

# **An Exploration of the Implementation, Impacts & Experiences of PDP at a Single UK University**

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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis has been to explore the implementations, impacts and experiences of Personal Development Planning at a single UK university. Combining an illuminative evaluation mixed methodology (Partlett & Hamilton 1972) with a Sartrean existential model of identity formation, the study has sought to examine both the systematization of PDP within a range of disciplinary cases and the ways in which student beliefs, attitudes and motivations have impacted on the ability of those systems to drive personal development as a product of each particular learning context.

Traditionally, PDP research has focused on the systems into which the innovation has been integrated, the individual student often a secondary concern to the motivations and practices underpinning the creation of the system in question. Research that locates the individual student at the centre of the PDP process has therefore been scarce, and the application of a Sartrean philosophical ground in this instance may therefore be seen as a response to this particular viewpoint, focusing as it does on individuals as fundamental drivers of their own personal development. Here, identity is formed within a political, and often paradoxical, negotiation between 'self' and 'other', with each party, or parties, demanding different responses from the other, or others. Where these demands of each other exist in conflict so development is framed within the ability to resist or comply with external pressures to develop in particular directions; be those socio-economic, professional or personal.

Drawing on Sartre's position of student-as-motivated-individual, an idiographic focus subsequently highlighted the role of congruence within student and lecturer attitudes and actions. For lecturers, decisions on how they would engage with PDP often appeared dependant on how they saw the discipline they were working in and their role within it. Consequently, what lecturers often expected from their students could be seen as a mirror of how they viewed themselves. In contradiction to authors such as Bernstein (1996) and Clegg & Bradley (2006a) staff attitudes to PDP were not constrained by discipline or professional

category in a generalized sense, but were determined by individual perceptions of those categories by their members. With each variation in understanding came different attitudes to assessment, practice and tutorial support, where significantly PDP was most commonly located. Each member of staff could on some level be seen to be defending their own perceptions and identities, projecting their own image out to their group as an exemplar. This was a position that was also commonly reflected in the attitudes of staff members to the motivations of government, and the sector, to impose PDP on pedagogic practice.

For the student, entering university with a particular identity based on a milieu of past experiences and expectations, and working towards particular personal ambitions, their willingness to adapt appeared equally reliant on the levels of congruence that existed between 'self' as learner and members of staff as exemplars. Where contact between the two parties was minimal then students in this study often appeared to be working around the system in a way that offered them the least challenge. Inevitably, the levels of compliance appeared linked to the degrees of congruence between the many parties involved, both educationally and socially, and the allowance within the PDP system to either comply or ignore the preferred states being offered them. As with staff members, students within this study appeared prone to act defensively in order to maintain their existing sense of 'self'.



## **Section1: Introduction**

### **1.1. The Study Focus**

The aim of this thesis has been to explore the implementations, impacts and experiences of Personal Development Planning at a single UK university. Combining an illuminative evaluation mixed methodology with a Sartrean existential model of identity formation, the study has sought to examine both the systematization of PDP within a range of disciplinary cases and the ways in which student beliefs, attitudes and motivations have impacted on the ability of those systems to drive personal development as a product of each particular learning context.

At first glance it would appear to be a simple aim, with simple academic ambitions. The title refers to a single educational policy intervention, set down and monitored by the Higher Education sector itself. Implementation of the policy was supported by a set of specific guidelines, presented by the QAA (QAA 2001) but initially authored by a community of educational practitioners (Barnes 2010). The aim of the policy was and is to promote greater student autonomy and an increased sense of ownership of the students' own learning. From these guidelines these goals would be achieved by teaching students to monitor and manage their academic and career development through *"a process of reviewing and recording learning and achievement and action planning"* (QAA 2001, p.8).

As such, PDP has become characterized as a set of processes that support self-awareness and evaluation and thus empower students to make the appropriate developmental and behavioural responses to contextual challenges both inside and outside of the academic environment (Jackson 2001a). Such a contextual extension was perhaps pivotal to PDP as an educational policy, autonomy and independence enabling the student to recognize their development across space and time, to temporally relocate their education at lifelong and life-wide levels (Jackson 2001c). This is not to be confused with traditional models of personal learning in which teachers respond to the individual learning requirements of each child (see James et al. 2004), but a shift towards the learner as responsive to their own sense of need and direction. As such Education was no longer to be seen in terms of summative

outcomes alone but in terms of the processes that underpin the acquisition of those outcomes, processes that would help students to be more responsive to the fluid contextual demands that they are expected to face beyond their academic boundaries (Jackson & Ward 2004). In essence, students were asked to take greater responsibility for their own learning because they, as holistic individuals, have become the primary focus of the educational process both within and beyond Higher Education. Subsequently, if, as Norman Jackson (2001b) predicted, personal learning as previously redefined is to be perceived as vital for lifelong personal and socio-economic wellbeing then greater autonomy and ownership can be viewed as essential educational outcomes for both personal and socio-economic growth and as such cannot be left to chance (Edwards 2005, Jackson 2007). Furthermore, with the sector facing an ever-increasingly diverse student cohort, the ability to manage diversity through a greater focus on the individual has brought further weight to the beliefs surrounding PDP and a focus on the individual as a driver of their own growth (Hagyard & Hilsden 2011, Burgess 2004).

The extension of education through a focus on learning as 'owned process' may be seen as the fundamental belief underpinning the policy, and yet it has been the use of belief as a key driver that has made both the implementation of PDP as a single policy, and indeed this research, inherently complex. The implementation of PDP has been considered by parties such as the QAA as a priority for more than a decade but research has historically highlighted an unwillingness in some students to engage with learning that concentrates on issues that are seen as beyond their academic expectations (Crawford 2008, Owen 2006, Cartledge 2007, Goodridge & Burkinshaw 2007). Embedding practice (Gibson 2005, Correy 2008) and employability (Kneale 2005, Anderson 2008, Cosh 2008) have been shown to aid student participation in PDP but still these have not been shown to ensure effective and consistent student engagement where engagement and participation are not deemed to refer to the same level of student activity.

At the heart of this study, therefore, lies the relationship between the implementation of educational systems designed to promote greater student ownership of their learning and development and the willingness of students to be

influenced in this manner, development being expressed as both explicit and codified. Furthermore, it is a relationship that seeks to change student attitudes and behaviour in ways that support lifelong learning and a willingness to accept personal responsibility for self- development. As will be revealed, explorations of this relationship in terms of levels of student engagement have predominately focused on the systems within which PDP processes have been applied to the learning context, the student being portrayed as passive to those systems. However, in this instance, this view has been deemed inappropriate where connecting with the holistic individual has been viewed as characteristic of the educational processes being applied. Whilst researchers have often perceived areas of individual uniqueness as idiosyncrasies, aspects of self that are open to correction (McCune & Entwistle 1999), the question must be raised as to whether these differences can genuinely be seen in this manner or instead reflect fundamental and resistant psychological forces that act to shape the relationship between the learner and their educational context. Authors such as Bufton (2007) and Clegg & Bufton (2008) have begun to identify individual students as inherently fluid according to time and context, but have continued to work through a systems focus and as such have maintained an external perspective of the student where a more specific and internal view may be more useful in an exploration of individual engagement and experience of an innovation designed to promote psychological change.

## 1.2. Study Foundations

References to the psychological concepts that have underpinned the implementation of PDP-as-policy are significant in that these reflect the constructivist themes that will be shown to be running throughout the formation and application of PDP processes as an educational innovation. In line with constructivist psychological models, knowledge is seen as fundamentally interpretive. Rhetoric, and theory as used within that rhetoric, has been seen as representations of ideas and intent, but equally as representations they are always open to change within the space between presenter and receiver. It is within this space that such symbols are interpreted according to the individual socio-psychological worlds of those making sense of the rhetoric, understanding and application becoming interpretive acts.

Such an acceptance of the individualization of knowledge has two consequences for the approach being taken. Individualization brings an inherent fragility to ideas of categorical solidity, doubts being raised over the ability of different individuals to view the same conceptual space in the same manner. This is important in that it promotes the need to not only examine the concepts and motivations underpinning the implementation of PDP-as-policy but also the individual interpretations of staff members of those concepts as staff seek to transfer them into practice. Equally, such a view also reinforces the need to prioritize student attitudes and interpretations of those applications as shaped within their own constructive processes, a recognition that again forces the relocation of the study from the educational systems produced to implement PDP-as-policy to an existential congruence between the processes and outcomes attached to those systems and the socio-psychological worlds of individual students. In response to Peter's (2006) call to treat students as active rather than passive participants in their own development, it is the experiential and developmental relationship between PDP and individual students that subsequently forms the final, and primary, level of exploration within this study. Indeed, in line with the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre that underpins this research, the individual student is viewed as the primary driver of their own development, the nature of their development grounded

in the choices that each student makes in accordance with their own histories, biographies and motivations. Self and context are viewed paradoxically as both simultaneously separate and contingent, the two existing in a constant process of negotiation that is not consciously open to either self or other (Spinelli 1995).

Originally a psychological study, this existential frame evolved through the growing recognition of the potential conflict that can exist between internal and external developmental expectations, and the political character that this tension promotes within educational models that seek to explicitly influence psychological development. For the purposes of enabling the reader to better understand the voice being used by the author, it should also be noted that the existential focus, and the manner in which it locates knowledge specifically within the individual, also defines the views being expressed in this work as individual interpretation and inescapable from the experiences underpinning the author's idiographic interpretations. Through the existential denial of Husserlean phenomenological bracketing and its goal to isolate self from the research process (Spinelli 1995), analysis is constrained within interpretation and as such 'self-as-author' is seen as a key driver of the analytical process. It is for this reason that time will be taken within the section on the Research Approach to explain my own philosophical, intellectual and political perspectives regarding PDP as a policy, in order to highlight my role within any analysis. It is not the intention for the study to become polemic in character but within this particular frame findings cannot be divorced from opinion, albeit informed by the analysis of the literature and arguments that have been gathered through the implantation of PDP as policy. Opinion here is an educated judgment, but one that remains entrenched in personal interpretation of data and statement.

Furthermore, such a philosophical ground has also led to a 'flattening-out' process of the ways in which different sources of evidence are used. Traditionally, academic and practitioner research has been divided, set in a hierarchy of academic rigour. However, in this instance, due to the situated nature of the discussions being built, the boundaries between data sources have been constrained in order to access

the interpretive foundations of comment beyond assumed perceptions of academic expertise.

It is important to acknowledge this prior to the following sections, in which description and debate become intertwined. What will be shown through this thesis is that whilst scientific and philosophical arguments have formed an important part of the PDP implementation process these have not been included neutrally but as an extension of a particular set of educational beliefs. As such they are never divorced from opinion, be those from the sector, institutional or personal and, through the adoption of an interpretive framework, never completely open to objective analysis.

### 1.3. The Study Format

The philosophical ground on which this perspective has been built will be further expanded on in section 2, which will both clarify these ideas and the ways in which they have shaped the research process. As indicated previously, to understand the levels of congruence that exist between student and staff all influential parties must be examined, although student findings will be seen as the major point of focus as it is their views that are being posited both philosophically and theoretically as the primary influence. Equally, with PDP-as-policy being perceived as a driver of psychological development, the manner in which students may change psychologically across their first year of study will also be examined through the use of psychological scales, the role of PDP in establishing such change being drawn from interview contact between researcher and student. The use of interview and scale within a mixed method format has been utilized in recognition of the existential complexity in which we all exist, and the impossibility of separating the developmental role of PDP, and education in general, from the '*learning milieu*' (Partlett & Hamilton 1972, p.14) in which individual development takes place. The paradigmatic decisions that have underpinned the use of illuminative evaluation mixed methods within the research, and the analytical procedures that have resulted from those decisions, will also be expanded on in Section 2.

It is usual for the methodological section to be placed after a literature review, method being seen as a reflection of the aims drawn from the examination of existing information. However, in this instance the research approach has preceded the literature review in order to both enable the reader to understand the tone of the argument being offered and to maintain the cyclic nature of the research process as explored through Section 3 onwards. It is through this focus that a hierarchy of information has been constructed, drawing down the influences that have shaped the application of PDP processes from initial implementation, through institutional and staff interpretations, to an exploration of the relationship between individual students.

Section 3 therefore begins this process by identifying and examining the key concepts and rhetoric that have framed the implementation of PDP-as-policy, and the influences that those have had on the ways in which the implementation has been viewed within the Higher Education sector. It is not a literature review in its traditional sense, although contains aspects of that. Instead, the goal of the section is to examine the psychological, philosophical and socio-political concepts that have underpinned the implementation process, and the ways in which practitioners have come to relate to those concepts during practice. What will be seen through this discussion is that whilst the reasons for applying PDP processes change according to the pressures being placed on both staff and the sector at any one time, the underlying concepts endure as it is these that lie at the heart of the personalization process.

It is a complex discussion, made complicated by the aforementioned influence of individual interpretation and an inherent assumption within the implementation process that a single stated belief is potentially able to cohere conceptual, contextual and pragmatic diversity. Equally, through a discussion of the political aspirations carried within the implementation process further conflict is introduced as the discussion touches on the fundamental purposes of education and the potential for psychological processes to be used to support socio-political rather than educational goals. For example, whilst many practitioners have viewed the linking of diverse educational concepts such as economics, employability, development and learning as both desirable and socio-politically inevitable (Watts 2005, Edwards 2005, Clarke et al. 2010) others, such as Sue Clegg, have been more critical. In 2010, Clegg described PDP as a specifically neo-liberal device designed to ensure individual submission to an economic ideal through which socio-economic and personal wellbeing become united and the state relocates responsibility for economic and social growth on to the individual alone (Bush & Bissell 2008). Which views may be considered to be correct would appear reliant on a congruence between the beliefs and attitudes of the authors from which the critiques are being drawn, and those of the reader.



Finally, disagreements surrounding the purpose and form of particular educational processes, such as reflection, will also be shown to be linked to the many contexts within which they are being applied and the individual staff interpretations that have resulted through contextual and pragmatic variation. To many authors this diversity has left the implementation of PDP open to accusations of being chaotic (Clegg 2004), conceptually vague (Fry et al. 2002) and inherently contextual (Brennan & Shah 2003), and for Fry it has been the resultant conceptual and pragmatic fragmentation that has limited the sector's ability to offer research evidence to support the effectiveness of PDP.

Diversity, and the ability to respond to diversity, can therefore be seen as common themes within this thesis. In order to manage such a broad range of associated concepts and their interpretations, and retain some relevance to the particular students being studied, the format of Section 3 reflects the key themes that have subsequently been gathered through the exploration of the institutional and staff responses to the implementation of PDP-as-policy.

The concepts being discussed will therefore be brought together under the following categories:

- PDP as a socio-economic response
- PDP as a driver of academic and professional identity
- PDP as a driver of student autonomy & self-regulation
- PDP processes and the management of learning
- PDP and the ownership of learning.

In recognition of the final point on the ownership of learning, Section 3 will include a discussion concerning the potential for PDP processes to bring personal and personalized learning into conflict, internal motivations being driven towards external expectation and demands. Where outcomes are shaped not by internal individual processes of construction but external political or discipline expectations then these have been defined not as personal but personalized, those outcome expectations proving congruent with the operational context rather than the

individual acting within those contextual expectations. Such a lens can be seen as a particular aspect of the Illuminative Evaluation method (see Partlett & Hamilton 1972), the focus of the study remaining fluid according to findings as they arise during the research process; individual areas of interest been pursued where they are considered to be of particular significance.

These themes, which have been gathered through the thematic analysis of institutional documentation and staff interviews, reveal which aspects of the implementation process have been given priority in this particular institutional context and how staff have interpreted those within the systems of PDP that have been applied in their particular disciplines. This dimension of the study will be explained more fully in Section 4, together with a discussion of student change and the experiences of PDP that each student saw as relevant to those changes. Here, the student experiences will be packaged within their immediate cohort contexts in order to highlight the negotiated relationship between PDP provision, lecturer and learner. As characterized within an existential piece, quantitative data will be treated qualitatively in accordance with the interpretive nature of the underpinning philosophy (Harré 2004), with details such as gender and age being made explicit as an active aspect of student experiences. Each cohort package will also be summarized, with particular associations being made between student experiences and PDP provision. The focus in this instance is not to construct inter-case generalizations but to discuss the ways in which provision has interacted with the learners as unique individuals, their experiences determining the effectiveness of practice. Whilst lecturer views have been treated thematically as aspects of the context within which the student learns, the student experiences have been analysed existentially, Giorgio's existential method allowing for the idiographic analysis of each student as a unique individual.

Following the process of contextualization that characterizes Section 3, and the results and analysis carried out in Section 4, Section 5 will act to link those two sections by redefining the relationship between PDP-as-system and the experiences and developments of individual students within those systems of influence. It is through this discussion that the potential for personal learning to be considered

personally owned and motivated can be evaluated, together with the potential problems that educational systems face when seeking to make learning personal in nature. As such the discussion will act to highlight problems associated with attempts to systematize and assess developmental processes. What the study has revealed about such issues will be then brought together as a general conclusion in Section 6. Each identified issue will drive questions regarding the sector's attitudes towards its students and highlight areas of potential research that will be defined as essential if the sector wishes to utilize pedagogies based on constructivist theory.

## Section 2: The Research Approach

### 2.1. Introduction

As discussed in Section 1, an explanation of the Research Approach has been brought forward in order to clarify and support the relationship-building process that forms the rest of the study. The role of the Research Approach is to describe and explain the processes through which the student experiences and impacts of PDP have been studied. As a form of extended methodology its aim is not merely to describe the research design and its associated methods but also the conceptual and philosophical choices that have underpinned those decisions.

Evans & Gruba have defined methodology as *“the branch of knowledge that deals with methods and its application in a particular field of study...indicating how we gain knowledge of the world.”* (2002, p.89) However, references to knowledge introduce an epistemological question in relation to what we mean by knowledge, and Cresswell & Plano-Clarke have commented that this section should not therefore cover only research design and methods but also *“the philosophical framework and the fundamental assumptions of research”* (2007, p.4). As such, any description should not only include the methodological aspects of the study as process but also the ontological and epistemological perspectives being adopted, and the reason for their adoption (Cresswell 2007). Indeed, for Cresswell, the central difficulties of research lie within these foundational concerns, commenting that, *“the assumptions, the worldview and the theoretical lens will be harder to shape than the method itself.”* (2007, p.42) And yet it is only through the answering of such questions that the researcher starts to understand and express the nature and purpose of the knowledge being gathered (Holloway & Todres 2007).

In this instance, it is the chosen philosophical ground, and the methodological decisions shaped by that ground, that enables this thesis to offer a unique perspective on PDP. Seeking to explore student experiences of Personal Development Planning, the chosen existential perspective relocates the primary

level of focus of that exploration away from the systems in which PDP processes are presented to the students and towards the ways in which the students' socio-psychological worlds shape their responses to those systems and the pressures and influences that are inherent within them. In doing so it ceases to simply explore the concept of PDP in terms of how to manage student engagement, and explores the relationship between the student and PDP as a single influence within a complex and individual developmental process.

