPN's, in 2000/2001 was 10%, BU achieved 8% and for 1999/2000 was 10%, BU achieved 7%<sup>3</sup>. This benchmark is based on the number of students of an institution who are from post code areas that are defined by HEFCE as being low participation neighbourhoods. The benchmarks take into account the location and nature of each institution.

Statistics for WP for the School of Design, Engineering & Computing are presented in Figures 1 & 2 broken down by category of WP and by course.

**Figure 1 Percentages for Each Type of WP Category for Full Time Undergraduate Intake of School of DEC**

Academic Year	LPN%	Disabled%	Mature %	Ethnicity %
2001/02	10.3			6.4
2002/03	10	10.1	11.9	18.6

---

<sup>1</sup> This definition of social class is taken from the Registrar General's classification system, until recently the official tool. This groups the population into six classes based on occupation (I-Professional, II-Managerial, IIIN-skilled non-manual, IIIM-skilled manual, IV-partly skilled and V-unskilled. However in Nov 1998 the Office of National Statistics produced a new set of social classification with seven classes, however, this has not yet been widely taken up. The *Socio-economic Classification User Manual*, April 2002 sets these out. It should also be noted that recently geodemographic profiles (such as MOSAIC) have also been used to classify students by where they live.

<sup>2</sup> The Office of National Statistics suggests low levels of accuracy for any self-declared categorisation used in the way information was requested on the application form provided by BU.

<sup>3</sup> Information from HEFCE (2000), HEFCE (2001) and HEFCE (2002)



**Figure 2 Percentages for Each Type of WP Category for Full Time Undergraduate Intake of School of DEC by Course**

Course	LPN%	Disabled% <sup>4</sup>	Mature%	Ethnicity %
BA/BSc Computer Aided Product Design	8.1	7.4	1.8	6.4
BA Interior Design	6.6	7.9	10.4	7.9
BA/BSc Product Design	5.6	7.1	2.0	15.3
BEng Applied Computing and Electronics	15.0	25.5	17.0	14.9
BEng Computer Communications	0.0	15.7	16.0	10.5
BEng Electronic Systems Design	6.3	14.7	17.6	20.6
BEng Medical Electronics Design <sup>5</sup>	44.4	11.1	37.5	22.2
BSc Applied Psychology and Computing	9.48	6.4	13.0	5.0
BSc Business Communication Systems	5.9	6.6	7.6	6.6
BSc Business Information Technology	7.5	2.6	4.6	7.5
BSc Computing	7.5	9.5	8.3	4.2
BSc Design Engineering	1.8	10.1	11.9	18.6
BSc Multimedia Communications	6.7	10.3	7.6	4.8
BSc Software Engineering Management	13.0	11.7	11.7	10.6
Total of Design, Engineering & Computing students	9.84	10.5	11.9	10.3

<sup>4</sup> The vast majority of these are registered as dyslexic.

<sup>5</sup> A cohort of only 4 students.

In order to address the issue of widening access and participation BU produced a policy. The BU Widening Access and Participation Policy Paper (BU 2001) contains an Action Plan which identifies nine major components of the WP strategy. The following activities in the action plan are designed to promote wider access and participation and many were commenced in academic year 2000/01, following the setting up of the Office of Lifelong Learning in summer 2000 (in summer 2003 the Office of Lifelong Learning became Partnerships, Access and Community Education after being merged with the Regional Partnerships Unit):

- working with secondary schools in low participation neighbourhoods in the sub region
- providing more localised learning opportunities for progression to HE study via progression partnerships, summer schools and other forms of pre-sessional study
- developing flexible patterns of study including open learning, work-based learning and part-time study beyond the traditional attendance mode in HE
- establishing and monitoring the implementation of Admissions Policy across the University
- integrated advice and information for students as well as strengthened student support related to study skills
- staff development working closely with key staff responsible for widening participation in each University School
- ensuring that the University's marketing programme promotes diversity whilst facilitating greater appeal to those from low participation neighbourhoods.

Subsequently, following the publication of the White Paper - The Future of HE in January 2003 (HMSO, 2003), and the increased funding for WP and Increasing Retention it was decided that the amount of money rolled out to Schools from this funding would be based on their WP profiles. It would also be subject to agreement, by the Office of Lifelong Learning, that their plans could demonstrably meet the BU strategic targets.

Before looking at the current WP policy and its implementation further it is important to consider the current situation in the context of the history of education and, in particular, the various past initiatives to develop a more inclusive education system.

## 1.2 Historical Background

The study should also be seen in the context of the long history of the sociology of education in general. That is, the studies begun in the 1930s looking at the relationship between social class and educational opportunity for children. Parsons (1959) defined, what Durkeim had observed, as the dual problem of 'socialisation' and 'selection'. Michael Young (1961) noted that education has to deal with the conflict between principles of selection by the family and by merit. Up to 1960s research tended to focus on the home background and the parental influence, suggesting a cultural deficiency in working class homes. This appeared to be supported by Bernstein in his 1971 study regarding linguistic performances of children from different social backgrounds, although Bernstein tended to target his criticism at schools and did not necessarily suggest superiority of one code over another. The debate moved on again with the publication of Hargreaves' 1967 study and Lacey's 1970 study both of which looked at the internal school environment. Young (1971) raised questions about the status of the school curriculum, which is a selection of knowledge by a dominant group, that is, the middle classes. Hence, the focus of research on the causal link between social class and education moved from the parental background to the school environment. A further shift occurred in the mid 1970s when Sharp and Green (1975) and Bowles and Gintis (1975) drew attention to the role of the system or state in this link. Here, neither the home nor the school environment, were directly blamed but the necessities of the economic system. In other words, schools prepare different sorts of students for entry into the labour market at the different points which a capitalist economy requires. Then in 1977 Willis produced a study which moved the debate on from a cause and effect, economic deterministic theory, to one based upon cultural production, that allowed for autonomy and creativity from those branded unequal. This has been republished and updated by an international group of academics (Dolby & Dimitriadis, 2004) and concludes that those themes discussed twenty five years ago are as relevant as ever today. The emphasis in government policy now lies in encouraging WP in HE, in other words ensuring higher educational opportunity for all social classes. There is evidence to suggest, which will be explored, that the cycle discussed above is about to be repeated with respect to the HE sector. Literature, which is reviewed in Chapter 2, explores ideas of both blaming the background of the student and is beginning to explore blaming the Universities.

Also relevant to this study is the history of adult education, perhaps the oldest form of WP, which is now 100 years old, in a formalised form, if its history is considered to start with the 1902 Education Act. This gave responsibility for adult education to the newly created LEA's and in 1903 the Workers Educational Association (WEA) was founded. Interestingly, many of the debates about the purpose of adult education echo those of WP. Should it be vocational as the 1902 act implied or should it be about non-vocational issues such as 'citizenship' which the 1919 Final Report of the Adult Education Committee concluded. Indeed, the report stated that even technical education should be liberalised as far as possible. However, Merricks (2001) suggests that liberal adult education has appealed only to the middle class, to women and the elderly.

There has been a continual struggle to produce a theory which bridges the gap between worthwhile learning for learning's sake and repayment for economic investment. The depression of the 20s and 30s saw a shift towards a politicised agenda for adult education which continued after World War II, however, since the 1970s a link has been made, which remains unbroken between education of the adult workforce and economic success of a country.

The extra mural courses run by Universities have always sat outside what was considered adult education and to this day (if they exist) they are not always part of the WP agenda of Universities. Not that huge numbers of students are involved just before the establishment of the Open University in 1969, which confused the issue still further, 7,957 students were enrolled in the UK. Funding was withdrawn from 1987 and by 1995 only award bearing courses received funding from HEFCE.

### 1.3 Definition of Terms

#### Widening Access/Widening Participation –

These terms are, in the context of HE, used interchangeably in recent literature although technically access refers to simply enabling people to get to or start HE, whereas participation refers to the continuing engagement after accessing HE. These terms are used extensively in recent literature related to the latest Government policies regarding HE to mean the attempt to engage people in HE who would not normally, historically, have engaged with HE. This is clearly a broad definition and it is common place for organisations attempting to widen access/participation to target certain groups such as ethnic minorities, mature women returners to the employment market, disabled people,

students from state schools, etc. In the case of Bournemouth University the target group has been given as those people, who come from the lower socio-economic groups (IIIM, IV & V) and from low participation neighbourhoods, as defined by their post codes. The post codes are those defined by HEFCE. Additionally, the University considers mature students aged over 25 years, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities as falling within the definition of WP. It should be noted that HEFCE only identify three indicators of access for young full-time entrants:

- the percentage of entrants from state schools or colleges
- the percentage of entrants from social classes IIIM, IV & V
- the percentage of entrants from low participation neighbourhoods

BU broadened its definition during academic year 2002/03 to - increase the diversity of the student mix to better reflect society. Events to publicise this change were held during week of March 17<sup>th</sup> culminating in Diversity Day on March 21<sup>st</sup> 2003.

#### Lifelong Learning/Lifelong Education –

These terms have been used and abused in much recent literature. The exact definition depends upon the perspective from which the concept is approached. What can be claimed as a common feature of any definition is the idea that the human being continues to learn new things throughout their life span. The learning that takes place is not necessarily the product of formal education, nor is it necessarily vocational. It is at this point that common ground begins to disintegrate. Clearly the recent government policies which have seen the establishment of the Learning and Skills Councils and education targets for different age groups within society, sees lifelong learning as being formal education, having a vocational focus to improve the economic productivity of the UK. Other groups, including many HE institutions and organisations such as National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE), see lifelong learning as encompassing formal education but not necessarily with a vocational focus. Yet, further groups see lifelong learning as not requiring formal education but is the sum total of life experience. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish between lifelong learning; lifelong education and lifelong training. Field & Leicester (2000:xvi) and Jarvis (2001:201) refer to the writing of Ilich who saw education as constraining and controlling but learning as liberating, however, Jarvis suggests such a clear divide is unrealistic. Teaching can be inspiring and in fact trying to learn without guidance can be very de-motivating due to its potential to inspire feelings of inability and inadequacy.

Field & Leicester (2000) suggest that both terms are used normatively because lifelong learning as a term which developed out of policy discourse is concerned with planned, purposeful, systematic learning, and carries a certain form of approval, is interchangeable with education. Although they acknowledge education is less likely to include non-formal and informal learning.

Aspin & Chapman (2000) attempt to pull together the various definitions of lifelong learning and suggest a pragmatic, problem-solving approach rather than an essentialist definition. They propose that the problems that lifelong learning is deemed to provide a solution to, by governments, which are to:

increase their economic potential, to make their political arrangements more equitable, just and inclusive, and to offer a greater range of avenues for self-improvement and personal development to all their citizens. (Aspin & Chapman:16)

form a complex interplay. Hence, a better educated workforce will contribute more to political debate and achieve a more rewarding life. This forms the basis of a hypothesis which they claim is sufficient to continue to travel across the ‘uncharted sea of learning’ as long as it is constantly critically evaluated and modified. While there is clearly some merit in the notion it is a rather too convenient and simplistic an argument, to what they acknowledge is a complex issue. Similarly their all encompassing concept of lifelong learning - starting with pre-school, moving through formal school education and post-compulsory education but encompassing semi-formal learning in the workplace, and informal learning through leisure and cultural activities - is convenient but does not really address the issues raised in their paper.

As can be seen above the debate has been further confused by the association of widening access /participation with lifelong learning in the policy literature. This begun in the Dearing, Fryer and Kennedy reports to be discussed in Chapter 2. Atkin (2000) sees Lifelong Learning as involving those beyond the age of 21 and sites it in a continuing education context. He regards this as including all adults and considers how far it reaches into all sectors of a rural community, thus clearly connecting lifelong learning with widening participation through a study based on Bourdieu’s habitus perspective. The view of lifelong learning as continuing education is particularly prevalent, and usually linked to consideration of choice about continuing education and

social class, gender and ethnicity (Hemsley-Brown, 1999; Gilborn, 1997; Tomlinson, 1997) – namely, the widening participation agenda.

Indeed, the relationship has now become so blurred that for many lifelong learning and widening participation are inseparable when in fact there are very clearly separate agendas. It is, for example, possible to achieve lifelong learning without widening participation by engaging those people who have already engaged with learning, of whatever form, to continue to do so throughout their life. Equally it is possible to widen participation without achieving any aspect of lifelong learning by enrolling higher numbers of young people (18-19 year olds) from recognised non-participation groups. There is an argument to suggest that these people will then continue to learn throughout their lives, that is, engage in lifelong learning, but this has not been proved as a causal relationship. Green & Preston (2001) argue that there are signs that policy-making is taking heed of the social impact of learning and point to quantitative studies in the UK and US which demonstrate correlations between learning and social aspects but are less conclusive regarding causality.

#### Culture and class –

Throughout this text the words culture and class are frequently used, therefore, a meaning in the context of this study is provided here for both terms, looking first at culture. The concept of culture begins with the ritualistic behaviours and ideas that characterise a group, its cultural capital. These are often the visual and audible manifestations of the underlying abstract elements that make the group work due to shared values or beliefs which either unite or divide the group. These are often grouped into three aspects: sociological, biological and practical (Archer *et al* 2003) The cues may include use of language, dress code, social behaviours and so forth. It is also important to acknowledge that the culture of a specific group is constantly evolving and does not remain constant over time and the definition of a specific group itself can be problematical.

Bourdieu (1990) used the term habitus to describe these types of ideas. Bourdieu defines habitus as those principles and procedures which are followed by the individual and then generate and organise social practices and representations (Bourdieu 1990:53). Bourdieu also notes that habitus ‘is always oriented towards practical functions’ (Bourdieu:52) and that the norms of the habitus are formed by social processes thus resulting in a class

habitus, upon which individuals base their individual habitus, which is only a slight variation. Bourdieu developed his theory on habitus after he undertook a number of ethnographic studies investigating social space, class tastes and lifestyles. He presented the results of his findings in *Distinction* (1986) in which he presented a series of diagrams which position the habitus of certain groups of people in two dimensional space. His theory provoked much criticism because it was claimed that it lacked empirical reality and was not generalizable. In *Practical Reason* he defends his theory presented in *Distinction* (1986) stating that

My entire scientific enterprise is based on the belief that the deepest logic of the social world can be grasped only if one plunges into the particularity of an empirical reality, historically located and dated but with the objective of constructing...an exemplary case in a finite world of possible configurations. (Bourdieu, 1998:2)

He also provides a succinct explanation of his diagram representing social space.

...in which I tried to represent social space, agents are distributed in the first dimension according to the overall volume of the different kinds of capital they possess, and in the second dimension according to the structure of their capital, that is, according to the relative weight of the different kinds of capital...in the total volume of their capital. (Bourdieu, 1998:7)

The discussion surrounding the work of Bourdieu is also exemplary of the debate over how social class relates to culture which is complex and disputed. Traditionally within education and sociology social class has been associated with modernist theories which define class as groups of people who share particular socio-economic characteristics which are objectively definable and unchanging (Crompton 1993 and Bradley 1996). Both neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian theorists, although different emphasise the inequalities present and regard education as essential in reinforcing social class distinctions, as opposed to Functionalist theorists who see it as a meritocratic sorting process. Whereas the 'class-culture paradigm' theorists (Byrne et al 1975) argue that social classes can be distinguished by their different cultures. As Archer et al (2003) point out this theory has been used by many of the widening participation initiatives which aim to raise aspiration and awareness of HE. They also point out that Williamson (1981) sees this as being problematic because it places blame for non-participation with the family or school of different groups of children, hence, echoing the history of school education recounted earlier in this chapter. Williamson also questions the class-cultural



explanation for non-participation as it does not explain why some people from the lower socio-economic groups do participate in HE.

There is also considerable difficulty in developing classification systems for social-class, such as those defined in section 1.1, which is based upon either occupation or demographic profiling. The initial problem when considering HE students is whether it is the parents' occupation or the students that should be used to define social-class. Then there is the problem that the demographic profiles which indicate patterns of occupancy in residential areas, where even an area of 500 people, can still be too broad to take account of considerable variation in social class, particularly in urban areas. Walkerdine *et al* (1999) also criticise both forms of classification because they contain assumptions about gender identities and the homogeneity of social class groups.

The postmodern and post-structuralist theories have developed since the 1970s challenge these ways of defining social class, considering that social 'reality' is not an objective fact but is socially and discursively constructed. Post-modernists also do not consider social class to be fixed but constantly changing and defined by multiple realities developed through interactions of individuals, groups, institutions and policies. It is undoubtedly the case that class structures have changed in the last 60 years (Bradley 1996), in particular, diversifying and individualising (Giddens 1991). However, Archer *et al* (2001) claim that critical theorists have forged a 'middle way' between the various theoretical divides in class research which encompasses lived meanings and patterns of inequality. Archer *et al* (2003:13) identify five main themes within postmodern/social constructionist approaches:

- shifting inequalities: the theorization of classed identities and inequalities as recursively linked and 'in process'; the role of HE institutions in the reproduction of unequal patterns of participation
- individualism and social class: the relationship between social class and dominant societal discourses, namely the 'hiding' of social-class identities and inequalities by the culture of individualism.
- risk, habitus and capital: the changing nature of social-class identities, characterized by patterns of consumption and taste.
- multiple identities: the inter-relationship of social-class with other social divisions, such as ethnicity and gender; the 'lived experience' of these identities and notions of agency and resistance.

- fuzzy definitions: the practical difficulties of defining and identifying social class within postmodern approaches.

Each of these themes has a relevance to this study and will be returned to throughout the data analysis. Thus within this study the stance that is taken is broadly in line with Archer et al (2003) that fuzzy definitions can be determined to illustrate that different social classes have different cultures. It is accepted that both these cultures and the definitions of each class are continually being deconstructed and reconstructed, hence they change over time. However, at a given point in time, both social class groupings and their respective cultures can be broadly defined, albeit with acknowledged difficulties surrounding the undertaking of this by either occupation or demographic profile. While it is acknowledged that class (usually defined in economic terms) and culture are not the same thing, they are inherently intertwined and therefore, throughout this study they are dealt with simultaneously. It is argued that it is possible to see them in terms of differential life chances and life experiences from which real patterns emerge.

There are, of course, cultures associated with groups other than socio-economic ones, the culture of the academy being an important one with respect to this study. Williamson acknowledges that academia has a culture, particularly defined in linguistic terms but believes this needs to be deconstructed to understand the inherent class inequalities.

To gain any understanding of a tradition of higher education....it is vital to go beyond the terms in which it understands itself. Conventional notions of ability, excellence, scholarship or 'the good mind' have to be relativized....questions of class cannot really be discussed in an atmosphere of disinterested objectivity for the questions themselves arise out of a larger political problematic. (Williamson, 1981:20)

There are a number of authors who clearly identify the existence and impact of academic culture (Reay *et al* 1999; Williamson, 1981) and in particular, Maguire *et al*:

The perceptions, distinction and choices of higher education institutions used and made by students play a part in reconstituting and reproducing the divisions and hierarchies in HE. It is in this way that they 'do' or embody social structures. In effect, this is social class 'in the head'. That is to say, cultural and social capital,

material constraints.....social perceptions and distinctions, and forms of self-exclusion...are all embedded in the processes of choice. (Maguire *et al*, 2000:7)

Thus academic culture is defined here as the knowledge of abstract elements which are specific to academics in a HE institution and in the case of this study a specific, named HE institution. There is a further complication when discussing academic culture which is that each subject has its own culture, attributes, and discourse.

#### 1.4 Paradigm and Assumptions

The study was based within the interpretative paradigm, starting with an observation, collecting data related to that observation, and then analysing the data to form an explanatory theory. The research explored the culture of the group in question, namely staff at Bournemouth University, thus the study were specific to one culture and not necessarily transferable or generalisable. The researcher was also involved in the study as an existing member of the academic community in this organisation. Thus the research was largely qualitative in nature, and focused on the ethnographic methodology.

The researcher, has first, analysed her own perceptions; prejudices and impact on the research process and then, taken account of this within the research findings. The researcher is considered to be pro-widening participation. However, a healthy scepticism related to the underlying purpose of the recent initiatives and the cost-benefit analysis is maintained. From the outset the researcher assumed that the attitudes of many staff to the widening participation agenda were discomfort, distrust or even disagreement. This generalised attitude may be exacerbated at Bournemouth University as it is currently very successfully targeting the market for vocational qualifications for the white middle classes. Thus, staff firstly, do not see the need to change and secondly, might be concerned about the potential adverse effects that widening participation might have on the current market.

The structure of the thesis reflects the actual research process undertaken during this study. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature related to widening participation, both in terms of the policy and implementation literature, which is sub-divided into three areas – philosophy of widening access/participation; the attitudes of staff and the approaches to change management. A number of themes are identified from this review, these are presented at the beginning of the chapter and highlighted throughout the

chapter as they arise from the literature under consideration. Subsequently, these themes are reconsidered during data analysis when they are compared to the themes which arose from the analysis of the data collected. The literature review culminates in the statement of the research questions, this study attempts to answer, namely ‘What are the attitudes of non-managerial staff at BU to non-traditional HE students?’ And a subsidiary question to this is: ‘Are these attitudes barriers to widening participation?’

Chapter 3 contains the rationale for, and explanation of, the research methodology that was used for this study and outlines the methods to be used for data collection, including the use of a two phased approach to data collection. The research methodology selected for this study was an applied ethnographic methodology. Chapter 4 presents the results from the data collected, indicating how the data was coded to determine themes arising from the data. The analysis of qualitative data is presented in a thematic form, initially discussing the common themes emerging from both the literature review and the data and then considering the themes which emerged from only the literature or the data. The analysis of quantitative data gathered from documentary evidence was used to support the findings derived from the qualitative data analysis.

Finally, the themes are drawn together in Chapter 5 to form a theory, derived from the work of Bourdieu, that positions HE staff and students in a cultural space which is defined by the volume of their cultural capital and their attitudes to education and economic capital. Their relative position in this space is used to explain the attitudes of HE staff to the widening participation agenda by providing an explanation of the problems they feel they currently experience in the form of a gap that has developed between students’ and staffs’ orientation to educational capital. A further conjecture is also presented, again based on the principles of cultural space regarding the relative positions of HE staff and WP students, along with recommendations for further study to test this conjecture through research.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

This study of the relevant literature is divided into sections. The policy literature is first considered and then literature regarding the implementation of that policy is reviewed in three areas - the philosophy of WP (A), the attitudes of academics (B) and approaches to change (C). A number of themes have been found to emerge from this review of the literature and these are presented here:

1. Reasons for the expansion of HE – is it for economic or social justice reasons and why the target of 50% participation in HE was determined?
2. Power relationships in policy making - what consultation was undertaken with stakeholders; such as WP candidates and Universities when establishing the policy?
3. Employment benefits – what are the effects of partaking in HE for WP candidates students?
4. Cultural gap - what consideration has been given to whether there is a cultural gap between the culture of Universities' and that of people from WP backgrounds, and how this gap could be closed if it exists?
5. Epistemology – what or whose knowledge is or should be accepted?
6. Curriculum models/structures – are the current models for HE appropriate? Is there a need for more inter-disciplinary courses, for example?
7. Delayed gratification – is there a trend towards the abandonment of education in favour of more instantly rewarding diversions.
8. Vocational v academic education.
9. Admissions criteria.
10. Declining standards.
11. HE culture - is it enacted rather than constructed and are academics passive and reactive in response to policy change?
12. Institutional funding and student finance.

Throughout this literature review these themes are indicated in footnotes as they emerge, thus clearly evidencing the themes against the literature. These themes are also used in the thematic analysis of the data presented in Chapter 4.

## 2.1 Policy Literature

The expansion of HE and the change that this entails, along with the idea of lifelong learning, is not a new phenomena. It can, however, be considered to start in modern HE with the Robbins report of 1963 (Robbins, 1963). There have been subsequent reports that stimulated further change including The White Paper, Meeting the Challenge (DES, 1987) and the 1991 White Paper, Higher Education: a new framework (DES, 1991) culminating in the Dearing and Fryer reports of 1997 (Dearing, 1997, Fryer, 1997). Although the effect of all these reports was to increase and widen access to HE it was not until Dearing that the emphasis was put upon increasing numbers of people entering HE from the lower socio-economic groups. However, the National Committee on Education report (1993) discussed many of the issues that were subsequently taken up in the following papers and reports. Issues such as: the funding of HE; the need to widen participation in HE; the link between economic success and higher education; the need to give status to HE teaching; the need for diversity in HE; the problems associated with widening participation to those people who do not see the point of education and suggests that 33% of the school leaving population will have had some form of HE experience by 2000. This of course, has now been achieved and indeed exceeded.

However, the percentage of those entering HE from socio-economic groups IIIM, IV and V has remained virtually static and arguably fallen since the 1960s. The National Committee on Education report, 1993 quotes the UCCA/PCAS statistics for 1992 for participation in HE by social class, as being 58% for classes I & II, and a further 23% from classes III A&B. Interestingly, mention is also made that

minority groups with a more disadvantaged class profile than whites produce much larger proportion of applicants

(The National Committee on Education report, 1993:295)

which is an eerie echo of the *Times Higher Education Supplement* article (Baty, 2002) that presents the findings of a report that concludes that white young men are the key excluded group from higher education. This is further supported by the National Audit Office report – Widening Participation in Higher Education in England (2002) which identifies the four groups with historically low participation in higher education as

women, social classes IIIM, IV & V, ethnic minorities and people declaring disabilities. Of these four groups the only one not to see increased participation in higher education between 1994/5 and 1999/2000 was people from social classes IIIM, IV & V. Field (Wojtas, 2002) further reinforces this point, claiming that in 1991 55% of children from professional background went into higher education, 36% from intermediate groups, 22% from skilled non-manual and 11% from skilled manual backgrounds. In 2000 the figures are 76% among professional groups, 48% from intermediate groups, 33% from skilled non-manual and 19% from skilled worker families. Thus the proportions remain virtually static.

