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A critical autoethnography concerned with attempting to foster transformative relationships in a neoliberal university

By

Alison Williams

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

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I would like to thank my family for their unconditional love and support.

I thank my supervisor for his patience and guidance.

I also thank my students and my colleagues.

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own except, where due acknowledgment is made. No part of the thesis has been previously used or submitted for any award at another university.

Abstract

This research is an account the factors that support and/or impede a teacher's (my) attempts to foster transformative relationships in the neoliberal higher education context. It is situated in a higher vocational education context within an inner-city university with a high proportion of non-traditional students. Central to the thesis is the idea that transformative relationships strengthen the conditions for transformative learning and that adopting a transformative approach to learning and teaching is essential to ensuring quality and equality in the context of the university at the centre of this study. The study employs autoethnography as a vehicle through which to study my experience within the newly-established vocational university and to view critically the personal and professional forces that influence my practice in this context. The voices of my colleagues are presented alongside my own in respect of the pressures emanating from the fee-paying students, the need to meet their expectations, increased accountability and the complex demographic of non-traditional students. The similarities and differences in our perceptions and experiences are drawn upon and provide a shared picture of the emerging culture of the university. Finally, I use my teaching reflections to narrate the process by which I seek to foster transformative relationships in the process of teaching itself, and I attempt to tease out the factors that support and/or impede my attempts to do so. The study's findings prompt a series of proposals concerned with implementing measures that can support the development of teachers and which can help ensure quality through promoting equitable learning experiences for non-traditional students studying in this and similar such higher vocational education contexts.

Abbreviations

FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HIVE	Higher Vocational Education
NL	Neoliberal
NSS	National Student Survey
NTSs	Non-Traditional Students
OFS	Office for Students
PRM	Postmodern Research Movement
RCT	Relational Cultural Theory
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SLS	Student Loans Scheme
SET	Student Evaluations of Teaching
SM	Senior Management
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
TL	Transformative Learning
TR1	Teaching Reflection 1
TR2	Teaching Reflection 2
TR3	Teaching Reflection 3
TR4	Teaching Reflection 4
ULT	University League Tables
WP	Widening Participation

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The intensification of neoliberalism in higher education

Higher Education (HE) today is increasingly characterised by unprecedented levels of competition between universities due to the intensification of neoliberalism (NL) within the sector (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005; Naidoo, 2016). Neoliberalism is a challenging concept to explain as it incorporates a range of factors across political, social and economic domains (Saad-Filho & Johnson, 2005). Despite this complexity, it has a set of definable characteristics: the favouring of mass privatisation, a free unrestricted market driven by competitiveness, profitability and minimal state intervention (Arestis & Sawyer, 2005; Thorson & Lie, 2007; Bockman, 2013). It is a set of political beliefs centred on the idea that unhindered competition allows for more efficiency, innovation and economic growth (Verhaeghe, 2014). Such beliefs rest on the idea that this is the most effective way to organise all exchanges of goods and services. This philosophy was initially embraced by the business sector in England in the 1980s and has since intensified alongside the escalation of technology and the increase in globalisation. Sectors such as HE, where market philosophies once had little impact, are now influenced by neoliberalism, resulting in an increase in competition between institutions (Ramachandran, 2010). The adoption of neoliberal principles in HE over the last 30 years has come about as a result of interrelated factors including globalisation, changes in industry and the pressures of austerity, all of which present challenges for those managing HE and for the learning and teaching taking place within them (Shattock, 2012). To understand these challenges and the ways in which neoliberalism influences the conditions in which students pursue their university studies, it is helpful to explore the underlying philosophy of neoliberalism, and to that end I explain its central principles – prioritisation of the market, privatisation, competition, choice, self-interest and self-investment – before going on to consider the way in which it has changed role of the university. I then go on to present the study's context and its central thesis.

1.1.1 Prioritisation of the market

In neoliberalism, 'the market is seen to be morally and practically superior to government and any form of political control' (Heywood, 2012:49). Thompson (2005:3) describes

neoliberalism as a 'cultural logic' which favours minimal state intervention and focusses on providing the conditions for proactive individuals to be successful. Increasing privatisation is characteristic of neoliberalism because it aligns with the idea of the market as a regulatory system rather than state intervention (McNaughton, 2015). In neoliberalism, the emphasis on the market is seen as positive because it encourages proactive enterprise, unlike state involvement which is considered to decrease initiative (Heywood, 2012).

1.1.2 Privatisation, competition and choice

A natural result of privatisation is competition because when services are privatised competition occurs as a result of the need to remain viable. Consequently, privately run services need to be developed in a way that encourages people to buy into them, or to invest in some way. In addition to its dependency on competition, neoliberalism is also based on the notion of choice, the rationale for both being the need to drive up standards (Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005). As a result of competition and choice, NL ideology induces a broadening of service provision as more providers compete to attract customers. Although state intervention is eschewed, there is still a high level of control imposed on those providing services, because focus must always be on thinking and acting in terms of profitability and sustainability.

1.1.3 Self- interest and self-investment

One key criticism of neoliberalism is its proclivity to encourage self-serving and self-interested individuals rather than co-operative social groups. Another is that it considers the market to provide an equal footing for individuals to make progress as a result of their hard work and talent. Neoliberalism subscribes to the idea of a meritocracy in which the qualities of self-interest and self-investment are regarded positively and as symbolic of hard work and deserved success. NL ideology legitimises the existence of inequality by attributing the reasons for disadvantage to fault within the individual, who is seen as not having been enterprising and resourceful enough to gain material wealth (Heywood, 2012). Because self-investment is regarded as the appropriate way to govern one's life, those who fail to achieve a comfortable material life are seen as having made poor – and in some case morally questionable - choices.

Before presenting the current study's context and the specific set of concerns related to vocational universities, the following section explains how these aspects of neoliberalism have been introduced into HE in the UK, thereby resulting in a considerable shift in relation to the role of the university within society. The concerns this raises for learning and academic quality are outlined, after which I go on to explain the issues relevant to universities with a strong

widening participation (WP) mission; namely, those universities that cater for high numbers of students from ethnic minority groups and/or disadvantaged backgrounds.

1.2 The changed role of the university

1.2.1 The rationale for neoliberalism in higher education

The importation of NL principles into HE has, many would argue, significantly changed the form and function of universities across the UK. Key influences in the HE sector are an increased emphasis on employability, the introduction of fees, wider access to HE, and the introduction of the university league tables. These influences have created a set of issues and pressures for universities as they seek to shape strategies and policies that enable them to align with NL ideology and thereby thrive.

HE policy in England has developed in response to neoliberalism, resulting in a change to the role of the university in society (Barnett, 2003; Delanty, 2001; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Saltmarsh, 2011) and to the nature of the social contract between the university and the state (Boden & Nevada, 2010). This altered relationship means that the state plays a minimal role in terms of the direct governance of institutions, while being instrumental in creating the conditions for market-based HE (Olssen & Peters, 2005). For example, whereas universities previously operated largely independently of labour markets, they are now 'directly related to national economic regeneration and growth' (Harvey, 2005:4). This is apparent in the fact that employability is high on universities' agendas and increasingly seen by them as a key responsibility (Arora, 2013). This shift towards a view of universities as producers of a skilled workforce has come about as part of the process of worldwide change towards a 'post-industrial labour market' (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006:305). As a result, universities in England are now seen as instrumental in sustaining the economy and as key sites for producing capital in the form of appropriately skilled graduates (Aroura, 2013; Thompson, 2005; Olssen & Peters 2005).

The university is now directly linked with the economic market, and competition between institutions at a national, international and global level now prevails, leaving each institution to find its own way to survive and thrive. This has meant that those managing universities have had to become increasingly strategic in order to attract and retain students (Rudd & O'Brien, 2019; Shattock 2012), something that has led to tensions between university management and teaching staff (Adcroft, *et al.,* 2010) as well as those involved more generally with teaching

and learning. One such reservation concerns the fact that the marketisation of HE places learning and academic rigour under threat due to an increased focus on student satisfaction. It is unclear as to how the university, now fashioned to serve economic gain, can preserve a mode of learning which is free from the potentially negative forces of neoliberalism. For instance, the link between universities and labour (employment) positions them as instruments of social mobility. Students, who are now paying consumers, may be forced to think of HE first and foremost in terms of future financial reward and lifestyle – something which threatens to detract from other aspects of learning such as personal development, and which potentially places the teacher under pressure to manage students' new expectations along with the learning process and its quality. While this is a matter of concern for those who wish to preserve curricula that focus on developing the whole individual, there is also the additional question of whether the rewards of participating in HE are equal for all participants. The fact that NTSs are clustered within lower-tier universities that tend to serve lower-paid sectors of the labour market suggests not (Archer, 2007; Boliver, 2013; 2015).

The issues explained in this section raise questions as to how one defines quality (something taken up in chapter 2) and the best approach to ensuring quality within a changing HE context that is increasingly characterised and governed by competition. All universities must grapple with this issue, but those offering an applied vocational curriculum must, additionally, strive to ensure a fair HE experience for NTSs who are frequently disadvantaged as they embark on their academic journey, and who are less likely than traditional students studying in well-established redbrick universities to have access to the same job opportunities and to reap the same monetary rewards and career prospects post-graduation, when they enter the employment market.

1.3 Study context

This thesis is contextualised in higher vocational education (HIVE) within an inner-city university with a high proportion of non-traditional students (NTSs). The university has a diverse student cohort, with 59% of students considered to be from a low participation background and residing in deprived neighbourhoods. It is ethnically diverse, with 48% students being white; 29% Asian; 15% Black and 7% Other. It has a strong connection to Further Education (FE) in that the institution provides both FE and HE courses within the same setting, albeit in separate departments. All courses (FE and HE) are vocational in nature rather than traditionally academic (the courses that I teach are Early Childhood Studies; Youth and

Community and Health and Social Care; level 4-7). The institution was given the power to award degrees in 2007 and was granted full university status in December 2012.

The university has a strong WP mission. My university's particular characteristics mean that its WP mission is distinctive from that of traditional research-intensive universities with low numbers of WP students (Boliver, 2015; Bosu *et al.,* 2018; Peach 2010). Through outreach activities and partnerships targeting low participation areas, it seeks to fulfil that mission by encouraging and providing opportunities for those who may have not otherwise have considered university. The WP work of the university tends to be concerned with the pre-entry life cycle of students. Once students decide to participate, the internal work of the university in terms of providing them with an equitable educational experience is less clearly articulated. This thesis aims to consider the requirement of fulfilling the university's WP responsibility within and through the HE experience its offers its student body.

Despite the success of the WP agenda in increasing access to HE for learners many of whom originate from non-traditional, disadvantaged backgrounds, this particular cohort continues to be vulnerable to systemic disadvantage, something exacerbated by the lack of parity they experience in terms of future employment prospects. This thesis focuses, in particular, on the action that can be taken by those engaged in teaching and managing in order to help ensure quality and equality for NTSs at universities that offer an applied vocational curriculum and which tend to be less prestigious.

1.3.1 Specific concerns and responsibilities for educators working in vocational universities

The over-representation of NTSs in less prestigious universities creates a set of concerns for educators working in vocational universities that are different from those of more traditional universities. For example, students who attend such universities are susceptible not only to a negative view of themselves and their suitability and potential, but also to negative stereotyping due to the stigmatisation of vocational education and the professions associated with it (Bathmaker, 2013; Hyland, 2014). NTSs frequently internalise the negative associations of vocational education, and in particular a common perception of it as an inferior or subordinate educational pathway, and their already fragile learner identities can be further undermined as a result (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003; Reay *et al.,* 2010). Educators must work sensitively in order to avoid reinforcing such perceptions, and in a manner that demands more of them in terms of understanding the potential barriers frequently experienced by NTSs.

NTSs' overrepresentation in vocational universities is problematic in that it is part of a wider web of systemic disadvantage (Bathmaker, 2013). NTSs' choice of university has been found to relate to their social class and sense of belonging in HE, and efforts to widen access to HE have not necessarily ensured fair access – or indeed success, once admitted. Furthermore, the monetary gains and social mobility prospects for such students attending the vocational university do not compare favourably to those of students who have attended traditional universities (Savage, 2015). Vocational universities must grapple with such issues if they are to offer an equitable educational experience to participating students. For newer universities that are establishing themselves within the HE sector, there is an opportunity to develop pedagogies that encompass both skills and criticality in a manner not usually associated with vocational education, often regarded as solely skills-based (Bathmaker 2013; Peach, 2010). An approach to learning and teaching that effectively combines each of these can equip students with the personal and professional capabilities to makes significant advances, and in order to bring this about the university has a responsibility to support the development of a responsive and appropriately critical pedagogy that helps ensure quality and equality in the context of consumer-based HE.

The external pressures emanating from intensified neoliberalism require careful mediation and negotiation by educators and those managing vocational universities, for these pressures have changed the terms according to which students may view their education. This is true, for example, of the pressure to ensure student satisfaction, seen as a marker of quality: in this case, while the temptation to develop internal systems that pacify students is strong (Harris, 2005), a quality curriculum is one that encompasses *all* aspects of experience and may even result in a degree of discomfort for the learner (Forrest *et al*., 2012; Wlodkowski, 1999). Whilst it is arguable that such issues affect all universities, the vocational university is unique in that it is a site at which there is possibility to re-think existing structures commonly associated with vocational education and to engender a curriculum through which students can graduate as agents of social change empowered with confidence and the criticality to direct their lives – and those of others in their future professions – as they choose. Universities with a strong WP mission have a responsibility to disrupt the reproduction of social disadvantage and to actively support social change, adapting internal systems and structures as necessary in the process. Imparting relevant subject knowledge and developing, supporting and implementing a pedagogy that invites students to think critically about themselves constitutes an essential part of meeting this responsibility.

In this section I have argued that educators have a responsibility to invest in the personhood of their students in order to understand barriers they may experience in the learning process. Clearly, in order to be effective educators, they must be prepared to reflect on the efficacy of their own practices and underpinning beliefs and, where necessary, to adjust these in the interests of ensuring quality and equality. The development and implementation of an appropriate pedagogy – one that is critical and which prepares students to enter their professions and to advance within these – is a key responsibility of the university as a whole. Communication between teachers, who work directly with students, and managers often removed to different degrees from the coalface of teaching and learning, is crucial in developing relevant, and ethically sound experiences for students through effective and ethical teaching practices; indeed, such communication is as important as the teaching and learning relationship itself. The university's role in serving a wider social purpose beyond the instrumental goals of neoliberalism is a joint enterprise and a peopled endeavour. The external pressures that may present obstacles to implementing a suitably critical approach need to be carefully negotiated in order to create conditions that support students in developing the confidence and criticality to study and work effectively within their practice-based disciplines.

1.4 Central thesis: the value of a transformative approach

Core to this thesis is the idea that adopting a transformative approach to learning and teaching (expounded in Chapter 2) is essential to ensuring quality and equality in the context of a vocational university with a strong social justice agenda and a high proportion of non-traditional students, and that the nurturing of transformative relationships is key to creating the conditions for transformative learning (TL) to take place.

The study adopts an autoethnographic approach in order to investigate how my – and my colleagues' – responses to the pressures that arise within the NL context may support or impede a transformative approach to learning, and what drives those responses. The study employs autoethnography as vehicle through which to study (my) self within the culture of a newly-established vocational university, and to view critically the personal and professional forces that influence my practice. The theoretical stance adopted within this study is relational in that it views self as interconnected with the network of people who share the study's context; as such it is positions me, the researcher, as part of a network of relationships that make up the university's culture.

The autoethnography presents a narrative of my experience across a variety of teaching and non-teaching situations. It is an 'active interpretation' of self in a specific set of circumstances and aims to shed light on the teacher experience (Biesta *et al.,* 2015:624) and reveal insights that potentially have relevance to vocational universities more generally. In particular, it promises to contribute to our understanding of how best practice in relation to TL within a vocational university context might be cultivated by other teachers working in similar institutional settings, and the resultant potential benefits.

In Chapter 2 (the literature review), I look at the vocational university and transformative learning within the broader context of developments in HE over recent decades, and what this has meant for efforts to implement a transformative approach in pedagogy. In particular, I focus on the issue of marketisation and consumerism and what it means for the way in which quality is understood, most particularly in relation to transformative learning.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1   The expansion of higher education in the UK

The government's acceptance of the Robbins Report in 1963 was pivotal in broadening access to HE. Prior to this, participation in HE in the UK stood at just five percent and there were discrepancies in its uptake in terms of social class. Furthermore, provision was limited by the relatively small number of universities in existence at the time (Barr *et al.,* 2014: xvii); consequently, one of the recommendations of the Robbins Report was to establish more universities and expand the sector in the expectation that this would help the UK remain buoyant in the globally competitive post-industrial knowledge economy by producing a larger number of appropriately skilled graduates (Bathmaker, 2003; Hasley, 1997). In this way, attempts to improve social equality through participation in HE aligned with a government priority to ensure that its citizenship was appropriately positioned to maintain and grow the UKs economic position in the world. To this end, the report called for the reclassification of existing training colleges to become HE providers (Wyness, 2010).

The expanding of provision meant that supporting it became costlier. It had been government funded from 1963 until the 1980s and, as participation grew, the government was pressed to devise more economically viable ways to fund it (Shattock, 2012). One key funding initiative was the 1990 Student Loans Scheme (SLS), according to which students would be partly supported by a government maintenance grant but would also make their own private contribution through a loan scheme (Mayhew *et al*., 2004). While this measure addressed criticisms concerning high levels of HE expenditure, it risked discouraging those NTSs from poorer working class backgrounds, who were already less likely to participate, from applying to university (Dearden *et al*., 2010). In addition to a raft of other potential factors influencing NTSs' decisions on whether or not to embark on a HE course, they would now also need to make a significant monetary investment in their education.

Following the Browne Review (2010), the move to student self-funding and an increase in student fees of up to £9000 happened alongside a diversification of HE institutions reflected in a new classification system (Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016). This expansion of HE has, unfortunately, not resulted in standardised provision, and increased participation has thus not neatly equated to equal opportunity for all participants for the reason that those from working-class

backgrounds continue to be more widely represented in the stratum of less elite HE institutions – a situation that exists despite pressure being brought to bear on the more elite institutions to diversify their student intakes (Albach & de Witt, 2020; Kartazi & Hayward 2020). Furthermore, the way in which the HE sector has transformed since the 1963 Robbins Report has done little to redress perceptions in the minds of students and those working in the HE sector of a qualitative distinction between traditional universities and other HE institutions such as those universities that were previously polytechnics (Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016; Hyland, 2001).

2.1.1 Universities Vs polytechnics

HE provision post-Robbins and prior to 1992 was structured within a binary system which consisted of universities that were independent bodies funded by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and polytechnics that were funded and regulated by the Local Authority (Bathmaker, 2003). The difference between universities and polytechnics was influenced by the way funding was earmarked for their internal activities, and this maintained a marked distinction between the types of institution. For example, universities' funding was assigned according to research activity, whereas funding provided to polytechnics was intended for teaching activity (Bathmaker, 2003). Despite the subsequent creation of a unitary funding system for all universities, namely the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), perceived and actual differences between different forms of HE provision remained and continue to exist (Archer, 2007; Boliver *et al.,* 2015*)*, one of the most significant of which was that while universities were linked to higher paid employment opportunities for graduates, polytechnics were associated with vocational careers that tended to be less well remunerated (Hyland, 2001; Otterwill & Wall, 2006).

The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act (c.13.) formally removed the binary divide between universities and polytechnics and, subsequently, the distinction between them has become increasingly blurred, if not entirely eradicated. The establishment of HEFCE in 1992 has facilitated the unification of what were previously quite distinct forms of provision and there is now a tighter link between all universities and the economy (Barnett, 2003; Delanty, 2001; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Saltmarsh, 2011). Whereas former polytechnics were already closely aligned to the labour market, the greater onus placed on *all* universities post-unification to generate employable graduates impacted the freedom universities enjoyed in relation to their curricula, and HE study as an academic pursuit became more difficult to justify. This shift in focus has been a cause of disquiet among those who feel that the essential purpose of the

university has changed quite fundamentally in response to an economically driven government agenda.

Although the unification of HE has meant that it boasts a greater variety of provision, the opportunities it offers students are not necessarily equal in terms of employment prospects and/or social mobility, with Bathmaker *et al.* (2016:14) noting that 'the status and value of different forms of HE are not equal in relation to one another' – an observation consistent with Hyland (2001) and Otterwill and Wall's (2006) reflection (noted earlier) regarding on the difference between the employment/income prospects of graduates of universities versus polytechnics prior to unification.

While, in principle at least, this expansion of HE provision via unification may be regarded as a successful outcome of the 1963 Robbins Report, the issue of whether, in reality, there is equal access to all forms of provision within the sector is open to question. This is an important issue to explore because of its implications for future employability and thus also life prospects. In order to shed light on the current HE landscape and to illustrate how the expansion of HE has resulted in a hierarchy which serves different sections of society and leads to different opportunities, three distinct bands of HE provision are discussed in the following section.

2.1.2 A diverse and hierarchical higher education system

There are now over 150 universities in the UK and the provision these offer differs according to institution, with factors such as the 'age, size and character' of the university being linked to their status, reputation and relationship to the labour market (Savage, 2015:232). Within the now vastly expanded and more diverse HE sector, there are three distinct classification bands of university, each associated with different employment trajectories for students (Archer, 2007; Boliver, 2015; Savage, 2015). Differences in status between universities are related to the age of institutions, with the older universities being associated with the traditional idea of educating small numbers of the elite and with a strong research and academic focus. The most well-established traditional Oxbridge universities, which serve only a very small percentage of the population, represent the top band of university provision and are linked to the knowledge economy and, therefore, to types of employment which offer greatest earning potential. The middle and largest band of university provision comprises not only Russell Group and traditional red brick universities established in the 19th century, but also those post-92 universities established by the Higher and Further Education Act (c.13). The more recently established post-92 universities tend to emulate activities of the older universities despite

tending to have applied rather than theoretical curricula (Hyland, 2014). The more recently established universities within the middle band of HE provision are linked to a different section of the labour market that offers less earning potential (Archer, 2007; Boliver, 2015). The universities within the first band and many within the second band are central to the knowledge economy due to being research intensive; as such, they have a strong international presence and are key to producing highly trained graduates who have the attributes that enable them to 'compete in the global economic market' (DfES 2003, as cited in Archer 2007:640). In contrast, but also located within the middle band, are the newer universities previously referred to as polytechnics. These universities are teaching focused and link to the labour market at a national rather than an international level, typically serving students with alternative qualifications. These universities are differentiated from the third band of universities (sometimes referred to as *New* Post-92 Universities), which consists of those universities 'responsible for "training" and serving regional economies, and adopting a distinctly "local" outlook and remit (Archer, 2007:638). Students on vocational programmes tend to occupy the (lower) second and third bands of the HE hierarchy and NTSs are disproportionately represented in the lowest band universities which typically offer less opportunity for mobility (Boliver, 2015; Rudd & O'Brien, 2019).

2.2 Widening participation, the political framing of non-traditional students, and the issue of systemic disadvantage

While government drives to expand HE have meant that levels of participation, particularly among individuals originating from non-traditional and (often) disadvantaged backgrounds have risen considerably over the past decade (Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) 2015; Katarzi & Hayward, 2020) and currently stand at just under 50 per cent Parry, 2014), there continue to be disparities in terms of the experiences and return on investment secured in relation to social mobility, for these individuals are frequently accessing universities with different curricula that serve very different purposes (Bathmaker, 2003). Furthermore, the diverse and hierarchical HE sector described serves to sustain a psychological demarcation between traditional and non-traditional students. NTSs are persistently juxtaposed with traditional students and (often inaccurately) perceived as being in deficit (Archer, 2007; Munro, 2011). In order to dispel this perception and help bring about equity for NTSs who choose to

participate in HE an appropriate response is required from universities such as that at the centre of this study.

The framing of NTSs as 'in deficit' is partly a product of the widening participation agenda initiated by the New Labour Government in 1997. The Kennedy Report (1997), the Dearing Report (1997) and the Fryer Report (1997) all identified non- and under-participation in HE as an obstacle to achieving a culture of lifelong learning and identified non-participants as typically originating from low socioeconomic and ethnic minority backgrounds (Tight, 1998). By targeting potential students from these backgrounds without paying adequate attention to the reasons contributing to their low participation, the widening participation agenda highlighted their difference vis-a-vis the traditional 'norm' and shaped perceptions of their capability to engage in HE and their attitude to learning.

Atypical students – 'those who have entered through alternative routes, those with qualifications other than the standard A-levels, those with a long-term disability, students from working-class backgrounds and students from minority ethnic groups' – are often referred to as 'non-traditional' (Leathwood & O'Connell 2003:598). In contrast, the traditional student is generally regarded as 'a recent graduate from high school with good grades and enrolled full-time.' (Munro 2011:115). NTSs are frequently juxtaposed with traditional university students, who tend to possess often significantly higher levels of the relevant capital due to their more privileged backgrounds and traditional educational trajectories. The alternative learning profiles and diverse social backgrounds of NTSs contribute to their categorisation as 'different' from the more 'desirable' norm – a norm which continues to be associated with 'whiteness and middle-class-ness' (Leathwood & O'Connell 2003:599). This effectively positions NTSs as 'others', outliers who do not fit easily within the established culture of traditional HE. It is against this notion of the ideal traditional student that NTSs are invited to identify themselves and which often leads to misrecognition (Burke, 2015) – a deficital yet inaccurate notion of themselves in comparison with the traditional academic ideal. It is this demarcation in the minds of NTSs themselves, and the deeply engrained image of the traditional university student in the minds of others in society, that can present very real barriers for NTSs when choosing their university. This subtle issue is one major factor, among other interrelated factors such as schooling, race and ethnicity and forms of social and cultural capital, that affect NTSs' choice of university.

2.2.1 The over representation of non-traditional students in newer vocational universities

The fact that NTSs are overrepresented in newer vocational universities that offer them lower financial returns is problematic. First, the reasons for their over-representation are linked to a wider web of systemic disadvantage through which inequality is maintained (Bailey, 2004). An example of such disadvantage is found in the way in which the type of secondary school attended by young people impacts their attainment and subsequent choice of university. State schools tend to differ in performance and attainment levels, with those who are most disadvantaged frequently attending the lowest performing schools, achieving at a lower level, and being less likely to apply to 'higher-status' universities, or to consider university as a viable option (Bathmaker, 2013; Boliver, 2016; Lawson 2014; Russell Group, 2015). This inequality of access to high-performing schools that offer better opportunities for attainment leaves those from disadvantaged backgrounds vulnerable to further systemic disadvantage and feelings of stigmatisation.

Second, in addition to being vulnerable to systemic disadvantage linked to limited access to high-performing schools, NTSs have frequently been exposed to practices within education that both reflect and generate negative perceptions of their ability; consequently, those who do chose to participate in HE often do so with feelings of uncertainty and trepidation (Lawson, 2014). Disadvantage in compulsory education operates both through the type of school attended and through expectations about how knowledge is best demonstrated (Boliver, 2016; Burke, 2015). Education has long been a 'sphere for white middle-class cultural reproduction' (Alexander *et al.,* 2015:44) and relationships and attitudes within school – for example, teachers' expectations of pupils and/or perceptions of their capability and potential – can affect prospective students' perception of self, their aspirations, and ultimately their decision about whether or not to participate in HE. In a school system that is normatively white, the values projected into the classroom and its learning culture can easily '… reinforce prejudices and stereotypes' (Arday 2015:49). Pupils who differ from the normative white middle-class culture of the classroom may struggle to be recognised as possessing potential – something that influences their trajectory beyond compulsory schooling and choice of university due to it frequently resulting in an internalised sense of deficit within the individual themselves.

Third, NTSs' choice of university is not equitable due to the elite and more prestigious universities belonging to a social field or institutional habitus access to which requires membership attained through the possession of cultural codes and forms of capital (Reay *et al.,* 2010; Katarzi & Hayward 2019). For many NTSs, HE as a social field represents a middle-

class milieu manifested in particular cultural codes and forms of capital that are inaccessible to them, thus reinforcing the idea that university – or, at least, some types of university – are not for them because they exist within a social world that is too different from their own and thus alien to them (Munro, 2011). NTS' beliefs around their difficulty in identifying with and fitting into the culture of the institution impacts on their choice of university and ultimately on their experience whilst there (Bathmaker, *et al.,* 2016; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003; Savage, 2015). The choice by NTSs to attend lower status vocational universities that represent the least threat has been linked to the desire to stay within their comfort zone in terms of the type of learning experience expected and the assumption that there will be 'people like us' sharing that experience (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003:599). This places an even greater onus on those institutions that enrol them, and their teaching staff, to try to ensure that they realise their potential.

Fourth, newer vocationally oriented universities tend to be perceived negatively due to differences in the benefits they offer. There is a strong argument that, due to their position in relation to the labour market and to the types of jobs and salaries secured by their graduates, third tier universities do not present the same opportunity for social mobility as other more prestigious universities (Archer, 2007; Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016; Savage, 2015; Webb *et al.,* 2017). Notably, the lowest-tier universities are aligned to service provision and, therefore, the students who graduate from these universities are more likely to become employed in lower paid jobs than those graduating from universities which are aligned with the international, global knowledge economy (Webb *et al.,* 2017). These differences in employment prospects can lead to the stigmatisation of students who attend vocational universities and fuel negative perceptions of the universities themselves.

The issues identified here suggest a disparity in that the choice to participate – or not – in HE is not made by NTSs on the same terms as their more advantaged counterparts. There are also marked differences in the emotional and psychological adjustment required once students have entered HE (Katarzi & Hayward, 2019). Significantly, universities such as the one at the centre of this study have a responsibility to ensure that their internal practices support fairness in the form of quality and equality, and to develop learning and teaching in a manner that prevents further systemic disadvantage from occurring. As I attempt to demonstrate later, the notion of quality is somewhat problematic particularly in a consumerist HE culture, partly because, while it tends to be evaluated according to sector-wide standards, these are a quite blunt instrument that does not necessarily reflect the particular profiles of individual universities and their

student demographics and missions. This has implications in particular for the kind of vocationally oriented university with a strong non-traditional student demographic that is at the centre of this study.

2.3   Consumerism in higher education

The globalisation and accompanying marketisation of higher education today has led to a culture of consumerism in HE which, not surprisingly, has its roots in the business sector and reflects a need to respond to the expectations of consumers, namely students, who are seen increasingly as clients looking for a particular product. Those institutions who most effectively meet these consumers' expectations attract most business and are, therefore, most profitable and secure. The positioning of students as consumers was cemented in 2015 by the Consumer Rights Act 2015 (Bosu *et al.,* 2018), which, in part, required universities to provide clear information to students about the services they can expect from their chosen university and made it incumbent on them to provide exactly the services they advertise (Bates & Kaye, 2014; Bosu *et al.,* 2018; Dearden *et al.,* 2014; Rudd & O'Brien, 2019; Pan, 2020).

The need for universities to operate more and more according to business principles in order to remain viable has led to a strong culture of regulation, performativity and accountability. Two particularly prominent products and promoters of this consumerist HE culture and its neoliberally-based ideology, are university league tables (ULTs) and the National Student Survey (NSS) (Archer, 2007; Harris, 2005; Lambert et al., 2007; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Sutton, 2015; Rudd & O'Brien, 2019). These instruments are intended to offer an indication to would-be students, their parents, their schools and future employers of how individual universities rate both nationally and internationally and, in determining where universities sit in these tables, particular sets of criteria are used. Although there is some variation between the criteria used in different league tables, they have much in common and typically include student-staff ratios, satisfaction with their courses, satisfaction with teaching, satisfaction with feedback, spend per student, and graduate employability levels. These criteria are essentially seen as markers of quality, and this raises the important question of how valid they are and whether they should be applied equally and evenly across all HE institutional contexts.

2.3.1   The question of quality in the age of consumer-driven higher education

Data for ULTs are drawn, in part, from student satisfaction ratings as derived from the NSS responses, yet the extent to which these instruments present an accurate picture of the quality

of teaching and learning in HE has been called into question (Aftab & Gibb, 2015; Archer, 2007; Brookfield, 1995; Copeland, 2014; Jones-Devit & Samiei 2011). Brookfield, for example, has questioned whether a questionnaire can produce an accurate and credible picture of teacher performance, given that there is an inherent danger that 'students may give the highest satisfaction rating to those teachers who challenge them the least', or reflect a tendency for students to be sympathetic in their ratings towards teachers they see as friendly and accommodating (Brookfield, 1995:93) and with whom they feel most comfortable (Jones-Devit & Samiei, 2011; Molesworth, 2011; Voss *et al.,* 2007). Brookfield (1995) also highlights the fact that teacher evaluation forms rarely help the teacher understand the learning experiences of their students as they fail to capture the complexity of the learning process; useful washback is, therefore, also limited. As a result, it is difficult for teachers to develop their practice in a way that responds sensitively to the experiences of their students, Furthermore, it reduces the opportunity for students to engage meaningfully in valuable participatory dialogue about their learning and the challenges they may have encountered in the process (Copeland, 2014; Heron, 1996). Significantly, in cases where teachers occupy different social and racial positions from their students, the opportunity for such dialogue can be further impeded and can even serve to create distance between teachers and students (Burke, 2015; Katarzi & Hayward, 2020). Consequently, rather than driving up standards, quality measures have the very real potential to undermine the teacher-student relationship and in doing so reduce learning potential.

Echoing Aftab & Gibb (2015), Brookfield (1995), Copeland (2014) and others, Morley and Dunstan (2013:138) have observed that, in today's consumerist HE culture, 'Terms like quality and quality assurance in teaching and learning say very little about practice and learning and more about measurability, efficiency, customer quietude and representation'. This situation raises the question of how one defines and measures quality in the current HE environment.

Harvey and Green (1993:10) make reference to quality as a relative concept as opposed to an absolute one in that 'quality is relative to the user of the term and the circumstances in which it is invoked'. In other words, what may be considered high quality by one user or in one particular institutional context may not necessarily align with what is considered high quality in another context. This idea of quality as a relative rather than an absolute concept is important when one considers the categorization by Van Rooijen (2019) of universities into three prototypes according to their role or value: traditional (associated with critical thinking and developing the intellect), utilitarian/accountable (associated with a wider social responsibility

31

beyond the critical thinking and the intellectual development of the individual), and sustainable enterprise (associated the university's viability and value in the HE market). All universities share all three of these strands, but they are weighted differently according an institution's history and development and the way in which it is positioned or positions itself within the sector. These prototypes are likely to influence the way in which universities see quality, and thus the nature of the curriculum, the way in which it is delivered by teaching staff, and the way in which it is measured. The profiles and mission statements of universities will be largely determined by the prototype into which they fit and will tend to reflect and determine their student demographic. This suggests that expectations and statements of teaching quality need to be nuanced, and that standard, sector-wide criteria are a blunt instrument and may not be fit for purpose beyond statements of competency that are so broad as to be unhelpful (Archer, 2007; Dobbins & Jungblut, 2020; Harris, 2005; Lambert et al., 2007; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Reddings 2019; Rudd & O'Brien, 2019; Sutton, 2015; Van Rooijen, 2019; Whitely, 2019). As I will argue later that the way teaching quality is conceived in vocational universities with a strong WP mission certainly requires such a nuanced approach and that there is a convincing case for seeing effective transformative learning as a crucial marker of such quality.

2.3.2 Two key aspects of teaching quality

The notion of teaching quality can be thought about in terms of two related aspects: the curriculum and pedagogy. Although value for money has been cited in the literature as one measure of quality (see, for example, Harvey and Green (1993), I will not address this directly but in passing because, while it is likely to be a factor in the way students evaluate their HE experience, it is peripheral to the nature of academic content and its delivery.

2.3.3 Quality as curriculum

As Henard & Roseveare note, the world of work that today's university graduates enter 'is characterised by greater uncertainty, speed, risk, complexity and interdisciplinary working' (2012:8) and there is an increased demand for non-routine cognitive and interpersonal skills (Peach 2010). These changes have demanded a review of teaching and learning in HE in terms of how students are encouraged to acquire knowledge and what types of knowledge are regarded as valuable. An emphasis on aligning HE curricula more closely with national economic strategy and goals has brought into question – or at least reduced the attraction, relevance and currency of – curricula focused on theoretical, abstract knowledge in the absence of real-world application (Peach, 2010); that is, learning for its own sake is seen as more of an indulgence and lacking in practical value – a perception increased by the high fees students

now pay for their higher education and the debts they incur and will be required to repay once they graduate and enter the world of work. A view of study as merely an intellectual pursuit rather than a means to a job, a decent standard of living, and a way of supporting the economy is today much less tenable than it once was. From the point of view of fee-paying students, there is a preference for content that is directly relatable to course assignments and to employability, while also being interesting and enjoyable (Copeland, 2014; Naidoo *et al.,* 2011; Pegg *et al.,* 2012). This is consistent with the culture of neoliberalism which encourages self-investment and the pursuit of material wealth as a marker of success (Heywood, 2012). Presenting learning in a format that clearly lights the way to such success minimises the likelihood of criticism and promotes student satisfaction (Aftab & Gibb, 2015; Jones, 2016).

Not only are practical knowledge and employability prospects given greater emphasis in today's HE environment, but different types of university tend to offer degree programmes that prepare their students for particular kinds of employment for which certain kinds of knowledge are seen as desirable or necessary. For example, so-called new universities most of which are former polytechnics or further education colleges, and which tend to embody Rooijen's utilitarian/accountable prototype, tend to offer skills-based programmes designed to prepare students for particular trades or vocational careers. Because of their historical roots, it is often these universities that have the kind of stronger business enterprise culture associated with Rooijen's third prototype (sustainable enterprise).

Although new universities have tended to be more naturally aligned to government economic agendas, labour market needs have put pressure on *all* universities to rethink their curricula in ways that combine theoretical knowledge with work-based skills and competencies (Boden & Nevada, 2006; Molesworth, 2011; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005; Naidoo, 2011; Walker, 2006). Regardless of government priorities, it is in universities' interests to do so if they are to obtain market share, meet their enrolment targets and survive, and this is reflected in the now common practice of requiring all departments to specify course learning outcomes and graduate qualities. Curricula which, in this way, favour what Toohey (1999) describes as a performance or systems-based approach provide a tangible way to demonstrate quality via fitness for purpose, and this in turn can be seen by both the university and its students as an aspect of value for money, identified by Harvey and Green (1993) as one measure of quality.

As Barabasch (2017) has observed, the extent to which all competencies can be measured and/or instilled in such competency-based curricula is problematic, as is the question of where

accountability rests when students fail to achieve at the desired level based on the methods of assessment used. Is such failure a reflection of an inadequate curriculum, poor teaching, insufficient student engagement, or a combination of these things?

2.3.4 Quality as pedagogy

Closely related to the issue of a quality curriculum, however defined, is that of pedagogy, for a curriculum is only as good as the pedagogy through which it is realised; the two are intimately connected. If a curriculum is to fulfil its purpose, according to the way the institution positions itself in relation to its profile and student demographic, then whatever pedagogical approaches are applied by teaching staff need to motivate and engage students; this itself is a marker of quality regardless of the nature of the curriculum and the considerations (ideological, political, commercial) that are brought to bear in shaping it. If students are to feel motivated and to engage in learning, they need to understand why they are learning what they are learning and how it is relevant to their purpose in attending university and their particular course. This is important because the reasons why teachers adopt particular approaches and how they are relevant may not necessarily be self-evident to students. In today's HE environment where teachers are subject to a culture of performativity and accountability and the associated pressures of providing student satisfaction, this takes on greater significance than ever (Bates & Kaye, 2014; Harris, 2005). In other words, in order to minimise the likelihood of receiving poor student feedback, not only might the curriculum be configured in certain ways, but teachers may feel obliged to teach it in certain ways. In particular, an increased desire on the part of students for very concrete course and programme outcomes that reflect the fees they are paying and the expectations of a job and decent future prospects post-graduation is likely to have implications for teachers' practice and the extent to which students may tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty within the learning process and any lack of clarity around the relevance of what is being taught and how it is being taught (Forrest *et al.,* 2012; Pegg *et al.,* 2012).

Teaching quality, then, is about the extent to which teachers cover the curriculum in a way that makes evident to students the relevance to the proposed outcomes of the approach they adopt in the process of doing so, and the effectiveness of the pedagogies employed in bringing about those outcomes. However, how teachers shape their approach and gauge its suitability will, to some extent, be subject to individual variation and may not necessarily be in tune with institutional expectations of quality as measured by teaching quality audits and the criteria employed in them. This means that although a teacher may cover the content of the curriculum,

what they regard as the most effective and appropriate way of doing so may not necessarily align with the institution's quality assurance expectations and criteria. This can create tensions between the institution's concern with satisfying student expectations – in a way that lacks nuance because they see a need for its efficacy to be immediately evident to students – and teachers' views on appropriate pedagogy. This is why teachers need to explain to their students the pedagogical thinking behind what they do: it is in the students' and their own interests and, ultimately those of the university. However, this does not solve the problem of their practices being evaluated according to quality measures that lack nuance and may be seen by teachers as inappropriate.

One potential area for tension to arise in relation to both the curriculum and pedagogy as a result of consumerism concerns criticality and the associated notions of uncertainty, the toleration of uncertainty and the suspension of judgement or beliefs. Due to an awareness of students increasingly viewing themselves as clients paying for a service and for a degree that will make them employable, and the resulting tendency to adopt a product-oriented or outcomes view of learning, there is the very real danger of simply spoon-feeding students knowledge and skills that are obviously relevant to their future careers, and of simplifying content in order to ensure that students are satisfied with their experience and that it meets their expectations in this regard. Concerns have been expressed that this has led in some cases to a dumbing down of content and the nature of its delivery, and a lowering of standards (Alderman, 2010; Baty, 2004; Lambert, 2019; Quality Assurance Agency [UK], 2009). Learning in HE needs to be seen as not only a product but a process that involves the intellectual growth of the individual through a process of criticality which can bring with it increased autonomy (Forrest *et al.*, 2012) and a sense of self-confidence and developmental capacity (Aftab & Gibb, 2015). Teachers, then, need to work to achieve a balance that satiates the need for students to feel satisfied, whilst also ensuring sufficient space for the development of criticality in the learning process. Problems arise, however, where a simplistic, low inference, input-output approach to quality assurance is adopted and where measures of teaching quality may not acknowledge, or acknowledge sufficiently, this critical aspect of teaching-learning and/or teachers' individual pedagogical approaches to promoting it. This raises the issue of teacher agency and identity and the extent to which institutions and their teaching evaluation schemes allow space for such agency – another problematic issue in the consumer-driven HE environment.

2.3.5 Teacher identity and agency

The literature is replete with academics' personal stories and experiences of negotiating their identity within the neoliberal HE context (Archer, 2008; Churchman & King, 2009; Clegg, 2008; Harris, 2005; Sabri 2010; Sutton, 2015; Trahar, 2011). For teachers, that literature highlights the 'ontological insecurity involved and feelings of lack of authenticity, low trust, guilt and insecurity' (Sutton 2015:330) brought about as a result of the culture of performativity that now exists (Archer, 2007; Churchman & King 2009; Harris, 2005; Sabri, 2010; Sutton, 2015; Trahar, 2011). Furthermore, there is evidence that academics' values and beliefs about their profession are tested, clung to more tightly or discarded as they negotiate the pressures of increased accountability, performance and scrutiny of their practice. Studies suggest a compulsion among academics to construct and maintain the most acceptable version of themselves in the face of such pressures. Archer's (2007:278) work makes reference to participants reporting on the strategies they adopted in order to maintain an identity that aligned with 'notions of integrity, professionalism, responsibility, ethical behaviours and so on' in a culture where they often felt these things risked being compromised. This theme of teachers feeling conflicted as they struggle in their practice to mediate between their values and beliefs about what is appropriate given the particular local teaching learning context, and the institutional expectations placed on them is very prominent in the literature (Archer, 2009; Bosu *et al.,* 2018; Calvert *et al.,* 2011; Churchman & King, 2009, Sutton 2015). Calvert *et al.'s* 2011 study reports how neoliberalism was experienced by academics in the form of increased workloads and pressure to perform to an extent that they prioritised aspects of their work above their own well-being. Furthermore, they displayed a propensity to work beyond their role in order to try to remain congruent with their professional identity and values as teachers. In a climate focused so intensely on student satisfaction, they reported that teachers felt they had little time for professional reflection.

There is widespread evidence that pressure to perform creates inner conflicts for academics, inducing emotional, psychological and behavioural coping strategies as a type of resistance to the discourse of performativity (Sannino, 2010; Sutton 2015). For example, work by Churchman and King (2009) highlights the dissonance between the dominant public story of performativity and the private stories which reflect the often challenging individual experiences of academics as they attempt to negotiate their professional identity in an effort to resolve the two. They speak of teachers 'confining interactions to those (colleagues) who share that identity, or maintaining isolated conditions' in order to maintain their professional identity

(Churchman & King, 2009:53). This phenomenon of seeking kinship with others of similarity is recognised by Ponterotto and Pederson (1993:27), who explain how it is 'common for people to prefer their own in-group' and for people to cling to their own values and personal views and hold them in high esteem for the reason that this provides a sense of belonging and security. Although Ponterotto and Pederson's work relates to ethnocentrism, it helps explain the tendency evident in academics' narratives to secure validation of their beliefs and practices – and thus affirmation – through seeking like-minded others, particularly where those beliefs are at odds with institutional expectations and notions of good practice.

Cohen's (1985) work on community offers useful insights into this kind of validatory approach. His work explores the symbolic construction of boundaries between groups of people and suggests that communities can be formed as a result of a shared sense of reality which serves to unite people. The 'symbolic' component refers to the rituals and cultural practices common to these groups. When bonds are formed as a result of this 'sharing', a community emerges (Crow & Allen, 2003) the members of which 'have something in common which marks them off from outsiders who do not belong and/or are not allowed to belong' (Crow & Allen 2003:184).

Archer's 2007 study elucidated how new conceptualisations of academic identity aligned to performativity and accountability are emerging and legitimised amongst younger academics. He discovered that whilst the intensification of NL, with its increased focus on performance, measurement and culpability, frequently led to resistance amongst established academics, this tended not to be the case with younger academics. Of particular significance were the sense-making processes identified through semi-structured interviews, where in contrast to their older, more established contemporaries, the younger teachers strove to legitimise their identity as credible academics via 'a general endorsement of the discourse of accountability, which was valued as a positive demarcation of the present academia from the past' (Archer 2007:272). Ideas of a bygone golden era when academics had an easy life with very little accountability were present in the narratives of the young academics interviewed by Archer (2007), and this sense of 'the past' appeared to make it easier for them to endorse the increased accountability associated with marketised education, and to see it as necessary to ensuring better practice in academia.

The notion of a new academic identity as an improvement on the traditional one also features in the work of Sabri (2010), who interviewed individuals holding positions of influence in

relation to HE policy development as opposed to practice. Part of this work revealed how the participants holding these positions conceptualised the traditional academic in a way associated with professing rather than teaching, with the former critiqued as too focused on their subject discipline rather than the student. This is suggestive of a perception of the traditional academic as being self-interested and strongly associated with the notion of the 'ivory tower academic' implicit in which is the idea of the NL-driven shift towards greater accountability in HE as a contemporary and positive development. This has the potential to create an age-based divide among academics where the curriculum and teaching – and their quality – are viewed somewhat differently as a result of new ideologies, policies and attitudes in education (Calvert *et al.,* 2011; Churchman & King, 2009).

These notions of marketisation and consumerism, and the ideas of quality and teacher agency that I have discussed have important implications for transformative learning, and it is to this that I now turn.

2.4   Transformative Learning

TL is a process through which the learner's unconsciously held assumptions are brought to the fore so that they can be critically appraised. The goal of this process is for learners to identify assumptions which are unhelpful, inaccurate and/or limiting in some way and, in doing so, gain '… a greater sense of autonomy and the power to determine their own actions' (Hodge, 2014:165). For NTSs, this may mean disrupting assumptions about themselves as learners, helped by an educator who has the requisite skills and, ideally – though not necessarily – knowledge of their experience through having something of a comparable life history.

TL is a model of education which seeks to help the learner reflect on their understanding of themselves and to gain a realistic and accurate vantage point in relation to themselves and the world (Lawrence & Cranton, 2009). It is primarily concerned with individual meaning making and with how meaning is '… constructed, validated and reformulated and the social conditions which shape the way meaning is made from experience' (Hodge, 2014:172). TL is defined by Mezirow as 'the transformation of the learner's meaning perspectives, frames of reference, and habits of mind' (Merizow, 2006, as cited in Illeris, 2014:148). An individual's meaning perspectives are a result of assumptions internalised through the course of early socialisation (childhood) and assimilated as unquestioned truths. Such assumptions are internalised from the 'social world, community and culture' (Taylor & Cranton, 2012:6). Experiences of schooling

and family background are key aspects through which assumptions occur and for many NTSs these are limiting and inaccurate. It is the role of the educator to forge a connection between themselves and their students in order to invite students to explore alternative perspectives to those which may be limiting and inaccurate, and to facilitate dialogue to support transformation. To do this they must be sensitive to and non-judgemental of the way a person thinks, feels and acts – or in Mezirow's terms to the 'habits of mind' that portray meaning schemes symbolic of a deeper layer of unconsciously held assumptions about how a person understands themselves and the world (Mezirow, 2000).