Naturally, this does not mean that the systems themselves can be ignored, and it is for this reason that the study format has been based on an Illuminative Evaluation model (Partlett & Hamilton 1972). For Tyler (1972), two clear characteristics must be present within the evaluative process of any system, the need to identify clear behavioural outcomes that can either be observed or measured and the ability to separate persistent learning from learning that is rapidly lost once unused. It is through these characteristics that the innovation can be compared against the expectations on which it has been built, and with that be perceived as valuable. In this instance, we are faced with two obstacles to this. Firstly, where PDP processes are focused on psychological changes and behaviours that must extend beyond the academy, such a process of enculturalization cannot be perceived as being open to loss, whilst the 'situatedness' of practice acts to hinder any attempts to extend our findings beyond the particular academic locations of each cohort being studied. PDP cannot be seen as a single innovation but a collection of attitudes and ideas that are loosely framed within the collective title. It is a position that reinforces Partlett & Hamilton's original image of innovations as impossible to isolate from the learning milieu as "*a network of cultural, social, institutional, and psychological forces*" (1972, p.1).

As such, the instructional systems in which PDP is located can only be viewed as an aspect of that milieu. Whilst systems contextualise the students' experiences from an institutional perspective, highlight differences and similarities within its presentation, and demonstrate the influences of professional and academic orientations, they do not in themselves define the manner in which students experience and engage with those many influences. As Tyler, again, suggests, it is

dangerous to assume that the lecturer has understood and presented the desired outcomes of the innovation explicitly, or that the socio-psychological complexity of the individual student receiving that information has enabled them to do so neutrally or unquestioningly. For staff and student alike, the research process therefore becomes a springboard from which greater self-awareness grows, and it this goal to attach interpretation to action that strengthens the use of an existential ground. From this position, each party must be seen as driving their own responses to the systems within which they exist (see Boekaerts & Cascallar 2006), each carrying their own assumptions, motivations and aspirations. Furthermore, with PDP being built on the need to increase student independence it is the willingness of students to be changed in this manner that can be seen as the primary concern of the innovation, and with that the analytical process in this study.

It has been accepted that the adoption of an existential frame within an illuminative evaluation model sets this work at least in partial conflict with more recent trends to locate the evaluation of practice within a socio-cultural perspective alone. Where Trowler (2011) posits that evaluation has been forced into a social space due to the increasing breadth of the social and political demands being made of the educational sector, the psychological focus of illuminative evaluation acts to question the relevance of this position. Here, to focus on practice within a social space, and the routinization of activity and performance which characterizes that space (Reckwitz 2002), simplifies the complexity of the context being examined through the avoidance of individual difference. In essence, by studying only one side of the equation through the assumption that the individual acts passively within the contexts laid down for them, we create abstractions of both practice and evaluation that are no longer fully representative of either point of focus. Where Trowler recognizes the *“internal divisions, different understandings, competing ideologies and political positions”* (2011, p.21) that characterize the different interests of government and its agencies, to prioritize these above the individual agent being acted upon by the system in question highlights the processes of power that exist between these parties. Furthermore, where Trowler supports the use of appreciative enquiry to focus on the positives of practice as a promoter of systems development,

the existential focus of the work denies those presenting the systems in question the right to necessarily decide what can be considered positive.

A brief explanation of the existential perspective in Section 2.2 will therefore start a discussion of the research approach being adopted. This will be followed by an explanation of how existential perspectives can be aligned with an illuminative mixed methods format. Mixed methods have been chosen as a reflection of the study aims, which lie not only in the student experience of PDP processes and systems but also in the ability of those systems to facilitate psychological change as development, in this instance self-efficacy, perceived control, dispositional malleability and learning depth. The manner in which change is identified quantitatively and then interpreted qualitatively will be expanded on in Section 2.3. Finally, these largely conceptual debates will then be translated into a research design, to be covered in Section 2.4. The aim of the design is to gather sufficient information to understand thoroughly the many influences that have shaped the context within which the student has experienced PDP systems and processes and the ways in which those influences have interacted with each other and the more fundamental and internal aspects of each participating student. It is through this exploration that it is hoped to identify the primary reasons underpinning student responses to the PDP systems and processes being applied to their learning and development.

## 2.2. Philosophical Foundations

In this instance, the existential ground mentioned previously has been specifically drawn from the existential phenomenology, or 'existentialism', of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). The term 'existentialism' would imply some universal character to a single train of thought, and yet the title has proved largely ambiguous (Cohn 1997, Warnock 1970) and due to the diverse range of views associated with the term it offers the reader only a loose understanding of what will be required of them.

All forms of existentialism can be seen as an adaptation of the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl argued that a person's consciousness, and with that their experiences of the world, are never general and abstract but always possess a particular point of focus. The 'meanings' that we apply to our experiences are seen as being constructed during the act of reaching out to the world (*intentionality*) and the objects (noema) and processes (noesis) to and through which we reach. Furthermore, whilst these processes can be seen as individual reflections of 'self', the experiential structures that these form also carry general themes that characterize 'being' as a universal and transcendental concern. For Husserl, therefore, an objective view of 'being', or indeed any phenomenon associated with 'being', becomes identifiable through the subjective experiences of the individual.

Husserl also recognized the co-constructive nature of such processes, that meanings are not constructed in isolation but with others with whom we share those experiences, or have shared other experiences beforehand. As Garza (2007) explains, such a sense of interconnectedness potentially acts to prevent access to another person's experiential structure because it becomes a joint reflection of the two parties involved, and it is for this reason that Husserl introduced the concept of bracketing to his phenomenological method. To bracket oneself from another is to remove one's own essence from the process, leaving the structures that belong to the other person in isolation and with that, open to objectification.



Central to this view is the explicit understanding that the processes through which individuals bring 'meaning' to their lives are a reflection of life as it is individually *experienced* rather than a product of external and abstracted theorization (VanManen 1997, Patton 2002, Zayed 2008). As such, experience is not reflective of a single external reality, but a series of internal interpretations to which we then respond. As Spinelli, an existential psychotherapist and researcher, explains:

*"Phenomenologists argue that this interpretational process must be acknowledged in our statements about reality. Indeed, phenomenologists suggest that, in our everyday experience of reality, this process is to all intents and purposes indivisible from the reality being perceived. Reality, as far as each of us experiences it, is this process."* (1995, p.4)

This would appear to make phenomenology a relativist model, but Mairet (2007), in his introduction to Sartre's 'Existentialism & Humanism', rejects this interpretation. For Mairet, subjectivity cannot deny objectivity, but objective truth does not reflect a single set of possibilities but all possibilities and it is this that makes objective truth unattainable. Subsequently, as Pojman later explains, *"it is not at all the case that subjectivity determines objective truth, but it is simply that subjectivity is the only way to approach the truth or to understand the truth"* (1978, p.9). Or, more succinctly, *"man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity"* (Sartre 2007, p.31).

Sartre's comment offers a point of departure for existentialism. Here, experiential uniqueness and subjectivity deny us access to another person's reality, and without this analysis becomes interpretation as guided by our own meanings and not those of the 'other'. Subsequently, understandings of 'other' become a reflection of 'self' and bracketing becomes impossible. 'Being' therefore cannot be separated from the world in which it is situated, and transcendence cannot be established because in seeking it we merely create further abstractions (Cohn 1997). For Sartre (1939), cited in Moran & Moody (2002), this is in part due to the nature of intentionality, the essential nature of which he saw as being experientially embodied

in the uniquely individual beliefs and emotions that inherently accompany the process of reaching out to the world.

Therefore, whilst the focus for Husserl lies within an understanding of 'being' through essence as a thematic concern, for Sartre "*existence precedes essence*" (2007, p.27) and it is through this statement that our inherent isolation and uniqueness is made explicit. Similarities remain. As Langbridge explains:

*"Existentialists were more concerned with existence (and human nature) than Husserl... As a result of their interest in existence, there was a change of emphasis in phenomenological philosophy with greater recognition of the way that all experience must be understood in the context of the person having the experience and the way that they see the world (i.e., a concern with the lifeworld)." (2008, p.1127)*

From the existential position, our potential to access and research the individual becomes specifically constrained within idiographic approaches that support the primacy of subjective experience (Valle & King 1978), efforts to generalize from the subjective position inevitably reflecting a process of co-construction between the researcher and the researched. Indeed, where analysis is completed in isolation from the original context of expression, the researcher's interpretation will necessarily dominate the process (vanManen 1997). As such, through an existential lens, research conclusions in all forms are always partial and both contextually and temporally constrained, bound as they are in the interpretation of either self-reflective or observational descriptions. As vanManen explains:

*"To describe meaning involves interpretation because it involves an awareness of the symbols being used by another individual, symbols that you can never have full access to. Some degree of interpretation is inevitable." (vanManen 1997, p.25)*

Furthermore, vanManen adds to our understanding of the inherent difficulties presented by the acceptance of interpretation as a fundamental aspect of research by highlighting the temporal impact of reflection within the data gathering

process. For vanManen, the temporal space between action and recall inevitably alters the nature of the initial experience through retrospective re-contextualization, and as such, *“when we interpret the meaning of something we actually interpret an interpretation”* (1997, p.26). In addition, when using narrative text to ground those interpretations our ability to reach out to the original action is further complicated by the relationship between interpretation and language. Similarity of meaning can be missed within linguistic difference, whilst difference too can be lost within assumptions of linguistic similarity (Churchill et al. 1998).

In both cases we are forced to return once more to our inability to fully access the worlds of others, and the subsequent drive to view ‘other’ as a reflection of ‘self’, a point expanded on by existential psychotherapist Rollo May:

*“Can we be sure... that we are seeing the patient as [they] really [are], knowing [them] in [their] own reality; or are we seeing merely a projection of our own theories about [them]. How can we be certain that our system, admirable and beautifully wrought as it may be, has anything whatever to do with this specific Mr. [or Mrs.] Jones, a living, immediate reality sitting opposite us...”* (1958, p.3)

This study is in part constructed around the use of particular psychological concepts, and these will be discussed later in Sections 2.3 and 3.3, but the views of Rollo directly challenge the ability of psychology to establish universal rules of behavioural causality (Churchill et al. 1998) through the treatment of data as neutral and language as univocal (Zayed 2008). As existential psychologist Collaizzi (1978) explains, by working at this level psychology limits itself to the creation of abstractions that bear little resemblance to those individuals that the science claims to explain. Partiality of ‘knowing’ does not prevent the study of ‘being’ but will inevitably impact on the creation of universal conclusions and applications being drawn from psychological research.

It is at this point that it becomes relevant to relate the views of Sartre to psychology, Collaizzi’s previous comments seeming to question the appropriateness of linking the two perspectives. Certainly, through Sartre’s resistance to Husserl’s

essential reductionism it is clear that Sartre would resist any attempts to universalize causality. Indeed, in 'Being & Nothingness', he refers specifically to the manner in which psychological explanations always *"refer us ultimately to inexplicable givens"* (1956, p.560), grand and abstract theories that generate essentialist understandings. However, through Sartre's reference to 'self-as-project', expressed explicitly in his comment that *"man makes himself"* (2007, p.59), 'self' is viewed as a psychological concern. The key for Sartre is not to assume causality but to relocate the investigation of that 'project' from the general to the specific in accordance with the *"unpredictability of the free act"* (1956, p.569). For Sartre, the only investigative tool that would be capable of doing this is phenomenology, due to its specific use of idiographic description and induction (Sartre 1956).

Again we return to the uniqueness and inaccessibility of 'being' and it is through the subsequent recognition of knowledge as fluid and partial that existentialism has tentatively become associated with post-modernism as a constructivist perspective (Churchill 2002), a point that gains particular relevance in Section 3.3, in which the growth of constructivist post-modernism has been directly linked to the implementation of PDP as a policy directive. Naturally, the essence of this debate will revolve around how the two perspectives are defined (Finlay 2009), and this is open to considerable complexity; however, there is little doubt that superficially, existentialism and post-modernism would appear in part to share many aspects, promoting both relativism and social responsibility whilst rejecting both reductionism and idealism (Spinelli 1995). In addition, they also deny the ability to universally objectify 'self' (Churchill 2002), a view shaped on their mutual foundations in the work of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, both of whom focus on the primacy of the individual (Warnock 1970, Barrett 1995). In particular, Nietzsche's description of humanity's inability to escape its social context could be seen to reflect a post-modern position in which individuals become co-constructing; however, it should be recognized that in spite of interpretive links to Nietzsche, Sartre did not accept this position. For Sartre, whilst co-construction is an aspect of sociality it remains framed in personal choice, *"emphasiz[ing] the existential choices a person makes about his or her life-situation, the 'essential project'"* (von

Eckartsberg 1998, p.8). As Sartre posits, *“human beings do not possess freedom, they are freedom”* (2007, p.117).

‘Being’, for Sartre, is not passive and contained but free to act on *‘itself’*, and in conflict with the social forces that would have it exist in a particular form. As such, from a Sartrean perspective we necessarily exist in a political conflict shaped by the individual/social paradox in which we must live. As Baldwin explains:

*“Sartre argues that although, for each of us, there is an aspect of ourselves that is dependent on recognition by others (our being-for-others), this is an alien conception of ourselves that we cannot integrate into our own self-consciousness; in relation to ourselves as we are for ourselves we are not dependent on others... Yet their conclusion is paradoxical – that we are always “de trop in relation to others.”* (1995, p.793)

In essence, we necessarily exist in social situations and these are inevitably constraining but our primordial and absolute freedom to choose always allows us to move beyond them where we seek to do so (Bowling 1997, Vandenberg 2001). Whilst the environment may condition us towards itself, we remain free to make of ourselves whatever we wish (Sartre 1956). Knowledge, in this sense, is not socially constructed but constructed within a social context; it is not necessarily defined by it. Certainly, Sartre has not sought to deny the importance of the social context within that process of personal construction, arguing that without the objectification of others we would always behave unreflectively and as such would not be able to recognize ‘self’ as a personal ‘project’. Whilst we have the power to choose the nature of that ‘project’ it will inevitably be in part responsive to the pressures being laid upon us, and our motivations to resist or comply with these influences. As Sartre explains:

*“We often say that the shy man is “embarrassed by his own body”. Actually this expression is incorrect. I cannot be embarrassed by my own body as I exist. It is my body as it is for the ‘Other’ which may embarrass me.”* (Sartre 1956, p.353)

The point is significant in its reference to the 'self' as a product of externalization. Again referencing Sartre, Spinelli explains:

*"The 'other' forces the exposure, evaluation of and confrontation with one's own identity which can be distinguished from, compared with and contrasted to the identity of 'the other' or 'others' in general."* (2008, p.120)

As such, we are inherently self-constructed through our relationships with other people. However, in opposition to pragmatic and philosophical practitioners and writers who have sought to promote the perceived need for students to self-objectify towards prescribed and external socio-economic ideals (see Kumar 2007, Buckley 2006, Barnett 2003), Sartre's philosophy would suggest that to do so possesses the potential to promote alienation from 'self'. For instance, where an employer, or employers in a generalized sense, are perceived to demand specific identity characteristics from students as a reflection of their own particular workforce needs so the political relationship becomes *"over-deterministic"* (Sartre 2007, p.79). Here, the student is no longer simply in potential conflict with their immediate context but the expectations laid upon them by a collective body that holds disproportionate power over them (Kruks 1996). The title of 'socio-economic resource' carries a specific political orientation towards social and psychological development and where individuals do not freely choose to accept those so they are placed in an existential relationship that they cannot control. For Sartre, the subsequent unease must inevitably lead to resistance at some level. This is not to present Sartre's ideas as dichotomous, that we exist either for 'us' or for 'others'. This would present a position that would over-simplify the fluid and complex relationships through which the paradox of 'self'/'other' can be understood. Instead, 'self' may be understood as the hub around which the multitude of relationships that define an individual's life play out, shaped as they are by choice and the will of the individual to express choice.

From such a partial description of Sartrean existentialism, and the recognition of a paradoxical conflict between individuals and the contexts within which they exist, the analysis immediately gains a particular focus both on the many

complex and interacting facets of a person's life and the relationships of power that define those interactions. It is for this reason that the focus of the study has been located not on the systems of implementation themselves but the relationships that exist between those systems and the individuals with which they interact. Here, the 'meanings' that shape our experiences of the world are seen as a product of the complex interactions that take place between our pasts, presents and futures and the actions and expectations that have resulted from those interactions (Garza 2007).

The adoption of an existential ground therefore clearly influences the methodological and analytical frame of the work through the constraints that it places on the ways in which data can be gathered and used. As Giorgio suggests, to hide such an influence would deny the reader both the ability to understand the interpretive lens being applied to the study, and judge the validity of the researcher's findings in line with the influences brought with such a view.

*"The chief point to be remembered... is not so much whether another position with respect to the data could be adopted (this point is granted beforehand), but whether a reader, adopting the same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher, can also see what the researcher saw, whether he agrees with it or not."* (Giorgio 1975, p.96)

The point would appear to be of particular relevance to a project in which the study is being carried out by a sole researcher, their isolated intellectual nature reinforcing the potential for their idiosyncrasies to become bias. As Fine argues, *"even a 'giving voice' approach involves carving out unacknowledged pieces of narrative evidence that we select, edit, and deploy to border our arguments"* (2002, p.218), and where the single researcher alone is responsible for those selections and edits then so self-awareness and the expression of that awareness gain significance. It is for this reason that the interpretation of research requires a fundamental openness on behalf of the researcher in terms of their beliefs and the assumptions that those carry. For Cousin (2009a), such influences are inherent within all types of research, all data analysis requiring interpretive reduction, but through the

application of such a strongly idiographic frame the need for clarity gains particular significance.



## **2.3. Mixing Methods**

### **2.3a. Introduction**

Sartre's philosophical position inevitably produces a particular tension within the research approach in that it both supports the concept of viewing 'self', including self-as-student, as a personal project and rejects psychological methods of quantifying changes within that project. And yet within illuminative evaluation, value is established through the socio-psychological worlds of individuals and as such the need exists to highlight individual change on both of these levels. Subsequently, the need to recognize psychological change becomes a necessary aspect of the approach.

From this perspective it is the aim of this section to explain how these two concerns will be intertwined within a mixed methods format chosen to reflect complex developmental aspect of the topic in question (Zayed 2008), both qualitative and quantitative data being considered important aspects of understanding both psychological change and the perceptions and experiences surrounding change. As Cresswell (2007) suggests, it is then necessary to make that relationship explicit within a coherent paradigmatic as defined by the underpinning philosophy on which it has been constructed.