The Dearing and Fryer Reports introduced widening participation in the context of Lifelong Learning, a move which has lead to much confusion of the two concepts which has already been discussed in Section 1.2. At publication both reports were considered to contain some visionary ideas and recommendations which, in the case of the Fryer Report have virtually all now been implemented. The recommendations of the Dearing report have not received such widespread implementation, although major ones such as student fees are now a familiar part of HE.

Tight (1998b) offers a critic of these two reports, the Kennedy Report which deals with Widening Participation in Further Education and the consultative paper, The Learning Age (DfEE, 1998). As Tight points out, the Fryer, Dearing and Kennedy reports all suggest that widening participation has and will contribute to a learning society, with Fryer pointing out that the key problem with developing a learning society is non and under-participation

there still exists a deep 'learning divide' in our society. On one side of the divide stand those who have already obtained qualifications and who carry on with an active involvement in learning throughout their lives, both in work and beyond...On the other side stands the majority, including those who have little to show by way of formal qualification and achievement...Such a divide is incompatible with a culture of lifelong learning for all. (Fryer, 1997:3-4)

Thus clearly establishing a link between widening participation and lifelong learning because to establish a learning society where everybody learns throughout their lives requires just that - 'everybody' to participate, not just the top socio-economic groups in society. Whilst not everyone must participate in higher level education a learning society surely needs representation from all sectors of society at all levels of learning.

Tight offers some criticisms, the first, related to the notion that lifelong learning must have a vocational focus<sup>1</sup> to improve the economy, is worthy of consideration. He asks where the evidence is to support the belief in the critical importance of lifelong learning for the economy. Presumably this concept is based on a simplified human capital theory but there is little literature that expands on and proves this relationship, albeit, it would appear a logically obvious relationship. This issue will be discussed further later in the paper when considering the 1999 White Paper (DfEE, 1999). His second criticism is particularly pertinent to this paper, in that he points out that all the reports having identified target groups for non-participation then lay the blame with the non-participants. This can be related to the early stages in the sociology of school education. His suggestion that some common ground needs to be established between policy-makers, providers and non-participants is an important concept to consider. Lack of consultation with providers may have lead academics to be reticent with support for widening participation (Trow, 1998) and lack of consultation<sup>2</sup> with non-participants may mean that the methods being used for widening participation are inappropriate and therefore doomed to fail. Kogan (1999) also makes this point.

The 1990s saw a plethora of literature discussing the various implications of Lifelong Learning for HE as well as trying to define what was meant by Lifelong Learning. The British government began to articulate their current view in 1996 and 1997 (DfEE, 1996, 1997) and broadened the view in 1998 (DfEE, 1998). Ball (1999) reflects that both the 1998 Green Paper and the Fryer Report miss the point when they focus on the post-compulsory sector to deliver inclusivity. He claims the school system is not geared to achieving this. The White paper *Learning to Succeed: a New Framework for Post-16 Learning* (DfEE, 1999) was the final paper in this long line. The view articulated is one that learning or education is good for you and that lifelong learning should be vocational to improve the economic performance of the UK<sup>3</sup>. Although, interestingly, the White Paper does contain a proposal to abolish the 'awkward and artificial distinction' between vocational and non-vocational courses (DfEE, 1999:48).

Coffield (2000) evaluates the last of the government publications, the 1999 White Paper. Coffield like so many of the authors in this literature review criticises the over-reliance on learning and up-skilling to improve the economy<sup>4</sup> and highlights the Treasury report (1998) on productivity which sets out four major weaknesses of the British economy of

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<sup>1</sup> Theme 1 – Reasons for the expansion of HE

<sup>2</sup> Theme 2 – Power relationships in policy making

<sup>3</sup> Theme 1 - Reasons for the expansion of HE

<sup>4</sup> Theme 1 – Reasons for the expansion of HE



which skills is only one. The other points from Coffield's eight criticisms of the White Paper that are of interest here are the lack of a model of change and consultation with the teaching professions<sup>5</sup> and that shortage of jobs, and appropriate jobs are the reason for unemployment, not lack of qualifications<sup>6</sup>. Coffield quotes from a project by the Learning Society Programme (of which he is a member) which states that three out of ten graduates in 1997 were in jobs for which a degree was not an entry qualification. He says there is a significant mis-match between demand and supply of qualifications. Of course, there is a counter argument to this, which has been well rehearsed, that you do the job better, more efficiently and so forth, if you are better qualified. Further research from the Learning Society quoted by Coffield confirms the views expressed in the Fryer report that the largest barrier to participation by those who don't participate is that they don't see education and training as appropriate for them. This will require a cultural change to overcome. The National Audit Office report (2002) identifies the following obstacles to participation:

- early disengagement from education
- differing educational opportunities prior to higher education (a point made by Ball 1999 as discussed earlier)
- concerns about completing and benefiting from higher education
- problems in securing financial support

Stuart also makes an important point about cultural change, which echoes Bernstein (1971) to some extent, that:

Successful participation does require the learning of a different culture and language which does not sit easily with previously learnt knowledge<sup>7</sup>. I am, if I am owning up, constantly aware that there are many parts of myself that I hide from the academy and the middle-class English world that I inhabit.

(Stuart, 2000:29)

Malcolm in a personal account of her own entry into HE from a 'sink estate' contends that although she achieved her academic qualifications she never felt a member of the University. Her statement 'Habitus is something I understood long before I came across Bourdieu.' (Malcolm, 2000:14) confirming that habitus is real and that change is required to fit into the HE environment if you enter it from a non-traditional background. The concept of habitus as defined by Bourdieu was discussed in Chapter 1. Hence, as HE

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<sup>5</sup> Theme 2 – Power relationships in policy making

<sup>6</sup> Theme 3 – Employment benefits

<sup>7</sup> Theme 4 – Cultural gap

stands at the moment participation is only offered at the expense of rejecting one's existing culture and knowledge set if that does not conform to the academe. This also introduces the question of who says what knowledge is valid and 'accepted'.

The most recent in a long line of government policy publications regarding Higher Education is the 2003 White Paper –The Future of Higher Education (DfES, 2003). This places a continuing importance on widening participation but also makes a clear distinction between expanding higher education (Chapter 5) and achieving Fair Access (Chapter 6), that is, widening participation to include all sectors of society. It clarifies the situation regarding expansion, placing this within sub-degrees, usually Foundation Degrees, rather than honours degrees. In a subsequent briefing by Charles Clark, Education Secretary it was clearly stated that:

...the government's previous top-priority target of getting 50 per cent of 18-30 year olds into university was less important to him than ensuring 'a much better class basis' in the 43 per cent currently attending.

(*THES*, 10/01/03:18)

It also introduces the Access Regulator or Office for Fair Access (OFFA) as it subsequently became known, to ensure that Universities are inclusive in their admissions policies if they want to charge top-up fees. This will be achieved through a five year agreement that must be signed by the HEI and Office for Fair Access. The white paper also recognises the financial problems of students from lower socio-economic groups and proposes a limited revival of the maintenance grant for students from the poorest families<sup>8</sup>.

However, it is worth noting that as Griffin (2000) contends lifelong learning in its widest definition cannot be described as a policy or even a strategy as the government has no means of implementing lifelong learning except within the formal education arena, that is lifelong education. This of course, returns to the difficulties with the various definitions of lifelong learning and its confusion with WP that were discussed in Chapter 1. This same problem does not, of course, apply to widening participation as can be seen below in the discussion of the role of the HEFCE as providing a mechanism to attempt to ensure that the WP policy is implemented.

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<sup>8</sup> Theme 12 – Institutional funding and student finance

The Higher Education Funding Council for England has provided the mechanism to force the higher education sector to implement the government's policy regarding widening participation. HEFCE required institutions to set out their strategy for widening participation in Report 99/33 (1999) and set out the funding structure for widening participation in Report 00/35 (2000). These documents leave little room for doubt that funding will be used as a weapon to ensure the implementation of the widening participation policy. Institutions have no choice but to produce institutional level policies and strategies for widening participation or risk losing premium funding as well as not obtaining project funding. This has been further strengthened by the White Paper's introduction of the Access Regulator who will judge whether an HEI should receive and then regulate the increased expenditure on WP students.

The criticism that can be applied to all of the policy literature is that the policy makers appear to have given very little thought, and carried out no research, as to the effect successful implementation of these policies would have. Trow makes this point effectively,

I have no sense that much effort was spent on the difficult business of trying to assess whether the desired outcomes might be achieved differently and more effectively, and what the unintended and unwanted outcomes of the new policy might be<sup>9</sup>.

(Trow, 1998:111-129)

There is little vision or real understanding of how dramatically society would change if 50% of the population were educated to degree level and everybody was engaged in lifelong learning. This, of course, echoes the concerns raised by Young (1961) regarding the consequences of meritocracy in the context of general education discussed in Chapter 1.

It is worth pausing to note at this point the International debate on WP and lifelong learning because it is not just a UK phenomenon. Countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, and Germany, with very different cultural systems to England are also engaged in WP. Indeed, UNESCO has a Lifelong Education Unit and we have recently had the European Year of Lifelong Learning. Aspin & Chapman (2000) grapple with the meaning and varied definitions of the term Lifelong Learning in their paper Lifelong learning: concepts and conceptions from an Australian perspective which echoes much

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<sup>9</sup> Theme 1 – Reasons for the expansion of HE

of the debate in the UK. However, the issues are rather different in Germany, France and the USA where there is a different type of widening participation policy which includes craft and academic education with equal value (Robertson, 2002). This highlights one of the apparent problems with HE in the UK which appears only to value academic higher level study to the detriment of high craft or practical studies. Although it should be noted that applications to plumbing courses have dramatically increased for academic year 03/04 due to high levels of media coverage highlighting the fact that plumbers can earn more than many graduates who cannot find graduate level employment.

## 2.2 Implementation Literature

The current literature can be divided into the three themes that the study aims to explore.

### A Philosophy of Widening Access/Participation

There are a number of sides to the current debate about what widening access/participation is and what it is for. Is it to obtain a better skilled workforce as Wolf (2000) and Francis (1999) suggest is the emphasis given by current government policy, or is it more a question of education for education's sake, the traditional view of liberal education/continuing education programmes, as Titmus (1999) suggests it should be? Do the potential participants see it as, a cost-effect calculation, a route solely to promotion, a better job as Williamson suggests is the current trend (Williamson, 1998) or do they believe there is value in learning for itself<sup>10</sup>? Archer (2002) also points out that HE is not as good an investment for working class students as it is for middle class ones. This is referring to the fact that they do not get such good jobs or earn as much money. The theme of variation in salaries depending upon the social class of the graduate is also picked up by Aston (2003). Dearing, writing in response to the white paper, while making the point that as higher education is usually a good investment graduates should help 'fill the funding hole for universities', acknowledges that 'not all will reap much of an economic dividend' (Dearing, 2003:12) and suggests capping repayments in terms of earnings thresholds and length of time. This is a particularly important debate as it touches on the ethical debate regarding the right of individuals to choose their lifestyles and so forth. It also perhaps begins to acknowledge that there is a complex cost, benefit analysis that underlies many people's decision to enter HE or not. Utley follows this debate by pointing out that lifelong learning can be interpreted as a form of social

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<sup>10</sup> Theme 1 - Reasons for the expansion of HE

engineering by making participation in learning as something which ‘divides the worthy from the unworthy’ (Utley, 2001:4).

Certainly human capital theory, which developed in the 1960s and 1970s, is the theory that underpins the side of the argument that links learning with economic success.

However, a number of criticisms have emerged of this theory, mainly emanating from a post-modern perspective, Tight (1998b) has already been discussed. As has the different ideas of the relationship between education and the economy prevalent in Europe and the USA. Wolf (2002) puts forward a powerful argument against there being a causal link between economic success and education and indeed, a powerful argument against 50% participation target for HE, although not against WP in the context of the most able from all classes in society being able to access HE. As Wolf says ‘education is a positional good’ (Wolf, 2002 :251) it is not about acquiring skills in an absolute sense, hence, more education for everyone simply shifts the segmentation higher up the education ladder. Wolf also echoes many of the debates related to the social inclusiveness or otherwise of secondary education (discussed in Chapter 1) through the twentieth century, concluding similarly that there are too many and complex issues to just expect the ‘able’ of socio-economic groups IV & V to enter HE because the door is now open.

Mannion, Dockerell and Sankey (1998) offer a critique of the ideology of emancipation (as they term it) using post-modern and post-structuralist theories. They question basic premises on which greater participation is based, such as: the assumption that Universities have got the right approach to knowledge<sup>11</sup>; that the collaborative discourse ideas of Habermas based on rational and ethical decision-making are no longer enough and they question whether a market-orientated University can still ‘express an ideologically-free perspective on knowledge.’ They suggest, the radical idea, that higher education should move from ‘transmission of a ‘body’ of knowledge’ to a non-foundational interrogation of how knowledge is transmitted’ (Mannion, Dockerell & Sankey, 1998:184) as this would equip learners to cope with the continual change of discourses. Although the paper transpires to be largely a critique of Barnett (1990 & 1997) they concur with Barnett regarding the criticism of Universities for not providing the inter-disciplinary learning opportunities that are needed to answer real problems and therefore be attractive to a wider audience<sup>12</sup>. This could be seen to echo the work of Young (1971) discussed in the introduction. Young argued that educational knowledge,

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<sup>11</sup> Theme 5 – Epistemology – what or whose knowledge is or should be accepted?

<sup>12</sup> Theme 6 – Curriculum models/structures

that is, the school curriculum, and the way in which it is controlled is socially constructed and was therefore a reflection of certain political interests. It can be argued that Tight and Mannion, Dockerell and Sankey are also suggesting that university curriculum is similarly socially constructed and this is to the detriment of widening participation. While it is undeniable that any educational curriculum is a social construct, there is a more complex debate as to whether it is the habitus or the knowledge associated with that curriculum that is the social construct. In many subject areas, for example, engineering, the knowledge is derived from empirical evidence and therefore, it is difficult to see this as a social construct of the middle classes (or any other section of society for that matter) with their own self interest in mind.

Wain (2000) also firmly cites himself within a post-modern philosophy, although he acknowledges the criticisms of post-modernism articulated by Habermas (1985) that post-modernism offers two alternatives: 'ethical nihilism and political anarchy or collusion with New Right thinking and politics' (Wain, 2000:45). Wain expresses concerns about the extent to which education, and in particular adult education, is now driven by market forces, hence, encouraging a focus on vocational qualifications, with non-vocational learning being consigned to leisure activities and private investment<sup>13</sup>. This change Wain contends is leading to a growing, not shrinking, learning divide where enterprising, educated and well-resourced individuals engage in personal, independent learning in response to ambitions and desires. Whereas, the dependent, poor- low-resourced are alienated by the growing use of technology and are denied support for non-vocational learning which might allow them access to the learning spiral. Wain also subscribes to Baudrillard's (1983) view that the masses in between these two extremes have abandoned education all together in favour of spectacle<sup>14</sup>. Not a very encouraging view of a policy that is attempting to increase participation in education.

At the moment there is a polarisation between the two views set out above, however, Tight (1998a) suggests that this divide needs to be bridged. He suggests that the bridge may be formed by the use of accreditation of prior learning; the concept of progression from leisure or return to learning courses to credit bearing courses and the concept of participation in an interested society leading to a more rounded, satisfied and productive individual. Tight does point out that this area of linking informal learning to formal learning is under-researched. While it is difficult to argue with the sentiment Tight

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<sup>13</sup> Theme 8 – Vocational v academic education

<sup>14</sup> Theme 7 – Delayed gratification

expresses his proposal must be subject to criticism regarding an over-simplification and naivete regarding the practical barriers to such a progression concept, not least regarding funding and standards and determining an alternative basis for judging knowledge claims.

## B The Attitudes of Academics

Very little of the academic literature related to lifelong learning and widening participation actually deals with the specific issue this study seeks to address, namely, the determination of the attitudes within HE to this agenda and the approaches used in changing those attitudes if necessary.

A relatively rich source of anti-widening participation attitude can be found in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (THES), albeit sometimes opinionated and not necessarily defensible with an evidence base. Wolf asks some of the essential questions, such as who is going to keep the streets and cities clean and fill the low-skilled but essential jobs. She also questions whether 50% participation of those under 30 by 2005 is the right number, particularly when there will not be jobs for them<sup>15</sup>. (Wolf, 2000). Of course, this echoes one of Coffield's criticisms of the 1999 White Paper discussed in Section 2.1.

Also expressing concern about the appropriateness of doing a degree for so many was Ruth Lea representing the Institute of Directors. She points out that the problem for many firms is the shortage of craft skills not graduates<sup>16</sup> and that 'there is evidence to show that some groups of graduates actually earn less than they would have done if they had gone into work at 18' (Lea, 2002:14). There is, a growing band of concern about the relationship between academic and vocational education which is fuelling a number of questions<sup>17</sup> over whether 50% participation in HE is the right figure, including a concern about this target effectively downgrading all other forms of post-16 education, (Burt, 2002). This effectively means a three tier system where the top two thirds undertake some form of HE, albeit this may be through a 'work-based' route, while the bottom third, who are 'in danger of social exclusion', have a non-advanced further education. These will fill the 30% of jobs which require no formal qualifications and become the 'failing boys' as Chris Woodhead has called them (Ainley, 2002).

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<sup>15</sup> Theme 3 – Employment benefits

<sup>16</sup> Theme 3 – Employment benefits

<sup>17</sup> Theme 8 – Vocational v academic education

Further issues with WP revolve around the problem of poor educational backgrounds, indeed the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education set up by Universities UK and the Association of Commonwealth Universities see it as a bigger problem than tuition fees for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds<sup>18</sup>. Tony Blair has stated in the House of Commons that improving school standards is the ‘absolute key’ to getting students from all backgrounds into university. After all, as has been stated earlier, only 25% of university entrants (2000/01) were from working class families yet they make up 40% of the UK population. Bunting reports that David Miliband the Minister of State for school standards admitted,

We continue to have one of the greatest divides in education in the industrialised world, with socio-economic attainment gap evident in children as young as 22 months. (Bunting, 2003:18)

This continues and increases as a child enters secondary education with 69% of pupils from professional families getting five good GCSE’s, falling to 61% for non-manual, 45% for skilled manual, 37% for semi-skilled manual and 30% for unskilled families. These statistics are disputed by Curtin (2003) who claims that if the social structure of the student body is compared with that of the population at large then the lower social classes in the student body represent a larger proportion of their source population than ever before. He also claims that the proportion of students from the lowest three socio-economic groups is rising while their home households proportion of the total population is declining. Additionally, Curtin disputes that young people from professional backgrounds are five time more likely to enter HE than those from unskilled backgrounds, saying that the proportion of professionals in the whole population is also five times larger than the proportion of unskilled in the whole population.

Meanwhile, HE Minister Margaret Hodge is of the opinion that Universities have accepted the principle of WP but have not produced the results in practice. In part acknowledging this is due to a lack of funding for HE but also citing the ‘Paving the Way’ survey which reveals a continuing reliance of GCSE and A level results in admissions decisions<sup>19</sup> (Thomson & Tysome, 2002). However, the Times Higher Education Supplement editorial suggests, in response to the comments by Hodge, that the problem is the huge numbers who drop out of school at 16/17 years old, not the admissions criteria, as admitted by Blair, cited above. Indeed, there are a number of on-

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<sup>18</sup> Theme 12 – Institutional funding and student finance

<sup>19</sup> Theme 9 – Admissions criteria



going studies looking at alternative admissions criteria to A levels, these include psychological tests; psychometric test; interviews and putting more emphasis on personal statements and references, which are likely to benefit WP students lacking 'conventional' qualifications but with the potential for higher level study (Swain, 2002). The report, *Fair Enough?*, published by Universities UK (2003) attempted to identify objective criteria that were related to academic success in an attempt to identify those who have the ability or potential to succeed but due to their background do not possess 'normal' qualifications demonstrating this. The project identified four criteria as being linked to success: self organised; works well independently; motivated to learn and interested in subject area. The challenge now is to develop techniques to determine the presence of these criteria. Connor, (2003) as a member of the *Fair Enough?* project team, argues that the admissions policy of many universities continues to be based upon little more than A level results and lacks transparency and objectivity.

There is evidence that some universities are now looking at other admissions criteria, for example, Goddard (2003) reports upon a new scheme by Birmingham University to give a lower offer to state school pupils if they complete a module called foundation of learning and information skills. Indeed, in the early months of 2003 the issue of admissions criteria became the focus of considerable media attention and debate when a number of universities, Nottingham, Bristol and Warwick among them began to give conditional offers of places on lower grades to state school pupils than public school pupils (Guardian, March 2003). The issue of the equivalence of prior educational experience is raised if qualifications other than A levels are to be considered as part of admissions criteria. Murray (2003), Archer *et al* (2003) and Allen (2001) all highlight the gulf in experience between further education and higher education. In particular, the difficulties faced by students entering higher education from further education, pointing out in many cases just how ill prepared both academically and culturally students are leaving further education for higher education.

What research literature there is related to widening participation is in favour of the concept albeit many allude to the different attitudes found in their colleagues. For example in paper number 2, King writes:

Throughout the institution, as with many others, there was a feeling of suspicion about the process, a worry that these changes would bring about a decline in standards and that, relatively newly established as a degree providing institution,

we would ‘slip-back’ into being ‘further education’ if we had too much contact or too many non-traditional students. (Slowey, 1995:46)<sup>20</sup>.

The difficulty with King and the other authors in this book is that they are personal accounts and thus essentially anecdotal, albeit they do not pretend to be otherwise.

### C The Approaches to Change Management

An important study that draws together much of the literature on the attitudes of academics to change, albeit with the focus on the curriculum, which was the prevalent policy change at the time is by Trowler (1997). Trowler considers a number of studies in the post-modernist philosophy, and suggests that the predominant model for these studies in organisational and professional culture in HE is the enacted, as opposed to the constructed. He points out that this seems strange given that academics have considerable resources at their disposal to effect action. He criticises many of the studies for lack of empirical data and a passive model of academics which sees a priority given to the epistemological characteristics of disciplines. Trowler is of the opinion that many of the studies, even those from managerialist or Fordist viewpoint ‘adopt an under-theorised, over-socialised’ (Trowler, 1997:303) concept of academics. He suggests that studies of the attitudes of academics need to take account of the organisational, cultural and ideological characteristics of the context. Trowler uses an ethnographic methodology for his single case study at NewU, however, there is no information, beyond the research questions regarding the exact methodology or the data collection and analysis techniques employed (although it does state that a full account can be found in Trowler 1998). The first of three research questions is of particular interest, ‘What are the patterns in academics’ attitudes to change in higher education, particularly ‘massification’ in a context of relative resource decline and the curriculum developments linked to the credit framework?’ Clearly, this question has strong links with the research area of this study, suggesting that this study can be considered part of a continuum of research.

Trowler suggests that academics fall into one of four response types to change: swimming, reconstruction, coping or sinking<sup>21</sup>. He positions this analysis within four contexts: educational ideology, discipline epistemology, cultural traffic and profitability to the individual academic. These contexts are interesting and may have some validity which will be worth while considering for use within this study.

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<sup>20</sup> Theme 10 – Declining standards

<sup>21</sup> Theme 11 – HE culture

It is also interesting to note that discussion of academics' attitudes to the changing nature of HE and, in particular, to increasing numbers of students in HE has a long history. Ross notes that in a 1953 report of the University Grants Committee comments were made that were almost colonialist in tone:

The presence in the universities of relatively large numbers of students who lack the advantage of a cultural home background has forced upon the universities a number of problems of teaching and the organization of university life.

And

...now more staff are drawn from the same social strata of society as the students there were now lecturers available who could offer these students' a more sympathetic understanding of their difficulties.

(Archer *et al*, 2003:31)

Of course there is the other side to this argument, it is not just the academics who have attitudes but the people from WP backgrounds. The study by Archer et al (2003) focuses on the attitudes associated with social class and identifies 5 groups of explanations as to why people from C1, C2, D & E do not participate in HE:

working class young people lack information about higher education opportunities

working class young people may not feel that higher education has sufficient value to be worth the time and effort (three sub-themes- hierarchy of uni, retention, employment).

working class young people may lack the necessary normal entry qualifications

the financial commitment to study may be seen as too great, too risky or insufficiently understood

some may perceive higher education as a threat to their class identity.

(Archer *et al*, 2003:93-94)

The study was conducted using focus groups of both participants and non-participants in HE, from social classes C1-E, and a nationwide questionnaire survey with the same section of the population, therefore, it neatly complements studies into the attitudes of academics. Importantly, many of the issues raised by the participants in the study and grouped under these 5 headings reflect common themes running throughout the literature

reviewed here. In particular, these clearly link with the 4 criteria set out in the National Audit Office report (2002) discussed earlier. The findings from the qualitative data derived from the focus groups are particularly valuable providing rich data about attitudes of this section of the population.

Pritchard and Wilmott's (1996) empirical study deals with University managers and their attitudes to implementing change but notes that data is lacking on the positions of rank and file academics. Many other studies also focus on senior academics (Weil, 1994; Miller, 1995; Slowey 1995). Selway (1995) does examine the effects of 'massification' of HE on academics below management level at the University of Portsmouth, but again concludes that academics are passive and reactive.