Fostering TL requires empathy in that the facilitator should have awareness of issues pertinent to the individuals they aim to teach. In culturally diverse settings, this means striving for knowledge about oppression, racism, discrimination and stigmatisation, and the impact of one's own identity on the learner (Lago, 2006). By focussing on individual experience and facilitating critical dialogue with students, a platform for transformation is created. Mezirow makes a significant distinction between learning as information and learning as transformation. Learning as information favours knowledge outside the learner through the acquisition of skills and facts; it is learning aimed at increasing the learner's 'fund of knowledge' and bringing new content to the learner's already existing frame of reference (Kegan, 2009:42). Conversely, learning as transformation is learning aimed at changing *how* a person knows rather than *what* they know (Kegan, 2009). Such learning necessitates reflection on the process by which facts and information are internalised.

A further important characteristic of TL is identified by Kegan (2009) who points out that many types of change can occur in the context of learning, but not all change is transformational. For example, acquiring information within the person's existing frame of reference is not necessarily transformational. Only learning which results in changes to the person's meaning perspectives (the background structure of deeply held assumptions) is transformational because it is this type of learning that requires the person to reorganise, and potentially discard, previously held beliefs and assumptions and thus adopt a new way understanding themselves and their being in the world (Hodge, 2014; Kegan, 2009). Kegan (2009:42) summarises the distinction between informative and transformative learning by stating that 'both kinds of learning are expansive and valuable, one within a pre-existing frame of mind and the other reconstructing the very frame'.

Significantly, transformation is something that cannot be *done* to another person, it is proffered through relationship and by exposure to situations and experiences that disrupt a person's frame of reference and which then requires reformulation. Illeris (2014) explains how it is the person's identity that is transformed through TL, illustrating the profound change that can occur in TL and the way in which it can impact on existing relationships as the person experiencing transformation acquires a new way of understanding themselves. University is an appropriate site for offering possibility for transformation, provided the conditions support it. Necessarily, the conditions need to be cultivated responsibly and with the wellbeing of students foremost in mind: a transformative approach is founded upon a specific type of relationship which, when cultivated, helps to strengthen the conditions required for transformative learning to take place. In the next section, I explain how transformative relationships support transformative learning and their significance to the purpose of the vocational university.

2.4.1 The importance of the transformative relationship to the purpose of the vocational university with a strong WP mission

A key objective of the vocational university with a strong WP mission is to provide an appropriate curriculum that offers opportunity for developing relevant appropriate professional skills *and* a critical and liberated mindset that serves to empower students post-graduation, both in the world of work and more generally. Another key objective is to challenge students' perceptions of their potential contribution within society as being of less value than that of students studying at traditional universities. Central to realising these objectives is strengthening the conditions for transformative learning. Here I explain four reasons that rationalise the application of a transformative approach in a vocational university with a strong WP mission.

First, due to the needs of the students attending them and the frequent lack of confidence and self-belief with which they come to HE, teaching-focused universities such as mine that cater to NTSs frequently face particular kinds of issues that can be mitigated by the creation of transformative relationship and the learning opportunities this can cultivate. The effects of frequently negative prior experiences of education – and, often, achievement – can be lessened through employing a transformative approach due to its recognition of the individual and the engendering of empathy among teachers in relation to their students and what they have experienced (Hodge, 2012; Lawrence & Cranton, 2009; Taylor, 2012). The fostering of supportive relationships that challenge their existing beliefs can help students realise their potential and develop their sense of self-confidence. Second, as a person-centred approach, the

transformative relationship offers a way of developing pedagogical insight based on the actual needs of the students. Through the nurturing of transformative relationships, NTSs are provided with an opportunity for their lived experiences – frequently experiences of inequality – to be acknowledged and used as a key part of the learning process, and for that process to help transform their lives. Nurturing transformative relationships is, therefore, key to ensuring both quality of provision and value for money for NTSs studying in vocational universities with a strong WP mission, whilst also equipping students with the confidence to pursue excellence within their chosen professions and beyond. In doing so, it has the potential to increase the percentage of students entering highly skilled employment, something currently viewed by the Office for Students (OfS) as a key indicator of quality.

Third, the transformative relationship supports a deep understanding of the teacher-student dynamics experienced in culturally diverse contexts, such as that which characterises the university at the centre of this study, and offers potential insight into how pressures such as those that arise from students' expectations may filter into the classroom and appropriate responses to them be developed. Universities catering for NTSs are exposed to the same external pressures as traditional universities and the emphasis on quality has increased as a consequence of students being increasingly regarded as consumers of HE. Quality is clearly important, but how it should be conceived and realised within the learning process is subject to contestation (discussed in Chapter 2). This is further complicated in culturally diverse settings where teachers often occupy different social and racial positions to their students. The perceptions formed by teachers of their students, and vice-versa, are prone to influencing the learning process (Pollard, 2008). Left unacknowledged and unchecked, they can undermine equality when teaching culturally diverse students and in doing so weaken both the quality of the teaching-learning process and its potential outcomes. The transformative relationship actively targets such issues inherent in human relationships due to individuals' divergent experiences, identities, values and beliefs, and it supports the development of fair and effective responses. Arguably, addressing perceptions that may lead to opposition, resistance and/or prejudice is helpful in strengthening the overall culture of the university and students' sense of belonging.

A fourth benefit of the transformative approach is that it supports the principle of engendering the kind of criticality essential for good professional practice within practice-based disciplines (Manning-Morton, 2006; Toohey, 1999). By cultivating greater understanding of themselves and their potential impact within the world in which they will ultimately operate as

professionals, students may carry the benefits of the transformative relationship into their own practice; that is, students who have engaged in meaningful transformative experiences themselves are more likely to foster this same process in their own interactions with service users and in doing so operate as agents for social change beyond the university itself (Farrell & Ives, 2015; Fook, 2003). Given the professions they will enter (childcare, youth work, social work etc.), fostering relationships that support transformation will serve to strengthen them as practitioners in these areas. Fostered through education, the transformative relationship can operate as a model for best practice that can serve wider society.

Here, I have explained how the benefits of the transformative relationship extend beyond the individual selfhood of the student (or educator) by engendering positive action that can serve to benefit others, including those with whom the students will come into contact in their professional lives. I have also described how the transformative approach acknowledges the frequently disadvantaged positions of students and purposefully uses their experiences to enrich the learning process. In doing so students are affirmed and encouraged to pursue their own excellence in a supportive and appropriately challenging learning environment. I have explained how the transformative approach is helpful for developing effective teaching and learning because it invites students lived experiences into the classroom, enabling teachers to gain insight into them and thus develop their teaching with sensitivity and from a more informed position. Essentially, I have stated how within culturally diverse contexts the transformative relationship offers a means by which subtle and complex factors that affect the learning process and its outcomes – and which potentially perpetuate disadvantage – can be better understood and responded to via an appropriate pedagogy.

The issues presented here and which explain the importance of the transformative relationship to the purpose of the vocational university with a strong WP mission demand a focus on university culture and the nature of relationships that are crucial to achieving that purpose. A key challenge lies in discovering a way to cultivate transformative relationships in the face of high-stakes situations where students expect value for money and in which learning itself is power-laden due to it being constructed within the context of NL ideology (Pedler, & Burgoyne 2017). Importantly, the widening of access to HE provision and the diversification of HE providers presents an opportunity to develop innovative and ethical responses to the intensification of NL and a re-valuing of vocational education and associated professions (Peach, 2010).

First and foremost, this thesis focuses on addressing the social injustices that may occur from the over-representation of NTSs in the newer vocational universities and on how, within such institutions, both quality and equality can be ensured and thereby prevent – or at least minimise – further systemic disadvantage. Importantly, I argue that educators working within vocational universities with a strong WP mission have an additional responsibility to that of academics working in more traditional university contexts, and that fostering transformative relationships and the learning these help cultivate is an appropriate approach to adopt in such contexts. I now turn to the transformative relationship itself and explain the characteristics that distinguish it.

2.4.2   The qualities of the transformative relationship

Educators cannot make students transform but they can aim to foster a type of relationship that cultivates the conditions for transformation (Rogers, 1957; 1983). The qualities of the transformative relationship are similar to those of the 'helping relationship' – a relationship aimed at promoting growth and development of the whole person (Harris-Perlman, 1993). Importantly, transformative relationships are not compensation for people who need to be worked on and made better; they are a medium through which human development is supported whatever the starting point or unique set of circumstances of the individual. Both teacher and student benefit from the transformative relationship as it is mutually enriching and invites the learner into a participatory journey through which their potential can be realised.

The transformative relationship rests on a set of principles and methods aimed at achieving transformative learning. Significantly, it is often – although not exclusively – the relationship experienced in the process of learning that is the linchpin to its success. The qualities of TL, along with the skills and knowledge required for its success, are discussed below.

2.4.2.1 An attitude of acceptance and openness

Acceptance within a transformative relationship is based on the notion of unconditionality and is important in cultivating a comfortable emotional environment for learning. However, acceptance alone is insufficient. In the transformative relationship the learner is invited on a personal journey of growth through which they can realise their potential. The educator, in their communication, must achieve an appropriate balance between acceptance of the other person (the student) and the expectation that they will engage in the kind of reflective and critical thinking needed to stimulate positive change. The teacher-student relationship is the medium through which TL may occur and/or be impeded, and the student needs to be supported in the endeavour.

Taylor & Laros (2014:137) suggest that the approach to fostering TL comprises six key characteristics: it is focused on individual experience; requires critical reflection; involves discussion with others; has a holistic orientation (in that it acknowledges the affective domain of teaching and learning); acknowledges the situated aspects of learning; and requires an authentic relationship between students and teachers. Importantly, TL also requires a set of beliefs and attitudes, skills and knowledge on the part of the educator aimed at fostering the transformative relationship (Lagos, 2006); for example, being 'open to the potential that another perspective is just as valid as our own – and perhaps sometimes even more valid than our own' (Soni, 2011, p. X). This principle makes the approach particularly appropriate when working in diverse contexts where the experiences of NTSs can be unheard and/or masked by labels and assumptions about their capability and ability. The transformative relationship aims to elicit these experiences and incorporate them into the learning process. Critically, the transformative relationship is one based on a balance between various qualities: acceptance and expectation; support and stimulation; and openness on the part of the educator towards the other person (Harris-Perlman, 1993; Parekh, 2002; Rogers, 1983).

2.4.2.2 Mutuality

The transformative relationship rests on the concept of mutuality (Chang, 2008; Edwards & Richards 2002; Rogers, 1983), a concept derived from relational theory and which, unlike traditional Western theories that focus on the development of the individual self, 'focuses on the development of self-with-others' (Edwards & Richards, 2002:37). Importantly, it has an inherently cooperative focus which aims at mutual benefit and is, arguably, in contrast to the self-serving and self-invested approach to governing one's life implicit in NL ideology. Significantly, for the transformative approach to be a tenable, responsibility for the 'intellectual and personal growth among all parties involved' must be distributed (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012:15). Teachers and their students must buy into or 'invest themselves in' the approach (Ableser & Moore, 2018; Hidalgo et al., 2018). In contrast to a traditional model of the teacher-student relationship in which the educator is separate from the students, the transformative teacher positions him or herself as part of the group and influential in the group dynamics and processes that occur during the teaching-learning process (Schwarz, 2000). They teach relationally and through their relationships *with* students and the relationships they facilitate *between* students the potential for transformation can be mobilised.

Importantly, when fostering TL, teachers must not impose their own world view onto their learners and must themselves be open to the possibility of being changed by their learners'

experiences and to adjusting their own world view (Soni, 2011). They avoid imposing their position of authority as teacher on the learning relationship despite retaining a level of responsibility. This dilution of power on the part of the educator forms part of the authentic relationship, a relationship within which there is no façade and that is somewhat akin to that of a therapeutic relationship where genuineness is considered a core condition for change (Rogers 1983). In educational settings, these conditions cultivate the conditions for dialogue and the sharing of experience that is helpful for personal and professional growth. The transformative teacher incorporates different viewpoints into the learning process, including their own, in order to stimulate thinking and discussion. Achieving this sensitively requires teachers to have an understanding their own position (e.g. their race, class, gender, age) and an appreciation of what they themselves may symbolise to the learners with whom they seek to foster a transformative relationship.

Much is demanded of teachers who subscribe to a transformative approach and there are obstacles that can impede its development. For example, teachers can fear the dilution of their power required to foster the openness that generates the kind of conversation so crucial to understanding those who are different from oneself. As I will show later, this dynamic is very significant in today's educational culture where student feedback about their learning experience is used as a measure of individual teachers' performance and, in effect, conceptualises effectiveness in terms of concrete learning outcomes attained rather than on the learning process that has led to these. In such cultures, teachers can experience pressure to provide learning that is very clearly aligned to assignments and course grades. They may also be fearful of traversing potentially controversial and/or sensitive issues and learning situations that may arise once students are invited to participate in their learning from a position of mutuality, and which may not invite positive student feedback or sit comfortably with institutional teaching quality audits and the criteria these employ.

2.4.2.3 Provocateur

Teachers who subscribe to the principles of TL aim to bring about change in their students' lives. Although TL intentionally aims to stimulate and disrupt students' thinking and established frames of reference, it is not operationalised as a constant stream of provocation and emotive topic content (Mezirow, 2006; Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). A key principle of the transformative relationship is that it is student led, based on student interests, and emphasises the need to 'explore and challenge students' questions, views and perspectives' (Slavich and Zimbardo, 2012:18). In addition, teachers need to consider carefully the content they choose

to deliver, how they deliver it and what they intend to achieve by doing so. For teachers to foster transformative learning effectively, they should regard themselves as active participants in learning and who engage in the transformative process *with* their students rather than as instigators of *their* (students') transformation (Ceglowski & Macovsky, 2012).

In this role, they need to have an appreciation of and sensitivity to students' preparedness if they are to avoid inadvertently inflicting potential harm. In other words, any discomfort experienced during the learning process should occur in the interests of helping the students achieve their full potential, with teachers providing the appropriate support in order to facilitate the process (Wlodkowski, 1999). Given the frequently uncomfortable feelings such an approach can induce in both the students and the teachers themselves, the teacher needs to strike an appropriate balance between stimulating students' thinking and offering the support they need to venture into unfamiliar territory (Mezirow, 2006; Taylor & Laros, 2014). The teacher must be endowed with a good degree of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2009), have a good understanding of their own and others' emotions, and be proficient in managing relationships. They must be attuned to reading the non-verbal cues of others and be aware, as far as possible, of their own behavioural nuances (Edwards & Richards, 2002; Soni, 2011).

2.4.2.4 Sensitivity and intuitive judgement

In order to stimulate thinking that inspires transformation, the teacher must pose questions at an appropriate pitch and in a way that is intellectually challenging. To do this effectively, a good grasp of learners' prior knowledge, experience and level of ability is required (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). Such knowledge ensures good use of judgement in terms of students' potential responses. The communication style of the teacher can impact students' receptivity to course content and how the teacher is regarded (Edwards & Richards, 2002; Ikepze, 2019). Educators need, judiciously and intuitively, to cultivate their relationships with individual students and with the wider class groups, and to know when to challenge and/or pursue an idea and when to hold back in order to allow time for students to become comfortable with subject matter and the challenges it may present for them (Harris-Perlman, 1993; Ikpeze 2019). This is important, not least because it affects the climate of the classroom by supporting safe exploration and the degree to which students feel they can trust their teacher (Merdinger, 1991; Soni, 2011).

2.4.2.5 Trust

Trust is a baseline quality of the transformative relationship and it has to be earned and cultivated (Soni, 2011). Trust also has relevance beyond the confines of the classroom as it relates to the culture of the university and the possibilities that can be supported by it. A collective approach of acceptance and openness needs to be engendered in order to encourage a climate of trust. Amongst the teaching staff, opportunities for conversation about their different ideas, experiences and approaches to teaching are valuable in cultivating a supportive environment for they help dispel team fragmentation and the sense of personal isolation that can occurs in distrustful situations (Rudnak & Szabo, 2019). Merdinger (1991) supports this notion, asserting how the learning environment aimed at cultivating transformation must be a supportive one. There needs to be awareness, amongst all people invested in students' success, of how learning disposition may be affected by the environment and one's experience within it (Lago, 2006). Importantly, the effect of the learning environment on teachers may be as pronounced and significant as it is on students. The additional investment made by the transformative educator as they open themselves to genuine encounter with students and with those different to themselves needs to be understood by those in management roles. Arguably, a transformative relationship stems from an understanding of factors, often socio-political ones, that impact the various marginalised groups and the felt experiences that accompany them, but also of issues that are central to the teachers who operationalise the process. Importantly, organisational culture has the potential to significantly affect the success of transformative relationships as there may exist implicit assumptions about what is expected and what is acceptable (Chang, 2008), and these, alongside any deficit of trust, can be detrimental to efforts to implement a transformative approach.

2.4.2.6 Facilitation of dialogue

Teachers must be sufficiently self-aware and confident to competently manage the potentially challenging discussions that emerge through students' engagement with subject matter. Discussion is a cornerstone of potential transformation, and relationships must, therefore, support the conditions for it to occur respectfully. The ability to foster dialogue is crucial in order to challenge stereotypes and prejudices that may be present within groups of learners. In situations where there has been little prior exposure to difference and diversity, it is common for there to be feelings of vulnerability on the part of teacher and students when negotiating the pedagogical relationship (Ikpeze, 2019). Those of similarity commonly perceive each other favourably. Allport (1979) characterises this as ethnocentrism: a phenomenon where the

associated culture, beliefs, values and behaviours associated with others of similarity are considered favourable to those of non-members. Left unacknowledged, this can lead to separation between groups of students, and/or teachers, and stifle the mutual empathy needed for cultivating a supportive and inclusive environment both inside and outside of the classroom. It is essential that teachers maximise opportunities for positive intergroup contact and recognise and tackle discriminatory attitudes within their learners and themselves, should they arise.

Having explained the characteristics of the transformative relationship and what it means for teachers and students, I now turn to the context of contemporary HE and consider the challenges it presents for vocational universities in particular, as they seek to align their practices with its core principles.

2.5 Fostering relationships for transformation is challenging in contemporary NL HE

In this section. I focus specifically on the challenges associated with the fee-paying student, employability and the established image of the traditional university student, as these relate to the vocational university.

2.5.1 The fee-paying student

Fostering transformative relationships may be challenging in the contemporary NL HE context, given the systemic pressures that now characterise it. For example, the fee-paying student who has made a choice to invest in themselves and their future is likely to come with a set of expectations concerning their higher education experience and what it should offer. For example, Caru and Cova, (2003-cited in Molesworth *et al.,* 2009:279) explain how 'where there is a financial exchange a consumer experience is produced'. The fees situation is one realisation of the wider consumer culture engendered by neoliberalism. Students who have taken on board this consumer culture now see getting a good degree as their entitlement, paid for by their fees (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). The fee-paying student is more likely to view themselves as a passive recipient of learning, seeking to bank a set of concrete, narrowly defined employability skills (Molesworth *et al.,* 2009), and this presents a number of pedagogical challenges for those wanting to prioritise TL as they and their students negotiate the HE experience in a climate of employability and upskilling. In such a context, student expectations are likely to focus on value for money measured in terms of grades received rather than the development of subtler – arguably no less important – qualities, such as the

development of selfhood and criticality, that are integral to TL (Inglesby, 2015; Molesworth *et al.,* 2009). Within today's competitive marketized university culture, these expectations can change the student-institution and student-teacher power dynamic and thereby disrupt the essential mutuality required of the transformative relationship.

2.5.2 Employability, expectations and motivation

A second and closely related issue that will likely affect a successful transformative relationship is that of employability. The expansion of HE and the increase in NTSs are frequently associated with curricular change, loss of criticality and a dumbing down of course content (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). In reality, however, curricular change is, in fact, more a product of a government-driven employability agenda according to which employability is now viewed by the government as a central function of all universities (Higher Education Academy, HEA 2012). The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCFE) states that 'embedding employability into the core of HE will continue to be a key priority of Government, universities and colleges and employers' (2011:5). The embedding of employability within the remit of the university has caused great concern that the emphasis on employability may, once again, alter the type of learning traditionally considered to be both academically and socially valuable; namely, criticality and self-development (Brennan *et al.,* 2012). On other words, there are worries that the government's policy agenda will have an undue and potentially damaging bearing on the internal practices of universities, and particularly the way in which they view and measure teaching practice.

For teaching-focused vocational universities, the meaning of employability and its monetary benefit to students raises important questions. For example, what is it realistic to expect of students in terms of their engagement in the learning process if, ultimately, their studies promise little in the way of monetary reward post-graduation? Yet such engagement can be highly beneficial as the notion of employability opens up a space for pedagogical practices that engender meaningful learning experiences for NTSs and equip them with the confidence to pursue goals that bring rewards beyond merely employability and financial ones. However, for this to happen, the transformative approach requires students to become critically reflective in relation to themselves and their future professions. The reasons why students pursue vocational HE, despite the fact that it appears to promise less in terms of monetary returns than courses offered by traditional, non-vocationally oriented universities, have to do in part with wider systemic inequalities. Understanding students' motivations for pursuing vocational education is crucial to understanding how they engage with course content and the learning process, and

for cultivating learning that enables them to benefit fully from their investment in HE and to see it as empowering rather than as the only choice available to them as a consequence of their socioeconomic and educational circumstances. As well as supporting the cultivation of transformative learning, the transformative relationship offers a means through which to find out about students' motivations and fine-tune one's pedagogy accordingly.

2.5.3 The ingrained image of the traditional university student

A third issue crucial to the learning experience of NTSs is their self-image and that which others have of them. Those teaching, learning and leading within universities widely reflect a culturally ingrained perception common in the West and which associates university education with 'successful young people, who attended public schools and grammar schools' (Bathmaker 2003:3). This dovetails with the idea that those longer-established universities that offer a more traditional academic curriculum are off limits to NTSs. The changing environment in which universities operate today, combined with the increasingly diverse student demographic, has led to a sense, for many, that the essential integrity of universities is being undermined, and that 'letting in the masses creates chaos and pollutes the pristine and pure university environment' (Leathwood & O'Connell 2003:599). The idea of the traditional university thus persists, along with longstanding notions regarding the type of students for whom it caters. Left unchecked, this has the potential to impact negatively on efforts to nurture relationships that support transformative learning and realise the purpose of the university in a manner that intercepts and disrupts further reproduction. While there are, without question, significant pressures shaping HE today, irrespective of university type, these are largely generated by economic factors, workforce needs and the need for universities to stay afloat in a highly competitive sector. To see these pressures as somehow an undesirable by-product of a more diverse student body is simplistic and needs to be guarded against, not least because it is unhelpful for fostering learning relationships that are based on positive expectations and which promote opportunity for transformation.

2.6   The implications of neoliberalism and the consumerist culture for transformative learning and perceptions of quality in the vocational university

The characteristics of neoliberalism and the consumerist culture it has produced, and their effects on institutions and their teaching staff have significant consequences for vocational universities with a strong social justice agenda and a commitment to widening participation

that speaks to non-traditional students who often originate from disadvantaged sections of society. As I argued in Chapter1, transformative learning is a teaching approach that is well suited to universities that fit this description and for it to be implemented effectively requires the support of institutional management and the teaching quality assessment mechanisms that are nuanced and show an understanding of what the university profile means for its curricula, and the consequences of this for the type of pedagogy required. Not only do senior management need to acknowledge and understand this but, as I shall eventually argue in this thesis, they also need to work collaboratively with teachers and employers to find ways of shaping the curriculum and teaching quality mechanisms in ways that reflect, respect and balance the learning and developmental needs of the student body, the existential commercial pressures faced by the institution, and teachers' sense of professional identity and associated values, beliefs and experience. While balancing these different things is challenging, as Jones-Devit and Samiei observe, any measure of quality needs to recognise '…the intrinsic value of education as a transformative experience' (2011:96), and this suggests that there is a danger in placing too great weight on student feedback mechanisms designed to gauge satisfaction levels. Almost inevitably, instruments such as the National Student Survey and university league tables are going to influence the types of practices considered acceptable by institutions (Molesworth *et al.,* 2011; Walker 2006) and, therefore, the degree of professional judgement teachers feel able to exercise (McCulloch & Tett, 2010).

As we have seen, ever-greater accountability and the pressure on teachers to align their practices with the expectations and specifications of quality assurance processes and mechanisms can be problematic, and this is certainly the case where such mechanisms are based on notions of quality that are not compatible with the kind of teaching and learning approach that underpins the successful implementation of a transformative curriculum. Quality reported nationally in the form of decontextualized performance tables, and/or quantified student feedback aggravates this pressure. There is also the danger that while transformative values may be espoused within a university's mission statement and promotional materials and seen as honourable and attractive to an external audience, actual practices may not necessarily be representative or supportive of transformation because internal quality assurance tools may only serve as broad, superficial markers of quality designed to reflect more sector-wide notions of quality teaching – and reflecting, in turn, notions of a 'quality' curriculum and value for money. Being consistent with sector-wide notions of quality means that universities are less likely to be a casualty of league tables and other products of marketisation and consumerism.

In other words, it may be entirely possible for a university to present a veneer of commitment to transformative values yet promote, uphold, even insist on practices that are seen as ensuring it future viability by keeping the student body (its 'clients') satisfied by promoting a curriculum and teaching approaches that meet their expectations in overly narrow terms of relevance and future job prospects – and, by extension, value for money. While these things are certainly desirable in any educational context, and consistent with a transformative approach, there are other elements that also need to be present if the teaching-learning process is to be truly transformative.

The strong focus on student satisfaction and the concomitant minimalization of student 'discomfort' in the learning process is problematic in relation to meeting the key objectives of the vocational university in particular, for it threatens to undermine the development of a critical and liberated mindset that serves to empower students during their studies and post-graduation, both in the world of work and more generally. The temptation to ensure student satisfaction in a manner that diminishes criticality, engenders complicity and risks perpetuating systemic disadvantage as students' existing frames of reference are not challenged in the manner I described in Chapter 1. (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). In vocational HE, in particular, space needs to be created for expanded thinking in relation to future practice (Banks, 2013; Crème, 2008; Kerka, 1996). For example, students on vocational courses need opportunities to consider how they will construct solutions to problems in practice rather than via 'a passive process of responding to procedures and guidelines' (Thompson, 2005:196). Among other things, this characteristically involves creativity, criticality, autonomy, and engaging with feelings of uncertainty because the answers to practice-based predicaments do not necessarily have concrete and/or clear-cut solutions, something which sits uncomfortably with the student-as-consumer mindset (Pegg *et al.,* 2012). Failure to encourage these attributes in the learning process may serve not only to maintain inaccurate and undermining self-beliefs or learner identities that impede the progress of NTSs during the course of their studies and as they enter their professions, it also reduces the likelihood of them instilling these same qualities in those they train subsequently in their own professional practice and who frequently occupy marginalised positions in society (Fook,1998; Walker, 2006). In this way, systemic disadvantage is replicated rather than addressed.

Teachers need to avoid being complicit in this kind of systemic disadvantage by allowing opportunities for ambiguity to be present in the learning process and fostering criticality and

students' sense of worth and self-affirmation. A transformative approach seeks to achieve this by encouraging students to question assumptions about themselves and the world, and this risks creating feelings of discomfort, resistance and resentment. A key skill needed in fostering the conditions for TL is that of creating an emotionally safe, environment (Taylor & Laros, 2014) within which to challenge students and encourage them to engage in the kind of critical dialogue necessary to disrupting the status quo in order to gain improved vantage points that promote selfhood defined by authentic choice. These skills and positive perceptions of self are especially crucial not only in developing the students themselves, maximising their potential during their studies, and preparing them to function effectively in social welfare-related professions such as Childcare, Youth work and Health and Social Care, but also in enabling them, in turn, to be agents of change in promoting these same skills in those with whom they practice professionally and who themselves are likely to have suffered disadvantage (Banks *et al.,* 2013; Thompson, 2005). In this manner, a transformative curriculum, appropriately taught, encourages ongoing transformation beyond the university context itself, thereby fulfilling the civic purpose of the university (prototype strand 2) (Van Rooijen, 2019).

For these things to occur, teachers need to feel empowered and that they have the necessary agency to create a teaching-learning environment and employ whatever practices they see fit – the efficacy of which may not always be amenable to measurement – based on their knowledge and experience of transformative learning and the student demographic with which they work. They can only have this freedom if the institution goes beyond superficial mission statements and understands and acknowledges what those statements mean for the curriculum and for teaching and is prepared to consider its quality assurance mechanisms in that light. What these issues and the tensions they create mean for teachers seeking to implement a transformative approach in today's competitive, consumer-focused environment where students have considerable leverage and teacher performance is measured according to feedback and quality assurance mechanisms that tend to serve the university's reputation rather then what learners really need given their profiles and the focus of their studies and future professions, has been under-researched. The current study is intended to address this.

2.7   The research questions

In chapters one and two, I have argued that the fostering of transformative relationships is synonymous with quality within the context of a vocational university because it both meets

the needs of graduates' future professions, while also providing a way to redress disadvantage that is frequently experienced by those NTSs that typically make up its student demographic. In the research that follows, I recount my lived experience of working to implement a transformative approach in a particular vocational university with a strong WP mission and philosophy of inclusion. I discuss the constraints and affordances that influence my decisions and actions, and I provide an account of my feelings as I negotiate the often overwhelming personal and professional challenges involved. I compare my experience with that of my peers and explore the degree of agency they perceive themselves to possess within the NL context as they seek to negotiate its various pressures. I discuss the implications for the prospect of fostering transformative relationships at an institutional level and consider what might be a practicable to negotiating those pressures in a manner that supports transformative learning.

The research questions that guide my investigation reflect my belief that a first-hand perspective is both valuable and limited; consequently, I seek to cross reference my own experience with that of my colleagues. I ask:

- RQ1: How do I experience the pressures that arise within the NL HE context?
- RQ2: In what way is my experience similar to and different from that of my colleagues?

I argue that the responses of teachers to the pressures of increasing NL are integral to the internal conditions of the university and to what may or may not be achieved within it. With this in mind, I ask:

- RQ3: What does the shared experience indicate about the emerging culture of the university?
- RQ4: How do I attempt to foster transformative relationships in this context and what are the factors that support or impede my attempts to do so?

The answers to these questions potentially have implications not only for the university at the heart of this study in terms of its effectiveness in realising its identity as a vocationally-oriented institution with a strong WP mission, but also other such universities that share a similar profile. In doing so it promises to shed light on the broader issue of how the NL imperatives of privatisation, competition, choice and the notion of success as a product of self-interest and self-investment, may transfer into practice and impact the fostering of transformative relationships, and thus the development and prospects of the individual.

Chapter 3: Theoretical and Conceptual framework

3.1 The philosophical basis of the study

Ricoeur provides a philosophy of man's-being-in-the-world (Kaplan, 2003) and in doing so provides a framework for understanding consciousness from a particular perspective, one that is seated in the existential domain. This branch of philosophy addresses the fundamental question of what it means to exist and, as such, it is a philosophy concerned with being human (Kaplan, 2003; O'Dwyer, 2009).

The existential basis of Ricoeur's work makes it easily relatable to the issue of human experience and therefore to autoethnography, which uses experience to gain insight into a specific culture and context (Chang, 2008; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Reed Danahay 2017) – in this case, the culture of a vocational university operating within the context of neoliberalism. Ricoeur's philosophy of experience presents a link between experience and the self by focusing on participative action. For Ricoeur, we participate in our own consciousness and one's 'self' is brought into being through experience. 'Life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life'; therefore, what one does (action) is significant to the experience that occurs (Kaplan, 2003). Action is inextricably bound to the external world in a reciprocal relationship. The 'self' we experience arises by and through action, and never in isolation. In other words, there is an inseparability between self and the context. This philosophical basis allows the influence of personal history, ideology and society to be regarded as interdependent with experience and action. The four interconnected theories I discuss in the remainder of this chapter have been selected with this in mind and will help guide my analysis of the autoethnography. They are: Miller's (1976) Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), Chang's Typology of Others, Young's Five Faces of Oppression, and Emirbayer and Mische's, Chordal Triad of Agency. Riceour's concept of inseparability is essential to Miller's RCT and to Chang's typology in that each of these sees relationships as being dynamically produced through their interplay with personal history, culture and society. Furthermore, it aligns with Young's theory of oppression which begins with the assumption that oppression is a part of reality and as such is inseparable from experience. In Ricoeurian terms, one's experience encompasses the past, present and future dimension all at once in a threefold present and this is encapsulated in Emirbayer and Mische's, Chordal Triad of Agency.

3.1.2 Relational Cultural Theory

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) originated with Jean Baker Miller's work in the 1970's as a response to dominant social structures associated with white, male and middle-class norms, and was later developed with her colleagues, Jordan, Surry and Stiver (1981). The purpose of Miller's research was to understand more about women's and men's development and their experiences of therapy. Focussing on psychology, the theory challenged the use of individualised approaches associated with masculinity within therapeutic practice. It originally addressed the frequently marginalised lived experience of women and later developed into a 'psychology centred in relationships' and founded on supporting human connections – between all persons – whilst recognising the power differentials that occur in relationships as a result of inequality, privilege, and marginalisation' (Miller, 1987:9). A central focus of the theory is on understanding the factors that lead to connection and/or disempowerment as a result of difference, and it regards such understanding and the need for mutual respect as essential to ensuring the wellbeing and development of the individual and of society (Fletcher *et al.* 2000; McCauley 2013; Miller 1987).

As its name suggests, RCT is inherently cultural in positioning the self as relational and as influential in what transpires within a given social context. That is, it sees people as relating not in a vacuum but in social, political and historical contexts (Leavy, 2017; Ricoeur, 1966; Van De Berg, 2002). Culture itself can be conceived variously; for example, as something observable from the outside, identifiable through patterns, behaviour and symbols (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952), or as located inside the mind, with individuals being active in creating culture and transforming it (Spiro 1987), Goodenough 1981; Obeyesekere, 2004). In this research, culture is taken as the interplay between the internal and external, one's inner world and the network of others from which it is inseparable. This aligns with RCT in that relationships cannot be dissociated from the larger culture in which they exist. RCT extends beyond individual relationships to consider the principal social constructions that shape relational patterns. Its central purpose is to identify social constructs that impact negatively on connections between people in order to foster relational conditions that lead towards a more empathetically connected and non-violent world (McCauley, 2013).

A key aspect of RCT is that of 'growth fostering relationships', described as relationships characterised by mutual engagement, mutual empathy and mutual empowerment. Mutuality in growth fostering relationships does not construct all persons as equal, but, rather, the differences between all persons are seen and respected (Fletcher *et al*. 2000: 248). Mutual

respect combined with empathetic understanding of one another's experiences leads to an expansion of oneself that supports the individual to flourish (Jordan *et al*. 1991; Miller, 1986; 2013). Conversely, the absence of mutual respect leads to psychological ill health that contributes to social conflict, resentment, hostility, and often violence (McCauley, 2013).

Miller's belief that human beings are inherently relational, has been criticized by those who see it as rendering individual autonomy (complete independence) impossible (Steven, 1973). Miller responds to this criticism with her concept of relational autonomy according to which individual human development is supported through relationships – an idea that draws on Ricoeur's notion of the inseparability of self and others. Miller goes on to explain how relational bonds influence a person's early sense of self (in childhood) and continue to be significant in helping the individual flourish throughout their development (Miller, 1987). The impact of societal values on relationships is important in RCT and the theory seeks to identify aspects of the wider social context that can construct persons in ways that lead to disconnection. For example, RCT challenges the idea of individual autonomy (complete independence), allying it with Westernised, masculine notions of the successful self as highly independent, competitive and successful through the acquisition of material advantage (Fletcher, *et al*. 2000; Miller 1987), and it questions whether this can represent a complete model of successful human growth without producing feelings of disconnection, alienation and/or situations of subordination (non-flourishing).

Those adopting a relational cultural lens regard the notion of independent autonomy as illusionary and see it as encouraging situations that foster unequal relations – referred to as 'non-mutual relationships' (Miller 1987: 9). The illusion is sustained through the belief that persons who do not possess valued forms of capital (e.g. social or cultural capital) or who do not manifest the behaviours associated with the dominant independent, competitive, norm (frequently associated with masculinity) are weak and/or inferior, whilst those who are self-sufficient and successful are associated with favourable, often innate qualities that legitimise their privileges. In RCT, the model of individual autonomy implicit in NL ideology denotes a separate-self perspective (referred to also as self-and-others) that leads to societal over-emphasis on acquiring personal strength and success through complete independence. Miller argues that such a model used to define a person's success is potentially damaging. It is often the case that persons' feel the need to alter aspects of themselves to fit in with societal expectations that are shaped by the principle of individual autonomy. It is the perceived

requirement to alter one's self – described by McCauley (2013: p.7) as a 'subordinated existence' – rather than valuing oneself authentically, that constitutes oppression.

RCT enables a distinction to be made between individual autonomy (a separate self, striving for independence) and relational autonomy that denotes a self-with-others perspective and in which mutually growth fostering relationships are central. This distinction is essential to my study, in which I explore my own approach to relationships. Essentially, RCT provides a way to do more than analyse relationships themselves; it opens up the possibility of exploring the implications of NL and its significance to social justice and the inequalities frequently experienced by NTSs, as discussed in Chapter 2. I intend to draw on Miller's RCT to illustrate how particular kinds of practices can come to be valued in an organization's culture. As we have seen in the literature, organizations driven by NL principles frequently encourage practices that offer efficient, measurable and easily definable pathways to individual growth and success through the acquisition of capital (Aftab & Gibb, 2015; Burke, 2015; Heywood, 2012; Katarzi & Hayward, 2020; Morley & Dunstan, 2013). Miller offers valuable insight into how reality framed by such principles can impact negatively and/or positively on the creation of the transformative relationship and the relational practices that are implicit in it. Furthermore, RCT, offers a perspective that enables me to analyse my experience as a woman within a social system (HE) governed by NL principles closely aligned with masculinity and the valuing of independence as a model of success, whilst teaching subjects widely associated with low-status, low paid vocational professions (Bathmaker, 2016).

Given its inherent concern with relationships, RCT can be (and has been) applied to pedagogy that uses relationships as a medium for learning and development and it has been used as a teaching and learning philosophy for teaching social work students (Edwards and Richards, 2002; Fook, 2007; Saari, 2005). More importantly in relation to my research, in professions that centre on people, a relational cultural approach aligns with transformative learning theory because, when adopted successfully, it can help foster the conditions for growth on the part of both teacher and students by requiring them to reflect on and critique their existing frames of reference in a supported, yet enquiring relationship. Furthermore, it helps to model the type of relationship that is required for effective work within social work-focused professions and it encourages student empowerment.

The subjects that I teach have much in common with social work professions in that they focus on youth, community and families and share a value base that promotes empowerment and

equality. RCT promises, therefore, to provide a suitable framework for the analysis of my experience as a teacher and for reflecting on my own attempts at fostering transformative relationships. Using its lens of "self-with-others" as opposed to "self-and-others" (Edwards and Richards, 2002) it enables me to frame my research from a position of active participant rather than as an objective, independent observer of culture. In doing so I am invited to take responsibility for my actions and for the direction of my future development. Furthermore, my position as an active participant within the university's systems and procedures can provide valuable insight into their effect on behaviour, attitudes and inclinations to action, as well as the ways in which I am affected by them. In this respect, my analysis is self-focussed but also illustrative of organisational conditions and the broader context in which they exist, namely a new vocational university operating in a neoliberal context. By shifting the focus from "self-and-others" (the teacher as separate from her students) to "self-with-others" (teacher and students as mutually influential), both teachers' *and* students' selves are implicated and important; what happens between them co-creates the learning experience. RCT directly relates the teacher's self to the learning experiences of their students and contrasts with other teaching-learning dynamics where the teacher does *not* intentionally view their selves as being subject to change through the learning process.

Dialogue is a central aspect of the relational approach, for it is through dialogue that differences in terms of power, social class, marginalisation and privilege can be better understood and learned from. In line with the Rogerian principles of unconditionality and positive regard for the other, the focus of dialogue should always be learning and the teacher's role as provocateur should be carefully and sensitively executed, always with a focus on the kind of personal development and emancipation characteristic of TL.

Although there are different theoretical perspectives on transformative learning, they are all emancipatory in their intent and support the idea of meaningful change in personhood in order to live a more fully conscious and human life (Freire,1970; Yalom,1980; 2002). In seeking to bring about that change, they do so not from a position of 'power over' (Miller, 1987:9), where expertise is imposed onto the recipient in order for them to be helped, but from one of mutuality where power imbalances are not absent but acknowledged and used intentionally to understand the experiences that arise as result of them. With its self-with-others perspective, relational cultural theory is fundamentally at odds with the power-over perspective and as such forms an appropriate basis on which to foster transformative learning.

Having explained my position as an active participant in mediating university processes and the ideology that frames them. I now present a typology of others that will guide my analysis of the factors that influence my – and others' – professional relationships in terms of similarities and differences, both actual and perceived.

3.1.3 Chang's Typology of Others

Chang's (2008) typology of others explains how self is always understood in relation to others, our perceptions of others, and others' perceptions of ourselves. This typology is applied within the autoethnography to illustrate the processes by which I relate to the students, colleagues and senior managers with whom I interact in my daily professional life, and the ways in which aspects of my self, including my personal history, language, background, age/generation and social class influence this. According to Chang's typology, others of similarity are those who we perceive to have things in common with ourselves are who we are, therefore, more likely to regard favourably because we accord them in-group status. Others of difference are perceived to possess attributes, behaviours and beliefs that are different from our own. Importantly, perceived difference is as powerful as actual difference and both can interfere with forming relationships, although differences can also be overcome. Where difference exists, this can be interpreted as opposition, with those of difference representing a real or perceived threat to self. I use the typology of others to inform the autoethnography and to tease out and attempt to understand the perceptions and motivations for behaviour across multiple relationships in the university, as well as my own motivations, attitudes, and behaviours.

3.1.4 Young's Five Faces of Oppression

Theories of oppression are concerned with understanding power and privilege and the intersectionality of class, race, gender, self and group identity (Leavy, 2017). They are concerned with systems and structures and the processes that enable oppressive practices within them. When employed in autoethnography, theories of oppression can help to 'examine systems, institutions, and discourses that privilege some people and marginalize others' (Holman Jones, 2018: 7). As evidenced in chapter 2 (Literature Review), universities function as part of a wider social web within which the issue of participation of NTSs is problematic due to the fact that these cohorts are particularly susceptible to taken-for-granted practices that can create and/or sustain disadvantage and inequality (Leavy, 2017).

Oppression is described by Soni (2011:27) as 'the act of being oppressive and the state of being oppressed'. Theories of oppression reflect an ontological assumption that oppression exists as a constituent of social reality rather than something experienced only by those who possess

particular characteristics commonly associated with it (Heldke & O'Connor, 2004). Oppression is understood as relevant to *all* persons and may be experienced in terms of being oppressed, being an oppressor and/or both (Freire, 1970); as such it is essentially a relational concept.

Young's Five Faces of Oppression constitute a theory in which each face refers to one of five categories of oppression, namely cultural imperialism, exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness and violence. Rather than oppression being a direct result of a particular person, for Young oppressions are 'systemically produced' in societal institutions (such as universities) through 'ordinary interactions' (2004:39). Young's perspective offers a useful analytical tool for thinking about social justice, one which while recognising the role of material factors in the creation of inequality, also brings 'social structures and institutional contexts under evaluation' as potential causes of inequality and injustice (Young, 2011:20). This systemic understanding of oppression points to a peopled process through which oppression occurs within a given social structure. A key objective of my research is to identify whether university practices bring forth the faces of oppression Young articulates and what this means for equity and justice in relation to non-traditional, disadvantaged students, and for efforts to address any disadvantage and maximise opportunity through transformative learning.

The governing logic of NL can be understood as a form of cultural imperialism in that all institutional systems and structures are organised in the interests of maintaining its ideology. As I explained in chapter 2, the HE sector is now directly aligned with the economy, and the internal practices of universities are geared towards preparing students for employment and monetary reward. Significantly, those managing universities are themselves subject to cultural imperialism, as are teachers and students, and they must develop ways to mediate the pressures that arise in such a context. Universities must focus on developing strategies in order to shape their own brand, with a view to attracting consumers, remaining buoyant and preserving their reputations (Harris, 2005; Lambert et al., 2007; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Reddings 2019; Rudd & O'Brien, 2019; Shattock 2012). In the process of doing so, structural inequalities can be knowingly or inadvertently maintained through the 'practices of education' (Young 2011:39) and there is a need, therefore, for carefully developed, context-responsive learning and teaching activity that ensures equity in HE whilst maintaining quality in the terms defined in chapter 2 – and, in relation to this thesis, quality within a vocational university with a strong widening participation mission.

In focusing on social interactions, educational practices and their link to wider social structures, Young's theory is helpful in exploring the issue of equity and justice in relation to NTSs and I will, therefore, draw on key aspects of her work to guide the analysis in my autoethnography. I begin with Young's understanding of identity on the grounds that it shows how identity is influenced by wider social conditions and the social-political narratives that frame social understanding.

While the recognising the existence of various overlapping and complex factors other than social class that impact identity and through which oppression can lead to particular groups being especially vulnerable to oppression (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and disability), Young's notion of identity highlights the idea of identify as a product of the individual's personal history and social status, which leads to them feeling a sense of affinity with particular groups the members of which share similar life histories, experiences and self-perceptions; thus, it is in part a social construct. She argues that it is 'identification with certain social status, the common history that social status produces and self-identification that defines a group identity' (2004:51) and that while 'not all groups are oppressed' some are. NTSs can be seen as one such group and more readily identify with the culture and social demographic of vocational as opposed to traditional universities, which are associated with 'white middle-classness' and thus seen as alien and thus as an uncomfortable and unnatural fit. This sense of difference (otherness) represented by the traditional university, is internalised long before NTSs make their university choices (Boliver 2015; Lawson, 2014). As I indicated in chapters 1 and 2, NTSs are over-represented in vocational universities which, historically and as a result of their curricula, have tended to prepare them for lower paid jobs; as such, they tend to be regarded as less prestigious institutions. As discussed previously, NTS students are conscious of the HE institutional hierarchy, their personal roots and position in society, and their perceived (and often actual) lack of the kind of cultural capital associated with higher-ranking – usually more traditional – universities. As a consequence, through fear of not fitting in, many opt to participate in a form of HE that offers them lower returns and which, therefore, maintains their less privileged position within society by preparing them for lower paid employment (Bathmaker, 2013; Boliver, 2016; Lawson 2014; Russell Group, 2015). This reflects what Young argues is an evolved shared understanding within societies of the types of labour associated with different groups in society and with who does what kind of work and the fact that certain groups often take on the most physically demanding yet less remunerative employment might be interpreted as exploitation, which Young says occurs when the labour

undertaken by some benefits those in more advantageous positions without prospect of those who are disadvantaged having the opportunity to advance.

Interestingly, despite employment prospects that are likely to offer lower monetary returns on NTSs' investment in vocational HE, Harvey and Green argue that there are other perceived advantages of participating in HE, and these include viewing it as an opportunity to enter a space traditionally associated with privilege (Harvey and Green, 1993). When NTSs take up that opportunity, they can be regarded as manifesting what Freire refers to as an 'attitude of adhesion' (p. 7), which involves the individual's 'submersion in the reality of oppression' as a result of a powerful inclination to identify with that which oppresses rather than challenge the status quo in the interests of justice, equity and liberation.

An unwillingness to enter higher education despite limited and low-income employment opportunities, or to enter HE at all, can give rise to marginalisation upon entry into the jobs market, where employment status is closely allied with one's right to full citizenship (Young, 2004). As such, the incentive to participate in HE is not only linked to employability but to social status and feelings of acceptance, affirmation and upward mobility.

Students attending vocationally-oriented universities can be stigmatised by the professions that they are preparing to enter not only because they tend to be associated with particular groups in society and to offer modest remuneration, but also because of the nature of the jobs themselves and the fact that they can be negatively associated with those sections of society that are the beneficiaries of their labour and who are typically regarded as vulnerable, problematic and costly. These include young people, the elderly, and/or those requiring ongoing medical, psychological and other support. Young explains how the notion of 'dependency' is linked to oppression through marginalisation in that it reflects a 'deeply held assumption that moral agency and full citizenship require that a person be autonomous and independent' (p. 51). This can mean that the professions for which I prepare my NTSs (Childcare, Health and Social Care and Youth and Community Work) mean that they end up assisting marginalised and/or disempowered groups, and this in turn can lead to negative stereotyping regarding the forms of labour they engage in and the social identities – *their* identities – associated with them.

Young's notion of oppression promises to help unearth some of the subtler ways in which privilege and oppression present themselves in the context of NL HE. In doing so it has the potential to support my goal of exploring my action and experience and the factors that support

and impede my efforts to promote transformative relationships specifically in a vocational university context characterised by a high proportion of NTSs. In order to structure the reporting and analysis of that experience as presented in the autoethnography, I use a model of personal agency informed by Zimmerman and Cleary's (2006) and Biesta, Priestley & Robinson's (2015) work on agency, and adapted from Emirbayer and Mische's Chordal Triad model of agency (1998).