Whilst Partlett & Hamilton were promoting mixed methodology in the 1970s, mixed methods research in education did not emerge as a significant force until relatively recently (Cresswell & Plano-Clarke 2007, Bergman 2008). This was not true of all academic disciplines and it should be acknowledged that within disciplines such as psychology the mixing of qualitative and quantitative data has a more established history. Struggling to account for the objective/subjective divide, psychology has commonly drawn on phenomenological perspectives to enrich and deepen quantitative data (Spinelli 1995). In this instance, that relationship may be seen as being reversed, with quantitative data providing indicative context to the qualitative analysis of interviews, but as Cresswell and Plano-Clarke (2007) suggest, it is through mixed methods research that the balance between the two different data

sources can be manipulated to maximize the efficacy of the investigation. As such, mixed methods research may be seen as:

*“A research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process... Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.”* (Cresswell & Plano-Clarke 2007, p.5)

The quotation is significant in that it highlights two important dimensions of mixed methods work: methodological functionality and the need for a philosophical framework through which the two data types can be cohered. Functionally, each technique has been seen as supplying a more complete picture in combination than would be possible if used in isolation, whilst also accounting for the strengths and weaknesses present within each approach (Cresswell & Plano-Clarke 2007). Subsequently, mixed methods are seen as offering a form of study that reduces the restrictions that are applied to the research process through traditional methodological perspectives and the constraints that they carry (Morse 2003).

In addition, mixed methods models may also be seen to establish trustworthiness through their inherent methodological and data triangulation, bringing with them an implication of constancy in line with the quantitative research concepts of reliability and validity (Flick 2009). As Tindall explains through his definition of methodological triangulation as,

*“The use of different methodologies as a way of reducing the distortions that are inherent to one alone... Here this is done partly by the mixed methods approach, which seeks to establish perceived understanding and perceived change.”* (1999, p.151)

However, as Parker (1999) comments, trustworthiness can never fully equate to reliability and validity because of the often unpredictable and unrepeatable areas

which qualitative methods engage with. Here, the strength of triangulation may not be to produce consistency and transferability but actually highlight conflict, inconsistency and paradox as a reflection of the individual lives being studied (Ely et al. 1991). Such a perspective appears to be of particular merit in a study in which the role of quantitative data has been used to indicate the possibility of change rather than suggest absolute truth. Such an inference again stems from the choice of an existential ground that adopts a particularly strong idiographic focus to deny both the creation of universal themes and relocate the individual from the general to the particular (Lenaars 2002).

As with existentialism itself, however, the term 'idiographic' has been seen as lacking a clear definition, a problem Krauss (2008) has identified as lying traditionally within its position as a dichotomous alternative to nomothetic study. For Krauss, three potential methodologies can exist under the same terminological umbrella: study that denies the existence of underlying laws, study that seeks to examine how individuals respond within the boundaries of existing laws, and finally study that simply seeks to work with individuals across time. Difficulties in defining the approach serve to highlight the fact that idiographic study doesn't intrinsically alter what is being studied, merely how it is studied (Thornton 2008). In this instance, through an existential lens, the idiographic approach can be seen as being utilized for both its particular and temporal attributes, *"an attempt to study man rigorously and systematically without sacrificing man's uniqueness and essential characteristics"* (Giorgio 1967, p.171). Subsequently, the method must also be holistic in nature, Lenaars revealing the breadth of this term through a discussion of suicide:

*"Suicide and suicidal behavior are multi-farious events. There are biological, psychological, intrapsychic, interpersonal, cognitive, conscious and unconscious, sociological, cultural and philosophical elements in the events. Thus, research in suicide cannot be reduced to a single approach."* (2002, p.19)

The inherent complexity found within education and learning are theoretically no different and as such a particular benefit of the approach is its ability

to allow the researcher respectful access to a person's "*idioverse*" (Rosenzweig & Fisher 1997) and with it aspects of that person that may have been dismissed through either generalized theory or a particular external focus (Robinson et al. 2006). Methodologically, therefore, mixed methods study can be seen to offer a broad range of benefits in terms of the depth at which research can be carried out.

Philosophically, however, the picture is more complex, Bryman (2008) suggesting that difficulties inherent within mixed-method research have been underestimated in order to simplify its use within policy construction and the search for good practice (Brannen 2008). As a result, mixed methods work has been commonly defined in terms of pragmatic purpose, and whilst this study will also be defined as pragmatic the use of that term has been changed in recognition of the particular philosophical form underpinning the study. Pragmatic in this sense is not being applied to policy or practice but the research technique. Where policy is evidenced through what makes it work most effectively, in methodological form pragmatism refers simply to what makes the research process more effective, the goal of the research being reliant on the researchers themselves. The key is where the word 'effective' is being used, to refer to the process and its findings or the outcomes attached to those processes.

For Tashakkori & Teddlie, "*pragmatists decide what they want to research, guided by their personal value system; that is, they study what they think is important to study. They then study the topic in a way that is congruent with their value system, including variables and units of analysis that they feel are the most appropriate for finding an answer to their research question.*" (1998, p.26)

In this instance, the mixed methods approach has been based on the illuminative evaluation model of Partlett & Hamilton (1972), the aim of which is to "*discover and document what it is like to be participating in the scheme*" (1972, p.11). For Partlett & Hamilton, the chosen methods are subservient to the problem being investigated, in this instance the relationship between the systems within which students experience PDP and the individual nature of those experiences and impacts. Eclectic in nature, mixed methods in this model are seen as promoting

triangulation, with the researcher adopting a role of authoritative figure rather than objective bystander as they direct the focus of the study towards particular areas that are perceived by them to be of particular significance. The model is not, and cannot, be replicated exactly within this context because as an early model of ethnography, observation is seen as the primary data source, but where PDP remains an implicit part of the learning milieu, often located within the privacy of the tutorial system, interviews have had to become the dominant data gathering tool. It is a characteristic of the study that again reinforces the interpretive nature of the data being gathered, subject as it is to temporal influence where experience is relocated from past to present through language.

### **2.3b. The Quantitative Aspect**

Having described the study as mixed-method, it is therefore necessary to describe just where different elements sit within the study and how the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research have been integrated. In this instance a quantitative aspect has been included to identify areas of personal change within the students taking part in the study, and this part of the work has focused largely on the concepts of self-regulation and learning depth, and the psychological attributes that have been thought to underpin them. Even where offered in negotiated form through the application of an existential lens, the use of such psychological dimensions remains congruent with existing community thinking and its over-arching focus on the management and evidencing of personal/psychological change, Sartre's own views regarding methods of raising psychological self-awareness, and the use of Giorgio's method of interview analysis, which is in itself a psychological method. These particular relationships will be expanded on as they arise in the methodological and context-building sections that follow, but the quantitative dimension will take the form of a battery of existing psychological scales to be presented to students at the start and at the end of their first year of study. It is through the use of such conceptual scales that personal change will be identified, change which can then be expanded on through interview. This battery will cover

the following psychological areas:

### **i. Self-Efficacy**

Self-regulation, as will be discussed in depth in Section 3, has become a primary driver within PDP conceptualization and the drive for personal learning. Self-regulation can be visualized as a psychological system in which different cognitive structures act to present the individual within a series of negative and positive feedback loops through which they consciously regulate their behaviours (Shapiro & Schwartz 2000). Differences that exist between the various available models of self-regulation are therefore founded on the diverse range of sub-concepts that have been theorized as existing within self-regulation and the different ways in which those processes interact. For Boekaerts et al. (2000), the areas in which those theories are to be applied will also have a profound effect on how the relevant models are visualized. Common to these, however, have been the more particular concepts of self-efficacy and locus of control; indeed for Zimmerman (2000), self-efficacy is the primary aspect of self-regulation.

Self-efficacy, as proposed by Bandura (1977, 1983), may be seen as a belief in one's ability to control or master a specific contextual event in order to ensure particular outcomes. Subsequently, self-efficacy gains particular significance within student development, defining as it does the ability of the individual to access their personal agency both academically and socially. For Bandura:

*“Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and other events that affect their lives. Efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave... Most courses of action are initially shaped in thought. People's beliefs in their efficacy influence the types of anticipatory scenarios they construct and rehearse.” (1993, p.118)*

As such, it is seen as having significant behavioural effects. Low self-efficacy has been associated with low aspirations, low motivation, an avoidance of challenge,

and a focus on self rather than performance. Alternatively, high self-efficacy has been associated with a willingness to face difficult challenges, positivity and motivation, performance orientation and deeper engagement (Bandura 1993). Subsequently, the concept has been associated with positive wellbeing and academic performance (Kuhl et al. 2006), together with efforts to drive specific areas of socio-political change (Bandura 2009, Schwartz, 1993).

As will be discussed in Section 3, psychological constructs such as self-regulation and meta-cognition were commonly referenced during the initial stages of the implementation process of PDP-as-national policy. Self-efficacy as an accepted aspect of self-regulation has therefore been considered an appropriate area of focus for this study, although the holistic nature of PDP makes the use of the concept problematic when considered solely through the work of Bandura. Initially Bandura saw efficacy as contextually specific, transferability only possible where the vast array of socio-cultural characteristics inherent in different events offer sufficient levels of similarity to minimize difference.

*“For example, the level and strength of perceived self-efficacy in public speaking will differ depending on the subject matter, the format of the presentation, and the types of audience that will be addressed... From this perspective, it is no more informative to speak of self-efficacy in general terms than to speak of non specific approach behaviour.”* (Bandura 1993, p.203)

But if this is the case then where would the study of self-efficacy be located, the focus of PDP seemingly being set at a life-wide level. If so, PDP systems and processes must not only contribute to improved academic performance but trans-disciplinary performance, and this broadens the field of expectation where it is not specifically constrained within a specific academic domain. If the concept of self-efficacy is to be used as a developmental measure then it must necessarily therefore become *“a global confidence in one’s coping ability across a wide range of demanding or novel situations”* (Schwartz 1994). For Bong & Hocevar, this shift from the specific to the general has been driven pragmatically by the nature of the tasks being studied and the results being sought. As they explain:

*“One could measure self-efficacy for performing a particular task under a very specific set of conditions (most specific levels), completing a class of activities sharing the common conditions and properties within the same domain (intermediate levels of specificity), or functioning successfully in given domains without identifying the tasks and conditions under which these tasks are to be performed (most general levels).” (2002, p.166)*

Subsequently, a scale of generalized self-efficacy has been chosen for the study (Schwartz & Jerusalem, 1995). Designed to identify *“a broad and stable sense of personal competence to deal effectively with a variety of stressful situations”* (Schwarzer, 1994), the ten-point scale has been translated widely from its original German and has been used extensively in education and health research.

## **ii. Perceived Control**

Self-efficacy has therefore been seen as central to self-regulation, but self-efficacy is not self-regulation in itself, but part of an interactive set of processes that empower active self-awareness and direction. This more complex cognitive set of processes, which includes the associated concept of ‘locus of control’ (LOC), are difficult to isolate from each other and for many theorists the boundaries between them are therefore difficult to define.

For instance, for Bandura, locus of control, the recognition of outcome as being reliant on either internal or external factors, can be seen specifically as a dimension of self-efficacy. Locus of control represents a personal history of event reinforcements that guides outcome expectations. Good outcome histories will promote high efficacy and therefore mediate expectation, and as such they contribute to levels of efficacy but do not define them. Locus of control is therefore subsumed within self-efficacy (Bandura 1977).

However, for Rotter (1966), the originator of the LOC construct, self-efficacy and locus of control are not the same. Where Bandura considered issues of efficacy



and self-regulation as processes through which personal histories are redefined and overcome, Rotter questioned a possibility where our generalized expectancies dominate not only how we interpret reinforcements but also where we look for them in the first place. As such, our generalized beliefs retain dominance over our specific expectancies. For Rotter (1975), we can escape our generalized expectancies where they become replaced by contextually specific knowledge (Rotter 1975), but in accordance with Bandura, events rarely offer sufficient similarity to allow transference and so we must inevitably remain reliant on our foundational beliefs. One can have the necessary competences for a particular action, and be aware of those, without necessarily believing that they will result in success. Starting that action therefore becomes futile (Thompson & Schloefer 2009).

Whether those expectancies stem from social learning or biologically founded models of personality and traits, remains unclear, but the difficulty for the two concepts as an interactive pair is that LOC does not effectively correlate with self-efficacy. It is quite possible for an internal LOC to stand alongside both low and high self-efficacy (Rotter 1966). Subsequently, even though an internal LOC and high self-efficacy can both be evidenced within the raising of academic performance (Eachus & Cassidy 2000), the two cannot necessarily be seen as representing the same concept.

It is for this reason that this study has utilized a scale of Perceived Control, a unification of the two concepts as a separate but interactive pair. As Thompson & Schloefer explain:

*“The perception that one can take action to get desired outcomes, consists of two parts: locus of control and self-efficacy... People have a sense of perceived control when they believe that, in general, personal action controls outcomes (internal locus of control) and they personally have the skills to enact those actions (self-efficacy).” (2009, p.2)*

Thompson & Schloefer add that the theories of Bandura do implicitly recognize such a difference through the differentiation between self-efficacy, the

belief that one has the skills to act, and response efficacy, the belief that such an act will offer the required outcome. Here, the response efficacy can in part be seen as an approximation of the concept of locus of control; however, self-efficacy remains Bandura's dominant concern (see Bandura 1986).

In this study, the scale of perceived control being used will be the Spheres of Control Scale (Paulhus 1983). The Spheres of Control scale offers a battery of 30 items that are separated into three distinct and independent developmental dispositions: personal efficacy, interpersonal control and socio-political control. As Paulhus explains, the benefits of such a differentiated model of perceived control lie in its:

*“systematic partitioning of the individual's control expectancy in useful terms, namely, spheres of activity... it provides an instrument to assess inter-personal control, an area that has been singularly neglected... It subdivides the internal core (rather than the external forces) to provide a more meaningful set of attributes for characterizing individuals.” (1983, p.167)*

As such it is also being seen as a useful tool through its ability to reflect the holistic aspect of PDP and learning in general.

The scale is being used here in its original form, however for the purposes of this study, whilst the battery being used has remained in tact in terms of the questions being asked the measure has been changed. Paulhus' original decision to use a progressive 1-6 scale to measure control strength was seen as denying the participant a position of uncertainty, and subsequently assuming that sufficient contextual data exists within every question to validate the adoption of a generalized personal perception. Consequently, the original scale was replaced by a 7 point +3/-3 Likert scale in which 0 would reflect the participant's inability to predict their perceptions of control in contexts lacking adequate experiential information. This position was also seen as reinforcing the reflective role of PDP processes and the ability of the individual to self-evaluate in such a manner. Whilst it was accepted that such a change would potentially impact on the quantitative reliability of the

scores being gathered, the increased qualitative value of the data being gathered and the indicative rather than absolute use of individual scores was seen as reducing the significance of any such effects.

### **iii. Dispositional Malleability**

Within the theories of self-regulation, self-efficacy and locus of control, the application of which will be discussed further in Section 3, we will find considerable reference to the role of personal beliefs, that what we believe strongly influences what we achieve and how we learn. Indeed, for Eachus & Cassidy (2000), the need to identify and work with student belief profiles should be fundamental to learning strategies and practice. It is a point that we will encounter later in Knight & Yorke's (2003) work on employability. For Knight & Yorke, work on belief was part of a meta-cognitive focus that strengthened the ability to act as human capital within the workplace through the promotion of flexibility and self-regulation. In that study their reference point was the dispositional work of Dweck (2000).

For Dweck, educational achievement can be profoundly influenced by the ways in which we view intelligence and personality. Where we view it as a malleable, incremental concept, we are more likely to accept challenge and risk. However, where we possess a fixed, entity model of intelligence then we seek out performance goals that are less challenging to our self-esteem (Dweck 2000). How we view intelligence and personality therefore influences the goals we set ourselves, and therefore the learning that we can potentially achieve, Dweck (2008) commenting that increased malleability can be evidenced as raising academic grades. For Dweck, a socio-cognitive theorist, such dispositions are learned and are subsequently open to change, the management of specific change lying at the heart of the socio-cognitive approach (Dweck 2008). The general focus of Dweck's work lies in the ways in which educationalists need to concentrate on process rather than product, reflect on individual beliefs and shape education to those. As such, and in line with Knight & Yorke, PDP processes would appear to both support the creation of malleable belief systems and in essence rely on them. Therefore, a study of

dispositional change has been incorporated as a small subsection of the study. Involving only 4 questions in total, the questions are taken from Dweck's (2000) questionnaire on dispositional change, the article allowing for partial use of the scales without negative effect.

#### **iv. Learning Depth**

As has already been implied, and will be discussed at greater length in Section 3, the diverse range of psychological components located within models of self-regulation highlight the contested nature of the concept (Boekaerts 1995). However, throughout the various theories and practices that have been produced all would appear to place reflection at the heart of the process (Schunk et al. 2000, Boekaerts 1995) and through this, educationally, the associated concept of learning depth. From its origins in Scandinavia, learning depth has been offered as a systems model that seeks to promote a particular and desired attitude to learning (Entwistle 2000). Framed within the dichotomous positions of deep and surface levels of individual educational engagement, the model promotes a more focused use of resource personalization, self-awareness and self-monitoring (Entwistle 2001). As such it becomes a measure of learning and teaching quality, motivation and strategy being founded on reflection and reflective practice as paths towards student engagement and self-management. As Eachus & Cassidy suggest, it is through such a shift towards "*meaningful*" (2000 p.311) learning as defined by the constructional processes of the individual that makes the model so relevant to the developmental aspects of PDP.

Learning depth is therefore being investigated in this study as an indicative measure of reflective learning. For this purpose the Revised Two-factor Study Process Questionnaire (Biggs et al. 2001) has been built into the questionnaire. As a 20 item, 5 point Likert scale it offers an insight into changes within both the products of learning and the strategies being used.

### 2.3c. The Qualitative Aspect

As has already been suggested, the quantitative measures discussed have been built into the research approach as an indicative tool, to provide an insight into the type and scale of changes being experienced by individual students. Whilst originally designed to allow direct inter-participant comparisons, the use of such scales in a more idiographically constrained manner as applied here is the consequence of the existential lens through which analysis becomes characteristically interpretive. As Parker explains:

*“Quantitative work assumes that it is possible to screen interpretation and that the singular and objective are achievable, however the qualitative researcher may argue that such solidity is not possible and that all of our representations are always mediated and therefore defined by interpretation.”* (1999, p.2)

It is a quotation that references traditional views regarding the differences that exist between quantitative and qualitative analysis, and yet the clarity of those differences has declined through the growing acceptance of individual interpretation within all methods of data gathering and analysis (Cousin 2009b, Haggis 2008). Byrne (1997) goes one step further and claims that the quantitative has now become essentially qualitative, Harré (2004) reinforcing this view through the suggestion that the two approaches offer similar data of the same subject but at different levels:

*“Despite its current prominence, the qualitative/quantitative distinction is superficial. It is derivative from the more basic distinction between two kinds of properties, intentional and material.”* (2004, p.5)

For Harré, psychological concepts and theories can be constructed to work within the concept of cognition but remain incapable of predicting how individuals choose to use them, and subsequently cause and effect remain localized. Micro and macro investigation is therefore required for a full, legitimate and integrated understanding of any individual (Harré 2004). Here, generalized phenomena such as self-efficacy and perceived control can be considered valid as indications of change in a particular domain but inadequate for describing that area in terms of either the

causes or experiences that define that domain for the individual. Nor can they explain how psychological and social influences interact in an intra and interpersonal sense as framed within a lifelong interaction between past, present and future. As existential-phenomenologist Giorgio questions:

*“Even where science refers to the meanings of behaviour, it implies the meaning of the measured behaviour. For us, do issues of confidence and control sit within a simplistic framework, or do specific judgements get made according to temporal context among many other influences. Are we not merely measuring a moment that is guided by the key factors at that moment? Can these be generalized to life in its entirety?” (1967, p.172)*

From an existential perspective the answer is clearly no, perceptions of measurement necessarily being irreducible to single dimensions or applicable to all contexts.