Slowey (1995) draws together common themes from the personal accounts of various academics to implementing change which include: the need to have a stimulus for change; the need to outline the costs and benefits to the individual; to lead by example; to be aware of being viewed as poacher turned gatekeeper; the need to persuade; to build on those people who believe in the change. A more recent report and discussion which summarises many of the barriers associated with WP and the changes that need to take place is on the Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education's (ILTHE) Symposium on WP and promoting student retention. Highlighting the now familiar issues of family wealth, aspiration raising, student support and retention and employment on graduation.

Rothblatt has noted that we are 'inundated with information about nearly every aspect of higher education, (but) we lack sustained discussion of the changing inner culture of universities' (Rothblatt, 1996:18). While Trowler (1997), discussed above, began to fill this gap, albeit still in the context of changes to curriculum, there has been little since.

### 2.3 Problem Definition

An analysis of the literature has show that there are clearly a number of problems which are raised by the literature which could form the basis of numerous research questions. These problems are summarised below and it is from this large number of possible research areas that the specific research questions outlined at the end of this section were selected.

- How the alienation of students entering a culture with which they are not familiar is addressed? (Murray, 2003; Archer *et al*, 2003; Allen , 2001; Malcolm,2000)
- Is the widening participation objective, as set by HEFCE, of greater numbers of students entering HE from lower-socio-economic groups being achieved? (Connor, 2003; Curtin, 2003; Bunting, 2003, Ainley, 2002)
- What are the aspirations of those targeted students and do they align with governments' vocational agenda? (Wain, 2000; Archer *et al*, 2003)
- Are there appropriate jobs for increased numbers of graduates? (Lea, 2002; Wolf, 2000, Coffield, 2000)
- What are the patterns in academics' attitudes to change in higher education, particularly 'massification'? (Rothblatt, 1996; Trowler, 1997; Selway, 1995)
- Is the curricula in HE a barrier to WP and is it appropriate to the world of today? (Barnett, 1990 & 1997; Titmus, 1999; Williamson, 1998)
- Do the targeted WP audience feel education is relevant to them or is 'spectacle' their interest? (Wain, 2000)
- Is the increased use of technology in education a barrier to WP? (Wain, 2000)

These problems should be seen in the context of the following general issues that have emerged from the literature review:

- That widening participation has now been so confused with lifelong learning as to be indistinguishable while not being the same thing at all. (Fryer, 1997; Tight, 1998)
- That careful consideration must be given to what can actually be considered a policy. (Griffin, 2000)
- That it is essential to truly understand why a policy is being made and understand the implications of the successful implementation of that policy. (Trow, 1998; Young, 1961)
- That Higher Education rarely turns its research upon itself and therefore the effect of these policies are not well understood, nor is the best means of implementing them. (Rothblatt, 1996)

The problems set out in this section can be considered potential barriers to WP and some can be related to the changing, or otherwise, inner culture of academia, which might be a barrier, in itself, to WP. Of course, the policy of WP, if it is to be embraced, demands change of this inner culture in any case. The research problem to be considered by this study develops the work of Rothblatt (1996) and Trowler (1997) by looking at this changing inner culture of Universities, specifically in the context of the WP policy. It also complements the work of Archer et al (2003). Depending on how or, indeed, whether this culture is changing will impact upon issues such as: the alienation of students; the use of technology and the appropriateness of curricula. Much of this is determined by the attitudes of the staff of HEI's who make up that culture, given an enacted view of the nature of culture is taken. Additionally, those attitudes are likely to be influenced by views on vocational education, massification of HE, the perceived opportunities for graduates and so on. Thus, the key problem that needs to be addressed is to determine what those attitudes are, as they are key to the culture of academia and to whether this is a barrier to WP.

Hence, the main research question that this study will attempt to answer is:

‘What are the attitudes of non-managerial staff at BU to non-traditional HE students?’

A subsidiary question to this is:

‘Are these attitudes barriers to widening participation?’

Thus, the twelve themes summarised at the outset of this chapter have emerged through this exploration of the literature. The themes represent my interpretation of the key elements in the field of study. These will be used to frame the data analysis in Chapter 4.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Questions**

The research problem that was considered by this study came out of the literature review and will further understanding of the changing academic culture, albeit related to a specific area of change in HE. As articulated in the literature review the main research question that this study answered addressed was:

What are the attitudes of non-managerial academic staff at Bournemouth University to non-traditional HE students?

A subsidiary question to this was:

Are these attitudes barriers to widening participation?

### **3.2 Research Design**

The use of various methods for undertaking studies within the sociology of education has echoed that generally seen in the social sciences, with the early studies largely using quantitative methods such as surveys and statistical analysis of cohort data. In the late 1960s when the focus moved to the study of the school environment case studies were produced using participant observation techniques. Thus there was a move away from structural functionalism to interactionism. This theoretical basis changed again in the mid 1970s to a structuralist neo-Marxism, however, certainly in the work of Sharp and Green methods remained similar with a detailed ethnographic account being produced.

Some of the papers discussed in the literature review take a post-modernist or post-structuralist view in studying WP. However, the standpoint adopted for this study was more pragmatic. The basic premise of the philosophy, that there is merit in workable and practical ideas, was at the heart of this research which sought to determine factual information from experience and then recommend a course of action. The philosophy of pragmatism can take a number of paths, however, the construction produced by Dewey known as Instrumentalism is the most useful in the context of this study and will form the basis of the approach that will be taken in this study. This type of pragmatism can be seen as a unifying or mediating philosophy which tries to link science and religion, speculative thought and analysis, and knowledge and action. Most importantly to this study is the attempt to weld theory and practice and hold a holistic view of the problems posed by human life.

All discussions had at their heart considerations of the validity, reliability and generalizability of the method in question, as well as considering ethical difficulties. However, these three standards are those associated with quantitative methods, therefore as this study used qualitative methods, more generally, the term validity is better replaced with credibility. Essentially both are attempting to ensure that the results are true, notwithstanding the issues raised by the post-modern philosophy that the concept of truth itself is problematical – whose truth, when was it true, and so forth? This is, however, outside the scope of the discussion in this thesis.

Data collection was considered credible if:

- the researcher was confident that themes and examples were repeated instead of extending, that is evidencing prolonged and substantial engagement with the topic area.
- the findings rang true and were agreed by the participants
- the findings were discussed with and accepted by peers
- the working hypothesis was revised to accommodate cases that did not fit, however, some cases were exceptions
- several data collection methods were used to check information thus providing for triangulation.

These concepts are derived from Cohen & Manion (1998).

Likewise the term reliability is better replaced with dependability. Where dependability considers issues such as is the person providing the data genuine, or do they have ulterior motives; was the person in a position to have the information sought and can another researcher follow the same steps. The data collected was considered dependable if a dependability audit to track changes and a publicly documentable record of the change process was clearly identifiable (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Finally, generalizability cannot be achieved in qualitative research in the same ways as it can in quantitative research, if for no other reason than the purpose of qualitative research is to understand, often immeasurable, aspects that relate to a specific group of people in a specific context. Therefore, the results from the research cannot be generalized to another group of people in another context. However, the findings of qualitative research can be considered to be transferable if thick description allows the



reader to determine if the results may direct researchers investigating the same research questions on other groups of people in similar contexts.

In line with many of the studies into the sociology of education an applied ethnographic methodology was selected. This tradition is seen to be continued in the more recent research of Trowler (1998), where he uses a research methodology based on ethnography. The rationale for this selection is that ethnography enables a better understanding of the beliefs, motivations and behaviours of its subjects than by using any other method (Hammersley, 1992). In particular, applied ethnography, as defined by Chambers is particularly appropriate as he says it:

helps people make decisions and is generally directed toward informing others of the possible consequences of policy options or programs of directed change.  
(Chambers, 2000:851)

Ethnography is a well established methodology dating back to the 1920s, however, it has been through several phases, and there is now some debate as to what form ethnography should now take. This is particularly important to this study because although the study broadly fitted a traditional ethnographic definition (see below) the debates in each phase effected this study. Denzin (1997) discusses the six phases of ethnography, and names them as:

1. The Traditionalist Period
2. The Modernist Phase
3. Blurred Genres
4. Crisis of Representation
5. Self Reflexivity/Messy Texts
6. ????

Denzin & Lincoln (1998) also name the first five of these phases as phases in qualitative research. Ethnography (and qualitative research) is about to enter the sixth, yet to be defined phase. In terms of educational ethnography LeCompte & Preissle (1993) consider there are several strands and that it is a relatively new discipline.

So where does this study fit within this complex picture, what is the justification for choosing an ethnographical methodology, what are the disadvantages and advantages of this selection?

This study fits could be seen to fit the traditional ethnography category. That is, as defined by LeCompte & Preissle as,

the investigation of a small, relatively homogeneous and geographically bounded study site, by long-term and repeated residence of the researcher at the site, by use of participant observation as the preferred data collection strategy supplemented with a variety of ancillary techniques, by the creation of a database consisting primarily of field notes and by a preoccupation with the interpretive description and explanation of the culture, life ways and social structure of the group under investigation. (LeCompte & Preissle, 1996:8)

It is debatable whether this study conforms to this description in two ways:

- i) this study focused on a small subset of a larger cultural system, namely one school within a University which will inevitably have its own discipline epistemology.
- ii) there was more emphasis on other data collection techniques than perhaps is suggested above.

Further, Denzin & Lincoln (1998) see traditional ethnography as being essentially reflective of a positivist approach while this study lies clearly within the interpretative paradigm. What is clear is that this study is a study which used ethnographic methods but is not an ethnography.

The current 5<sup>th</sup> movement is working with local, small-scale theories fitted to specific problems and specific situations (Lincoln, 1993). However, as Denzin & Lincoln (1998) note each of the phases in ethnography are still operating, thus resulting in both a multiple and fractured history that allows a researcher to attach his or her study to any of the phases. What is clear though is that the concept of the aloof researcher has been abandoned and that the position of researcher in terms of class, race, culture, gender and ethnic community must be explicit and considered.

The use of terms such as ‘...small, relatively homogeneous and geographically bounded study site...’. (LeCompte & Preissle, 1996:8) might suggest the idea of a case study.

Indeed, it could be argued that all ethnographies are by definition a study of a case. However, I prefer to describe the methodology used for this research as an ethnographic study because case studies can include be seen to take many different forms in different paradigms including quantitative studies in the positivist paradigm, and use many different methodologies (Yin, 1994).

It is important to acknowledge the position of the researcher when using an ethnographic type methodology. Thus, the researcher hold the status of Senior Academic (one of 10 managers of the Academic School); is a female in a study group dominated by male academics and students and female administrators; is of white ethnicity in a 80% white dominated study group and is of the middle class in a middle class dominated study group. The researcher has a common background to the study group in terms of subject discipline as an Engineering Designer. The researcher is pro-widening participation, however, a healthy scepticism related to the underlying purpose of the recent initiatives and the cost-benefit analysis is maintained. The assumptions of the researcher were that the attitudes of many members of the study group to the widening participation agenda are of discomfort, distrust or downright disagreement.

The methods that were applied in the field are those classically associated with the ethnographic methodology: interviews, focus groups, participant observations and documentary investigations.

### 3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Four methods of data collection have been employed in this study: participant observation, focus groups, interviews and documentary investigation.

#### 3.3.1 Participant Observation

As discussed earlier this research was conducted within the Interpretative Paradigm, and using an ethnographic methodology, therefore the type of observation used attempted to collect data from the natural environment and not an artificial environment. The type of data collected was qualitative and therefore, it was not coded such that it could be analysed in a quantitative manner. The aim was rather to gather rich data that through analysis allowed patterns of behaviour to emerge which is only possible using qualitative methods.

The determination of which type of participant observation was most appropriate is important in ensuring the credibility of the data collected. Ethnographers attempting to collect data from a natural rather than an artificial environment consider four participant observer roles: complete participant; participant-as-observer; observer-as-participant and complete observer. In this case the choice was really between participant-as-observer and observer-as-participant because complete participant could not have been defended ethically in this study and complete observer was simply not realistic given the relationship of the researcher to the study group. The choice was made particularly difficult in the study in question as, as stated above, the researcher is normally a member of the group under investigation. Thus, the only realistic choice was participant-as-observer as this enabled the least influence of the researcher to be felt and enabled the study to be conducted with due regard to ethical issues. Of particular importance is the strength of the participant-as-observer method that the researcher directly records the data which means that there is no second interpretation of the data. It was, however, necessary to take into consideration that the researcher still has an influence because of her social position in relation to the group.

The fieldwork took place over a 6-8 month period of non-continuous study. The study commenced with a survey period of participant observation to clarify ideas and behaviours. The initial observations, or survey period, was primarily unfocused and resulted in descriptive data. This period allowed the themes and problems for a more focused study to emerge and enabled early description of how the socio-cultural system operates. As the researcher was already a member of the group this had its own problems, particularly in ensuring the dependability of the data collected. The dependability issues included the extent to which the relationship of the researcher to the group under study affected their responses and the extent to which the researcher was able to see “the wood for the trees” and also to make non value judgements about observed phenomena. It also raises a number of ethical issues which are discussed in detail in section 3.8.

A period of progressively more focused and selective observation followed the survey period. One of the strengths of participant observation used as the study progressed, has been the ability, to check or triangulate to ensure the credibility and dependability of data obtained from other sources, particularly those which produce unexpected results (Fetterman, 1998).

Less structured observation practice was used, which as Sappsford and Jupp (1996) state, allowed the study of the way social interactions and meanings changed over time and the way in which social order was actively constructed. However, less structured observation is limited in its use for testing theory. This is not a limitation in this study as, as stated at the beginning of this section, participant observation was used at the outset of the study to develop theory, which was then tested by other methods.

In conventional participant observation using the participant-as-observer type the researcher engages with all aspects of the life of the study group. In this study the activities were clearly limited to the working life of the study groups and were defined as follows:

- Formal Meetings - course team, academic group, school, administration
- Informal Meetings - over coffee, staff common room, staff offices
- Exchanges between: staff members of different types, academic and administrative; academic staff and students; administrative staff and students

What was particularly challenging with this study was to observe the last of these activities, yet it was in these exchanges that much of the true culture patterns and meanings was discovered. It was, however, difficult to determine when these types of exchanges were part of the observation and when they were casual events. Inevitably, ethical issues arose around the issue of the place of these casual conversations that may have been seen by the researcher when she was not engaged in 'observation'. While much of value may be felt to be obtained from such events it was not considered ethical to collect data from them.

However, it was necessary to determine exactly what features within these activities were observed. Thus, following on from the suggestions of Burgess (1984) for studying a school, the type of features which were observed in this study, included:

- Space - the overall site layout - this was less importance in this study
- Actors - the people involved in the situation - Activities -the related activities of people in setting - this was particularly important in establishing relationships and cultural patterns
- Objects - physical objects such as furniture and its layout - this gave clues to their cultural perceptions
- Acts - actions of individuals - in particular their use of language and body language

- Time- time sequence of activities - less important in the context in question
- Goals - activities people are attempting to accomplish - less informative than the acts themselves
- Feelings - emotions in particular contexts - vital but difficult to observe with reliability

As stated above, a less structured observation practice was used, however, it was still necessary to determine to some extent what features were observed, as all features could not be observed at the appropriate level of detail to ensure rich data and hence, transferability. Clearly, a potential weakness of this data collection method lies in the need of the researcher to select aspects or features to observe. Thus, leaving room for bias towards the pre-conceptions of the researcher in the choice of features which may influence the findings of the research.

### 3.3.2 Interviews

In general, semi-structured or informal interviews were used to test the theory which was developing, initially from the participant observation. Informal interviews were most suited to obtain information regarding what people think and how different peoples perceptions compare, both of which are critical to this study. Guide questions (see section 4.2.1) were used and these were covered in any order as determined by the flow of the conversation. Tape recordings and written/typed word were used to record the interviews. Transcripts of interviews were checked with interviewees.

Semi-structured interviews have the advantage of being more naturalistic and therefore less likely to obtain data that is influenced by the interviewee giving what they consider to be the correct answer. Also as conversation is not directed the connection of certain events/issues by the interviewee can be illuminating and new information that was not anticipated by the interviewer can come to light because the interviewee in part directs the conversation.

Ensuring ethical compliance and attempting to limit contamination by badly timed and phrased artificial questions needed to illicit information the interviewer requires can both be difficulties with the method, as can the perception of the interviewer's characteristics (inter-interviewer variability). Power relations and trust - perceptions that the interviewer can affect the life changes of the interviewee can be difficult to managed. Also the relationship formed with the interviewee in that there is a need to engage with the

interviewee but remain detached, this is a particular issue when the interviewer is well known to the interviewee as will be the case with this study.

Interviews were conducted with people with the following job functions:

- Senior lecturer
- Lecturer
- Programme administrator
- Course Tutor
- Technician
- Demonstrator

These job functions were selected to be representative of all members of staff of the School of DEC who may come into contact with students and who may thus influence the success or otherwise of students from WP backgrounds by their attitudes to the WP agenda.

### 3.3.3 Focus Groups

A focus group was used in Phase One to probe, in more depth, the anticipated range of attitudes to the issue under investigation and to gain a deeper understanding of group dynamics with a view to proposing how attitudes may be changed. Tape recordings, video recordings and written/typed word were used to record data from the focus group. The transcript from the focus group was checked with participants.

Focus groups enable the researcher to gain views without researcher influence and thus observe if knowledge and behaviour is different when the participants are left on their own. It also enables shared experience to be gained which can shed light on full range of attitudes and key ideas which the researcher is unaware of maybe raised and explored by the group. It also has the advantage of feeling less artificial than interviews.

There are, however, a number of limitations, including that focus group discussion can be too flexible leading to dependability being compromised. It cannot be used as a stand alone method and it is possible that only the dominate persons view is collected. As it is a group activity it is unlikely to bring to light personal experience and there is little indication of strength of support for attitudes . Finally, focus groups can be difficult to

manage – when should interviewer intervene to keep debate on track or prevent one person dominating, Wilson (1997).

A single focus group was conducted in Phase One of people with the following job functions:

- Course tutor
- Programme administrator
- Senior Academic
- Lecturer/Senior lecturer
- Administrators' assistant

This selection of job functions was made on the same basis as that for interviews, a range of all those who influence the success of students in various ways.

#### 3.3.4 Documentary Investigation

Documentary investigation was also used to study minutes of meetings, internal reports, publicity material and responses to proposals related to widening participation. Analysis of this material enabled common themes/attitudes to be discovered. Both direct and indirect use of both secondary and primary sources was used.

Particularly helpful can be the use of primary or secondary sources in the documentation of the study group to draw out some more detailed questions. The use of indirect approach to gain insight into the culture by looking behind what is said to the reason why, in say publicity materials and an understanding why a document was produced can lead to useful insights into the culture. The use of language in the document can be studied (which will be affected by why and for whom it was produced) which can also lead to insights into the culture producing the document.

There are issues that need to be addressed, such as can the message in the source be trusted which is closely linked to why, for whom and by whom it was produced as this will clearly influence the information and nature of the message it conveys.

Hence, the following type of documents were analysed:

- Minutes of committees and meetings
- Under Graduate Prospectus
- Student Handbooks



- Annual Reports on Course Monitoring
- Magazines and newspapers of BU
- Internal reports related to WP

### 3.4 Data Capture and Recording Methods

Clearly it was not possible to engage in participant observation continuously, therefore, it was necessary to select what, when and who to observe. It was also necessary to consider in what form the data was recorded. Video and audio tape are the best in terms of capturing richness of data and being the least obtrusive. Verbatim transcripts were produced to ensure that the data remained in the language of the participants. This is important because meanings form an important function in construction of the culture and its perceptions. However, there were a number of occasions when it will not be possible to use these methods of data recording, for example, informal exchanges over coffee, in the corridor, and then it was necessary to use the written form for recording. In this instance, it was necessary to write up the observation immediately after the observation as obvious recording during the observation would have influence the observed activities. As Fetterman (1998) recalls - it was not possible to record during an observation of social dropouts, he conducted, as this would jeopardise his acceptance by the group.

With respect to 'who' was observed this is discussed in the next section, 'while' what was observed was discussed in the previous section. 'When' was determined by the production of an observation schedule, after the initial survey period which set out regular observation sessions in:

- programme administrators offices,
- informal meetings
- PR events

These were supplemented by observations at a sample of formal meetings during the data collection period. As it was possible to predict when observations took place it was possible to negotiate access and ensure ethical compliance by briefing study group members appropriately. However, such limitations did, firstly prevent the study from being an ethnography, rather a study using ethnographic techniques and secondly, can never account for what happened when the study group was not being observed. It was difficult to determine if 'company' behaviour had been forgotten such that the participants did not changed their behaviour due to being observed.

All interviews and focus groups were audio taped with verbatim transcriptions being produced which were checked and approved by those involved.

### 3.5 Sampling

The study was a micro-level study limited to one School within the University, and commenced with the period of participant observation discussed above. As discussed above the participant observation was non-continuous and it was not possible to observe all members of the study group, therefore, it was necessary to select a sample of group members to focus observation upon. This sample included a variety of roles, for example: lecturer, programme administrator, office administrator, technician, demonstrator, course leader. The survey period was used to enable selection of the sample to be undertaken. This selection was not random but was selected by the researcher to ensure that a variety of positions were represented by the participants, to ensure consideration of intra-cultural diversity, with regard to the research questions was present. Obviously, the weakness of this type of selection is bias by the researcher selecting the sample and ensuring that sufficient knowledge and understanding of the study group has been gained to enable accurate selection.

Consideration must also be given to how the selection was conducted for those members of the group who were interviewed and took part in a focus group. Due to the high level of knowledge regarding the study group a randomised strategy was used to select approximately 10 members of staff for interviews. Membership of the focus group was not random and was carefully selected in an attempt to obtain a broad spectrum of opinion.

### 3.6 Phasing of Data Collection

Two phases of data collection were used, in Phase One, the data collection methods were conducted with a small group of staff outside the intended study group but still within BU. Specifically the Office of Lifelong Learning (OLL). The second phase was with a group of staff within the same HEI but within one academic subject area, that of the School of Design, Engineering & Computing. The rationale behind this selection for phase one is that having recently spent a year on secondment in the Office of Lifelong Learning I know the participants as well as those with whom I will be conducting the actual research. Additionally, the range of roles were comparable with those of the Phase

Two group - lecturer, administrator etc and there was little if any cross-over between those participating in phase one and those participating in phase two.

In Phase One semi-structured interviews were used, in particular to test the proposed prompt questions for the semi-structured interview and to ensure a good understanding of the difficulties that were to be faced regarding ethical issues and data contamination. Similarly the focus group was used again to test the proposed prompt questions and to ensure a good understanding of the difficulties that were to be faced regarding ethical issues and the potential for data contamination. The exact questions used for both interviews and focus groups and how and why they changed between Phase One and Phase Two are discussed in Chapter 4.

It should be noted that Phase One could be seen as a pilot study because it was used to test questions for interviews and focus groups, however, it would be more accurate to consider it as the first stage in the ethnographic research cycle (Spradley, 1980). Phase One was used to gather data from a group of people with a different perspective on the study topic than those taking part in Phase Two. This enabled general views about WP to be explored and established with a group of people within the study context with detailed knowledge related to WP. Subsequently, this allowed comparison with the Phase Two data when the difference of perspective was seen to provide a rich source of data regarding the attitudes of staff to the WP agenda.

### 3.7 Limitations of Study

The study is not necessarily generalisable to HE. As the study used qualitative methodology, the understanding of the academic culture that was gained was specific to BU. Therefore, although it will add to the discussion of the changing inner culture of universities, that Rothblatt called for, it will do so in a limited way.

The extent to which the study was conducted by a member of the cultural group under investigation, may be considered a limitation if compared to a study conducted by an outsider. There are, however, compensations to this as the academic community is a complex culture which is difficult to penetrate.

Reflexivity, namely, where the provision of information related to a subject simultaneously revises the view taken upon that subject, was also an issue in Phase Two.

Due to most of the participants having little prior knowledge and given little reflection to the subject the extent to which many of the staff participating in Phase Two modified their thoughts on the research subject as a result of being asked to consider detailed aspects of it was impossible to quantify. This was less of an issue with Phase One as the staff involved work with WP agenda on a daily basis.

### 3.8 Ethical Issues

Qualitative research, or any research involving human beings inevitably brings with it ethical issues. Some of these have already been raised in the previous discussion, however, it is necessary to revisit these and to consider some further issues which have an important role in data collection.

Access - clearly as the choice of observation type is participant-as-observer access needed to be negotiated at all levels, beginning with Head of School and then with each and every member of the group who was observed, including both University staff and students. This was problematical when the observation covers large School meetings which involved people who were outside the sample group. Additionally, when observing exchanges between students and members of staff it was difficult to ensure permission has been negotiated. For example, an observation that took place in a programme administrator's office which is open access for all students. It was not possible to obtain permissions from every student who may enter in advance, however, a similar approach to doctors who ask permission for a medical student to be present during an examination just prior to the event proved a solution.

Relationships - the point of naturalistic observation in the ethnographic methodology is that the researcher is immersed and becomes part of the study group, hence relationships must develop. In this instance the researcher was already part of the study group and thus, relationships already existed with every member of the study group. These needed to be understood and made explicit along with consideration of the changes that may have occurred to these existing relationships because of the new combined position as both colleague/superior and researcher.