3.1.5 Emirbayer and Mische's, Chordal Triad of Agency

Zimmerman and Cleary see personal agency as the ability to initiate and direct actions toward the achievement of defined goals (2006), and Bandura as the idea that people can exercise some influence over what they do (2006). Biesta *et al.* (2015) explain how the material and political aspects of their professional environment are highly pertinent to how teachers experience it and the degree of agency they perceive to be possible within it (Biesta *et al.,* 2015; Oolbekkink-Marchand *et al.,* 2017). Importantly, they assert that a teacher's perception of their professional context is more influential than the objective reality, thereby highlighting the phenomenological nature of experience. In the work that follows, I discuss the impact of such perceptions on my 'capacity to initiate purposeful action' in pursuit of my aim of fostering transformative relationships (Lipponen and Kumpulained 2011:812) and in doing so draw on Emirbayer and Mische's Chordal Triad of Agency.

Emirbayer and Mische's Chordal Triad of Agency (1998) explains how the past, present and future are all simultaneously present in all forms of human action, and impact on action differently according to the situation, context and personal meaning the individual brings to it. Fitting with this, Collinson (2006), asserts there are multiple versions of self, often opposing and contradictory. With this in mind, in the analysis I illustrate the selves that appear in my experience and how they are influenced by the university context as I negotiate the pressures of NL. In the autoethnography that follows, I refer to the past, present and future dimensions of my experience in order to understand the motivation behind certain of my actions, and their implications for my fostering of transformative relationships. The model adopted aligns with Ricoeur's concept of the threefold present, in which 'the past, present and future are experienced in one moment' (Mallet and Wapshott, 2012: 275). This is an appropriate concept to use when observing the phenomenological aspects impacting on my experience and on effectiveness in fostering transformative relationships. The model used is presented in figure 3.1.

Temporal Dimension of Experience	Experiential Factors
Past	➢ Personal factors ➢ These include personal history, past experiences including those related to upbringing and education. Habits of mind and internalised oppression.
Present	➢ Present factors ➢ These include the immediate environment, other people and current policy and governmental requirements. For example, the requirement to provide evidence of teaching quality within the university, the layout of the building, student demographic and working conditions. ➢ Practical judgements made in this context and responses to emerging dilemmas are central to such factors.
Future	➢ Projective factors ➢ These include anticipation of consequences, personal and professional aims and ethical and moral reasoning related to decision making.

Figure 3.1: Temporal Dimensions of Personal Agency

In this chapter I have explained the conceptual and theoretical framework to be adopted to guide my analysis within the autoethnography. I have presented the underpinning philosophy of Ricoeur, which, due to its emphasis of experience and the inseparability between experience and action, is an appropriate philosophy to foregrounding this autoethnographic study. Miller's (1987) Relational Cultural Theory has been explained as an appropriate conceptual tool with which to analyse my attempts to foster transformative relationships and with which to analyse the wider systemic issues, such as the increasing emphasis on performance and accountability, on my ability to do so. Chang's typology of others has been explained and its usefulness in helping me identify the similarities and differences between myself and others with whom I interact in the university in recognition of the propensity to identify more favourably with others of similarity. The research method adopted – Autoethnography - is recognised for challenging the status quo along with the assumptions that enable it, Young's theory of Oppression has been identifies as a useful tool with which to unearth the subtler ways in which oppression can operate through people and their relationships as well as systemically. Finally, to help me move between past, present and the imagined future I have explained Emirbayer and Mische's Chordal Triad of Agency (1998). Chapter 4 will explain the Autoethnography as a research method and its application in this study.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In this chapter I provide an initial explanation of autoethnography and my rationale for adopting it as my preferred approach to exploring my primary research question: *Can I negotiate the pressures of neoliberalism in a way that fosters the type of relationship that offers potential for transformative learning?* I begin by positioning autoethnography within the research paradigms and distinguishing it from traditional ethnography. I then go on to explain how autoethnography is frequently viewed with scepticism and address, in turn, each criticism typically levelled against it before going on to explain and justify the particular type of autoethnography I employ, namely critical autoethnography.

Having articulated my rationale for adopting an autoethnographic approach, I explain the research design, including the data collection methods and instruments used and the ethical issues that arise and how I sought to mitigate these. This is followed by a description of my approach to analysing and interpreting the data.

4.1   What is Autoethnography?

Autoethnography is a qualitative approach to research that sits within the constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2003; Young & Collins, 2004). Grix (2002) explains that the way in which research is planned will depend on how the researcher views the nature of reality and that the researcher's stance will influence their questions and how they attempt to answer them. Thus, he suggests that the researcher should clarify their perspective and its suitability to their project at the outset (Grix, 2002). Two commonly opposing stances in relation to the nature of reality are objectivism and constructivism. Objectivism is associated with the positivist paradigm and views reality as existing independently of the researcher (Howell, 2013). Constructivism, in contrast, is associated with interpretivism and sees obtaining knowledge free from our beliefs and values as not possible (Atkinson, 2006; Crotty, 1998; Hammersley, 2008; Letherby *et al.,* 2013). Constructivism is a way of viewing the world, its core assumption being that 'realities are not objectively out there, but are constructed by people, often under the influence of a variety of social and cultural factors that lead to shared construction' (Guba and Lincoln 1989:90). Constructivism embraces subjectivity by recognising that people have different experiences and understandings of the same world and it acknowledges that the way people act, think and feel is connected to their experience and to the meaning that they give it

(Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). This valuing of subjectivity is criticised by those who favour the positivist perspective with its emphasis on objective knowledge. However, those planning and conducting research within the constructivist paradigm are not seeking to make objective claims; they are interested in acquiring knowledge about peoples' meanings whilst recognising that meaning is itself always shifting and influenced by context (Crotty, 1998). Rather than diminishing constructivism's validity, this offers scope for understanding lived realities that are socially constructed at a particular time, within a localised context (Howell, 2013). In the case of this study, the constructivist lens focuses on my lived experience as a teacher attempting to foster transformative relationships in a particular NL HE context.

There are differences between constructivism and objectivism regarding the role of the researcher. For example, in objectivist research the researcher seeks to remove themselves from the study completely, whereas constructivism disputes the possibility of achieving complete objectivity and recognises the role of the researcher's own interpretation in the research process. Constructivist research designs frequently incorporate steps, such as member checking, to acknowledge and reduce possible inaccuracies in their interpretation of others' lived realities (Smith *et al.,* 2009).

Falling with the constructivist paradigm, autoethnography and traditional ethnography have a number of characteristics in common, summarised by (Whitehead, 2004:1) as follows:

- They involve the study of cultural systems.
- They examine sociocultural contexts, processes and meanings in cultural systems.
- They require consideration of the emic and etic.
- They are dependent on fieldwork.
- They are processes of discovery that produce an open-ended, emergent learning process that is not rigidly controlled by the researcher

Autoethnography is an extension of more traditional ethnography, defined as 'participant observation and immersion in experience in order to understand and interpret a particular cultural system such as an organisation' (Van Maanen 2006, as cited in Haynes 2011:135). Autoethnography is the study of self within the particular culture to which one belongs, and a prerequisite of the autoethnographic approach is that the researcher must have full membership of the culture that s/he is studying (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008). The autoethnographic process, which is highly reflexive, has the potential to present experience from the subject's

position as a social political being, often joining the personal with the political (Spry, 2010). In this way, it can operate as a transformative frame through which positive change can take place due to the researcher's heightened awareness of their experience (Belbase, 2008; Taylor 2008, as cited in Meerwald, 2013). Historically, the role of the researcher in traditional ethnography incorporated positivist perspectives in that '… objectivity and distance from the subject should be ensured' (Howell 2013:119) and this can lead to challenges for the researcher in terms of balancing the emic (the experience and reality of others who share the setting being investigated) with the etic (researcher experience and reality) (Atkinson, 2006). Autoethnography deals with this issue of positionality by making explicit from the outset how the subjective interpretations of the researcher are intentionally used as the medium through which insight into a particular context is to be gained and expressed (Chang, 2008). Furthermore, autoethnography and traditional ethnography sit in different philosophical camps. Autoethnography is a research method that emerged as a distinct approach in line with the Postmodern Research Movement (PRM) of the 1980s (Curtis & Curtis, 2011), which challenges the idea that *any* research method has the capacity to ascertain objective truth about the social world (Holt, 2003; Reed, 2010). Autoethnography presents the perspective that there is no 'singular truth out there in decontextualized participants' (Spry, as cited in Meerwald 2013:45) and as such is seen as challenging the notion that it is possible to establish objective truth (Letherby *et al.,* 2013). This has contributed to the fact that 'gaining status as proper research continues to be problematic' for autoethnography (Sparkes 2000, as cited in Wall 2006:8) and it is one of a number of criticisms levelled at the approach and to which I shall return shortly.

Autoethnography is, then, by its very nature highly subjective. Nevertheless, autoethnographers seek to understand themselves within a particular social context, and in order to strengthen their data may actively seek to cross-check their own experience and interpretation of that experience with others who share their context.

According to (Bochner, Adams & Ellis, 2010:39) 'the questions most important to autoethnographers are:

- Who reads our work?
- How are they affected by it?
- How does it keep a conversation going?'

These are, to some extent, ethical questions that also have significance for the value and contribution of the research. As Vryan (2006) has noted, producers of autoethnography should always be practical and ethical.

Autoethnography requires an interrogation into the very personhood of the researcher (Atkinson, 2006), an aspect of autoethnography captured succinctly by Jones (2013:10), who explains that: 'It [autoethnography] asks not only that we examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act and feel as we do. Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe and that we challenge our own assumptions'. Furthermore, autoethnography '… asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who we are and how we want to be' (ibid., p. 10).

4.1.1 Criticisms levelled at autoethnography as method

Due to its overt use of personal experience, autoethnography is often seen as narcissistic, self-indulgent and as presenting a radical subjectivity (Crotty, 1998). It is, therefore, incumbent on the autoethnographer to explain their approach and its value convincingly if they are to reassure potential critics that their work is not solipsistic or mere navel-gazing (Burnier, 2006). Furthermore, while it is essentially reflexive in nature, Bourdieu has argued that the purpose of such reflexivity should be to understand the researcher's positioning in the social world in order to gain a greater understanding of it and not to raise the profile of the researcher's own feelings about the social issues being explored – something that can take precedence unless caution is exercised. Reed Danahay (2017) similarly argues that the mental function that underscores autoethnography is reflexivity and that considered autoethnographic writing can shed light on the complexities of the social world as it is lived in a manner that more traditional qualitative methods cannot (Reed-Danahay, 2017). The researcher who recognises the inextricable connectedness between the individual self and the social context in which that self exists is able to provide an enriched account and understanding of how the social world works from a position of embeddedness.

A second reason why autoethnography has invited scepticism concerns its relationship with storying – along with other artistic modes of expression – as a means of presenting the final account (the product). This relationship has brought into question its viability as a proper research method in the social sciences because it 'fractures the boundaries that normally separate social science from literature' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, as cited in Pace 2012:2).

However, it is often the utilisation of these divergent approaches that enables autoethnography to connect with non-academic audiences.

A third criticism often levelled at autoethnography concerns the type of knowledge it engenders, namely that connected to experience and emotion. Personal practical knowledge is not viewed in the same way as 'expert knowledge' that has historically been monopolized by traditional, positivist research paradigms (Wall, 2006; Letherby *et al.,* 2013). These and similar concerns, however, risk overlooking both the capacity of the autoethnographic method to produce a valuable, meaningful account of personal experience embedded in a particular social context, and to give voice to those experiences that are otherwise silenced and/or under-represented (Belbase *et al.,* 2008). Furthermore, as Stanley is keen to stress in reference to autoethnography, 'the difference from other forms of academic writing is only that individual experience is foregrounded, not that rigour does not matter' (2020:18). It is the apparent lack of such rigour that has meant that the less conventional, evocative styles of autoethnography that privilege emotion and intentionally dramatize events being recounted have tended to attract the strongest criticism (Pace, 2012), with some autoethnographic accounts using emotional content as a means of drawing in and holding the reader, thereby achieving greater impact (Belbase *et al.,* 2008). This is where the autoethnographer has to be aware of his/her positionality and maintain integrity and discretion in order to produce an honest, authentic and therefore useful account.

In contrast to evocative styles, analytic autoethnography is less prone to criticism in that while the author is visible in the narrative, rather than their own experience being the sole focus, others are also written into the account. The researcher engages in dialogue with informants in order to inform the research and maintain balance (Anderson, 2006, as cited in Pace, 2012). The analytical autoethnographic style prioritizes 'theoretical analysis, not just capturing what is going on in an individual life or socio-cultural environment' (Anderson, 2006 as cited in Pace 2012, p. 6). It is common for evocative and analytical styles to be viewed as either/or (Pace, 2012; Vyran, 2006); however, Vyran (2006) asserts that this need not be the case and suggests a bespoke application in line with the researcher's intentions and the research matter. Adams (2017:62) explains how there are various approaches to 'doing autoethnography' and that the autoethnographer must make their perspective clear to avoid misevaluation of their intentions. He explains the various autoethnographic perspectives, such as social science projects, that adopt traditional academic reporting often applying themes and codes to analyse the data (Kestenbaum et al., 2015; Zibricky, 2014), 'interpretive/humanistic

71

autoethnographies' that convey personal experience to unite readers in understanding the significance of the experience reported (Adams, 2017:63) and there are critical autoethnographies that aim to rectify social injustices, often drawing on feminist theories (Berry, 2016; Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015; Zibricky, 2014). No single approach functions as entirely separate and the range of perspectives cited here is not exclusive. However, in line with Adams' (2017) suggestion, it is my responsibility to be clear about the perspective taken in this study.

4.1.2 The autoethnographic perspective to be adopted

The perspective I take in this autoethnography is that of critical autoethnography; my primary focus is on raising the profile of social injustices related to NTSs in HE. Whilst aspects of my project resemble a traditional approach, in that I have thematised and coded the data, its intention it to convey experiences in the NL context and their link to the type of relationships that occur in such a context. I draw on theories that are relevant examining my own experience as a person and as a woman to understand the relationships I foster and the significance of these to the wider social context in which they occur. Within the text there are descriptions and interpretations of my experiences with frequently evocative reporting as I convey personal experiences as a means of connecting with the reader. The critical autoethnographic approach that I have chosen to adopt for the present study is discussed in the next section.

4.1.3   Critical autoethnography

Critical autoethnography explores the 'oppressive and liberating forces' that shape' one's experience (Mcvilveen, 2008:15) and seeks to bring about positive change via reflexive analysis (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). It seeks to challenge dominant narratives, raise the profile of less heard voices (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014: 15) and communicate about issues and phenomena that are frequently overlooked and/or overshadowed by 'dominant, taken-for-granted, and harmful cultural scripts, stories, and stereotypes' (Adams, Ellis, Holman-Jones, 2017:3). In doing so, it draws on critical social theory by purposefully embracing the complexities of the researcher's position and challenging existing understandings with a view to improving practices that are embedded in wider social structures (Hughes & Pennington, 2017; Jupp, 1993). Autoethnography can be healing by uniting the reader in a shared experience in relation to which they have previously felt isolated. In the case of critical autoethnography, in particular, it is frequently reported from the margins (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Adams, Ellis, Holman-Jones, 2017) and as such is likely to convey emotion in as much as struggles and injustices associated with social structures and attitudes can be painful human experiences (Boylorn, 2014).

Along with more conventional qualitative approaches such as personal narrative and autobiography (Pelias, 2018), autoethnography can be seen to employ a range of other, less conventional approaches to presenting and drawing attention to social issues through the personal experience of the autoethnographer, thereby taking a critical autoethnographic turn. These include layered accounts, poetic inquiry and social fiction (Polous, 2021). This combining of literary style with qualitative research can be seen in Boylorn's (2017) *Sweetwater: Black Women and Narratives of Resistance*, which recounts and helps expose the experiences of black women living in oppressive circumstances. Through her autoethnography, Boylorn contributes to a better understanding of historically marginalised identities.

In this way, and despite the criticism that such blurring of literary and research traditions has attracted, autoethnography's often hybrid and creative approaches frequently produce new insight, increase awareness, and connect with readers in a manner that traditional qualitative approaches are unable to achieve (Pelias, 2018).

There are three requirements of critical autoethnography. First, there is a need to 'ground interpretations and inductive theorizing in meaningful, storied 'data', thickly described' (Stanley, 2020:10) – Holman-Jones speaks of theory accompanying the personal story in order to tell it (Holman-Jones, 2016). Second, critical autoethnography should 'link analysis and action as they unfold' (Holman Jones, 2016: 231). Third, critical autoethnography needs to harness the potential for change. The research that follows reflects a critical autoethnographic approach in that the experiences reported provide insights into my phenomenal world as a teacher, telling the story of my experience across one academic year. However, as Holman-Jones (2016) explains, critical autoethnography does more than just tell stories and to ensure criticality in the recounted experiences I draw upon the theories explained in chapter 3. I use these theories to become more critically conscious of my action and to produce a wider discussion connected to oppression and systemic disadvantage as it relates to HE. In doing this I aim to identify areas of change, within myself and in the system that I work within.

My research takes a critical approach in that it uses the researcher's (my) position to contest existing understandings, recognising these as embedded in wider social structures (Hughes & Pennington, 2017; Jupp, 1993). This application of practical and reflexive research is essential to answering my primary research question: *Can I negotiate the pressures of neoliberalism in a way that fosters the type of relationship that offers potential for transformative learning?*

4.1.4 The suitability of (critical) autoethnography to this research

The reflexive stance required by the autoethnographic process (reflexive meaning the requirement to analyse one's action in relation to the wider socio-political context (Reed Danahay (2017) is well suited to exploring the tensions brought about as a result of neoliberalism in HE because, rather than simply recording their experience/observations in the form of field notes, the teacher must *think about* such experience and analyse and evaluate it in relation to the full range of factors beyond the immediate environment. What is revealed through this process can result in change and the development of intentional strategic action towards the intended goal – in this case, the goal of fostering the kind of relationship and approach to teaching which offers the potential for transformative learning. It is this formulation of strategic action as a result of the autoethnographic process, through which unconscious 'habits of mind' (Mezirow, 2006) are identified - that Jones, earlier, referred to as prompting the autoethnographer to 'rethink and revise' in pursuit of making conscious decisions about who we are and how we want to be' (2013:10) It is by bringing to the fore and acting positively upon, those aspects of our experience, previously outside awareness and yet influencing our action, that it is possible for us to 'become' and 'embody' the changes necessary to tackle oppression (Holman Jones, 2016, p.231). In other words, the reflexive stance of Critical Autoethnography is a process through which the autoethnographer can identify aspects of themselves and their action that are complicit in maintaining the status quo (in this thesis, that is, is the continuing disadvantage of NTS in a context of widened access to HE). They unearth the reasons behind their existing practice and move purposefully toward change that is congruent with values of emancipation as it may be fostered through education (Freire, 1970; Hodge 2014; Lago, 2006; Mezirow, 2006).

The active recording of experience through the autoethnographic process crystallises teachers' understanding of the strategies they adopt as they mediate between their beliefs and the realities of practice (Pollard, 2008), helping them identify the inseparability between themselves and the socio-political context in which they teach and relate (Emirbayer and Miche 1989; Ricoeur 1966; Van den Berg 2002). As these interrelated aspects, that are frequently obscured from view (Young, 2012) are brought into shaper consciousness, through the reflexivity promoted through the autoethnographic approach, they become easier, and possible, even, to discuss with other teachers. This is particularly important since the literature suggests that while teachers develop individual strategies for maintaining satisfying practice, transference of this into collective pedagogical responses to NL pressures is often elusive (Sutton, 2015). Furthermore,

autoethnography can help the teacher identify spaces for trying something different as, through the reflective and reflexive process, they can begin to construct solutions to problems they encounter and discover ways to potentially become agents of transformation yet remain broadly in tune with neoliberal principles (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Given the background of increasingly pervasive monitoring borne of NL, discussed in chapter 2, such collective problem identification and solution seeking opens space for devising teaching approaches as they emerge in this context that are enlightened to current demands experience by students, such as the pressures for students to gain employment - to be self-reliant, self-sufficient, valued individuals who contribute to the state (Heywood, 2012). Considering the scope for possibility presented, contrary to it being a self-indulgent and narcissistic form of navel gazing, autoethnography facilitates an essential form of reflection that has benefits beyond the individual researcher.

AE is also often utilised (as is the case in the current study) by practitioner researchers who wish to explore and give voice to practice-based issues within a socio-political context (Barr, 2019; Starr 2010). Indeed, the intention of my research is to raise the profile of issues that perpetuate the continuation of systemic disadvantage frequently experienced by NTSs by expressing the challenges I experience when attempting to foster relationships that support transformative learning. I consciously position myself as an instrument through which the impact of the increasingly pressurised context of NL HE can be discussed in relation to its influence on relationships between key stakeholders (students, teachers and managers) who are crucial to how learning takes place within that context – and specifically that of my own university.

For the reasons explained in this section, autoethnography – and, in particular, critical autoethnography – has been adopted as a suitable approach to explore the impact of unprecedented competition on efforts to facilitate the type of relationship that supports transformative learning. It focusses on self as part of a network of relationships (Chang, 2008) and provides me with a means through which I can begin to understand how the self operates as a cultural unit and how my relationship with other people operates within the university. By doing this, I can gain a better vantage point from which to observe and explore how the constraints and affordances resulting from NL govern my actions and how they may be interpreted by myself and others who share that environment. The use of my own personal experience provides insight into the challenges that occur when attempting to foster relationships that support TL and in the discovery of potential solutions to these. Along with

the personal benefits I derive from the research, the sharing of my experience in the form of the final autoethnographic account invites others teaching in universities similar to that at the centre of this study into a process of reflection on their own practice.

Creating an opportunity for shared reflection is important: as we have seen in in Chapter 2, there are a set of pressures operating within the NL university that can lead teachers to focus on their own survival and reduce their interaction with their teacher colleagues (Archer, 2007; Churchman & King, 2009; Harris, 2005; Sabri 2010; Sutton, 2015; Trahar, 2011). While, arguably, educators have some degree of choice as to how they mediate those pressures, the energy needed to invest in their learners and foster transformative relationships can easily be eroded. I argued in Chapter 1 that educators in the WP university have a particular responsibility to foster transformative relationships as these mitigate the effects of what have frequently been negative prior educational experiences for NTSs – experiences which, if they have been internalised, can contribute to disadvantage and a sense of inferiority. Teachers may attempt to go about investing in their students in many ways and negotiate the NL HE context differently, but where conditions exist that fail support them or which present significant challenges to sharing and reflecting on their experience, opportunities for transformative practice and its development can be lost and/or its value remain unacknowledged and unexploited. Furthermore, autoethnography recognises university conditions to be a peopled process and that it is the responsibility of the university as a whole to create a set of conditions that best support an effective enactment of the WP mission. On completion of the autoethnography, I shall present a set of proposals that facilitate the promoting of conditions that encourage teachers' investment in transformative practices within the NL HE context.

4.2   The research design

As explained in Section 4.1, autoethnography anchors data collection in the researcher's experience (Chang, 2008). This makes it an ideal method for exploring practice from a personal perspective. In the research that follows, I aim to use my experience as a vehicle for exploring my actions and the type of relationship that may (or may not) come into being through those actions. I am interested in how the changing and increasingly pressurised context of a vocational university may support or impede my attempts to foster relationships that support transformative learning. My research questions are follows:

- Primary research question: Can I negotiate the pressures of neoliberalism in a way that fosters the type of relationship that offers potential for transformative learning?
- Secondary research questions:
- RQ1: How do I experience the pressures that arise within the NL HE context?
- RQ2: In what way is my experience similar to and different from that of my colleagues?
- RQ3: What does the shared experience indicate about the emerging culture of the university?
- RQ4: How do I attempt to foster transformative relationships in this context and what are the factors that support or impede my attempts to do so?

While all research needs to be constructed thoughtfully using a framework that ensures rigour (Hamilton *et al.,* 2009; Wall, 2006), Litchman (2013:108) points out that the task of designing research can be difficult for autoethnographers. He states: 'Although there is quite a bit written about autoethnography as a method, it is surprising that little is written about how to do it. Thus you have a challenge.' The staged data collection process presented in Figure 4.1 was designed to reflect a recognition of the exploratory nature of autoethnography, alongside the need for a framework that would ensure rigour but also flexibility as the research evolved.

Data type	Timeframe	Purpose
Field notes	1 semester (Sept - Dec) 2017	To identify aspects of my daily experience that illustrate particular pressures, my responses to these and how I relate to others (co-workers) within the university environment
Reflections *in* action & Reflections *on* action	1 semester (Feb - May) 2018	To reflect in and on action and identify factors that support and/or impede my attempts to foster transformative relationships when teaching
Personal journal & autobiographical memory	Throughout the research process	To freely reflect on all my experience including my personal history
Focus group with other teachers	June 2019	To cross reference my experiences within the university with those of my colleagues

Figure 4.1: Data collection methods and their purpose

4.2 The position adopted in relation to others within the autoethnography

Autoethnographic research is conducted with other people, and not on them (Bochner, Adams, & Ellis, 2010; Hayano 1979). Cultural analysis that accompanies the reporting of personal experience is a vital element of autoethnography, and as De Munk (2002) reminds us, culture is never about the psychology of an individual alone but is only possible in reference to others.

A challenge with autoethnographic work is, therefore, that of constructing an approach which has the capacity to include and represent those people, other than the self, who share the cultural context (Hayno, 1979). Importantly, the authorial voice of the autoethnographer cannot be assumed to represent the experiences of all participants within the context being studied. The researcher should make a conscious decision about how they will position themselves within their own study and report their experience, while weaving the stories of others into the narrative in a way that lets them tell their own story (Chang, 2008). Methods, therefore, should be sought to cross reference the researcher's experience with that of others who share the context.

A useful tool through which to think about 'the other' comes in the form of Doloriert and Sambrook's (2009) auto-ethno continuum.

4.2.1 The auto-ethno continuum

Doloriert and Sambrook (2009: 443) explain how 'Autoethnography encompasses a wide range of different auto-ethno relationships moving along a continuum from a more separate researcher and researched to that where the researcher is researched'. This continuum, illustrated in figure 4.2, is useful for visualising the shape of an (this) autoethnographic research design in terms of the position and involvement of others in the research and for rationalising the methods of data collection to be employed.

| Auto | Experience in the research context | Ethno |

Position 1: researcher *as* researched	Position 2: researcher *and* researched
Researcher is the primary source of information.	The researcher's own experiences are combined with others who share the same context.
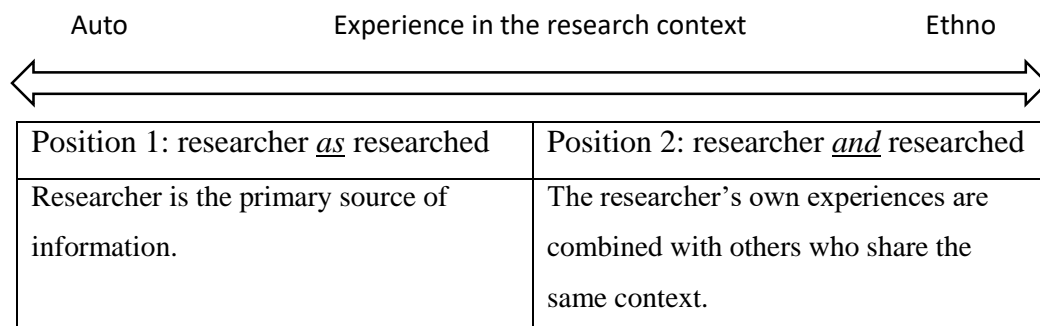
Figure 4.2: the auto/ethnographic context and researcher positions - Adapted from: Doloriert and Sambrook (2009:443)

It is not necessary to choose starkly between the two positions presented in figure 4.2; instead, moving between the two can produce a balanced analysis that addresses the research aim. For example, methods of data collection may involve a combination of researcher-*as*-researched, in which 'the line of self is the primary focus of inquiry' (Chang, 2008:65), and researcher-

and-researched methods in which the co-experiences of others who share the context is used to strengthen the autoethnographic account, which is 'still anchored in your personal experience' (Chang, 2008:65). The position of the self in relation to others at various stages of the research is illustrated in figure 4.3.

Data type	Auto/ethno position	Involvement of others
Field notes	Researcher *as* researched	Others in auxiliary relationships with the self
Reflections *in* action & Reflections *on* action	Researcher as researched	Others in auxiliary relationships with the self
Personal journal/autobiographical memory	Researcher as researched	Others in auxiliary relationships with the self
Focus group with other teachers	Researcher *and* researched	Researcher's own experiences combined with those of others who share the same context

Figure 4.3: the position of the researcher in relation to other within the process of data collection

I intend to interrogate the relational approach I adopt using the researcher-*as*-researched position to do so. However, in order avoid to the criticism that autoethnography is self-focused, and because one's experience never occurs in isolation (Chang, 2008; Burnier, 2006; De Munk 2002), I employ methods that enable me to think outside of myself using the researcher-*and*-researched position, and in doing so draw on the experiences of my colleagues in order to cross-reference these with my own. Thus, the final autoethnography presents a combination of my own and my colleagues' experiences and considers the similarities and differences between them in order to shed light on the cultural conditions of the university, our role in sustaining and maintaining them, and issues within that localised context that are perceived by us to impact on our agency and development as teachers. Ultimately, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, I am interested in exploring the possibility of using that agency to create transformative encounters in the vocational university at the centre of this study because, as I have argued, these create optimal conditions for the university to function as a space for social justice maximising the potential and opportunities of NTSs. Using aspects of Ricœur's philosophy (phenomenology, distanciation and critical hermeneutics), I invite myself to observe and reflect on the way in which I participate in my action (my encounters) through a lens of reflexivity and in doing so open up opportunity to understand self-with-others and better observe the constraints and affordances – both external and within myself – that impact my ability to foster transformative learning. Furthermore, I seek to discover whether there are ways in which I may

be complicit in sustaining some of the more negative forces of NL, and thus perpetuating the systemic disadvantage with which it is associated (Hughes and Pennington, 2017).

In this section I have discussed how both positions – the self-focused auto and the outward-focussed ethno – will be used within the research. In the recorded field notes and the teaching reflections, I adopt the position of researcher-as-researched. Moving outwards toward the ethno, I involve others directly within the focus group, the purpose of which is to cross-reference my experience and perceptions with theirs and to form a shared interpretation of the university's culture. This will allow me explore the factors that support and/or impede my attempts to foster transformative relationships within the NL university.

This research, and the auto-ethno positions I adopt in the data collection process, create a particular set of ethical considerations, and it is to these that I now turn.

4.3 Ethical considerations within the research design

4.3.1 Researching within one's own institution

Despite the intention that it should provide meaningful knowledge about learning and teaching, there is a risk that insider research (and even the insider researcher themselves) can be perceived as subversive, and/or renegade because it looks in depth at the systems that underpin organisational effectiveness (Kakabadse,1991). Nevertheless, the issue of identifying systemic problems produces an ethical dilemma for autoethnographers. For example, although it is through sharing experiences that effective strategies for managing them are more likely to be found, how does the autoethnographer reveal *difficult* experiences that occur due to organisational systems and structures without being perceived as unhelpful and critical? To some extent, this tension can be reconciled or at least reduced by being transparent at the outset of the research. In the case of the current study, in order to ensure transparency, a letter was written to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) of the university clarifying the objectives and aims of the research and the methods of data collection to be employed and seeking permission to undertake the work. The issue of institutional representation was explicitly mentioned, along with a statement of my intention to ensure, as far as reasonably possible, an honest and balanced representation of my experience and of the institution itself. Approval to proceed was subsequently received.

It is well recognised that researching within one's own institution is never a neutral activity (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Brookfield, 1995). My motivation to engage in this autoethnography is not neutral because it has been inspired by my own experience of the changes to my role, my profession and my personal life that have been brought about by the increasing pressures of NL and the response of my university to those pressures. I am thus personally invested in the research. To ensure a sound basis from which to commence, I have to ask myself at the outset what my intent is and who will benefit from my autoethnography (Ellis, 2007). My response is that revealing insight into teacher experience within an organisation is helpful because it opens up an important dialogue about learning and teaching in a political context that is changing the expectations of students who are now fee-paying consumers. This context and its associated pressures brings forth new challenges for teachers and managers alike, yet an appreciation of the experiences of these different stakeholders cannot be obtained and understood unless they are voiced (and heard). Formalising my experience is a way of identifying issues and challenges that influence learning outcomes positively and/or negatively and can serve as a basis for informed development at the institutional level in a way that helps ensure that systemic disadvantage is not perpetuated.

4.3.2 Protecting myself

Chang (2008) advises that the researcher needs to be skilled in selecting relevant engaging material that allows for sufficient analysis of the research question(s) while ensuring that no harm occurs in the process or from making the final account public. In the case of the autoethnographer, consideration needs to be given to what the researcher reveals about themselves that could prove detrimental to them (Ellis, 2007; Doloriert & Sambrook, 2009). Candidly sharing one's own experience and, in doing so, potentially evoking powerful emotions, can leave one feeling exposed; and yet, it is in doing so that the final autoethnography may speak to others who share the research context in a way that is inspiring, comforting and/or encouraging. With this in mind, I will select material that helps provide insight into learning and teaching – and particularly the fostering of transformative relationships – that I feel comfortable to share.

4.3.3 Protecting others

Involvement of students and their representation within the autoethnography

One of the difficulties of autoethnographic research lies in predicting when other people will feature in the process of data collection; as such, the issue of informed consent prior to the research commencing can be problematic. While full transparency and institutional gatekeeper

consent is essential at the outset, it is my responsibility as researcher to take steps to ensure that any participants are protected from potential harm and that the right to privacy is adhered to.

Although individual students feature within the autoethnography, some are 'more intimately interwoven than others' (Chang, 2008:68). Those students who appeared in my field notes do not all appear in the final autoethnography, and those who do are anonymised and any identifiable features changed or omitted. Although I was researching myself rather than the students, I nonetheless obtained students' permission to audio record my teaching and subsequently gave them verbal reminders that I would be recording at the start of each subsequent session. If any student did not wish to be recorded, then that session would not be recorded; however, this eventuality did not arise. In all cases of student involvement, the analysis of my encounters with them is focused on myself and I do not delve into their personal situations or attempt to elicit details of their experiences within the university.

4.3.3 Involvement of colleagues and their representation within the autoethnography

Those colleagues who feature in my field notes are anonymised throughout to minimise the risk of identification. In the case of the focus group, informed consent was obtained from participants. An email was sent to my colleagues explaining the research aims and inviting their voluntary participation. It was made clear that they had the option of withdrawing from the research at any point without any negative consequences. As noted by BERA (2018), absolute protection of privacy is not always possible, particularly when participants share the research context with the researcher. In order to mitigate any participant feelings of vulnerability over potential exposure within their place of work, they were reassured that the University had been made aware of the nature of the research and its objectives and had consented to it taking place.

4.3.4 Fair and balanced representation

In keeping with the autoethnographic approach, the final write-up presents my own narrative. However, within this, the presence of other teachers is evident as I weave insights from the focus group into that narrative in a way that reflects Lapadat's observation that 'autoethnographic stories are not wholly our own, they implicate relational others in our lives' (2017:593). Those 'implicated' in the final account were given an opportunity to read the work prior to its inclusion in the thesis in order to ensure they were happy with the way in which they are presented in the final narrative. Ellis (2007) refers to this as 'returning to the field'.

Having explained the ethical aspects of the research design and the steps taken to protect myself and the participants, the following section describes the methods employed in the data collection process.

4.4   Data collection plan

The research design was intended to facilitate reflection on experience in order to discover new ways of addressing the challenges that arise in the process of attempting to foster transformative relationships that support the potential for TL within the NL university. The data sources drawn upon comprise field notes, in-class teaching reflections, a personal journal, and a recording of a focus group discussion with teachers. Importantly, and in keeping with all autoethnographic work, the researcher's own history was kept present throughout (Hughes and Pennington, 2017).

The data collection process drew on Ricoeur's philosophy and decided on with a view to facilitating reflective thinking about my experience within a critical framework, but also in order to enable me to look back into that experience, interpret it and redesign my approach to teaching. It is this transformative aspect of reflection and the infinite possibilities for interpretation that are characteristic of Ricoeur's phenomenology and the use of text to stimulate imagination and creative action (Janke, 2012). It also draws on the kind of reflective practice associated with Argyris and Schon's (1978) theory on congruence and learning, and Schon's (1983) reflections *in* and *on* action, both of which I discuss below.

4.4.1   Studying personal experience

Methods for studying personal experience need to be 'practical, efficient and feasible' (Marshall and Bossman, 1989:108). Adhering to this advice, the time frame for collecting data is shown in figure 4.4 along with the data types and corresponding data sets.

Data type	Data set number	Timeframe
Field notes	One	1 semester (Sept - Dec) 2017
Reflections *in* action and reflections *on* action	Two	1 semester (Feb - May) 2018
Personal journal & autobiographical memory	Three	Throughout the research process
Focus group with other teachers	Four	June 2019

Figure 4.4: an overview of the data collection methods, type and timeframe

4.4.2 Data collection methods and procedure

The methods of data collection selected fit with Ricoeur's assertion that experience is never free from the immediate context or ideology and that experience, meaning and action are influenced by personal history (Kaplan, 2003). The idea of experience being multidirectional is supported by Denzin and Lincoln (1998:158) who suggest that there are various dimensions involved in studying experience and that methods for studying personal experience should 'simultaneously focus in four directions: inward/outward, backward and forward'. In this vein, the methods of data collection described below accommodate the situated and multidimensional nature of human experience and are designed according to Ricoeur's notion of participative action in order to discover how I may be complicit in creating the conditions that characterise the NL university.

Four types of data were collected, each serving a specific purpose in meeting the research objectives. The different data sets were to be cross-referenced in the process of constructing the final autoethnographic account. The function of each data type is described below.

4.4.3 Data set one: Field notes

Field notes were collected over a 12-week semester, with entries made daily. The field notes were labelled with a date and reference number and imported into MAXQDA where they were annotated and coded with a view to identifying emergent themes.

Field notes serve to create a vivid picture – Marshall and Rossman speak of a 'written photograph' (1989:79) – and, in keeping with autoethnographic methodology and its phenomenological underpinnings, are not restricted to clinical description but include the 'gathering of impressions of the surrounding world through all relevant human faculties'

(Denzibn and Lincoln, 1998:80). The way the world looks, feels and sounds to the researcher is documented and then analysed with a view to the research questions and the writing of the autoethnography, where the data is brought to life as the researcher uncovers and shares with others their experience. The process of collecting field notes has been described as a form of participant observation, something Duncan (2004:5) explains in relation to autoethnography as being 'the core practice through which reflections are developed and all other data collection activities are organised'. Accordingly, I used field notes as a way of reflecting on my own experience and of understanding the context and my participation in it (Carr and Kemmis 1986; Kawulich, 2005) before analysing my responses to the realities of that context. Later I cross reference my own experience with that of my colleagues.

4.4.4 Data set two: Teaching reflections

In addition to the field notes, a series of 12 in-class teaching reflections were recorded.

Refection *in* and *on* action was to be carried out *at least* twice a week in alternate 3-week blocks over a 12-week semester (6 weeks of reflection in total). Alternate blocks were decided upon in order to allow for the periodic organisation of large amounts of information.

Semester week	Research activity	Semester week	Research activity	Semester week	Research activity	Semester week	Research Activity
Week 1 Week 2 Week 3	Reflections in and on action	Week 4 Week 5 Week 6	Interim review of reflections	Week 7 Week 8 Week 9	Reflections in and on action	Week 10 Week 11 Week 12	Interim review of reflections

Figure 4.5: overview of reflection in and on action and interim reviews of the data over a 12-week semester (Feb – May 2018)

4.4.5 The purpose of the teaching reflections

In keeping with Ricoeur's philosophical principle of participative action, the purpose of the reflections was to capture my action, and having done so, consider with greater clarity the factors that support and/or impede my attempts to foster transformative relationships and thereby promote transformative learning.

4.4.6 Reflection *in* action

My reflections-in-action were written in narrative form and include an account of my emotions and thoughts. This is because it is notoriously difficult to capture the factors that influence moment-to-moment action as the knowledge used by teachers in their everyday action is implicit and applied without thinking (Kingston and Melvin, 2012). Action and the motivation for it can be obscure and as such is frequently insufficiently reflected on (Brookfield, 1995). Nevertheless, teachers' action can shed light on concealed assumptions and unconscious knowledge that influences their practice.

Capturing a description of *in*-action thinking depends on memory and the level of detail one commits to paper, detail which may be lost or inaccurate due to time lapse; therefore, the written account of action needs to be completed as soon as possible after the event, or at the latest by the end of the working day. Teaching sessions in this phase of data collection were audio recorded to enable the researcher to revisit the events as they occurred in action. Reporting my experience in a narrative format helped me to identify the less clearly observable aspects of myself and understand how these influenced my action. Reporting my experience in this manner provides others with access into a world that may otherwise never be known and/or discussed in the pursuit of personal and professional development.

Teacher's implicit knowledge is referred to by Schon (1983) as 'knowing in action' and consists of strategies internalised from prior experiences. Whereas Schon refers to prior teaching experience, I widen the scope and consider within my reflection all prior experience that may influence my action and the effectiveness of my teaching. My autobiographical memory – including my learner history – means that influential people who populate my psyche are likely to feature within the action reported – an example of what Chang (2008) refers to as the indirect involvement of others in the research. The carrying out and recording of my teaching reflections in a narrative format supports the process of my own development by helping me bring to consciousness deeply ingrained experiences, feelings and beliefs that can be difficult to articulate but which may be important drivers of my actions and of my interpretation of others' actions. These offer a phenomenological account my experiences of the NL HE context that may not otherwise be voiced, represented, acknowledged or used productively. Consistent with autoethnography, the teaching reflections facilitate an interrogation into the very personhood of the researcher and can, therefore, be challenging (Atkinson, 2006).

4.4.7 Reflecting *on* action

Following reflection *in* action and the recording of this through written description and an audio account, I will reflect *on* my action. Reflection *on* action is the act of reflection after the action has taken place. When reflecting *on* their action, the researcher is able to contemplate the rationale underpinning the action and therefore assess their espoused theory in action (Argyris and Schon, 1978). In doing this it is possible to identify 'gaps between our espoused theory and the theory implicitly expressed in our actions' (Uschi and Macfarlane, 2011:478) – in this research, actions which support relationships and an approach to teaching and learning which optimises the potential for transformative learning.

Using Ricoeur's concept of distanciation and recognition of experience as inseparable from emotions, ideology and context, a pro forma was developed to assist with the analysis of my teaching reflections (see Figure 4.6).

Description of reflection on action (critical incidents0
a. Prominent features of the experience
b. Emotional responses and reasons for these
c. What assumptions underpin the action?
d. Consequences of actions, interactions, emotional responses
e. Micro/macro conditions (micro: immediate environment/macro: wider social conditions e.g. organisational factors, government ideology)

Figure 4.6: the pro forma which will guide the analysis of reflection on action

A pro forma was seen as helping structure and formalise reflection and as useful for exploring and identifying the aspects of tacit knowledge drawn on in practice, and for promoting the researcher's self-awareness. The gradual assimilation of understanding gained from reflecting on new situations facilitates the expansion of existing knowledge that can be drawn on and applied in future situations. This is essential for one's transformation and development and is an important step towards conceiving new meaning, something considered essential by Jeffs and Smith (1999) and Kozulin (1991) in terms of developing agency.

The pro forma was an operational measure taken to ensure that the reflections on action remained aligned to the research aims and consistent with the autoethnographic paradigm

(Duncan, 2004; Hughes and Pennington, 2017). Its purpose was to unearth underlying assumptions and drivers of emotions, including residual emotions, and it embedded criteria adapted from Boud's (1985) method for recapturing experience, and Brookfield's (1995) guidance on becoming a critically reflective teacher. While one purpose of the formal reflections is to foster reflective practice, their key purpose in the research is to provide further insight into the realities of neoliberalism in HE and how this ideology is reinforced or resisted by the individual (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Emirbayer and Miche 1998). The pro forma facilitates evaluation of the role of power in relation to practice and, as such, stimulates critical reflection. This is important because while it is recognised that 'persons play an active role in shaping their lives by the way they handle or fail to handle events or problems they encounter', *critical reflection* acknowledges that power external to the individual shapes the conditions of practice, in addition to personal agency (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 88). This, again, reflects the critical nature of the autoethnographic approach employed in the research and its attempt to bring together three aspects of experience – the emotional/psychological, the immediate context (the micro), and the wider institutional and ideological (the macro) – and what these means for attempts to actively promote transformative learning.

4.4.8 Data set three: Personal journal and autobiographical memory

As its name suggests, autobiographical memory signifies the backward dimension of experience and is considered essential because it helps the researcher understand the present (Chang, 2008). It is a repository where their own framework of beliefs is held (Brookfield, 1995; Bagnall, 2002- cited in Walker, 2006). In the language of TL, the backword dimension draws focus to the meaning structures and habits of mind which are a product of internalised assumptions about one's self and the world (Hodge, 2014). As such, the researcher is required to draw on aspects of their experience as a learner in order to inform analysis of the present. The use of autobiographical memory positions the research within a critical frame by recognising that beliefs about teaching and learning (or indeed any beliefs) do not simply 'come into being in a vacuum', they are socially, politically and culturally embedded and are powerful in shaping an individual's sense of self. This is supported by Baltes' life-span developmental psychology which recognises that human development is 'embedded in history' (1987, as cited in Crawford & Walker, 2009:17).

The assumptions teachers have about teaching are strongly connected with their experiences as learners (Brookfield, 1995). The inclusion of autobiographical memory data aligns with a narrative (auto) approach in that it values the 'individual's description of their life' and 'the

events they consider to be important or influential' (Crawford and Walker, 2009:26). This is an important step in the process of revealing one's own narrative (to oneself). In order to evaluate the influence of prior experience on present practice it has to be seen and then understood. Within the written autoethnography it is possible to see aspects of my residual self continue to shimmer under the surface of current action. Fook (2003) recommends that personal stories (narratives) should be written as spontaneously and non-analytically as possible in order to help unearth 'unconsciously held assumptions' (Kagan 1992, as cited in Farrell & Ives, 2015:595). For this reason, and with the exception of the pro forma, which does encourage me to look backwards, I have not adopted a formal structure in order to elicit memory-based data but have, instead, allowed it to emerge across all of the data sets.

The personal journal provides a space for extended exploration of what is being observed and experienced in the research context. What is recorded is spontaneous and has not been 'cleaned up' in order to make it read as rational and conceptually coherent; instead, it reflects an exploration of the tacit and emotional dimension of experience without being bound by the need to conform to such conditions.

4.4.9 Data set 4: The focus group

Brookfield suggests that 'colleagues' perceptions help us gain a clearer perspective on the parts of our practice that need greater scrutiny' (1995:141). Accordingly, the focus group signifies an outward shift by directly involving others in order to offer a point of comparison in relation to my own perceptions and experiences, and to thereby broaden and strengthen the data through cross-checking (Einsner, 1991; Duncan, 2004; Chang, 2008).

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants for the focus group. Colleagues who shared the day-to-day context of the university were invited to participate as they were considered to possess knowledge of the research context and would therefore serve as a valid point of comparison (Creswell, 2003; Morgan 1998). As Morgan (1998) notes, sampling should be undertaken carefully and where appropriate 'homogeneity of background in the required area' is essential to representative data (p.533). Six teacher colleagues who shared the teaching context took part in the focus group, and although this was understood to be a relatively small sample size, it was nonetheless viewed as a useful and informative point of comparison and, as such, as legitimate, particularly given the primary autoethnographic nature of the study. Furthermore, many of my own perceptions of others' views and feelings are a product of my

day-to-day interactions with them over many years. The focus group discussion was audio recorded and transcribed.

The focus group took place for a duration of two hours, following a staff meeting on the morning of 17th September 2019. It was an opportunity to formalise the often informal and fragmented conversations that occurred between colleagues and give profile to the staff voice within the NL context. Rather than exclusively serving the purpose of aiding the research, the focus group enabled teachers to reflect upon and discuss their experiences and to collaborate regarding strategies for navigating the shared context. Its facilitation was adapted form Brookfield's (1995) method for facilitating collaborative problem solving, which I explain next.

4.4.10 Researcher positionality and focus group dynamics

There are some potential issues and challenges when undertaking a focus group with colleagues that are noted by various authors (Burger, 2015; Cohen, *et al*. 2018; Denscome, 2014). For example, my own position as a colleague known to the participants to be studying the influence of NL on my approach to teaching was potentially problematic; with this knowledge already in their minds, how may my colleagues already knowing my research focus affect what they would tell me? As Morgan (1998) notes, such a dynamic can lead to silence and or tempered responses due to the reluctance to cause conflict with colleague/s. Furthermore, it was necessary to consider whether the focus group may simply reproduce a collective narrative that failed to yield anything new (Cohen, *et al.* 2018). My own position as the focus group facilitator had to be carefully considered to minimise the possibility of such issues impacting unfavourably on the focus group data. To combat these issues, at the start of the focus group I drew on Brookfield's (1995) method for facilitating collaborative problem solving that offers a structured frame within which teachers can discuss their individual and collective experiences with a view to solving problems collaboratively. Prior to the focus group, I had documented my own experiences and responses to pressures within the NL university. I had collated them thematically (see section 4.3.5) and these were used to structure the focus group. I was clear in communicating the purpose of the focus group to participants: that I was interested in knowing in what way my colleagues' experiences were similar of different to my own and that the focus group represented a forum for practice based discussion. Clarifying the aim of the focus group provided boundaries and promoted a safe emotional climate for participation (Brookfield, 1995). Furthermore, sharing my own experience and explaining the rationale for doing so

before expecting others to do the same reinforced a climate of genuine sharing rather than inviting participants to agree with my own reported experience (Brookfield, 1995; Morgan, 1998, Newby, 2010; Gibbs, 2012).