In line with these points, quantitative data in this study has been treated as indicative of change rather than used as an absolute measure of change. Change is therefore constrained within the unique individual and the qualitative nature of the approach becomes dominant in order to avoid the creation of global and normative abstractions. Both sets of data may refer to the same event, but it is through the qualitative work that the researcher engages with change as possessing a particular meaning to a particular individual. For instance, McCune & Entwistle (1999), in a small-scale qualitative study of first year students, found that whilst such models of learning depth provide what they considered to be useful abstractions of learning, they were inadequate when seeking the ways in which individuals perceive and use them in their actual day-to-day studies. As such they failed to successfully describe either the processes or the students in actuality.

As Lefcourt has advised when discussing models of locus of control, researchers need to remember that scales offer little more than *“convenient abstractions describing individuals’ causal beliefs”* (1981, p.1). Where cognitive aspects are reduced to singularity, and where these are equally placed within

interconnecting and hierarchical systems with other cognitive aspects, so in reality it becomes difficult to differentiate between them. We have already encountered this in the work of Bandura. If locus of control is an aspect of self-efficacy, how can one be measured without the other, and if they can't be measured in isolation how can they be deemed to be separate concepts?

Similar arguments can also be applied to the socio-cognitive reliance on thought as being solely rational, Zucker & Ichiyama (1996) expressing concerns regarding the tendency for socio-cognitive theorists to describe any cognitive process through such a reductionist perspective, commenting that; *“full models of causal processes need not only take account of “economic, political and sociological causes”, but also need to encompass biological as well as social-psychological and phenomenological variation.”* (1996, p.86)

Where the aforementioned battery of tests act to indicate areas of psychological change or adaptation, it subsequently becomes central to the study's philosophical foundations to make individual experiences and understandings of those changes the primary concern, as it is only at such a level that abstractions approach reality. For Bannister et al. this is a problem that possesses particular relevance for psychology as an area of investigation:

*“Psychology is about people, and, despite the attempts of many psychologists to deny the fact, it is conducted by people who have much in common with those they study: psychology is one of the disciplines in which subject (the investigator) and object (the investigated) coincide... Quantification all too often fuels the fantasy of prediction and control, but qualitative research in psychology takes as its starting point an awareness of the gap between an object of study and the way we represent it, and the way interpretation necessarily comes to fill that gap.”* (1999, p.3)

## 2.4. The Research Design

### 2.4a. Introduction

To date, the research approach has been discussed in largely conceptual terms; however, these do not gain legitimacy as decisions until they are placed within a particular design (Creswell 2007). As Creswell and Plano-Clark have stressed, mixed method requires convergence and as such mixed method study has to move beyond the simple collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, and unify them in such a way *“that together they form a more complete picture of the problem than they do when standing alone”* (2007, p.6). This, in turn, suggests that mixed methods can involve a single study, multiple studies (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2007), or even a layered or nested model (Creswell 2003) as used here within the contextualization of the student experiences as a consequence in part of the implementation process.

As originally explained in Section 1.2, the central focus of the research has been the student experience of their first year of study and the role that the application of PDP processes within those studies has played in driving personal change. The focus of the work is therefore set within both the psychological changes being experienced by each individual student and the diverse and particular contexts within which those changes have taken place. As such, the research approach may be seen as a collection of individual portraits framed within a range of departmental contextual cases as defined by their different approaches to PDP. Again returning to the illuminative nature of the methodological model being used, the cases must cover all aspects of their character in order to fully acknowledge the political, disciplinary, professional and personal influences that have come together to define practice in any one location at any one time.

The acknowledgement of the concept of case is significant in that it implies the traditional use of a case study methodology that allows an intense focus *“on the circumstances, dynamics and complexity of a single case, or a small number of cases”* (Bowling 1997, p.373). As Stake suggests, *“case study is not a methodological choice*



*but a choice of what is to be studied"* (2000, p.443), and it is through their methodological flexibility that case studies are perfectly suited to an idiographic, mixed-methods approach as already described. They can be used to investigate and portray ordinary and unusual cases as purposefully required (Cresswell 2007) and, through their use of multiple sources of information, offer an in-depth understanding of the relevant phenomenon over time.

In this instance, from a traditional phenomenological perspective as described by Cresswell (2007), the five bounded cases could be seen to have been determined by the nature of the PDP processes being experienced by the student, those specific forms of PDP representing the phenomenon being studied in order *"to understand the meaning of experiences of individuals about this phenomenon"* (Cresswell 2007, p.94). Each cohort case, as determined by their academic/professional and undergraduate/postgraduate status would then represent a specific attitude to PDP and further reflect the diverse and fragmented nature of PDP presentation as will be discussed at greater length in Section 3. As a study the breadth of this focus allows for an exploration of the experiential areas that characterize the issue in question (Stake 2000), such as variations in goal, methods, application and interpretation, together with their influence on the student's learning.

The difficulty here in defining this project as a longitudinal cohort case study lies in its existential foundations and its subsequent focus on the individual. To this point the focus of the case study model has been framed by the systems of PDP within which the students have been asked to participate, the case defined as the 'bounded system' being examined (Mukherji & Albon 2010). And yet, as has already been discussed, the aim of this project has been to explore the student experiences of change not solely as a reflection of the PDP as a system but as part of the holistic learning experiences that are framed within each individual's histories, attitudes and expectations. It is a perspective that is reinforced by the study's existential foundations, which would support the view that experientially it is not five models of PDP that are being studied but ten, each a unique reflection of the individual student.

However, for Cresswell this does not prevent the basis of the study being described as a cohort case study due to the study's phenomenological ground and its continued search for a description of "*what*" they experienced and "*how*" they experienced it" (2007, p.58). Existentialism does not deny the researcher the ability to answer such questions, but acts to limit the degree to which the research can be generalized and applied due to its subjective foundations. It is a philosophical characteristic that negates a primary criticism of case study work, which is the method's perceived inability to extend beyond the contextual borders within which it is set (Stake 2000, Tsoukas 1989), even though it is inevitable that people will attempt to do so (Stake 2000).

Furthermore, the various intentions underpinning the different systems of PDP remain a constant within each cohort context even where these may not be seen as the only point of focus for the research. Subsequently, whilst the study inevitably involves ten idiographic student studies, during analysis these will continue to be located within their specific PDP contexts in order to examine the relationship between the different approaches to PDP presentation and the individuals to which they are being presented.

#### **2.4b. Stage One: The General Context: The Conceptual Review**

The need to contextualize PDP at a progressively more specific level towards the individual student has been discussed already in Section 1.2, the diverse range of interpretations and actions offered in its name making general comments inappropriate. In order to achieve this, the study has been broken down into five key areas of work designed to gather an ever-more specific understanding of PDP and the ways in which its implementation has contributed to the contexts in which the students have developed during their first year of study. Section 3 represents the first part of that contextualization process with a specific focus on the general context in which PDP as a policy came into being and the manner in which the relevant institution responded to that process.

The general context refers to the political environment within which PDP was conceived and how that acted to shape the implementation of it as policy. Through the interaction between educational practice and socio-political expectation, this section has included a discussion of the various stakeholders that have brought their particular influences to that process and the ways in which the recognition of their expectations shaped the implementation of PDP as policy. In particular, sector agendas such as 'employability' and 'graduateness' have been discussed in terms of the particular outcome expectations that each expects from higher education.

As already mentioned, the promotion of a wide range of psychological and philosophical concepts and learning models was characteristic of that process, each offering a different route through which a diverse staff base could interpret and engage with the policy's key tenets. These concepts, together with the equally diverse spectrum of interpretations and applications, have also been discussed, together with the often-conflicting philosophies that underpin them. It is for this reason that this section has been referred to as a Conceptual Review rather than a Literature Review in its traditional sense.

The potential scope for this discussion will have already become apparent, and with such diversity comes the need to organize that information within a coherent structure that can then be used in a meaningful way throughout the study as a whole. In order to achieve this, each sub-topic has been located within a set of themes that are specific to the institution in question, these themes being identified through the qualitative analysis of institutional literature and staff interviews as completed in stages two, three and four of the study. Here, the contextualization process incorporates a conceptual review but in a non-linear form that allows the gathered literature and the ongoing research process to become constantly interactive (Cousins 2009a). The process through which these themes were established will be expanded on in the following sections, but the identified general themes were:

- PDP as a socio-economic response
- PDP as a driver of academic and professional identity

- PDP as a driver of student autonomy & self-regulation
- PDP processes and the management of learning
- PDP and the ownership of learning.

Such a broad area of focus has also naturally resulted in the use of a wide and diverse range of literature, from peer-reviewed papers through to journal articles published through community literature resources such as PDPUK. In addition, due to the socio-political influences attached to the implementation of PDP as policy, sector and governmental reports have also been included, together with the 'grey' literature that has been published within the sector in order to promote and support the implementation process.

This use of documentation and internal publication has been strongly criticized for being both too socially constructed and too subjective; however, as Bowling (1997) suggests, document content remains a reflection of the intentions that underpin their production and often represent the most significant interface between those who would introduce policy and those that must apply that policy in practice. As Bowling explains, the understanding of the themes and goals underpinning the construction of a document may be seen as more significant than the linguistic content alone.

In congruence with the purpose of the study, the main focus of this reading has therefore been the identification and examination of the many themes and concepts that have been used within the implementation process, together with the expectations that those have placed on both staff, in response to the policy directive, and students, as a result of those responses. The consequence of this focus, together with a study approach that signifies the contexts and experiences surrounding individual change above participation as a representation of change, has been the removal of hierarchy from the information being gathered. The attitudes of practitioners are given equal significance to peer-reviewed academics and organizational representatives because they represent the final level of interpretation between the formal expectations of the policy and the students. As suggested previously by van Manen (1997), such a position reinforces the qualitative

view of analysis as interpretation, and in this instance clearly the interpretation of an interpretation, but this is seen as characteristic of both the philosophy underpinning the study and the nature of the policy implementation itself.

#### **2.4c. Stage Two: The Institutional Context**

In stage two of the research process, the character of the policy becomes relocated within the interpretations and responses of the particular institution within which all of the cohorts are located. Documentary evidence has been gathered to identify the processes through which the institution has interpreted PDP as a policy, and how it then transferred those interpretations to its staff members. In reference to the previously discussed problems associated with the analysis of documentation, an interview process has been added to this section in order to identify the tacit thinking and inter-departmental politics that influenced its introduction and yet cannot be recognized within the relevant literature. Here, the appointed institutional PDP 'champion' has been interviewed, whilst the attitudes and the actions of staff, which are to be examined in subsequent sections, have added to an awareness regarding the implementation process and the expectations that it carried. The nature of the interview process and analytical method will be discussed in detail in the following section.

In line with the idiographic nature of the project, it should be noted that all interview data has been made anonymous, and names have been changed within the text where appropriate. Technologically, it should also be noted that to prevent institutional access to the data, transcriptions were stored on a separate hard drive in a different location. Ethics clearance had previously been gained from the institution in question as part of the PhD process, data anonymity proving the greatest concern together with appropriate routes for student withdrawal and care. These requirements were accounted for by the completion of ethics forms at the start of each part of the research process.

#### **2.4d. Stage Three: The Course Context**

The goal of Stage Three has been to draw down the contextual influences from both the sector and the institution itself as an agent of the views of the sector, and locate those views within the attitudes and actions of staff as direct influences on the learning context in which PDP processes were subsequently applied. As such, the primary focus of the section lies both in the systems of PDP application within each cohort, and the attitudes of the staff members that have underpinned those systems as a response to institutional demands. Here, the students become located within the courses that they have undertaken and the views and practices of the staff as institutional, professional and personal drivers of change.

As with Stage Two, this stage has drawn from two sources. Firstly, a review of the course programmes has been undertaken to recognize explicit course expectations together with their engagement with personal development processes at programme level. These have then been built on through staff interviews within which their individual attitudes, interpretations and practices have been identified.

Interviews with the staff have offered significant data for the study in that they represented the immediate interface between the institutional policy makers and the students themselves. In accordance with initial research findings, the interviews have been carried out in a semi-structured manner, with a set of common thematic concerns being sent to each interviewee in advance in order to both allow them reflection time and to guarantee informed consent (Burnham 1999, p.52). The chosen themes referred to their general perception of the origins of PDP as an intervention, their beliefs regarding its purpose, descriptions of how it was built into their courses, how it was assessed and finally how they attributed ownership of the process. No time limits were set and interviewees were free to take the conversation wherever they wanted so that we could explore any perceived "*gaps, contradictions and difficulties*" (Burnham, 1999, p.51).

The recorded interviews have then been transcribed and thematically analyzed according to the processes described by Braun & Clarke (2006). Although

the overall study is essentially a mixed-methods design guided philosophically by an existential-phenomenological lens (Cresswell 2003), a thematic approach has been considered appropriate since time limits and sampling opportunities would not allow access to all of the staff members that each student would work with as part of their first year studies. Staff views were therefore seen as representative of the possible variations in policy interpretation and application that students would experience within their specific courses. Together with the interviews and analysis covered in the preceding section, the general themes discovered during the interview process were then used to cohere the contextualization section within the results under the aforementioned five general headings.

As previously discussed, five cases were chosen to form a representative sample as a whole. Three vocational/professional courses, one at undergraduate and two at post-graduate level, and two traditional undergraduate courses agreed to participate in the study. Two interviews from each cohort supplied a general thematic overview of the range of attitudes with which students could come into contact, ten in total. Both for validation purposes and as an attempt to recognize the role of interviewer bias within the interview, written summaries were then sent back to the interviewees for their comments so that enhancements and corrections could be made where appropriate (Cousin 2009a).

Initially, contact was made with the appropriate course leaders who bore primary responsibility for the ways in which PDP have been applied within their specific contexts. Personal recommendations then offered further interviewees. These were the champions of PDP within their departments, or at least those who had been given responsibility for the departmental application of the innovation, but their readiness to be interviewed perhaps represented an unavoidable bias within the study, as in a majority of cases only explicit supporters of the policy volunteered for interview. Even though an open admission of resistance was evident within all of the interviews to varying degrees, such a limitation has potentially acted to imply an inter-staff consensus regarding the purpose and nature of PDP as a policy innovation that was not in reality possible to support through the interviews. As with the previous section, anonymity had been assured but did not appear to raise the

willingness of resisters to engage with the study. As with all of the participation within the study, each stage was preceded by an ethics form in which the aims of the study were clarified and their anonymity and right of withdrawal were assured. Again, as with all other parts, data was stored off site, interviewee names were changed within the text and the specific subjects that they taught were removed from both the transcripts and their analysis.

#### **2.4e. Stage Four: Identifying Change**

Stages One to Three have focused on establishing the context within which the student experiences have been set, but in Stage Four the process is relocated to the students themselves. Here the goal has been to identify the psychological changes that they have experienced across their first year of study. As already discussed in the introduction, for the purposes of this study only first year undergraduate and postgraduate students have been included, their newness to their courses offering both pre-PDP data and greater awareness of transitional issues that surround entry into differing aspects of Higher education. For Beard et al. (2007), such a period of transition reflects both a need for students to engage fully with themselves as learners in the making and a highly appropriate context within which PDP should be introduced. In addition, Miller (2007) has commented on a lack of research of first year students and their explicit engagement with PDP. For the postgraduate courses being included the year formed their entire course, the nature of their prior experiences both within and outside of their academic environments being sought through the subsequent interviews in order to contextualize the identified changes.

Psychometric forms (see Appendix 8.1) were created through a combination of existing models as previously discussed in Section 2.4. These were then offered within the first three weeks of Semester 1 to the appropriate cohorts, either personally or by staff where access was problematic. It was recognized that this decision could potentially introduce staff influence; however, as purely psychological scales they contained no reference to teaching experiences, and could not be



correlated to teaching experiences without the considerable additional data that would be gathered through the subsequent interview process. In these instances an introductory script was provided to minimize individual differences within form presentation and assure the students of their confidentiality. No compulsion was applied to ensure completion and student anonymity was assured, staff access to data analysis being denied. As with the previous staff research, all data including course titles and individual names were coded and stored off-site. The forms also contained a description of the participant's ethical rights within the study and details of how their confidentiality would be assured. A tick box enabled the students to express their willingness to be interviewed and further space was provided where they could add a method of contact such as an email address.

The questionnaire was then repeated within the last month of Semester 1, a study period of 7 months. The boxes expressing their willingness to participate in further research was repeated, thus offering them the option to withdraw permission where it had been previously given.

It is worth noting at this point that the choice of student participants for interview was left until the end of the quantitative process in order to both limit sampling mortality, and enable purposive selection according to discovered patterns of change. Furthermore, it would also serve to prevent what Cohen & Manion (1994) have named the 'control effect', in which initial interviews act to directly influence subsequent behaviour and therefore negatively influence further study. This would seem particularly relevant where initial interviews require the participant to self-reflect and self-analyze, which are in themselves fundamental processes within PDP. Furthermore, whilst the particular focus on Semester 1 can be seen as a period of characteristic instability for the student due to the newness of the transitions being experienced by the students, this was again deemed acceptable where the psychological findings were to be both considered indicative and reviewed retrospectively.

#### 2.4f. Stage Five: The Student Experience

Through the gathered psychometric data, indications of change have been identified. Comparisons between the first and second batteries allowed for the creation of a purposive sample list of participants willing to progress to interview as defined by patterns of positivity, negativity and stasis. Ultimately, the purposive nature of the final study group was to be limited by the number of participants that withdrew consent at a later stage, although the existential and idiographic character of the project made it representative by nature. Individual patterns of change (see Appendix 8.2) offered a semi-structured foundation to each piece but these boundaries were held only loosely in order to allow them a clear field for self-expression. Interviews started with a simple question regarding how the participant thought they had changed during their first year and they were offered 15 minutes at the start to gather their thoughts in writing. There was no time limit for the interview process, and scale findings were openly fed back to the participants for comment during the interview process.