The Researcher - the position of the researcher with respect to the attitudes to be studied was considered as the opinions held by the researcher may have biased the observations selected, the data recorded and the analysis conducted.

Power - as the researcher/observer can always be seen to hold power over the observed and hold data related to the observed there is always the possibility the resulting data will be influenced by the reactions to this situation. In this particular study the researcher normally, holds a Senior position in the social hierarchy of the study group with the associated opportunity to influence the lives of those in the group. The impact of this situation on the data collected was taken into account

Harm to Participants - of considerable ethical significance was how the participants are identified in the data recorded. Clearly in terms of video or audio tape the identities of the participants are clear, however, these recordings were transcribed, at which point, the identities of the participants were concealed to prevent any possible actions being taken as a consequence of the publication of research. Hence, there were some events when it was simply not possible to transcribe or use in writing up the research without the persons identity being revealed, in this instance, ethics demanded that the piece of data was not used. Ethics also demanded that all transcripts were shown to and agreed by the participants as a true record of the events - this also ensures credibility.

## **Chapter 4. Results and Analysis of Data Collection**

### **4.1 Background to Data Collection**

The data collected fell into two phases. The first phase was conducted with specialists in the area of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, from the Office of Lifelong Learning (OLL). The second phase with a group of academics within the same HEI but within one academic subject area, that of the School of Design, Engineering & Computing.

The OLL has a central university function, to promote and ensure implementation of the University's WP policy and therefore, staff of the OLL engage with staff at all levels across the entire University. The data collected from this phase, therefore, provided a good breadth of emerging themes that was compared to those that emerged from the more detailed phase two. It should be noted, however, that the OLL does not run UG programmes, although it does run UG Summer Schools and a PG CPD framework, so that staff are not directly responsible for admissions of UG students, nor supporting UG students. The OLL also runs the Lifelong Learning Programme of the University, which is a leisure interest programme designed to engage people who would not normally engage with an HEI in anyway.

As discussed in the Methodology chapter, the rationale behind this selection for phase one is that having recently spent a year on secondment in the office I know the participants as well as those with whom I will be conducting the actual research. Additionally, the range of roles were simulated to match those of the actual research, lecturer, administrator etc and there will little if any cross-over between those participating in phase one and those participating phase two. Thus, the specific staff that were chosen for interview were chosen because of their role and not any views they may hold on WP.

### **4.2 Results of Phase One**

#### **4.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

For Phase One three interviews were conducted in the OLL:

- Administrator
- Senior Lecturer
- Lecturer

The interviews were semi-structured, hence, there was an attempt to cover approximately the same topics in each interview. Therefore, the following questions were used as prompts:

1. What does the term widening participation mean to you?
2. What do you think of as a student from a widening participation background?
3. How would you recognise one?
4. Assuming you think you had recognised one on an application form how would you determine if they should be offered a place on a course you are involved with?
5. Do you think you engage with any?
6. Can you call to mind a recent episode when you have engaged with a widening participation student? What do you think might be particular issues for them?
7. Do you think widening participation has changed your life as a professional in education?
8. Is there anything you would like to add that we haven't discussed?

The intention behind questions 1 & 2 was to determine breadth of perception, the response would indicate whether the view of a WP student was stereotypical or whether a the vast breadth of definition that a WP student can cover was appreciated. Question 3. is also in this vein, detecting attitudes related to whether its qualifications or potential intellectual ability that is important. Question 5. Was used to determine whether the interviewee consciously thought about the nature of the students they engaged with. The intention behind question 6. was to determine the depth of understanding, was the understanding fairly superficial or had more reflection been given to detailed areas that might be issues for a WP student. Question 7. was aimed at drawing out any views positive or negative about the impact, if any, of WP of the interviewee's professional life.

The interviews were audio taped and full transcriptions of the interviews were produced and agreed by the interviewees, in order to practice this technique. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes from which a full transcript was produced which was subsequently agreed by the participant, including any requests for the removal of any information. The interviews were conducted in a formal meeting room without any interruptions from external sources.

#### 4.2.2 Focus Groups

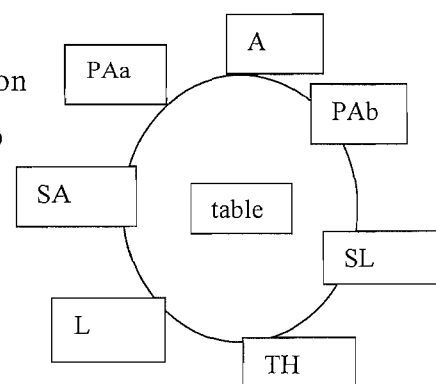
A focus group, of 6 people was conducted using staff from the OLL, these cover the following job functions – 1 - administrator (A); 2 programme administrators (PAa, PAb);

1 senior academic (SA); 1 Senior Lecturer (SL) and 1 lecturer (L). Fully founded questions were used to direct the group discussions as follows:

1. What are you hearing people say about widening participation in the Uni?
2. What or whose needs are being addressed by widening participation?
3. What outcomes or results from widening participation have you heard about or observed?
4. Who doesn't, engage with the widening participation agenda?
5. Think back to an experience you have had with widening participation – describe it.
6. What do you think is the most important thing to keep doing with respect to widening participation?
7. How would you measure success in widening participation?
8. What do you consider to be the barriers for widening participation in HE?
9. Have we missed anything?

Question 1. was intended to provide a general flavour of what messages people are picking up about the WP agenda. Whereas question 2. was attempting to obtain information about how much thought the group members had given to the purpose of WP in their view. Question 3. obtained information on just how widespread, or otherwise, the awareness of WP activities is in BU. A perception of the type of people/ roles engage with WP was obtained from question 4. Question 5. provided data on a range of WP scenarios and also on what staff considered to be an experience of WP issues. Question 6. provided an opportunity for the group to give their views on WP activities, followed up by question 7. which seeks to explore more attitudes to what WP is about. Question 8. directly seeks information on what people think are barriers, whether they are just the stereotype ones or whether more subtle consideration is in evidence.

The focus group was audio taped and a full transcription produced and agreed by all attendees. The focus group lasted approximately 45 minutes. The physical location was a formal meeting room in the territory of the participants. The diagram right shows the position of each participant.



**Figure 3 Position of Each Participant during Focus Group**



#### 4.2.3 Participant Observation

Participant observation did not form part of the data collection techniques for Phase One, as it was not felt to be appropriate with the staff of the OLL who, as already stated do not directly interface with WP students or UG programmes. Additionally, a number of the meetings which will be observed in Phase Two were likely to be attended by members of the OLL. Thus, to undertake such observation in Phase One would contaminate the Phase Two data.

#### 4.2.4 Reflections on Phase One

Generally, both the focus group and the individual interviews went well with most of the potentially identified pitfalls being avoided. The interviews felt naturalistic and the relationship of myself and the interviewee's did not become an issue. The questions enabled a degree of comparison between interview data while maintaining enough flexibility to pick up on and follow any issues raised by the interviewee. It was, however, necessary on several occasions to re-order the prompt questions so as not to interrupt the flow of the conversation, although this did lead backtracking in some cases to ensure all areas had been covered in each interview. While being provided, the importance of a comfortable and peaceful setting was apparent and was a necessary component of the final research interviews. Asking the interviewee to briefly explain their professional role also allowed a period of settling in, in particular time to get used to the tape recorder was afforded.

The focus group also worked well with conversation flowing around all participants without the need for me to frequently direct the event. The room was appropriate, however, it was quite formal with the table being present and a less formal setting was chosen for the final research focus group. The importance of the physical position of each participant became very obvious and was managed in the final research. As the diagram in section 3.2 illustrates the administrators were clustered together at the far end of the table from me, this tended to result in a feeling of them and us and they did not participate as much as the academics.

A problem with Phase One arose from the fact that the people involved have a much more detailed knowledge and engagement with WP than many of those people involved in the final research had. This lead to some difficulty with some of the questions,

particularly those surround familiarity with WP activities, however, this did not invalidate these questions for the final research.

While the questions used for both the focus group and individual interviews appeared to be eliciting information appropriate to asking the research questions, it was felt, that the following questions needed to be considered:

- Are the questions too leading?
- Are the questions driving people to be too negative?
- Are the questions obtaining too broad a data set, that is, all barriers to WP rather than focusing on attitudes of staff and then determining if this is a barrier?

It was determined to modify a number of the questions in both the interviews and focus groups because they had caused an unhelpful reaction in Phase One with people becoming defensive. However, this did not invalidate the research as the questions were re-framed rather than being questions seeking different information. Thus the following questions were modified:

Interview questions -

2. What do you think of as a student from a widening participation background?
3. How would you recognise one?

Were re-framed and became one question in order to minimise any sense of leading the interviewee towards a certain type of answer -

How would you recognise a student from a widening participation background?

Focus Group questions -

1. What are you hearing people say about widening participation in the Uni?
4. Who doesn't, engage with the widening participation agenda?

Was re-framed in a more positive form -

What do you think widening participation means to people in this Uni?

Is there engagement with the widening participation agenda?

#### 4.3 Results of Phase Two

##### 4.3.1 Documentary Evidence

Specifically the following documents were analysed:

- Minutes of Lifelong Learning Committee academic year 01/02

- Bournemouth University Under Graduate Prospectus 2003 – general & DEC sections
- Horizon - Bournemouth University Newsletter, Spring 2003, Issue 14 this is a staff newsletter.
- Nerve - Student's Union Bournemouth University magazine, January 2003, Issue 4 and March 2003, Issue 5.
- Pathways - Bournemouth University OLL newspaper
- Minutes of Course Team Meetings academic year 01/02 – 1 course from Design, Electronics & Computing
- Minutes of DEC School Committee academic year 01/02
- Student Handbooks academic year 02/03 – 1 course from Design (ID), Electronics & Computing (SEM)
- Annual Reports on Course Monitoring academic year 01/02 – 1 course from Design, Electronics & Computing

#### 4.3.2 Participant Observation

The activities observed in final research were as follows:

- Formal Meetings - course team, academic group, school, administration
- Exchanges between: staff members of different types, academic and administrative; academic staff and students; administrative staff and students

An observation schedule is shown in Figure 4:

**Figure 4 Participant Observation Schedule**

Day	Month	Activity Observed
20 <sup>th</sup>	Nov	School Committee Meeting
1 <sup>st</sup>	May	Administration Meeting
various	Mar/Apr/May	Administration Office
19 <sup>th</sup>	Mar	UG Open Day
5 <sup>th</sup>	Mar	CTM - CAPD

Permission was sought from all participants, by a variety of means, before observation begun.

### 4.3.3 Interviews

Interviewees were sought by a general request emailed to all members of the School of DEC. The text of the email is reproduced below. This text was carefully constructed to encourage as wide a range of people as possible to respond and to minimise a prejudiced response.

'Some of you will be, but many of you may not be, aware that I am currently studying for a Doctorate in Education at Southampton Uni. To this end I am due to undertake my data collection during this AY. The subject of my research is the widening participation agenda in HE. I am looking to conduct 45-60mins interviews with members of staff from across our School. I am looking to include interviews with staff in a wide range of roles and areas within our School.

These interviews will be audio taped and a full transcript produced which will be given back to you for your agreement. Any information used in my thesis will be anonymised and the transcripts will be shared only by you and myself.

So if you are a technician, administrator, demonstrator, lecturer or Senior Lecturer in DEC and you would be willing to give up 60 mins of your time at a mutually convenient point to be interviewed I would be most grateful and happy to hear from you. Please reply to this email.'

Interviews were conducted with staff, who volunteered in response to the above email and who hold the roles as shown in the schedule below:

**Figure 5 Interview Schedule**

Day	Month	Staff Role
10am 23rd	Jan	Snr Lecturer 1 (SL1)
10.30am 26th	Nov	Lecturer 1 (L1)
9.30am 2nd	Dec	Course Tutor 1 (CT1)
4pm 23rd	Jan	Programme Administrator (PA1)
10am 27th	Feb	Administrative Assistant (PA2)
11am 19th	Dec	Demonstrator (Dm)
10am 21 <sup>st</sup>	Jan	Course Tutor 2 (CT2)
10am 6th	Feb	Snr Lecturer 2 (SL2)
11am 14 <sup>th</sup>	Jan	Lecturer 2 (L2)

More people volunteered than were required, therefore, selection was made on the basis of achieving a balanced spread across the disciplines represented in the School of DEC and across the various role functions. The balance of roles is broadly in line with the proportions of total staff in each role in the School of DEC.

The revised set of questions, as below, were used in a semi-structured format:

1. What does the term widening participation mean to you?
2. How would you recognise a student from a widening participation background?
3. Assuming you think you had recognised one on an application form how would you determine if they should be offered a place on a course you are involved with?
4. Do you think you engage with any?
5. Can you call to mind a recent episode when you have engaged with a widening participation student? What do you think might be particular issues for them?
6. Do you think widening participation has changed your life as a professional in education?
7. Is there anything you would like to add that we haven't discussed?

The interviews were conducted in a private meeting room and were tape recorded. Full verbatim transcripts were provided to interviewees to enable them to make any amendments or offer comments. No changes were made by any of the interviewees.

#### 4.3.4 Comments on Phase Two

The data collection for Phase Two was generally un-problematical with people coming forward to participate and little objection being offered. Due to the ready availability of information the data collected can be considered to be a fully representative sample as defined in the Methodology, Section 3.

Two points to note with respect to the interviews are that firstly, a majority of the interviewees had themselves completed degrees as mature students and considered themselves to come from backgrounds where it was not typical to go to University. Secondly, that many of the interviewees stated that they had volunteered to be interviewed as they saw it as an easy way to obtain information about WP, which they did not feel they knew a lot about. Although both these points are discussed in greater detail later in this section it must also be acknowledged that my position as a Senior

Academic and member of the School Executive may have influenced their decision to volunteer and some of the information they provided.

#### 4.4 Introduction to Data Analysis

As this study is based on an ethnographic methodology the coding system for the data was established after collection, thus becoming part of the analysis. The logic behind the coding system that was used is that related words and concepts or themes start with the same numeral. The fundamental concepts that emerged from Phase One data and were coded are:

##### *Code Concept*

- 1 Issues related to members of academic staff such as feeling hassled, overworked, ignorance of, resistance to and scepticism of government policy. As well as concern over 'dumbing down' and the role of academics.
- 2 Issues related to funding of Universities and students
- 3 Sociological aspects of WP, including what might be considered elitist views of HE and whether there is a social justice or economic argument for WP.
- 4 Issues related to discrimination and inclusivity, including admissions policy and social class values.
- 5 Political themes related to WP, such as what is 'good' education, who owns knowledge, whether WP leads to social engineering and ethical issues about raising aspirations and displacement from cultural backgrounds.
- 6 Issues related to the organisation of HE, including the provision of a pastoral and academic support and a personal tutoring system.
- 7 Issues related to change and its management.

These themes were derived from reading the transcripts of the Phase One interviews and focus group. Hence, they have grown out of the data rather than pre-formed ideas being imposed on the data. This will enable a comparison to be made with how closely they match the themes derived from the literature review. These same codes were used to code Phase Two data.

## 4.5 Qualitative Data Analysis

### Phase One Analysis:

Data collected during Phase One consisted of the transcripts from 3 interviews and 1 focus group. No participant observation or documentary analysis was undertaken. Thus, the analysis presented for Phase One is based on interviews and a focus group only.

As you would expect this group are fully aware of the various initiatives both nationally and within BU related to the WP agenda. They are also positively engaged with the WP agenda. The overwhelming impression gained from reading the data is that there is perceived to be a lot of resistance to WP in BU as a whole. Additionally, some OLL staff, while accepting the principle of WP do have a number of, unresolved, issues regarding WP. Most notably, academic staff have concerns related to the potential social engineering aspects of WP while administration staff tend to re-enforce some of the stereotypes by their use of language, such as 'dodgy post-code' areas, and a prevalence for concerns about student financing.

A more detailed analysis of the coding themes demonstrates that many of the themes that emerged from the literature review can also be seen to be emerging from the Phase One data analysis.

### Phase Two Analysis:

Three methods of data collection were employed in phase two - participant observation, interviews and documentary analysis. The data analysis will be presented thematically, considering each of the themes that arose from the literature review in turn, and considering evidence from each source of data.

The interview data was coded using the same concepts and codes as Phase One data. Also with respect to the interviews it should be noted that of the 9 people who volunteered to be interviewed 6 considered themselves to have a WP background. This was because they were of the opinion that they come from working class backgrounds and were not 'expected' to do a degree and went back later in life, as mature students, to study. The implications for the data collected include the fact that the interviewee's own experience will effect their current view on the WP policy. It is possible, for example, that they may be less sympathetic towards people from WP background who they perceive as having it easy', compared with their own experience of entering HE.

Additionally, most interviewees commented that the process of interview was making them think about WP, therefore reflexivity is an issue. Namely the process of undertaking the research has had an influence of those being researched by making them think about the issue, when previously they had not done so.

The documents were analysed for firstly, explicit references to WP or related issues. The content of the documents, in terms of both words and images, were also analysed for the messages implicitly contained that might have relevance for people from WP backgrounds.

The data collected from participant observations was not coded in the same way as interview data. Instead areas that are linked to WP were extracted from the real-time notes that were taken on peoples' roles, peoples' actions, their body language, their verbal language, images used, locations and room layouts.

Throughout the data analysis for Phase Two the data collected from this study into the attitudes of staff in the School of Design, Engineering & Computing in BU is compared to the attitudes of people from WP backgrounds reported in Archer et al (2003). The aim of this is to help in determining if the attitude of staff is a barrier to HE for people from WP backgrounds.

#### 5.2.1 Thematic Data Analysis

Theme 1 - *Reasons for the expansion of HE – is it for economic or social justice reasons and why the target of 50% participation in HE was determined?*

Phase One:

Academic staff raised issues which are ethical in nature. They expressed concerns about why 'we', the government and the University, have such a target, that is, whether it was for economic reasons or for social inclusion? The general feeling was that, certainly, the government, and probably the University, had economic reasons. As one academic put it

I think, whatever the difficulties are, they see it as hassle, don't they? Except for those, and I think there are some, ...see it as a financial incentive. I think there are some who have got like a social justice sort of view of it as well but I think they are in the minority...



Although another academic suggested that the government

would probably say both, its to enhance our productivity as an economic nation but also to enable social-inclusion...

but also went on to address other ethical issues

and you know, I think there are some ethical issues about, you know, by saying these aspiration are positive, that to aspire to HE is a positive aspiration, does that mean that those that don't have negative aspiration...we are perhaps asking a group to move out of the sort of norms with which they are comfortable.

Indeed, concerns were expressed by both academic and administrative staff about the various known effects of participation in education, such as, alienating people from their original culture, and thus, whether encouraging people to enter HE without apprising them fully of all the issues was ethical. This issue is reported on by Utley (2001) who quotes a number of academics expressing concern over the effectiveness of education to combat social exclusion and on the danger of labelling people who don't participate. A particularly, interesting point made by Phil Hodkison of the University of Leeds, is reported - 'Not all learning is beneficial to society' (Utley, THES, 05/01/01:4). He continues by pointing out that prisons are very effective learning environments - to be better criminals. This kind of example might point to a good argument for using the term lifelong education as opposed to lifelong learning and returns to the discussion on definitions in Chapter 1.

Phase Two:

Interview data indicated that most people felt that the expansion of HE student numbers was not necessarily a good idea because, there are only a percentage of the population that can work at honours degree level, and it was felt that this was less than 50%. There was more support for expansion at sub-degree level with comments such as 'I meet people who would really benefit from other types of courses other than degree courses.'

Of course, this aligns with the clarification of government policy set out in the White Paper (2003) which firmly puts expansion of student numbers in Foundation Degrees and other sub-degree programmes and not Honours degrees.

Another interviewee echoed Coffield (2000), Tight (1998b) and Wolf (2002) in contesting the economic benefit of such a high percentage of the population being so highly qualified.

I'm not convinced by the economic argument first off, because it is not clear to me that you actually need to have people with all those skills. I think there is also a big hole as a result in the craft skills and apprentice schemes...

One course tutor and one administrator disagreed with this, they felt that the 50% target is a good idea because the country has skills shortage and we are currently 25<sup>th</sup> out of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries for skills, when we should be much higher. Thus, the perceived emphasis of all interviewees was that WP is for economic reasons, at least as far as the government is concerned. This might be expected as the government policy literature, for example the White Papers, Learning to Succeed (DfEE 1999) and The Future of Higher Education (DfES, 2003), clearly makes this connection. However, a minority of interviewees actually believed such a correlation could be proven.

The counter argument to this, as a Senior Lecturer summed it up, is the recurring social justice issue of, broadening as opposed to increasing HE with more of the same, with

they want to WP but they actually simplify that into numbers. I don't think they are the same thing and I think that is a problem.

and addressing the elitism argument the same Senior Lecturer:

I am not necessarily against elitism of a kind and it seems to me that people equate elitism with being opposite to WP and I am not sure that is necessarily so.

Another Senior Lecturer summarised the problem:

...with 50% you are just moving the line down to pick up more of the people who would have gone anyway whereas WP is trying to spread the net wider isn't it, so you are not just trying to take more of a similar target population you are actually trying to widen the target to other areas?

Subsequent to these interviews being conducted Charles Clark, Education Secretary confirmed, in a briefing following the publication of the white paper (DfES, 2003), that he was more concerned with broadening the mix of students from all sectors of society than in attaining the 50% target. This has been further reinforced by the setting up of Office for Fair Access as part of the implementation mechanism for the white paper.

It was commonly considered that the policy is not doing some 'kids' any favours, because students are entering HE for the wrong reasons, it has become an extension of 'compulsory' education, quotations such as 'well everybody else in my class went to Uni ...' were reported. In the words of a Senior Lecturer again:

I almost feel guilty about that, all we are doing is interfering in their lives because they could have gone into worked in industry, learnt XXX or whatever they are going to learn without getting into a huge amount of debt. We have actually made life worse for them, we haven't developed them particularly intellectually, so if we put them off coming and they went and got a training course they wouldn't be in debt, they would be the same bright intelligent people they always were and they would be in a better position in life. In a way we are not helping them.

A detailed examination of the transcripts from a telephone survey undertaken within the School of Design, Engineering & Computing to determine the reasons students had withdrawn from programmes reinforces the idea that many students enter HE without giving much thought to the reason why they are doing so. Out of 50 students who had withdrawn from programmes within the School of Design, Engineering & Computing, 20 were interviewed, when asked why they had chosen to go to university and chose BU, nine gave responses along the lines of the following:

...for the placement year and because it's near the sea.

...in order to get a degree and a better job....it's a nice place to go.

She chose Bournemouth because of the town.

Dunno really, next logical step

...it seemed like a good idea at the time.

...it seemed the right thing to do - getting a qualification.

She applied to university because everyone else was but her heart was not really in it.

It is also important to note here that the attitudes of current students to obtaining a place at University are likely to be strongly effected by a change in generational culture. For 18 year olds in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is now the norm to go to University, whereas, for most of the academic staff of universities today, when they went to University they were part of the top 10% of the age population. Hence, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that these academics will not empathise with current students who they may feel did not have to 'work' to get a University place.

The concept of higher education being considered solely the route to a better job by potential participants, is a concern highlighted by Williamson (1998), particularly, as Archer (2002) and Dearing (2003) conclude that the variation in salaries, depending upon social class, mean that HE is not necessarily a good investment for working classes. The idea of education for education's sake (Titmus 1999) is not a concept that arises from the data. This is discussed further in Theme 7.

Generally there is very little direct reference to WP issues in the prospectus, although it has two pages dedicated to WP and lifelong learning but these really only set out how the University is implementing the government policy and highlight various forms of study other than just honours degrees. There is no information in the prospectus about numbers of WP students in BU or about admissions policies for WP candidates.

*Theme 2.- Power relationships in policy making - what consultation was undertaken with stakeholders such as WP candidates and Universities when establishing the policy?*

Phase One:

Interestingly, this specific theme does not occur in the data collected, see comments in 5.2.2. However, a comment was made during focus group discussion that

...we open the doors and we let people in but its not an inclusive place where people feel integrated in and they feel they belong and they feel they own it.

Phase Two:

This theme was not explicitly mentioned by any of the interviewees, however, other related points are discussed further under Theme 11.

Looking at the documentary evidence there is not a clear indication that WP candidates have been consulted about the way BU has chosen to go about implementing its WP policy. The BU Widening Access and Participation Policy Paper (Bournemouth University 2001) discussed in section 1.1 sets out the nine components by which BU aims to WP. For example, one clearly definable WP promotional event was Diversity Day held on March 21<sup>st</sup> 2003 which generated a variety of documentary evidence. The staff newsletter (delivered attached to pay slips) Horizon contained a page dedicated to this diversity celebration but which really only outlined the programme. The BU Student Union magazine Nerve (a free glossy A4 size magazine) in its March issue carried 3 pages on the theme. However, the focus of the programme was very much on ethnic cultural diversity rather than the other aspects covered by the WP agenda. Living within a multicultural society like Britain in the twenty first century it seems rather dated to be running events, included in the programme, such as food and music from around the world, which is generally available in every major supermarket and music shop. The day also did not address the real diversity issues for WP which is about socio-economic diversity.