These procedural steps provided clarification of my role as the focus group moderator, something deemed essential by Morgan (1998) and which strengthened the focus group's integrity. The focus group produced rich data and allowed the participants to expand on their experiences and compare and contrast them with those of the other focus group members.

4.5 Organising, analysing and interpreting the data

Doloriert and Sambrook (2009) point out that autoethnographic research yields a vast amount of data and as such it is helpful to break the data into manageable chunks. Chang (2008:31) recommends that looking for 'reoccurring themes, topics and patterns' and 'contextualising broadly' are helpful strategies in the analysis and interpretation of data. In this chapter I describe how the four data sets employed in the current study were analysed and integrated into the autoethnography presented in Chapter 5.

4.5.1 Data set one: field notes

Using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA, dominant themes were identified in my field notes from which emerged four key situational factors that provided a workable frame for analysis, namely:

1. No permanent office base in the main teaching building
2. Open Plan Design of the MH Campus
3. Conversation and talk
4. Heavy workload

For each situational factor, relevant extracts from the field notes were identified and numbered, and any connections with findings from the other data sets noted. In accordance with Corbin and Strauss' (2008:123) advice to keep well-organised data within the process of analysis, each line of the numbered field notes was then analysed using a coding system as follows:

description = green typeface

action = underlined

thought = italics

emotion = bold

red typeface = initial interpretive notes (Appendix 1).

This coding system enabled me to 'zoom in' on the minutiae of my experience and helped shed light on the nature of my relationship with the university context, the neoliberal ideology governing it and the wider HE sector. Such analysis would later enable me to analyse my experience in terms of how it relates to my attempts to foster transformative relationships.

Multiple aspects of (my) self (e.g. confidence, anxiety, fear) were extracted from the field notes through a line-by-line analysis of the text. The field notes were segmented, or 'fractured' into parts and numbered so that I had a series of mini windows into my experience that could be rewoven into the autoethnography (Maxwell, 2005:95) (Appendix 1). Each segment of data was given a descriptive summary that helped me gain some distance from the data (Ricoeur's notion of 'distanciation'). Focusing on my experience and action, using this analytical method, provided a starting point for gaining a better understanding of my actions and answering the research aims (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). As is common in autoethnographic work, only those excerpts that were helpful in answering the research aims were eventually included in the autoethnography.

An important aspect of AE is as well as focusing on the personal is to evaluate the wider influences such as organisational/political ones on experience. To help me do this I constructed an analytical frame (figure 4.7).

Situational factor 1	Immediate material factors	Interacting factors and action	Internal personal factors	External organisational and ideological factors	Personal history/ Learner autobiography

Figure 4.7: Analytical framework for the field notes

This analytical frame helped me to 'zoom out' and identify the organisational and policy-related factors permeating my experience and to see connections between the different data sets (Maxwell, 2005 p. 95) and between experience, action and personal meaning – concepts inherent to autoethnography, (Chang, 2008; Roberge, 2011).

92

This analytical framework was developed using the aspects of Ricoeur's philosophy and the model of agency provided by Emirbayer and Mische (1998). These see action and environment as inextricably linked, with each impacting the other (Obelkkink-Marchand, 2017:38). Furthermore, the framework helped capture the temporal dimension of experience essential to autoethnography; for example, the role of memory and emotion associated with my personal history (Chang, 2008; Hughes and Pennington, 2017). It provided a way to unearth and discuss memory-based and ideological influences within my action that may otherwise be buried.

4.5.2 Data set two: teaching reflections

A total of 12 teaching reflections were completed, four of which were selected to be used in the autoethnography. As is common in autoethnographic research, there was an excess of data available (Chang, 2008) and two main criteria were used to determine whether or not to include reflections in the final autoethnography. The first was whether reflections reported clearly on the approach I adopted when teaching and as well as my sense of connection with students. The second concerned self-exposure, vulnerability and the ethical implications which accompany all autoethnography (Bochner, Adams, and Ellis, 2010; Doloriert and Sambrook, 2009). For example, one reflection in particular focussed on deeply uncomfortable feelings surrounding an aspect of my role. This was rejected, for to share it would have revealed aspects of my personal self which may have caused problems for future working relationships and/or with perceptions of me in the university due the candid descriptions it provided of my values, judgements and responses.

The aim of the teaching reflections and the associated pro forma was to present and reflect on my 'in action' teaching experience. I wanted to understand the possibilities for my fostering of transformative relationships when teaching within the constraints of NL HE, and how and when I appropriated aspects of the system. Such understanding was integral, ultimately, to developing a wider breadth of agency (choice) over my approach to teaching. The pro forma acted as an interpretive tool that helped me to reflect on my 'in action' experience, its underlying assumptions and residual emotions. The process of reflecting on action generated a lot of writing as I allowed myself to exhaust the interpretative range in the initial write up and it was necessary to refine the analysis into a presentable format so that the key points of analysis could be elicited. The selected teaching reflections and their pro forma summaries are presented in chapter 6.

Through analysis of the teaching reflections, aided by the pro forma, it became possible to observe the aspects of self that had been identified in the field notes (data set one) as they appeared within my teaching reflections. The strength with which each aspect of (my) 'self' came to the fore was influenced by my perception of the university environment and the students (or significant others) with whom I was interacting. The selves commonly presented themselves dynamically and were not easily extracted as singular functioning entities. The earlier process of segmenting the field notes and analysing them line by line was helpful in perceiving various aspects of self in my teaching reflections and their potential impact on my fostering of transformative relationships in the act of teaching. The analysis of the reflections was aided by my use of Emirbayer and Mische's Chordal Triad of Agency (1998), explained in section 5.4.2

In autoethnographic research, the process of data collection and its analysis is ongoing. It is a method that allows themes to emerge organically and the researcher has control over which themes they consider most salient to the overall aim (Chang, 2008). Through ongoing analysis of the field notes and teaching reflections, I had begun to form an understanding of my action within the university context and of the factors that influenced it. It had become possible to identify essential aspects of the NL HE context that were significant for my attempts at fostering transformative relationships. For example, the day-to-day pressure generated by a culture of performativity, student expectations and their role as consumers, the varied backgrounds of students and their associated experiences, problems and the ways in which these differed from my own were experienced by me as pressures as I sought to meet their needs. These pressures were evident in my field notes and in my teaching reflections. In addition, I had begun to gain insight into less tangible pressures that were presenting themselves due to aspects of my learner history, my perception of the university's culture and the dynamics between myself and others as I attempted to foster transformative relationships. I identified four key aspects of experience (or themes) from the data collected prior to the focus group interview based on their salience to the research aim; namely, the teaching audit, the fee-paying student, the student social demographic, and workload. The interim analysis of data yielded these as pressures that characterised my own experience and my perception of the university's culture. I then sought to cross reference my own experience of these four aspects with that of my colleagues who took part in the focus group.

4.5.3 Data set three: the focus group

The focus group was structured using the four areas of experience that I had identified in my interim analysis.

These were:

- The teaching audit
- The fee-paying student
- The student social demographic
- Workload

These four themes were integral to the focus group discussion and to the reporting of our shared experience in the autoethnography. The data from the focus group was transcribed and then analysed with a view to identifying similarities and differences between our experiences. The focus group findings are reported in Chapter 6. A key function of the focus group, in line with Chang's invitation to remember that 'what makes autoethnography ethnographic is intent on gaining cultural understanding' (2008:125), was to establish whether and to what extent there was a shared view of the University's culture that would provide reassurance that my own account was not idiosyncratic. That is, it was intended that the data gathered from the focus group would provide a more robust basis from which to discuss our *shared* perception of the university's culture in the autoethnography itself.

4.5.4 Data set Four: the personal journal

The keeping of a personal journal helps the researcher to recognise their self as transitional and is a space in which the researcher can take the stance of interpretive actor and tap into their agentic capacity (Wiley, 2012). My personal journal served as a critical space where the I was free to explore practice experience without the restrictions of academic formality. It was a 'potential, intermediate or transitional space' in which I could imagine myself choosing differently and thus transforming my practice (Ortlip, 2008:695). Indeed, the personal journal was invaluable in capturing the subtle, yet clearly transformational effect of the teaching audit reported in the autoethnography itself.

4.6   A prelude to the autoethnography

The autoethnography that follows is presented in stages that reflect each of my research questions. First, I present my own responses to the pressures that arise within the NL HE

context as they were elicited from the process of data analysis described in this chapter. I then present my colleagues' experiences of those pressures and discuss in what ways their experiences are similar to and/or different from my own. Following this, I use Young's five faces of oppression to describe how our collective experiences reflect an increasingly oppressive culture and shed light on the way key stakeholders, such as teachers, students and managers, are partially complicit in reinforcing a culture that risks perpetuating ongoing systemic disadvantage for NTs.

The autoethnography does not claim to be – nor should it be – an objective account, but rather it is an interpretation of how life as a teacher is experienced in the context of the university at the centre of this study, told from a first-person perspective. While it should be noted that 'narrative is not an objective reconstruction of life – it is a rendition of how life is perceived' by me the experiencer (Webster and Mertova, 2007:3), nonetheless, it invokes the experiences of others as a counterpoise. With this in mind, it is the hope and intention that the autoethnography should yield insights into the creative strategies used in professional practice to mediate tensions between beliefs and organisational imperatives (Bold, 2012), and from which others may benefit. I hope too that it serves to generate critical discussion that elucidates operations of power which might otherwise remain concealed at the expense of social justice and equal opportunity.

In this chapter I have explained Autoethnography as a research method and the specific approach of critical auotethnography to be taken. I have explained the details of the methods employed to meet the research aim and to answer my research questions. The position adopted in relation to others along the auto-ethno continuum has been rationalised along with ethical considerations within the research design. A data collection plan through which I will use personal experience as the medium for exploring my actions and the type of relationship that may (or may not) come into being through those actions has been communicated. Finally, I have explained the system I used to organise, analyse and interpret its findings.

Chapter 5: A critical autoethnography concerning the fostering of transformative relationships in a neoliberal university

5.1 Introduction to the autoethnography

In this chapter I provide an account of the factors that support and/or impede my attempts to foster transformative relationships in the NL HE context. In doing so, I focus on my own perception of the university environment and recount my personal experience of navigating the pressures that arise within a newly-established university catering for a high proportion of NTSs.

This chapter illustrates how the autoethnographic process enabled me to understand the process of personal and professional transformation as I negotiated the pressures resulting from NL in this context. I begin with the notion of resistance (conflict with and opposition to NL pressures) as a platform for agency, interweaving into my narrative the four areas of experience elicited from my data: the teaching audit; the fee-paying student; the social demographic; the working conditions. The voices of my colleagues are presented alongside my own in respect of each area of experience, and I tease out the similarities and differences between our perceptions and experiences. I then present, in a separate section, an evaluation of our shared perceptions of the emerging culture of the university. Finally, I use my teaching reflections to narrate the process by which I seek to foster transformative relationships in the process of teaching itself and attempt to tease out the factors that support and/or impede my attempts to do so.

The autoethnography uses a non-linear format in which various aspects of (my) 'self' appear, co-exist and contradict across the various experiences described. Using Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) model of agency, I move between past, present and future to show the inter-relationships between various aspects of experience as they occurred in the process of narrating my identity (my 'self') within the university context. Throughout the analysis I draw on the theories explained in chapter 3 (Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), Chang's Typology of Others, Young's Five Faces of Oppression and Emirbayer and I apply them to illustrate my own attempts to foster transformative relationships and to form a bigger-picture analysis of oppression beyond that of my own experience.

The excerpts used in the autoethnography that follows have been selected on the basis of their usefulness in showing connections between various aspects of myself across a variety of teaching and non-teaching situations, and on the basis of the insights they reveal into the process of attempting to foster transformative relationships in the university at the centre of this study. The instantiations illustrate the '… phenomenological complexity of the observer's world …' (my world) as the experiences unfolded in the context of everyday practice (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998:81). It is hoped that the account will invite the reader into my lived experience and speak to other teachers working in similar settings, inviting them to reflect on their own practice and thus increase their capacity for agentic action. Beyond that, the hope is that it stimulates dialogue and action aimed at dismantling structures that perpetuate systemic disadvantage among those invested in education.

I begin with my experience in the weeks leading up to the University's teaching audit.

5.2 RQ1. How do I experience the pressures that arise within the NL HE context? The teaching audit

A university-wide teaching audit that was intended to gather evidence of teaching excellence was introduced by the university in September 2017, five years after the institution was awarded university status and one year prior to the Office for Students' assuming the legal right to regulate and hold universities accountable for the quality of teaching they provide (Gov.UK, 2018). The introduction of a new audit to measure teaching quality meant that the relative privacy of the classroom was reduced and our professional space entered with the purpose of grading our teaching – and thus effectively regulating it – and providing evidence of teaching quality. The audit thus symbolised an institutional shift towards embracing the NL demand for evidence of quality teaching in the form of quantifiable data. It represented a corporate strategy that endorsed the performativity and accountability symbolic of NL (Harris, 2005). While I was open to engaging in developmental feedback on my teaching, the increased focus on student satisfaction emanating from policy and the University's approach to ensuring the quality of our teaching provoked resistance and produced in me a feeling that I needed to protect myself. I began to focus more on what I was doing as the changes occurring in the university brought my beliefs into sharper focus. In this way, the intensification of NL was a catalyst spurring me to interrogate my personal narrative (Fook, 2003) and assess how useful

it was to me in realising my aim of fostering transformative relationships (Farrell and Ives, 2015).

5.2.1 The weeks before the audit

Alone. Sunday: Sitting in the backroom feeling heavy; dark; exhausted. Sunlight streams over my right shoulder as I sit at my narrow wall facing desk. The whole family is elsewhere – doing stuff. I am here; alone, an 'other' who does not partake in family activities on a Sunday. Heavy; dark; exhausted. Work is my company and, right now, my identity. My body aches; burden is inground in my muscle fibres. No quick fix, no hot bath, spar day or brief respite will fix this (so please don't anyone suggest that as to do so further alienates me).

Exhausted. Like every year (in this role) that I can remember, this year has been about survival. Sleep, eat, survive, repeat. Survive the day, the semester, the class, the interaction. The intensity of the workplace feels like being trapped in game, in which every level (year) demands more and gives less. Audit. Game over?

Isolated, exhausted, alone. Self for company. Sitting, wasted, feeling pathetic and exhausted. I'm not up to this. Are those my words or society's'? Hard to tell sometimes. I try not to listen, I keep surviving. Don't stop. I worked hard to become something (a teacher). I have fought hard for validation (in whose eyes?). I am still something unless I fail. I cling desperately to the thing I have become, to being something rather than nothing. Keep working, achieving. Don't stop.

My resistance to the audit was born out of fear that it would derail the current professional identity that I have worked hard to forge and that has, albeit superficially, healed me from the wounds of a painful identity formed during an adolescence in which, due to my parents' decision that I would enter community college course at age 16, to become a nursery nurse, I experienced myself as an 'other of difference … distinguished as a stranger' (Chang, 2008: 26). My sense of difference due to this decision was exacerbated by the fact that my parents had encouraged both my older siblings to take a traditional A-level route. In effect, my parents' choice regarding my future was experienced by me as a form of othering; it marked me out as different from them (from theirs' and my sisters' middle-class-ness). Both my parents had professional teaching careers and for them, working-class-ness had been something to move away from. For that reason, loss of professional status in my inner world was not only linked to a general concern with social class but to my sense of belonging within my family. My feelings in this experience bring an aspect of Miller's RCT to life in that she explains how

relationships cannot be separated from principle social patterns (Miller, 1987). In this case it was the wider social assumptions regarding different types of education (vocational and academic) and the linking of my personhood to a route associated with inferior knowledge and menial work that meant I internalised a message of inferiority and difference (Bathmaker, 2016; 2013; Bartky, 1990). Young (2012) further explains how professional status and social class interrelate to form a privilege/oppression dynamic that is representative of the structure of a capitalist society. Non-professionals, who are typically menial workers (e.g. nursery assistants, paid childcare workers) experience a class-based form of oppression because their position provides them with less social status than professionals and less economic benefit. It was through my newly ascribed professional status that I had become similar to my parents, more 'like them' – an 'other' of similarity (Chang, 2008). This symbolic sense of similarity was a powerful influence on me and the potential loss of it was psychologically difficult; it would confirm the already internalised messages of inferiority associated with social class, status and power that Young (1993; 2012) sees as existing due to a grander social narrative in which a person's profession is linked to their social status. Psychological oppression flowed within my fragile identity at the time of the audit and diminished my resilience to respond positively to it.

In the run up to the audit, the future self I perceived, activated my past self. In Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) terms, my past/future thinking produced a present self that was fearful and resistant to change. Meanwhile, Sannio (2010:839) explains how teachers' resistance is often born 'as an unfortunate consequence of new policies …' (such as the audit) and from the obstacles these produce in relation to a teachers' preferred practice, and this was certainly true in my case, leading me to view the audit negatively. Resistance often entails positioning one's self-narrative centre-stage and strengthening one's attachment to one's own beliefs values and practices, (Carroll and Levy 2008; Brookfield, 1995; Farrell and Ives, 2015). However, in my situation, there were more primitive, emotional (fear based) factors driving my resistance: the audit threatened my very personhood. It rekindled pain. It intersected with my life narrative in which I frequently felt disempowered and experienced fragile self-esteem and confidence. My resistance was not (yet) about preserving my values and beliefs; it was directed at preserving (my) self.

Vasilyuk (1988) explains how difficult experiences are important prompts that can lead teachers to engage in transformation and innovation; yet, as Lasky (2005:913) warns, such experiences can, instead, also lead to an unwillingness to change (Lasky, 2005:913). Fear-

based responses such as mine frequently lead to self-protective behaviours that can be difficult for the individual to confront and/or make known to themselves, let alone others. Positive development cannot, therefore, be assumed in the context of organisational change. Arguably, my personal history, sense of isolation and exhaustion did not represent fertile ground for transformation and innovation; and yet, somewhat paradoxically, my diary entry at the time suggested an openness to change.

> *25th April 2018 Personal journal excerpt:*
>
> *'I have been thinking recently how dogmatic it is to suggest that there is one right or wrong way to teach – surely it's about having the flexibility to respond to students' needs – My problem is that I'm not sure what their needs are'.*
>
> *30 April 2018 Personal journal excerpt:*
>
> *'I find myself thinking a lot recently that I don't know what teaching and learning is anymore.'*

Drawing on relational theory, my story demonstrates how a work-based issue (the audit) is navigated with psychological reference to my upbringing; how the 'imagined, and historical voices and feelings generated in relation with others' circulate in the present (Helps 2017:23). The tendency to question and consider alternatives (evident in the diary excerpt) constitutes a strategy that helps me retain psychological distance from my early years and the oppressive influences that I experienced. My April 25 2018 diary extract in which I express the need to acknowledge, understanding and respect the position of others (alternative views), reflects an attempt to reject the kind of parental domination that had caused pain in my childhood (and later adulthood) – a resistance that I project onto other perceived forms of domination, such as the audit and NL imperatives.

5.2.2 'Resistance and rebellion': the story of the staff meeting

The audit felt like something was being inflicted on us (me). It was communicated to us by senior management as a strategy important to securing our future by helping ensure that departments would improve their performance and, as a consequence, NSS ratings would improve in line with students' experience and satisfaction levels, with resultant benefits for recruitment. I took issue with the approach used to communicate this and to the message itself and what I perceived it to represent. Despite understanding the need to ensure and be able to evidence good practice, and despite agreeing with the principle that students should enjoy a

positive educational experience, the absence of a mechanism through which we could share real (and difficult) feelings with senior management concerning what felt like an intensification of regulation and monitoring, created a psychological divide between 'us' the teaching staff and 'them' the senior managers (Cohen, 1985). There was an unspoken expectation that staff should buy into the audit as it was in our interests and those of the institution to do so. These feelings I experienced in relation to the audit again acquire meaning in light of my personal history:

I'm 14 again, admiring the fifth stud in the ear that my father told me not to get pierced. Pushing the boundaries of his authority, though relatively harmlessly, those earrings say something about me: I will make choices. I have a will. I am a person. My teenage self resists, rebels, subverts and emerges, somewhat involuntarily, in a staff meeting:

> *20 February 2018 Personal journal excerpt:*
>
> *Much of the meeting was focussed on the forthcoming audit within which we will be graded as teachers - this is an unpopular thing. It was useful to listen to The Vice Principal's explanation of the audit, which is very much linked to TEF data and metrics. The Vice Principal brought closure to the meeting by stating that the reason that our department had been left until last was because it posed the least risk due to its reputation for good performance and positive NSS results compared to other departments in the University. Without thinking, my response to this - which I verbalised -, was 'we may be the first next time round!!!'.*

Albeit unintentionally, my comment in the staff meeting clearly betrayed negative emotions; it was a reflection of my perception of the somewhat arbitrary nature with which various departments could be looked upon favourably or unfavourably depending on how well they were perceived to be performing as measured against established metrics. *We, the teaching staff, were something to be managed - not developed.* The Vice Principal's response to my verbal slip (which was less than humorous) was to reject these emotions and insinuate that I could choose to feel differently – more positively. I momentarily became unable to enact surface emotion that would give the impression of being compliant with the forthcoming audit (Hochschild, 1983); a semi rebellious teenager shimmered under the surface of my adult veneer; my inner child trembling; a frightened onlooker; powerless and objectified. I was unable to express my actual thoughts and feelings authentically or directly, namely that I perceived the audit as deeply threatening to my professional self, to my livelihood and thus to the stability of my family.

I immediately regretted making the comment in the staff meeting and felt I had put myself in a vulnerable position due to the possibility of being perceived by the Vice Principal as an 'other of opposition' (Chang, 2008:27). The comment I had made betrayed a resistance to the forthcoming audit and raised the possibility that I might be seen as a threat and potentially non-compliant with other regulatory approaches adopted by the University. The audit brought into focus the way in which I identified (and/or disidentified) with the organisation's emerging culture, where a particular type of teaching was sought and valued and where a mode of compliance was required if I were to retain legitimate membership of that culture. I experienced pressure to be seen as on-side and concerned about the university's survival in the context of external pressures, and therefore as being compliant with the audit.

5.2.3 The audit and oppression

Despite the notion of quality being problematic for reasons highlighted in chapter 2, the audit's function was that of a quality control mechanism, and scepticism or resistance to it were construed negatively by senior management as a '… human complication within organisational systems' designed to help ensure that the University had a secure future (Bulaitis, 2020: 204); as such any pushback represented a threat.

One indicator of teaching quality used in the audit was whether all students, particularly the more reserved ones, were successfully encouraged to participate. Another was how clearly the relevance of the lesson's content to the course assignment and to students' future employment was communicated to them. Teachers' awareness of students' backgrounds, and whether and how they took account of it in their teaching approach was not included in the audit's observation criteria which failed to adequately consider such less tangible factors that have the potential to influence students' learning; yet such knowledge is crucial to creating a transformative relationship and to how a teacher negotiates their relationships with others more generally. For example, a teacher who knows the reason for a student remaining quiet, by having knowledge of particular factors relating to their personal history, may take a particular approach to eliciting an in-class response. However, the audit did not sufficiently account for the need for teachers to exercise autonomy in this respect or the skills they demonstrated in doing so. Instead, quality criteria were largely imposed in the absence of any tangible awareness on the part of senior management of such factors and of consultation with the teachers themselves, and this lack of input and thus control, was therefore felt as a form of oppression (Young, 1993).

Checking quality using the kind of low inference markers described rather than seeking to develop quality practices based on higher inference criteria risked overlooking the possibilities for developing and implementing more sophisticated and responsive approaches to the pressures of NL. The audit's value in terms of enhancing teaching practice in line with the notion of transformation as quality was limited, and the use of low inference markers that reflected institutional pressure to produce tangible outputs quickly and simply in order to justify provision (Hernard and Leprince-Ringuet, 2008) did not allow for the complex nuances that present themselves in teaching and learning contexts characterised by student diversity, and in particular, a large proportion of disadvantaged students.

5.2.4 'Competition, competition, competition'

Every day since the audit was announced, I have been preoccupied with the thought of not achieving a Grade 1 (outstanding) in my teaching observation. It isn't the not achieving an "outstanding" in itself that matters to me, it's avoiding the shame and embarrassment of being less than my peers. There is a competitive edge among the staff team. Everyone wants a Grade 1 and the fact that we are graded encourages us to focus on this. I have an overwhelming instinct to avoid failure. I prepare, re-prepare, re-think lesson ideas; my body wracks with pain, my breath sharp and shallow – the kind that shortens the lifespan. My confidence is fragile. Maybe I feel the pressure more than some? I retreat into myself. The prospect of failure burns in my mind. I fluctuate between having an objective understanding of my feelings and the reasons for them, and being too fatigued to protect myself from them. I stop talking 'audit' with colleagues. It feels good; I am quietly exercising power in a situation that might otherwise overwhelm me and I am a better person for maintaining a noble silence (I tell myself).

5.2.5 Resistance as agency in response to grading the quality of our teaching

Sannio (2010) explains that action often springs from resistance as one attempts to express one's values and beliefs. My action of withdrawing from conversations about the audit that I felt were unhelpful was a form of self-expression and positive agency (action) in that it was something I was able to do in a situation where I felt I had limited control (Biesta *et al.,* 2015). Withdrawing from some conversations – and particularly those that I felt resembled aspects of an increasingly individualistic culture that encouraged us to compete – was a way of exercising my freedom of choice. It was a form of agency born from resistance, but it was not positive, nor was it helpful to my attempts to foster transformative relationships. Cushioning myself by withdrawing in this way was a coping strategy recognised in the literature as something used by academics in situations that are all-consuming (Churchman and King 2009). My choice to

partially withdraw meant that I experienced an increasing sense of isolation; I could not talk directly about my feelings; I could only think about them. I felt estranged from those around me and sought out those elements of my work that I found meaningful.

I became aware of how my resistance to the audit reflected, even strengthened, my desire to cling to an identity in order to maintain a sense of confidence in and security about my professional self (Carroll and Levy, 2008). I constructed myself as a transformative teacher, motivated by the nourishment I derive from my relationship with students (Miller, 1987) and through which I nurture and care for them. Holding onto this narrative was a way of dis-identifying with those aspects of the University's culture that I perceived to be at odds with this construction of my identity. It enabled me to retain a sense of power in a situation over which I felt I had little real control. My desire to hold onto the idea of myself as a transformative teacher was a form of resistance to my perception of a system that was pushing me to think, behave and relate competitively, and the fact that I felt unable to do so meant that I experienced this very negatively. The pressures and my responses to them induced inner conflict when I found myself focusing on performance outcomes in terms of my own preservation rather than on my effectiveness in fostering transformative relationships.

Despite not wanting to, I cared too much about my grade because the prospect of a poor grade threatened my sense of professional identity and my sense of belonging, both to my peer group and the University. Despite my resistance to it, I was unable to psychologically opt out of the competitive culture that was being encouraged by the grading system. Rather than being concerned about the students and whether what I was providing for them was actually beneficial to them I became focused on myself, my own survival, and the need to avoid incurring the disapproval of senior management by achieving an acceptable grade in the teaching audit. My preoccupation with the audit ultimately led to a complete re-evaluation of my professional identity.

The audit itself did not support me in developing better teaching practice, but the scrutiny it placed me under and the anxiety I experienced as a result made me question myself and the things I had considered to be important in relation to it. My advocacy of approaches that foster TL, was brought into sharper focus as I began to question what motivation lay at the centre of my teaching and whether I really had the level of commitment required to sustain my aim to be a transformative teacher. Unpleasant though it was, this was a positive aspect of the audit for it forced me to reflect on my current actions and seriously question whether these were

congruent with my personal narrative. I needed to consider how I may need to adapt my current approach in order to foster transformative relationships whilst also meeting the demands of an increasingly NL context. In essence, I had entered a period of critical transformation (Hughes and Pennington 2017).

My own experience of the teaching audit was significantly affected by my own perception of it. I now turn to the focus group to investigate my colleagues' experience of the audit with a view to comparing it to my own and identifying points of convergence and divergence and whether or not a broadly shared view of the audit and the institutional culture.

5.3 RQ2. In what way is my experience of the teaching audit similar to and different from that of my colleagues? (Evidence from the focus group)

Tom felt that the way the audit was managed was unhelpful and demotivating for teaching staff due to its focus on student *dis*satisfaction as the primary driver of change to teaching practices.

> *'I think a lot of it, though, is about how it's managed and, you know, if it was managed in a way that it was seen as a constructive exercise; so it's not someone trying to pick holes, its someone actually trying to help you develop your practice. But because of the ... I guess the organisational culture, where, I mean, it's interesting when you're talking about feedback from students. Now what I think about here is that there's lots of really, really, good feedback that students give, but what's picked up on is the small number of voices that are saying 'oh you're not doing this' or 'it's your fault', and actually there's probably 10 times more voices that are saying 'it's really brilliant what you're doing, you're really supportive, your lectures are really informed, you're really helping me here. But it's those smaller voices that are always picked up.'(Tom)*

Tom's perception of the audit as being something through which to '*pick holes*' in practice rather than develop it echoes my own response in that it sees it as questioning our competence. It sheds light on aspects of the University's culture and tends to be negatively oriented in the way it implements policy initiatives in response to NL pressures, and exemplified by its emphasis on negative student feedback and the assumption that it is teachers' competence that is to blame.

Another FG participant, Chris, thought that the audit lacked a meaningful evidence base with which to justify it and thought that this made it difficult for teaching staff to regard the audit positively.

> *'I think a lot of the things ... the changes that take place aren't evidence based ... erm ... so ... and that and they're not meaningful sometimes, so I think it's difficult to buy into the process isn't it, because it doesn't feel supportive, it doesn't feel like it's done in a meaningful way and its very much driven by metrics and things like this isn't it. So, and it's also a bit of a blame culture sometimes, isn't it, so you I think you do, we do, end up feeling like that.' (Chris)*

Chris' response was similar to mine in that she regarded the audit as something through which to satisfy external measurement systems rather than being a genuine tool for teaching development. The fact that it lacked what she saw as a questionable evidence base led her to believe that the audit was, in reality, there to benefit the organisation itself as it attempts to respond to the external pressures of NL.

David's response to the audit resembled aspects of Tom's and Chris' responses in that he did not regard it as something through which his teaching could be developed:

> *'Well, you know, people are going around ... whether its managers or students ... with a whip to crack against us. My feeling is to just avoid getting hit by it, not to improve and to better myself. But what are they looking to get me on here when they're observing me and how do I make sure I ticked the boxes (Fiona: yep, yep)? But it's not really about being a good teacher at all, a lot of that.' (David)*

Like me, David expresses cynicism in relation to the audit. He regards it as a box-ticking exercise and lacking in real meaning in terms of helping him develop as a teacher. His perception depicts a culture in which teachers experience pressure and vulnerability in that they are particularly susceptible to the expectations of management and students themselves and any resulting penalties from perceived poor performance.

A comment made by Tom suggests that the organisation's aim in adopting the audit was not clear beyond that of providing evidence in the form of metrics for external stakeholders.

> *'There doesn't seem to be any articulation apart from "we need to do this..."'*
> *(Tom)*

Feelings of frustration and anxiety over the approach taken to managing the audit were evident in Fiona's comments, which also conveyed a sense of not being listened to by senior management:

> *'So what is it trying to achieve? And ... I think that's what's not communicated (another participant 'yeah'), So talk to us about what you're trying to achieve and arguably, there's lots of people and expertise that ... so, therefore, our opinion of what it should be doing and how it would help us (laughs) ... that's what you should be drawing on. I don't think anyone would sit here and say they're not willing to, you know, have people point out where they could be supported and make*

themselves better at their job. I don't think anyone would be closed to that, it's just that suspiciousness that you're out to get me not that you're out to support me and develop me.' (Fiona)

Fiona refers to an openness and willingness amongst the teaching staff to engage in continuous professional development. However, the perceived unhelpfulness of the audit due to lack of consultation with teaching staff undermined its credibility and staff confidence in senior management's approach to communicating and implementing it. Fiona's laughter when making reference to the idea of senior managers consulting with teaching staff seemed symbolic of a culture in which there is scepticism and a divide between senior managers and teaching staff, and it reflects a more general perception that the expertise of teaching staff is overlooked. The approach taken to ensuring quality appears to be administered through regulation rather than consultation. Fiona's perception was similar to mine in that she had a sense that opportunities to voice our opinions as professionals are minimal and our views undervalued.

A further issue raised in the FG was that of our teaching being graded during the audit.

Tom: 'Even the whole grade thing … what's that about?'

Tara: 'Ofsted don't do that but we're still doing it just to give us that label…'

David: 'Well its utterly random as to what grades are awarded sometimes…'

Chris: 'So what … well, you know, it does make me think, what's the purpose of grading us if it's not necessary and if the feedback is that people are finding it unhelpful?'

Tara: 'To tell us whether we're good enough or not'

Chris: 'Well yeah, it doesn't …'

Fiona: '… it depends who you … who is looking at these results and their understanding of teaching and learning and, arguably, if you haven't got that understanding of teaching and learning then you need to rely on something you can quantify because that appears concrete and I think that that's it …'

Chris: 'But this is part of that bloody neoliberal sort of thing though isn't it … it … it yeah, it it's all part of that kind of idea about metrics and underlying that is not giving people the control and power and trusting them as professional people to be able to make judgements about things because obviously doing a half an hour looking at somebody once a year isn't going to reflect anything is it, it's stupid.'

The increasing pressure to provide evidence of good quality teaching and the measuring of this through the teaching audit fostered an environment in which positive student satisfaction with

teaching was felt to be emphasised more strongly than other aspects of university life such as the environment, resources, social life and opportunities and assistance with career choices. The emphasis created within me a sense of vulnerability and reinforced my sense of students' power being greater than my own/ours. The fact that the audit was communicated to us as a diktat added to the intensity of this feeling.

5.3.1 Similarities in our perceptions: the teaching audit

The FG reflected a unified perception of the audit and of the approach taken to implementing it. One similarity in our perceptions was that it was ineffective in developing our teaching and was little more than a '*tick box exercise*' for the institution. It was seen as yet another change, another pressure being foisted upon us and '*very much driven by metrics'.* There was a sense that it was calling into question the quality of our teaching and making us accountable for the success or otherwise of the institution. Rather than supporting us, the audit was seen as increasing the burden on us as teachers, a fact that university management failed to appreciate and could have mitigated, had they consulted with teachers on its implementation. In sum, the entire exercise was perceived solely as a tool through which we, the faculty, could be regulated, controlled and held accountable.

5.3.2 Differences in our perceptions: the teaching audit

Although the grading system was not perceived as helpful, the FG participants did not overtly express how it made them feel or regard themselves as teachers/professionals; rather, they saw it in more objective terms as limited in its capacity to help staff develop professionally due to its purpose not being sufficiently articulated beyond satisfying external pressures.

The differences in our perception of the audit itself were not remarkable as there appeared to be a collective sense that its implementation and design was unhelpful. What was evident was that the teaching audit had highlighted the fact of increased accountability: our practice and the NL imperative to which is was subjected had been brought into sharper focus due to the demands the audit placed on us.

5.4 RQ1 cont. How do I experience the pressures that arise within the consumer-focused NL HE context? The fee-paying student

The university had begun a process to realign its systems in such a way as to emphasise student feedback and prioritise the student voice. Students are now regarded within the university as

consumers, increasing institutional pressure to offer a student experience that reduces potential dissatisfaction. In the pages that follow, I use italics to describe my experience of a year managing a group of undergraduate students, and vignettes from my field notes to capture my phenomenal world. Using Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) model of personal agency, I then go on to reflect on the type of relationship that may or may not be brought to bear as a result of the aspects of (my) self that I identify during the course of the experience reported. The situational factor of having no permanent office in the main teaching building frames the account.

5.4.1 September 2017 – experiencing undergraduate year management in the department of education and community

I re-check the file containing a record of late enrollers; my 3 timetables and quick reference records of students' various seminar groups – just to be sure; I copy it from my USB stick and save it onto the hard drive of my laptop: lose it … game over! Several late enrollers have meant me having to do additional mini inductions. These are time-consuming and, frankly, irritating and I resent the additional pressure they create. I take pains to record late enrollers and the date of their inductions in case there is any comeback from the First Impressions Survey. I close my eyes, seeing, momentarily, lists of students' names behind my eyelids. A colleague enters the makeshift office. I feel too busy to talk but I say hello and hope they don't attempt to strike up a conversation. I'm tense. There's a pregnant pause, or so it seems – a mental holding of breath. I break: 'How are you?' the conversational floodgate opens; the clock ticks … I wish that I was someone who didn't feel obliged to ask how others feel. I mean why do I do that and create more of a burden for myself? Obligation and expectation course through my veins and to do/feel differently would take graft. Back to my laptop. Breathe out…

Sharp in breath; my notebook containing my 'to do list' isn't in my bag - I attempt to re-trace my movements up until this moment. I had moved between buildings twice yesterday, felt so tired I could have dropped. In my mind's eye I see the notebook on the desk in the 11th floor office at the other campus. My eyes close involuntarily, this time in disbelief, and in my mind's eye I see a chaotic mass of tasks. The notebook – from which I am now separated – is my psychological safety blanket, an extension of my mind. Losing it (the notebook – not my mind) is a daunting prospect.

The fatigue I experience due to the multitude of responsibilities and frequently hidden components that exist within my role can feel like a dangerous tipping point sometimes. To

understand this more, I watch the aspects of (my) self that come to bear in this situation: self as responsible, self as frustrated, self as anxious (SF1 interpretation: lines 1-8: Appendix 1).

In order to help analyse how I go about navigating the immediate university environment, I draw here on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) Chordal Model of Agency, identifying the various aspects of self (myself) identified in the data (Collinson, 2009) and which operate together in my experience. As will become evident, the selves identified appear to conflict with one another and do not always align well with my aim of fostering transformative relationships. Guided by Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) Chordal Model of Agency, I illustrate how some aspects of 'self' show themselves to be more influential than others depending on the situation and the meaning it has for me.

5.4.2 Self as responsible

As evident in section 5.4.1., it is often in my head that I should know exactly where the students in my assigned year group should be and, if I am not able to direct them appropriately, it would indicate, to myself and possibly others, that I'm not doing my job properly. The use of the notebook is symbolic of my sense of responsibility towards students and reflects an aspect of self that is connected to my upbringing through which I have acquired strategies to feel affirmed by being organised and thoughtful towards others. The use of the notebook aids my self-esteem. I take pains to do so in order to protect myself from students' potential criticism:

> *Field notes October 2017 - Action: spend time with a confused student who enrolled late (SF3 Field note entry part: 57-64)*

> *First appointment at 10am – a student who missed induction and feels 'confused' about 'everything'. I sit and chat to this student, who is in my year group, and try to establish the root of her confusion. I feel moderately irritated by having to talk these things through with the student as it appears from the nature of our conversation that she has not located the assignment remits on Canvas, which is a really simple thing to do. I show her step-by-step how to find assignments and hand-in dates.*

> *Aspects of self: self as responsible; self as empathetic; self as frustrated (SF3 Interpretation: lines 57-64)*

5.4.3 'Self as responsible' the past in the present and its impact on my attempts to foster transformative relationships

(My) self as responsible appears as I relate to students within the experiences described and, in my relating, the 'habits of mind' (Mezirow, 2006) internalised in childhood are activated. The way I relate to the environment and how I perceive and navigate the challenges it presents continues to be influenced by significant others (my parents), despite their not being physically present; in the words of Harris Perlman (1993:25), my 'mental life is heavily peopled'. Mirroring the relational style of my upbringing, (My) self as responsible is quietly authoritarian, albeit tempered with an urge to protect and support. The action that ensues from this internal set of relations that, when converging with the present context of university life, induce a strong urge to support others in order to feel a sense of control and protect myself from criticism. Whilst effective in helping me manage my year group, the influence of the past on the present encourages me to adopt a closed view of the students by positioning them as infantile and in need of constant direction and protection (Parekh, 2000). Consequently, the relational conditions that cultivate TL are impeded and require a different expectation on my part of the students and an ability to communicate this expectation to them (Perlman-Harris, 1993). Whist I recognise the need to develop this, there are matters others than those seated within myself that make it difficult for me to put an alternative approach into practice.

5.4.4 Self as anxious

The pressure to satisfy students influences my behaviour and my attempts to appear helpful. In some instances, I go out of my way to maintain positive perceptions of myself and inadvertently, those of the institution:

> *Field Notes October 2017 – Action: check in on year group and help move furniture (SF4 Field note entry part 32-40: Appendix 1)*
>
> *Straight after teaching at 12 o'clock, I move to room 117 MH to check on my first-year group of 62 students who have been allocated a room that is too small for them. This happened as a result of late enrolments due to students entering the programme through clearing. The room size issue has been concerning, especially in light of the current climate in which students are positioned as customers. It has taken several emails to the Dean of the department to try and resolve the issue. Unfortunately, it remains unresolved as an alternative to the room would mean splitting the group and a later finish for half of them. I have tried to be 'up-front' with the group about the issue by offering them the choice of staying in the smaller room with extra chairs or splitting the group – the majority chose the smaller room. As a*

result of this situation, I feel obliged to head down to the room at the start of the session every week to support the lecturer who is teaching them by bringing in extra chairs. I am conscious that it could be difficult for her to maintain a positive and compliant atmosphere within the group if we are not seen to be doing all we can to address the situation.

Aspects of self: self as responsible; self as anxious; self as frustrated (SF4 Interpretation: lines 32-40 Appendix 1)

5.4.5 'Self as anxious' past and future in the present and their impact on my attempts to foster transformative relationships

It is difficult to stop myself from doing too much for the students in the present HE context, where students have increased power due to their influence in teaching quality audits and where the expectations placed on lecturers have increased (Antoniadou, et al., 2015; Willmot, 1995). I am anxious; I fear criticism and/or negative feedback that will hold me to account. Coupled with feelings of responsibility (see sections 5.4.2. and 5.4.3) this anxious aspect of myself means that I find it difficult, in the present context, to achieve an appropriate balance between meeting students' needs while at the same time allowing sufficient room for the kind of uncertainty and ambiguity needed for students to engage in problem solving (Forrest et al., 2012; Banks, 2010). (My) self as anxious is driven, in part, by the desire to be competent, successful and acceptable, and the feelings of worry that accompany it are magnified by the university context, which I perceive to be potentially threatening. A sense of vulnerability is brought forth in situations where I perceive other peoples' (in this case, students') perceptions of me to be influenced by factors outside of my control such as room size, timetabling and resourcing. I invest considerable energy in avoiding a self that is regarded as unsupportive by students and my attempts to be supportive and accommodating at the start of the year constitute a strategy for helping engender positive student perceptions in a context where they hold considerable weight. I experience inner tension: I am conflicted between maintaining a sense of order for myself (self-preservation) and the security this brings, and the need to remain true to my aim of fostering transformative relationships.

5.4.6 The significance of my experience to transformation as quality

Here, drawing on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) Chordal Model of Agency, I have reflected on the aspects of self (myself) that are brought to bear in the university context and the significance for fostering transformative relationships of the actions which stem from them. The experiences that I have shared each illustrate my attempts to navigate the pressures that I experience within the university. Some of these pressures reflect challenges common within

most if not all teaching contexts (timetabling issues, room size etc.), while others, such as my instinct to keep students satisfied and minimise criticism, are a product of my perception of the university's culture and of my beliefs which, in turn, are a product of my personal history. I have illustrated (in sections 5.4.1 - 5.4.5 inclusively) the inner constraints that co-exist with contextual ones that bring about uniquely personal responses to NL pressures. Arguably, identifying such factors within oneself is challenging, open to self-deception and yet essential to finding a tolerable way forward for one's self in their professional life. It is this (often) hidden process that sits behind action and/or the inclination to challenge the status quo (Brookfield, 1999). With this in mind, I have brought to the fore, a teacher's lived experience (my own) in order to understand how perceptions of the immediate university context relate to ensuring quality in HE. I ask of myself: do my actions foster transformation as quality? The experience reported illustrates how the present HE context elicits self-protective behaviours in an increasing culture of accountability. Whilst I have identified that these internal restrictions, are, in part a product of my personal history, they are also of value to the university's emerging governance because students' *and* teachers' realities are significant to quality.

There is evidence in my account that the expectations of the fee-paying student-as-consumer as well as learner (Bosu *et al.,* 2018; Piller, 2012), and the impact of this on the audit and the conceptualisation of teaching quality, had begun to alter my perception of some students and the way I was inclined to communicate and connect with them. This, in turn, had implications for my ability to support their transformation. Far from being mutually growth fostering, my relationships were tipped toward me maintaining control, as far as was possible, over students' perceptions in order to maintain a sense of inner security. Had the internal practices being implemented, such as the audit, (see section 5.2-5.2.5) resembled a more supportive function, the psychological restriction I experienced, to some extent, have been reduced and more freedom experienced to facilitate transformative practices.

The autoethnographic process so far has enabled me to look critically at my position as a teacher and enabled me to begin forming an understanding of myself and my motivations as I navigate the NL environment. I have been able to pinpoint a seemingly obvious incongruity within my current approach with one that nurtures transformative relationships (that is my tendency to over-support due to anxiety) and I have been able to identify some of the factors responsible. These factors reside within me and externally within the university environment, the people who populate it and the social and political context. For example, students'

expectations clearly influence my actions, as do the university-wide expectations communicated to us through the teaching audit.

I now turn to the focus group data in order to explore my colleagues' perceptions of the pressures arising within the consumer-focused university. I then identify in what ways they are similar to and/or different from my own.

5.5 RQ2. In what way is my experience within the consumer-focused university similar to and different from that of my colleagues?

The impact of the student as consumer in terms of the institutional emphasis on their satisfaction was recognised in the FG. My meticulous approach to teaching large groups in response to the expectations of the student consumer (evident within my teaching reflection in section 6.17) was mirrored by one of the FG participants (David).

> *'It [the need to ensure satisfaction] makes me sure to do certain things; that I'm seen to always link back to the assignment, that I'm seen to sell every single thing I'm giving them so they understand the relevance of it rather than actually just trying to teach them and do sessions that might not always be enjoyable but make sure it pushes them and they learn. It's more about well they're going to want a bit of this and a bit of that and they're going to need to see the relevance of ... they want to know about the assignment ... so you're often giving them what they want, not what they need.'* (David)

The FG revealed the pressure that these teaching staff, like me, experience when trying to meet students' expectations and maintain their satisfaction:

> *'I certainly think there was an issue when it went to the higher fees back several years ago. There was a sense of, you know, they've now got this financial whip in their hands that they can crack, that they couldn't before, that maybe changed the dynamics somewhat.' (David)*

The shift in dynamics created by students as consumers of HE was recognised within the FG:

> *'... some of it changes the dynamics in terms of the students' expectations of their grade, doesn't it?'(Chris)*

> *Other FG participants: 'Yes.'*

The idea of staff being at the interface of policy and practice and a concern with maintaining quality also arose during the course of the FG:

'I think everybody experiences that don't they, so that's a way in which there's a whole discussion about grade inflation and our expectations as people who are doing assessments and how ethical that is. So I'm conscious of that in the sense of trying to give them the best experience, but also having to hold a line professionally. We have this discussion don't we, [nods toward other participants] in terms of things like *** (gaining a recognised professional qualification) so I think those two things go hand in hand and we are at the forefront of sort of making decisions about what grades they get, and that is related to how much money they're paying in their minds.' (Chris)

The attitudes of fee-paying students and the feeling that their expectations may be unrealistic was seen as raising pedagogical challenges:

Tara: 'I had a student say to me once that because they paid for this degree they shouldn't be expected to read anything and I should just tell them all the answers because they paid for it.'

David: 'Well, you see, I haven't got any time for that sort of thing. You wouldn't buy a gym membership and expect not to work out and it just somehow creates a wonderful body [laughter from others]; that's, that's insane ...'

Tom: 'But similarly there are probably a lot of people who go to the gym that think flip, you know, six sessions an' I'm gonna have, you know ... they're gonna struggle'.

David: 'Unrealistic expectations.'

Tom: 'Yes.'

Chris: 'But I think, all of that ... we're at the interface of that aren't we [affirmation from FG: 'Yes'] between those policies and sort of organisational structure and requirements of us and then the students, and those two meet where we are don't they.'

The FG was unanimous in that all participants saw themselves as being at the *'interface'* of external policies, organisational structure and students' expectations, and reference was made to the adoption of coping strategies in order to manage the tension between policy and practice, in particular:

'I think cus' it seems like SO much that I haven't got control over and I try to make it as I'd want it to be but you end up feeling so powerless in it that that's a really uncomfortable emotion isn't it, so you disassociate yourself from it and think well I'm just gonna do what I can do because it's uncomfortable to feel that you are so powerless in it all. We can't really make much difference to a lot of things.' (Tara)

'I think that it's almost that maybe it's ... it's selfish, but to do the best you can and then that's your conscience clear – you know, that's how I feel; I've got to do the

116

best I can. There are some pressures that mean you can't always do exactly what you want to, but I think generally if you can live with what you're doing is to your best ability, taking into account everything else that's going on, then, then I have to make peace with that.' (Fiona)

These responses suggest that while my peers experienced tension due the contextual limitations that impacted on their ideal practice, they had come to accept these as a way of protecting themselves from feelings of guilt. They were doing what they could under the circumstances.