Once transcribed, analysis was made in accordance with Giorgi's (1975) existential-phenomenological method. Giorgi constructed his method for psychology, building on Husserl's model of transcendental phenomenology to create an investigative route via which essential processes could be identified through the description of subjective experience. This is a four-stage process designed to allow for thematic conclusions to be drawn from situated data, idiographic data being reduced to general themes in the final stage.

*"In Giorgi's method, idiographic analysis may form part of the process of analysis but the eventual aim is to explicate—eidetically—the phenomenon as a whole regardless of the individuals concerned. Idiographic details are thus discarded or typified and generalized." (Finlay 2009, p.9)*

As such, Giorgi promotes the idea of scientific objectification through bracketing, but as with the discussion surrounding the compromises involved with the relocation of philosophy into science, he did not view this process in such

absolute philosophical terms. Instead, Giorgi defines bracketing as a process whereby *“one simply refrains from positing altogether; one looks at the data with the attitude of relative openness”* (Giorgi, 1994, p.212), Giorgi attempting *“an atheoretical psychological analysis”* in which *“all speculation is avoided”* (2008, p. 42).

Here, the analytical method follows Giorgi through the first three stages. Key experiences are identified, together with the meanings that those hold for each individual. These are then pulled together as reflections of the individual structures on which those meanings were founded, reflections of each individual’s phenomenological relationship between their pasts, presents and perceived futures. According to Giorgi’s method, these individual structures should then be abstracted into themes that identify the universal phenomenon being investigated; however, it is at this point that the method is halted due to Sartre’s previously discussed rejection of essentialism. The construction of themes requires the reduction of individual meaning to a universal form and for Sartre this is not possible due to the partiality and subjectivity of knowledge. Post-analytical discussions will therefore remain framed within the relationships between individual structure and contextual influence without referring to either in a generalized form, a conflict that may find some degree of resolution in the application of ‘fuzzy generalizations’ (Bassey 1998). Here, generalizations are toned down to possibility rather than actuality, *“may”* replacing *“will”* (Cousin 2009a, p.135).

The goal of this final section has therefore been to reveal both the students’ understandings of PDP processes and their awareness of associated change. It has also been designed to frame PDP within their overall life experiences, expectations and choices, in order to gain an insight as to its relevance to those.

## **Section 3: The Conceptual review**

### **3.1. Introduction**

As has already been discussed in the previous section, the role of Section Three is to explore the general context in which PDP-as-policy came into being through the enduring concepts and rhetorical devices that have become associated with the approach as both an educational and socio-political force. The aim of this section is therefore to examine the intellectual foundations on which the approach has been built, with particular reference to the potential for interpretive space that is inherent to each conceptual area. In this way a better picture can be gathered of the manner in which the sector, and the many disciplines within it, have adopted the many themes and concepts that have been used within the implementation process, together with the expectations that those have placed on both staff, in response to the policy directive, and students, as a result of those responses. This process will be managed through the use of 5 over-arching thematic headings that have been identified through the contextualization process and the data analysis that has followed. As already discussed, these themes have been constructed specifically in accordance with their relevance to the institutional context in question, and help reveal the complex relationships that can exist between the conceptualization, implementation and application of educational policy. It is through these themes that the intellectual field surrounding the implementation of PDP can be identified, allowing the reader to set individual interpretations and responses of staff against them. In essence, it is a process that seeks to define PDP-as-policy through the contexts within which it was formed and the ideas and practices that can be seen as reflections of the forces and processes that brought the innovation into being. The themes are:

- PDP as a socio-economic response
- PDP as a driver of academic and professional identity
- PDP as a driver of student autonomy & self-regulation
- PDP processes and the management of learning
- PDP and the ownership of learning.

As previously discussed, the conceptual review is slightly different from a traditional literature review in that its main focus is the enduring concepts and rhetorical devices that have acted as the foundations for the many different ways in which PDP-as-policy has been applied. Naturally, it includes aspects of a literature review, drawing on a broad range of published literature to evidence academic and practitioner responses to PDP-as-concept, but uses those sources to discuss the motivations that have underpinned PDP-as-practice rather than the practice alone. It is a focus that has been made more relevant by the inherently situated nature of PDP practice and the difficulties that such 'situatedness' offers research findings when discussing them trans-contextually.

## **3.2. PDP as a socio-economic response**

### **3.2a. Political Foundations**

As we have already discussed, part of this review process must be focused on defining PDP both in terms of intention and the contexts within which those intentions were formed; to enable us to consider the relationship between the student and the innovation, safe in the knowledge that we understand fully the nature of the innovation in question and the developmental ambitions that characterize the innovation.

To begin this process requires the recognition of educational innovations as originating both within and beyond the academic environment. As discussed in the methodology, this is inevitable where the outcomes of education now reside both within and outside of the academic environment. As Trowler (2011) suggests, policy and practice are now intrinsically linked in a way that forces practice from the academic arena and out into the social domain through political pressure. As such, practice becomes ever-increasingly open to public scrutiny as reassurance is sought that those social responsibilities are being met through practice. It is a dimension of innovation that makes the exploration process more complex as we seek to reveal the many stakeholders that act to shape educational practice and the relationships that exist between those diverse forces of influence. As such, the exploration of Personal Development Planning can be viewed as an exemplar of the sector's ability to reach beyond itself through policy. Subsequently, the initial part of this contextualization process will focus on the many political expectations that have become associated with PDP-as-policy and the ways in which staff members have responded to those expectations within their own systems of application.

Progress Files, and later Personal Development Planning, have commonly been seen as being forged from the recommendations held within the 1997 Dearing Report (QAA 2001, East 2005, Haigh 2008), with particular emphasis being placed on Recommendation 20:

*"We recommend that institutions of higher education, over the medium term,*

*develop a Progress File. The File should consist of two elements: a transcript recording student achievement which should follow a common format devised by institutions collectively through their representative bodies; a means by which students can monitor, build and reflect upon their personal development.” (NICHE, 1997)*

As predicted by previous comments regarding the many views that shape educational policy and innovation, the responses to the Dearing report have been varied. Wes Streeting, then vice-president (education) of the NUS and highly supportive of PDP as an educational innovation has argued that its main function was quality assurance (Grace & Shepherd 2007), Becket & Brookes (2005) have identified the report as a route towards better social cohesion, whilst David Robertson, professor of higher education policy at Liverpool John Moores University, has described funding as its sole function (Tysome 2007). Indeed, the report has most commonly been expressed as a funding paper (Grace & Shepherd 2007, Barnes 2010), references to educational process and purpose being seen as a reflection of the political nature of the current economic environment. Central to such an interpretation were explicit references to the ways in which education could increasingly address key economic issues such as employability and social cohesion through the accountability, quality and cognitive transparency of educational outcomes. Composite concepts such as graduate identity were already being offered as a way of evidencing the complex skills and values required by employers as a clear and explicit product of the higher education experience (see Hinchcliffe & Jolly 2009). However, as Steuer & Marks have suggested:

*“The aspiration, as outlined by Dearing, is that higher education serves a number of purposes, ranging from inspiring personal ‘growth’, through to supporting economic development and building what is now often termed ‘active citizens’. The reality suggests, however, that it is the third purpose – to serve the economy (and arguably individuals’ competitiveness within it) – which is now driving the higher education system to the detriment of the others.” (2008, p.10)*

From this position funding is offered as the route through which political will is

transferred to the educational sector. Through the re-contextualization and regulation of knowledge and pedagogic process (Bernstein 1996), lifelong learning, inclusivity, and widening participation can then be brought into alignment within such an *“application of ideology, accountability and regulation”* (Salter & Tapper 2000, p.68). For Lord Dearing, such claims were not surprising but represented an inevitable consequence of the economic pressures being applied to the sector at that time. As he explained:

*“Much of our report is concerned with material things and with the central role of higher education in the economy. It would be surprising were it not so.”* (NICHE 1997, Chapter 9 point 41)

Certainly, the alignment of socio-economic expectation and educational practice is not new, but has become characteristic of higher education as a promoter of enterprise (Somervill 1993). In 1976, then Prime Minister James Callaghan had explicitly linked the need for socio-economic advancement with Higher Education and the merging of the two has continued to grow in an attempt to increase the relevance of higher education to economic sustainability and growth (Marshall 1990). The Leitch Report (2006) would later align notions of individual responsibility and the acquisition of economically appropriate skills, whilst the Department of Business, Initiatives and Skills (2009) has since made explicit connections between funding, employability and the need to support courses that primarily support economic growth. As a report from the DBIS in 2009 explains:

*“That means focusing on the key subjects essential to our economic growth, and boosting the general employability skills expected of all graduates... Universities already need to be vigorous in withdrawing from activities of lower priority and value, so that they can invest more in higher priority programmes.”* (2009, p.4)... *All universities should be expected to demonstrate how their institution prepares its students for employment, including thorough training in modern workplace skills such as team working, business awareness and communication skills.”* (2009, p.13)

Subsequently, the survival of higher education as a relatively autonomous



sector may increasingly rely on its ability to balance student learning and welfare within an increasingly demanding political context. Economic and political expectations have become increasingly ingrained with educational policy-making, whilst accountability may have acted to reinforce the relationship between academic achievement, employability and economic growth. In response, it may be that educational outcomes and expectations have also had to change in order to ensure an explicit relationship with those socio-political concerns, the shift towards issues such as employability and the transferability of disciplinary and trans-disciplinary knowledge and skills (Harvey, Moon & Gaell 1997, Jackson & Ward, 2004) being obvious examples as higher education widens its focus on the world of students beyond its own academic borders. As Boud & Falchikov explain:

*“The raison d’être of a higher education is that it provides a foundation on which a lifetime of learning in work and other social settings can be built. Whatever else it achieves, it must equip students to learn beyond the academy once the infrastructure of teachers, courses and formal assessment is no longer available.”*  
(2006, p.399)

Initially, some within the sector were dismissive of the key recommendations within the report, their doubts largely framed by a perceived lack of educational ambition (Jackson 2001a, East 2005). However, the general direction of the report was accepted and indeed those recommendations, together with the role of the QAA, which had also been established through Dearing, remain the key perceived drivers of PDP as a policy initiative (Williams 2003, East 2005, Haigh 2008, Barnes 2010).

The role of the QAA is of particular interest. Between January 1999 and May 2000, the response of the sector to Dearing’s recommendations was shaped within a consultation process led by the QAA, CVCP (now Universities UK), Universities Scotland and the Standing Conference of Principals (now GuildHE). The interpretations of the consultation group, to be known as the Progress File Implementation Group or PFIG, would be critical to how the intervention would be formed and presented to the sector, and its staff. A key driver of this process was

Norman Jackson (Strivens & Ward 2010), then Assistant Director in the Development Directorate of the QAA and later to become Senior Professional Advisor to the LTSN Generic Centre, and a driving force within the implementation of PDP-as-policy in practice. For Salter & Tapper, it was his presence that gave the implementation process a predictable direction, suggesting that:

*“His ideas of a collaborative relationship between provider and external agency were particularly one-sided, and driven particularly towards the voice of the external agency imposing its own standards and regulations.”* (2000, p.81)

The views of Salter & Tapper may be revealing but also simplistic. Certainly, as a single source of influence within the PFIG, the QAA offered a strong and politically aligned presence shaped by politically defined funding councils and independent directors, their internal character remaining largely reflective of a market-driven ideological form (Salter & Tapper 2000). Furthermore, as Hughes & Barrie (2010) suggest, the internationalization of education through movements such as Bologna may have added to the significance of the QAA in the implementation process through the inherent standardization of educational quality and outcomes that are bound to its fundamental goals. However, the QAA view their organizational role as enforcers of sector rather than political policy (Barnes 2010), and whilst Salter & Tapper imply an ulterior motive on behalf of the QAA to simply align the internal nature of the student and the external demands of the socio-political environment, regulation and accountability relying on the creation and control of transparent and predictable educational and developmental outcomes, in doing so they perhaps underplay the complex position that members of the QAA found themselves in as representatives of all the concerned parties. Furthermore, by simplifying the political context within which PDP was implemented, Salter & Tapper also act to deny the role of the QAA in allowing the sector to effectively deny its own role in what was always a top-down policy intervention even where contextualized locally (Barnes 2010, Jackson 2001b).

### 3.2b. Educational Foundations

Immediately, we are faced with a discussion in which there appears no clear picture, intentions and ambitions hidden within discussions that appear to be shaped within individual interpretations of the implementation process, and where the motivations underpinning the innovation appear uncertain so the interpretation process gathers significance for both the understanding of policy and its application in practice.

The potentially political character of PDP as highlighted in the previous section will reappear throughout the conceptual review, an inevitable reflection of the aforementioned alignment of academic identities with the issues of funding, economic development and globalization. As such, even where the roots of the Dearing Report have been located within existing educational “*grassroot activity*” (Jackson 2001c, p.1), the imposition of PDP-as-policy on sector staff has touched on issues surrounding the fundamental function of higher education and existing staff concerns regarding the politicization of the sector.

When discussing the origins of policy it is always difficult to decide on an appropriate temporal distance for retrospective analysis; however, in this instance clear associations can be made between the origins of Personal Development Planning as an extension of Dearing’s proposed Progress File, and previous policy directives such as the Technical and Vocational Initiative in schools, and the National Record of Achievement (Bullock & Jamieson 1998). In turn, these can then be linked to more informal clusters of practice surrounding a pre-existing educational focus on adult learning (Jackson 2001a, NCVQ 1984), student profiling (Fenwick & Assiter 1992, Assiter & Shaw 1993) and Recording Achievement (Broadfoot 1998, Jackson 2001a).

The National Record of Achievement (NRA) in secondary schools may be of particular interest here, in that both its inherent goals and difficulties can also be found within the implementation and application of PDP-as-policy. Initiated by the DES in England & Wales, the NRA represented a response to teacher concerns

regarding the motivations of non-traditional and non-academic students that were leaving school with little evidence of their employability. A primary goal was therefore to refocus attention from formal, traditional models of educational categorization and assessment towards models of informal, non-academic learning (Broadfoot 1998). As such, the NRA was seen as a way of establishing a more holistic view of the individual beyond academic reductionism (Shaw 1995, Broadfoot 1998).

For Broadfoot, an enthusiastic supporter of the intervention, the NRA offered a possible resolution to the tensions that were developing at that time between humanistic views of educational inclusivity and the ever-growing call for economic relevance (Broadfoot 2000). However, in practice, efforts to shape it within an economic frame acted to complicate its implementation and limit levels of engagement with educational practitioners (Broadfoot 2000). Practice became diverse and idiosyncratic, and efforts to unify it by placing it within the auspices of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications in 1991 set it within a more generic skills format which in turn alienated many of the educational enthusiasts that had originally established the model (Somekh et al. 1994). As such, Assiter & Shaw (1993) found that whilst the NRA was implemented as a full educational policy, it was still perceived by many practitioners as a minority concern. Meanwhile, due to perceived inconsistencies in the application of the intervention, some researchers were finding industry unwilling to engage fully with it (Somekh et al. 1996), entrepreneurs calling for a greater focus on skills transferability centred on reflection at a time when the processes of skills transference remained vague and as such were difficult to build into defined educational practice (Assiter & Shaw 2003).

As Broadfoot (1998) suggested, such a conceptual and pragmatic fragmentation had proved difficult to overcome where genuine discussions surrounding liberal and functional models of education remained poorly expressed in clear and open terms. Similarities of language, particularly around the idea of educational personalization, were effectively hiding primary differences in practice regarding the underlying philosophy of the model. For Broadfoot, governments were increasingly adopting concepts of lifelong learning not in terms of maximizing personal potential but according to predictions of future economic demand, their

failure to successfully build this into the education sector stemming from their inability to balance competing stakeholder demands regarding issues of formative and summative assessment (Broadfoot & Pollard 1997). Where practitioners such as Broadfoot were seeking routes towards humanistic inclusivity, external stakeholders were primarily concerned with how learning is evidenced and directed through “*the language of performance indicators—the identification of explicit dimensions to represent the ‘quality’, ‘efficiency’ or ‘success’ of education systems and of individual institutions within them*” (Broadfoot 2000, p.359). As will be shown, in turn, the notion of evidencing performance would also become a key theme within the introduction of PDP as policy.

Performance offers a significant point of focus, not only with regard to the theories of self-efficacy and self-regulation that will be discussed later but also as an indicator of a general shift towards pragmatic education that this implies. When discussing differences in educational intention between different disciplinary groups, Bernstein (1996) has highlighted a key shift towards identity expectations shaped by competence and performance. For Bernstein, traditional models of competence focus on a strongly introjected sense of autonomy and a temporal location in the present, what the individual can do in the immediate sense. However, through the shift towards performance those are shaped instead towards a socially projected and regulated future, with discussions around skills being framed as deficiency rather than strength.

Such views, and those of Broadfoot before them, act to highlight the potential tensions that were becoming evident between liberal educationalists and the political contexts within which their views were being located. They also highlight the potential differences that exist between personal and personalized learning, differences that will be returned to throughout the contextualization process through its inherent reference to a balance between internal and external motivators of learning.

Further evidence of this can be found in the introduction of the Technical and Vocational Initiative (TVEI), which, according to Carrick (1992), offered a clear

example of how the 14-19 sector has attempted to respond to the increasing demands for economic and educational unification. Margaret Thatcher initially launched the Technical and Vocational Initiative in 1982 as a route through which pre-HE students could acquire greater work-orientated skills. Monitored by the Department of Employment, and driven by Norman Tebbit and David Young, then of the Manpower Commission (Dale 1985, Chitty 1986), the TVEI openly sought to establish ties between education and employability skills at all levels (Carrick 1992).

For Carrick, the model could be seen as a reflection of a distinctly market-driven political agenda, and a clear attempt to resolve the subsequent paradox of allowing different institutions to compete with each other under a free-market rationale, and yet control the nature of their outputs as a collective by focusing largely on community collaboration towards singular goals and outcomes. Carrick was directly involved in the implementation of a TVEI cluster in Nottinghamshire and their research within that cluster of institutions suggested that staff were fully aware of such a conflict of interests held within the TVEI, and indeed were largely uncomfortable with them, but accepted them on the basis of political pragmatism. In addition, the TVEI structure placed an ever-expanding role on middle managers within education, their role to establish and oversee those same clusters in terms of their cost efficiency, quality and outcome consistency (Edwards et al. 1990). Again we return to the theme of education as subservient to perceived economic need, the TVEI representing an explicit effort to convert *“education into a servicing-process for a free-enterprise economy”* (Chitty 1987, p.21), a statement given considerable solidity when set against the views of David Young as representative of the government attitudes driving its introduction.