Then there is the issue of the contrast of the SU magazine Nerve, to the Office of Lifelong Learning newspaper, Pathways. The format and general content of the Nerve



Figure 6

magazine are not inclusive, with the content being almost exclusively targeted at young, white, middle class students who are interested in pubs, nightclubs, image, chart music and high octane sports (see



Figure 7

Figures 6 & 7). However, it must be recognised that this audience does make up the large majority of the student population of BU at this point in time. It is particularly, interesting to reflect back to a comment from the focus group in Phase One and note that it

was reported that the BU Students Union was well aware of the difficulties some students from WP backgrounds find in fitting into the BU environment, suggesting that some consultation with WP students does take place.

In contrast the Office of Lifelong Learning newspaper Pathways (a colour tabloid newspaper format, see Figure 8.) reports on initiatives from across BU to increase the number of students from WP backgrounds with a view to encouraging people for WP backgrounds to participate in BU. Examples include, The Media School working with local schools, mature students undertaking degrees in School of Finance & Law, the School of Conservation Sciences and the School of Design, Engineering & Computing, along with reports on HE Taster Days (where children from schools in local LPN's come to University for a day and in the case of the School of Design, Engineering & Computing undertake Making a Robot sessions), Access courses and Summer Schools. It must of course, be noted that the audience for this publication is very different to that of the Nerve magazine. This newspaper is put through the door of all households in an approximate 50 mile radius of BU, including the conurbation of Poole, Bournemouth and Christchurch, the rural Purbecks and Blackmore Vale as well as the market towns and



Figure 8

Pathways newspaper, the contrast with the reality of life on a BU campus, as portrayed by Nerve magazine, may come as something of a shock.

their surroundings of Weymouth, Dorchester, Fordingbridge and Ringwood. It has a circulation in the region of 275K copies. Interestingly, I was reminded of its existence by it dropping through my letterbox at home, not by seeing copies on campus. By contrast the Nerve magazine is readily available at many locations across both campuses. Should somebody from a WP background be tempted to enter BU because of the information and image portrayed by the

This is particularly important in the context of the need for information of the right type to be available to WP candidates as found by Archer, Hutchings and Ross (2003).

Further, a recent telephone survey conducted within the School of Design, Engineering & Computing to ascertain the reasons students have withdrawn from courses during academic year 02/03 established the following reasons, in no particular order. It should be noted that these students are not necessarily WP students:

- learning and teaching issues
- change of mind regarding preferred subject of study
- course not suitable
- finance
- accommodation
- social life
- health
- taking a break from study

The top three points indicate that perhaps there is a problem with how information is provided to certain types of students. Upon examination of the transcripts of the telephone interviews a number of interesting points emerge with respect to how students used, or did not use, information to make their decision on choice of course:

...he didn't investigate the course enough, didn't really know what he was looking for.

...he did not research the course enough.

The course was more intensive than he thought it would be...

There was a lot of work, very intense, you had to do a lot of thinking. It was too intense and I didn't have the enthusiasm for it.

Although it should be noted that many of the students interviewed did say they had enough and suitable information and the course was what they expected but had withdrawn for other reasons. The report also states that there is no correlation between mis-perception about the nature of the course and non-attendance at open days. This is particularly interesting in the light of Archer et al (2003) findings regarding how people from WP backgrounds use different types of information. Namely, that they see documentary information as 'cold', that is not reliable or helpful but open days and the views of peers and family as 'hot' and most useful. This point will be discussed further under themes 4 & 5.

Theme 3. - *Employment benefits – what are the effects of partaking in HE for WP candidates students?*

Phase One:

Interviewees expressed concern regarding the danger of over-qualification, and the limited availability of jobs which actually required graduate skills. This was, however, largely linked to concerns regarding the cost of HE resulting in high levels of student debt which would be difficult to pay off if appropriately paid employment could not be obtained after graduation.

A young administrator pointed out:

There are only so many good jobs....you can go to Uni, you can do your 5 years, you can leave qualified and not get a job and work in a restaurant for 4 years because nobody wants to employ you because you're overqualified...

Another administrator added:

...if you start at the bottom as a junior, those four or five years that you spend at Uni you can spend those four or five years, in a good company, working your way up. You can get to a position without any qualifications that the person from Uni will come in at, and you're on the same wage as him and you haven't got £15K debt...

Interestingly, it was an academic who moved this debate onto the social justice argument, pointing out

But if you go down that line about saying well we don't need this many graduates in the future, the logical argument is well lets leave things as they are and you've got, again it comes back to this social justice argument.

This comment perhaps highlights ones of the differences between the perspective of current academics who prize education for education's sake and the current potential WP student population who see it as a means to an end. This perhaps again raises the point that there is probably a generational gap between the ideals of current academics and current/potential students regarding HE, as discussed in Theme 1. Indeed, this



generational gap may manifest itself as a difference in habitus of the type proposed by Bourdieu, discussed in Chapter 1.

#### Phase Two:

This theme was not explicitly mentioned, the only references are to the related issues, discussed in Themes 1 & 8 respectively, about the appropriateness of degree qualification to so many jobs and expectations regarding the earning power of graduates. The reason for this may be explained by the subject area that the School of Design, Engineering & Computing covers, namely computing, engineering and design, all of which industrial sectors are suffering skills shortages and therefore, it is not generally a problem for graduates of the School of Design, Engineering & Computing to find appropriate employment on graduation. Current (graduated 2002), HESA graduate destination data for the School of DEC shows 72.6% of graduates in a relevant employment six months after graduation with a further 11.5% continuing to study. However, there is no evidence available to show what type of student goes into what type of job. It is also important to note here the issues regarding what is classed as employment. *The Times* reported both employment as defined by HESA and what it termed graduate or graduate-track jobs (new classification) for the Good University Guide 2004, resulting in a number of subjects showing significant differences in employment rates. Interestingly, from the point of view of this study and the School of Design, Engineering & Computing, General Engineering, Computer Science and Electrical and Electronic Engineering all showed decreases in employment rate under the new classifications, falling from 88.1% to 74.8%; 82.3% to 66.7% and 84% to 66.1% respectively. (Kingston, 2003)

There was evidence of concern with this issue, however, in the School of Design, Engineering & Computing Open Day video the content of which stressed employment issues, jobs at the end and the importance and benefit of placements. The video featured a reasonable spread of people in terms of age, but not ethnicity, but again with an emphasis on a young white agenda. The video particularly featured comment from a mature male, a young female and a young male student, all of whom were white.

The study by Archer *et al* highlights that employment is a big issue for students from working class backgrounds

All this money innit is really not worth it because at the end of the day you could get your degree and all that and you can't get a job you're sweeping the streets with your degree! So what's the point? (Carmelle, 17, black, Caribbean female) (Archer *et al*, 2003:135)

and

It's getting overcrowded, there's too many people going to university and how many jobs are there for those people? There's none, there's hardly any, especially nowadays, hardly any. (Liam, 22, white male) (Archer *et al*, 2003:135)

These are typical of the type of concerns regarding the perceived benefit referred to by Willis (1977). It may be concluded that staff in the School of Design, Engineering & Computing are not sufficiently aware of the importance of this issue to WP candidates and therefore, on whether or not they apply. They may also be under the possible illusion that graduates from the School of Design, Engineering & Computing do not have a problem finding graduate employment.

Theme 4. - *Cultural gap - what consideration has been given to whether there is a cultural gap between the culture of Universities' and that of people from WP backgrounds, and how this gap could be closed if it exists?*

and

Theme 5. - *Epistemology – what or whose knowledge is or should be accepted?* and Phase One:

Academics were very clear that the whole education system is a middle class system that is not inclusive, it is owned by a certain group, this is exemplified by the comment of one lecturer 'we let people in but its not an inclusive place where people feel integrated...'. The same lecturer went on

Because I think until we begin to break down those ivory tower values and say yeah everyone can play around with this, its not something which is a lecturers you know, you have to talk big words, then you know we will have people in Uni who don't feel it belongs to them.

Further, it was reported that academics can feel uncomfortable and anxious with people who do not share this middle class culture. One instance was also quoted of students from WP backgrounds becoming very angry with academic language which they felt was

mystifying and they felt discriminated against, they did not see that it is necessary to express concepts precisely and without ambiguity.

A different interviewee was concerned that because HE changes you, parents from Low Participation Neighbourhood's would be frightened they would lose their children because they would leave their background behind them. This links with the ethical issues discussed under Theme 1. Further, it was reported that the BU Students Union had concerns regarding WP students

...finding it incredibly difficult to relate to sort of, relate to, mix with, sustain a student life in the environment that is overtly middle class, wealthy with everything else that means in terms of expenditure, in terms of clothes, whatever it may be.

It must be noted that the evidence base for these views regarding both parents concerns about 'losing their children' and students having difficulty relating to the environment is not clear. Additionally, it is possible that this may indicate that the interviewee holds a stereotypical view of people from WP backgrounds.

The academics who were interviewed questioned the current view about what is defined as 'good education' and, further, who owns and generates the accepted knowledge. They suggested that it is assumed that middle class knowledge is the 'right' knowledge and that the working class should aspire to a middle class education as being a 'good' education. This reflects the current governments' apparent belief that middle class values and practices are the ideals to which the working classes should aspire (Gerwitz 2001). It is also important to note here that it is, of course, precisely this type of 'knowledge' that is accepted by the professional and practitioner communities and that failure to conform would simply result in ostracization from the very communities an education is providing access to, as they would not value other 'knowledge'.

An administrator took a slightly different approach to these themes remarking that

...I think the University itself could deal with mature students a slight bit better even if they just had a bar. They've got bars for the younger students but there are

a lot of mature students here that would maybe like to bring their families along and actually just sit and socialise...

Thus reinforcing the idea that BU is a place for young students. The same administrator also commented upon the use of language in HE, and specifically BU.

I mean when I first started working for the Uni it is very hard to keep track of a conversation if you were speaking to somebody who maybe worked for the Uni for years and years....their wording is very academic and I found it difficult in the beginning coming from a background where I didn't have any of that at all...

#### Phase Two:

Although these issues were not addressed specifically by any of the interviewees, a number of points related to it do arise from the data, not least the fact that it was simply not a question that entered the heads of the interviewees to ask themselves. One course tutor made the comment that they thought that greater diversity will bring richness to the teaching and learning because people will bring different ideas which is lacking at the moment. Unlike Phase One there was no real evidence from the interviewees that they considered the 'language' issues, although Archer *et al* (2003) demonstrate that this can be a real issue for students from WP backgrounds

I think that's another culture shock in a sense, the language. It is a different language from being at college, from being at school, it is a totally different language. (Archer *et al*, 2003:133)

There was a general lack of empathy with, or understanding of, issues that WP students may face that are different to others by course tutors and Senior Lecturers. However, demonstrators, lecturers and administrators, demonstrated a better understanding of issues such as lack of confidence, with reference to 'you don't ask, it's not the done thing' and an understanding that there might be problems at home which along with a poor school background can cause additional stress for a WP student. One lecturer in particular quoted an example of a student (of ethnic minority descent) they knew who was not 'fitting in' who is better now he is playing in a University football team, as he now feels he belongs.

One administrator said

and I wonder whether people who don't experience it are afraid of people who do, you know, that it will change them. I mean it does, there is no getting away from it you will never go back the same as you were before whatever subject you study...

This reflects a similar concern expressed in Phase One regarding alienating people from their culture and ties in with one of the 5 reasons given by Archer et al (2003) for people from WP backgrounds not going into HE. Indeed, concurs with the words of one student quoted from this study

Well my boyfriend keeps on telling this saying to me... Once I come into University I will start acting like a uni student, I will start talking like a uni student, I'll start reading the papers they read...And I do find myself doing that.  
(Archer *et al*, 2003:177)

The need for pastoral support to be separate to academic support was highlighted by more than one interviewee. This issue was also raised by interviewees in Phase One and is discussed further under Theme 14 Student Support.

The prospectus attempts to indicate inclusiveness by using pictures illustrating a variety of students, in terms of age and ethnicity, and has a section dedicated to International students. However, the overall impression is still that BU is a place for young adults who enjoy a hectic nightlife of pubs and clubs and outgoing sports leisure pursuits. There is really little to attract the mature student, student with disability or the student from a minority ethnic group or many WP backgrounds. There is still evidence of an underlying assumption about what a University culture is about, albeit BU has a different culture to say a pre-1992 University. Indeed, this difference in the culture of universities was highlighted by one of the lecturers who talked about being aware of young people who had left one university to go to another because they did not like the culture and reiterates the points made by an administrator in Phase One.

The student handbooks vary from course to course but generally contain an introductory letter from the course tutor, the course structure and sometimes a syllabus for each unit of study. They also set out the assessment regulations and University and course management structure. As would be expected no specific mention of WP is made, however, some appear less formal and adopt more friendly language. This has the effect of making them more accessible and less intimidating if the student is not used to reading and using information from formal documents. Additionally, many students from working class backgrounds distrust or don't use 'cold' knowledge as set out in document like these handbooks (Archer *et al* 2003).

Observations made at the School of DEC Open Day all point to BU having a particular, narrow culture. The predominance of young white males dressed in the fashionably casual 'uniform' of the middle class could have been very off-putting for others not of this cultural group. There was certainly no evidence of 'street style' which might be found in many Low Participation Neighbourhood's. This concept of styles of dress being associated with and an expression of belonging to a certain youth group is well established in sociological studies (Haralambos, 1985:324, 359).

Similarly the videos, although appropriate for, and reflecting the audience, reinforced this narrow cultural identity. Images in the accommodation video shown at Open Day was exclusively young and white (no mature, ethnic minority or disabled), with a mix of male and female, expressing views about being near the town centre for pubs and clubs or near the BU nightclub, the Old Fire Station. There was, however, coverage of safety concerns and the BU bus service along with a variety of accommodation being shown, which to some extent reflected a range of lifestyle preferences.

The content of the Powerpoint presentation did include information on academic support and student welfare although nothing regarding general pastoral support.

The images are particularly important in that these non-verbal communications are very powerful in conveying messages about who this University is for (Archer *et al*, 2003). The same study also highlights the importance placed on 'hot' information and in particular by the opportunity to attend an Open Day and to talk to people, there was no enthusiasm for more documentary or internet based information, that is 'cold' information:

Yes I thought [the prospectus] was all right but I thought the Open Day was better... You have really got to come and feel the atmosphere if you like it, and that's when I came up and visited...

(Archer *et al*, 2003:117).

Theme 6. - *Curriculum models/structures – are the current models for HE appropriate? Is there a need for more inter-disciplinary courses, for example?*

Phase One:

This theme was not directly mentioned during either interviews or the focus group, however, a comment made during the focus group discussion does have some relevance here and the theme has links with Theme 5 already discussed. A lecturer suggested that

...looking at what kind of institution we are, where we belong in the learning experience and what kind of learning... What kind of knowledge we have and how we want to see that developed and who owns that knowledge

is important to see whether it is attractive to people from WP backgrounds. Indeed, the same lecturer suggested that it is important to decide how to measure what is a successful education system before it is possible to measure the success of WP. This echoes the ideas expressed by Barnett (1990 & 1997) who suggests that what Universities should do is provide inter-disciplinary learning opportunities and concentrate on real world and transferable problem solving skills rather than narrow subject based discipline knowledge. He suggests that concentrating on real problems would be attractive to people from WP backgrounds and would make those graduating more useful in the real world.

Phase Two:

As the courses on offer in the School of Design, Engineering & Computing are very much interdisciplinary and very vocational, for example psychology with computing; business with IT and electronics with computing, it would be surprising if this theme had been manifest in the data. However, although Barnett talks about the need to provide more inter-disciplinary courses, as discussed above, these courses are still focused on subject knowledge rather than transferable and problem solving skills. Although the

nature of the disciplines taught within the School of Design, Engineering & Computing mean that problem solving plays a significant part within the syllabus.

What is perhaps more surprising is that no evidence of any questioning of what should be taught by Universities, namely, what kind of knowledge or who owns it, was detected.

*Theme 7. - Delayed gratification – is there a trend towards the abandonment of education in favour of more instantly rewarding diversions?*

Phase One:

One academic interviewed considered that the concept of going into debt for later gain – ‘deferred gratification’ is a middle class idea and underpins the idea of Universities as elitist institutions. Students from non-traditional backgrounds are not only debt adverse but culturally expect more instant reward. This was supported by an administrator who commented - ‘When you went to Uni, lets face it, it was for posh kids’.

Phase Two:

There was general support for motivated and capable students from ALL backgrounds being able to access HE but not more of the same. The majority of interviewees identified the most important factor as being, motivation and interest in the subject, along with a good work ethic and an ability to articulate their thoughts. Many interviewees from all roles were looking for signs of ‘graduate-ness’, that is, an indication of conformance to a habitus familiar to themselves. Much frustration was expressed by this typical quotation from a conversation with a first year student or an applicant ‘....what interests you in the course? And there is usually a blank response...’ along with, from a demonstrator,

if the motivation is not right then they are going to be bored. And I’ve seen lecturers really good lecturers, lecturers who I look up to in terms of how to do the job, give really good lectures, interesting, interactive, all the kind of buzz words you can think of, the information is given out three or four times in lectures and build up seminars and then we get to run an experiment in a seminar and we have students saying I don’t know what this is about, we’ve been badly informed. And it isn’t that at all, I can see them especially as the assistant stood in the room just watching them, not doing the presentation. I can see they are not engaged at all, they are just not here mentally.



These comments are particularly interesting in the light of comments made by participants in Archer *et als* study:

Up to boring lectures, like some of them you have to sleep through and then make up the notes afterwards... (Archer *et al*, 2003:114)

and

[Education]'s boring. No one sits in here telling us that...it's going to be thrilling, its going to be a buzz, its going to be like a drug where you're going to want more and more and more. I don't get that impression at all.  
(Archer *et al*, 2003:115)

and

When I see it in the media I can see pure books. People is walking with their books on their arm all the time, looking all sad and cold and that. They should just like just relax, be like cool! (Archer *et al*, 2003:115)

Indeed, Archer *et al* make the point that those who enjoy studying are seen as socially inadequate in working class and black male youth cultures.

The comments made by academic staff indicate that they feel they are already suffering from the problems that may be associated with increased number of WP students, even though numbers of students who are classed as having WP backgrounds are very low. This, of course, must be linked to the target of 50% of people experiencing HE not being the same as broadening the background of people who experience HE. Indeed, a Senior Lecturer commented that

I'd be surprised if its going much outside the envelope what we get of what you might call normal students. I mean some of those exhibit distinct problems when it comes to work culture and study skills.

This point is further discussed in section 5.3 Quantitative Data Analysis.

A course tutor made the point that students from partner colleges which are in low participation neighbourhoods are very negative and say 'its not fair' but are not prepared to help themselves very much, when in fact a lot is being done for them.

## Theme 8. - *Vocational .v. academic education*

### Phase One:

There was a view expressed that vocational education was still seen as sub-standard to academic education by many sectors on society.

### Phase Two:

Although BU is expressly a vocational University and all courses in the School of Design, Engineering & Computing are strongly vocational many interviewees still expressed the opinion that many students just see it as a way to get a job, they see University in financial terms instead of as an education. The following quotations from lecturers and demonstrators illustrate the point: 'The expectations of some of their earning power is astronomical.' and, of formative work 'they can't understand why I don't want to read it...' and '...but that element of being on a degree which is purely for making more connections inside your head doesn't appear to be there...' and 'if I find out a student has read a book I'm always impressed.'

Similarly, a Senior Lecturer was of the opinion that

I think many of them as well don't really want to study the sort of course, the traditional degree course we offer, I say traditional because they are not the very traditional type but they are the normal vocational courses. Quite a lot of the ones we see, they really only want to train up to do a specific job which is only a relatively small part of the overall syllabus but again the notion of studying the wider subject... is not welcome.

Again, the gap between the expectations , or habitus, of academics and current students is in evidence.

One Senior Lecturer stated that

I kind of like some of the ideas that have been touted at 14 age...its certainly true there were a number of people who from 14 were quite disaffected and who have benefited from a vocational approach if they had that opportunity...

This sums up the general view that although the courses in the School of Design, Engineering & Computing are vocational the degree worthiness of them requires students to read around the subject and develop both an independent and analytical style

of learning and, thus, to engage with a broader education than the purely job related. Indeed, during observation of the Open Day this very point was stressed by Course Tutors in an attempt to ensure that potential students were aware of what the courses involved.

#### Theme 9. - *Admissions criteria*

##### Phase One:

Academic staff suggested that admissions staff only understand WP in terms of admissions criteria and this means that only the 'normal students' with good qualifications get in, suggesting that perhaps we should be interviewing more or using psychometric tests. In addition to this the pressures of meeting targets, both of recruitment and retention means there is a reluctance to look to the unknown. Thus admissions staff tend to see WP students in terms of 'Dodgy post codes'. Mention was also made of hearing the term 'The great unwashed' used - interestingly this term appears in an article in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* which quotes Richard Brown, CIHE chief executive (Tysome, 2002). Concern was also expressed regarding positive discrimination – 'and that's where positive discrimination very often throws up people feeling am I here on merit or am I here because of the colour of my skin or whatever.' This becomes a particular problem with the use of Summer Schools to assist entry for WP students who wanted to know 'why are we here, why us, why have we been chosen?' With respect to people from the local community it was felt that BU is 'a bit like Sleeping Beauty's castle, you know, the thicket hedge goes up' and nobody can see its there, let alone get in the door.

##### Phase Two:

Topics around admissions criteria created a lot of comment. In particular the need for more 'sophisticated' admissions techniques which we don't have at present which includes the need to determine attitude and motivation. There was an acknowledgement that qualifications were not all that important but then again the need to know subject material and the need to know how to pass exams and how to study was raised.

Course Tutors expressed the fact that they can fill places with students with good A level results and that they usually leave admissions decisions to administrators and admissions tutors. However, they would consider a WP student with lower qualifications but the right attitude and interview them, but they don't know if they get told they have WP

applications so how can they do this? One course tutor interviews all but it is small course and they are prepared to be flexible but still insists that they get knowledge before starting course. Course tutors were aware of general acceptance that it was OK to accept lower grades from people from schools in Low Participation Neighbourhood's than public schools etc. It should be noted that these interviews started before the time of great debate about admissions policy (Bristol Uni lowering grades for state schools etc) which really came to a head in March 2003. However, it is reasonable to suggest that the interviewees were already aware of the complexity of the issue. Indeed, administrators acknowledged that at confirmation of places on receipt of results should the points of a WP applicant be slightly less than the offer

whereby we may reject, I suppose, we would reject other people who are not from the WP area, those would be looked at more closely and given a more favourable opportunity I suppose.

There was generally little idea about what is going on to get young people from WP backgrounds interested and prepared for HE, although the problem of raising aspirations was mentioned by a some course tutors and administrators. Only 2 people mentioned Summer Schools and 1 HE taster days. This would indicate the problems highlighted earlier of attempting to implement a centrally driven policy within a devolved structure. It also highlights that publications such as the Pathways newspaper are not being successful in disseminating information regarding what is being done to engage people from WP backgrounds.

Interestingly there was no comment about the appropriateness of qualifications other than 'A' levels as preparation for HE by interviewees. However, at an observation of the Design, Engineering & Computing School Committee meeting it was pointed out that the School's 'A' level entry points are in the middle comparing nationally yet the retention rate is below average. However, there is a diverse range of students which means many don't come with A levels therefore, there is a need to understand better what happens before they enter Uni. The view was expressed that this was a school issue and not a University issue. There was no recognition that the cause of their problem with students' attitudes might be related to prior experience in tertiary education being different, and hence, it will be necessary to understand learning and teaching practice set by schools in order to narrow the gap to that experienced in HE.

This is particularly important when considered in the light of one student's comment from Archer *et al*

My friend did travel and tourism (GNVQ) and he found it crap as well and now he's at uni he's really struggling cos the course didn't prepare him for university. So I don't think this course prepares you for uni cos it's so relaxed and the work's just, well I don't think the work's difficult at all.  
(Archer *et al*, 2003:151)

Statistics for qualifications upon entry to programmes and retention, in the School of Design, Engineering & Computing, are presented and discussed in section 5.3 quantitative data analysis.

The section of the prospectus that is specific to the School of Design, Engineering & Computing largely provides factual information on courses, however, of the three student profiles one is of a mature male student and one of a female student. It is stated that the mature male student left school with no formal qualifications and gained entry via a foundation programme. The young male student came to University straight from school. The required entry qualifications other than referring to standard benchmark entry qualifications state specific tariff points and profiles and give little indication that other backgrounds may be considered.

In a Course Team Meeting, that was observed, a concern was raised regarding standards when it was announced that the intake numbers for academic year 03/04 had been raised significantly. It was generally felt that whilst this number could be attained it would be at the expense of the standard of qualifications and in the longer term would cause problems with retention. No discussion of other forms of admission criteria were discussed or of providing extra support for weaker students. The discussion lead to more general comment about having to take lesser qualified students for WP purposes and to cover losses elsewhere in the school.

Theme 10. - *Declining standards*

Phase One:

Concerns about dumbing down were reported upon, however, it was also stated that little evidence had been found at BU thus this may be a media driven idea. Although one Lecturer did suggest that

...the kind of feelings that I've witnessed from some members of staff who perceive them as a different species who are dumbed down in some way and/or have questionable rights to be here

And a Senior Academic reported that

I think its driven by anxiety and to some extent also driven by some of the media terminology that is used, like 'dumbing down', so I think its an anxious perception, but at the moment I think it's a potentially negative attitude that I've come across.

Further, a Senior Lecturer felt that academic staff's concerns regarding WP were a definite barrier for WP students, saying

...but I think it worth saying that I think staff are, they are concerned about, those involved in the WP agenda are going to cause a lowering of standards, because they see this sort of encouragement, to some extent to disregard the 3 A levels or whatever, they see that as lowering standards.