David also described the feeling of tension as a consequence of feeling under an obligation to provide a level of service to students in order to keep them satisfied and avoid complaints:

'So even if it's not your fault and you're the representative in the room and maybe representing something that you don't think's good enough for them or could be complained about, I still feel that I'm the one who has to stop that happening, and has to show that what … you know, that we're … we're doing enough, I guess, that we're, we're justifying the fees that they're paying, or will at least pay in the future, possibly, for some of them.' (David)

David doesn't talk specifically about anything that he has done that was *'not good enough'*, but what he does say suggests that he places responsibility on himself to keep his fee-paying students satisfied and minimises the potential for complaints: '*I'm the one who has to … show that what … you know, that we're, we're doing enough'*. David's words emphasise the issue of teaching staff being at the forefront of a wider organisational culture where there is a strong focus on student satisfaction, but also his awareness of the broader organisation's vulnerability to the wider policy context of consumerism. His willingness to act as a buffer for things '*that could be complained about'* suggests that he has a constant awareness of the students' position as consumers as well as learners and this colours how he communicates with them as he responds to the pressure of having keep them on side. How exactly he achieves a balance between protecting himself and ensuring that he can deliver what he feels is a good quality product is not clear. David's comments reflect an awareness of the responsibility of the organisation to provide value for money and to respect the considerable investment made by students who have chosen to participate in HE.

While David is concerned with being seen to provide value for money, Tara feels less of an obligation to teach in a way that she considers would represent value for money. Tara does not place blame on herself or on the students for doing what she perceives to be a less than ideal job, and she rationalises this on the basis of organisational factors:

> *'I feel guilty sometimes that I don't feel we are giving them value for money. But I feel like that's bigger than me and that's kind of how we operate as a university, and there are lots of things that are outside of my control ... I'm often put in a position where I'm not actually able to deliver them what I think they deserve for their money, but it's sort of outside of my control ... I'm not put in a position to do my job to the best of my ability.' (Tara)*

Although Tara states that she 'sometimes' feels guilty, she distances herself from such feelings by locating the problem in factors outside of herself. Unlike me (and David), she opts out of taking on personal responsibility for ensuring value for money.

Expanding on David's issue of teaching staff '*being the representatives in the room*' and Tara's sense of *'not being put in a position to do my job properly'*, Chris refers to wider systems within the university and the pressure she experiences internally in some situations because of them:

> *'Well, that team meeting was just an example of that, wasn't it (referring to the meeting that had taken place immediately prior to the focus group)? So there were about four different requirements that we now have in addition to things that are just not managed in a sort of coherent way that generate even more work that's got nothing to do with actually teaching and learning has it. But we're all required to, you know, have to do things at the last minute that we're probably ... I mean, I've gone into things and I've done the best I can, but internally I've been kind of squirming at the sort of last-minute nature of it, which is horrible!' (Chris)*

Like David, Chris signals inner discomfort at having to implement organisational policy without necessarily believing that it is beneficial to the students. Her remark emphasises how additional requirements and new initiatives can detract from our ability to focus on providing quality teaching and learning and, like Tara, she shows frustration at what she regards as the less than satisfactory quality of what she is able to provide.

Within the FG a range of issues emerged that illuminated the pressures experienced when trying to ensure students both receive and perceive that they are getting value for money from their education. Across the FG, the issue of value for money arose in relation to ideas about quality, professionalism and accountability as we navigate institutional demands. The sense of us as teachers being at the interface of policy, the organisation and student expectations was aptly expressed by Chris in terms of the need to 'hold a line' and preserve a level of quality that is threatened by pressures associated with the expectations of students and by factors within the organisation itself, most saliently concerns with student satisfaction and the impact of this on reputation, recruitment and performance on TEF measures. These pressures frequently left teachers conflicted and adopting different strategies in an effort to resolve them

and it reflects the kind of inner conflict teachers can experience during a process of organisational change (see, for example, Pollard, 2008; Van den Berg, 2002).

Here I identify the similarities and differences between my experience of the consumer-focused university and that of my colleagues.

5.5.1 Similarities in our perceptions of the consumer-focused university

The fact of students as consumers was universally acknowledged, as was the accompanying '*shift in dynamics*' that had occurred as a result of the power students assumed in that role. While student expectations were something that we all recognised as needing to be managed, another theme that emerged and which created a personal tension for us was that of managing *institutional* pressures such as ensuring adequate standards of achievement, meeting the expectations of fee-paying students, and clarifying our own understanding of 'value for money'. We were all concerned with the issue of quality and being able to provide what we each considered good quality teaching and learning as an essential part of the student experience, yet a collective understanding of quality was not evident – perhaps unsurprisingly, given the contested nature of quality evident in the literature (Harvey and Green, 1993). There was universally felt frustration and cynicism regarding both institutional impositions such as the teaching audit and the apparent lack of understanding of the additional challenges created by it, as well as a lack of regard for quality in respect of teachers' academic work and the preparation required in discipline-based practice. This placed us under considerable strain as we sought to maintain professional standards.

Various emotions such as dissatisfaction, resentment, powerlessness and anxiety were manifested among the participants, with my own emotional response being most closely aligned with David's in that we both experienced a need to protect ourselves and yet felt uncomfortable with the approach we took in order to do so. Our strategy consisted of over-supporting, over-planning and over-explaining teaching content to students in order to make certain that they understood what was being taught, its purpose, and the reason for the pedagogical approach adopted.

5.5.2 Differences in our perceptions of the consumer-focused university

While different stakeholders (teachers, students, managers, external regulators) may have different ideas about what counts as value for money (Bosu *et al.,* 2018), from the focus group discussion I was able to distil an overall sense that, in the minds of teachers, providing students with learning that reflected value for money had to do with the freedom and ability to practice

in the manner of our choosing, without political and institutional pressures making themselves felt. This was evident in comments such as '*not being in a position to do my job to the best of my ability*' '*I end up giving them want they want and not what they need*' and '*what do you do when the impossible is being asked of you?*'.

There were differences in the way each of us mediated the pressure to respond to the institutional imperative to provide value for money, the needs and expectations of students, and our own values. For example, while there was a general feeling of guilt at being unable to provide value for money by teaching in the way that we each believed to be appropriate and efficacious, the degree to which individual teachers allowed themselves to engage with this feeling differed. One participant (Tara) had decided not to take responsibility for those instances when she did not provide what *she* perceived to be value for money, choosing to see it as the institution's responsibility – a product of their policies or perspective and thus not *her* problem. Rather than feeling acutely responsible for ensuring quality and concerned that students perceive their experience to be satisfactory, Tara appeared to set clear demarcation lines around what she considered possible, given the circumstances. She did not feel the need to compensate for institutional factors that prevent her from creating what she considers to be optimal learning situations, and in this she differed not only from me but also from David and Chris. This does not mean that she was immune to feelings of dissatisfaction and pressure; indeed, she was aware that she could do more to provide better quality teaching but appeared to manage better and/or be less affected by such feelings/pressures.

The differences in how FG participants made sense of themselves amidst organisational change reflected differences in our responses to the students and their expectations and in what we felt it was necessary to do in order to protect ourselves from potential criticism from the students themselves and senior management. For example, when teaching, we each recognised the idea of being '*the representative in the room*' but our experience of this was different. For David, pressures arose from the institution's concern with student achievement and his sense of personal accountability in this regard. Avoiding being struck with senior management's metaphorical whip was paramount for him. David experienced dissatisfaction with his teaching because he felt that it was largely a product of constantly striving to avoid negative consequences in terms of student or senior management complaints rather that what was pedagogically desirable and efficacious.

The consumer focused environment and the audit appeared to lead to teachers into adopting a variety of self-preservation tactics that served as a kind of psychological defence against the increased pressure of accountability and which operated to maintain their sense of security and belief that they were doing their best. There were differences in the psychological strategies adopted. For example, two teachers (Tara and Fiona) established a firm demarcation between themselves and the demands of the university. They fenced off (psychologically) what they regarded as being their responsibility from that which they perceived to fall outside their role; for example, the numerous social issues accompanying students into the classroom and the effect of class size on learning students' names. In contrast, other teachers (David and I) were more inclined to adopt practices that we felt would be well received by students, such as being highly supportive and purposely drawing students' attention to the quality of what we were delivering to them in our teaching. Such tactics can be out of kilter with the notion of quality as transformation. For example, I realise that the need employ such tactics in order to protect myself risks compromising my ability to foster the kind of mutuality that Miller (1987) regards as essential to establishing transformative relationships. In pursuit of such mutuality, the teacher needs to remove much of their professional façade (such as the tactics I have described) in order to build trusting relationships through which often difficult and challenging subject matter can be tackled in the manner described in Chapter 2.

My data illustrate how a teacher's instinct toward self-preservation may be accentuated by the context in which they teach, particularly where there exists a need to ensure good results and a positive student perception, for example. The impact of the wider university context on teachers' ability and/or inclination to foster relationships that involve challenging students' habits of mind may leave them exposed to potential criticism. In a hyper-vigilant context of accountability there is a danger of such relationships and the attempts to foster them becoming a casualty of approaches focused primarily on 'playing it safe' by maintaining the status quo. Such circumstances are concerning because they enable everyday practices to continue the oppression by denying NTSs, who may otherwise have had an opportunity to experience transformation through their educational experience, the opportunity of doing do so.

5.6 RQ1 cont. How do I experience the pressures that arise due to the social demographic within the neoliberal higher education context?

My attempts to support the University's diverse student body are a key element that shapes my experience as a teacher and the pressures I feel. Here, I use vignettes to illustrate encounters with various students each with quite particular personal circumstances that undoubtedly shape their own experience within the University. I reflect on my action and on the interacting factors that influence it (e.g. immediate material factors such as space, resources and class size; personal factors; and external contextual factors such as the need to maintain student satisfaction) and I consider the type of relationship that may or may not come into being through my action. My first story focuses on mental health, which arose within my field notes and in the focus group as a salient aspect of students' experience.

5.6.1 Students' mental health

Field notes 30 November 2017 – Action reformulate lesson content/prioritise a support meeting with a distressed student (SF3 Field note entry parts: 12-30)

Monday morning was spent responding to emails and preparing for the Learning Skills lecture to take place between 1-3pm. However, an additional pressure on this day was that I needed to see one of the students in the group who had disclosed an attempt to take her own life the previous week. While the incident had been reported to student services and she had been signposted to the relevant support services, the plan agreed between the safeguarding manager and me was for me to see her asap in order to work out how best to support her with her work. I was very apprehensive about meeting with this student as I am not trained in talking to people who feel suicidal. It was hard for me to observe this student in the group prior to my meeting with her, knowing the trauma she was experiencing. I had planned to finish the lesson half an hour earlier than it should do in order to make space to see her, otherwise she would have to wait a whole hour afterwards because of my individual tutorials starting straight after the lecture. Students were highly likely to turn up for their slots as I had notified them via a reminder message the previous day, Sunday afternoon (along with writing a subject board report and answering various emails).

The lesson went quite badly. There was a group of students who were persistently chatting while I was speaking. I firmly asked them to stop talking, which they did, but I can count the number of times I've ever done this in the past 6 years on one hand, so it seemed like a big deal to me. The session, prepared by my colleague, originally contained 49 slides on various

types of cognitive bias. I knew that I would not be able to deliver the content at the pace or in the style required to engage students. To combat this, I had whittled the presentation down to 12 slides and planned to include an interactive activity to stimulate critical thinking (which in the end did not happen). I'm sure this lesson would actually have been deemed poor by the new audit standards. I finished the lesson early and managed to get into a side room to meet with the student. I felt cautious in how I was communicating with her and I had to try and switch off my own feeling of stress and discomfort hanging over from the experience of the lesson. I actually think I did this quite well and listening to her was easier than being stood in front of the class. We got disturbed after 15 mins. and had to move to another room in which we stayed for the best part of an hour. I listened hard to how she spoke about her challenges and agreed to meet with her the next day to look over her work – I thought doing this would be helpful in giving her a sense of security that she was on the right track and that it may be a good focus for her.

Aspects of self: self as fearful; self as overwhelmed; self as responsible; self as inadequate; self as failing (SF3 Interpretation: Lines 31-39)

5.6.2 The experience of supporting students with and without the prospect of being observed

I am proud that I was able to be psychologically and emotionally 'present' for this student during the tutorial. However, I find it disturbing that I find it easier listening to a suicidal student than I do standing in front on a class of students with a lesson going badly and with knowledge of the impending audit clouding my mind. Such experiences are strongly influenced by the anticipation of consequences (Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Lawrence 1999). I fear that imperfections that occur as a natural part of the teaching process, and that are often helpful in developing effective strategies (Roberge 2009), may lead to professional failure. Such an anticipated consequence induces a tension in me that frequently contributes to teaching being a stressful activity for me. The audit has a strong psychological impact that limits my practice and, in particular, my freedom to create the conditions needed to develop and foster transformative relationships (see sections 2.4 and 2.6). I find it intriguing – even troubling – that although I am neither experienced nor proficient in supporting students with severe mental health concerns, listening to the suicidal student in this instance is more tolerable for me than teaching because there is not an impending prospect of being observed and I do not have to perform according to specific criteria. I was able to be intuitive and experience uncertainty in supporting her without concern of professional failure.

Later, and in the weeks that followed, it played on my mind that the way on which I managed the situation with the suicidal student and my interactions with her could subsequently influence her to attempt to take her own life and that within a culture of accountability, I could somehow be held responsible. This itself induced considerable anxiety related to anticipation of consequences that were arguably outside of my control, but the regulatory atmosphere of the university clouded my ability to separate students' personal responsibility for their actions and situations for which I may be held accountable by the institution. Being at the interface of policy, institutional structures and regulatory mechanisms such as I have described, and students who, in this case, had a particular set of needs, contributed to feelings of exhaustion, vulnerability and resistance to the wider university culture.

Another salient issue that arose in my field notes and in the focus group was the cultural diversity of students and the fact that, for many, English was not their first language; as such, there was a need for them to adjust to a new culture alongside the demands of study and a range of learning-related needs. Below, I illustrate the diversity of students and situations and I recount how I have gained knowledge of students with experiences similar and different to my own and how doing so has shaped my perception of their needs and influenced my experience. Guided by Chang's typology of Others, I explore how these similarities and differences are significant to my attempts to foster transformative relationships. I explain some of the difficulties I experience when attempting to support some of these students and the residual emotion for my own experience as a NTS that is stirred during the course of my interactions.

5.6.3 Mature students (Ava and Freda)

Field notes October 2017 – Action: Spend time talking to students informally after providing support for their assignments (SF3 Field notes part 8-11) Aspects of self: self as a learner, self as similar (SF3 Interpretation lines 8-11).

"Today you have a choice… (I address my Friday afternoon seminar group) you can stay in class for one-to-one assignment support or you can have an early finish and leave now"

The class empties and just a few students remain.

I'm relieved; I don't like this seminar because it contains material that is not within my usual area of knowledge - plus, it's on a Friday and that pretty much kills the enthusiasm of many of the younger students and erodes the patience of others already spent from a whole day of lectures.

Ava and Freda have stayed. They are both mature, African women with EAL. I sit down with them and begin discussing their assignments.

Suddenly, I am sitting at the table in my small two-bedroom semi-detached house. It's dark and quiet. Everyone is asleep. My eyes are heavy as I check the time on the corner of the laptop: 11:35pm. I glance at the papers in front of me; journal articles heavily annotated and Putman's Social Capital highlighted in my notes…

Images of myself sat studying past midnight whilst my children slept are rekindled when I see Ava's notebook in which she has diligently dissected a theoretical model of health promotion. I can sense she's tired. I also sense her dedication, her motivation and her unerring determination to do this - for herself and her family.

My heart stirs and the fact that it's Friday afternoon and I'm exhausted from the week's events matters less than it did.

5.6.4 Perceived similarity with others as a protective factor within an increasingly challenging context

The residual emotions connected to my own experience as a mature NTS acts as a protective factor within an increasingly challenging context. I perceive Ava's incentive for study to be similar to my own and this leads me to regard her as an 'other of similarity' sharing my values (Chang, 2008: 26). This personal factor at the intersection of the university context and wider HE sector is important for understanding the range of factors that support teachers' ability to withstand a demanding and increasingly regulatory university context. Chang explains how the level of existential threat presented by others is reduced in situations where there are perceived and/or actual similarities (p. 26). In this case it is the opportunity to spend time with students and to gain insight into their lives that induces a sense of connection which is motivating and energising – characteristics that are beneficial to the fostering of transformative relationships, which require courage and resilience (Edwards & Richards, 2002; Harris- Perlman 1993; Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012).

5.6.5 Prior learning experiences and English as a second language (Lala)

I inadvertently hear the stories of students who have had very different life experiences to mine and to those of the other students in the class.

> *5 November 2017 Personal journal excerpt:*
>
> *In a seminar today, something in its content prompted one student to share an experience with the class. As she began, I intuitively knew that what she had to say would be lengthy and detract from the actual planned seminar task, and possibly be irritating to other class members, but once she had started, it was evident from her body language and emotional cues that she wanted (needed) to continue. Despite the potential frustration it may evoke in other class members, I allowed her to do so as I judged that it would be*

insensitive to cut her off. I reasoned that we could use any frustrations as a talking point about how we support each other in the learning process. After all this was Lala's learning space as much as theirs.

The experience she shared with the class was one of subordination and humiliation in a prior educational context in which she had been told that her aspirations were unrealistic due to her language proficiency at the time. It seemed to me that this incident was a primary motivator for her to undertake her degree in order to prove that the person who had undermined her previously was wrong about her.

This tugs at me because it makes me think about how influential educators are and their impact on students and their futures.

5.6.6 Fostering mutual understand and avoiding otherness

This experience was important to me because I was able, in this impromptu situation, to transcend my usual anxiety induced by the impeding teaching observations because it occurred during an evening session in which no teaching observation would be likely to take place. I was able to make an in-the-moment decision in a manner that opened up, rather than closed down, the possibility to create the conditions of ambiguity and uncertainty so key to transformative learning. My experience of this situation was intense but I was able to focus my attention on managing its complexity with an inner sense of competence and willingness to tolerate risk in order to further learning. Significantly, the situation presented an opportunity for greater 'empathetic understanding' (my own and that of the students present) to take root. Such instances offer transformative potential because they invite others to put aside their own framework and see others' experiences within another's framework (Geertz, 1984, p. 126). In the context of WP, such instances are essential; they go beyond mere access to HE to offer an opening for wider issues of oppression to be aired and acknowledged within the educational process, thus offering a platform for transformative learning. Furthermore, allowing students to air their experiences sends a strong message about what and who is valued. Where a person such as Lala may otherwise have experienced a continuation of 'otherness' and/or disconnection had she been shut down or managed superficially, this situation brought forth an opportunity to strengthen and foster the relational mutuality that sits behind transformative potential (Edwards & Richards, 2002; Miller, 1987).

5.6.7 International students, cultural adjustment, language proficiency and support (Suki)

In an entirely different experience, but no less illustrative of students' wide-ranging circumstances and needs, I grapple with supporting an international Master's student who is struggling:

Field notes October 2017 – Action: Help a student in my MA year group who is new to the university and for whom English is a second Language to find information; look over work when there is insufficient time to do so properly; respond as kindly and honestly as possible (SF2 field notes part 20-24). Aspects of self: self as obliged, self as frustrated, self as resentful, self as dissatisfied, self as angry, self as alien (SF2 Interpretation: lines 20-24).

The balance tips in some circumstances: when pressure overrides the ability to make good judgements; when kindness clouds the truth of a situation; and when opportunities shouldn't necessarily be taken just because they can be. In the following story I grapple with balancing these factors.

It feels literally inhumane sometimes the degree of student exposure I experience within a working day. Often a mere crumb of myself is all there is left. Today I am an **opportune crumb for those who happen upon me**. *Suki is watching the crumb; I can feel her eyes bearing into my present interaction with Shaguptha, with whom I have just spent a painful hour deciphering her written work in the open plan landing area. Shaguptha leaves…The seat opposite me is immediately occupied by Suki. My prediction that this would happen was correct. I experience mild irritation.*

Suki is a mousey student whose eyes glint with vulnerability. This unassuming mouse, ferocious in her neediness, may consume my last crumb of energy today. I smile at her, hoping she can't see my fatigue. If she has, she doesn't show it.

In English that is difficult to follow and in a manner that appears overtly worried, she asks me if I can explain to her the online portal; she is confused about how to find the terms dates there. Intuition tells me that she's struggling to manage the transition, hers and her family's, into the UK. I don't mind helping her but the intense neediness she emits and her unclear language makes it's hard going. I am aware that she has recently received some feedback on a draft assignment and that it has knocked her confidence. Unexpectedly, she produces a draft of the work and places it in front of me. I can feel her need for reassurance. In fact, I am a prisoner to it; a response other than a supportive one feels to me lacking in compassion.

Foolishly, I find myself looking at the work she has placed in front of me. There is not time for me to do this meaningfully and my ability to respond to the complexity of the situation is impaired by my low energy and by my reluctance to allow her to feel unsupported. Inwardly I experience guilt because, at a glance, my reading of her work tells me that she is going to struggle to meet the requirements of the course due to her language proficiency. Knowing her situation, I am conflicted between being honest in my response to her draft and providing her with disingenuous reassurance. I feel annoyed that this situation has arisen in the first place, in part, due to an admissions

127

process that does not account for the reality experienced by some international students who do not have the academic capital to navigate the demands of postgraduate study. I feel empathy for Suki and I wonder, where do we go from here?

5.6.8 Students as unknown others

Despite being the manager of her programme of study, I did not teach Suki and felt that I was not able to build a proper relationship with her. Although I believe that she experienced our interaction as supportive, the possibility for me to gain real insight into her circumstances was limited. In part this was due to the language barrier, which meant that some aspects of the transformative relationship were difficult to enact; for example, the dialogue required for mutual understanding (Jordan *et al*. 1991; Miller, 1987). Because Suki's situation as an international student was potentially quite isolating, she could be described as an unknown other as a result of any similarities and differences between Suki, myself and her peers remaining largely obscure.

In this section, I have described my experience of differing student needs and backgrounds within the NL HE environment. Each experience (one part of an ongoing set of experiences) reveals aspects of myself and provides an indication of how I approach my work with students whilst negotiating the pressures of NL, and I analyse my learning from these encounters in chapter 6 (Learning from the autoethnographic process). Next I turn to my personal beliefs and how these relate to the relationships I foster with students.

5.7 The teacher-student relationship and my personal beliefs

In this section, I evaluate experiences within my personal history and learner autobiography that have helped shape my beliefs regarding the student-teacher relationship, with the intention of gaining a better understanding of how my learner history colours my current experiences and my relationships with students. To help me assess the extent of any congruence between the beliefs I articulate regarding transformative relationships and my actual practice, I draw on my field notes and refer to three encounters with students.

5.7.1 Encounter one: 'Aqsa'

Different and seemingly opposing aspects of myself are brought into being through my encounter with Aqsa; namely self as non-traditional student and self as privileged. These aspects influence how I relate to the other within the relationship.

> *October 2017 action - Spend 1 hour with a student in an informal conversation (SF2 Field note entry parts 5-13: Appendix 1)*

I often marvel at the vast social difference between 'Aqsa' and me. Our race, age, culture, religion and background are very different and yet I experience a strong sense of connection when talking with her. I think this may be because I identify with her struggle and the role education has played in helping her overcoming it. Her struggle relates strongly to my own learner autobiography which is characterised by completing HE as a mature student whilst in employment and supporting three young children (self as NTS; self as struggling). My educational journey bares a sense of hardship, as does Aqsa's, albeit for different reasons. Talking with Aqsa reconnects me with my own experience as a NTS. I am aware that Aqsa's struggle is very different to mine and that she has experienced the additional issue of poverty and teaching herself to read in English as a child (self as privileged). I admire the tenacity she displays towards her studies despite her having had a less advantageous starting point than many (than me) (self as tenacious).

Aspects of self: self as non-traditional student; self as having experienced struggle; self as tenacious and determined (SF2 interpretation: lines 5-13: Appendix 1)

Over a period of years talking with Aqsa in tutorials, our relationship has become 'meaningful' (Harris-Perlman, 1993:24). Despite the considerable social differences between us, I have an implicit understanding of her emotional world (Thompson, 2009) and despite the difference in our ages and my position as her teacher there is a sense of mutuality between us, of mutual positive regard and enjoyment in one another's presence. Even with Aqsa being a fee-paying student and thus symbolic of threat due to her consumer status, my time with her is enlivened with the emotion that comes from genuine relationship and a sense of connectedness (Harris-Perlman, 1993). As I strive to negotiate what is a demanding role, this relationship energises me and reminds me that students are not a faceless body of demanding consumers. Through our relationship, Aqsa, who could potentially feel alienated by traditional university culture, is able to experience increasing confidence in herself as a learner. The mutual positivity experienced in our relationship was evident in the very fact and nature of our conversation after the formal work of the tutorial had ended. The relationship represents a 'genuine encounter' (Chang, 2008:27) in which both student and lecturer are engaged in something enjoyable that occurs outside the domain of the tutorial itself. Importantly, taking time to listen to Aqsa's story has afforded me greater 'Verstehen' (Chang, 2008:27), or empathetic understanding (Geertz, 1984). I have a stronger appreciation of how it is possible to occupy a position of both similarity and difference in relation to others and of the significance of emotional connection in strengthening relationships and bridging difference (Chang, 2008).

5.7.2 Student two: 'Zaina'

Zaina is a mature part-time postgraduate student whose first language is French. By the end of the week I am exhausted, yet my own experience as a NTS motivates me to work beyond regular hours to provide feedback for her before the weekend.

> *October 2017 Action – work beyond contracted hours (SF4 Field note entry parts 1-3)*
>
> *Head to quiet classroom, eat sandwich, begin looking at 44-page Masters draft and resign myself to staying at work until I have completed a set of feedback for this draft and sent it to the student. I work solidly on it for an hour. At around 5pm my son phones. He left for university 2 weeks ago and is thinking of coming home this weekend - mostly because it is my dad's (his grandad's) 70th birthday. He decides to come home tomorrow (Sat). I send draft to student and I leave work at gone 6pm – I'm extremely tired. The job is completed but it has resulted in a late finish on a Friday. The coming weekend is very busy*
>
> *Aspects of self: Self as a non-traditional student; self as determined; self as morally obliged; self as frustrated (SF4 Interpretation: lines 1-3)*

Like Zaina, I have lived experience of managing study, paid work and looking after children. As a learner myself, returning to study at the age of 26, in low-paid employment and with three young children, I engendered a fairly typical non-traditional learner identity (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). In some respects, I continue to possess this identity now as I work as a full-time teacher in HE, study for my PhD and still maintain considerable parental and financial responsibilities. Zaina's situation resonates with me. I imagine she has limited time to focus on her work and that receiving the feedback before the weekend would be helpful to her. This influences my action. By the time I come to read her work it is late afternoon on a Friday. I feel frustrated by the fact that, until now, there has been neither mental nor physical space to read her work and complete my feedback.

Aqsa and Zaina are perceived by the teacher (me) as persons of similarity to me due to their backgrounds as NTSs and their response to the struggle it presents. I see them as sharing 'similar values and standards' to myself in relation to education, despite them belonging to different community groups (Chang, 2008:26).

I view Ziana as a person of similarity due to her circumstances. I identify with her as a NTS and regard her as possessing 'like me' characteristics (Rose, 2012:37). This influences my behaviour towards her. I prioritise providing her feedback over my fatigue. Zaina is not

required to attend classes as she is nearing completion of her dissertation. She is, therefore, not embedded in a particular year group and is thus separate from the day-to-day culture of the university. My usual fears regarding potentially negative student feedback are not felt in relation to Zaina. Rather than being driven by fear, my action towards her is defined by how I imagine it to impact on her personhood. I draw on my own experience as a learner, when the behaviour of teachers influenced my confidence level and sense of security and competence in the learning process. I identify with Zaina and have a sense of sharing membership with her of the NTS learning community. My action is influenced by this sense of connection and by the loyalty I feel towards an 'other of similarity' (Chang, 2008:21).

5.7.3 Student three: 'Ahamna'

October 2017 Action – Spend a lot of time talking to a new first year student (SF3 Field note entry parts: 1-3: Appendix 1)

Spent a lot of time this morning talking to a new first-year student who has a sensory impairment and EAL. I wonder how she will cope on the course although she appears to be very resilient. More so than far less challenged students (and more so than I would have been at her age). She tells me about her family who she visited in south America this summer. She speaks with heart and I am genuinely moved by her courage to move to the UK and pursue this course. I hope she does well.

Aspects of self: self as inferior; self as responsible; self as puzzled; self as judgemental (SF3 Interpretation: lines 1-3: Appendix 1)

I prioritise time with this student as I feel concerned about her being on the programme away from home. The time I spend with her is born from a sense of responsibility. I have set up an early tutorial as I want her to know that she has a person she can come to if needed. She is eighteen and I treat her as I would want my sons to be treated at their universities (self as responsible). However, the main driver that keeps my interest sustained is that I am genuinely fascinated by her ability to manage away from her support network, having English as a second language and a hearing impairment (self as puzzled). In talking to her, I find myself revisiting my younger self and contrasting my own development with hers.

I perceive Ahamna, who displays confidence and resilience at a young age, as a person of difference, as her characteristics contrast with mine at a similar age. In this respect, Ahamna is 'a stranger who poses and operates by a different frame of reference' (Chang, 2008:26). However, my approach to the relationship is engendered with positive regard and an investment in getting to know the person of the student. Although my relationship with Ahamna is not

'meaningful' in the same way as it is with Aqsa, it is imbued with the acceptance and support that characterises the transformative relationship (Harris-Perlman, 1993). I am curious to get to know Ahamna and I respond to her with an interest to learn from her perspective, even though she possesses 'not like me' qualities (Rose, 2012:37).

These three encounters illustrate how different aspects of myself are evoked in my encounters with students and how some of my prior experience influences my approach to supporting them. Interestingly, each encounter demonstrates how dynamics of similarity and difference operate as a part of my action towards them. Having reflected on my relationships with Aqsa, Ziana and Ahamna, I have clarified some of the motivating factors that underpin my relationships and behaviours towards students. These encounters have stimulated me to seek further insight into factors that shape my beliefs about the student-teacher relationship. With this in mind, I now look into my personal and educational history.

5.8 Experiences related to my personal history that have shaped my beliefs about the student-teacher relationship.

In my encounter with Ahamna, I feel the weight of my limitations, themselves a product of my own educational journey – a journey characterised by vocational study from age sixteen and then a direct transition into employment as an eighteen-year-old in a local, low-paid childcare job whilst still living at home. The fact that I commit so much time to ensuring that this student feels supported is driven by an assumption that she is experiencing her move to the UK and her start at university as daunting, and that she is therefore in need of help. I realise that this is based largely on how I imagine myself to have felt and how I would feel now in similar circumstances. Having made a connection with her, I sense that she will contact me if needed and this makes me feel more relaxed about her being in my year group. While my interactions with her highlight for me the differences between us, I also experience a strong sense of connection and similarity with regard to the things she has chosen to share about her family. I enjoy the time spent with her and I do not experience it as a hardship, despite the time it takes.

Having followed a non-traditional pathway after leaving school, I regarded the opportunity to complete a university degree as a chance to prove that I was of value to other people. My thoughts about participating in HE were connected to ideas about a university education belonging to people more competent and of greater worth than myself. This was heavily influenced and reinforced by my parents, both of whom were teachers and who frequently

132

stressed the value of education throughout my childhood. My experience of HE was transformational as it exposed me to concepts and theories about lifespan development, childhood, sociology and psychology that helped me make sense of myself. This enabled me to examine and begin reformulating assumptions and beliefs that had been established during my childhood (Lawrence & Cranton, 2009, Mezirow, 2006) and which led to an internalisation of feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.

My sense of inadequacy as a learner (self as inferior) which, I have come to realise, has shaped my whole identity, stems from my childhood and adolescence. I was starkly compared with my two older sisters who were regarded as being competent in the traditional sense of being able to engage in academic work. Conversely, both my parents described me as being 'not very academic and different to the others' (my sisters); and to me 'different' was a euphemism for not being very clever. My two older siblings followed the traditional A-level route before progressing to HE, something my parents had decided was not a safe option for me due to my being non-academic and different from my sisters. The decision for me to leave school at age 15 and to take a nursery nursing course was made for me by my parents, without my proper consent, but I could offer no alternative at the time as I did not have the maturity needed to identify one. Years of displacement followed as I was out of step with my peers, the majority of whom had pursued A-levels. I was an 'outlier' who did not fit the system. I didn't know who I was and came to define myself by my sense of inferiority.

My opportunity to participate in HE eleven years later opened a space for my transformation. I was now a young adult, a wife and a mother of three children.

Rather than being attributable to a particular individual, my experience of transformation through HE came about as a result of circumstances, opportunity, and the content of the programme I was studying. The chance to participate in HE was provided by my workplace at the time. As well as being circumstantial, there were particular individuals who were influential and who were significant in changing the view I had of myself at that time. My course tutor's confidence in me as a learner was unerring and it was through my relationship with her that I began thinking about myself as capable, an idea I had previously been unable to entertain. I am aware that this significant relationship remains active within my current professional identity. It gave me insight into how self-regard and confidence can be changed through education and relationships, and I strive to have a positive influence in this way on my own students.

My belief in fostering transformative relationships is strongly influenced by my adolescence, during which I was not given the opportunity to make my own choices about my future; choices were made for me rather than with me. I was not encouraged to be an autonomous, self-directed individual (Deci and Ryan, 2012), not because my parents were bad people, but due to their desire to protect me from harm and to shield me from any emotional pain that might have been brought about through my experiencing failure. Nevertheless, the approach they took to parenting was quietly authoritarian and reflected a relational pattern through which I learned to be disempowered. My lived experience since and my subsequent journey towards self-realisation – of which my own HE experience is a major part – has strongly influenced my belief that the teacher-student relationship should be a transformative one through which the conditions for personal growth are cultivated and both teacher and student are liberated.

Having presented my own experience of relating to a range of students attending my university, and having also reflected on my beliefs about the teacher-student relationship, I now present my colleagues' experience of students of the university and the way on which it aligns – or not – with my own.

5.9 RQ2 cont. In what way is my experience of the students attending the university similar to and different from that of my colleagues?

5.9.1 Difficult Learner backgrounds

One focus group participant (Ruth) explains how she perceives students' past experience of education to be frequently negative as a result of fragile learner identities that can be difficult to respond to:

> *'I think that you can't get the best of the year until they trust you and there's a massive impact isn't there; so you might walk into a classroom and 10% of them might trust you straight away because they're ok with teachers, but 90% are like Ooo, I haven't liked any teachers so far - I'm not going to like you but you just not got to give up ... you've got to keep tapping away and finally you'll get there that they'll trust you and sometimes it could take a year; it could take two years. (Ruth)*

Ruth's response illustrates the additional investment required of the educator in this context in responding to the individual needs of learners.

5.9.2 Mental health and adverse circumstances

The adverse social conditions of many of the students and the impact of this on their mental health was raised by Chris:

> *'Working with wellbeing, we went through one of my groups and there was, like, I think it's nearly half of them that are taking antidepressants and erm... part of those are about the social conditions: people are being prescribed antidepressants because it's a cheaper way of managing them, just being able to get through life isn't it. So, when you're aware of that and working with people in the classroom it's a ... what's the word? ... It's a perfect storm isn't it in terms of having to deal with it as a tutor.' (Chris)*

Tara acknowledges the range of factors that she observes when working with students:

> *'You know, YCF and H&SC students generally have a lot of issues don't they...'* (Tara)

5.9.3 Suicidal students

Fiona recognises the impact of tutors on the life trajectories of some students and the importance of our position in supporting them. She also refers to the fact that senior management do not really recognise and acknowledge the role teaching staff play in responding to such intense emotional issues:

> *'We do provide some amazing support that I don't think is acknowledged, and particularly in our school. I've had students say that, you know, their year manager stopped them from killing themselves – you know completely life-changing stuff and that's just kind of completely overlooked.' (Fiona)*

The issue of attempted suicide featured in other FG responses. Lecturers' responsibility for students with significant mental health issues was raised as an issue of concern by David, who expressed anxiety over the blurred lines of accountability, should a student harm themselves.

> *'The fears I can have with that are ... so you know, we've worked with students who have been suicidal and who have attempted suicide, if I'm, you know, If I'm dealing with that student and the pressure of study becomes too much ... because it is too much pressure for them and they go and do that, am I somehow responsible if they were my student? You know, what am I meant to do? Where does the line strike?' (David)*

Similarly, to me, David was concerned with his influence over students' decisions and their potential to harm themselves and felt himself to have a degree of responsibility for their welfare. What he said implied that the institution itself may hold him accountable if a student were to take their own life.

5.9.4 Difficulties with learning

Aside from student mental health issues that can commonly present, the additional issue of learning difficulties was also raised by one FG participant (David). He spoke about this is terms of the pressure he experiences to maintain acceptable grade averages whilst meeting the needs of students who find learning difficult.

> *'That's one of the real massive difficulties that I recognise - that you've got a group there where they struggle academically, there's lots of learning difficulties etcetera, but you still need to get your grade average up and you think well HOW do I do that? Then you're kind of vulnerable not only to, you know, their criticisms of those above you and action against you but you're vulnerable to kind of doing things you don't want to do - like do you (emphasis) just up the grades and think forge or do you help the students more than you should because what do you do if the impossible being asked of you?' (David)*

The tension David experienced when working at the interface between policy, institutional expectations and the need to meet students' expectations was magnified by his thinking concerning students' capabilities and his feelings of vulnerability due to potential criticism from senior management in the event of students obtaining poor grades. His discomfort was further increased by his feeling the need to compromise his personal standards when teaching in order to avoid such criticism. For David, there could be no satisfactory resolution without either undermining his personal values or rendering himself vulnerable to criticism from senior management. In his mind, the professional challenge lay not in any deficit within himself but in what he regarded as unrealistic institutional expectations.

The idea that many of the University's students find learning challenging was also expressed by Ruth, who stated:

> *'Our students are part of the less academic ones. Is that fair to say? (David – its accurate to say) And they can be in that situation because they never learned to take responsibility for their learning, so that's, that's the thing that you've got to do, and if you can show that you're actually pushing them to do that, I think the big thing is engaging them. If you give them an interesting thing, they will learn, but if they don't like your subject it's a lot more difficult isn't it.' (Ruth)*

These comments by Ruth and David diverge from my own thinking about the students. For me, students' life circumstances, first language and cultural background are major causes of disadvantage and I recognise my own lack of intercultural competence as a hindrance when trying to create conditions conducive to learning. That is, I see myself in deficit as much as – if not more than – the students.

What came through strongly in the FG was a strong sense of under-acknowledgement on the part of senior management of the demands on and extra work required of teachers working with students in the institution. As Tom stated:

> *'It keeps coming back to the same thing for me, it's the organisational culture. There's a lack of understanding, you know, of the impact on us of what we do, but also in terms of, you know ... that it's not us causing those issues ... I think that if you work for an organisation who understands the nature of the students and the environments that they're living in and the issues that they're bringing, there's an understanding that, well ok, what is the actual role of the lecturer? What support can you realistically offer?' (Tom)*

To some extent the issues that arise when working with students in a university with a strong widening participation mission are an integral aspect of the working conditions experienced by teachers as they attempt to meet the range of students' needs. However, the FG demonstrates the intensity and additional investment experienced by teachers responding to a diverse students demographic in which there are high levels of social deprivation.

Here I identify similarities and differences between my perceptions of the students attending the university and those of my colleagues.

5.9.5 Similarities in our perceptions: the social demographic

There was a perception that students' learner histories were relevant and frequently proved problematic as students navigated the demands of HE. As such, the additional investment required by us as educators working with NTSs was widely recognised. The adverse social conditions frequently experienced by our students were felt to be outside of our control yet featured as a primary issue that influenced our sense of accountability. The task of maximising teaching quality and thus learning, while supporting the often complex needs of students, was regarded as challenging, but insufficiently understood and/or acknowledged by senior management.

5.9.6 Differences in perceptions: the student demographic

There was a common perception of the level of need exhibited by students but also a divergence between me and some FG participants in terms of the causes of their needs. For example, whilst Ruth recognised the influence of our students' prior experience of education in the often cautious manner in which they view us as their HE teachers. Unlike me, she perceived the challenge of meeting students' needs to be attributed to their 'less academic' disposition. While I shared with the FG the perception of NTSs frequently having problematic education histories and was cognizant of the often adverse social conditions they experienced, unlike

David and Ruth, I tend not to attribute the difficulties I experience when teaching them to an 'academic' deficit within the students themselves; instead, I hold myself largely responsible due my limited cultural awareness of what is a diverse student population in terms of ethnicity and the various forms of educational disadvantage. I recognise that my ability to truly empathise with their situations is limited. I perceived this to be a barrier to creating TL situations and to providing value for money.

The fact that some of the challenges associated with supporting students are attributed to them being 'less academic' is symbolic of a wider social and systemic process that enables categorisation, which in turn frequently fosters inequality. As we have learned from Young, categorisation according to groups is a recognised aspect of identity formation and inequality can occur when a particular social group with which one is identified experiences oppression. Importantly, Young explains how individuals categorise themselves, but are also prescribed a group identity by others. It is possible (and frequent) for oppression of a particular group to be reinforced by others who belong to non-oppressed (often more powerful) groups or oppressed groups with different characteristics to NTSs. Such groups, whether oppressed or not, possess internalised ideas about social and cultural capital and the value of that capital, particularly in terms of the types of professions and opportunities with which it is associated. Such ideas – and in this particular case the idea of social groups being somehow 'less academic' – need to be challenged, whether they exist in the minds of academic staff or students, or both.

5.10 RQ1 cont. How do I experience the pressures that arise within the neoliberal higher education context? The working conditions

In this section, I explore pressures that arise as a result of the working conditions the exist within the University. In particular, I focus on aspects of the material environment such as the open plan design of the building, lack of permanent office base and rooms in which to hold private tutorials, increasing class size, a heavy workload, and the uneven distribution of teaching responsibilities.

5.10.1 Physical demands

Moving between campuses is physically demanding and frequently results in things being forgotten or misplaced (such as my notebook, referred to earlier in the autoethnography). Simple actions, such as carrying bags, can create an increased sense of challenge resulting in

me experiencing frustration. The following excerpt from my personal journal captures the frequently hectic dynamic that I experience.

> *31 October 2017 Personal journal excerpt:*
>
> *So frustrating - the whole day ☹. Loads of bags to carry. Laptop, gift bag, work bag, shoulder bag. Inefficient arrangement of bags and general organisation of things. First thing, had to go to the old campus from the car park to collect handouts for a lesson at 10am and then back to the makeshift office in the main teaching building to meet with a colleague to start working on formulating exam questions. The colleague turned up at 9.20am – I was due to teach at 10am!! It had taken me from 9 – 9.20 to get onto the online site to begin inputting exam questions. We didn't really achieve anything in aside from me realising that I will need to put aside time to focus on developing and inputting the online exam questions with no interruptions.*

5.10.2 Lack of space conducive to work

It can be difficult to locate colleagues and to find space to plan teaching activities. There is a makeshift office. Room 600 is a small, narrow makeshift office which has desks with PCs and seating along the left-hand wall. Against the right-hand wall there is a small round table which seats two people. There is just enough room for people to walk down the middle of the room between the PC area and the small table. Opposite the door, at the far end of the room, there is a large glass window that overlooks the postgraduate computer/study area. Room 600 is the only office space available for staff not permanently based in the MH campus.

As most of my teaching takes place at the main campus, I frequently use room 600 for storing resources and as a crossover point in between teaching sessions. Although intended to be a working space, 600 also functions as an informal space where teachers offload and/or talk about non-work related matters. This can mean that concentrating and being productive is difficult because it is so small and busy (something David later describes in the focus group). Jobs requiring sustained concentration are difficult to complete due to the frequency of interruptions and the inconsistent availability of the PCs. Conversation and talk flows through room 600 and influences the emotional climate among the staff team, reinforcing and/or diminishing feelings of trust, satisfaction and collectivism.

> *December 2017 Personal journal excerpt:*
>
> *Something made me smile today.*
>
> *As I was working on my laptop in room 600 and going through some emails, two colleagues entered into a discussion about someone in their school.*

Colleague one: 'The marking is just ridiculous.' She then explained that has she has heard that an additional two weeks are going to be integrated into the academic calendar, implying that this was based on helping with marking and preparation.

Colleague two responds with: 'I didn't know that you took hallucinogenic drugs'.

This made me laugh because the idea of senior management making decisions with empathy for teaching staff seems unthinkable and so the extra two weeks must be a result of recreational drug use on the part of the speaker.

The colleague who mentioned the two extra weeks then said they heard that if they (senior management) get the students in early they can 'get more money from the Student Accommodation.' I noticed the door of room 600 was ajar and it crossed my mind that someone e.g. senior management, may overhear the conversation and not view it in a favourable light.

This excerpt reveals a shared perception of some aspects of the university's culture according to which we perceive ourselves and our working conditions to be of secondary importance to the more monetary-focused priorities of senior management. It was unthinkable that our needs would have taken precedence over finances. Our discordant work environment was poignantly illustrated in my awareness of the door being ajar and in the sense of concern and vulnerability this evoked in me and my colleagues.

Field notes November 2017 – action: Sit in room 600 waiting to use the phone (SF1 Field note entry: parts 33-38)

I enter 600. One of my colleagues is there. It is nice to see them, but I need this hour to be productive as I have not had time for catch-up activities all day. Before I can get to the phone (which is why I had come into room 600 in the first place) another colleague enters and picks the phone up. I sit down – am starting to get a headache. Yet another colleague enters (one who does not get on well with the first colleague) and my headache goes up a notch.

This colleague sits down and explains that she has been feeling very unwell this week but has not had time off as she worries about the impact on others e.g. the staff team. I remark that I have done the same in the past. She says she feels demotivated with how things are at the moment, and again I can relate to that as it is incredibly tough managing such a heavy workload. There is an implicit understanding of the meaning of 'how things are at the moment': namely that we all deal with a heavy workload and little

acknowledgement. She then reveals that another staff member was awarded the higher pay band in the grade review panel which took place last May (when I was not awarded it). She is a newer member of staff with much less teaching experience. I wish I hadn't been told this as it niggles at me.

Aspects of self: Self as suspicious and distrusting; self as exhausted, self as fearful; self as frustrated (SF3 Interpretation: lines 33-38).

A simple task such as making a phone call is made difficult due to my sense of obligation to interact with others in room 600, the small size of the room, and lack of resources (in this case too few phones). Tensions between colleagues have an impact on how comfortable the working space in room 600 feels. The worsening of my headache is indicative of the stress induced by the situation and by the need to get things done in between teaching sessions. I found the information about another staff member who was not in the room unsettling and it was this very type of conversation that led me to isolate myself from further discussions about paygrades, audit grades or anything that I perceived to contribute to the circulation of negative feelings or vibes within the university. I had not chosen to hear the information that was shared but it impacted me negatively and made me feel resentful, nonetheless. Furthermore, what had been said about feeling demotivated and overworked was likely to have had a negative impact on everyone else in the room who was listening. I also found it unsettling to hear a colleague's pay grade being discussed in their absence. Such instances increased my resolve not to become complicit in creating the kind of tension and division that such conversations can engender and which can easily arise in spaces such as room 600.

5.10.3 The open plan design of the building

The layout of the building forces teachers and students to be 'on show' when interacting. The design of the building also has an impact on students' sense of accessibility to their teachers. While this has benefits, there are also implications in terms of the fatigue it can create for teachers, particularly in a situation in which there is limited space for respite from face-to-face contact. In some instances, difficult situations occur spontaneously due to the open plan nature of the building and the ease with which students can initiate interactions with lecturers. There are several instances within this autoethnography that illustrate this particular issue; for example, when trying to find space to support the suicidal student and when Suki sits down in the chair opposite me and produces a draft of work shortly before another student is due to arrive. The following field note provides a further example:

Field notes October 2017 – Action: Have an unplanned conversation with a student whilst eating a wrap (SF2 Field note entry parts 1-4)

12.50 head towards tutorial seat on landing – another student wants to talk to me. Energy dips slightly as I know this will consume the 10 minutes I would have had before my planned tutorial at 1pm. She wants to discuss career plans. I help as much as I can, while eating a wrap.

Aspects of self: self as friendly, self as accessible; self as informal (SF2 Interpretation: lines 1-4)

My experience of the working conditions within the university reveals a set of pressures that have implications for fostering transformative relationships. For example, along with the layout of the buildings, the hectic dynamic that I frequently experience due to the many activities and tasks that form part of my role often mean that my energy is eroded. This threatens the extra investment of time required by educators, such as myself, who wish to pursue transformative relationships. Interestingly, despite frequently feeling exhausted, nurturing relationships with students feels rewarding and, despite the fact that I sometimes go through entire days with no proper non-contact time, I am often glad of these interactions with students. These instances can offer pockets in which I am able to develop transformative relationships and they provide me with a sense of nourishment and achievement in an otherwise highly pressurised university environment. However, such instances frequently occur spontaneously rather than by design and they come at a cost to myself in terms of the time and energy required in a busy working day.

My experience of the University's working conditions is somewhat reflected by that of my colleagues who also describe the physical demands placed on them by not having a permanent office base in the main teaching building. I address these next.