*“Within the harsh context of restricted resources and the absolute need to achieve a cost-effective economy, I see no place for education merely for its own sake...In the market-place of world competition such vague thinking is a luxury we cannot afford.”* (McCollock et al. 1985, p.199)

Whilst both approaches offer a different view of the relationship between education and governance, each reveals a long-standing tension between the HE

sector and the educational practices that the sector prefers, and the economic drivers within which the sector now sits. Whilst education has perhaps always been in part about the application of external authority over the individual (Rosenow 1973) the challenge to higher education to be externally responsive in such a fundamentally political manner has challenged the sector to at least in part release its autonomy to external stakeholders and adopt the role of social agent. Furthermore, it has also perhaps challenged it to deny its liberalist history in favour of a neo-liberal, socio-economic discourse, a negotiation that has historically proved difficult to resolve. As Broadfoot again explains:

*“Our educational institutions are already under intense pressure to adapt to the changing needs of the labour market... Without doubt there will be pressures to change the processes of education and the ways in which it is provided and organised. But equally, there will be pressures that result in an even more fundamental debate about the goals of education, a pressure to bring back a sense of vision to educational policy-making, and to re-examine what learning is for.”*

(Broadfoot 2000, p.358)

### **3.2c. PDP & Agenda Alignment**

The discussion of the NRA as offered by Broadfoot again highlights the presence of an existing academic struggle between humanistic and economic educational philosophies. For Jackson (2001a), a key driver within the implementation process and a key proponent of lifelong and life-wide education (Jackson & Law 2010), the implementation of PDP-as-policy represented a possible resolution to this debate. An education system shaped by the application of PDP processes, such as reflection, would both engage holistically with the individual learner and help them to respond more effectively to the social and economic demands that will be made of them once beyond academia. As such, it would act both academically and socio-economically, both forms being viewed as mutually supportive. But to deem the aforementioned political tension as resolved requires

the acceptance of Jackson's proposition, a proposition that aligns liberal and neo-liberal educational expectations through a statement of fundamental congruence between personal and socio-economic wellbeing. As with the NRA before it, the actual levels of acceptance of this proposition remain unclear, the nature and purpose of PDP processes proving more determined through individual interpretations of education as a socio-economic response and the pressures on staff members by institutions and professions to perceive those processes in such terms, than as an accepted 'truth'.

The recognition of personal interpretation as a key influence within the implementation process has been recognized by Ward (2011), director of the Centre for Recording Achievement and participant within the PFIG conceptualization process, who has raised concerns over the degree to which the application of PDP processes has become reliant on economic drivers alone. However, there can be little doubt that the concept of employability lies at the heart of the initial implementation (Buckley 2008, East 2005) and the dominant discussions that have taken place within the associated community of practice post-implementation.

Indeed, it could perhaps be argued that the political rhetoric now surrounding the sector shows employability to be the dominant agenda and pragmatic driver to Higher Education. Recent government publications have built on the Leitch Report (2006) to explicitly tie higher education to economic growth, the DBIS defining the key function of education as preparing "*students for the jobs of the future*" by "*focusing on the key subjects essential to our economic growth, and boosting the general employability skills expected of all graduates*" (2009, p.4). It is from this perspective that employability inevitably becomes the prime driver of education, the DBIS again commenting that:

*"All universities should be expected to demonstrate how their institution prepares its students for employment, including thorough training in modern workplace skills such as team working, business awareness and communication skills."* (2009, p.3)



Such comments have built on a general shift within the sector towards a more explicit socio-economic role, Yorke & Harvey (2005) describing the wholesale changes being asked of higher education as being the direct result of employer intervention and the subsequent need for employers to be acknowledged as primary stakeholders within the educational process. Here, PDP becomes a potential solution to the demand for employability as an evidence-based, educational outcome (Harvey & Knight 2005). As Jackson has explained when discussing the purpose of PDP as a policy intervention, education had become a key driver in creating a predictive workforce of the future by *“helping to prepare students for jobs that don’t yet exist, using technologies that have not yet been invented, in order to solve problems that we don’t know are problems yet”* (2007, p.xi). His focus lay on the changing nature of organizations and the need for a flexible workforce able to *“change organizations, roles and identities many times”* (2007, p.xi). Indeed, for Jackson, it was a need that was of such importance that students couldn’t be trusted to meet it through choice. As he argues:

*“Enabling all students to realize their potential in line with realistic aspirations is too important to be left to chance or individual choice... the central focus here will be on developing students towards graduate level employability and lifelong learning.”* (2007, p. xiv)

In spite of such a clear focus on employability, the term has not yet proved to be a simple concept to define, and perhaps remains problematic due to such a focus on future and abstracted dimensions of the term. Discussions have struggled specifically with sustainability and the question of whether directives should focus on the need to obtain employment direct from education or to stay employed in the long term (Harvey & Knight 2005, Ipate & Parvu 2010). In part this relates to the immediacy of graduate employment rather than employability as a lifelong concern, Knight & Page suggesting that:

*“There is some evidence that a lack of [wicked] competences, employability skills and the like on graduation may not matter after three years of graduate employment.”* (2007, p.2)

In addition, Clegg & Bradley (2006b) raise concerns over exactly what it is that employers want from students, claiming that empirical work to date has been largely characterized by inconsistency. For instance, where Heijden (2006) has viewed employability from a business perspective, defining it in terms of four very specific attitudes linked to the assimilation of the individual within corporate culture, Holmes (2001) has suggested that for most academic and careers practitioners the term has become synonymous with a simple skills-matching process. For Holmes this potentially creates further difficulties through the acceptance of a related belief that 'skills' possess a universal character irrelevant of context. As Holmes explains:

*"Part of the problem with the skills agenda and initiatives in higher education is that they assume that the term 'skill' has the same meaning when used in an educational context as when used in an employment context. Perhaps part of the 'common sense' appeal of the skills agenda is our familiarity with the term 'skill' in everyday, mundane discourse."* (2001, p.112)

The interpretation of the term 'skills' has therefore become a further complication within employability and the need to interpret employer expectations and establish institutional responses to those expectations (Knight & Yorke 2003, Monks et al. 2006). The concept of 'skills' will be returned to when discussing the associated concept of 'graduateness' in Section 3.2, but it is clear from the discussion thus far that, as we will find with PDP as a term, definitions of 'employability' as a single concept remain academically uncertain. Subsequently, the concept of 'employability' has itself come under critical discussion for its lack of a solid theoretical base, its resultant lack of evidence and its philosophical reliance on a single view regarding the nature of higher education and the relationship between the sector and those individuals studying within it (Barrie 2005).

Questions therefore remain regarding the ability of employability to both drive employment and shape educational processes within 'skills' that are not yet known. For Fevre (2007), the validity of employability as a concept remains unquestioned only where the concept is seen to support the acceptance an eternally fragile work environment. In his book, 'Employment, Insecurity and Social Theory: The Power of

Nightmares', Fevre refutes both the reality of this perspective and the role of employment insecurity as a socio-political tool, rooting employability in an unquestioning theoretical acceptance of post-modernism and a research base specifically designed to locate diversity and malleability. As with PDP, any inability to evidence theory is not perceived as an academic concern where it builds on an existing political zeitgeist and sufficient political momentum for the idea to be accepted as a common-sense reality. It is an argument that highlights the possibility that educational interventions shaped around employability, including the application of PDP-as-policy, are temporally located within an externalized and abstracted future, designed to cater for potentials that may or may not occur, an issue that will be returned to when discussing planning in Section 3.5c.

From this perspective, discussions of education and employability become inherently instrumental in character, both in terms of the sector's ability to respond to stakeholder pressure and remain autonomous by showing itself to be both socio-economically responsive and relevant. Again we return to the complexity of the negotiations in action within the implementation process, negotiations framed in the need to both ground the student in academia and translate that grounding into levels of socio-economic relevance that would allow the continuation of the higher education sector as autonomous. Furthermore, as we have seen through the ideas of Jackson it is a negotiation that requires a high level of student complicity with those goals if the individual student is to motivate themselves in ways that serve all parties. As we will discuss, this is a difficult position to maintain. For instance, Barnett (2010), whose work has been used to support the promotion of innovatory practices such as PDP (see Jackson & Ward 2004), writes on the need for education to honour the essence of being human and yet still frames this in economic relevance and the need for market responsiveness. The ability to respond may be framed in a wide range of agendas, such as employability, lifelong learning and citizenship, but in each the claim to be personal is countered by a particular macro-focus on external goals with little reference to the values and beliefs of individual students (Cooper 2006, Watts 2005).

### 3.2d. PDP & the Marketization of Knowledge

Whilst the discussion so far has both suggested a possible political ground to the implementation of PDP-as-policy, and revealed the tensions that such a political character has added to educational interventions such as the NRA, the dominant theme has been the relocation of higher education from the academic to the pragmatic in accordance with particular socio-economic and political stakeholders (Conroy et al. 2008, Haigh 2008). As we have already seen with the NRA, it is a relocation that has proved controversial with staff and the subsequent sense of disagreement has directly influenced the sector's ability to apply educational innovations that demand shifts away from established practices and outcomes. However, in such discussions it is not only the outcomes and processes of education that become changed but also the nature of the subject itself, knowledge.

Employability in all of its conceptual guises demands two things: that all knowledge can be made transparent and that its value is determined by its potential for academic, professional and/or pragmatic application. As such, knowledge and learning become transformed by the locations and outcomes that define their purpose (Tsoukas 1997). Here, the application of social power may reside with the integration of educational goals and processes with accountability and transparency as enforcing agents of the external context above the acting individual. Transparency in this form could be applied to students and staff alike, but from either perspective the ability to make outcome and process explicit is central to quality and accountability in that it ensures access to teaching and learning as measurable concerns. As such, transparency could also be seen as central to employability as political and economic stakeholders seek to ensure that their needs are being met. Equally, if employability lies at the heart of PDP so too does transparency.

As Stathern, building on Tsoukas (1989), states:

*“There is nothing innocent about making the invisible visible... The arena is one which the notion of surveillance would seem to have been made familiar, where visibility as a conduit for knowledge is elided with visibility as an instrument of*

*control.*" (2000, 309)

The interpretation of PDP as a successful intervention, through whichever terms such successes are measured, must therefore be founded on the acceptance that more of the products and processes of learning can be made explicit and that this must be true of both academic and psychological learning. Polanyi (1962) suggests that this is difficult to evidence. When we learn something within a specific experiential context, we are not only attempting to replicate the desired skill, but the unconscious and individual elements that have made that skill effective as a reflection of another individual. Without the ability to codify such knowledge, learning may be impossible to express to anyone without a similar unconscious knowledge of the rules being applied. As unconscious factors these may not even be open to the expert before us (Zack 1999).

Again, referring to Polanyi, Ozdemir (2008) argues that such a position highlights the fact that all knowledge is actually tacit and interpreted, and therefore reflects the core of the individual as a unique 'being' driven with personally relevant sets of beliefs and values. Such a position strongly reflects the existential philosophy on which this study has been built, efforts to express such a complicated internal position externally becoming impossible through the subsequent inability to retain the essence of the individual creating that knowledge. In essence, whilst tacit and explicit may be considered essential parts of thought and action, the two terms cannot be seen as interchangeable; that which is expressed is information rather than knowledge and must be seen as an abstracted and lesser form of it.

The latter point may be significant in that the call for process transparency does indeed attempt to treat knowledge as information, an expectation that may indicate a particular focus on organizational rather than academic endeavour and a particular reference to the knowledge economy. Here knowledge becomes information where the beliefs, contexts and expectations that shape that 'knowing' are removed in order to enable access to the superficialities of description (Stenmark 2002). If knowledge is to become central to economic expansion then it must be able to be treated as information, as a commodity, it must be stored and retrieved,

owned and sold (Simon 1999). In this form it no longer possesses a philosophical character but a pragmatic one (Stenmark 2002), its use being defined by its transferability through codification, access, transaction, and protection (Duguid 2005). Here, as with education itself, knowledge becomes a managerial concept in which use is prioritized above construction. Grounded in context, the value of knowledge is no longer assessed as a universal concern but in accordance with the group, organization, or inter-organisational requirements within which it is being used (Stenmark 2002). Its worth becomes defined not by the knowledge itself but by its relevance to economic venture, and shaped within consensus models established within that activity.

It is an approach that is well exemplified through the work of management theorists Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), who perceive language and behaviour to be absolutely sufficient for the universal acquisition and transfer of knowledge. As such they *“define explicit knowledge, or codified knowledge, as knowledge that can be articulated, and in formal language including grammatical statements, mathematical expressions, specifications, and manuals. Such explicit knowledge, they conclude, can be transmitted easily and formally across individuals”* (Stenmark 2002, p.6).

But returning to earlier comments by Broadfoot (1998), when referring to the potential inadequacy of language to universally clarify intention and motive, referencing Nonaka & Takeuchi (see Jackson 2001b) without acknowledging their specifically functional focus can be misleading. In their book, ‘The Knowledge-Creating Company’, it is the demands of the organizational context that drives the needs of the knowledge in question and as such ‘knowledge-as-action’ is all that is deemed as valuable. As they explain:

*“By organizational knowledge creation we mean the capability of a company as a whole to create new knowledge, disseminate it throughout the organization, and embody it in its products, services and systems.”* (1995, p.3)

As such, it is a particular *aspect* of knowledge that therefore becomes transferable because the contexts within which it will be shared are deemed to be

essentially similar, sharing as they do the beliefs, goals and processes of the organization in question. If knowledge reflects tacit information, it is the functional dimension alone that is required to be made available, and what that knowledge may mean to the individual, and how it has been personally constructed, is assumed to be a secondary concern compared the purpose of that knowledge and its ability to drive effective organizational action.

When exploring the narratives that have underpinned the implementation of PDP policy, it is an interpretation that may find support in the views of the PFIG as reflected in the writing of Norman Jackson. Of particular interest here are the PFIG's description of sector practitioners as "*ambivalent to the idea of evaluation*", Jackson claiming that "*the motivation and interest within the community is in the development of practice and there is less interest in evaluating the effects of practice*" (Jackson 2001b, p.6). Transparency in this instance becomes framed by sufficiency, only particular parts of its character being required for organizational transference, a perspective that when projected onto personal development negates the need to either explore or identify the crucial individual difference that exists "*between overt demonstration of a performance, behaviour or action and the student's internal dispositions and qualities driving it*" (Kreber, 2010).

### **3.3. PDP as a driver of academic and professional identity**

#### **3.3a. The introjection and projection of identity**

In Section 3.2 we discussed the contested nature of the foundations underpinning the conceptualization and implementation of PDP, and the complex nature of a negotiating process that has theoretically sought to balance the needs of society, the sector, its staff and its students. Within this discussion employability has been used as a metaphor for that process of negotiation and a proposed socio-economic desire to align both higher education and individual identity with socio-political and economic concerns. However, as highlighted through the NRA and TVEI, such innovations have often raised tensions between the sector and its own practitioners, educational motivation coming into conflict with political need. Within the NRA and TVEI the consequence of such conflict has been practitioner disengagement with the very practices that they had originally been seen to initiate. In such instances practitioner disengagement creates conceptual and pragmatic fragmentation and it is through this that full implementation is prevented (Barnett 2003).

It is through the acceptance of conceptual, philosophical and pragmatic fragmentation that the tensions present within the implementation process can be realized. As will be discussed in Section 4, in the context of this study those tensions have been created not only through the implementation of PDP but also the concept of gradueness through which PDP was presented as an extension. Conceptually, it would be easy to simplistically bolt gradueness on to employability, but as a concept it precedes the current push towards employability (Barrie 2005). In many ways the differences between the two concepts may appear minimal, and yet whilst both focus on the notion of skills acquisition, gradueness may be interpreted as reflecting a reflection of the different cultures and contexts that characterized higher education at that time. Here, the focus lies not particularly on a direct response to socio-economic expectations but more the broad range of inherent skills that can be gained from student engagement with higher education, as Barrie explain when defining gradueness as:



*“The qualities, skills, and understanding a university community aggress its students should develop during their time with the institution. These attributes include but go beyond the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most university courses. They are qualities that also prepare graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future.”* (2005, p.1)

Graduateness therefore defines what higher education offers the student in terms of what they should learn, how that aligns specifically with higher education, and how those empower them to act as positive socio-economic agents (Barrie et al. 2009). This sits in contrast with employability, which instead concentrates on what higher education should offer through the lens of a particular set of primary social and economic requirements. Whilst the target groups for each movement may vary, each can be still be associated in varying degrees to the aforementioned attempts to redefine education socio-politically, social wealth and social wellbeing being increasingly seen as interchangeable terms (Barrie 2005, Harvey & Knight 2005).

The concept therefore offers preconceived professional and academic identities, into which students become immersed as they study within higher education, PDP-as-policy potentially driving the self-awareness that allows the skills associated with that identity to be made explicit for the purposes of developmental management and employer integration (Harvey & Knight 2005). However, as with previous initiatives, this sense of universality has been difficult to establish due to the conflicting academic and professional diversity that inevitably exists within a single university, each possessing particular ideologies and pedagogic forms that promote the acquisition of specific outcome expectations (Gurung et al. 2009). These expectations then constrain both the skills being acquired and the terms through which those are defined, the inherent diversity of those factors preventing the creation of the generic and universal skills set as previously defined (Barrie 2005).

The reference to professionalization here is a significant one. Through the enforcement of membership as a pragmatic reflection of their individual characters, each profession seeks to shape the student within their own behavioural and

psychological expectations. As such, PDP processes are designed not for a generic skills set but the acquisition of skills, attitudes and values that are seen to be of particular worth to the context within which each profession sits.

For the future of each profession such enforced fragmentation may be seen to be counter-productive, differences in practice, theory and accreditation preventing the development of inter-professional practice that today characterizes key areas such as health care. However, professional individualities remain, and, together with the many discipline identities that nest within an academic environment, act to prevent the sharing of universal understandings of university learning through their perceived needs for identity management in their own form. Similarly, for PDP, whether shaped by ideas of employability through generic skills transference, deeper academic learning or particular value-based models of democratic social-constructivism (see Bowskill & Smith, 2009) the freedom to interpret within which the implementation has taken place allows PDP to take form according to the individual views of those defining, and confining, its processes.

### **3.3b. The Community Function**

For Barrie, the consequence of such fragmentation has been the sector's inability to construct unified and cohesive interventions, both in terms of their underlying theoretical base and the outcomes expectations attached to those ideas. Referencing the many outcomes that have become associated with 'graduateness', Barrie comments:

*"The extent to which the rhetoric of such statements actually represents a shared understanding of the outcomes of a university education is a matter of conjecture. The extent to which present day university teaching and learning processes actually develop such outcomes in graduates is even more contestable."*  
(2006, p.215)

Subsequently, whilst Joyce (2005) has commented on how PDP processes may

help align theory and practice within a professional context, Huntingdon has warned that this should not be taken within the community of practice as a whole to mean that the understandings constructed within that particular environment should be considered '*shared*' (2005, p.52). As knowledge moves between disciplines, and even individuals, so that knowledge is re-contextualized and reconstructed (Bernstein 1996), and it is through this that the mutual understanding of the relevant discourse is lost. For Bernstein, disciplines are therefore inherently defensive, as are the interpretations that each carry with regard to pedagogy and purpose. For Bernstein, *"staff are necessarily tied to their category and organizational base. This means that, in this system, the staff cannot relate to each other in terms of their intrinsic function, which is the production of pedagogic discourse."* (1996, p.25)

Facing such a diverse and potentially fragmented context, it is perhaps unsurprising to find attempts to establish a coherent educational community at the centre of the implementation process. Indeed, facing a significant lack of systematic evidence regarding the efficacy of PDP processes within education (Jackson et al. 2004), and a potentially fractious professional and academic context (Barnett 2003), the drive for community cohesion was the main point of focus of the PFIG. Ideological belief and a sense of moral duty historically dominated the presentation of the intervention to the sector, an attitude that was *"as much about winning hearts and minds as about establishing objectives and procedural requirements"* (Jackson 1999).