A related issue was reported as having been found across BU which was the University staff are there to research and not to teach, with the implication being that WP students will require more teaching as they will not be self managed learners.

Phase Two:

Although the term declining standards was rarely mentioned there is much evidence in the data which suggests that the general opinion is that standards have declined. The most obvious comments being:

I think that Uni's will become schools, or colleges. I cannot see a Uni being somewhere people go because they really desire to learn, it will be somewhere people go to get a qualification.

and

...because they has to be a knock on debate about standards and its seems to me that there has to be a knock on in terms of standards, you can't expect that many

people, I mean the population does not get that much better, they probably get better...but it has not improved by those kinds of orders.

Along with the story regarding one student who left the course because 'he said there is no intellectual conversation here', however, as with all standards debates there is little if any hard evidence to demonstrate that standards are falling. There is perhaps more evidence to support another concern that was also expressed that degrees have got devalued. That is, that now everybody has a degree they can't be worth that much in terms of status.

Evidence of the related theme reported in Phase One regarding the role of a University lecturer, to teach or to research was found in Phase two data in the quotation 'I didn't become a lecturer to teach WP students all the while ...I want to develop myself... to teaching on a Masters course ...'.

Theme 11. - *HE culture - is it enacted rather than constructed and are academics are passive and reactive in response to policy change?*

Phase One:

Two interviewees expressed the opinion that Universities as institutions don't embrace change, and hence, academics not really engaging with WP issues which require change. This view is evidenced by quotations such as 'Uni's don't manage, they administer' and also 'My suspicion is that the majority, have and will continue to ignore it as long as they can and just get on with what they are doing.'

Phase Two:

It is perhaps not surprising that there is no reference to this theme in the data which was collected largely from academics. The lack of knowledge about the changing policy with regard to WP in itself suggests a passive and reactive nature from some of these academics. This lack of knowledge also leads to incorrect assumptions about who are classed as WP students although course tutors and administrators generally had a better knowledge about the classifications for WP. The general view was that WP students were those who wouldn't normally go to HE but few interviewees could be more specific about exactly what BU defined WP students as or whether they actually engaged with any. A couple had found out by accident that they taught students defined as WP. This is further supported by the data collected in phase one and can be summed up by repeating

the quotation 'My suspicion is that the majority, have and will continue to ignore it as long as they can and just get on with what they are doing.' Therefore, there can be no argument that academics treat WP students differently because they don't know who they are and therefore, the concept of a 'WP student' itself becomes an artificial construct of policy.

The minutes, from academic year 01/02 of the Lifelong Learning Advisory Committee of the University reveal that the committee is constituted of representatives from all seven Academic Schools of the University as well as a variety of central support services. The meetings are generally well attended, however, the contribution to the meeting of the Academic School representatives is minimal, with the exception of Bournemouth Media School, only one set of minutes include updates on activities in the Schools and these activities are limited to increasing Continuing Professional Development opportunities. The evidence from these minutes indicates that the WP agenda is currently being centrally driven and is not yet embedded with the Academic Schools. This is further evidenced by the limited attendance at Staff Development workshops offered by the Office of Lifelong Learning on WP which are largely attended by administrative staff and not academics. The minutes also reveal that there is disagreement across the schools regarding the format and use of Summer Schools leading to two different types of Summer School being offered during the summer of 2002. The extent of this being a centrally driven agenda is likely to increase with the need for each School to agree its WP strategy with the Office of Lifelong Learning in planning for academic year 03/04. The implications for the successful implementation of this policy as a centrally driven policy in a devolved structure need consideration.

The Annual Reports on Course Monitoring, a centrally imposed quality procedure, again do not deal explicitly with WP issues, although statistics on students profiles, progression and achievement do indicate age, ethnicity and post-code status. There is also comment upon these statistics and where appropriate reasons are identified on a unit by unit basis for poor progression rates. The reasons considered are varied but never reflect upon the backgrounds of the students who fail. This may be linked to the fact that the majority of academic staff teaching the units are unaware of the background of individual students, as evidenced by information extracted from the interviews. Staff are, however, aware anecdotally that students from WP backgrounds might be failing, one Senior Lecturer said



I have heard a rumour that the students in this category are not doing particularly well, I don't know if that is true because I don't know who they are...

## Theme 12 – *Institutional Funding and Student Finance*

### Phase One:

Funding for both institutions and students was identified as a big problem. In relation to students it was generally considered that with the stopping of the maintenance grant and the introduction of fees it simply became impossible for many people from less well off backgrounds to consider University. The problems with funding were raised by academics and administrators alike during the focus group discussion, however, it was the administrators who expressed stronger views regarding the reluctance to take on debt, with one saying:

...if I was in a position where I know that at the end of my University career I know that I would have all the qualifications but I would have £15,000 debt, I would rather not have the debt and not have the qualification then at least you are out and you're working and you're earning money and you don't have this kick start your life with a huge debt.

The funding for the institution was identified as being related to the reason why some people were in favour of the WP agenda. This is summarised by the following quotation 'A lot of people see it as an extra bit of funding, a price tag, because the WP students come with extra money.'

### Phase Two:

The problems regarding finance for WP students was well recognised in issues such as: not having their own computers; not being able to afford the latest fashions (BU students fashion victims); not being able to afford to go out so much; not being able to afford good paper for printing etc and for 'glossy' presentation of coursework which this might effect their mark.

There was also a belief that the WP students would need more support, although interviewees were not able to articulate exactly what form this would need to take, and a Senior Lecturer illustrated a widely expressed comment, 'but as far as I am aware there

is no increase in resources'. In fact, the school gets extra funding for WP students precisely to provide any additional support. This funding is currently used to support the various initiatives to improve retention.

At the School Committee meeting the student representative raised the issue of top up fees. They asked what was BU proposing to do but also expressed concern that if BU did not charge full top up fees it would damage reputation of its degrees for those who had already got them as well as for the future.

Interestingly the report conducted into reasons for student withdrawals from programmes in the School of Design, Engineering & Computing did not highlight finance as being a major problem, with only one student out of 20 stating he ran out of money and had a problem finding a part time job.

Two additional themes emerged from the data that were not evident from the literature:

Theme 13 – *Extra work and work overload*

Phase One:

Those interviewed from the Office of Lifelong Learning had a clear perception that for many staff in BU WP simply meant more work when they were already overloaded, and felt this was a definite barrier to WP. Comments included:

My suspicion is that the majority, have and will continue to ignore it as long as they can and just get on with what they are doing. It might be because they've just got enough on their plate...I tend to feel as though most people tend to feel as if they are up to their eyes anyway...

and

Because I think that people are just overloaded already, they are initiative out.

Views related to this issue expressed during focus group discussion ranged from ignorance, 'I don't think they necessarily know enough about it to have strong views.' To some expression of sympathy for time pressure and priorities '... but significantly although they may be open to the notion they clearly don't regard it as sufficient priority when there are time pressures...'

It was noted also that academics generally didn't attend the workshops run by the Office of Lifelong Learning on WP. These workshops were generally only attended by administrators.

#### Phase Two:

The concern that this (WP) will mean extra work for which there is no extra resources was a consistent issue along with general initiative overload, for administrators in particular, with one saying '...and I'm like - Oh my god - you know when is it going to end.'

### Theme 14 – *Student Support*

#### Phase One:

Concern regarding a lack of appropriate student support was mentioned by interviewees in Phase One. One Senior Lecturer in particular, linked this to the difficulty of people from WP backgrounds to adapt to the culture stating that 'I'm surprised more people don't give up because of all the adjustments that have to be made really.'

Another interviewee felt that the lack of a personal tutoring system at BU was an issue who said that students had reported that

...they felt a gap, a vacuum where they want to talk to somebody, they want somebody to listen to them...they want somebody within the school that will listen to them...they don't want it in central services.

Interviewees linked the issue of student support to the issue of retention rates. With one Senior Lecturer suggesting that WP may be the

....inevitable price you pay for WP....WP is the risk game in a sense, in that you are bringing in the people who may have difficulty with a-culturation...and maybe therefore, an increase in wastage is inevitable.

There is here a clear recognition being demonstrated of there being different cultures.

#### Phase Two:

Interestingly, there was an obvious lack of ideas about what support WP students may need that would be different to other students. Yet most interviewees were engaged in one form or another with changing the nature of the learning and teaching environment in an attempt to improve retention and progression rates. This issue was high on the agenda in the School of Design, Engineering & Computing at the time the interviews

were conducted. However, most interviewees failed to see the connection that many of the measures being put in place would also support WP students. Yet there were examples of initiatives being implemented to sort out retention problems that would help WP students anyway. Measures included the use of peer mentoring or first year students by second years and the introduction of pastoral tutorials by Course Tutors or Year Tutors. Also, worryingly, an administrator expressed concern that

I think that lecturers should be aware that people that have come from these backgrounds and I'm sure if they make mistakes with the way they lay out assignments or...they would be interested to know, and not just have it written on fail...I think some people would treat them a bit flippantly.

The minutes, from academic year 01/02, of the School Committee of the School of Design, Engineering & Computing do not specifically address the issue of WP, with one exception, when the issue of diversity in the University was raised by the Chairman to confirm that WP was part of the promotion of diversity within the University. However, a number of issues were raised which have implications for WP students, these include the extension of the teaching day to 7pm, the fact that some courses had high wastage rates and that pastoral tutorials had been introduced on some courses. Additionally, that there were problems with the early finishing of the University bus service and the attitude of some bus staff.

Observations taken at a School Committee Meeting academic year 02/03 also indicate concern with student support issues and once again the issue of timetabling the standard day from 9am to 7pm was raised by both staff and student reps. This is causing difficulties for students with childcare responsibilities and those living in accommodation where the evening meal is provided usually earlier than 7pm.

Also discussed was the fact that increased pastoral support for students implemented on some courses appears to be improving retention. This issue, although not related to WP in the discussion is, of course, extremely important for successful WP, therefore, it is particularly concerning the link was not made in the meeting.

Observations at a Course Team meeting recorded that a new method for recording student attendance was installed, however, as the new register system is not kept up to

date it is impossible to know which students are not attending and therefore, at risk of dropping out. If we know we can take preventative action which is sometimes successful.

### 5.2.2 Comments on Qualitative Analysis

In Phase One there were significant issues which emerge from both the literature review and the data that do not correspond. Much of the concern reported relating to academic staff centred around the perceived increase in workload and general 'hassle' that comes with the WP agenda. A particular concern that was raised related to BU is the lack of a personal tutoring system, which it was felt WP students may have more need for, the reason identified for not having such a system was lack of resources. However, a different interviewee felt that students entering from WP backgrounds do not necessarily need different support, indeed the very idea may stigmatise them, but that in fact all students would benefit from support. Along with these issues a scepticism and defensiveness about what are seen as centrally imposed policies, both in terms of government and internally to BU (particularly with the devolved structure of BU) was reported. These issues do not emerge from the literature.

Yet, Theme 2. - the lack of consultation by the government in establishing the policy and consideration of the appropriateness, to WP students, of courses offered is a clear issue in the literature but does not appear from the collected data. This is particularly concerning in that it suggests that the Office of Lifelong Learning at BU has not consulted WP candidates regarding its WP policy and practices. It may also be indicative that, generally, the responses from academic staff concur with the view expressed by Trowler (1997) and Selway (1995) that the response of academics is generally passive and reactive. Also, Theme 6, curriculum models/structures, was not raised in the data collected, this could be due to the group not being closely allied with specific undergraduate programmes. It must also be considered that one reason why these themes did not appear in the data collected may be the nature of the questions used to obtain the data. Reflection on the revised questions used for Phase Two prior to commencement of that phase determined that the questions allowed these themes to be raised just as much as others that were mentioned. Hence, no change was made to the questions related to these themes,

The over riding themes which emerge from the Phase Two data are that staff still wish to retain an elite who obtain an honours degree but that elite includes people from ALL

backgrounds who have the right attitude, motivation and enthusiasm for their subject along with the will to want education for the intellectual development. What they are against is what they feel they have got which is a lot of mediocre middle class students who don't know why they are at University or are only there to get a well paid job. Indeed, some have a moral difficulty with encouraging so many people to study degrees when it is unlikely there are the jobs for them, they will get into lots of debt and a high likelihood they may fail because of the wrong attitude. Interviewees do see some of the difficulties with ensuring that people from ALL backgrounds have fair access to HE but are generally unaware of the initiatives which are already underway to attempt to remedy the problem and most were unclear about exactly what constituted a WP student. They also feel overworked and therefore, don't really know how they would be able to offer the additional support academically and pastorally that they feel WP students may need, but they would be more inclined to offer such support to students who show the right attitude.

#### Comparing Phase One & Phase Two:

Three main differences emerge when comparing the issues arising from each phase of the research:

- Interviewees from Phase One raised the issue of how staff feel teaching WP students, however, no mention was made of this by the staff who actually teach WP students in Phase Two.
- In general the staff who responded in Phase One expressed deeper ethical issues related to ownership of knowledge and nature and culture of HE, however, this type of comment did not emerge from Phase Two data.
- The issue of students entering HE for the wrong reasons was a clear issue for respondents in Phase Two but did not emerge in Phase One data.

These three differences are significant in that they may be indicative of staff from the Office of Lifelong Learning seeing the same functions and activities of the University rather differently from staff within the School of Design, Engineering & Computing. This is likely to be because they have a different perspective on the WP agenda to each other. There is also evidence to suggest that the process of transferring from policy determination by staff in the Office of Lifelong Learning to that policy being embedded or implemented has not been fully successful. Thus, confirming the importance of stakeholders in the policy process.

#### 4.6 Quantitative Data Analysis

One of the clear messages that emerges from the qualitative data analysis is that staff in the School of Design, Engineering & Computing feel that they currently teach a lot of 'mediocre middle class students' who don't know why they are at Uni. To determine the exact nature of the current student population of the School of Design, Engineering & Computing the following statistical analysis has been undertaken. This will enable this perception to be tested against the reality to determine if there is a gap. However, before the reality can be established it is important to consider exactly what staff mean by the term 'mediocre middle class students'. Looking at the qualitative data analysis the type of comments that frequently occurred, include:

- moving the line down to pick up more of the same;
- lack of motivation;
- not knowing why they are here;
- problems with work culture and study skills;
- studying the wider subject not welcome;
- no real desire to learn.

Interestingly, there is no actual comments regarding their qualifications or actual knowledge, the comments all relate to issues related to attitude.

The statistics for qualifications on entry to programmes for the School of Design, Engineering & Computing, for the last three years are given in Figure 9.:

**Figure 9 Statistics from Qualifications on Entry to Programmes in School of DEC**

<b>AY</b>	<b>A level</b>	<b>BTEC</b>	<b>GNVQ</b>	<b>Access</b>	<b>APEL</b>	<b>HE</b>	<b>other</b>
<b>02/03</b>	59.6%	8.2%	7.4%	4.7%	3.2%	0.3%	18.5%
<b>01/02</b>	56.3%	10.4%	14.9%	5.3%	3%	0.3%	806%
<b>00/01</b>	49.6%	11%	11.6%	7.9%	5%	0.3%	16.5%

These statistics would indicate a decreasing willingness to consider other qualifications than A level, with BTEC, GNVQ, Access and APEL entrants all decreasing. It is of course, also possible that this simply reflects a trend in applicants to having A level qualifications.

This compares with HEFCE data from Performance Indicators 2002 from all HEI's for young entrants to full time first degree courses by subject and entry qualifications 2000-2002, see Figure 10:

**Figure 10 HEFCE Performance Indicators by Subject and Entry Qualification**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>A level</b>	<b>BTEC</b>	<b>GNVQ</b>	<b>Access</b>	<b>HE</b>	<b>other</b>
Maths & Computer Sciences	78%	0.04%	11%	0.008%	0.04%	0.03%
Engineering & Technology	80%	0.05%	0.05%	0.02%	0.04%	0.03%

Hence, the School of Design, Engineering & Computing clearly takes a much higher percentage of students without A level qualifications than the national average for the subjects covered by the school.

Statistics for A level points on entry, by programme, for the School of Design, Engineering & Computing for academic year 2001/02 are presented in Figure 11.

HEFCE data from Performance Indicators 2002 from all HEI's for young entrants to full time first degree courses by subject and entry qualifications 2000-2002 shows the national average for A level points in:

Mathematical & Computer Sciences was 18.1 points

Engineering & Technology was 18.4 points.

It is important to note that under Curriculum 2000 and the new UCAS tariff system all qualifications, not just A levels, are awarded points and it is the total that is used in both prospectus and conditional offers. Additionally, the GNVQ qualification has been replaced by the AVCE and the A level has become the AS+A2 qualifications. This applies to entrants enrolling from September 2003.

Statistics for first year progression for the School of Design, Engineering & Computing for the last three years are presented in the Figure 12.



**Figure 11 Statistics for A level Points on Entry by Programme**

Course	Av. A level points on entry <sup>1</sup>	Prospectus 2001	Prospectus 2003
		UCAS tariff	UCAS tariff
BA/BSc Computer Aided Product Design	17.0	14	180
BA Interior Design	16.4	12	160
BA/BSc Product Design	17.0	16	220
BEng Applied Computing and Electronics	12.4	12	160
BEng Computer Communications	10.1	12	160
BEng Electronic Systems Design	12.8	12	160
BEng Medical Electronics Design	13.0	12	160
BSc Applied Psychology and Computing	16.7	14	180
BSc Business Communication Systems	13.4	14	180
BSc Business Information Technology	15.4	18	200-240
BSc Computing	15.5	16-18	200-240
BSc Design Engineering	13.6	12	160
BSc Multimedia Communications	16.0	14	180
BSc Software Engineering Management	15.5	16-18	200-240
Total	14.63		

<sup>1</sup>It should be remembered that this only covers 56.3% of the student intake who have A levels.

**Figure 12 Statistics for First Year Progression for School of DEC**

AY	Total Passes	Total withdrawn	Total Fails	Non Continuation
01/02	69%	13%	16%	29%
00/01	74.6%	11.5%	12%	23.5%
99/00	71.8%	12.7%	12%	24.7%

Note there are a very small number of students who for various reasons have not yet taken re-assessments, hence, the figures do not total to 100%.

It is important to note here the difference between withdrawn and failed students, although both categories result in non-continuation. Withdrawn indicates that the students has removed themselves from the course, whereas failed indicates that the student has taken the assessments and not attained the necessary academic standard to pass. The reasons for withdrawal are likely to be very different to those for failure. Hence, a breakdown of non-continuation by course and academic qualification for School of Design, Engineering & Computing for academic year 2001/02 is presented in the Figure 13.

This table presented in Figure 13. indicates that students with non A level qualifications are more likely to withdraw than fail, whereas for students with A levels the numbers are roughly equal.

This compares with HEFCE data from Performance Indicators 2002 from all HEI's for young, full time first degree entrants for non-continuation following year of entry (1999-2000):

Maths & Computer Sciences – all qualifications 10%

Engineering & Technology – all qualifications 10%

The table presented in Figure 14. shows the same non-continuation data broken down by qualification.

**Figure 14 HEFCE Performance Indicators for Non-Continuation**

Subject	A level	BTEC	GNVQ	Access	HE	other
Maths & Computer Sciences	8.78%	16%	15%	23%	15%	18%
Engineering & Technology	9%	16%	19%	15%	15%	23%

**Figure 13 Statistics for Non-Continuation by Course and Academic Qualification**

Course	A level	BTEC	GNVQ	Access/ Fdtion	Other	Total Non-cont
BA/BSc Computer Aided Product Design	5 3	3 1				WD 8 Fail 4
BA Interior Design	2 2		1			WD 3 Fail 2
BA/BSc Product Design	8 3	1	1			WD 8 Fail 5
BEng Applied Computing and Electronics	6	1 2	1			WD 8 Fail 2
BEng Computer Communications	3 2	1		1		WD 5 Fail 2
BEng Electronic Systems Design	1		1		1	WD 2 Fail 1
BEng Medical Electronics Design	1			1	1	WD 2 Fail 1
BSc Applied Psychology and Computing	5 1		1	2	2	WD 10 Fail 1
BSc Business Communication Systems	1 3	1	1 1	1 1	1	WD 4 Fail 6
BSc Business Information Technology	6 2	2	2 2	2 2	1 1	WD 13 Fail 7
BSc Computing	5 8	2 1	2 3	1	1	WD 9 Fail 14
BSc Design Engineering	1 1		1			WD 2 Fail 1
BSc Multimedia Communications	2	4	1	1		Fail 8
BSc Software Engineering Management		2	1 1	2		WD 5 Fail 1
<b>Total WD or Fail</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>% of those enrolled with that qualification</b>	<b>18.9</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>34.1</b>	<b>50</b>	

These statistics clearly indicate that students not holding A level qualifications are less likely to be retained.

The A level points for those entering the School of Design, Engineering & Computing programmes with A levels who did not continue are spread fairly evenly across the points range as the table presented in Figure 15. indicates:

**Figure 15 A level points on Entry for School of DEC**

Points	>24	20	18	16	14	12	10	8	6<
No of students	6	10	6	7	9	6	10	5	5

In summary these statistics reveal that the School of Design, Engineering & Computing has:

- a lower number of students entering with A levels than the national average for these subjects, albeit rising, 50-60% against 79%
- a lower average A level points than the national average for these subjects, 14.6 points against 18.1-18.4 points.
- a higher non-continuation rate than the national average for these subjects between 24-29% against 10%, however, the proportions against qualification type are approximately the same as the national average indicating the Design, Engineering & Computing courses are no less suitable than the national average for students with qualifications other than A levels.
- a match with the benchmark of 10% for students from Low Participation Neighbourhood's, along with 10% being disabled, 12% being mature and 10% from ethnic minorities (from Section 1.1)
- a higher number of students with non A level qualifications withdraw than fail, whereas it is roughly equal for students with A levels.

It would appear that there is a clear relationship between qualifications other than A levels on entry and likelihood of non-continuation. This would confirm the evidence from Archer *et al* (2003) and from the qualitative data analysis which indicates that qualifications other than A level do not prepare students for HE study as well as A levels. This is further evidenced by the fact that non-continuation is more likely to be due to withdrawal than failure suggesting that the students entering HE with non-A levels qualifications find HE study and possibly culture a greater challenge than students with

A levels. It may also account for the lack of thought as to why a student entered HE widely reported in the qualitative data analysis.

Given that both BU and the School of Design, Engineering & Computing have very low numbers of students who are classified as being in WP categories, and particularly from lower socio-economic class groups, the findings reported here related to staff and their views of the students they teach, must refer to non-WP students. On initial analysis this would appear to support the interviewees view that they currently teach a lot of mediocre middle class students, however, the actual qualifications held by these students need further consideration. It must be noted that the national average figures obviously include pre1992 universities. If a comparison were to be made between BU and other post 1992 universities the situation would look rather different and BU would be within the average range for qualifications and for non-continuation. Thus, it may be possible to conclude that what the evidence actually points to is a gap between the culture of current students (predominantly 18-22 years old) and that of the staff within the School of Design, Engineering & Computing. This is further evidenced by the following statistics regarding progression and achievement of some of the students falling into the WP category as defined by BU presented in Figures 16 and 17.

**Figure 16 - 1<sup>st</sup> Year Progression**

	00/01 wd	00/01 fail	01/02 wd	01/02 fail	02/03 wd	02/03 fail
Home non –white	10%	25%	13%	23%	12%	21%
Int non-white	0%	50%	22%	26%	7%	27%
Home white	12%	11%	12%	15%	11%	12%
Int white	8%	21%	13%	13%	10%	5%
Disability	14%	20%	16%	11%	8%	13%
LPN - DEC	16%	20%	18%	20%	16%	16%
<i>LPN - BU</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>12%</i>	<i>11%</i>	<i>16%</i>	<i>12%</i>	<i>14%</i>
<b>DEC Progression</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>13%</b>

**Figure 17 -Degree Classification**

	00/01 All	Hm n-wh	LPN	01/02	Hm n-wh	LPN	02/03	Hm n-wh	LPN
1sts	5%	0	15	9%	11	18	12%	5	0
2:1	35%	15	23	41%	37	50	44%	26	53
2:2	52%	62	46	43%	42	21	34%	37	29
3 <sup>rd</sup>	5%	19	8	5%	11	7	7%	26	6
Pass	4%	4	8	2%	0	4	3%	5	12

It must be noted that numbers of home and international non-white students is small (only 2 in 00/01 5 in 01/02 and 3 in 02/03), similarly actual numbers of Low Participation Neighbourhood students is small (00/01=26; 01/02=28; 02/03=17).

As can be seen from the figures above the three WP categories covered by these statistics are ethnicity, Low Participation Neighbourhood and disability. Considering each category in turn, in summary these statistics indicate that:

#### Ethnicity

- Failure rate for Home non-white and international non-white much higher than total progression for Design, Engineering & Computing.
- Home and International non-white students in Design, Engineering & Computing gain lower graded degrees than home and international white students.

#### Low Participation Neighbourhoods

- Progression in Design, Engineering & Computing, in terms of both withdrawal and failure, for these students is worse than Design, Engineering & Computing average and worse than BU average.
- Low Participation Neighbourhood students in Design, Engineering & Computing have achieved a higher number of 1sts than average until last year and higher number of 3rds and pass degrees but a lower number of 2:1's suggesting they tend to do really well or really not well.

#### Disability

- Progression for students with disability is improving and in academic year 02/03 was above the Design, Engineering & Computing average.