5.11 RQ2 cont. In what way is my experience of the working conditions within the university similar to and different from that of my colleagues? (evidence from the focus group)

6.11.1 No permanent office in the main teaching building

The lack of a permanent place to rest and recuperate within the working day is illustrated in David's comments as follows:

'I feel like kind of walk around with this kind of nomadic existence over here. There's nowhere to go and I have my bag on my back with my laptop in and sit

down anywhere I can but yeah I'm always open to contact at all points, which is not traditionally how it would be in HE. Like, you never rest, you're never OFF. You can't just go back to your office for half an hour…' (David)

Another FG participant (Chris) refers to the makeshift office (room 240) and highlights the additional strain she experiences when using it as a temporary base:

> *'I was just about to say the same thing because if you sort of go into a communal space like 600 you can't … you just get dragged into conversations you've got no control over don't you.' (Chris)*

What Chris says echoes my experience of the 'chat' among my colleagues concerning the audit. In my case, I had chosen not to engage in such chat as it unnerved me. Although I felt somewhat isolated as a result, my exposure to it still had an impact on my experience and sense of belonging within the overall culture of the University.

David also recognised the additional pressures that are sometimes experienced as a result of the makeshift office space, and like me he notes the difficulty of conversing with others out of a sense of obligation:

> *'It's not a standard office so you going into people you're not normally with so almost obliged to have a conversation. If you've got a settled office space, you can just get on with work.' (David)*

Tara talks about the isolation that she experiences due to the distribution of teaching staff, their offices and the movement between buildings:

> *'In kind of an opposite way it kind of makes me feel like I'm just not part of a team at all. This semester last year – just the way it worked out, I just never saw anyone. You know I was up in the old building, no one else was there, I just completely felt like a lone worker. I was just wandering between the two buildings to see … and just never saw anybody, which isn't great.' (Tara)*

5.11.2 The open plan design of the building

The fact of the open plan design of the building not being conducive to having private tutorials involving sensitive issues was raised by Fiona, another FG participant:

> *'I find private conversations in the open plan building difficult. I had a PG student who wanted to talk to me about something really personal and I was literally 'where are we?', and then also I worry about the impact of dragging them round trying to find somewhere, on their ability to tell me what they were GOING to tell me.' (Fiona)*

This resonated with my own experience when trying to find an appropriate space to meet with a suicidal student. Fiona was aware of the potentially negative impact of not having such a space and the possibility of it hampering her relationship and ability to support the student.

5.11.3 Teaching outside own area of expertise

Another issue that appeared in the FG was that of teaching staff being expected to teach subject matter outside of their comfort zone:

> *'They're not keen on letting you be a specialist lecturer here are they? So if it's your specialist subject and you're teaching the things that you feel comfortable with that won't be an issue because you'll go in that class and talk about it because that's what you love. It's when they want you teach something you don't know anything about and you don't enjoy and the you're going to get something bad when you have a teaching thing [meaning audit observation] because who can teach something that they're not interested in themselves – do you know what I mean? You can manage your own stuff and you enjoy it, but when you're trying to get your head round something that is new to you and you're not getting the support for that…'*
> *(Ruth)*

Ruth's reference to 'they' refers to senior management and reflects the psychological divide between the teaching staff and those higher placed in the University. Her reference to *'it's when they want you teach something you don't know anything about'* resonates with Tara's earlier comment (reported in section 6.4) that '*I'm not being put in a position to do my job to the best of my ability'.* Together these reactions indicate the frustration – even resentment – teaching staff feel at being put in what they see as an unreasonable situation due to the audit and associated expectations. The issue of having to teach material that is outside of one's expertise and/or having to use material that is not your own reflects my own experience of having to reorganise my lecture delivery plan the day before I was to meet with a student who was feeling suicidal (see section 6.10.3. 'suicidal students').

5.12 RQ2 cont. In what way is my experience of the working conditions within the university similar to and different from that of my colleagues?

5.13.1 Similarities in our perceptions: working conditions

The lack of permanent office space presented physical and mental challenges for each of us. The physical burden of carrying laptops and bags between buildings all day and the mental fatigue caused by always being accessible to students and having no place of retreat were all acknowledged in the FG, as was the lack of a space conducive to work and to feeling prepared

for one's teaching. The issue of co-inhabiting the temporary office space with colleagues from across the university was collectively experienced as a challenge over and above the day-to-day challenges associated with teaching often complex and demanding students.

One source of stress was the sense of limited control over our working environment; for example, being privy to and/or obliged to be involved in conversations with other people in room 600, often the only room available where there was access to a PC and printer. These were often value-laden conversations about management, the changing dynamic of the student body, or the pay status of colleagues, and as such they served to magnify my existing anxiety and negativity. The disjuncture between teaching staff and senior management was especially evident in conversations that took place in room 600 and there was a shared perception that SM were out of touch with what we experience as teachers and have very different priorities. For example, the idea of a newly-structured academic calendar being implemented for the benefit of staff was referred to as 'laughable' and 'insane'.

Two further aspects of the environment that were collectively perceived as creating pressure were the requirement to teach unfamiliar content that had been developed by another teacher, and the lack of privacy for conversations and tutorials with students. This latter was felt to be particularly stressful in cases where there was a need to support students with complex needs that impacted on their learning.

5.12.2 Differences in our perceptions of the working conditions

The were no significant differences in our perceptions of the working conditions within the institution.

Having identified the ways in which my experience was similar to and different from that of my colleagues, it is now possible to consider what our shared perceptions of the NL HE context indicate about the emerging institutional culture. In order to discuss this and to understand the significance for cultivating student transformation of the organisational practices and experiences reported, I draw on Young's faces of oppression, explained in chapter 3 (Theoretical and Conceptual Framework).

5.13 Organisational pressures and practices, and the faces of oppression

The four areas of experience reported in the autoethnography (the audit; fee-paying student; student social demographic and workload) have enabled me to observe the process through which the university's culture was being shaped by the communication between senior

managers and teaching staff. Within the experiences reported it is possible to identify Young's faces of oppression (1993) and to observe how they are made possible through day-to-day interactions. Furthermore, it is possible to understand how the ideological and political factors that played a key role in shaping the internal practices of the university relate to the notion of oppression in a way that potentially limits the possibilities of achieving transformation. In the section which follows, I explore how the dynamics reported in the autoethnography instantiate Young's notions of exploitation, marginalisation and powerlessness, and their implications in a context characterised by a strong WP mission.

5.13.1 Oppression as a social process: exploitation

Young (1993) explains that exploitation is a social process that is maintained through structural relations. It requires some people to have power while others do not and is linked to other forms of oppression such as powerlessness and marginalisation. Here, I explain how the audit enabled exploitation and increased powerlessness amongst teachers and that of the university within the wider sector.

Teachers' sense of exploitation arose from the perception that, rather than helping us develop our practice, the purpose and value of the audit was seen by senior management solely in terms of providing concrete evidence of quality teaching and satisfying TEF metrics. Although, arguably, we stood to benefit from a good TEF performance, not least in term of employment security, such considerations were outweighed in our minds by a strong belief that the audit should have supported our professional development. It point of fact, it was the case that our teaching practice was increasingly subjected to monitoring through interventions focused on evidencing quality. These functioned as a tool through which the institution could satisfy external metrics that focused on ensuring quality and value for money but with little acknowledgement of the reality this created for us as teachers and our increased sense of vulnerability (Sabri, 2010). Neither was there recognition of the pressures and the often quite particular pedagogical demands we experienced when supporting the learning of students with complex life circumstances, and the skills this required and which we had honed through years of experience. This perceived lack of recognition engendered resentment and provoked a sense of exploitation. In other words, teachers' compliance with the audit seemed to benefit them – and the students themselves – less than those managing the university.

Although university culture today is influenced significantly and, to a large extent, unavoidably by sector-wide pressures, the relationships between individual members and bodies within the

institution can, arguably, act as a buffer or mitigator of those pressures and even effect changes to practices within the university that can better reflect the particular realities of the teaching context while also addressing institutional concerns with quality and institutional security. However, even here power comes into play as a factor, for individuals' or groups of individuals' ability to effect change depends in large part on the extent to which they are given opportunities to be involved in decision-making. The fact that the audit's design and implementation was not decided in a consultative manner with all stakeholders, but rather in a dictatorial manner, reflected an unequal distribution of power within the university. While in any hierarchical system there will always be an unequal distribution of power, what it critical is how that power is wielded in order to create the best, most effective institutional culture. My awareness of the unequal distribution of power we experienced as teachers in respect of the audit was evident in the fact that, despite my strong personal beliefs regarding transformative learning and its significance to the university's WP mission, I was reluctant to speak out in staff meetings in order to prompt the critical discussion of the audit. The primary emotional driver for my silence was fear. I was scared of being scapegoated and earmarked as a troublemaker. My need for security and favourable status impeded my willingness to share my beliefs about teaching and the development of good practice if that meant calling into question the university's thinking. I was not brave enough to risk appearing to dis-identify with the directive and my silence rendered me complicit in an organisational dynamic that continued to oppress me and the students.

The audit seemed symbolic of a '*blame culture' (Chris)* and a way to hold individual teaching staff accountable for the experience of students, rather than the broader University. Any expression of negative emotion such as anxiety and frustration put us at risk of being marginalised and/or stigmatised, and labelled as non-compliant, resistant to, or 'unresponsive to new realities' that required us to adapt our approach to learning and teaching (Parekh, 2000:247). That risk was greater given our relatively low status within the University and, consequently, such emotions were repressed and only expressed privately. Processes such as the audit were thus viewed with suspicion, rather than more positively as a developmental aid, and this induced a sense of anxiety in me.

Because we did not have a voice through which to make it known without being seen as non-compliant, senior management were not fully aware of – or did not acknowledge – the emotional strain of our work as a result of students' complex learning needs. Coupled with

fatigue (as noted in David's comment on how that he is *'always open to contact at all points')*, this increased our sense of resentment.

The issues of fatigue and lack of an office base in the main teaching building (*'you never rest, you're never OFF. You can't just go back to your office for half an hour…')* *(David)* further compounded our sense of not being appreciated and/or understood by senior management. Nonetheless, their expectation was that we should remain loyal and motivated in order that their priorities/agenda should be met. The fact that we were given little opportunity to participate in making institutional decisions that would affect us engendered a sense of disempowerment and inequality in the distribution of power between senior management and teaching staff. This combined with the sense of exploitation and fear of marginalisation, produced a situation in which we felt that our considerable collective experience as teachers was undervalued by senior management. This perceived lack of value, allied with an inability to voice our feelings, fostered a culture in which frustration and resentment was frequently expressed in conversations between teaching staff.

5.13.2 Oppression as a social process: powerlessness

Freire (1970) explains how a culture of silence is characteristic of powerlessness and that in some oppressive situations people can find ways to express themselves depending on the degree to which they are aware that they are being oppressed. Our resentment at feeling subordinate frequently found voice in our interactions during which it was commonplace to mock senior management as a way of alleviating our sense of powerlessness and maintaining a sense of worth. Through those interactions, we sought to define ourselves as a collective with a shared expertise, albeit one that was overlooked by SM. In doing so we accentuated the dissonance we felt between the norms and values that we held as teachers in respect of learning and teaching, and those of senior management. We saw senior management as unwilling to invite us into a 'joint co-operative enterprise in the solution of shared problems' (Parekh, 2000:247) and had effectively stereotyped them and marked them out as 'other' (Young, 1990; Parekh, 2000). This induced a sense of camaraderie among us. NL principles were thus governing practice and shaping relationships within the university and in doing so producing a culture characterised by disrespect, distrust and suspicion.

5.13.3 The absence of dialogue between senior management and teachers

The absence of the kind of consultation and collaboration between teaching staff and senior management that could have increased mutual understanding of our different perspectives and

the challenges we each encountered in responding to the pressures of NL, engendered an unhelpful institutional dynamic where there were 'closed views' of the other (Parekh, 2000:247). There was a prevailing and closed view of senior management as not having aims in common with the teaching staff. Rather than being viewed as potential partners, senior management were regarded as our masters but as lacking expertise in teaching and learning and a good understanding of the particular challenges presented by the University's student demographic. SM possessed a similarly closed view of teaching staff, positioning them as a collective resistant to change. Our subjugated positions led to a perception of SM as being in opposition to rather than in partnership with us in the shared pursuit of realising institutional goals and ensuring its survival. This divide was seen by us as irreconcilable and a culture of opposition resulted (Chang, 2008).

The absence of a platform upon which critical dialogue could take place and a respectful and progressive environment cultivated had the effect of creating an oppressive institutional culture that we were somewhat complicit in sustaining through our responses to senior management's efforts to meet NL imperatives.

5.13.4 Students within the relational dynamics of the NL HE context

As with senior management, and due to their ascribed status as consumers, the students were perceived to possess greater power than us, the teachers. They had become a potent instrument through which senior management could justify initiatives that focused on student satisfaction in a way that was linked to the institution's success and ultimately to our livelihoods. Senior management's response to the fee-paying student body prioritised internal activities, such as the audit, that could demonstrate the institution's success in ensuring value for money and student satisfaction; and the way such measures were implemented afforded students greater power while simultaneously diminishing ours. In essence, we were positioned between two groups, both of which had greater than power than us.

The dynamic between SM and teaching staff impacted on our perception of students, who, like senior management, were regarded as powerful others. They too were susceptible to stigmatisation by us in that they were deemed to have '*unrealistic expectations' (Tom).* Our authority to challenge such expectations was undermined not by the students themselves but by senior management's emphasis on keeping them happy. We were under pressure to meet their expectations even if it clashed with our beliefs about the process and products of learning; that is, we felt under an obligation to '*give them what they want rather than what they need'*

(David). The result was that we could neither practice in the manner we desired nor express our feelings about being unable to do so.

Despite our sense of camaraderie and a largely shared perception of our working conditions, there were also differences between us as individual teachers; however, the conditions for discussing these differences with a view to developing a shared approach were constraining and induced feelings of fatigue in that they lacked privacy to talk in a place free from potential intrusion. As a result, as we sought to derive a measure of personal satisfaction from our work, there were differences in the way we each mediated the pressures we experienced as the University's sought to adapt to NL ideology.

5.14 Summary of organisational pressures, practices and the faces of oppression - their importance to transformative learning

In this section I have shared insights into the university's internal practices and how these may or may not be supporting the development of transformative practices. Young's faces of oppression that emerge within the processes described, and the way these are experienced, illustrate a number of important points. For example, with no current consensus of what quality university teaching is (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010; Scourfield, 2019), it incumbent on those governing and working in universities to ensure that low-inference markers of quality are recognised as such and that any conception of quality needs to take into account the actual needs of students in the particular context in which it is being measured. In addition, through open dialogue, teachers' experiences of and/or feedback on their work with students, needs to be sought by those who wield power in order to continually evaluate the appropriacy of the instruments used to measure quality. Those instruments can help avoid perpetuating the exploitation of students by looking at how and to what extent pedagogy utilises opportunities for transformation. Arguably, the University's audit required teachers to teach in a manner that invited students to participate in their learning as NL subjects and that reinforced the valuing of approaches that successfully demonstrated this. However, evidence of consultation with students through mechanisms other than mass feedback systems such as the NSS did not appear to be used to inform the audit and so a more nuanced understanding of students and their needs was not achieved.

The link between an oppressive university culture and teachers' will to act is an important one. Freire (1970) explains that those who experience powerlessness can lose the will to act because

they perceive that their efforts will not mean anything or have any impact. In other words, teachers see as pointless any attempt to question those in positions of power and who wield that power autocratically. In the context of a university catering for NTSs, such a situation is problematic because it undermines a critical function of transformative leaning: to question the status quo and generate new possibilities in a changing organisational context in order to disrupt systemic disadvantage. The experience reported in this autoethnography, however, suggests that teachers' sense of powerless was not, in fact, absolute; they continued to find ways to express their thoughts and feelings, albeit in a manner that was subversive. However, in the absence of dialogue between senior management and teachers regarding pedagogical development, it was left to individual teachers to develop their practice 'privately'; however, this was a problem in that this practice did not necessarily align with the expectations of the teaching auditors.

Our collective perceptions reflect an organisational culture in which there is a lack of understanding and/or appreciation of different roles. Communication is hampered by negative emotions such as fear, resentment and cynicism. Consequently, the strengths of individuals and teams go unrecognised and under-utilised. I now turn to what our reported experiences and the emergent university culture may mean for the developing teaching and learning practices within the university.

5.15 The intersection of organisational context and teaching and learning: My teaching reflections

Hughes and Pennington, (2017) argue that it is easy to be complicit in maintaining unsatisfactory situations. For this reason, I now turn to myself as a part of the network of relationships that make up the University's context and focus on how aspects of that culture may be created and maintained through my teaching.

Here I present four teaching reflections in order to explore my relationships and how well these may support or impede transformative learning.

The reflections included are labelled as follows:

1. My use of judgment to balance expectations of and support for students
2. The position adopted by the teacher and the use of questioning to facilitate discussion
3. My approach to teaching and my willingness to be open and to take risks

4. Teaching strengthened by a sense of connection with students

Sharing these reflections invites others into a world of experience, my phenomenal world, and makes it accessible to them. Each reflection presents 'a world opened up by language … a world disclosure yielded by text' (Ricoeur 1991:490) and functions as a work 'fixed in text' and through which I can gain greater understanding of how I use my professional space and my scope for agency despite the pressures I have discussed throughout this thesis.

Ricoeur states that 'It is by an understanding of the worlds, actual and possible, opened up by language that we may arrive at a better understanding of ourselves' (Ricoeur, 1991:490). My teaching experiences are presented as me (self) reflecting in action; that is, the texts I present express as accurately as possible the thinking and feelings around my action as it occurred. Through these reflections I aim to better understand the personal and contextual constraints and affordances that govern my teaching.

I have made a genuine effort to be honest regarding my cognitive and affective state during the experiences recounted and have written it in the present tense. In recognition of Ricoeur's notion that text is open to infinite interpretation, including that written by the self about the self, I acknowledge that absolute objective reflection in and on action is not possible. The value of the texts lies in the fact that they can open up new possibilities for creative action and transformation (Ricoeur, 1966; Roberge, 2011). Having presented each *in action* reflection, I then engage in a focused reflection *on* that action using the pro forma described in chapter 4 (Methodology).

5.16 Teaching Reflection One: My use of judgment in achieving a balance between my expectations of and support for students

5.16.1 Prominent feature of the experience TR1

When teaching a class of 96 Childhood Studies students in week three of a 12-week semester, I am assiduous in my efforts to instil in students a sense that learning is taking place.

5.16.2 Reflection in action TR1 (class size 96)

> *I anticipate the anxiety within the students that the session may induce, and I feel fearful of the consequences. What I have read about student anxiety, anticipation of their response and my own experiences as a student are*

present in my mind as I begin introducing the session. So, to offset their potential anxiety, I begin by warning the students about how difficult they can expect the content of the lecture to be. This is a coping mechanism to ease my own feelings of anxiety about how the content will be received. I am terrified that the lecture will be an instant turn-off, inaccessible to students and – worse – that it will create anxiety, uncertainty and later, when it comes to the exam, lead to accusations of poor, unclear teaching that may jeopardise their grades. It is week three and a disaster at this point could undermine their confidence in the module, which could have potentially serious consequences for me. In these moments of introducing the lesson on current policy, I am desperate to keep the students with me, to manage their psychological and emotional responses to the subject matter. However, I can already see glazed expressions on the faces of some students and a general 'switched-off' demeanour which I feel annoyed about, but which also further fuels my angst.

Alongside my stress, I have a desire to ignite the possibility, within them, that they can understand this difficult set of ideas; I want them to be active, critical thinkers in relation to the subject matter and to be critical practitioners. I feel this in the moment of this experience. I say: '<u>It is my aim to get us through this session giving you an overview of the actual framework, so what is it – that's just what, that's quite easy to do from my perspective; I can tell you 'what' (emphasis) it is</u>'.

I deliberately focus them on how the material from the past two weeks will be helpful in this difficult lecture, '<u>so we're already ahead of the game</u>'. I'm hoping that they attribute this to me and my organisation of the module. I also want to build their confidence by suggesting to them that they know something already. I continue by telling them that simply describing the policy framework is a basic thing to do and that there are also other things which are a bit subtler than that. These are the things that have taken up my whole weekend with me worrying about how to get them across. I say: '<u>Now it's going to take quite a lot of brain power to get through it because it isn't … it isn't, that easy to engage with</u>'. The feeling of the SEND policy landscape being a big and complex picture in my own head is present in the

moments that I am saying this. I am aware of the danger of over-labouring the point, which could become demotivating, so I attempt to pick up the pace: 'Let's get going.' I am aware of over-emphasising the difficulty of it and not actually addressing the material to come, and there is a lot to get through.

'So, the context we're talking about, the new policy, the current policy we're talking about today is following 13 years of New Labour's attempt to be inclusive. Okay, so this is a really big change for this government because they're putting something new out. So we're starting from 2010, which is when New Labour went out, remember on our timeline? I'm referring a previous lecture when students had made giant legislative timelines. I want them to make the connection between last week and this session. I continue: '… and the coalition came in and they had a new set of ideas. So that's our time period. Ideology…' I instantly experience the need to explain this word (ideology), so I expand with '… set of ideas - new government, new set of ideas. Alright? That's quite common when you have a new government; they want to put their mark on something. It's quite common for policies to change quite significantly when there's a new government come into power. That's why when I was 19 I was worried about that because …' I refer to last week's lecture when I told students about what I was doing at the time of the New Labour election: '… remember I was telling you that I'd grown up when the Conservatives had been in power for 17 years and all of a sudden the Government changed and I thought, what's life going to be like? So new government, new set of ideas…'

Residual emotion is present within these moments, related to my personal development and my own experiences as a learner (I am referring to my adult learning experiences, when I was studying for my BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies. I hear myself using words like "ideology" and immediately follow this by offering a simplified definition of the term as I understand instinctively how opaque and overwhelming this concept can be when one is first exposed to it, and the feeling of alienation that may result. Conscious as I am of this, I intentionally use an illustration of my younger self at age 19, describing to the class my thoughts and feelings when the New Labour Government was elected in 1997 following 17 Years of a

154

Conservative government, and the feeling of uncertainty about the future that this induced even though I was not a very politically aware individual (something I had talked to them about the previous week). Until I was exposed to them through my undergraduate degree studies, I had felt embarrassed about my lack of knowledge in relation to political matters and I would not, at that time, have liked this to have been exposed to anyone. This knowledge affected the way in which I framed the content of this class in an effort to avoid overwhelming the students.

In these moments of introducing current policy and ideology, my 26-year-old learner self (the age I was when I returned to HE) is there with me, remembering and feeling the vulnerability of not knowing, but feeling that I should. There are internalised feelings of shame and self-doubt and I attribute these to my lack of knowledge and awareness. The influence of my father is also present in these moments, but less consciously. His political beliefs had always been a strong narrative theme in my family as I grew up and I feel now that I should have been more politically engaged and aware because of the map he had provided, yet it has taken years of study to gain the understanding I now have. I am, consequently, keen to ease similar feelings of doubt or shame experienced by any student. I do not wish to be a person who affirms their self-doubt. I want them to find within themselves a way to learn and to see themselves as capable of doing so. I want them to feel that current policy and government ideology is not as intimidating as it may seem but rather something they can understand and think about in relation to themselves and their practice. I also want to protect myself from their experience of uncertainty.

5.17 Teaching Reflection Two: The position adopted by the teacher and the use of questioning to facilitate discussion

5.17.1 Prominent feature of the experience TR2

This experience took place with the same class referred to in TR2. In this reflection, the prominent feature is a question I asked my students that was too vague and lacked

a clear focus and to which I do not elicit the response I anticipated. I end up working hard to maintain an environment conducive to learning.

5.17.2 Reflection in action TF2 (class size 96)

I aware that I am struggling to talk confidently and, although this is probably not apparent to students, it is markedly different from my delivery of the same material last year (to a similar size group). I feel like my language is cumbersome and waffled, which reinforces my feelings of being ill at ease. I begin explaining the diagram on the slide that shows layers of disadvantage that may be experienced by children with special educational needs (SEN). I initiate a question. A quick response is offered by a student. I am grateful for their response without me having to wait a painful amount of time for it.

I follow up the student's input by summarizing what she has said about children not having much power. I then ask a question about gender and why that could be a potentially disadvantaging factor for children with SEN. I see a student gesture and I invite her to contribute using her name. I'm still feeling uncomfortable but pleased that I can remember this student's name, and using it gives me confidence. She responds, saying that people may have a stereotypical view related to gender. I know what she means but it needs developing. I affirm her answer and prompt her to expand: 'Yeah, unpick that a bit more. So, what do you mean? This buys me time to think about how to elucidate the point, should she struggle to do so. She replies:

'Just like erm, just like on say … so … erm … not that this is true all the time, but erm … boys do well in maths in comparison to girls. You have that … let's just say a teacher wants to achieve better in certain results, they might just focus on children that are more capable.'

I am slightly thrown off by her response. This is because, although her response attempts to build on the concept of gender stereotyping, it does not focus on the child with SEN. It also presents a series of points which offer scope for more critical exploration and her articulation is underdeveloped. It reflects an emergent rather than consolidated understanding of issues related to gender stereotyping and the potential inequality that may occur as

a result. Instead of pursuing her response by pinpointing the areas that needed more discussion and stimulating further discussion, I follow it with a general affirmation and then a further question:

'Ok, so teacher perceptions. Yeah, there could be a perception of the capability of the child. But there also could be – and this is in the literature – the issue of erm ... special educational needs more commonly being identified in boys than girls. Why?'

I instinctively bring the focus back to SEN, using her link to teachers' perceptions as an inroad for doing so (but it feels like a weak response on my part). I notice that I am keen to emphasise my knowledge of the literature, to demonstrate that I have read it and to emphasise that what I am saying is credible (although I could have strengthened this by specifying the literature I was referring to). As I say this, I wonder how my response is perceived by the student who had just contributed and by the others in the group.

A different student responds to my question of 'why?' with: 'because they're seen to be like more, like (pause), naughty...' She says this quietly as if slightly ashamed. She doesn't seem to have the words to articulate the point differently. I laugh and say: 'Okay, yeah, absolutely'. I am grateful for her input. I confirm her name and she nods. I am warm in my communication as I want her to feel that her response is welcome. The flow of the lecture feels reasonable, with students responding relatively spontaneously to the questions I am posing. As this is happening, I am engaged in a constant process of assessing the quality of their responses and at the same time assessing my proficiency in fostering links between what they contribute and the focal point of the slide (and lecture). I feel grateful for the participation of some students as this helps give an appearance that the session is flowing well. To some extent, my relief over this overrides my concern with the quality of their answers, or of my responses. Although dialogue is taking place, I am not confident that it is sufficiently detailed or that my responses are well focussed enough to further their learning and stimulate them to think critically. I don't know how much of value the students (those who contribute and those who don't) are deriving from what is unfolding.

Then I pose a question that students don't answer in the way that I expect, given how the lecture has flowed so far. The purpose of my question is to get them to consider how a child's social position, gender and type of special educational need may interact and impact on their experience of education. I launch into a quick succession of questions (too many) in relation to various factors that may be disadvantaging for a child, and finish with: 'What are your thoughts on that?'

I pose my questions like this: So how old are you? Are you a boy or a girl? What type of special need have you got? What type of family do you come from? And then, to add another layer to that, which cultural group do you belong to? Do you belong to a group that is not the dominant culture of the place that you're going for your education, and if you don't belong to that culture, so if you're not ... erm ... the mainstream er... white middle-class culture that is what our education system's underpinned by, what does that mean? Are you going to be misunderstood in some ways? How is that going to affect the likelihood of you reaching your potential? What are your thoughts on that?

Silence ... (3 second wait). Uncomfortable. I feel frustrated, vulnerable and under pressure with no one talking. I rephrase, but the concept I am attempting to elicit has a nebulous quality and my layered approach of questioning does not create a good platform for engagement:

Silence... (8 second wait). I've already repeated (rephrased) the question; and I can't ask it again or I'll risk losing credibility.

When a response comes, it really isn't anything to do with what I was trying to get at. Mild feelings of panic set in as I now have to balance an acknowledgement of the student's contribution with a further prompt to try to elicit the type of answer I wanted. I respond with a tenuous affirmatory summary of what she has said. I prompt once again but I am conscious that continuing like this will – if it has not already – become detrimental to what I am trying to elicit.

Thankfully, after my fourth prompt, another student responds. I invite her input using her name. She says something that very basically relates to the point I was aiming at. I respond enthusiastically: 'Right, you've got it in one!' I do this mainly to create a sense that what I had wanted to elicit had been achieved; in reality, I was grateful to have an opportunity to move on from this point in the lesson and escape further prospect of disaster.

5.18 Teaching Reflection Three: My approach to teaching and my willingness to be open and to taking risks

5.18.1 TR3 Prominent features of the experience

This refection took place with a smaller group of first year Youth Work students in week four of a 12-week semester. I employ a teaching tool I had attempted to use with the group the previous week but which I felt had been unsuccessful; namely, a specific genre of music which I hoped would stimulate connections between the subject matter and the students' identities. The focal point of the reflection is on how my vulnerability promotes a greater sense of connection with the group.

5.18.2 TR3 Reflection in action (class size 30)

I arrive to an empty classroom – a pang of horror strikes me that none of them might turn up and that my lectures are so worthless that they're not worth turning up to. I imagine the discussions going on between students about how they can't be bothered to attend my lectures but how 'such and such's' lectures are so much more interesting. I have set the classroom up and it looks organised – two chapters of reading printed, ppt. presentation on – just need the students.

I wonder whether it is this type of scenario that eventually erodes some teachers' motivation and passion. I think my problem is that I am often more passionate about the subject matter than the students are themselves. In this moment I recognise my enthusiasm as a privilege. I feel so far away from this student group: here I am standing with the privilege of holding down a fairly well paid job that keeps my family fed, clothed and having a reasonable standard of living and – while I don't consider myself well off – I wonder

what the end result of this degree will be for students on this course and how they must think of themselves in relation to it. Why would they be enthusiastic about this course? It's alright for me getting paid to talk about things I am interested in. To them I must seem worlds apart. What sorts of lives do they lead and what has led them here to do this course?

*When students do eventually start to arrive, I make a deliberate attempt to ask them how they are finding the course in general; I really think I need to find out more about what they are experiencing. I greet students and hand them their reading individually. I say, 'here's a present for you; these will help you with your assignment'. Enquiring after each individual and providing them with material right from the start of the session eases how I am feeling and helps to get students into a receptive state for the lesson to come. **I hope it** is a way of encouraging them to see the worth in coming to the session because they are physically getting something out of it (a handout).*

I am dreading the lesson ahead as I don't feel fully prepared and I haven't been sure how what I have been teaching for the past few weeks has been received by this group. I think they may think it's woolly and that I am not really that interesting and haven't got anything very valuable to say. I feel very uncertain about how I and my materials are being received. – uneasiness about the situation. I fear that I won't be able to sustain the level of commitment to teaching if there's no pay off – e.g. the engagement of the students and me realising I am worlds apart from them on many levels and that I must seem like an alien to them.

The emptiness of the classroom and me standing there with everything set up actually feels slightly humiliating. I feel a slight sense cynicism over the audacity of the group to turn up late – or not at all – without any email or prior communication. I marvel at the fact that so many students could take this approach simultaneously. I briefly attribute this to the group's culture as it is not uncommon for this class to start late, due to the lateness of so many members; however, there is usually at least a handful of students present at the start! Not today. Yet, my feelings of uncertainty in relation to

160

myself and my teaching win the mental and emotional battle in this particular situation, as I am more concerned that the reason they are late is because they do not like my lessons rather than due to their lack of personal responsibility (which I should tackle). The fact that I do not tackle it suggests that my fragile confidence and sense of vulnerability are quite overwhelming in this particular situation.

During the lesson, I refer to an example from the previous week, in which I had played a 'Stormzy' song. I had thought using music could be an effective way of encouraging students to connect with what was being taught in the module (which is focused on social identity and understanding self in relation to others). My aim was to highlight the role that religion can play in identity development and the significance of religious beliefs and values in relation to social networks and belonging. However, when attempting to implement this creative idea the previous week I had felt like it had been a disaster and I had regretted doing it. Today, in this lesson which is aimed at developing reflective practice (lesson title: 'Learning Cycles'), I use the 'Stormzy' incident from the previous week as an example of reflecting on my own practice. I hadn't planned to use the example so what unfolded was spontaneous and improvisatory.

To illustrate the concept of a learning cycle to the group, I begin explaining: 'So for me, I might think I need to think of a way to get a complicated idea across to students. I'm going to imagine a way of doing that and imagine how I want it to be for me and for the students and then I have a go at it. It might fall flat on its face and its rubbish, like the week when I did … well I thought it was rubbish … the Stormzy idea that I had. Who was here for the Stormzy session'? Students acknowledge through gestures of recognition that they remember the session I am referring to. Me: 'Was it rub … well I thought it was rubbish, the Stormzy idea I had. Was it really rubbish? What was it like?

Various students respond:

'Stormzy was good'.

'Good idea'.

'It was cool'.

They're responding relatively positively, but my feeling about the session the previous week had been that what I was aiming to convey by playing the track had been very unclear. From their response, I think that the group are accepting of me and my approach but that doesn't mean that the lesson I had taught them two weeks ago was any good. I say: 'Stormzy was cool, but I didn't do that well with it ... because what I wanted ... so maybe I need to reflect on that and do it again at another point. I was trying to get at how powerful religion can be in relationships and how it can really be part of how we relate to other people, but I need to revisit it because I don't think it was very clear how I did it.

A student says –

'Well it must have been'. Me: 'Well that's good'. Student: 'I've had the album on repeat' (laughter by other students). I overlap laughter with: 'So the Stormzy itself was ok ... So the idea of music in the lesson is ok, is it? Does it work'? Many positive responses from students: 'Yeah'. Me: 'That (i.e. music in lessons) does. Right'! (I have confirmation that students like the idea of music in the sessions).

As this encounter unfolded, I was genuinely surprised at the students' response. They had liked the idea of using music and wouldn't mind me doing it again, but I was more surprised that they had regarded the session positively. What I learned is that they genuinely don't mind and, in fact, liked the idea of songs to support learning. I am glad I have shared my thoughts with the group about the Stormzy session as I have a much clearer grasp of what is going on in there and I feel like I am being genuine and open, which makes me feel more connected to the group.

Then a student (Ram) states: 'Maybe your understanding of Stormzy's music is a bit off cos' '100 bags' is about money'. Me: 'Is it money? See, I don't even know.' I had in fact chosen a track in which the artist's mother says a prayer to him at the start and in which the artist refers back to his mother

162

throughout the track. But in the moment, I feign ignorance because Ram's response highlights clearly to me that they had connected with the material but in a way that I had not intended. But saying that to Ram doesn't seem fair as it was me who had failed to provide a very effective follow-up to the song in terms of its relationship to social identity. It seems fairer to position myself as not understanding the lyrics properly than stating that she had not made the connection I was after. Her feedback is also helpful, as I had suspected that the message I was trying to convey was quite lost. I resolve that I will need to think much more carefully about how to integrate this into a future lesson.

Another student enquires: 'You say that you think that Stormzy's cool. Well … what do you think he's cool for? Just out of curiosity.' When asked why I think Stormzy is cool, it is on the back of Ram's comment that I have not grasped the meaning of the song's lyrics. I feel acutely conscious of how my claim that I think Stormzy is cool could be perceived as disingenuous; it may seem unlikely that I would like his genre of music due to my age, gender and perceived social class. The fact that I have just positioned myself, through my response to Ram's comment, as not understanding the basis of the song creates a heightened sensitivity within myself to these issues and influences my response when questioned.

I explain that I like Stormzy's music because 'he's saying something important because he's talking about being trapped down in the society that we live in. He's got something to say and he should say it and people should listen to that'. But I realise in the moment of explaining why I like it that the meaning the music has for me may be very different to how students may understand it or think of it. Part of me is also worried that they may think it's a gimmick and that I am somehow being disrespectful, or naïve. It might reveal something about me that will make me lose my credibility in their eyes, but my intention is pure: I thought the song was a useful illustration of social position, relationships and factors which unite and divide people. I think I have a generally good grasp of the meaning of the lyrics but I haven't lived it, so I don't know the experience described in the songs. I am therefore only an onlooker and I think my choice of artist highlights that.

163

Although my openness and the dialogue which followed as a result has provided me with greater insight into their perception of the session, I think the extent to which this helped them understand the concept of a learning cycle is debatable. However, I have made myself open and visible to them as a person modelling an honest process of thinking in relation to my own practice. I hope this is of some value to them even if it is not immediately apparent. Following this session and in the weeks that followed I experienced a marked shift in connectedness between myself and the students in this class.

5.19 Teaching Reflection Four: Teaching strengthened by a sense of connection with students

5.19.1 Prominent feature of the experience

This session took place with the same class referred to in TR3, a few weeks after the Stomzy incident described in the previous reflection. During this session, after providing students with copious information and handouts in preparation for their assignments. I press them to provide examples of how they promote the professional value of participation and active involvement within their work placement settings. They seemed to be having difficulty doing this. When this difficulty became apparent, I was tenacious in eliciting their responses and I did not let them off the hook by giving them answers. I consciously decided to insist on their explanations and links to practice as this is what they would be required to write about in their assignments.

5.19.2 Reflection in action (class size 30)

One student catches my eye. I decide to press them for a response. There is no particular reason for targeting them, other than that they are making gestures to say they done know the answer to what I'm asking. It's Lee (he has fairly good attendance to this class; likes music; has a sense of humour; can distract others; loses concentration easily). My decision to press him for a response is fuelled by past experience, this being my knowledge that if students are not given a chance to provide their own explanations for things, their opportunity to an understanding is often limited. In this current situation, I know that my detailed explanations up until this point will not help them gain an understanding of what they need to do for their

assignments and that they need to actively think it through themselves. It is also in my head that I could be in the firing line later down the road if they don't understand how to approach their assignments. I am also aware that I spend way too much time working too hard to model examples and placing greater demands on them is something I need to do to develop myself. These thoughts influence me as I push Lee for a response. I am determined to elicit his/their (the class's) suggestions as to how they could promote participation and active involvement of the young people within their placement settings. Our dialogue unfolds:

*'You **do** know Lee, don't look like that, you do! I laugh as I say this partly to keep a light-hearted feel to the situation and partly because Lee's reaction is childlike and induces a parental communicational style in me. I say: 'Right, where's your placement'? **Lee** replies: '**A school'. **Me:** 'Right, is it an ordinary school? **Lee:** 'No'. **Me:** 'Okay. Is it, a sort of behavioural… **Lee:** 'I'd say it is a normal school, but it's a centre at the same time. **Me:** 'Okay, so it's a pupil referral at the same time. So you've got challenging young people in there. How old are they? **Lee:** They're up to year 9. **Me:** 'Okay, so they're up to about fourteen, something like that? So let's think about Lee's placement. Everybody help with this because this is what you've got to do…' I am anxious not to let the group sit passively leaving all the work to Lee and I also don't want Lee to feel under too much pressure by being singled out. 'What problems might he (Lee) face in the Pupil referral Centre, in terms of the young people wanting to participate in activities'? I return to Lee and ask him for an example:' What problems do you face? Let's ask you'. I direct this at Lee, thinking he would be best placed to answer it. Do you face any? **Lee:** Yes. **Me:** 'Right. Come on then, share that with us'. I feel mildly irritated by his stilted response. **Lee:** 'Just kids really. Too much attitude towards their teachers, like…' he tails off... **Me:** 'what sort of things do they do to show that attitude? Just as Lee responds, someone's phone pings in the class, which is ironic given Lee's response. **LEE:** 'On their phones … just being dumb … being stupid'. **Me:** okay, so if you're in a role where you're trying to help people learn and they're getting their phone out, they don't want to listen to you, they're not interested, they don't want to learn or participate'*

... I am aware of a parallel I am drawing in my mind between what Lee describes and my observation of the class in front of me. I continue: ...then, you've got to decide what you're going to do about that. I don't mean just you personally Lee, but everybody in that situation if they come across it in practice. I don't want to make him feel picked on and under the spotlight too much. 'So, come on then, how would you promote participation and active involvement in that context'? This is addressed to the class. No response from them. I press: 'You wouldn't want to just sit there in that situation and think "well I'm not going to do anything" because that would be disempowering yourself wouldn't it? That would be like saying I can't do anything and I'm not going to try'. I feel irritated by the passivity of the group and that they don't seem able to provide a response and I am conscious that I am drawing a parallel in my mind between what I am saying and how they are appearing to me in this very moment and I wonder if they realise that! I am annoyed that I have been so helpful in providing all the basic reading materials for them to complete their assignments up until this point yet am getting nothing in return in terms of an attempt to resolve the challenge posed by Lee's description of young people's behaviour in the pupil referral centre. While I am trying to elicit a response, it runs through my head that I may actually be modelling the opposite of promoting active involvement and participation in the approach I am taking, which strikes me as slightly ridiculous given the focus of the lesson!

*'So, what sort of things should you be doing in that situation'? Complete silence. No response from anyone. I laugh due to the absurdity of the situation and repeat: 'What sort of things should you be doing? (addressed to the group). Another student asks: Are you talking to just Lee, or everyone'? This, I find very irritating – either I am not being clear at all or she/they are totally zoned out. **Me:** 'Everybody, because we're all in this together aren't we. One option is to sit there and say I've got really difficult young people in my setting and it's quite hard, even as a professional, to be motivated to help them participate in activities. But if the values of your profession are to promote participation and active involvement of young people to support their learning and development, then you have to do*

166

something because that's what you're supposed to be doing. You've got to find a way of promoting that professional value, otherwise you're not going to be the best professional you could be in supporting the young people. So, what sort of things do you think you're going to have to do?'

Immediate response from a student: 'I think sometimes in a school or pupil referral unit you have to kinda' take an informal approach … sometimes. You can't be as … like if you was a teacher in a mainstream school they're a lot more … I don't know what the word is…' **Me:** *'Authoritarian?'* **Student:** *Yeah, that's the word.* **Me:** *'Right, can I just press pause?'* **Student:** *'Yeah.* **Me:** *'I'm putting it on deep freeze; that's Stormzy by the way'. The whole group laughs. I warm to them again. I am comforted by their response and relieved as it breaks the tension in myself. I continue: 'So, you're really opening this up for the group now …' 'Alright, so Ede's saying if you've got pupils that are like that, you've got to adapt your approach. If you go in like a school teacher and start telling people what to do, they aren't going to listen to you. 'If you shift your approach to be more informal, you're more likely to get them wanting to talk to you and communicating with you'.*

I look at Ede and say: I'll come back in a moment because I think you had more to say there; but over to Lee now to pick up on this' (I want to finish what I originally started with Lee). 'So, Lee, in that setting with those young people who you said were acting dumb, is the approach that Ede describes something that you've seen modelled in your placement setting?' How do the teachers communicate with the young people in the setting?' **Lee:** *Different … like … some are like ... wanna teach (tails off).* **Me:** *'So the ones who want to teach, who are motivated to do it, would you say you've seen examples of where those difficult young people are participating and do get involved? Have you seen examples of that?* **Lee:** *'Yes'.* **Me:** *'Right. So what are the teachers doing?'* **Lee:** *'Just being firm and being strict'.* **Me:** *Are they only being strict and firm?' Lee: 'Basically yeah (pause) - yeah and no…'*

Another student starts to say, 'I think in…' but **Lee** *continues. This is positive as he is motivated enough to pursue this line of thought. He continues: 'Some of them are, some of them are just like laid back'.* **Me:** *'but they still get the*

167

*results?' **Lee:** 'Some'. **Me:** Some. So we've got to get that balance by being firm, setting the boundaries, but not being too firm and being off-putting. It's a really difficult balance to get isn't it?'*

*I return to the other student: 'What were you going to say? She replies: 'I was gonna say that you've gotta sort of cater for the individuals as well and not just try to teach everybody as a group. Perhaps if you had one-to-one interaction with them and perhaps set them slightly different tasks because not everybody can just sit down and focus...' **Me:** 'So you're giving us ideas, so we've now got two ideas. We started off with everybody staring at me and saying we don't know! But we've pursued it and, like Ede said, to promote active involvement and participation you change your approach or you try to, like Sam said, to promote active involvement and participation, you try and differentiate and look at the needs of your learners. These are all things you should be doing to promote that value and that's the type of thing I want you to write about in your assignments'.*

5.20 Summary of my teaching reflections: how do I attempt to foster transformative relationships when teaching in the NL HE context?

TR1: My use of judgment to balance expectations of and support for students

I attempt to foster a transformative approach within my teaching by using myself as a younger learner as an example. The intention is to support and reassure students that it is acceptable to approach unfamiliar subject matter from a position of ignorance and that it is not something to be ashamed of. Despite being encouraging, arguably it does not imbue the appropriate degree of expectation or stimulate them to talk about their own experience or current level of understanding of the subject matter. The approach taken does not create opportunity to get to know the learners. Self-preservation overrides my effectiveness in stimulating criticality due to my concern over student perceptions and potential criticism. Admittedly the size of the group makes this challenging.

TR2: The position adopted by the teacher and the use of questioning to facilitate discussion

I adopt the role of traditional teacher in order to maintain control and manage students' expectations. I use individual students' names and am sensitive to their feelings when reintegrating their answers into the lesson. This helps create an emotionally safe environment that may encourage their participation – and it works: students do participate. However, my posing of questions is technically poor. Too great a focus on self-preservation is a constant threat and this frequently seems to impede my ability to relax. The drivers for the feeling of self-preservation are my concern over student perceptions and potential criticism and the sense of intimidation I feel over such a large group of students.

TR3: My approach to teaching and willingness to be open and to take risks

I am vulnerable as a result of my offering a spontaneous invitation to students to give feedback about my teaching the previous week the subject matter of which is focused on learning cycles. Consequently, a discussion around the use of music to support learning occurs and my own racial and social position is brought into sharper focus. Although I know that there is a need to pursue dialogue around this and my choice of music, I judge this to be too risky due feeling that I have not established a strong enough relationship through which to have these potentially emotive conversations in a safe and productive way. I doubted my skills of facilitation regarding an issue that required cultural competence.

TR4: Teaching strengthened by a sense of connection with students

The issue of me providing a lot of direction and support in the form of concrete materials remains evident in TR4. This, along with the closeness of the relationship that has developed between me and the group, provides me with confidence to press the group for answers to questions. I am also able to express emotions such as mild frustration whilst also maintaining a supportive and encouraging environment. My relationship with the group gives me the courage to persevere and to accept their resistance to participating. The issue of self-preservation is diminished. I experience a greater degree of freedom of expression.

5.21 Analysis of the teaching reflections: toward transformative action in the classroom

Oolbekkink-Marchand *et al.,* (2017) explain how a combination of contextual and personal factors influence how teachers use their professional space. Here I discuss the impact of these factors on my 'capacity to initiate purposeful action' in pursuit of my aim of fostering transformative relationships (Lipponen and Kumpulained 2011:812). I use my teaching reflections to narrate the process by which I seek to foster such relationships and to illustrate the factors that support and/or impede my attempts to do so.

5.21.1 Analysis of Teaching Reflection One (TR1)

Starting from Ricoeur's position of inseparability (explained in chapter 3), I analyse my actions as they unfold. Using Emirbayer and Mische's Chordal Triad of Agency, Relational Cultural Theory and Young's notion of oppression, I identify obstacles to TL and ways to actively improve my teaching in order to alleviate the oppressive forces of neoliberalism as they relate to NTSs. As I have argued throughout this thesis, I understand transformative relationships to be worthwhile in creating equity for NTSs as at their heart such relationships challenge the status quo, a primary goal of critical autoethnography (Holman Jones, 2016). Having analysed my action in light of relevant theory, I go on to summarise the challenges and tensions related to fostering transformative relationships in the NL context.

NL is a constant psychological companion in my teaching and the issues of accountability and the necessity to demonstrate quality are omnipresent. In keeping with Ricoeur's philosophy, the 'self' I experience in my working context is never in inseparable from the influences of ideology, personal history and society; these are interdependent with experience and action. In TR1, I imagined what I thought students would consider value for money as this is widely understood in the literature (Jones-Devit & Samiei; Molesworth, 2011; Voss *et al.* 2007), namely interesting, enjoyable, intellectually easy and clear content that is directly relatable to their forthcoming exams and future employment. The impossibility of distancing myself from those aspects of NL that I have identified as problematic in the University's culture becomes evident in TR1 where my practice is clearly influenced by my sense of vulnerability, the corollary of which is my wish to avoid student complaints. The resultant action is impulsive yet also unconsciously strategic in that I do things to help manufacture a favourable perception of myself in the eyes of my students, '*I bring their focus to how the material from the past two*

weeks will be helpful'(TR1). It is an agentic choice of sorts, but one driven mainly by self-preservation rather than purely a desire to benefit the students. In effect, I am restricted in my capacity to relate by my preoccupations and feelings of anxiety.