As practitioners were therefore the main targets of the early literature to be offered in support of the implementation of PDP as policy, the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) was brought on to the PFIG, bringing with it an existing network of sympathetic and supportive members (Strivens & Ward 2010). Indeed, it was members of the CRA community that supported the construction of the initial QAA guidelines regarding the goals and uses of PDP processes, and their subsequent re-draft in 2009 (Barnes 2010). The Community of Practitioners attached to the CRA were seen as essential to the implementation, collectively offering a pragmatic route for the universal acceptance of the intervention whilst further deflecting any potential antagonism away from the policy as an imposed managerial directive

(Jackson 2001b). As Jackson et al. (2004) argued, this was as it should be since from his own rhetorical position those were the practitioners whose work lay at the foundations of the policy:

*“PDP (Progress File) policy was driven by the political desire to improve the quality of information on learning and achievement in higher education, but it was informed and influenced by the practitioner discourse that believed that the learning behaviours developed by PDP resulted in improved learning potential and outcomes even though the evidence for all these potential benefits was generally lacking. This situation places responsibility on the organizations that are promoting the policy to facilitate the sharing of the practice and learning of those who are at the forefront of experimentation in order to create the evidence to demonstrate actual benefit”* (2004, p.3).

However, to change the educational environment culturally would require full access to that culture, a view that reflects the perspectives of managerial theorist Michael Fullen (see Jackson 2001b). Fullen (1999), as referenced extensively by Jackson, had argued that minority beliefs would be adopted where the target cohort was offered an intrinsic role in their development and application, and only access to that target cohort would enable such a fundamental process of change. For Fullen, benefit drives belief, and that benefit can be recognized through an expansion in self-examination and inter-staff communication, as reflected in a community of practice. Practice and outcome would therefore always take priority over concept and theory in the eyes of practitioners, but to ensure engagement would require a freeing of restrictions to both allow personal expression and deny the enforced nature of the implementation.

But benefit may not be considered a necessarily objective concept, bound as it is, not to the application of practice, but on specific outcome expectations. For instance, meta-analytical work in the United States by Ayala (2006) highlighted an early failure to gather significant statistical support for the effectiveness of e-portfolios, a failing at least in part framed within a lack of clarity regarding the diverse goals that have been attached to them. Subsequently, as clarified by Yancey

(2009), it has been the belief in the efficacy of e-portfolios that has underpinned an assumption that e-portfolios will prove efficacious, and that such an efficacy will be then be proved through research post-application. For Scott, this is an inevitable consequence of conceptual vagueness, commenting:

*“If a phenomenon does not have construct validity then it is difficult to assess... Clearly if you can’t agree on what something is, assessing it is rather tricky.”* (2010)

Perhaps it was the aim of the implementation process to promote ‘goal displacement’ (Hargreaves 2000), to create a sufficient focus on pragmatic outcomes as to deflect or disempower critical discussions regarding the philosophy of the policy beyond those pragmatics. By re-focusing practitioner concerns to practical personal experiences as teachers, their attention as educationalists could easily be displaced away from the underlying philosophy and towards the innovation’s practical form alone. As Avis & Bathmeyer warn:

*“As long as teachers and educators are ‘busy reflecting’ on their own practice, social relations of domination remain unquestioned and, consequently, unthreatened.”* (2004, p.309)

It is a position that perhaps supports comments by Harland & Pickering (2011) regarding the unwillingness of practitioners to critique the foundations of their own actions, and the subsequent potential for the implicit politicization of educational practice when passively founded on the beliefs of others (Fevre 2007). The consequence for the community of practitioners associated with PDP, as largely published through the community publication PDPUK, was a rapid growth in studies of practice but rarely any genuine engagement with why practice was shaped as it was (Buckley 2008). Practice has been subsequently shaped in an uncritical theoretical debate, concepts such as meta-cognition (McKellar & Barton 2006), learner identity (Buckley 2006), identity management (Buckley 2010), social constructivism (Bowskill & Smith 2009), and concept thresholds (Joyes 2010) discussed in terms of pragmatic certainty rather than theoretical possibility.

The point takes us back once again to Broadfoot’s experiences of the NRA, and

the ability of language to hide conceptual and pragmatic differences, and with that the inability of a community to act in a coherent manner. The situated nature of linguistic meaning may act to deny the view that communities of practice can ever cohere behind particular beliefs, and seek to establish shared understanding of process. As Stenmark comments:

*“In a world of bounded rationality and imperfect knowledge, where personal experiences is our principal source of learning, dissensus is a natural state. Attempts to arrive at a view shared by all humans are bound to fail.”* (2002, p.4)

### **3.3c. The Fragmented Community**

From this position, doubts are raised over the legitimacy of any community of practice to represent itself as a single entity, together with the ability of that community to reach beyond itself. Where communities are seen as being the fragmented body that post-modernism would predict then at best they become a series of individual communities of thought, or at worst only the perception of a community. Here they reflect different codifications, different values, and different motivations; consequently, transferring tacit knowledge from one group to another, or one individual to another, will necessarily require an extensive understanding of their core attributes.

For Digid (2005), such difficulties arise in the use of Lave & Wenger’s notion of the community of practice, within which the sense of community is far better explained than the influence of practice itself. Furthermore, to focus on practice has itself proved problematic through its reliance on explicit rather than tacit knowledge, Digid again highlighting the difficulties that surround the notion of ‘best practice’.

*“Nowhere, perhaps, is this more evident than in the endless problems of “best practice” diffusion. On the one hand, theorists of “best practice” put their finger on the essential point: Practice is critical. On the other, they regularly attempt to move a best practice from one community to another by codifying and circulating the explicit knowledge. What, of course, is truly critical is the knowing how these are embedded*

*in the practice and wrapped around with ethical and epistemic commitments. Without these—and these are admittedly very hard to transfer.” (2005, p.114)*

Here a different problem with communities arises, in that where they prove unable to share knowledge through fundamental differences then they inevitably become communities in conflict as defined by Social Identity Theory. Membership becomes a process of categorization and comparison, and as such in-group similarities and inter-group differences become exaggerated (Wetherell 1987). For Turner (1982) this is the result of the processes of depersonalization and self-stereotyping that occurs upon initial group membership. The problem for Communities of Practice on this level is that through group categorization, research ultimately becomes defensive and inter-group communication becomes potentially bound within aggression and negativity. Subsequently, the rhetoric within PDPUK remains focused on belief and unity as the key themes behind successful implementation (Ward 2006, 2007), scepticism and disagreement still being reframed as cynicism (Strivens & Ward 2010). As Foucault suggests, different groups, or communities, inevitably compete with each other in forms that reflect their own arguments, *“their power strategies becoming clear through the nature of their discourse”* (1986, p.116). Subsequently, the possibilities for effectively sharing knowledge and creating consensus will ultimately rely on their ability to engage with each other’s discourses in a meaningful way.

As such, the PDP community may have been left relatively disempowered without arguments that can serve to cross the complicated boundaries of discourse that have been discussed so far. Indeed, whilst Jackson & Ward (2004) express the need for evidence gathering, Jackson et al (2004) would suggest that through the use of practitioner networks the focus of their evaluations would always be contextually constrained within practice itself (2004, p.16). And yet in doing so the community may open itself up to politicization through its lack of solid theoretical ground, a concern that has driven Fevre (2007) to warn:

*“The need to cast around for evidence on which to found normative judgments means that someone else’s judgments may already have shaped the ‘evidence’ that*

*is taken for granted... Instead of unwittingly supporting these interests, theorists might do better to subject the zeitgeist to close critical scrutiny and even enquire whether it might be a dystopian dream of powerful interests."*

Whilst the argument to date has looked at the need to present a cohesive community model, Clegg & Bradley (2006a) in particular have highlighted the inherent difficulties surrounding such a goal when faced with such a complex disciplinary picture. Basing their arguments on the identity theories of Basil Bernstein (1996), Clegg & Bradley have argued that ultimately, PDP processes are always used as replications of the context in which they are being applied. Bernstein had argued that the shift towards projection through regulation and an increased focus on future action through the potential impact of skills deficiency, the sector was seeking to regionalize knowledge. Clegg & Bradley described this as a "*general secular trend towards projection*" (2006a, p.62), a method of shaping the student within the expectations of the particular discipline that they had chosen to study.

However, for Bernstein, regionalization would inevitably be limited where the identities of specific singulars, or in this instance particular disciplines, was strong. For Clegg & Bradley, these could be separated into three distinct categories, professional, academic and employability, although as will be shown these should be considered useful generalizations of practice rather than universal exemplars. Section Four will discuss the ways in which individual staff expectations from within departments can act to counter PDP effectiveness by implicitly, or sometimes explicitly, challenging the collective position based on categorical context. As such the categories must be seen as '*ideal types*' (2006a, p.63), best suited to achieve the consensual goals of particular academic and professional domains.

This section has focused on the problems associated with attempts to promote acceptance of a single educational belief, here as postulated largely through the narrative of Jackson, and the influences that different contexts apply to shape both the processes and outcome associated with that belief. Whilst the community of practice as offered through the CRA has recognized the situated nature of practice, we have also discussed the ways in which this '*situatedness*' acts to prevent



conceptual cohesion through the creation of conflicting student 'ideals'. Drawing on comments from Broadfoot concerning the NRA, such contextual diversity has been presented as creating barriers to effective communication between practitioners, inter-disciplinary discussion failing to recognize the significance of their contextual differences and establishing an inaccurate sense of cohesive debate.

### **3.4. PDP as a process to support student self-regulation & autonomy**

#### **3.4a. Psychological Foundations**

As previously discussed, the original ambitions of the PFIG were seen as pragmatic, a community of practice providing the impetus behind the acceptance of the implementation. And yet in the last section the ability of a community to act in such a unified fashion was brought into question, leading to a suggestion that the implementation of PDP may be reflecting the very same issues of conceptual fragmentation that dogged the NRA. And yet the significance of that community of practice for the successful implementation of PDP-as-policy was central to the PFIG model being used. As Jackson (2001b) has suggested, there was simply too little time to organize and evaluate research prior to implementation and theory would therefore be sought and applied retrospectively. It is a sequence of action that raises questions regarding the value of both theory and evidence when sought in this way (Barrie 2005).

In spite of such a pragmatic focus, the resulting evidential vacuum initiated a diverse search for a relevant theoretical ground on which to validate pragmatic application of PDP-as-policy, each theory implying a different purpose and a different sense of outcome. From a practitioner's perspective this search was characterized by the situated nature of the community and the different needs that each member or group demanded from the use of PDP as a pedagogic form (Buckley 2008), but academically with these variations came accusations of PDP being "*chaotic*" (Clegg 2004, p.?), "*conceptually vague*" (Fry et al. 2002, p.?) and pragmatically diverse (Brennan & Shah 2003). Indeed, for Fry the sector's inability to offer research evidence to support the effectiveness of PDP processes has been grounded in this conceptual and pragmatic fragmentation. Investigating PDP as a tool for professional CPD they concluded that whilst processes such as reflection and self-evaluation could support student motivation to evidence their learning, the processes and concepts being incorporated lacked the necessary solidity for successful application as a specific innovation.

Certainly, early research struggled with this lack of conceptual clarity, which in turn negatively impacted on the ability to offer methodologically rigorous evidence for the innovation. The first sector funded research project was the EPPI Review (Gough 2003), which offered the first systematic review of educational research on Personal Development Planning. It drew its information from 157 studies that had been written in English and referred to the key terms of “*reflection, recording, planning & action*”. Only 41 of these studies originated in the UK, and once this had been reduced to 25 studies, only one UK study remained. From the examined data Gough concluded that issues such as learning, attainment, skills transference, and even self-esteem could potentially be enhanced through such an intervention, but were ultimately unable to support a causal relationship between PDP processes and those issues due to the diverse nature of the nationalities, contexts and methods from which these conclusions were being drawn (Jackson et al. 2004, Clegg & Bufton 2008).

Whilst models of personal learning could be shown to improve academic learning, claims that these could extend that into self-development would need further research and funding, and to do so would require greater clarification of the terms and goals being examined. The review question, “*What evidence is there that the processes that connect reflection, recording, planning and action improve student learning?*” (Gough et al. 2003, p.2) contained no direct references to PDP nor offered a coherent theoretical or epistemological view of the processes in question (Clegg 2005). Subsequently, whilst Gough et al. could imply that the application of PDP processes could benefit the student in some way, they were not able to explain how or why those benefits could be obtained (Clegg 2004). In addition, as Quinton & Smallbone (2008) have noted, the review focused almost solely on self-regulation rather than learning in an academic sense, an issue that for some theorists has strengthened the perceived political character of the intervention, Clegg (2005) associating the review itself with directives stemming from New Labour policies on education. The problem was to be replicated in the CHERI report (Brennan & Shah 2003), who equally saw the potential benefits for PDP as an innovative, value-adding educational approach that could raise employability, improve tutor contact and

increase retention, but found a lack of common understanding of its processes and purpose; again, situated diversity was hindering understanding.

There is a sense that the previously described conceptual and pragmatic confusion was inherent within the field being examined in that PDP had never actually been defined but only left as a general statement of direction towards student self-regulation. The EPPI Review's connections with concepts such as employability, which was to become the key driver within the implementation process, was only minimal and a majority of the research was focused on learning styles within contextually specific, and therefore situated, learning environments with particular outcome expectations. As Gough explains:

*"Most studies adopted a prescriptive approach to PDP implementation in order to achieve course-specific outcomes."* (2003, p. 3)

As a reflection of subsequent practitioner research, the understanding of the potential innovation was again effectively constrained within the same conceptual confusion that authors such as Sue Clegg would later highlight. Furthermore, the report's particular focus on reflection and reflective journals for particular course outcomes would perhaps suggest a far stronger academic focus to the model being formed than would later be realized in a literature base that would strongly support the use of employability as a key driver to student engagement. Where Salter & Tapper had suggested that the role of Norman Jackson and the QAA within the PFIG had been to strengthen the socio-economic relevance of the sector, the nature of the research question being initially instigated in the name of the PFIG would suggest a far more complex function that seeks to support economic relevance through improved discipline performance.

### **3.4b. PDP as self-regulation**

The use of the term 'performance' has not been included accidentally, as through the use of the term our focus can be shifted to the particular psychological theories that have been used to support the conceptual understanding of PDP-as-

policy, and the manner in which practitioners have sought to apply the innovation. Here socio-cognitive models of self-regulation have become a dominant perspective within practitioner and academic literature, an adoption perhaps predicted through the use of American research sources in the EPPI Systematic Review and the titling of PDP in the United States as 'self-regulation'.

Whilst early attempts to theorize and evidence PDP were largely eclectic, through the relocation of learning within self-development, the issue of self, and the role of the student to create and maintain that construct, they became the dominant academic ground for PDP conceptualization. Early descriptions had set the model within a pseudo-Rogerean model (see Rogers 1983) in which, *"the application of PDP processes seeks to locate the student at the centre of their own learning; autonomous, responsible and necessarily self-engaged and motivated"* (Tymms et al. 2013, p.5), and as such learning was no longer perceived as solely academic, but driven by psychological characteristics that were perceived as theoretically open to change.

*"Less concerned about the hard, recordable, quantifiable results of learning and more concerned with the broader experiences of learning about learning; learning about the multiple contexts and identities in and through which learning is transacted; and coming to better understand self"* (Sunderland 2004, p. 4).

Again, as with the NRA before it, Sunderland raises a discussion that may refer to several socio-political and philosophical grounds. The potential for such a position to support the creation of a fluid and responsive labour force has been made on several occasions already; however, as Barnett suggests, it also supports the maintenance of an existing liberal educational philosophy:

*"It is imperative – if higher education is to recover anything approaching the liberal qualities that it promises – that students are encouraged to stand back, to reflect deeply, to consider the ethical dimension of both thought and action, to understand something of the place of their knowledge in society, to glimpse*

*something of what it might be, and to gain their own independence from all that they learn, think and do.” (1990, p.78)*

From either position the clear shift towards psychological development can be seen in practitioner efforts to infer a psychological, or pseudo-psychological, character to the application of PDP processes, with socio-cognitive interpretations of meta-cognition (Jackson & Ward 2004), meta-learning (Biggs 1985, Jackson 2003) and self-regulation (Jackson & Ward 2004) being identified as offering effective retrospective validity. As Jackson & Ward remarked:

*“Interest in the model (self-regulation theory) has been encouraged by the growing awareness that personal success involves more than innate ability and exposure to good teaching. It also requires the personal qualities of initiative, persistence, belief in self and self-direction”. (2004, p. 438)*

The rhetorical assumption that initiative, persistence and the ability to self-direct aren't innate abilities has been noted and will be discussed later. However, knowing how to learn was now being seen as a key life skill (Jackson 1999), and with it came an increasing, if eclectic, mix of psychological models and practices, from personality profiling and psychometric testing (Cottrell 2003, Kumar 2007), to cognitive therapy (Cottrell 2003), and dispositional malleability (Knight & Yorke 2003). Learning was increasingly being viewed by a community of PDP practitioners as an issue of identity building fashioned from personal experiences both within and outside of the academic environment (Jackson 2007). It also reflected a particular belief in the situated nature of knowledge and identity, as characterized within the work of socio-cognitive theorists such as Zimmerman (2000), Schunk (1997) and Bandura (1986).