The statistics for Low Participation Neighbourhood's are particularly interesting in the context of this study in that although WD and failure rates are higher than the School of Design, Engineering & Computing average many of those who are retained gain 1<sup>st</sup> class degrees, indeed a higher than average number. Although, conversely they also gain higher than average number of 3<sup>rd</sup> and pass degrees. This may indicate that educational capital is higher in many WP students who do really well than in non-WP students who tend to gain 2:1 and 2:2s.

## **Chapter 5 Conclusions**

### **5.1 Reflections on the Methodology & Methods**

#### **5.1.1 Validity, Reliability & Generalizability**

The principles of validity, reliability and generalizability were discussed in Chapter 3 in the context of a predominantly qualitative research study. As discussed previously, the term validity is better replaced with credibility and reliability is better replaced with dependability, in a qualitative study such as this one. As the data collection and consecutive analysis proceeded, through Phase One and 2 it became clear that a number of themes were emerging. It was also clear that these themes were being repeated and that the focus group in Phase One, the 12 interviews conducted, along with participant observation and documentary analysis was sufficient to ensure that extension of themes was no longer occurring. All transcripts were checked and agreed with participants of both interviews and the focus group. Further the findings have been discussed with both participants and other members of staff of DEC and with educational researchers and all findings discussed were considered to 'ring true'. Four data collection methods were used to enable a good level of triangulation to be undertaken, this is evidenced in the data analysis where each theme is discussed supported by data from a number of these different collection methods.

By deliberate selection the participants were expected to have varying levels of familiarity with the WP policies and their implementation at BU. It was felt that this was necessary to genuinely reflect the range of staff which students will come into contact with. However, this did lead to a certain amount of reflexivity occurring which is acknowledged in the data analysis, with a number of participants commenting that they had not really considered some of the issues being discussed before. As far as it is possible to be sure of another human beings motives, the participants were felt to be genuine, however, a number of points relating to their motives must be acknowledged. These are discussed further in the section on sampling.

As noted in Chapter 3, true qualitative research cannot be generalized, however, it is certainly possible to see that the methodology and results from this study may be used to direct a study investigating the same research questions on another group of people.

#### **5.1.2 Ethnographic Methodology**

The ethnographic based methodology described in Chapter 3 was implemented in full for this study. However, as with any ethnographic study the impact of the researcher on the

study group must be determined. This is discussed in detail in the section ethical considerations and is felt to genuinely reflect the reality experienced during data collection. The ethnographic methodology was successful in allowing patterns of behaviour to emerge during analysis from the rich data gathered. Thus, theories were formed from the data, as intended.

### 5.1.3 Data Collection Methods

All participant observations followed the format described in Chapter 3 and permissions were sought and granted in all cases. No observations were recorded outside formal observation sessions, although on a number of occasions to do so would have provided valuable evidence.

As ever with interviews that are structured or, as in this case, semi-structured, it is necessary to consider to what extent the questions lead to certain responses. The wording of the questions was reviewed after Phase One and some small modifications made, these are discussed in Chapter 4, Data Collection. It is not considered that the questions necessarily directed or lead the direction taken by the discussion, however, it must be acknowledged that the very act of questioning lead to participants considering their response to the subject matter during the interview. In many cases, the subject matter had not been reflected upon to any great extent by the participant prior to the interview. The use of a semi-structured format fulfilled the intention of ensuring that all interviews covered the same material, however, it did mean that other areas may not have been explored. All participants were, however, given the opportunity to add any comments of their own and many took this opportunity, albeit those who had perhaps a more pre-considered view on the subject. The role and impact of the interviewer must also be considered, this is discussed under ethical issues.

Only one focus group was run in Phase One which proved useful in confirming the areas for investigation in Phase Two. The focus group was conducted as described in Chapter 3, however, it must be acknowledged that the physical seating arrangement lead to a slightly confrontation atmosphere between academics and administrators that would best have been avoided. It is unlikely, however, if this significantly effected the data.

### 5.1.4 Sampling

As mentioned previously in the section of dependability in this chapter the method used for sampling, namely asking for volunteers, must lead to inevitable questions relating to



the motives behind the act of volunteering and, hence, to the need to consider whether this has skewed the data. The possible motives that lead to people volunteering are considered to include:

- the chance to ‘sound-off’ about an issue (not necessarily WP) they feel passionate about
- the chance to be listened to and make their points to a Senior Academic and manager of their School
- a genuine interest in WP
- a feeling of empathy or antagonism with the WP policy due to their own backgrounds
- a genuine desire to help with a research activity

As the motive that prompted a member of staff to volunteer may have a significant impact upon the data collected, the likely impact of each of these motives is evaluated here. It is often commented upon, anecdotally, that individual members of staff do not have a lot of opportunity to communicate with senior staff. Thus, it is possible that some participants took this opportunity to communicate. This might account for their apparent lack of knowledge on the subject of WP, however, as no participant attempted to lead the conversation in other directions this did not impact the credibility of the data and suggests that many participants were actually trying to be helpful to somebody conducting research. Comments made during interviews particularly, suggest that many participants were using the opportunity as an easy method to obtain further information on a topic that they felt was impacting their professional lives but about which they felt they had little information. This did lead to some participants trying to seek information rather than respond to the questions, however, only factual information was given in response to such questions which should not have influenced the data collected. It has been acknowledged elsewhere that a significant percentage of the participants transpired to consider themselves to have been students from WP backgrounds when they entered HE. It must, therefore, be acknowledged that their own feelings towards the very different experiences of current WP students will have influenced their responses, and as their number was significant, have skewed the data. However, their backgrounds are still considered to be representative of a significant number of staff within post 1992 universities and, therefore, the data is still considered valid.

### 5.1.5 Ethical Issues

As mentioned earlier in this chapter when evaluating the ethnographic methodology used for this study it is difficult to determine the impact of the researcher entering the study group. This was made particularly difficult in this study as not only was I a member of the study group in the course of my normal occupation but I also have a senior managerial role within the group. Thus, the extent to which I was able to form objective judgements on the data collected and the extent to which my presence influenced the data collected must be evaluated. My role within the study group, although managerial in nature, did not involve direct line management of staff. This may well have positively influenced dependability of the data as the participants would not have felt that I was in a position of power over them.

It must also be acknowledged that some data has had to be omitted where it was not possible to guarantee anonymity.

## 5.2 Final Reflections

The data analysis took the themes that emerged from the literature review, which are listed below, and compared them to the themes emerging from the data.

1. Reasons for the expansion of HE – is it for economic or social justice reasons and why the target of 50% participation in HE was determined?
2. Power relationships in policy making - what consultation was undertaken with stakeholders such as WP candidates and Universities when establishing the policy?
3. Employment benefits – what are the effects of partaking in HE for WP candidates?
4. Cultural gap - what consideration has been given to whether there is a cultural gap between the culture of Universities' and that of people from WP backgrounds, and how this gap could be closed if it exists?
5. Epistemology – what or whose knowledge is or should be accepted?
6. Curriculum models/structures – are the current models for HE appropriate? Is there a need for more inter-disciplinary courses, for example?
7. Delayed gratification – is there a trend towards the abandonment of education in favour of more instantly rewarding diversions?
8. Vocational .v. academic education.
9. Admissions criteria
10. Declining standards.
11. HE culture - is it enacted rather than constructed and are academics passive and reactive in response to policy change?

## 12. Institutional funding and student finance.

Before proceeding further it is important to consider some critical comments regarding some of these themes which have an important impact on the conclusions drawn in this chapter.

Theme 4 considers problems associated with the definition of the concept of culture and class which were explored in chapter one and linked to the concept of habitus (Bourdieu 1990). However, given that, if not a culture then a cultural capital can be defined, the cultural capital that is considered as academic is inherently tied to middle class cultural capital. This is confirmed many times in Archer *et al* where perceptions were found to 'be generally framed in terms of taste.' (Archer *et al*, 2003:177) as defined by Bourdieu (1986). In other words, while social class is a socio-economic classification each class is characterised by certain behaviours and nature of cultural capital. The argument then is that rather than try to change the cultural capital, is it not better to equip groups who are not so familiar with these cultural expectations with the appropriate understanding and cultural capital to empower them to operate in a variety of cultures. However, Archer *et al* highlight the complexities around working class people changing their culture and point out that many 'embraced potential economic mobility but resisted social class identity change' (2003:177-8). Archer *et al* also acknowledge that 'working class young people may be disadvantaged because they do not possess the same cultural capital as their middle-class peers' (2003:193).

Theme 5 considers epistemology. While it is a fact that the knowledge that is held within HEI's has a middle class orientation and habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), it is difficult to see how this can be changed for two reasons. Firstly, with the subject of engineering the knowledge is based upon theories that have been proven by empirical data and therefore, cannot be altered. Secondly, given that the knowledge that is held within HEI's is that which is accepted by the professional, research and practitioner communities even if other knowledge was considered it is unlikely that it would be accepted or valued by these communities. Thus it would not empower the owners of that knowledge.

The idea of instantly rewarding diversions, considered in Theme 7, must be seen in the context of the past experience of the students who engage with multi-media information on a daily basis and who will have experienced multi-media and problem based approach to teaching in schools.

Most of these themes also arose from the data collected, although two themes, which were found in the literature review, did not emerge from the data collected during the study. Theme 2. - the lack of consultation by the government in establishing the policy and consideration of the appropriateness, to WP students, of courses offered is a clear issue in the literature but does not appear from the collected data. This is particularly concerning in Phase One, in that it suggests that the Office of Lifelong Learning, which is attempting to drive the uptake of the WP policy at BU, may not have consulted WP candidates regarding the WP policy and practices it has established on behalf of the University. Although the 'Community Programme' offered by the Office of Lifelong Learning does reflect a broader range of courses and subject areas. It may also be indicative that, generally, the responses from academic staff concur with the views discussed in Trowler (1997) and Selway (1995) that the response of academics is generally passive and reactive. A case of, 'this is what we offer, take it or leave it'. Also, Theme 6 regarding curriculum models/structures, was not raised in the data collected. For Phase One this could be due to the group not being closely allied with specific undergraduate programmes. In Phase Two it may be that most staff perceive the courses offered in the School of Design, Engineering & Computing to be interdisciplinary as discussed in the chapter on data analysis.

There was some difference between Phase One & 2 data in terms of the themes which arose. Comparing Phase One & Phase Two:

- Interviewees in Phase One spoke about how staff might feel teaching WP students, namely that because they were different to themselves they might be uncomfortable. However, this comment in itself suggests a prejudice and an attempt to stereotype WP students. There was no mention of this issue in Phase Two which involved staff actually teaching WP students, albeit the staff concerned were unaware of which students were WP and the number of WP students is very low, approximately 10%.
- Academic interviewees in Phase One indicated they had deep ethical questions regarding the premise that a middle class education must be good. Again this did not emerge in Phase Two. This may be significant in that the cost (not just in financial terms) to students from WP backgrounds may be considerably greater than to students from backgrounds where it is more traditional to enter HE. Hence, the cost, benefit analysis will have rather different outcomes for these two groups of students, thus, leading to rather different expectations of benefits due to the different experiences of the cost. This issue is discussed further later in this chapter.

- Whereas the issue of students entering HE for the wrong reasons was a clear issue for interviewees in Phase Two, it did not emerge in Phase One.

When considering these differences it must be borne in mind that the nature of the two groups studied had one vital difference. The professional role of the group in Phase One, from the Office of Lifelong Learning, is the development and implementation of the WP policy within BU, therefore, it is not surprising that they have a more developed philosophical view of the human and ethical issues related to WP. Equally, it is no surprise that they do not identify with the concept of ‘wrong reasons’ for entering HE, as, assuming they are supporters of the WP policy (and some did express doubts about some aspects of the policy) aspiring in any form to HE is to be encouraged. As discussed in Chapter 5 the perspective of participants in Phase One on the activities of BU and the WP agenda in particular the WP agenda is rather different to those participants in Phase Two. Indeed, it is possible to pick up on the ideas of Bourdieu again here and see the habitus of staff within the Office of Lifelong Learning as being different in some aspects to the habitus of staff with the School of Design, Engineering & Computing.

Additionally, two new themes emerged from the data collected:

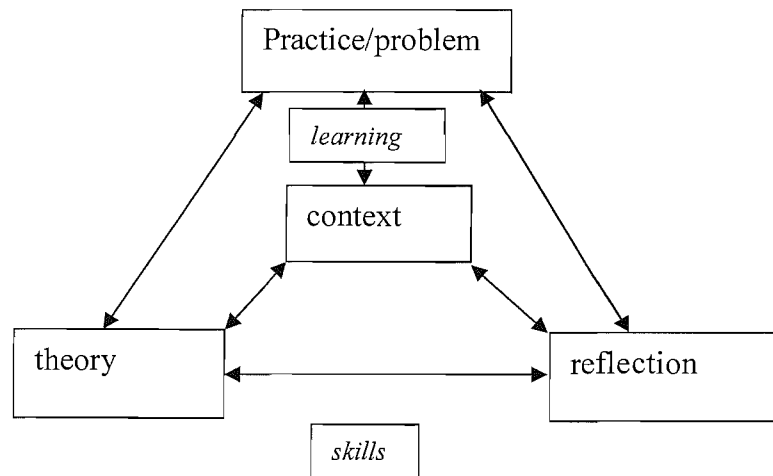
13. Extra work and work overload for staff

14. Student support

Drawing together some of these themes it is possible to begin to conceptualise some theories regarding the attitudes of non-managerial staff to widening participation in HE. The expression of attitude was usually articulated in relation to current students, only a minority of who are classified as from WP backgrounds. One of the emerging concepts is that of a generation gap existing between current academic staff and current students (not necessarily WP students). This gap manifests itself in their attitudes to learning. The academics regarded learning for learning’s sake as a sacred right of HE, along with a traditional view of the need to learn subject theories. They expressed great frustration with students who are very reluctant to ‘read around’ the subject, only wanting to learn what is necessary as a means to an end, often a job. This may suggest that many of those interviewed have their main interest held by the subject they teach rather than by the practice of teaching, however, this introduces the whole debate regarding the purposes of higher level learning.

On the one hand there is a view (Barnett, 1990 & 1997), that HE learning should be concerned with learning higher level skills - problem solving, thinking, critical reflection and so forth, rather than subject specific knowledge. It is argued that this would provide more useful/flexible graduates. In many ways this is the opposite of the academics interviewed who value these skills but in relation to specific subject matter. There is also an interesting link here to some WP best practice recommendations that the way to engage WP students is to offer learning which solves real problems and not just learning which is subject/discipline specific. Further there is also a link here to the theory of adult learning (andragogy) in the work of Knowles (1980) who advocated a practical problem solving approach as being most successful for the education of adults. Although it can be argued that this approach to education/learning is equally valid for children.

**Figure 18 Problem Solving Approach to Learning – Dyke, 2001**



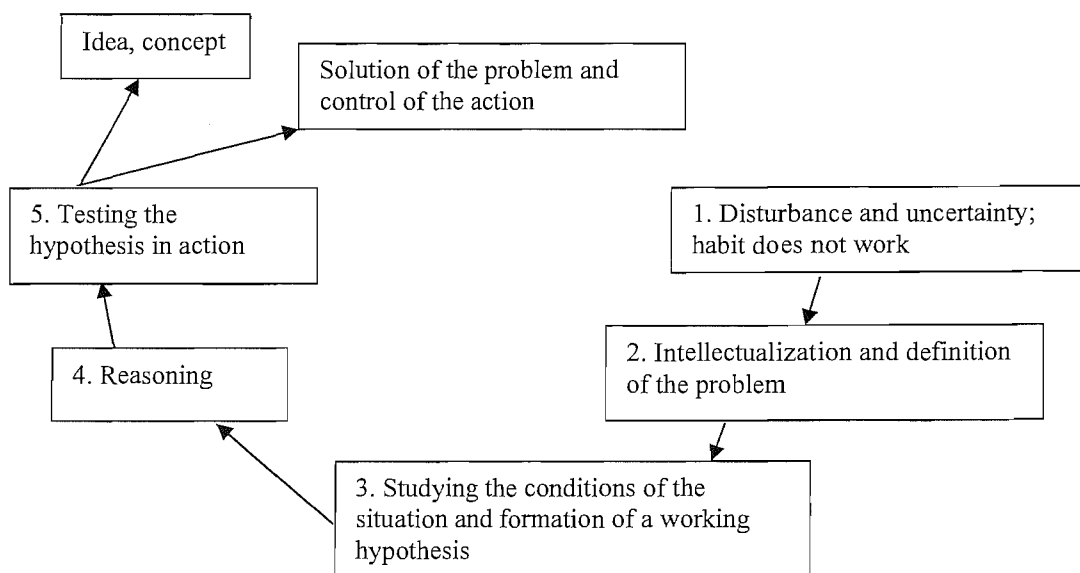
The diagram in Figure 18 (after Dyke, 2001, lettering in italics my addition) attempts to represent the problem solving approach to learning and also seeks to demonstrate the flaw in the argument that suggests HE should be about developing higher level cognitive skills and not learning subject knowledge. In order to enable problem solving skills etc to be developed (learned) it is necessary to firstly, ground the problems within a context (discipline knowledge) and secondly, to refer to existing theory in attempting to successfully solve the problem. Hence, perhaps the frustration of academics, particularly expressed in relation to theme 7, who see students only picking on bits of knowledge without viewing it in a broader theoretical context. Interestingly, staff involved with the development of learning and teaching practice, within the School of Design, Engineering & Computing have recently run teaching and learning workshops to assist academic staff in developing a problem based approach to learning.

There is a link too within Themes 4 & 5 which question the accepted knowledge of higher education. It can be argued that it is not the ontology that needs to be changed, indeed with engineering for example, it cannot be changed if it is to retain the role of providing a valid understanding of the physical world, but the context in which it is delivered, that is, the teaching practice. Perhaps what needs to be made more relevant to the students within the School of Design, Engineering & Computing is the theory being placed in their practical experience or cultural habitus.

Dewey (1909) perhaps demonstrates a middle way between these two polarised positions, namely learning based either on experience (practice) or theory. Dewey, taking material life activity (he calls it primary experience), believed that reflection is the method (or secondary experience) by which problems with habitual ways of behaving can be solved. Dewey also considered that reflection has to take place within, and in consciousness of, the culture in which the activity takes place. That is, reflection must take place in a context or thought-community. Dewey's model of reflective thought is illustrated below, (Figure 19.) where there are two outcomes, the obvious resolution of the problem and an idea or concept which is carried forward to be used in the future resolution of problems (ie the intellectual learning).

Perhaps this is a resolution of the vocational .v. academic education debate discussed in theme 8. The vocation is necessary to make meaning of the academic.

**Figure 19 Model of Reflective Thought – Dewey, 1909**



It also became clear that part of the attitudes towards WP stemmed from a generation gap which manifested itself in the different attitudes to being an undergraduate (having a University education). For current academics going to University meant (even as mature students) they were part of an elite (approximately top 15% of population), however, for current students going to University is largely regarded as the 'norm'. It is possible that there is a feeling that such a large number of people gaining HE qualifications has devalued their own qualification, this might account for some of the views expressed, such as:

- Linking with Theme 1, the target of 50% of the population gaining an HE qualification and WP not being the same thing. Most staff expressed the view that they supported getting everybody who has the ability to enter HE but not just taking people to achieve an arbitrary target. The emphasis was clearly on 'worth' and 'earning' a place.
- The commonly held view that attitude and motivation, not qualifications were most important. Although, a subsequent clause was usually added that they will need to have sufficient knowledge as well, concern was frequently expressed over how this will be achieved and hence, the concerns discussed in Themes 9 and 10 regarding admissions criteria and declining standards were raised.

This generation gap may also lead to a lack of consideration, by staff, of the cost benefit analysis of engaging in HE for current students, and particularly WP students. The concept of cost versus benefit is a theme which is referred to by Williamson (1998) which was discussed in Chapter 2 and explored in some depth by Archer *et al* (2003). As Archer *et al* point out in Chapter 6 the perception of participation in HE for working class groups is 'entailing higher costs and uncertain rewards.' (Archer *et al*, 2003:119) Archer *et al* also illustrates that the value of HE must be measured in many ways, not just financial but also social. As mentioned previously in this chapter the cost for a student from a WP background to engage with HE may be much higher than that of a student from a traditional background. For example, it is likely they will have had to travel further to attend a lecture, probably using public transport, they may also have had to arrange care for family members while they do so and their very attendance may be ostracising them from their family and friends. Hence, it is no surprise that their expectations of a lecture and lecturers may be high in order to match the cost to themselves. The cost-benefit analysis undertaken by academic staff, even those who claim they come from non-traditional backgrounds is likely to be rather different from that of either WP or current non-WP students.



The new theme (14), that emerged from the data analysis, regarding student support may also have an important position here. Providing additional support to students from WP backgrounds to enable them to successfully engage with new cultural capital/ habitus would empower them particularly, if this is coupled with an understanding of their apparent desire for spectacle. This desire may be driven by the result of their cost, benefit analysis as well as their previous experiences. If this expectation is allied to the expectation of being entertained driven by exposure to the constant stream of multimedia, short attention span, surface cognitive processing requirement of TV, film, video, internet, games ecetera then it is little surprise that many students find the more traditional learning and teaching methods hard to adjust to, resulting in apparent disinterest. This latter point regarding their past experiences is, of course, relevant to all students, not just those from WP backgrounds. Additionally, as will initiatives to aid retention that were reported in the data analysis, pastoral support (such as a personal tutor system) would benefit all students who are struggling with the gap between school/college and HE habitus.

This may also be indicating that there is a gap that has developed between teaching practice in schools and Further Education colleges and that in HE. This may be leading to the student expectations of teaching and learning methods not being met, hence, resulting in the academics expectations of students' attitudes to study not being met.

The idea, held by some academic staff, that they taught a lot of mediocre students, who are in some way not worthy of a place in HE was tested by quantitative data analysis. The analysis was based on the qualifications and success of students within the School of Design, Engineering & Computing over a three year period. It is clear from the data that the School of Design, Engineering & Computing has a lower than average number of students entering with A levels, and those students entering with A levels have lower A level points than the national average. The non-continuation rate is also higher than the national average. Therefore, there is some justification in the view expressed by academics that the students were not academically able. However, what must be noted is that this comparison is with the average across the whole of the HE sector, given that the HE sector in the UK is very diverse it would be more meaningful to undertake a comparison with other post-1992 universities. It is expected that the comparison would yield a very different result with School of Design, Engineering & computing students being probably above average as reported in analysis of theme 9. Hence, this may be

another example of staff expectations being out of line with the type of institution and type of student encountered within it.

The idea that there may be a gap between the expectations of students and staff is something that could be explored using the theories of Bourdieu. Bourdieu produced a number of variations on a diagram showing social and life style space, for example, food space; political space etc. Of particular interest is the diagram, illustrated in Figure 20, showing social position and lifestyle space (Bourdieu, 1986:128-9). Bourdieu explained his representation of social space as

...agents are distributed in the first dimension according to the overall volume of the different kinds of capital they possess, and in the second dimension according to the structure of their capital, that is, according to the relative weight of the different kinds of capital, economic and cultural, in the total volume of their capital.

(Bourdieu, 1998:7)

In other words, Bourdieu is attempting to position people, as defined by their jobs and characteristics of their lifestyle. The 'y' axis represents the total volume of economic and cultural habitus (these terms were defined in Chapter 1) while the 'x' axis indicates whether there is an orientation towards cultural or economic capital.

So returning to the concept of a 'gap', Bourdieu himself wrote of a 'gap' in *Practical Reason*

This idea of a difference, or a gap, is at the basis of the very notion of space, that is, a set of distinct and coexisting positions...which are defined in...their relations of proximity, vicinity, or distance, as well as through relations of order, such as above, below and between.

(Bourdieu, 1998:6)

He also states that 'Spatial distances on paper are equivalent to social distances.'  
(Bourdieu, 1998:6).

Taking this diagram as a starting point it may be possible to produce a similar diagram which illustrates a hypothesis regarding the relationship between the attitudes of

Figure 20 Social Position and Lifestyle Space (Bourdieu, 1986:128-9)

Figure 5 (shown in black)

The space of social positions.