Emirbayer and Mische's Chordal Triad of Agency (1998) explains how the past, present and future are all simultaneously present in all forms of human action, and impact on action differently according to the situation, context and personal meaning the individual brings to it. In keeping with this and Ricoeur's concept of inseparability, I cannot disconnect myself from the past-present-future dimensions of experience. My personal history is ever-present: my own NTS background influences my 'in the moment' decisions that affect how I attempt to relate. In TR1, this aspect of self is brought to the fore in order to provide myself with a greater sense of security in a situation in which I am experiencing vulnerability by inviting students to view me as an 'other of similarity' through sharing an example from my own experience as a HE student that I think might resonate with them (Chang, 2008). This is an intentionally supportive action. The example I use is one of me having felt intimidated by seemingly difficult concepts. I do this very consciously because I want them to feel that it is quite normal and acceptable to not know/grasp things immediately. Whilst intentionally supportive, it is also an indirect attempt to protect myself by encouraging them to view me favourably. From the perspective of Collinson's (2009) notion of multiple aspects of self, competing/discordant selves are brought into play in TR1 (and across all the teaching reflections). The immediate situation (teaching a large group) and broader institutional context (NL HE) bring forth an intensity of emotion (fear) that overshadows the supportive, empathetic aspects of self that are arguably important when attempting to foster transformative relationships.

My action in TR1 was an attempt to relate to the NTSs in the class as an 'other of similarity' who has similarly rubbed shoulders with disadvantage and oppression. This attempt to relate can be seen as a product of the wider social context that is shaped by NL principles that are allied with Westernised, masculine notions of the successful self as being highly independent, competitive and successful as a result of the acquisition of advantage (Fletcher *et al.* 2000; Heywood 2012; Miller 1987). It is in this context that people develop a sense of their identity and perceptions of their position within society. My attempt to relate illustrated illuminated my own perception of belonging to the NTS social group that is frequently associated with disadvantage.

Without due reflection, the use of personal examples, such as used in TR1, where I draw on my own experience of being a NTS, could act as a barrier to my 'full acknowledgement of the other' by my making assumptions about their experiences and/or learning dispositions that may not, in fact, reflect reality (O' Dwyer, 2009:3). There is a tendency, revealed in this instance and based on my own personal history, to homogenise the NTS community as being in deficit and as lacking the necessary resilience to be HE students.

In TR1, I am frequently hampered by my preoccupation with what I imagine students to be thinking, and despite my genuine desire to help the students '*to find within themselves a way to learn and to see themselves capable of doing so*', my efforts are likely to be compromised because my approach is at times too authoritarian. Significantly, my approach reflects a tendency to juxtapose NTSs with 'traditional' students (Bathmaker, 2015; Lawson 2014). Internalised from my own experience in society and my upbringing, I recognise that my NTS self is infused with feelings of inferiority, habits of mind that are self-limiting and thus reduce my freedom to act (Mezirow; 2006). Reflecting in the way that I have, it is possible to bring underlying assumptions to consciousness (Brookfield, 1995; Farrell and Ives; 2015) and thus discover a way to begin my own self-directed transformation in recognition of the obstacles I have identified and the assimilation of these into a new way of being.

The way that I attempt to relate in TR1 has implications for fostering transformative relationships. Instead of challenging the status quo, I am complicit in maintaining an unhelpful distinction between traditional and NTSs, albeit unintentionally, by communicating with students in a manner that reinforces a perception of myself and them ('us') as inferior. Furthermore, I find myself under pressure to meet students' expectations in terms of manifesting practices that I perceive will be seen by them as promoting the benefits they seek from participating in HE – these being clear routes to tangible benefits in terms of employability prospects. The competing/discordant selves that are brought into play as I portray a mix of empathetic support and authoritarian rigidity illuminate two pathways of oppression flowing through me and reflected in my communication with them: one is the perception of NTSs as inferior to 'traditional' academic students, and the other is my perception of students' expectations as influenced by NL principles. These factors mean that I do not open avenues for criticality within my teaching and instead play it safe by conveying support and focusing students' attention on how they can become successful in what I represent as a frightening academic context. Such actions bring to mind Freire's 'attitude of adhesion', where the individual is submerged in the reality of oppression as a result of a powerful inclination to

identify with that which oppresses (Freire 1970:7). Instead of inviting students into a relationship through which they can value themselves authentically and gain confidence needed to be autonomous, I reinforce the NL idea of success in terms of gaining membership of privileged more powerful social groups and becoming more aligned with the dominant successful ideal of independent autonomy described by Miller (1987). Despite a conscious desire to foster transformative relationships, my identification with the oppressive factors described significantly impedes my attempt to do so.

5.21.3 Analysis of teaching reflection two

As discussed in Chapter 3, Relational Cultural Theory challenges the dominant 'power over others' paradigm associated with Westernised, masculine notions of the self as being highly independent. Here, I explore the notion of 'power over others' as it arises in TR2 and relates to the governing logic of NL understood as a form of cultural imperialism (Young 2012), and I discuss the negative implications for fostering transformative relations. In reflecting on my action, I focus in particular on the present and future dimensions of experience as these emerge as the most salient aspects of the Chordal Triad.

In TR2, I pose questions in a manner that positions me as separate from the students rather than as self-with-others, as required in the transformative approach (Schwarz, 2000; Slavich and Zimbardo, 2012). I cultivate a classroom culture associated with retaining authority as often seen in traditional models of teaching (Biesta, 2012), and in this case it was my preoccupation with retaining authority due to fear of failing to meet students' expectations that undermined my fostering of mutuality between myself and my students. Consistent with this idea of authority widely associated with a more traditional teaching dynamic, I was keen to manufacture and maintain a perception of myself as capable, strong and successful – characteristics often seen as being at odds with the softer emotions associated with femininity and which are often regarded as a weakness (Miller 1987; Young 2012). Maintaining a perception of authority in the eyes of students may, to an extent, be necessary and helpful for building the kind of trust that underpins the transformative relationship (Harris-Perlman, 1993) because it helps students feel more secure and comfortable; however, if adopted as the *only* approach, taking a position of authority can undermine the development of mutuality that is crucial to the transformative relationship (Schwarz, 2000). Importantly, in relation to people-based professions such as childhood, youth and community-based programmes, Spencer (2000:35) describes relationship as 'the mechanism through which development occurs'. Arguably, the position of the teacher and the type of relationship that they create with students

is significant in cultivating criticality in relation to the subject matter and to the students' practice within their discipline (in this case childcare).

Assisting students to develop into professionals capable of empowering, teaching and supporting others requires the teacher to recognise emotion as a regular part of experience and as a tool to promote learning (Banks, 2013; Edwards and Richards, 2002). In line with Relational Cultural Theory, s/he needs to invite students to think critically about their own experiences, communication skills and professional judgement by demonstrating a willingness to share examples from his/her own experience. As NTS, this enables potentially oppressive experiences and/or behaviours to be named within the process of teaching and learning. If, for example, a valuable classroom interaction or critical incident presents an important learning opportunity, it needs to be explored with a willingness to be honest about the emotions being experienced. Yet, in TR2, I am reticent about being open enough with students to build a developmental relationship with them through which I can share and explore experience and emotions. In order to insulate myself against the risk of negative perceptions, I am reluctant to show any fallibility. Instead, I present a 'pseudo self' that enables me to manage my anxiety, but which is inauthentic.

Theories of oppression offer a useful theoretical tool with which to 'examine systems, institutions, and discourses that privilege some people and marginalize others' (Holman Jones, 2018: 7). In relation to TR2, I am interested in both the reasons behind my action (specifically, the presentation of a pseudo-self) and how that action connects with the issue of oppression at a wider institutional and social level. That is, in the moment, as my teaching unfolds, I imagine how it might be viewed by an auditor and whether it would be regarded as acceptable. Lawrence (2011) describes this as a future-orientated intentionality. As Emirbayer and Mische (1998) note, dimensions of experience do not occur in isolation; action is influenced by those dimensions most activated in a given situation. In TR2, I anticipate the possible consequences of my teaching being judged. My action in TR2 reflects my perception of the University's culture in which I see myself as having limited freedom to critically question and to protect myself from negative repercussions should I receive an unsatisfactory lesson observation. These feelings substantially diminish my ability to cultivate classroom conditions that can promote and sustain mutual discovery and growth (Miller 1987) in a manner consistent with transformative learning.

As in TR1, my action in TR2 tends towards self-preservation in that I am more concerned with maintaining my image as a credible teacher than I am with the level of criticality I manage to foster in my students. This hampers my attempts to initiate dialogue, a key feature of the relational and transformative approach (Taylor & Laros 2014; Miller 1987; Richards and Edwards 2002; Saari, 2005; Slavich and Zimbardo, 2012) and through which I can foster links between the subject matter being taught (the rights of children with special needs) and issues of power, social class, marginalisation and privilege. It is through fostering these links that students are encouraged to consider issues of oppression as they relate to society and their future professional practice. For example, through dialogue, factors that lead to the disempowerment of children, youth and families who are the focus of their future work can be explored and better understood, along with the reasons why a family may decline the offer of assistance. In this way, the classroom can become a fertile space for self-exploration in relation to oppression, with insights gained through exposure to other peoples' sharing of experiences and effective facilitation.

Essentially, it is through the fostering of dialogue that wider social issues related to oppression and privilege that Young sees as difficult to define due to their non-material nature, can be brought into sharper focus. For example, in her writing about marginalisation (one of the five faces of oppression), Young focuses on the patriarchal rationale embedded in westernised capitalist systems in which the self and its achievements reflect an individualistic cultural disposition not unlike that of neoliberalism and according to which individuals are constructed as individually responsible for their material success, or lack of it (Heywood, 2012; Fletcher, *et al.*2000; Miller 1987). Young explains how the notion of 'dependency' is linked to oppression through marginalisation in that it reflects a 'deeply held assumption that moral agency and full citizenship require that a person be autonomous and independent' (p. 51). Through classroom dialogue focused on subject matter concerning marginalised and/or demonised sections of society, this socio-political construction of a person's value and deservedness can be questioned and reconsidered. The importance of doing this is not only significant to developing students' professional criticality but opens up a space where they can consider themselves, their profession and their own capacity to become agents of change in recognition of often veiled social and systemic issues that can serve to marginalise and oppress.

Whilst there is a lack of clarity in my own thinking in TR2 concerning my use of questions designed to prompt students to think transformatively, it is my unwillingness to appear vulnerable that places boundaries and limitations on the teaching relationship 'and erects a

barrier against the openness and mutuality inherent in any approach to the possibility of genuine relationship' (O'Dwyer, 2009:3). My fear of negative perceptions regarding my teaching hampers my ability to foster transformative relationships, and with it my potential to contribute optimally to my students' preparedness to enter the practice-based professions for which they are training.

5.21.5 Analysis of teaching reflection three

Framed by my perception of the University context, my need for self-esteem and belonging are apparent in TR3.

TR3 captures my vulnerability in the process of connecting with a class of culturally diverse students in the third week of a twelve-week semester. My need for acceptance and belonging is illustrated by my failure to address the issue of lateness due to my concern that students may perceive me to be unfriendly and unapproachable, qualities at odds with those linked to the notion of student satisfaction as expounded in the literature (e.g. Brookfield,1995; Jones-Devit & Samiei, 2011; Molesworth, 2011; Voss *et al.,* 2007). Consequently, I became complicit in their lateness, which was likely to continue as a result. My action (inaction in this case) legitimised unacceptable behaviour and maintained distance between them and me because I was confronting honestly an uncomfortable situation as it arose.

I held back from addressing the situation because I was worried that it was my lack of ability to connect with students, or maybe their reluctance to connect with me, that was the reason for their lateness. My welcoming behaviour at the start of the session reflected my need to seek their affirmation and to offset this troubling emotion - a reaction typical of a person confronted with a situation that is 'psychologically threatening' (Argyis and Schon, 1978:11).

Whilst my failure to challenge lateness was a way of maintaining a favourable perception and managing my sense of vulnerability in an organisation intensely focused on metrics – and specifically those concerned with teaching quality and student satisfaction – there were also subtler issues at play regarding group identity. Young's notion of identity sees identity as a product of the individual's personal history and social status, which leads to them feeling a sense of affinity with particular groups the members of which share similar life histories, experiences and self-perceptions. I frequently identify with my students due to the fact of my own experience and identity as a NTS, and this point of intersection often increases my ability to connect with them. However, in TR3, I am acutely aware that I do not have a complete understanding of the full range of students' experiences and backgrounds, something I am

particularly conscious of in TR3 because the class is so diverse and it is still early in the semester. I have not been able to get to know the class and share much of myself with them. Young argues that it is the 'identification with certain social status, the common history that social status produces and self-identification that defines a group identity' (2004:51). To a diverse group of learners, – as a white university lecturer – I may represent to them an identity associated with privilege that they dis-identify with and, consequently, the conditions required for genuine communication, and thus transformative learning, remain largely absent despite any common experiences I perceive myself to have with them due to my NTS background.

What is somewhat surprising to me, given my precarious sense of identity with this group of students, is the fact that I share with them my feelings about how successful I thought the previous week's (Stormzy) lesson had been. This quite spontaneous instance of sharing resembled a slippage similar to that which occurred in the staff meeting (see section 5.5.5) when I had involuntarily expressed emotion and an attitude of cynicism which I later regretted. I was genuinely surprised that they had liked my attempt to use music in the lesson and by the warmth of their response when I admitted to them that I thought it had been a disaster. Although risky, this exposure of the pseudo-self resulted in my feeling vulnerable, which in turn enabled me to begin developing a sense of connection with the class from which a more mutual and authentic platform became possible. Through this instance I discovered that, despite my underlying feelings of alienation, there was a possibility of forging connection. I experienced a sense of relief at this as the previous weeks had felt lonely and uncertain. The absence of a proper support network through which such experiences could be unpicked and discussed, along with the competitive culture engendered by the focus on grading our teaching, magnified feelings of anxiety and isolation.

I was pleased that my attempt to try something new had paid off because, while it had not been perfect, it enabled a more genuine dialogue to ensue about what was being experienced (by me). Furthermore, it was also in keeping with the subject matter I was teaching that week which focused on learning cycles and reflection in youth work. Albeit unwittingly, I had invited students into my own process of learning and was modelling the skills that they would need as professionals; for example, the ability to manage uncertainty and ambiguity, and to be open to critical feedback from others in relation to their practice.

My feeling of unease and embarrassment around what I referred to inwardly as 'the Stormzy incident' was driven by various factors, one being how it highlighted my difference from the

group in terms of my age, race and social class: I imagined them thinking that someone like me – a white, middle-aged female – would not like or perhaps even know Stormzy. Whilst I could live with that idea, I worried that my choice of music genre may have suggested that I had made assumptions about them: that due to their backgrounds, they would be familiar with and probably like the artist Stormzy. In actuality, I had chosen the artist because I genuinely believed that its lyrical content offered a good basis for learning about assumptions and stereotypes at a wider social level; inequality and injustice featured explicitly. Nevertheless, I worried that they may have perceived me to be 'othering' them; assigning them to a category stigmatised by negative labels such as gangsters and criminals with which the Grime music genre is frequently associated (Dedman, 2011; Fatsis, 2019). I felt that I had increased the likelihood of that perception by allowing the student (Ram) to be 'the expert' regarding the lyrics. I feared that implicit in my response to her was the idea that they would know more about the lyrics than me, given their race and background. In fact, my response had been an attempt to demonstrate that I was open to learning, with the help of the class, the idea of positioning self with others in the endeavour of intellectual and personal development.

TR3 illustrates how I was able to judge when to pursue an idea and when to hold back (Harris-Perlman, 1993). I held back from initiating dialogue around my own racial position in relation to the music because I did not feel that there was a secure enough relationship established in order to do so safely and productively, and this might impact negatively on the students' perception of me and create tensions between the students themselves. My unease over my own sense of group affinity suggested that I needed to find a way to relate better to the students and become one with them by promoting a delicate group process in which we collectively acknowledged our differences and emotions they evoked. My holding back from pursuing further critical dialogue in this instance was intuitive rather than overtly conscious and reflecting on this is crucial to my professional development.

A salient feature of this experience was the effect of my relinquishing of authority and allowing myself to be vulnerable (Schwarz, 2000). It was in stark contrast to my approach in TR1 and TR2 (in which I was rigid and more controlling), and although it felt uncomfortable, especially when it was suggested that I had not entirely understood the song's lyrics. I managed to avoid reacting defensively and instead did so in a manner that I thought would strengthen my future relationship with the group rather than undermine it. Here, as in many of my experiences, our differences were accentuated in TR3. Through my interactions with students (including my encounters with Lala, 5.7.3; Aqsa, 5.8.1 and Ahamna, 5.8.3), I have become aware of my

privileged position in terms of my whiteness and middle-classness (Baily, 2004). I recognise the contextualised nature of my own particular educational struggle and that any marginalisation I experienced was offset with the privilege of being white-middle-class and speaking English as a first language. I do not have experience of the complex intersections of race and class experienced by many of my current students, and the 'Stomzy incident' highlighted this fact in my mind and induced feelings of uncertainty.

In my time as a student, the fact that I occupied the same racial and social position as my teachers meant that I possessed an 'unearned asset conferred systematically' (Bailey, 2004:305). My whiteness and middle-classness was an advantage that I believe led to positive perceptions on the part of my lecturers because these characteristics were seen as 'conferring' on me certain kinds of knowledge, experience language that matched their expectations (Burke, 2015). As a teacher, I now wonder how my whiteness and likely perceived middle-classness places me in the eyes of my own students. Although I felt closer to the group, after sharing my feeling about 'the Stormzy incident', the differences between me and the class were brought sharply into focus.

5.21.7 Analysis of teaching reflection four

TR4 demonstrates the significant impact that the kind of more secure relationship with the class that I referred to in TR3 has on my willingness to challenge students and to place greater emphasis on them as learners rather than customers.

In TR4, I manage to transcend the fear that is present in TR1 and TR2 and which holds me back from attempting to elicit students' responses in a way that engenders criticality. It is through my relationship with the class and the individual students within it that I am able to invite them to recognise their own emerging knowledge, something that is crucial to the process of their personal development and thus to their transformation. An example of fostering students' confidence in themselves is shown when I tenaciously draw out their responses to my questions in this teaching reflection.

In TR4, my ability to work sensitively with students is evident, as are my skills in using the responses from individual students to further the learning of the group as a whole. I confidently facilitate the learning situation by communicating an appropriate balance of expectation and sensitivity in order to effectively engage the students in problem-solving. My confidence is boosted by the events of the previous week and the stronger bond that has developed between us. I am proud of myself in this teaching reflection because I have overcome my anxiety and

diverged from my default setting in which my self-as-responsible can be controlling and stifle opportunity for students to be critical and engaged. I am enlivened by the experience and feel liberated and able to develop.

In the weeks following this lesson, our relationship strengthened and a climate of kindness and compassion developed within the group to an extent where it was possible to discuss potentially controversial issues such as homophobia. As was evident in TR4, I continued to experience frustration with the class but was more willing to express this to them. It was a far healthier manifestation of (potentially) negative emotion than the fear that governs me in the larger teaching sessions. Admittedly, the sense of need to protect myself, which I address by providing students with handouts at the start of the session, remains present. What is salient for me in this experience is the bond I form with the group and the courage it gives me to take risks and place the kind of more demanding expectations on students that promotes their and my development. My experiences within TR3 and TR4 highlight the delicate process of relationship building and the additional energy and investment involved in doing so.

5.22 Summary

The teaching reflections have enabled me to explore the interplay between factors within the environment that impact on the degree of agency I exercise when teaching, and particularly those that inhibit it. Embedded in them are salient features of experience that resonate with the notion of oppression as it occurs at a personal, institutional, systemic and wider social level. Oolbekkink-Marchand *et al.,* (2017) describe how practice is 'contextually embedded' and a teacher's judgement of how to act is made 'by means of the environment' (p. 964). With this in mind it has been possible to produce theoretical insights concerning oppression through contextualised personal experience.

A university catering for high numbers of NTSs studying a vocational curriculum is ideally positioned to develop standards in respect of institutional practices that reduce oppression. Yet, as my teaching reflections have illustrated, systemic oppression as a result of NL principles having been imported from the business sector (and which, according to Young, represent a form of cultural imperialism) can pose a very real risk to such an aspiration, leading as it has to a predominant concern with student satisfaction and accompanying regulatory practices, such as teaching quality audits, that adopt criteria that are open to question and inevitably reflect the way in which the institution views learning in terms of its process and products. Neoliberalism, and the policies it brings with it, affects teachers' attitudes, sense of integrity,

autonomy and security. For me personally, the design and implementation of tools intended to measure teaching quality can, if wielded carelessly, perpetuate a sense of powerlessness, in part because I feel I have no right of reply should my practices be subject to criticism. Furthermore, I experience the need to alter my practice in the way that Miller (1987) and McCauley (2013) relate to the experience of oppression. In the teaching reflections, the perceived pressure to align with organisational values driven my NL principles and ones that I also believed to be in the minds of students, gives rise to self-protective behaviour which, in effect, places limitations on my ability to foster transformative relationships in my teaching. As does my sense of vulnerability and my need for self-esteem, affirmation and acceptance (as evidenced in teaching reflections 1, 2 and 3) all of which have deep roots in my personal history.

Another aspect of my practice that emerges from the teaching reflections is that of support often outweighing challenge (as seen in TR2, for example); that is, I elicit and manage students' responses supportively with 'warmth, empathy, caring' but without challenging students in a way that requires them to think critically about themselves and the subject matter in a manner essential to the transformative relationship (Harris-Perlman, 1993; Saari 2005; Miller; 1987). The obligation to perform is on *me*, not them. Some degree of choice is evident in my action, but again, I find myself steering towards personal security and away from my goal of fostering transformative relationships. Competing/discordant selves are brought into play in a way that produces inner tension (Collinson, 2009). While my actions, as reported in the teaching reflections, do not portray an *inability* to foster transformative relationships, they do highlight a reticence to do so due to institutional policies, attitudes and expectations that are perceived as being unsupportive, and to practical conditions such as large class sizes and the resultant perceived need for teaching to be more prescriptive and teacher-fronted, with a consequent reduction in opportunities for meaningful interaction.

The cultural diversity of the students I teach is a key contextual factor that influences my pedagogical decision-making and this is evident in TR3. A supportive context is needed to traverse the delicate issues experienced and which implicate Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality (1989) and the; issues which require the ability to facilitate dialogue confidently and effectively. Yet, within TRs 1 – 4, there are factors that impede my ability to do this and thereby foster transformative relationships. The issue of students' expectations and the pressure to perform, combined with the fact of students who occupy different social and

racial positions to mine, make it difficult for me to know how to create meaningful and thought-provoking discussion whilst maintaining a sense of security. Interestingly, it is only when I perceive that I have formed a connection with students, in part by discarding any NL façade, that I am able to experience conditions that promise transformation. Intriguingly in TR4, as a result of the shift in our relationship that I describe in the reflection, I am able to express greater expectations of students in terms of their participation and role as learners, and am more comfortable to open dialogue.

5.23 Learning from the autoethnographic process

Autoethnography is a process which can help the teacher develop greater insight into their own practice. Through analysing action as it unfolds they can see more clearly the experiences and courses of action that have lead them to their current experience, and in doing so achieve a better vantage point from which to make changes and adapt their practice (Holeman-Jones, 2016). It is in this spirit that resembles that of a critical autoethnographer that I reflect on what I have learnt from the autoethnographic process as a step toward change. I begin by acknowledging actions that align with fostering transformative relationships.

5.24 Actions that align with fostering transformative relationships in the NL HE context

My autoethnography has illustrated quite a complex set of interrelated factors that support and impede the development and maintenance of transformative relationships within teaching and non-teaching situations. Here I identify the actions evident within my autoethnography that align with the goal of fostering transformative relationships, and in doing so draw on my experiences with Lala, Aqsa, Zaina and Ahamna reported in chapter 5 (The Autoethnography).

My proficiency in managing relationships between students as well as their perceptions of each other is a key aspect of fostering transformative relationships. My experiences with Lala (Sec. 5.7.4) and her impromptu sharing in class demonstrates my ability to manage my emotions and to display the sensitivity and intuitive judgement of a transformative teacher when responding to the emotions of other (Harris Perlman, 1981; Ikpeze, 2019). Lala does not usually speak out in groups. The fact that she felt able to do so is a positive indication of how she was experiencing that class, and of my role as a key factor in this. Miller (1987:253) describes this skill as 'empathic teaching' that fosters a mutually empowering situation.

Mutually growth fostering activity as it is described by Fletcher *et al.* (2000) is located in the three encounters with Aqsa, Zaina and Ahamna when I invest time and I learn *from them;* I take time to get to know them because I am interested in who they are. This is a key characteristic of a transformative educator; namely, a teacher who regards the student as a 'mutual colleague in pursuit of leaning' (Edwards and Richards, 2002:37) but it is also resembles mutually growth fostering activity. In my interactions with Aqsa, Ahamna and Zaina, it is not a question of 'helping or being helped or being dependent or depended on' (p. 248); these interactions 'exchanges' are spaces in which both people can be enlarged and become something greater that would otherwise be possible. From Aqsa, I gain insight into cultural differences, her lived experience of poverty, and the experience of education from the perspective of a person who grew up in a family with non-English speaking parents. From Ahamna, I learn about the different dispositions of students and the capabilities associated with these, particularly resilience and independence. My own learning is facilitated by our conversation in which there is a sense of acceptance and positive regard which I feel transcends our differences and absolves hierarchy that may otherwise stilt interaction of this kind between teacher and students (Fletcher *et al*. 2000). In each encounter, I work with sensitivity to fulfil my responsibility as a tutor. I engage in continuous self-reflection to ensure, as far as possible, I do not impose my own beliefs on them, and I am careful to listen to and guide them with genuine care for their development as individuals and to engender a relational space that is mutually growth fostering. The behaviour of Aqsa and Ahamna towards me (for example, their willingness to talk openly about their lives and share personal thoughts and feelings about their hopes, fears and aspirations) suggests that they regard me as trustworthy. They experience the kind acceptance, warmth and support vital to the transformative relationship.

The behaviours I manifest – investing time in my students, learning from them and engaging in a process of continuous self-reflection – illustrate how my theory-in-use engenders relationships with transformative characteristics. They resemble relational practices identified by Fletcher (1999) that are frequently associated with women such as 'empathy', 'shouldering responsibility' 'extending responsibility beyond the technical definition of the job', 'affirming individual uniqueness through listening, respecting and responding' (p. 237). Such practices are evident in my reported experience (see sections: 5.7.1; 5.7.2; 5.7.3; 5.6.5). A key point here is that these types of relational practices produce unique experiences and have implications when implemented within contexts shaped by principles that encourage competition and autonomy. Whether adopted by women or men, Fletcher explains how there is little focus on

relational practices, in terms of how they can be used most effectively and appropriately in organisations such as universities. This lack of focus indicates that the range of approaches used by teachers that are not in keeping with the traditional masculine model of efficiency and the valuing of competition and autonomy as underpinning success tend to remain overlooked (Fletcher 1999, Fletcher, *et al.* 2000).

In addition to those experiences with individual students, it is important to reflect on whether the actions conducive to fostering transformative relationships are reflected in my teaching. Despite the challenge of managing the increasingly pressurised NL context, my encounters with Aqsa, Zaina and Ahamna not only encourage but compel me to remain loyal to the goal of fostering transformative relationships within my teaching. However, successfully fostering a relational pedagogy that encourages transformation requires more than the will do so; there are specific conditions and competencies needed to support the approach. Whilst I recognise that I possess some of these, there are aspects of the University's context and its conditions that work against me doing this successfully and remaining committed to the approach. There are also aspects of myself that, left unchecked, can impede my ability to achieve my aim.

I now revisit my resistance to the intensification of NL in order to understand the factors that support and or impede my attempts to foster transformative relationships in the context of NL HE. I begin by my resistance to organisational change and how this encouraged me to continue fostering transformative relationships.

5.24.1 A factor that supports my motivation to foster transformative relationships: my resistance to organisational change

My resistance to organisational change supported my motivation to foster transformative relationships. To counter-balance, the uncomfortable emotions I was experiencing, in what I perceived as an increasingly competitive and individualistic culture, I made a conscious decision to explore the extent to which I fostered transformative relationships with students and to address changes that may be needed in order to live what I considered to be a meaningful professional life. It was the nurturing of transformative relationships that presented an opportunity for positive resistance to the pressure of NL that I perceived to be impacting negatively on myself and my colleagues. Similar to the strategies described by Calvert *et al.,* (2011) that are adopted by academics in contemporary HE, I was moved to act in order to preserve my values and keep a particular professional narrative going, one that was student-centred. My resistance and the action that stemmed from it was, however, framed by layers of

sedimented beliefs due to which many of my attempts to enact transformative relationships were frequently stifled and/hindered. I summarise those next.

5.24.2 An impeding factor: my learner history as a NTS

Several factors associated with my learner history risk impeding my attempts to foster transformative relationships. For example, the subconscious associations I make with my own NT background and with vocational education lead to me viewing myself and other NTSs as being 'in deficit' and complicit in maintaining 'terrible messages of inferiority' (Bartky, 1990:34). While my own background is not part of the material contextual space in which I was attempting to negotiate the pressures of NL, it nevertheless interacted with it and influenced my action and the possibilities that may or may not spring from it. For example, as is evident in my teaching reflections, because my students are NTSs who I assume adopt a deficit learner profile and associated set of dispositions, I expect them to feel anxious when confronted with unfamiliar and complex subject matter. I use examples from my own experience in a way invites them to focus on more negative aspects of learning such as anxiety and struggle and, in some instances, I frame questions that prompt them to think of themselves from that reference point. It is important that I bring to consciousness and articulate those aspects of self that arise from my identity as a NTS if I am to ensure that I am not imposing my own beliefs and values on them in a way that may counteract my attempts to support them to develop as individuals in their own right.

5.24.3 A supporting factor: my learner history as a NTS

Institutional change brought into sharper focus my own story and beliefs about teaching and the way in which these helped me make sense of myself and my identity in the context of intensified NL (Archer, 2007; Churchman and King, 2009; Clegg, 2008; 2009; Harris, 2005; Sabri 2010; Sutton, 2015; Trahar, 2011). My lived experience as a NTS was a key factor that motivated me to foster transformative relationships, as was the limited freedom of choice regarding my future that I had experienced as a younger person. Focusing on fostering transformative relationships served ultimately to channel what had been personally painful experiences into positive activity that aimed to help others and made me feel useful in the process; that is, it was affirming.

I was further motivated by what I perceived to be unjust systems that devalue certain forms of knowledge and lead to the negative stereotyping of atypical, 'non-traditional', students (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003:598). Indeed, this differentiation – and stigmatisation –

induces memories of the way in which my parents differentiated me from my siblings and left me feeling inadequate by virtue of being labelled as "not academic". Such personal experience of othering and of what I now see as inaccurate assumptions by others concerning my potential incites me to be hyper-vigilant about repeating history with my students and to be open to the value of different kinds of knowledge and to the expression of knowledge in ways that may diverge from the expectations of mainstream education but enable them, nonetheless, to realise their particular strengths.

I was empathetic to the often difficult positions from which students were attempting to progress; for example, managing the practicalities of study alongside other responsibilities such as employment and childcare. Together, these personal factors and the NL pressures I was experiencing served to strengthen my sense of similarity with the NTSs and prompted me to adopt a transformative approach. I wanted to foster their transformation as a way of rescuing my younger self. However, my considerable personal motivation and investment in what I was seeking to do, in combination with those delicate, more fragile aspects of my self (such as self-esteem), ironically and somewhat paradoxically also had the potential to limit my practice and left me vulnerable to exploitation and emotional burnout. I turn next to the aspects my personal history as a factor that impedes my fostering of transformative relationships.

5.24.4 An impeding factor: organisational conditions and my/our emotional responses to change

My autoethnography has illustrated how emotions such as anxiety can disincline teachers to take risks and thereby reduce their effectiveness. Paradoxically, the pressure to evidence high-quality teaching appeared to restrict the development of my practice. The implementation of the audit induced negative emotions; it heightened the sense that our teaching was being scrutinised and provoked feelings of resentment and disempowerment as teachers felt undervalued and that their professionalism was unacknowledged or being called into question. Rather than presenting a space for focusing on improving practice, the experience of teaching became threatening and/or unrewarding. Factors seated within the University's culture were viewed as restricting our ability to practice as we would wish. Our frustration tended to centre around what was not possible or what *must* be done at the expense of exploring possibilities to improve our effectiveness as teachers. It became easier to direct that frustration at senior management than to focus on how best to adapt our practice in response to the pressures that we were experiencing. Consequently, we played some role in sustaining a culture of complicity in which the real issues that impacted on quality and equality continued to be overlooked.

A heavy workload and challenging working conditions frequently depleted the energy and/or motivation required to identify and explore students' needs and experiences, and to use that knowledge to improve our practice whilst protecting ourselves and meeting institutional expectations.

5.25 Some areas for development

Aside from the pressures existing at organisational level, my autoethnography has served to highlight three professional competencies needed to support the effective fostering of transformative relationships. These are:

- technical competencies such as the sensitive and strategic use of questions
- emotional competencies that motivate and encourage
- cultural competencies that facilitate students in exploring their experiences and backgrounds

5.25.1 Area of development one: the effective use of questions

In order to ask effective questions, the teacher needs to be clear about what they are trying to achieve. The data from my teaching reflections illustrates that my own thinking is not always clear and I sometimes fail to elicit responses from students that generate meaningful dialogue. I struggle sometimes to identify questions that will effectively elicit students' ideas and scaffold their learning.

It may be helpful to develop a repertoire of generic transformative prompts derived from an ongoing process of reflection (Farrell and Ives, 2015; Uschi and Macfarlane, 2011). Doing so may help alleviate the emotional strain of teaching large groups by acting as a reliable set of resources when mediating contextual pressures, such as managing my idea of students' expectations and the pressure of formally graded lesson observations. With better emotional regulation, questions can be asked with more precision and clearer responses to the questions provided.

5.25.2 Area of development two: managing emotions

As well as developing the ability to use questions effectively teachers need to be emotionally intelligent. For example, teachers need to manage their own emotions if they are to frame their questions in a manner that elicits thought processes and responses that promote transformation. As my autoethnography has illustrated, emotions such as anxiety can impede teachers'

inclination to take risks and thus their effectiveness. They may, for example, refrain from asking challenging questions (Carroll and Levy, 2008). Furthermore, it has shown how my own learning experiences are highly influential in pedagogical decision-making and in the way I interact with students and the feelings induced in me when doing so (Brookfield, 1995). Powerful emotions connected to self-esteem and self-worth can induce protective behaviours. For example, I strategically position myself as similar to my students because I want them to regard me positively as this responds to my need for personal validation and to feel secure in a work environment that I perceive as threatening. However, this limits my role as provocateur and/or mutual co-learner, so essential to the transformative approach (Mezirow, 2006; Taylor & Laros, 2014). Although I possess sensitivity, I need to develop a stronger ability to remain present within the teaching situation in order to maintain the clarity of mind required to execute effective questions that can shape the climate of the class in a manner that conveys appropriate expectation balanced with support.

5.25.4 Area of development three: cultural awareness

My experience of teaching using grime music (in this case, Stormzy) as a stimulus for the subject matter of identity brought my own culture into sharper focus. My competence and confidence in doing so were precarious and the experience highlighted the need for courage to open dialogue in a class where I was in a racial minority and to work at improving my cultural competence. I doubted my skills of facilitation regarding issues of race and inequality. Importantly, it was the fundamental shift towards my sense of connectedness with the class that provided an entrée into understanding how students were experiencing my teaching and a starting point for eliciting their individual experiences and effectively integrating these into learning.

5.25.5 Summary of personal learning

Here I summarise the key points of personal learning derived form the self-reflective process employed within autoethnography, before explaining more comprehensively in chapter 8 (the conclusion), what using autoethnography has enabled me to do in relation to the research aim.

As Brookfield (1995) explains, it is only through intentional reflection and a willingness to understand one's flaws that greater congruence between one's desired and actual approach to teaching can be achieved. The self-reflective process has enabled me to identify some helpful qualities that I possess along with a greater awareness of my blind spots and their impact on my aim of fostering transformative relationships. I have examined aspects of my identity that

lead to 'commitments to certain norms within my practice' (Ikpeze, 2019:105). For example, I need to become more aware of how and when I project my own learner history onto students, for although doing so can be helpful in ensuring sensitivity and promoting effective strategies while implementing a transformative approach, it can also impede attempts to foster students' development if it is based on incorrect assumptions based on personal experience. Whilst there is clearly a need for me to become more resilient, the data also suggests a need for university-wide conditions that support the development of skills and approaches such as those concerned with cultural competence and for teachers to feel supported in a context where potential student dissatisfaction may impede teachers' willingness to engage in appropriately challenging teaching.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this final chapter I return, briefly, to the purpose of a WP university in offering an applied vocational curriculum, explaining the value of the transformative relationship in achieving this. I go on to summarise my key findings and discuss their significance in relation to my primary research question: Can I negotiate the pressures of neoliberalism in a way that fosters the type of relationship that offers potential for transformative learning? Following this, I review the indicators of quality in auotethnography and explain what employing autoethnography has enabled me to do. I then summarise the cultural insight gained from the study and, finally, I present a series of proposals based on insights derived from the autoethnography presented in Chapter 6.

6.1 The importance of the transformative relationship to realising the purpose of the WP university

Challenging students' perceptions of their potential contribution to society as being of less value than that of students studying at traditional universities needs to be a key objective of universities with a strong WP mission. Such universities commonly rank lower down the league tables and provide fewer potential opportunities for students post-graduation than traditional universities in terms of monetary returns (Bathmaker *et al.,* 2016; Boliver, 2016; Savage, 2015). Their curricula are frequently viewed as inferior on the basis that they are weighted more towards skills than theoretical knowledge and understanding – and in this respect are seen as less academic – and this can often result in stigmatisation of both the universities themselves and the students attending them (Burke, 2015; Munro, 2011; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). A key objective of the WP university is to provide an appropriate curriculum that offers opportunity for developing relevant professional skills *and* a critical and liberated mind-set that serves to empower them in the world of work and in their lives. As we have seen in Chapter 2 (Literature review), the reasons for NTS being overrepresented in lower band universities are complex and relate to factors that are in operation before students even begin to consider their HE participation (or not) (Lawson, 2014). Particularly potent and easily concealed factors are those that impact on the personhood of the student. For example, the misrecognition that occurs when a person identifies themselves

as something other than a traditional and often more desirable norm (Burke, 2015). Dominant ideas regarding forms of knowledge, for example, that of academic knowledge as being more desirable than vocational knowledge, are often embedded in NTSs' understanding of themselves and frequently combined with other identities such as social class, race and ethnicity that can lead to misrecognition and disadvantage (Alexander et al., 2015; Arday, 2015; Burke, 2015; Hyland; 2014; Bathmaker, 2013). I argue that that universities with a strong WP mission should strive to implement a transformative approach because of its potential to aid understanding of the often complex inequalities experienced by NTSs and in doing so, assert the value of such institutions within the wider hierarchical HE sector.

Before presenting my set of proposals, I summarise the pressures discussed in the autoethnography and the responses they provoked in me and my colleagues.

6.2 Summary of findings

6.1.1 The Audit

Teachers responded negatively to the teaching audit due to the way in which it was implemented and their perceptions of its primary purpose. As a result, its potential as a developmental tool was hampered considerably. The audit impacted me both psychologically and in my approach to teaching in a manner that impeded my fostering of transformative relationships.

6.1.2 The Fee-paying student

There were different responses among me and my colleagues to managing the pressures associated with fee-paying students; for example, over-assisting or, conversely, establishing firm psychological boundaries regarding the responsibility that some teachers were prepared to place on themselves in terms of what they felt could be achieved with students without provoking a backlash. The findings illustrate that, in the context of a vocational university, some teachers experience pressure to "*hold a line*" in terms of quality as measured by those standards established by the professions for which the students are being prepared. Among the teachers, maintaining quality was associated – and frequently in tension – with students' grade expectations, which were perceived as somewhat unrealistic, in part as a result of their fee-paying status. The data illustrates how the pressure to ensure high grades was increased further due to senior management's focus on ensuring student satisfaction and customer quietude,

often leaving teachers feeling sandwiched between organisational pressures and their own values and ideas of quality, and those of students' future professions.

6.1.3 Social Demographic

All teachers perceived the student body to be complex, with a tendency to present a myriad of mental health and learning-related needs. However, teachers' understandings of students' attitudes, abilities and learning needs varied. While difficulties were commonly attributed to students' problematic learner histories or to the perception of students being 'less academic', my own experience suggests that teachers' own backgrounds influence their perceptions of students and, in some instances, those perceptions can disadvantage students if they are linked to low expectations and /or preconceived ideas about students' attitude to learning and/or their ability.

6.1.4 Material conditions

The material conditions within the university impacted on energy levels, motivation, and attitudes towards others within the university as a whole. The shared office space was often privy to value-laden conversations about management which had the potential to undermine healthy relationships and attitudes towards work. The issue of co-inhabiting the temporary office space with colleagues from across the university was collectively experienced as a challenge over and above the day-to-day challenges associated with teaching often complex and demanding students.

Having summarised my key findings, I now reflect on the autoethnographic process and summarise the cultural understanding it has enabled. I then go on to present a set of proposals that demonstrate the significance of my findings for realising the WP mission of the university by providing learning experiences which provide both quality and equality for NTSs and thereby strengthen the university as an agent of social justice. Finally, I reflect on the personal impact of the autoethnographic process, consider the study's limitations, and make suggestions for future research.

6.3 Reflections on the autoethnographic process

Here I reflect of the autoethnographic method and its usefulness in helping me generate discussion beyond myself and open up a space to examine the wider systemic issues that permeate the NL HE context.

6.3.1 Indicators of quality in autoethnography

Mcilveen (2008:16) suggests that there are three markers of quality in autoethnographic studies as follows:

1. The experience reported is genuine and reflects the author's phenomenological position faithfully.
2. The author is transformed through self-explication.
3. The work informs the reader of an experience that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to share with the academic community.

A further marker of quality in autoethnography is noted by Chang (2008), who explains that the cultural insight achieved through the analysis of findings related to self is what makes a study autoethnographic rather than solely a self-study or autobiography. With these indicators in mind, I now explain what the autoethnography has enabled to achieve and summarise the cultural insight provided within the autoethnography itself.

6.3.2 What has autoethnography enabled me to do?

Central to the research was the question of whether or not I was able to negotiate the pressures of neoliberalism in a way that fosters the type of relationship that offers potential for transformative learning. I wanted to discover whether my aspiration to do so was realistically achievable within an increasingly pressurised NL university, and to understand the factors that supported and impeded my attempts to do so within that context. I was interested in the university's conditions, their impact on teaching and learning, and ultimately, whether the conditions fostered quality and equality for students. By taking a first-person perspective, I was able to view myself both within and as a part of the university's culture.

Autoethnography enabled me to understand and investigate my experience within the university and to share this in a manner that would not usually be expected within the scope of my teaching role. It is not common for professionals to share their vulnerabilities with others (Custer, 2014); however, I considered it imperative to do so in order to bring my experience, and its significance for my personal beliefs and values into clearer focus (for myself) and to give voice to those issues that I considered important to fostering an equitable HE experience for NTSs. Furthermore, the literature had indicated that other academics experienced pressures that I recognised, and I wanted to offer an invitation to them to share in my experience in order

to help foster an honest and supportive research community[1]. It was through examining my own experiences, in part through my discussion with colleagues, that it became possible to identify, discuss and understand aspects of the university's culture that impacted on my relationships with students and on the relationships between other key stakeholders within the university. By researching myself in a context where I was an active participant, I was able to observe the organisational dynamics by which NL imperatives were appropriated and put into play. Through the autoethnographic process, I was able to understand how I operated as part of the university's culture and observe the factors that made me susceptible to appropriating and enacting NL imperatives that I had argued were to be avoided. These discoveries were crucial in enabling me to gestate an alternative mental approach to my professional life and in prompting critical discussion in the spirit of opening up a space in which to examine the university's approach to ensuring its distinctive WP mission. Through the autoethnographic process, I have become more confident in articulating what was once a gut feeling into a carefully refined set of thoughts.

6.3.3 A summary of the cultural insight gained through the autoethnographic process

My engagement with autoethnography has enabled me to observe the process by which Young's five faces of oppression emerge as products of the ways in which power circulates within the university and the actions of people and how they communicate. Through observing myself as a part of its complex dynamics I have been able to learn more about how and why NL is frequently enabled, even by those who disagree with its principles.

The autoethnography has shown that, principally, the nature of communication between senior managers and teachers in the university limits the possibility of embedding transformative learning into its culture. A process of othering was evident in the communication, norms and expectations that were establishing themselves in the university. Most apparently, the autoethnographic process has revealed the relational dynamics between senior managers and teachers in the university, through the implementation of the teaching audit. This impeded the conditions needed to develop shared meanings about learning and to engage in the necessary collaboration about how it could be developed. The power relations between teachers and senior management was most recognisable in the lack of consultation that took place regarding a key change (the audit) that would impact on teaching staff and by teachers' reluctance to

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[1] The difficulties associated with prompting critical discussion within one's organisation in terms of the delicate position of the insider researcher were explained in chapter 4 (Research Design).

express their feelings regarding the audit. It was essentially through an absence of appropriate communication on both parts that various forms of oppression were invited and sustained. For example, our silence arose due to fear of being seen as non-compliant with the directive (senior management) or as a renegade questioning organisational norms and practices that were being asserted by those in positions of structural power. What was unspoken in this situation was illustrative of the emotional life of the university, that was frequently under acknowledged, yet powerfully influential in the behaviour and relations within it. Strong feelings of resentment and distrust circulated via informal chat amongst teachers, resembling Freire's notion of silencing in which people find alternative ways to express themselves in situations where they are unable to talk directly to those in positions of structural power about what they are experiencing (Freire, 1970). However, these informal conversations frequently overrode more meaningful in-depth conversations focused on developing appropriate teaching practices whilst recognising the pressures affecting the university.

As teachers, we were frequently sandwiched between the directive of senior managers concerned with evidencing quality (through the audit) and the elevated position of students due to their consumer status. This meant that our role was increasingly subjected to scrutiny but without us having a formal mechanism through which we could talk about our developmental needs or express our concerns and ideas regarding the negotiation of NL pressures. Furthermore, there was a preoccupation with grades and performance, of teachers and students, that appeared to encourage within them, the individualistic, self-focused disposition valued by NL. It was difficult to think outside an increasingly competitive culture and to cultivate the will to invite students into a transformative relationship, as this required a resilience against the need to protect oneself that was easily induced in a context where our professionalism would be measured by outputs in the form of good grades, student satisfaction and teaching that matched senior management's markers of quality in the audit process. The erosion of my own will to foster transformative relationships when teaching was evident in my autoethnographic account in which I observed myself becoming suspicious of students, regarding them as potential complainants and experiencing heightened feelings of vulnerability. The teaching audit became an instrument that enabled NL imperatives to filter through the institution in a manner that reinforced the powerlessness of teachers. Rather than uniting in a shared attempt to address the pressures and demands brought about by those NL imperatives, the communication between senior manager and teachers within the university separated and divided us, leading to an unspoken yet oppressively felt university culture.

Through autoethnography I was able to illustrate the process by which seemingly fair systems can operate to conceal inequality. For example, the conclusions drawn identify a need for careful and sensitive implementation of teaching quality measures if the ideology it represents is to be actioned in a manner that supports quality and equality for NTSs. Failure to do so risks further symbolic violence occurring towards already disadvantaged students because, rather than supporting teachers to develop their practice and take the necessary risks to do so, they induce feelings of resentment and anxiety that impede effective pedagogical development. The insight gained through the autoethnographic process demonstrates that there exists a real opportunity to foster equitable education for NTSs and for the university to serve as a conduit for social justice.

The proposals that follow promise to help rectify a situation where the university culture is being significantly altered by NL ideology at the expense, I believe, of teacher morale and the benefits promised by transformative learning. To do nothing is likely to perpetuate existing systemic disadvantage; however, I am optimistic that the option to do things differently remains available. In this spirit I present a set of proposals that offer an alternative form of practice within the WP university that can support the development of transformative practice.

6.4 The research proposals

As is appropriate to the autoethnographic endeavour, the proposals which follow reflect my own experience; however, they also draw on the experiences of my colleagues whose views were enlisted in order to allow readers to evaluate the extent to which my account aligns with a broader, collective perspective.

Furthermore, while it is in the very nature of autoethnography that it is an account of the individual's personal experience, the proposals that follow seek to provide signposts – as opposed to a prescription – that may be of value to other institutions and contexts similar to my own, where there is a desire to implement a transformative approach to learning. What will become apparent as I set forth the proposals is their inter-dependent nature.

One key question that needs to be asked in relation to this study is whether TL and NL are fundamentally incompatible, or whether, by nurturing an appropriate institutional culture, the two can co-exist. That is, are there ways in which the two can be made compatible? My proposals suggest that there are but that the key to success – and the common denominator among the proposals – is abundant and effective communication. With effective

communication can come a consultative and thus unified approach that promises to optimise the likelihood of real transformation taking place in teaching, and thus by extension, within the student body.

6.5 Proposal One

Thoughtful design and sensitive implementation of teaching quality assurance processes are essential in order to encourage a university culture that supports transformative practice.

Ensuring the quality of teaching is an important indicator of an effective educational institution (QAA, 2018; Greatbatch & Holland, 2016; Scourfield, 2019). My autoethnographic journey suggests that unless the measures adopted to measure quality are carefully designed and implemented, they can adversely affect quality rather than drive up standards and can impact adversely the conditions needed for transformative learning to take place. I believe there remains scope for creative, well-informed and appropriately responsive approaches to achieving quality that can promote a university culture that supports transformative practices; however, for that to happen my data suggest that a number of key factors come into play and bear careful consideration.