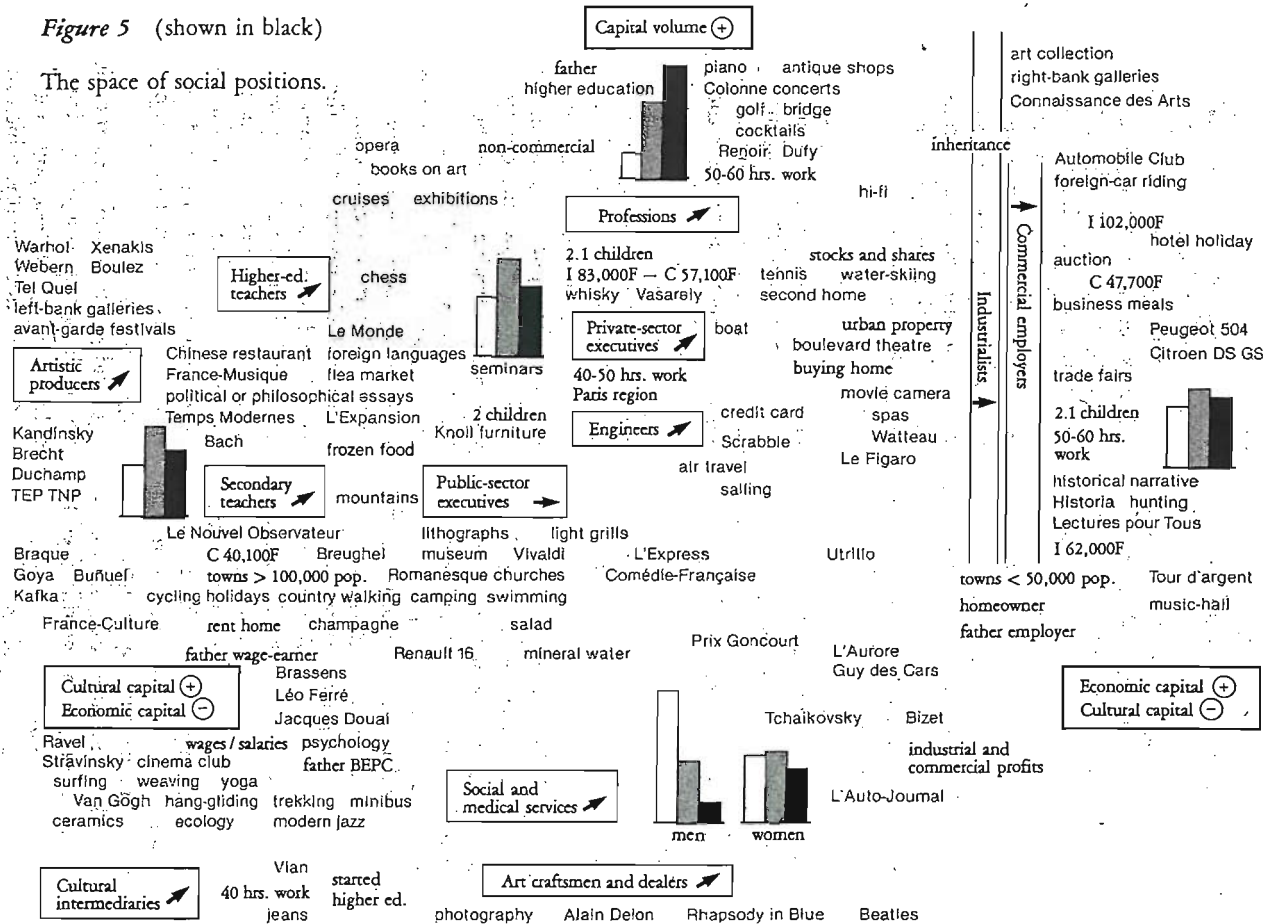
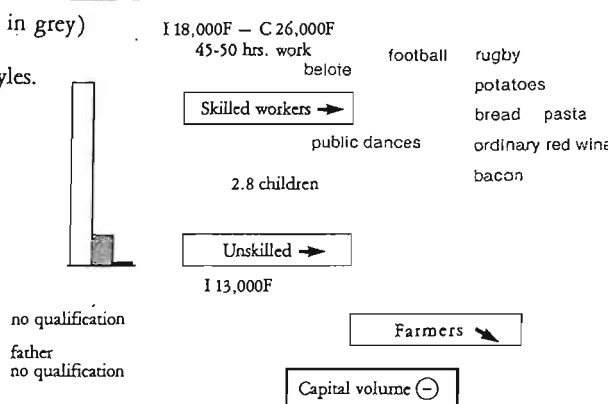


Figure 6 (shown in grey)

The space of life-styles.



academics and current students based upon their respective educational habitus and their total educational and economic capitals. The diagram illustrated in Figure 21 considers input capital to education only. It assumes that output capital is fixed, that is, the educational capital attained on being awarded a HE qualification. It is acknowledged that it is widely perceived that degrees awarded by various institutions vary in 'standard' or 'worth', however, this discussion is outside the remit of this study.

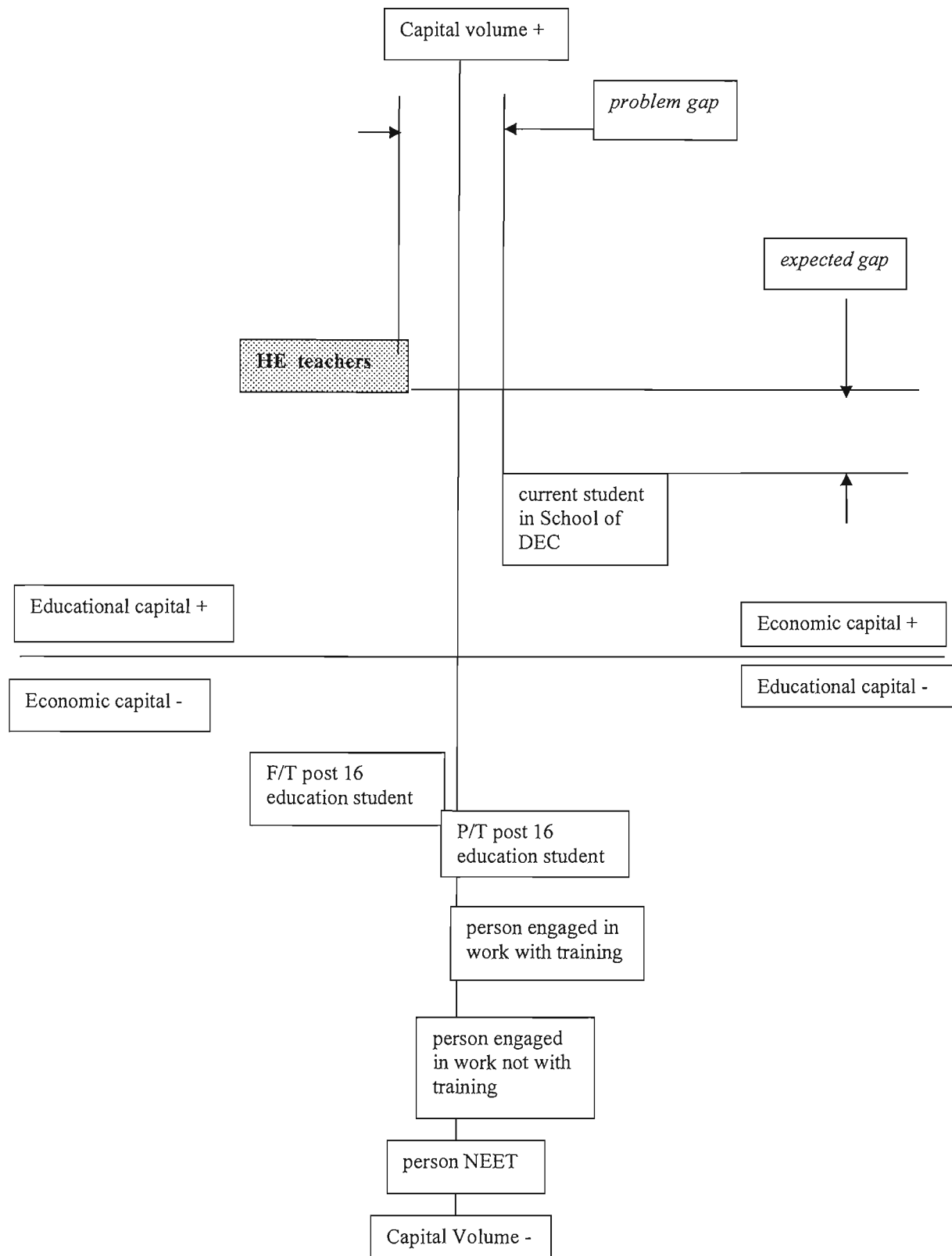
Thus, the hypothesis being suggested is that the relative positions of HE staff (positioned in the same place as Bourdieu's HE teachers) and current students (WP and non-WP), would indicate that there is an 'expected gap' in the total capital, due to incomplete education, but more importantly, a difference in orientation towards educational capital, resulting in a problem gap as identified in Figure 21. With current students being orientated towards economic capital and academic staff towards educational capital. Interestingly, one member of staff interviewed actually suggested this idea

I'd be surprised if its going much outside the envelope what we get of what you might call normal students. I mean some of those exhibit distinct problems when it comes to work culture and study skills.

It is contended that the gap in the orientation towards educational capital, the problem gap, is the root of many of the issues academic staff report related to current students and thus, plays a large role in forming their attitudes to the WP agenda. This problem gap might be considered to consist of: thirst for knowledge; critical evaluation; reflection on practice and experience and use of language. The gap has likely resulted from differences in learning and teaching strategy in tertiary education; larger numbers of people entering HE and differing views as to the purpose and cost-benefit relationship of a higher education, as discussed earlier.

Interestingly, Collins (Calhoun et al, 1993) picks up on the last of these points, use of language, and makes a link between Bourdieu and Bernstein in terms of language and education, which, as suggested in the Literature Review is reflected by the comments of Stuart (2000) that follow.

Figure 21 Educational Space



This is close to the schematic formulations of the early Bernstein (for example Bernstein 1964) about “restricted” and “elaborated” codes...But Bourdieu and Passeron enrich those earlier accounts by differentiating between *linguistic capital* – class-linked traits of speech differentially valued in a specific field or market – and a *linguistic habitus* – a class-linked relation to language...In both linguistic capital and their linguistic habitus, one group possesses what the system expects and is able to appropriate what the system offers, in the forms it expects, whereas the other lacks what the system expects and is less able to appropriate what it offers.

(Stuart, 2000:118)

Thus,

A speaker’s feelings of competence, of ability to meet the perceived requirements of public, official language, will vary as a function of class experience, with personal tension increasing as distance from the dominant code, and hence presumed incompetence with the dominant language, increases.

(Stuart, 2000:119)

Many academics showed considerable ignorance about WP. This was initially surprising since many of them claim themselves to be the first one in their families to go to University, one of the measures of WP. However, this may be due to the gap defined above that exists with current students that is the product of differences in educational habitus which are largely related to generational differences.

Evidence of this includes:

- ignorance about detail of what WP covers, that is, who is defined as a WP student;
- finding it easier to relate to WP categories mature, disability and ethnicity, because they are easily definable;
- not understanding the issues related to different WP categories, especially socio-economic;
- a feeling that more support might be needed but unable to define what. Along with a belief that there was no funding for extra resources;

Generally, administration staff were far more aware of the policies and issues surrounding WP. This may be because they do not carry the same educational capital as

academics or are better informed and less passive in their response to their changing environment. This is discussed in detail later.

The quotation “My suspicion is that the majority, have and will continue to ignore it as long as they can and just get on with what they are doing.”, that is, failing to realise that a number of gaps have developed, may go a long way to explain this ignorance, it also reinforces the idea of HE having an enacted organisational and professional culture, with passive academics (Trow, 1989; Halsey, 1992; Becher, 1994). Trowler (1997) (see theme 11) questions this passive attitude and enacted culture. Trowler using four categories - sinking, swimming, coping and reconstructing to categorise the attitude of academics in the University he termed NewU. He claims that academics can be found to fit into all four categories and that, moreover, such categorisation must be seen in the light of educational ideology, epistemological character of disciplines, profitability and cultural traffic. In this study, however, the data collected regarding themes 4 & 5 provide evidence for the assertion that academic staff simply enact an existing culture without questioning it and without apparently taking account of the profitability or cultural traffic within their changing environment. Thereby, allowing a gap to grow between their habitus and that of current students. It would be reasonable to say that many academics could be categorised as sinking or coping.

It is of course, ironic that many academics are guilty of exactly the kind of thinking “Passivity, docility, acquiescence, come to be primal intellectual virtues.” (as defined by Dewey, *How We Think*, 1909 LW8: 277) that they accuse students of. It is, of course, possible, and surely a defence that would be suggested, that the reason for this passivity is that there is no time to reflect on the changing nature of the HE environment including the changing nature of the student populus due to over work. However, this argument can also be applied to students, particularly, those from WP backgrounds who may be experiencing rapid change in, and intensification of, work and family life. It is also necessary to consider administrative staff here who do not appear to take such a passive view of the changing environment they find themselves in. Indeed, their approach would appear to be much closer to that characterised as coping by Trowler. Additionally, theme 12 regarding student finance needs to be considered carefully, as it is a far more complex matter than whether a student simply has enough money to cover living cost, transport, fees ecetera. As discussed earlier the cost of studying at HE level for many students incorporates much more than simply direct financial costs.

Thus, a number of theoretical gaps in educational habitus have been presented here, which have clear links to one another:

- Generational gap regarding purpose of HE, academics respond to learning for learning's sake, while current students see it as a means to an end, usually a job, hence, academics orientation is towards educational capital while current students is towards economic capital.
- Generational gap regarding the value of HE. Having an HE qualification now means you are part of the 'norm' rather than part of an elite. This means that the cost-benefit analysis for current students is rather different from that which is perceived by academic staff.

This results in a gap between the expectations of academics in the School of DEC and current students in terms of educational capital. Hence, academic staff perceive current students as being mediocre which in turn prejudices their attitudes towards what they perceive as WP students. Allied to this is the fact that many academics are essentially passive in response to their environment, hence, are unlikely to change their attitudes to accommodate the possible different needs of people from WP backgrounds

The study included a subsidiary question - Are these attitudes barriers to widening participation? The theories presented above suggest that the attitudes found are not only likely to be barriers to WP, but are in fact already barriers to the effective education of current students.

The current student population of the School of Design, Engineering & Computing is overwhelmingly white, young and middle class, hence the attitudes of staff and the message contained, often implicitly, in publications are defended as being appropriate to its audience. However, many of the points raised in these conclusions are applicable to all students not just those from a WP background and, in any case the question must be asked - what comes first, change the expectations or change the population?

What needs to happen is a narrowing of the gap between current students and academics within the School of Design, Engineering & Computing. This may be achieved by a change in learning and teaching practice towards a more problem based approach to learning, perhaps following the theories of Dewey. This is particularly important in that declining student applications (applications have fallen each year for the last 3 years) and difficulties with conversion from offers to places taken up will mean that BU needs to



change its attractiveness to a different section of society. It is likely that since the pre 1992 Uni's are recruiting more students from the pool BU would normally recruit from BU must look elsewhere. In this context, Malcolm makes an important point when she says

The daily student experience may be very different, but in many ways the lack of attention to the student as a person and as a community member is not that dissimilar to the regime I experienced...

(Malcolm, 2000:19)

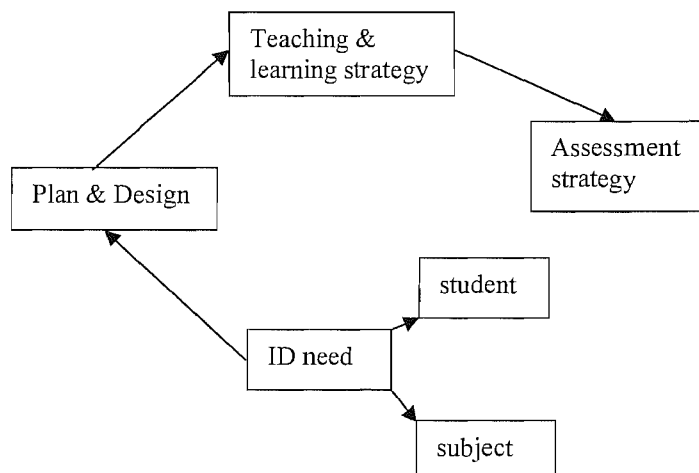
and suggests that

...what is missing from the contemporary version of 'learner-focus' is precisely that recognition of the identity and socio-cultural situatedness of the student...

(Malcolm, 2000:20)

This, along with the discussion presented earlier regarding problem based learning suggests that there should be more focus on learning and teaching practice as illustrated by the diagram in Figure 22 In particular, more focus needs to be placed on identifying the needs of individual learners as well as the needs of the subject.

**Figure 22 Teaching and Learning Practice**



Throughout the data analysis there is also evidence to suggest correlation with the five themes, listed below, identified by Archer *et al* (2003) regarding reasons why people from WP backgrounds don't go into HE:

- Working class young people lack information about higher education opportunities
- Working class young people may not feel that higher education has sufficient value to be worth the time and effort.
- Working class young people may lack the necessary normal entry qualifications

- The financial commitment to study may be seen as too great, too risky or insufficiently understood
- Some may perceive higher education as a threat to their class identity.

While these issues present greater barriers than can be expected to be overcome by a change in the attitudes determined in this study it is interesting to note that each of these issues can be linked in some way to issues detected in the attitudes determined by this study. The messages conveyed at Open Days and in the publications of BU and the School of Design, Engineering & Computing contain messages which are unlikely to be appealing to students from a WP background. While Archer's research suggests that publications constitute 'cold' information and are therefore, unlikely to be used by WP students, Open Day's are exactly the kind of 'hot' information they are likely to use. However, the School of Design, Engineering & Computing does offer HE Taster days to pupils from senior schools which provide exactly the kind of 'hot' information which is important and useful to students from WP backgrounds and also increases the educational capital of the participants. This also links with the fifth of Archer's points regarding class identity.

The theory presented regarding the cost-benefit analysis undertaken by students to determine the value of HE to themselves, is precisely that referred to by Archer. Considering cost in its widest sense and not constrained to simply financial cost, although clearly for many WP students the financial costs is a severe barrier. The quantitative data analysis regarding entrants to the School of Design, Engineering & Computing indicates that students with a wide variety of qualifications are considered and do gain places, however, the analysis also suggests that support for students with non-traditional qualifications may be lacking as the non-continuation rate is high for these students. Hence, the financial risks involved with non-continuation simply adds to the financial barrier.

It is possible to conjecture that it is for the reasons discussed above that the School of Design, Engineering & Computing has seen a large increase in the number of applications for its Foundation Degrees run in partner Further Education colleges during the academic year 03/04. The two year Foundation Degree constitutes a lower level of risk in terms of financial and cultural in that Further Education colleges are usually perceived as having lower levels of total capital and an education habitus closer to that of many WP and current students. There are a number of factors which substantiate this

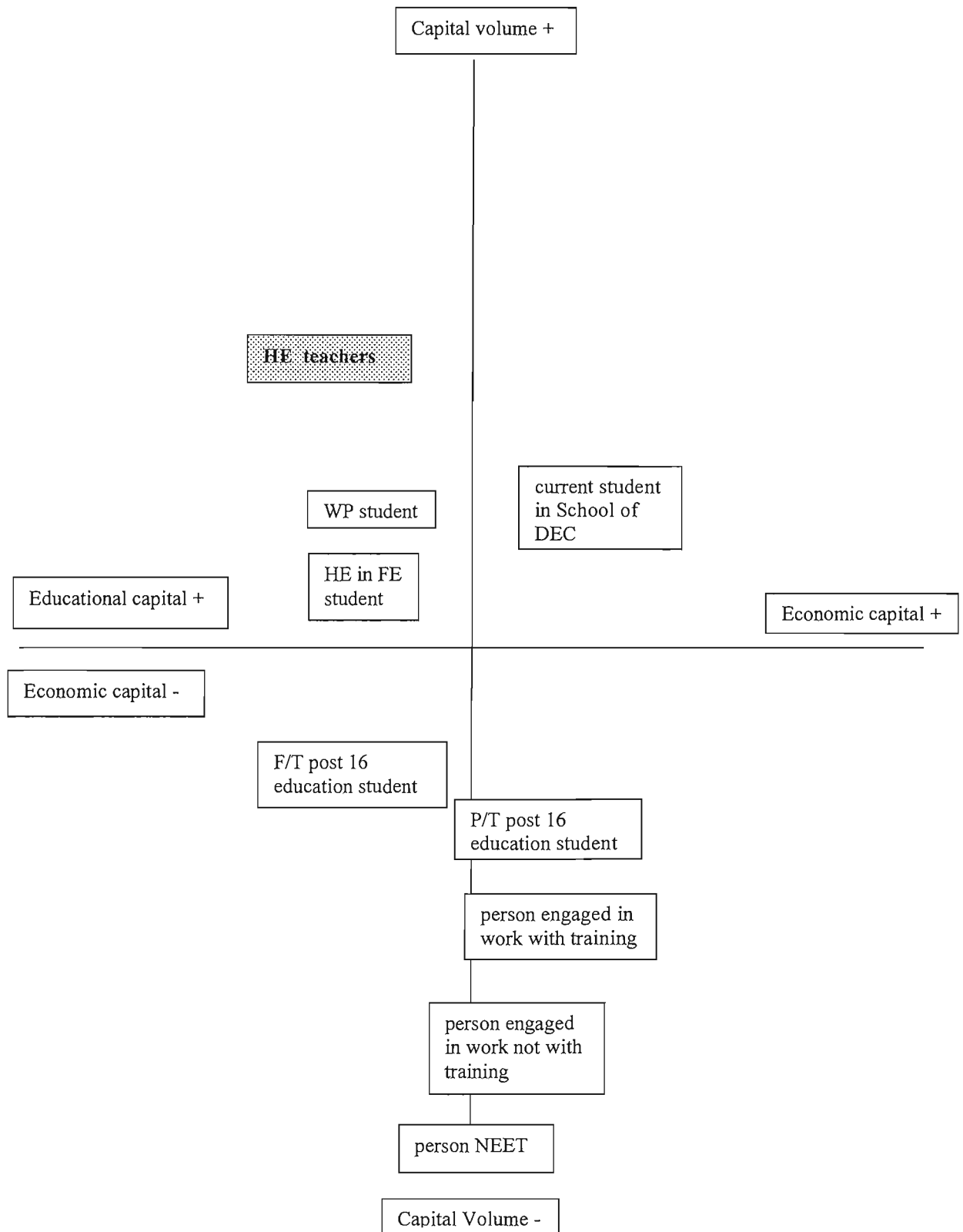
perception. A report by Ofsted (2003) indicates that less than half of FE teachers have a degree on entry to teacher training, hence, they are likely to have very limited personal experience of HE. Additionally, lecturers in FE tend to have higher teaching contact hours than those in HE thus allowing less time for scholarly activity. This brings with it its own problems because if it is accepted (and this needs to be investigated in detail) that Further Education colleges have less total capital then how are students going to be aculturised to that expected by the subject community and hence, empowered.

However, it may be possible to conjecture that the total capital volume of a current non-WP student and a WP student in the School of Design Engineering & Computing may be the same but the WP student may be more orientated towards educational capital and the current non-WP student towards economic capital. The rationale behind a WP student being more orientated towards educational capital than a non-WP student is derived from the likely motivations for a person from a WP background to enter HE. Such a path requires them to have made a conscious decision not just to follow the 'norm'. It will also have required them to have already shown a desire to gain an educational capital above that of their habitus and for them to have gone ahead despite a cost-benefit analysis that is likely to have indicated little financial benefit.

Figure 23 illustrates a suggestion as to where WP students may fall on the diagram illustrated in Figure 21. It is accepted that further research would be necessary to move this from being purely conjecture. Should this conjecture be proven then it would suggest that the gap identified earlier between current non-WP students and academics is in fact more problematic than the gap between WP students and academics.

Although, this study set out to consider WP students many of the findings are generalisable to all students within the School of Design, Engineering & Computing at BU. Attitudes are not just barriers to WP students but potentially all students, and perhaps more so to non-WP students, as expectations of staff and students do not currently align. So perhaps an additional way to breakdown these barriers, to those discussed earlier, is for all staff, but particularly academic staff, to reflect upon their own feelings and then extrapolate these to their students who may well be experiencing the same kind of issues. Namely, work overload, too much change too quickly, insufficient and inappropriate communication and support, financial pressures etc. Hence, empathy will be developed along with a greater understanding of the behaviours of the current student population.

**Figure 23 Educational Space including WP students**



Thus in summary, the themes are drawn together to form a hypothesis in answer to the research questions posed, namely,

‘What are the attitudes of non-managerial staff at BU to non-traditional HE students?’

A subsidiary question to this is:

‘Are these attitudes barriers to widening participation?’

Derived from the work of Bourdieu, the hypothesis presented here positions HE staff and students in a cultural space which is defined by the volume of their cultural capital and their attitudes to education and economic capital. Their relative position in this space is used to explain the attitudes of HE staff to the widening participation agenda by providing an explanation of the problems they feel they currently experience in the form of a number of gaps that have been identified between the expectations of staff and students. These take the forms of differences in the purpose of learning, previous learning experience and the value of an HE qualification, that lead to a gap in the orientation of habitus.

These, together with a passive response to their environments demonstrated by many academic staff, mean that there is a barrier not just for WP students but for many of the current student population. Indeed, it is not stretching the point too far to suggest that it is, not by concentrating on WP students, but by concentrating on providing a more appropriate learning environment for the majority of current students that real improvements in the learning of all participants will be produced. Until the orientation of habitus of staff and students is more closely aligned, the learning environment will continue to be a barrier to many students.

Therefore, recommendations for actions that could be taken within the School of Design, Engineering & Computing would be:

- change the learning and teaching practice to a more problem-based approach with teaching methods related to those used in tertiary and further education
- develop a learner-focus that recognises the individual identity and socio-cultural situatedness of current students
- engage staff in developing an understanding of the cost-benefit analysis undertaken by WP and current students regarding their HE
- consciously manage the ‘image’ presented to the outside world

The findings of this research also indicate that there are some conjectures that can be drawn that require further research to formulate as hypotheses. It is conjectured that the orientation of habitus of WP students is closer to that of academic staff than the orientation of habitus of current students. It is also conjectured that the increasing prevalence for studying HE qualifications within an FE environment may limit the extent to which HE habitus is developed. As many WP students prefer to choose to study HE qualifications within an FE environment this may disadvantage them. Clearly, these areas were not the focus of the research reported in this thesis and therefore, further research in these areas would be recommended.

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