6.5.1 The purpose of teaching evaluations should be clear

For teaching evaluations to be valuable, they need to have a clearly defined purpose, the rationale for which needs to be communicated effectively to all those involved (Cardoso *et al.,* 2015; O'Leary 2013; Wragg, 2012). Furthermore, involvement of *all* in the design process is likely to enhance the evaluation tool's effectiveness (Skelton, 2005). If the purpose of an evaluation tool is not clear, teachers are less likely to regard it as valuable and more likely to resist it, resulting in its developmental value being reduced (Cardoso *et al.,* 2015).

Clear communication of a teaching evaluation's purpose is essential if teachers are to buy into initiatives such as the audit process described in the autoethnography. In the case of my own university, the rationale for the audit was justified as a way of demonstrating the quality of our existing practice. While we acknowledged that this was reasonable, even necessary, several factors meant that we felt challenged by the process. First, it was not made clear to us what the audit was trying to achieve beyond providing evidence of quality to satisfy external metrics; for example, there was no reference made to its value as a developmental tool from which we – and ultimately our students – stood to benefit. Furthermore, conversations about quality and

its contested nature (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010; Hernard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008) were not encouraged or incorporated within the broader audit process.

The audit was not developed in consultation with teaching staff and so its introduction felt like a top-down imposition rather than a joint, collaborative enterprise; and in combination with the sense among teaching staff that it was endorsing the increased regulation and accountability associated with NL, this led to feelings of resentment among the teachers. Change was taking place within the university and the question of what teaching quality should look like was being brought into sharper focus. In such periods of institutional change, Skelton (2005) reminds us that a careful review of what has been regarded as good teaching practice previously should be reviewed in recognition of how the university works before implementing a new approach. Teachers were not involved prior to the implementation of the audit and it became symbolic, in the eyes of teachers, as an instrument through which wider political imperatives could be satisfied, rather than being a tool that would genuinely help develop our teaching. Furthermore, the audit served to facilitate an uneven distribution of power in the university by which a stream of oppression was enabled through the actions of and communication between teachers and senior managers.

6.5.2 Effectively implementing change, such as the audit process, requires empathy on the part of those leading it

An organisation's culture is a peopled process that is subject to change. In this vein, it is well recognised that change commonly meets resistance and causes anxiety among those impacted by it, and particularly those tasked with implementing it (Van den Berg, 2002; Pollard 2008). Two crucial considerations when implementing any organisational change are the extent to which those driving it show due regard for its impact on those tasked with implementing it, and whether or not those tasked with implementing it feel listened to (Murray, 2016). In other words, empathy on the part of those driving change is an important determinant of the degree of receptivity of those on the receiving end of the change initiative. Arguably, failure to consider carefully and sensitively the implementation of a new formal teaching audit can give rise to significant negative consequences for an organisation and its goals. In the case of this study, it impacted adversely on the university's effectiveness in supporting transformative practices by discouraging teachers to move outside of their comfort zone and take risks in the manner needed to implement such practices.

If teachers are to view quality initiatives such as teaching audits favourably, arrangements for the teaching observations should demonstrate recognition of their impact on teachers (Scourfield, 2019). The involvement of teachers in discussions around the rationale for the audit is also helpful for easing potential (and likely) negative emotions. The evidence from my autoethnography suggests strongly that a more sensitive implementation of the audit that incorporates teachers' experience and acknowledges the challenges of their role, is likely to generate a more mutual and co-operative culture in the university. Thus, teaching evaluations offer the potential to create a more positive organisational culture rather than one which challenges teachers' sense of worth and fails to acknowledge their professional experience and the difficulty this entails.

In my research, the absence of teachers' involvement in the construction of the audit, along with its primary focus on observing our teaching rather than or in addition to other methods for measuring – and *understanding* – quality, reinforced a perception of its purpose as a regulatory activity rather than as a developmental tool. As Greatbatch and Holland (2016) explain, understanding quality involves being sufficiently cognisant of students' needs, and recognizant of varied formations of quality teaching to meet these, yet we were not able to talk about students' needs and the challenge of meeting them in a way that contributed to the development of the observation process. This magnified a perception among staff that senior management did not understand the complexity of students' needs and the challenges these frequently presented for teaching and supporting them. As a result, trusting relationships within the university between senior management and teachers were undermined, as was the opportunity to develop an appropriately responsive pedagogy.

6.5.3 Power dynamics within the process of implementation need to be acknowledged

In addition to adequate consultation, empathetic implementation and having a clearly defined purpose (beyond instrumental goals), the process of implementation needs to be carefully considered in terms of who the observers are, what is done with the data and how the activity is followed up and the findings utilised (O'Leary 2013; Wragg, 2012; Randall, 2020). Each of these aspects has the potential to support and/or impede the development of transformative practices because they impact on the level of trust between co-workers and the degree of vulnerability experienced by teachers.

Another potentially unhelpful – even harmful – effect of the audit and which relates to the issue of power and its unequal distribution, was the fact that it focused on teachers and teaching

rather than on learners and learning. Involving teachers in developing and agreeing a focus for the audit offers a partial solution to this issue as they are closest to the students and have a particularly good understanding of their needs, the demands they place on teachers and their modus operandi. Furthermore, future audits might do well to include an element of consultation with the students (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010); it is, after all, they who are on the receiving end of any approach to teaching. Currently, student satisfaction is measured via external instruments such as the NSS which have the potential to drive change initiatives within universities whilst overlooking the highly context-specific factors that may pertain and which can impact quality in teaching and learning (Aftab and Gibbs, 2015; Copeland 2011; Goos & Salomons, 2017; Voss *et al.,* 2007). Such factors most certainly include the student demographic and what that means for their learning needs and the approaches to teaching that are adopted. More direct involvement of students in the development of teaching evaluations would also be useful in understanding the impact of students' backgrounds: their social circumstances and their experience of learning in culturally diverse classes. Understanding how knowledge is acquired and expressed in light of these factors is essential to ensuring that teaching is contextually responsive and thus potentially more effective.

Involving teachers *and* students in decision-making around where to focus an audit is essential to ensuring the application of practices that provide authentic, context-specific opportunities for learning and development; however, the way the student voice is brought to bear in order to achieve this requires careful consideration on the part of senior management. If, for example, teachers feel that the student voice renders their own voice impotent, then this risks producing resentment as teachers are likely to see themselves as marginalised and their expertise overlooked. This can impact negatively on their attitude towards their work and even towards the students themselves.

6.6 Proposal Two

Understanding different perceptions of quality is essential in developing a shared vision of effective transformative practice

To ensure quality, consideration of relevant stakeholders' understanding of the construct needs to inform teaching developments within the university. Teachers, students and the professions they will serve are all relevant when considering quality. As Hernard and Leprince-Ringuet,

2008:5) explain, notions of quality in HE are 'stakeholder relative' and this needs to be regarded carefully when constructing tools by which to measure it.

One issue relating to quality that emerged from the data concerned the actual standard of students' work and the extent to which this was – or was not – reflected accurately and appropriately in the grades teachers awarded. The data illustrates how teachers felt pressured to award high grades due to senior management's focus on ensuring student satisfaction and customer quietude, often leaving teachers feeling sandwiched between organisational pressures, their own values and their own ideas of quality. There also arose the issue of teachers making subjective judgements concerning students' ability, that provoked discussion regarding the impact of this on their perceptions of quality in students' work.

Whilst the issue of subjectivity has long featured in the marking of work, in contexts where the student demographic is over-represented by learners with complex learner backgrounds, EAL and/or a range of factors that impact on how they acquire and express their knowledge, the issue of subjectivity can become enmeshed with that of systemic disadvantage. Judgements of quality are, arguably, closely related to teachers' perceptions of students and to their own academic backgrounds (Farrell & Ives, 2015; Brookfield, 1995) and, therefore, they can influence ideas of what constitutes quality work. Differences in perceptions of students and of quality may lead to variability in what is taught and how it is taught, and ultimately on the quality of the education that students experience. The data indicates that FG participants had different perceptions of students' learning needs and of the challenges that these present. For example, some teachers viewed NTSs through a deficit lens and as having learning difficulties, whereas I regarded students' varied learning needs to be products of differences in their educational and cultural backgrounds (arguably, my own vocational learner background is influential to my perception). Each of these perceptions has implications for the expectations that teachers have of their students and their approaches to teaching. One of the areas where there was consensus among teachers was in the belief that meeting students' needs, however they were understood, was a challenging and pressurised experience. The FG participants viewed the demands of senior management and their perception of student achievement as a reflection of teaching quality as unrealistic, even naïve, illustrating a marked disjuncture between senior management's and teachers' understanding of what was needed to ensure quality. Without proper dialogue about such matters, the quality and equality of the student learning experience cannot be assured.

Another factor that relates to quality, and one that was evident in the data, is the pressure teachers feel to award higher grades for students' work than they believe are justified. One potential solution, offered by Narey (2019), is the direct involvement of regulatory bodies in observing teaching in order to ensure professional standards in the discipline being studied. There are, however, questions that arise in relation to this prospect, regarding the potentially competing priorities of universities and the professions. Increased involvement of external regulatory bodies in matters related to HE teaching may curtail the current freedom enjoyed by universities to develop their curricula and careful negotiation between stakeholders would be needed to implement the approach effectively and fairly. Nevertheless, the involvement of the relevant professions in decision-making around quality criteria would introduce an element of authenticity and greater objectivity while also helping alleviate both the pressure teachers feel to award inflated grades for work, and the accompanying feelings of discomfort associated with compromising their professional integrity.

Quality emerged clearly as a contested concept and the issues highlighted here illustrate the need for teaching observations – their rationale, structure and conduct – to be carefully considered in such a way that all stakeholders are involved (Hernard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008; Miller, 2016; O'Leary 2013; Wragg, 2012). This will help ensure that any measure of quality reflects greater uniformity, is bought into by all stakeholders, and has greater validity and relevance to the students and their future employers rather than merely serving as a box-ticking exercise.

6.4.1 Institutional processes, such as teaching evaluations, can increase understanding of differing perceptions of quality

Teaching evaluations are a key institutional process through which more understanding regarding different stakeholders' perceptions of quality can be gained. Designing teaching evaluations in a manner that invites students into a process of shared meaning about what they are experiencing offers fertile ground for understanding diverse learning needs and for developing effective responses (Najar & Choi, 2018). As I have argued in proposal one, addressing issues of quality requires a sensitive and careful institutional response. This is especially important because understanding quality may also necessitate understanding fairness. The relationship between quality and fairness is pertinent for all universities in light of research that reveals a continuing disparity in attainment between White and Black and Minority Ethnic students (BME) (Ross *et al.,* 2018; HEFCE, 2015), something that has led to a stronger focus on institutional processes and their role in ensuring quality and equality (Ross

et al., 2018). Institutional processes and an institutional culture that encourages teachers to bring their assumptions into consciousness will be important in understanding more about the complex and multi-causal explanations for differentials in attainment according to ethnicity (Miller, 2016; Ross *et al.,* 2018). Whilst institutional conditions that actively support teachers acknowledging personal factors and/or practices that require change because they contribute to disadvantage in any of its forms, a process that Pillow (2003:175) describes as engaging in 'uncomfortable reflexivity'; the full range of institutional, social, political and economic factors that contribute to differentials in attainment also need to be carefully researched. Careful understanding of teachers' subjectivity as part of, and embedded within, the larger ideological context will be essential when attempting to develop and implement effective institutional processes that demonstrate quality. As I have argued, the transformative relationship focused upon in this thesis, when adopted as an approach to teaching, offers much scope for active classroom based research that can help gain understanding of the often nuanced and multi-contextual nature of students' experiences. From a WP perspective, understanding the full spectrum of disadvantaging factors (including those related to ethnicity but not solely focussing on those at the cost of others) are essential to the university's purpose and quality assurance.

6.7 Proposal Three

Conditions within the university need to support the sharing of perspectives and experiences in order to support the development of transformative practices

A key to successful teacher development is trusting relationships, both between teachers, those who oversee their development, and between teachers and their students. Finding ways to strengthen these relationships will significantly improve the university's capacity to support transformative practices.

The issue of trust, in particular, arises as a key factor in maintaining a positive and productive university culture. As Merdinger (1991) explains, without trust very little can be achieved. Approaches to leadership also shape how it feels to be a part of a given organisation and are connected to processes through which trusting relationships may or may not be developed. Here I explain how trust and leadership contribute to the culture of the university and to the conditions in which teaching and learning takes place. I offer some suggestions for strengthening trust and supporting the development of transformative practices. Arguably,

strengthening trust may optimise conditions in which the issues related to quality and fairness discussed in proposal two can be addressed.

6.7.1 There are pedagogical benefits to be derived from trusting relationships

Trusting relationships increase the likelihood of teachers taking risks in a manner that has the potential to support their development and effective pedagogy (Ikpeze, 2019; O'Leary, 2013). Dynamic, creative and innovative teaching occurs when the teachers are willing to take risks and feel able to step outside of their comfort zone (Carroll and Levy, 2008). Teachers who feel safe enough to try out new ideas, make mistakes and allow themselves to learn and develop from those mistakes are able to continuously improve their practice (Randall, 2020). It is important that teachers perceive their professional context to be one that is supportive of this endeavour.

One way to strengthen trust is for leaders to value teachers' individual approaches. Rather than seeking pedagogical uniformity, teachers should be encouraged to be creative and reflective practitioners, willing and able to identify their strengths and weakness, and to think about the philosophical underpinnings and principles underlying their pedagogy (Brookfield, 1995). Teaching evaluations can be supportive of such a process, but they can also discourage approaches that diverge from the expectations of those managing the process and observing classroom practice, even though such divergence need not involve flouting teaching quality criteria. Incorporating opportunity for teachers to talk about the rationale for their approach, the students they are teaching and any factors that may not be immediately apparent to an observer, helps minimise feelings of vulnerability to what otherwise may feel like an arbitrary judgement of their effectiveness.

In situations where a university wishes to implement a change to how it evaluates teaching quality, such as in this study, it may be helpful to undertake considerable groundwork to establish what is regarded as teaching excellence (Skelton, 2005). As we have seen, when conducted in the absence of consultation and in a spirit that is not constructive and focused on teachers' professional development, evaluations can feel like an imposition, raise teachers' anxiety levels, and carry a message of distrust rather than support.

6.7.2 There are alternatives to formal observations that can support conditions for teachers' development and aid the effective evaluation of pedagogy

There are alternative ways to evaluate and support teaching, other than formal observations, which can be helpful in instilling a sense of trust and confidence in teaching staff and which

communicate to them that they are valued. I suggest that teacher-led workshops are one such way. Furthermore, I suggest that teacher-led workshops provide a way to combine teacher development with effective evaluation of pedagogy.

6.7.3 Teacher-led workshops support conditions for teacher development

Teaching proficiency is something that develops over time and with experience. Providing opportunities that encourage and support teacher development is a mark of good practice (Pollard, 2008; Randall, 2020). Teacher development workshops led by teachers and which are supported by and involve senior management in the process may be powerful spaces within which to listen to others, to share practice and, if not agree with, then at a minimum be respectful of alternative viewpoints and open to the possibility of change. They offer a mechanism through which teachers are able to discuss the realities of their day-to-day teaching and to engage in useful dialogue around the challenges and obstacles they face and strategies for overcoming them. They promote a sense of mutuality and help forge a stronger community of practice.

Carefully implemented teacher development workshops can promote institutional cultural empathy and serve to strengthen institutional processes that support reflective and reflexive practice. Cultivating a culture that supports these is arguably essential in light of the emphasis placed on institutional processes in addressing inequalities in attainment according to ethnicity as it provides a supportive basis for the full range of issues encountered in practice to be discussed (Ross *et al.,* 2018). Teacher development workshops can also alleviate negative emotions of teachers, such as those reported in the autoethnography, that otherwise frequently operate unhelpfully by leading teachers to a focus on institutional dissatisfaction rather than on developing teaching practice. A delicate balance would need to be struck when facilitating such workshops to avoid them becoming a substitute complaints bureau for teachers (Brookfield, 1995). The purpose of the workshops described needs to be clearly focused on development and on understanding challenges with a view to addressing them through institutionally supported action.

Crucially, through the implementation of teacher development workshops, a shared, more unified view can emerge of what good teaching can mean within the particular institutional context, leading to evaluations of teaching that are more meaningful, have teacher development at their heart, and towards which teachers are consequently more positively disposed. This in turn will promote their engagement with the process. Such workshops encourage the

collaborative solving of problems in favour of a formal approach which aims to assess teaching by grading it (Brookfield 1995; Randall, 2020). They can also serve to empower teachers by virtue of the fact of their taking a leading role in their delivery, while also promising to raise awareness among senior management – who may be removed from the realities of the classroom – of the challenges teachers face in their everyday practice.

Teacher-led workshops also have the potential to alleviate some of the less helpful strategies teachers may adopt as they negotiate the intensification of NL and of the culture of performativity this engenders (Archer, 2007; Churchman and King; 2009; Harris, 2005; Sabri 2010; Sutton, 2015; Trahar, 2011); for instance, internalising their feelings and/or only seeking counsel from those who hold similar views to themselves. In the absence of mechanisms that encourage teachers to communicate with each other, such pressures can lead to an increase in individualised practice and isolation that erodes teachers' energy and commitment (Sutton, 2015). Furthermore, as we have seen, the literature increasingly attests to the fact that policies, processes and systems currently adopted by universities, and associated expectations, are being driven by business principles that sit uncomfortably with the values of education as a transformative practice (Sutton, 2015; Shattock, 2012; Pegg *et al.,* 2012; Forrest *et al.,* 2012). The need for concrete evidence of quality and assurances that universities are providing value for money has strengthened a focus on practices that produce overt educational benefits for students, such as their future employability and good grades. While the accrual of such benefits should certainly not be ignored, other important processes need to be carefully regarded and prioritised at the institutional level to ensure inclusion and social justice. For example, gaining an understanding of teaching approaches that invite students to participate in learning as a process of self-development that offers them opportunity to discard any self-limiting beliefs as they prepare to enter professions, where they themselves will need to foster the same criticality in others is an essential institutional process that demonstrates a commitment to quality and equality (Fook, 2003; Toohey, 1999). Failure to do so enables the oppressive power of NL to sustain inequality within HE but also in wider society. The teacher-led workshops I am proposing provide a forum through which the kind of critical teaching practice that can help combat oppressive forces can be developed.

Lack of consensus on what is effective university teaching constitutes a weak link through which NL can gain a foothold on the internal practices of the university and thereby shape its conditions, irrespective of the particularities of the institutional context. To mitigate against this, universities – and particularly university senior management/policymakers – should strive

to understand as fully as possible the characteristics of their own teaching-learning environment in order to better recognise and support effective teaching within that context. Teachers are arguably well placed to offer insight into this. The benefits of senior managers supporting teacher-led developmental workshops are twofold: they help enable practices within the university to be responsive to the student demographic and support the university in shaping its curriculum so that it is both relevant, responsive and efficacious.

Ideas about effective teaching and what it should look like need to be discussed in relation to the local context and with teachers who are on the frontline of responding to students. This is because effective teaching may differ according to context and there will be different challenges depending on the backgrounds and characteristics of students. Discussing teaching and learning strategy and its guiding principles and philosophy in relation to the local context is a necessary prerequisite to evaluating it if any such evaluation is to be meaningful. On this basis, alternatives to formal observations are essential. Failure to develop a teaching approach that best serves the needs of the students towards whom it is directed is likely to lead to resistance and a perception of the evaluation of teaching as ill-informed and an imposition. Worse, uninformed teaching evaluations can operate to sustain and perpetuate disadvantage by failing to adequately identify the needs of students or assist teachers in developing the skills needed to meet those needs. In such cases, poorly implemented teaching evaluations act as a conduit for NL in a manner that enables symbolic violence towards students.

Furthermore, as there is currently no single accepted consensus on what is effective university teaching (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010; Johnson & Ryan, 2000; Paulsen, 2002; Trigwell, 2001), and in the face of increasing pressure to provide evidence of quality, there is a temptation for teaching evaluations to measure effectiveness in terms of whether what is observed aligns with the corporate vision of quality; namely that which is seen as most likely to promote student satisfaction, regardless of the soundness of its basis and underlying assumptions. Senior managers actively supporting teachers to work together and share their experiences with those in management provides a more valid way of measuring quality and, therefore, of strengthening the university's capacity to respond effectively and ethically to the pressures of neoliberalism.

7.8 Summary of the research in relation to the research questions

In this section, I summarise the research in relation to my research questions.

6.8.1 RQ1: How do I experience the pressures that arise within the NL HE context?

I experienced the pressures that arise within the NL HE context as a catalyst for reflection and readjustment of my current practice. It was a process that raised unsettling feelings about my commitment to fostering transformative learning. The audit and its observations were one part of the wider changes occurring within the university that brought NL imperatives into sharper focus. Whilst the audit may have opened a useful space to help develop my teaching, there were factors about its design and implementation that hampered this and which added to the increasingly challenging environment. The approach taken by senior management to implementing the audit provoked a response in me of clinging more tightly to my beliefs about good teaching and to resist the changes taking place within the university. I was prompted to interrogate and revise my current approach and assess how useful it was to me in realising my aim of fostering transformative relationships; however, the conditions within the university did not support me in doing so.

My perception of the fee-paying student was influenced by the university's focus on providing satisfaction and was one that filled me with trepidation and insecurity in teaching situations. I was frequently conflicted between maintaining a sense of order for myself (self-preservation) – something that expressed itself in a fastidious approach to managing and teaching students, and the security this brings – and the need to remain true to my aim of fostering transformative relationships. I demonstrated a tendency to be overly controlling in teaching situations and to view students suspiciously rather than as partners in the learning process. My response arose partly due to aspects of my personality and personal history, but it was my perception of the university's conditions that most heightened my anxiety. Had the conditions supported my sharing of experience and feelings, the prospect of being observed may not have induced such an intense sense of threat.

My response to the considerable diversity of the student body was one of care and concern but also intrigue concerning the dynamics of similarity and difference that operated between us. I wanted to understand what I needed to do in order to be an effective teacher for them; however, my energy was eroded by constant anxiety. The working conditions within the university frequently presented me with obstacles and I experienced greater fatigue due to factors such as not having a permanent office base. I was susceptible to adopting some of the less helpful coping strategies discussed in the literature such as maintaining isolated conditions and internalising my experience rather than sharing it in a manner that may have helped alleviate some of the pressure.

6.8.2 RQ2: In what way is my experience similar to and different from that of my colleagues?

There was a common perception amongst teachers that senior management did not understand the realities of our roles and the difficulties we encountered within them. Unanimously, the audit was not regarded by any of us as supportive or helpful in developing our teaching and there was a shared perception that the university environment and the complex student body presented challenges to us as teachers that were not acknowledged by senior management. There were differences in our responses to managing the pressures associated with fee-paying students; for example, some teachers applied a more pragmatic mind-set to the level of responsibility they assumed for meeting the needs of students and what they felt could be achieved with students without provoking a backlash. There were differences in our thinking regarding the issues that students presented and how best to respond to them. The issue of quality was linked to the pressure felt to award higher grades in response to what were seen as unrealistic expectations on the part of students and senior managers, particularly given students varied levels of ability and their complex needs. Without a mechanism through which the sharing of our different mindsets and perceptions of quality could be discussed, along with the challenges around ensuring quality in our teaching, senior managers, with whom the greater balance of power ultimately resided, were ultimately the arbiters of quality.

Embedding an infrastructure within the university that encourages communication between teachers and senior managers will be essential to generating an organisational culture in which there is a shared understanding of quality and of the contextual factors that affect it.

6.8.3 RQ3: What does our shared experience indicate about the emerging culture of the university?

Our responses to the pressures arising in the HE NL context signified the emergence of an increasingly oppressive institutional culture in which the ideas held by those with greatest power were seen as being imposed on teachers. The implementation of the audit was collectively experienced both as an imposition and as an obstacle to teachers in the effective performance of their role, rather than as a developmental tool. Our collective resistance to the audit and sense of powerless unified us to a degree, but our responses were not conducive to the proper development of our teaching. The absence of dialogue with senior management about our feelings and the realities of our roles actually maintained conditions in which we simply found ourselves surviving rather than developing and thriving as animated, motivated, and innovative teachers. The absence of a proper mechanism for the sharing of ideas,

challenges and feelings undermined the possibility of promoting a rigorous and collective understanding of quality and helping us develop our teaching practice accordingly. Consultation with teachers in the designing of the audit would have strengthened a sense of collaboration and unified thinking in the university, helped ensure buy-in and averted the feelings of resentment and threat that it engendered. That is, the audit was a potential opening through which to foster conditions within the university that could support a creative and innovative response to the pressures of NL focused on offering equitable education for NTSs, and in this sense a lost opportunity.

6.8.4 RQ4 How do I attempt to foster transformative relationships in this context and what are the factors that support or impede my attempts to do so?

The primary vehicle through which I evaluated my attempt to foster transformative relationships was ongoing critical self-reflection, through which I identified several factors at play. Some of these were internal factors that resulted from my personality and personal history; for example, subconscious associations with my background as a NTS and with vocational education lead to me to view myself and other NTSs as being 'in deficit' because, in my experience, we are – and are frequently seen to be – less academically inclined. Because of this aspect of my identity, when teaching, I used examples from my own experience in a manner that invited my students to focus on more negative aspects of learning, such as anxiety and struggle and, I framed questions that prompted them to think of themselves from that perspective.

Notably, I have identified that other FG participants adopt a deficit view of students and attribute many of the pressures of teaching to their perception of students as having learning difficulties. They adopt this as a general perception of the student body in terms of the difficulties they encounter in trying to maintain the expectations of senior managers regarding achievement. I take a different view. As a result of my own experience as a NTS, I now find myself an advocate for NTSs, with a desire to challenge perceptions – including my own – of NT vocational learners as less capable of academic engagement and success. It is through the rejection of my own deficit learner identity that I am motivated to nurture transformative relationships and to ensure that students have the opportunity to realise their potential through their education.

One factor that impedes my ability to nurture transformative relationships are those conditions that I perceive to be threatening and which restrict my inclination to take the kind of risks needed to fully connect with students. I frequently find myself 'playing it safe' and behaving in a way that I believe will keep students satisfied.

I now turn to the personal impact of the autoethnography on my own thinking and development as a teacher and as a person.

7.9 The personal impact of the autoethnographic process

My engagement with the autoethnographic process has brought a number of personal benefits. It has enabled me to understand my own educational history in relation to my current beliefs and values about teaching. It has revealed to me in stark clarity the strength with which I may cling to my beliefs in order to maintain a worthy and useful identity and how this, paradoxically, can obstruct my ability to develop and adapt. As far as it is possible to do so, I have 'looked myself in the eye' and reflected on my identity, where I have come from, and my behaviour as honestly as possible in an attempt to see how well I may support others (or not) through the way I relate to them. In doing so, I have found some aspects of myself that are reassuring in that they suggest that I possess an essential humanness that aligns with a transformative approach and from which my students can benefit, and this gives me a sense of belonging and value.

Autoethnography required me to confront fragilities that are part of who I am; for example, my need for validation and belonging. I found myself vulnerable when revisiting aspects of my past. Documenting and analysing my experience via my field notes, personal journal and teaching reflections frequently re-opened old wounds as I re-experienced formative parts of my life in which I had felt powerless, incompetent and displaced. They created a space for me to observe past experiences and how these were activated and active in my present professional life. I became able to see how my own NTS identity was problematic in that although it enabled me insider status with other NTSs (to some degree at least), the meaning I ascribed to it was inferiority. How could I genuinely foster transformative relationships if I was viewing my students through a deficit lens? I needed to revise that thinking in order to understand the starting point of a truly transformative relationship. I do not seek to shake off my NTS identity, but I now feel better able to reflect on its significance more objectively and keep it in check.

Reconnecting with and researching my past has enabled me to psychologically reposition myself so that my expectations of myself and my students are more appropriate and reasonable.

My own autoethnographic journey has brought into focus the values that I consider essential to my being and to living a meaningful life according to them, but it has done more than that; it has forced me to consider the usefulness and effectiveness of some of my actions and the reasons for them. Through autoethnography, I have observed how oppressive forces are frequently brought to bear through my emotional responses and by the essential humanness that makes me susceptible to self-investment in the quest for security and status. Essentially it has engendered a greater sense of empathy towards all those subjected to the pressures of neoliberalism. Through autoethnography, I have been able to re-imagine and invent a self that can operate more strategically in accordance with my own values. The insight I have gained has increased my confidence and strengthened my ability to speak out for those changes that I believe promote transformation in the NL university. It is this development that I find the most personally significant of my autoethnographic journey because I have discovered that I can make choices and act in a manner that enables me to live a meaningful professional life – or at least work towards living one – in a manner of my choosing.

One question that is key to the credibility of my proposals and the underlying notion that WP universities need to develop teaching and learning in a manner that supports social justice is: How does fostering transformative learning realistically help those students who are required compete in a job market in which their social mobility will be limited? My answer to this question returns to my own realisation of the fundamental importance and value of living a meaningful life along self-defined terms and which has been subject to self-examination, rather than one defined by systems and ideologies that can serve to dehumanise the individual. The usefulness of transformative learning lies in its potential to develop criticality with a view to enabling students to recognise untruths that are often internalised and that can render a person complicit in their own subordination within such as system. It is the invitation into a fair system which offers ground on which authentic relationships can be cultivated that I argue should be the primary focus of all those involved in managing universities. TL is essentially about meaning and enabling one to decide how to live their life; and to some extent it gives them the tools to do so, despite persistent limitations imposed by attitudes and ingrained social systems and structures. It aims to diminish self-deception. It encourages recognition of strengths and limitations and is associated with transcendence and achieving a better vantage point that can liberate a person from inaccurate beliefs about themselves and the world. The person

undergoing transformation acquires a new awareness of systemic and other factors that restrict their potential and it opens up a space between the person and the system of which they are a part. It expands the capacity for agentic choices and for a life in which self-investment occurs through internally defined values. From a relational cultural perspective, it is through transformative relationships that the individual's autonomy is promoted and the perceived need to alter themselves according to a narrowly defined model success, such as that represented in NL, is dispelled. In such situations, the full range of possibility available within one's personhood is opened up and with it the possibility to transcend what may otherwise be a subordinated existence (McCauley, 2013; Miller 1987).

Arguably, for any person transformation brings benefits. For the NTS, these lie in its giving them the potential to challenge untruths about themselves and their intrinsic value in society. The enlightenment found in transformation of this kind has multiple benefits for the individual and for their future professions. For example, a person will view their value and reach for personal and professional goals beyond those defined solely in monetary terms. Realising one's own potential can also serve to instil one with the confidence and courage to prompt organisational change and/or political change that can in turn benefit the transformation of others. Through the transformative process, NTS are able to call to action other 'politically inscribed beings' (Spry 2001:23) who are marked by the historical inequalities that come about when particular groups are subjugated by more dominant ones. For these reasons, TL supports the university's role in producing a wider social good in that it enables students of Youth Work, Childhood and Social Care Studies to carry transformative capacity into the professions and impart its underlying principles to those who occupy disempowered positions. My own transformation throughout the autoethnographic process tells me that this is not an unrealistic proposition.

The research has marked out a period of significant transition in terms of my professional identity. I have brought subconscious factors that influence my approach to teaching to consciousness, enabling me to observe them more objectively. I have focussed predominantly on my identity as a vocational learner and NTS. Through the autoethnographic process, I have discovered how this identity influences my network of relationships with students, colleagues and the wider university system, and I can see with greater clarity how this identity sits within many of my actions and the motivations for them. It is my identity as a vocational learner and NTS that leads me to perceive the university context and wider HE sector in the way that I do. Essentially, by examining my identity I have developed a greater ability to guard against

unhelpful emotional drivers that can produce resistance which, rather than supporting growth, may subdue my creativity and capacity to develop transformative relationships.

7.10 Limitations of the study

This study has provided insights from within a newly emerging university and identified how its internal practices relate to the broader issues of systemic disadvantage. While these insights and subsequent recommendations offer potential benefits for the university at the heart of this study, they are not necessarily generalizable to other universities that are governed by their own contextual particularities. The study does, however, provide prompts for further research into pedagogical development in HE in recognition of the pressures faced across the entire HE sector. A limitation is found in the degree of depth generated in relation to other teachers' emotional experiences. Whilst the study has effectively cross referenced their perceptions of the university's culture with my own, the depth in which they experience the pressures identified and how these may transfer pedagogically in accordance with their learner histories has not been elicited in this study. Similarly, the willingness of those in positions of structural power, such as senior managers/policymakers, to adopt a transformative approach has been explored indirectly through observation, experience and perception rather than directly via interviews, for example. It would be informative to hear the experiences of senior managers as a way of eliciting insights into their motives, strategies and understanding of practices within universities catering for NTSs, as well as their sense of agency and its impact on action. Finally, whilst the study's design has enabled me to gain an important foothold on matters of my own identity when negotiating the pressures of NL and attempting to foster transformative relationships, it did not directly invite NTSs to explore *their* learning needs and express *their* understanding of these. There are certainly further opportunities for teacher-led and university supported research to enable such a research design.

7.11 Future directions for research

My findings open an avenue for future research into the contextual factors that influence teaching and learning across a variety of universities. Research carried out collaboratively by different universities that share similar characteristics may yield valuable data about mechanisms for addressing inequalities within the HE sector and which can be adopted by other universities wanting to strengthen their WP mission.

Whilst my study has provided insights into some of the challenges associated with implementing a transformative approach in a particular university context, other universities that cater for NTSs may adopt different approaches to addressing sector wide pressures in a manner that promotes quality and equality for NTS. Arguably, collaborative research between universities sharing similar characteristics, is a starting point for understanding, developing and implementing effective university-wide systems that support learning and teaching and build the kind of transformative cultures needed to do so. Any university's approach to fostering learning needs to be founded on an authentic attempt to understand the learning needs of its students. A research design that directly invites students into conversation about *their* learning and experience would offer an important participatory approach to developing pedagogy in manner that acknowledges the injustice that can occur within hegemonic structures (Najar & Choi, 2018). Research that elicits perspectives of those leading institutions would provide knowledge of different stakeholders' perspectives of NL pressures and how these are experienced similarly or differently according to role. Action research stemming from teacher development workshops would help provide an evidence base for effective practice in diverse contexts. Increasingly, universities will need to continue to demonstrate how their internal processes ensure quality. Future research of this nature would certainly help work towards evidence of this (Miller, 2016). Finally, identifying perceptions of transformative practice in evolving NTSs' experiences of the HE experience and their perceptions of any changes they perceive themselves to have undergone, and the ways in which they value them (or not) would be useful. Importantly, future research needs to involve all key stakeholders in identifying and implementing change that promotes shared dialogue and a collective approach to change that promotes self-defined values as a tool for negotiating the neoliberal landscape.

Chapter 7: References

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225

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Chapter 8: Appendices - Field Notes: organisation, coding, analysis and interpretation

Sections 10.1 – 10.4 are examples of how the data was organised, coded and analysed in order to interpret my experience as a teacher the NL university.

8.1 Situational factor 1: no permanent office base in the main teaching building

8.1.1 SF1 Field note entry: part 1-8

Coding: green: description; action: underlined; thought: italics; emotion: bold (red: initial notes written spontaneously)

1. Room *** is a small, narrow room with 2 PCS and a small table which seats 2 people. There is a photocopier, set of cupboards and a coat stand. One end of the room has a large glass window that overlooks a computer/study area.
2. Room *** is situated on the 2nd floor of **
3. I have lost my notebook yet again – not sure if it's over at ** or at home. **I hate losing my notebook as it makes me feel out of control.** *Emotion – reflects anxiety and fear and frustration - 'yet again'*
4. It has all 3 of my timetables in it, records of which students are in which seminar group and my 'to do' list. Reflects multiple responsibilities
5. I use it to refer to and write things down in. **I feel insecure without it**. Emotion – fear
6. It's hard to keep on top of each session and things that have happened because I do not start and finish the day in the same building – sometimes I do not go to my SR office for several days. Suggests that things may need to be written down at the end of the day to avoid forgetting them
7. **It is a hassle to retrieve things from there if I have forgotten them.** Hardship of having to go to the other building just for the notebook
8. It makes having a sense of being organised difficult. Emphasises the need for a sense of being in control which suggests actually being in control is not possible
(Group 1a - October 2017 - conditions\i. data 18.10.17: 14 - 14)

8.1.2 SF1 analysis and interpretation: lines 1-8

MAXQDA Data reference	(Group 1a - October 2017 - conditions\i. data 18.10.17: 14 - 14)
Situational factor 1	*no permanent office base in the main teaching building*
Immediate material factors	**Room *** data excerpt 1-2 group 1a** Provision of a makeshift office room *** Room *** is small and busy. There are frequent interruptions. PCs/printers not always available

Interacting factor/s and Action	***Data excerpt 3-8 – group 1a*** Timetabling and responsibilities <u>Use of a notebook to maintain a sense of being in control</u> Easy to mislay things due to movement between buildings
Internal personal factor/s	***Data excerpt 3-8 – group 1a*** Strong sense of responsibility - need to know where my groups are and should be to feel in control. Fear of criticism/consequences if students are not happy Fear of not meeting my own standards want to have a particular reputation and be seen in a certain way Concerns about how students see me and also how they feel – whether they trust me Want them to see me as credible/professional – want to see myself as this
External contextual factor/s (encompassing structural organisational factors and consumer discourse)	***Data excerpt 3-8 – group 1a*** Raised profile of the student voice Students expectations and the student experience – how they may report things in questionnaires e.g. the first impressions questionnaire Emphasis on student experience and voice Scrutiny on performance of modules Public sharing of student satisfaction
Autobiographical memory	***Data excerpt 3-8 – group 1a;*** BA (hons) ECS 2004-8*.* Definite sense of which lecturers were organised and respected. Had an impact of how the course itself was perceived, experienced and talked about. There were also implications around level of trust that work would be marked fairly, that assessments would be managed efficiently and information shared clearly. Growing up in a very orderly household with high expectations and overprotection.

Descriptive Summary

Dominant aspect: Self as anxious

This experience suggests that the note book acts as a comfort and an organisational aid. The need for the notebook appear to be produced by the feeling of needing to be in control and fear of losing control. It is also linked to feeling responsible and accountable for multiple responsibilities and several groups of students (which provides insight in to the expectations of the organisation). There is a suggested future projection: of self not maintaining control and this may present a threat to the experiencer's identity as a reliable, competent professional. There is a sense that the wider organisational environment reinforces the fear of losing control and magnifies the likelihood of possible consequences. There is a sense of effort being required to go to the ** building (old campus) and maybe resentment, particularly at the end of a busy day and also frustration over having misplaced it.

Other aspects: Self as fearful, self as responsible, self as frustrated

Emerging theme/s: self-preservation and keeping students happy (the fee-paying student); management of workload; scrutiny and accountability (the audit).

8.2 Situational factor 2: open plan design of the campus

8.2.1 SF2 Field note entry parts 5-13

Coding: green: description; action: underlined; thought: italics; emotion: bold (red: initial notes written spontaneously)

5. 1pm – meeting with student who I have known for 4 years - no longer in my year group but our relationship is such that I am willing to see her despite this and to discuss her work. I am looking forward to seeing her.
6. She has high anxiety and has had to have extended time across the duration of the programme.
7. She is of a ****** background but grew up and went to school in the UK.
8. She has talked to me in the past about her experiences of school and has not had much confidence in herself. I am aware that she sees me as someone she can trust and I accept this position and the responsibility which comes with it
9. She has described teaching herself to read because her parent's couldn't help her. This induces a sense of empathy in me as I imagine her inner experience as a child
10. One of reasons for doing the degree is so that she will have the capital gained through education.
11. She truly understands the value of this. I admire her and respect the personal qualities she displays
12. I have developed a relationship with this student and *I am genuinely fond of her*.
13. I spent an hour with her *and I do not mind*. This time was very consciously spent Roughly 20 minutes of this hour were spent focused on her assignment – the rest was contemplating our positions and experiences in society and the role of education. And talking about her being pregnant, which is a new development in her life. I was aware of it being an informal conversation without a specific work-related focus.

(Group 1a - October 2017 - conditions\e. data 12.10.17: 6 – 6)

9.2.2 SF2 Analysis and Interpretation: lines 5-13

MAXQDA Data reference	Group 1a - October 2017 - conditions\e. data 12.10.17: 6 - 6
Situational factor 2	Open Plan Design of the MH Campus
Immediate material factors	Open plan seating area, busy environment with students seated nearby or walking past
Interacting factor/s and action	Being visible to others: students and staff Spend 1 hour with a student in an informal conversation Length of time with student possibly apparent Reinforcement of general perception of my accessibility
Internal personal factor/s	I spend a long time with this student talking about their life rather than their academic progress I do this because I am interested in this student's life and experiences and because it helps me make sense of me.
External contextual factor/s (encompassing structural organisational factors and consumer discourse)	Demographic Opportunity

Autobiographical memory	BA (hons) ECS 2004-8 Learner Autobiography (LA)
	I think I may be identifying with 'the struggle' and the role of education in helping one overcome this. This strongly relates to my own learner autobiography which is characterised by returning to higher education as a mature student with three children to support. I am aware that ***'s 'struggle' is very different to mine as she has the added issue of poverty and English as a second language. I deeply admire her and am completely committed to supporting her through her educational journey.

Descriptive Summary

Dominant aspect: Self as a learner and non-traditional student

Emotions surround this encounter prior to it commencing as this student is regarded positively by the lecturer. As a result, time is consciously set aside without feelings of hardship. There is a sense that this meeting is energising rather than regarded an extra duty. There is insight into the student's personal characteristics and emotional world. It is evident that trust has been established in the relationship over a period of time and that this has helped the lecturer understand the student and her experiences. It appears that the position of a trust which is ascribed to the lecturer by the student is taken seriously by the lecturer and that the lecturer has an implicit understanding of the student's emotional world. The experiences of the student, who has had to teach herself English and to read, resonates with the lecturer's own experiences as a much younger learner and this contributes to the lecturer's empathy for the student. The student's tenacity with her studies and much less advantageous starting point than many, adds to the lecturer's interpretation of this student and contributes to their perception of her approach to study as admirable.

The wider organisational systems and current framework for HE are regarded as providing a positive opportunity for students such as this, they are not experienced as a threat in the mind of the lecturer in the interaction with this student. This interaction, which lasts for an hour within a busy working day, symbolises a relationship which has value beyond that of satisfying student perception or being seen by the student as a source of information. The conversation continues after the 'formal work', which was the purpose of the tutorial has been discussed which suggests that both student and lecturer are engaged in something that they are enjoying, but which is not directly related to the original point of the tutorial.

Other aspects: self as a fearful, self as non-traditional student, self as having experienced a struggle, self as tenacious and determined

Emerging theme: diversity of students and cultural differences (student demographic)

8.3 Situational factor 3: conversation and talk

8.3.1 SF3 Field note entry parts: 1-3

Coding: green: description; action: underlined; thought: italics; emotion: bold (red: initial notes written spontaneously)

1. Spent a lot of time this morning talking to a new fist year students who has a hearing impairment and EAL. Concerned about my responsibility

2. I wonder how she will cope on the course although she appears to be very resilient. More so than far less challenged students (and more so than I would have been at her age). I feel embarrassed about myself and the attitudes of some other students

3. She tells me about her family who she visited in Peru this summer. She speaks with heart **and I am genuinely moved by her courage to move to the UK and pursue this course. I hope she does well.** Similarity from the perspective of family connections

(Group 1a - October 2017 - conditions\d. data 11.10.17: 4 - 4)

8.3.2 SF3 Analysis and Interpretation: lines 1-3

MAXQDA Data reference	(Group 1a - October 2017 - conditions\d. data 11.10.17: 4 - 4)
Situational factor 3	Space for conversation and talk
Immediate material factors	Summer Row office
Interacting factor/s and Action	Time spent talking to students or other staff has to be balanced with other aspects of the workload
	There is a degree of freedom with which such sessions can be managed. Some students have complex needs which require more time. Extra time spent with students is not officially acknowledged
	Spent a lot of time this morning talking to a new fist year students who has a hearing impairment and EAL.
Internal personal factor/s	It is my choice to initiate conversation with students about their lives
	My choice to initiate conversation is linked to me making sense of myself
	I have a strong sense of responsibility to students with additional needs and as such spend more time with them
External contextual factor/s (encompassing structural organisational factors and consumer discourse)	Talk and conversation occur in none regulated spaces
	Official tutorials do not capture the actual talk which occurs with students and the impact this has on their learning and experience
Autobiographical memory	NNEB DIPLOMA 1993-95 LA
	I feel the weight of my limitations when looking back to my own educational journey – which is characterised by vocational study from age sixteen and straight into employment from eighteen in a local, low paid childcare job whilst still living at home.

Descriptive Summary

Self as inferior

Time is spent talking to students when a need is perceived. This appears to occur in partnership with a sense of responsibility as a year group manager, to ensure that the student feels supported and to protect oneself form criticism should the student begin to experience difficulties. The way that the student presents herself is notable and there is a sense that her attitude and approach to studying as a student from abroad is remarkable and different to commonly observes attitudes from home students.

I consciously prioritise time with this student as I feel concerned about her being on the programme away from home. The time I spend with her is born from a sense of responsibility. I have set up an early tutorial as I want her to know that she has a person she can come to if

needed. She is only eighteen and I treat her as I would want my sons to be treated at their universities. However, the main driver that keeps my interest sustained is that I am genuinely fascinated by her ability to manage away from her support network, having English as a second language and a hearing impairment. In talking to her, I find myself revisiting my younger self and contrasting my own development with hers.

I cannot understand myself as a person who could do what she is doing. I feel the weight of my limitations when looking back to my own educational journey – which is characterised by vocational study from age sixteen and straight into employment from eighteen in a local, low paid childcare job whilst still living at home. The fact that I commit so much time to ensuring this student feels supported illuminates an assumption that she is experiencing her start at *** and move to the UK as daunting and is *in need* of support. I realise that this is based largely on how I imagine myself to have felt and how I would feel now in similar circumstances. At the very least however, having made a connection with her I sense that she will contact me if needed and this makes me feel more relaxed about her being in my year group.

In contrast to how different my interaction with this student makes me feel I also experience a strong sense of connection and sameness to the things she shares about her family I enjoy he time spent with her and I do not experience it as a hardship despite the time it takes.

Other aspects: self as responsible, self as puzzled, self as judgemental

Emerging theme: students' needs; others of difference (Social demographic)

8.4 Situational factor 4: heavy workload

8.4.1 SF4 field note entry parts 32-40

Coding: green: description; action: underlined; thought: italics; emotion: bold (red: initial notes written spontaneously)

32. Straight after teaching at 12 o'clock, I move to room 117 MH to check on my first year group of 62 students who have been allocated a room that is too small for them. **I feel the need to keep on top of them**

33. This happened as a result of late enrolments due to students entering the programme through clearing. Created extra work

34. *The room size issue has been concerning, especially in light of the current climate in which student are positioned as customers.* I find this unfair

35. It has taken several emails to the Dean of the department to try and resolve the issue. ***Frustrating.***

36. Unfortunately, it remains unresolved as an alternative to the room would mean splitting the group and a later finish for half of them. It is difficult to manage students' perceptions in this situation as they cannot easily understand what the issue is and why it cannot be resolved in the way that they want.

37. I have tried to be 'upfront' about the issue by offering them the choice of staying in the smaller room or splitting the group – the majority chose the smaller room.

38. As a result of this situation, **I feel obliged to head down to the room at the start of the session every week to support the lecturer who is teaching them by bringing in extra chairs.**

39. *I am conscious that it could be difficult for her to maintain a positive and compliant atmosphere in the group if we are not seen to be doing all we can to address the situation.*
40. *It is also quite useful to drop in to this session as I can let them know of my availability later in the day and make any other announcements.*

(Group 1a - October 2017 - conditions\e. data 12.10.17: 8 - 9).

8.4.2 SF4 Analysis and Interpretation: lines 32-40

MAXQDA Data reference	(Group 1a - October 2017 - conditions\e. data 12.10.17: 8 - 9).
Situational factor 4	Heavy workload
Immediate material factors	62 students in a room that is too small
Interacting factor/s and Action	<u>Check in on year group between teaching sessions and assist a colleague to move chairs and tables to provide each student with a seat</u>
Internal personal factor/s	Responsibility toward the students Maintaining a positive perception Support for colleague and keenness to maintain appositive working relationship with them
External contextual factor/s (encompassing structural organisational factors and consumer discourse)	Late enrolment/pressure to recruit Student satisfaction Student expectations
Autobiographical memory	In my experience as a learner at the same university where I now work, I know from experience that students develop perceptions of lecturers. I am keen to at least be seen as helpful even if they are unhappy with the overall situation. Feelings of pressure in childhood to meet expectations and perform as expected are residual.

Descriptive summary

Dominant aspect: Self as responsible
The room capacity is not suitable for the class of students and the lecturer feels obliged to be present in order to acknowledge to the group that they are aware of the situation and addressing it. The role of year manager is particularly taxing when managing a first year group, as is the case for me this academic year. They require a lot more initial support than the other more well established year groups. This is not something generally acknowledged but can have a knock on effect if holding other responsibilities. For example, this year I have also got responsibility for a Master's Programme and Year group, which has meant that I did four days of induction rather than one as other staff (cross link to SF4 Interpretation: lines 9-15
Other aspects: self as responsible; self as anxious; self as frustrated

Emerging theme: working conditions; workload