Zimmerman's model of self-regulated learning was of particular interest in that it offered what was being viewed as superior learning through the engagement of teaching practice with individual cognitive processes, through which the individual processes of knowledge creation could be made explicit (Jackson & Ward 2004). Drawn from theories of operant conditioning (Flanagan 2004), and social learning

(see Bandura 1983), Zimmerman has perceived the individual and the environment to be acting reciprocally to determine behaviour, outcome expectations and motivations becoming aligned through the contextual conversation between self and context. We actively shape ourselves according to the needs of that context, and manage our identities by judging our beliefs and behaviours against our observations of others, either immediate or vicarious, and the outcomes associated with their behaviours and values. The acquisition of our motivations and goals are therefore managed and directed through observation, emulation, self-control, and finally self-regulation. In Zimmerman's words:

*"The social cognitive perspective entails not only behavioural skill in self-managing environmental contingencies, but also the knowledge and the sense of personal agency to enact this skill in relevant contexts."* (2000, p.14)

Self-regulation is therefore seen as a fundamental evolutionary aspect of our ability to think and act (Zimmerman 2000, Demetriou 2000) and as such the concept has been considered a specific cognitive skill that drives our key motivational strategies (Shapiro & Schwartz 2000, Zimmerman 2000). Transferred to the educational sector, it can perhaps therefore be seen as a potential foundation for the holistic focus of personal development planning, and its expressed need to ensure student educational independence and contextual flexibility. As Zimmerman & Schunk (2000) suggest:

*"Neither a mental ability nor an academic performance skill, self-regulation refers instead to the self-directive process through which learners transform their mental abilities into task-related academic skills. This approach views learning as an activity that students do for themselves in a proactive way, rather than as a covert event that happens to them reactively as a result of teaching experiences."* (2000, p.1)

The model carries with it an existing and established research base, Winter et al. (2008) highlighting a whole range of supporting evidence with regard to improving academic self-efficacy and achievement, together with subsequent

support for educational processes that promote peer interaction and therefore emphasize the socially contextualized dimension of learning. And yet beyond their pragmatic uses, the educational application of psychological theory continues to be problematic. For Shoda & Mischel (2000), the fault lies not in those seeking to use psychological theory but an inherent fragmentation within psychology as a discipline that is all too rarely acknowledged. As Shoda & Mischel explain when discussing personality theory:

*“Each voice in the theories of our field says much that is compelling and persuasive even when seeming opposites are stated. Thus personality and its expression in thought, feeling and action is consistent and inconsistent, stable and unstable, relational, contextualised and intrapersonal, predictable and unpredictable. We adapt to situations while internally coherent; we are goal directed, planful, and future orientated but also reactive, impulsive, automatic, and reflexive; we are influenced profoundly both by the social environment and by the messages of our genes and biological pre-dispositions. We are architects of our lives and their victims.”* (2000, p.421)

From a cognitive perspective, it is not therefore surprising that psychological concepts such as meta-cognition, self-regulation and self-regulated learning have all struggled to reach any genuine state of theoretical consensus, preferences for each view being driven by the widely different academic areas that have sought to apply them (Boekaerts 2000). For Dinsmore et al. (2008), self-regulation and self-regulated learning are merely aspects of meta-cognition and impossible to treat in isolation, meta-cognition being viewed as a complex and sequential system of cognitive activities (Livingstone 1997) that currently prevent practitioner attempts to isolate different cognitive characteristics into simple pragmatic forms. If correct, Flavells’ (1971) much-quoted definition of meta-cognition as *‘thinking about thinking’* becomes over-simplistic as the true complexity of such a statement is refuted. Subsequently, Boekaerts & Cascallar (2006) question whether the cognitive processes within self-regulation can ever be raised above the unconscious, even through reflective practice, a significant point where reflection is theorized to sit at the heart of self-regulation and PDP-as-policy.



Through a cognitive lens the role of society is also brought into question. Where Zimmerman has portrayed self-regulation as a personal response to environmental demand, Boekaerts & Cascallar (2006) have highlighted its self-serving nature. Whilst both characterize self-regulation as the ability to temporally move one's cognitive focus from forethought (goals and values) to self-reflection, through performance and self-monitoring, the social roles in each differ considerably. For Dinsmore et al. (2008), these are confusions that have stemmed from the relocation of cognitive concepts within a socio-cognitive perspective. Here, internal cognitive processes become mediated by external contextual demands, and are given a particular pragmatic purpose, what Moshmann (1982) has called 'dialectical constructivism' due to the inherent inner/outer interactions.

The issue here is the degree to which internal psychological processes are shaped by external influences. Molden & Dweck highlight the issue as lying at the heart of questions surrounding socio-cognitive self-regulation:

*"Such perspectives (social-cognitive) are primarily concerned with how motives, sensitivities, or styles, which may vary either chronically between individuals or from moment to moment within a single individual, affect the ways in which people give meaning to their experiences... The fundamental question here is whether fundamental person attributes (such as intelligence or personality) are considered to be static traits that are relatively fixed or, instead, more dynamic qualities that can be cultivated."* (2006, p.193)

For Dweck (2008), students can be educated towards a dynamic state, or malleability, but this statement relies on the acceptance of an essentially behaviourist view of personality and behaviour as predominantly learned. Having recognized the existence of biological, Freudian, and cognitive arguments surrounding the source and stability of personality traits, Dweck (2000) rejects them on social grounds, but Demetriou has questioned the legitimacy of such a strongly fixed view:

*“Personality research suggests that the basic structure of personality remains invariant from early childhood... Evidence related to the development of cognitive style is very similar, and suggests that the basic dimensions of cognitive style, such as reflection – impulsivity or field-dependence – independence, are in place very early in life...These findings suggest strongly that personality and style channel how an individual is self-represented and self-regulated.” (2000, p.242)*

Whether any perspective is correct in isolation is unlikely, but as Schunk suggests, the subsequent inability reach a conceptual consensus profoundly affects the ability of any community to evidence itself:

*“This situation, although understandable, is problematic. How we define processes influences the measures we use to assess them and how we interpret our research results. It is little wonder that research results are often inconsistent when investigators have used different definitions and measures.” (2000, p.464)*

Facing such fragmentation, our ability to choose becomes influenced by many factors, Flavell (1979) arguing that when faced with so many theoretical alternatives, choices will be largely determined by their proposed pragmatic use - what we are asking the theory to do. For Boekaerts, a cognitive theorist, such a position has characterized the use of psychology within mainstream education, practitioners using theory for *“their own parochial interests and concerns”* (2000, p.1). It is a claim that has been supported by Davis (2008), who who has also argued that through an overtly simplistic awareness of theory the ability of educationalists to incorporate it into practice has always proved flawed. Theoretical choice becomes predictable according to underlying behavioural need, motives rather than understanding revealed in application. For example, when discussing the use of self-regulation theory, Post et al. have argued that *“compliance and independent learning could both be created though very similar systems if similar external processes are brought to bear”* (2006, p.5), adding that self-regulation has always been centred around an external goal motive and an external definition of the social/individual relationship.

Indeed, whilst much of this discussion has centred on the search for a

theoretical foundation, for Barnett (2000), such decisions must remain pragmatic. Whichever theory is decided on as suitable, the primary focus of that theory must still be the need to be eternally flexible within ever-changing academic, professional and working contexts, a drive that necessarily drives educational change towards identity management (Jackson & Ward 2004, McKellar & Barton 2006, James 2009, Buckley 2006). If true, then a fundamental character of PDP as initial policy would be to shape the individual within the demands of social and organizational forces. It is a point that Jackson (2006) comments on specifically:

*“As far as I’m aware, the UK is the only higher education system in the world attempting to systematize identity and personal knowledge building in the HE curriculum... From this set of activities we can generate a social and process-based conception of PDP.”*

The suggestion that personal identity should be systemized through a focus on particular aspects of the social context carries with it an implication of cognitive correctness. That failure to act in a manner which society values can be viewed legitimately as cognitively dysfunctional. Such a shift towards a therapeutic stance within higher education has been strongly criticized by some academics for promoting the perception of continual personal failure (Ecclestone 1996); however, support for the approach can be found in Cottrell’s (2003) suggested use of cognitive-behavioural methods within PDP (2003). Here, Cottrell recommends the use of self-evaluation in accordance with the therapeutic models of Ellis and Beck (Dweck 2000) and their proposed routes to improved rationality and objectivity within experiential interpretation. However, the potential successes to be gained from this approach appear to depend on an understanding of the eclectic theoretical ground within which such theories have again been located. Where Cottrell (2003) and Kumar (2007) propose the use of cognitive-behavioural self-evaluation, they do so in association with psychometric testing models as favoured by human resource management. For Shoda & Mischel (2000), it is an association that is psychologically contradictory. One perceives us as being eternally stable, the other eternally fluid, both supporting conflicting goals and yet claiming conceptual consensus; to align

them and claim that we can create personality change through cognitive action remains far from certain (Maggioni & Parkinson 2008).

The section on self-regulation started with a reference to performance, and the implied significance of that term. Discussions then followed that suggested a particular relationship between socio-cognitive models of self-regulation and PDP. That relationship is framed by the basis of the model lying in performance, and the ability to link performance to particular explicit discipline outcomes (Schunk & Zimmerman 2007). It is in this model that process and outcome become aligned, and the cognitive actions underpinning each are set aside, because it is only through outcome that process is understood. The adoption of socio-cognitive theories within practice acts to shift the educational focus from cognitive process to social influence, and therefore links theory and practice with additional sector debates concerning learning transparency, quality, and employability. However, to use the model in this manner may again emphasize the potential conflict between process and product that typified the NRA, in that to focus on outcome denies the focus on motivation that stems from the process of learning, outcome being seen as a consequence of process and not the primary focus.

#### **3.4c. PDP & the autonomous learner**

As has been discussed, two particularly strong aspects of socio-cognitive theory are its focus on performance and the fundamental role of the operational context on learning and action within that context. As such, it holds particular strength within disciplinary and professional domains that carry specific sets of actions and values within their presented knowledge. Furthermore, socio-cognitive theory may be seen as supporting modernist power-relations between the teacher and learner through the interpretation of student as agent within a particular domain controlled by the values and outcome expectations of the expert 'other'. As such the model, or rather the application of the model as a way of promoting desired sets of behaviours, incorporates potentially combative issues of politics and

philosophy. This point may be of particular significance where the concept of self-regulation is perceived as aligning learning with increased autonomy, even where each promotes the dominance of context over the individual as agency.

The pragmatic significance of these dimensions will become clearer in Section Four, where we will focus on self-regulation and the drive for student autonomy at a strategic institutional level. In that section it will be made clear that student autonomy has become a key strategic concern, and yet the previous discussions have brought into question how this can be gained through concepts that actively place context above the individual, or in a reciprocal relationship in which one source is characterized as possessing greater power. As has been discussed, the shift away from psychological constructivism to socio-cognitivism carries with it the potential for individual objectification and externalization as the social context drives the behavioural responses of the individual. As such, the individual can never be divorced from the social context within which they exist because it acts as a key driver within the construction of self, choice inevitably constrained by social pressure.

The relationship between student autonomy and PDP-as-policy has been a constant theme within the QAA literature surrounding the implementation (2001, 2009), and by default the members of the community of practice that authored their guidelines, and yet as previously questioned by Rosenow (1973) it remains unclear as to how structured and supported processes can ever lead to greater autonomy where those processes carry socio-cognitive and behavioural expectations as outcomes. As Rosenow suggests, formal education may always be shaped by purposes that are external to the individual, *“the student is first and foremost the object of the educational process, and never merely its subject”* (1973, p.354). Education, and with it PDP, has a social role, defined by politics and policies, economics and philosophies to which the student must at least superficially comply if they are to pass successfully through it. If as Morrison suggests, *“education is essentially and pervasively normative”* (2008, p.14), then education can only support a perception of challenge whilst maintaining the political dominance of those thinkers preceding the students in question (Arendt 1957).

It is this possible position of learner subservience that raises doubts over the sector's ability to promote, or even suggest the intention to promote, greater learner autonomy. At what point can a process defined by the purposes, outcomes and expectations of one of the two parties be said to promote autonomy within the other? Similarly, if the sector is seeking to renegotiate such a relationship, how can a new position be achieved whilst ensuring the sector's continuing worth as defined by the political context in which the sector rests? For Rosenow, such a renegotiation cannot be achieved through intervention, asking:

*"Can freedom be reconciled with intervention? Does not freedom mean autonomy, self-determination, independence? And does intervention imply their very opposites – heteronomy and dependence?"* (1973, p.354)

As previously commented, the need to raise autonomous individuals has often been quoted as a primary concern within PDP literature (see Jackson & Ward 2004; Jackson 2001, East 2005, Atlay 2009), and yet the power imbalance that traditionally exists between the sector and its students would appear to make this problematic where pedagogies continue to seek autonomy through what could easily be seen as heterogeneous technologies. Returning again to the idea of identity projection discussed in Section 3.3a, for Pitt (2010) part of this confusion has come about through the increasing appropriation of professionalization within the educational sector, commenting that:

*"As a common trait of the modern, educated human being, autonomy refers to independence from external influence and freedom of the will. In professional contexts, autonomy is, on the one hand, extended and specified through claims to specialized knowledge and skills and, on the other hand, opposed as an expression of the will of the individual against public or institutional interests."* (2010, p.2)

Linking the discussion back to intrinsic differences that lie within the community of practice associated with the implementation of PDP-as-policy within the professions, the concept of autonomy must necessarily re-define itself as agency or the ability to act within a specific set of externalized boundaries and remain

unable to raise oneself beyond them (Ryan & Deci 2006). The professions, in this instance, mirror post-modern 'situatedness'. They attempt to set us free from our social contexts and yet define us through those and thus actively prevent our actual escape (Bohn et al. 2010).

As with post-modernism itself, however, autonomy can be defined through a wide range of possible interpretation, arguments shaped by ontological belief and political convenience (Swaine 2010). From this perspective it is difficult to isolate the debate from positions of power and the legitimacy of political elites (Atkins 2006, Swaine 2010). Reflecting a Sartrean position through Foucaultian terminology, Oliver comments on how modern life cannot essentially act to deny autonomy but makes it increasingly hard to achieve, transforming the concept into a matter of relative perception rather than actuality. As he writes:

*"One is constantly bombarded by mainstream discourses that enclose one in a veritable 'panopticon' (or domain of optimal visibility) of 'normalizing' exhortations, 'advice', prescriptions, dependence-inculcating commodity-promotion and the like... we live in a 'carceral' society today, where social subjects are constituted, via various discursive mechanisms, as 'docile bodies', with hardly any capacity to act in a relatively autonomous manner."* (2010, p.294)

Here autonomy exists within a political rather than philosophical frame, the fluidity of the political domain within which the concept of autonomy is applied acting to prevent the concept from final completion. As Bohm et al. suggest:

*"As autonomy is never completely captured by any of the practices which are done in its name, it remains a promise that social movements can continue to appeal to. But because autonomy never completely reveals itself and always remains as a possible promise, it can be appealed to in many different ways. This can create the possibility of antagonism and struggle around what the concept of autonomy might mean and how it might be actualized. This means autonomy becomes a site of political struggle over what it could possibly mean in practice."* (2010, p.27)

Debates surrounding autonomy subsequently become culturally and

temporally bound, reflecting a particular, and often dominant, political and philosophical persuasion. As Barnett (2000) suggests, the continuing need for higher education to be both innovative and relevant has driven it to change, shaping its philosophies according to ideological and political zeitgeists, such as excellence and accountability. Education framed in such a manner “*is no longer just about knowing but about being*” (Barnett 2000, p.135), although the nature of that ‘being’ is never made clear and remains open to interpretation.

For instance, in their book ‘Post-modern Education: Politics, Culture and Social Criticism’, Aronowitz & Giroux (1991) offer a consensus position, postulating the possibility of truth from consensus, a form of truth that is fluid according to social evolution and yet shapes action through our need to comply to the consensus position. However, for other post-modern philosophers, such as Lyotard (1983), such a position is merely the replication of modernism, consensus being little more than a convenient fabrication designed to ensure compliance. For Lyotard, knowledge of the ‘self’ cannot be made explicit in this way, our absolute uniqueness making ‘self’ unknowable to ‘others’. Institutions may talk as if post-modern but for Lyotard consensus positions such as those offered by Aronowitz & Giroux merely reflect our inability to deal with the ‘*terror*’ of realizing absolute diversity and subjectivity, mechanisms of control that ensure behavioural predictability.

Whilst education, and PDP as a conceptual intervention, may therefore appear to be aiming to embrace constructivist post-modernism through a particular focus on pragmatics, a failure to engage with the foundational ideas on which it is built leaves it vulnerable to criticism (Coulby & Jones 1995). To promote a post-modern perspective denies the sector its right to enforce a particular morality (Glanzera & Ream 2008), and denies the liberalist view of universalism (Ojeily 2001), whilst the social contextualization of knowledge denies the student the opportunity for genuine autonomy as a freedom from context (Ojeily 2001). Where Barnett (2000) talks of social ‘super-complexity’ and the need to educate students to act within society’s characteristic state of flux, he does not promote autonomy but merely agency and the freedom to work within an externalized framework of social expectations.



An important point to make here is the recognition that pragmatics can never be divorced from ontology, in that the value of action can never be separated from an underlying perception of 'being' and what it means to 'be'. As has been suggested through the methodological engagement with the work of Sartre, it is at this underpinning level that the space between presenter and receiver of any idea can potentially come into conflict where value judgments of 'should' differ between the two parties involved. It is the understanding of such a space that lies at the heart of the case studies examined in Section Four.

The discussion of the psychological and philosophical ideas underpinning efforts to conceptualize and apply PDP processes as part of outcome achievements have highlighted the complex socio-political and academic debates within which PDP-as-policy has been framed. As Boekaerts has suggested, there is a strong sense here that theory and philosophy have been chosen not on a particular ontology but for their potential to achieve particular pragmatic goals. This is not to deny the ability of such theories to be used effectively in promoting student motivation and achievement; however, the discussion raises doubts over the ability of such methods to do so where formative-summative divide is not resolved and the power of the context into which PDP-as-practice may potentially act to overwhelm that of the individual, denying the reciprocal nature of the learning relationship being discussed. It has also suggested that the nature of those conceptualizations and expectations attached to theory will be formed in a situated location within which the power of context over individual is potentially reinforced.

### **3.5. PDP processes and the management of learning**

By discussing the psychological foundations onto which PDP was initially built, it has been possible to better understand the standpoint that the sector may have been adopting through the implementation of the policy. In this section we have once again been faced with issues of internal and external learning and the forces at work to drive the individual towards each aspect of learning. Socio-cognitive models of self-regulated learning rationalize the individual within the operational contexts within which they exist, but by framing the student in contextually specific performance it has been proposed that the learner is not in essence controlling their development but more responding to the expectations of those around them. It was therefore proposed that PDP process could struggle to support greater student autonomy and self-regulation where individual development is shaped by an educational system that has been designed to produce specific behavioural and psychological outcomes. And yet the academic and community literature, together with the institutional view being examined, commonly maintain greater autonomy as being a prime concern.

#### **3.5a. Reflection**

From this perspective, much appears to depend on how PDP processes are applied. The core common process within all aspects of PDP-as-applied and theorized is reflection, a process that has already been shown as pivotal within socio-cognitive Self-Regulated Learning. To plan ahead we must know where we seek to go, and to understand what we must do requires us to understand what has already taken place and the processes that have shaped that journey. As East (2005) claims:

*“The essential characteristic that PDP seeks to develop in students is reflection, whereby students are able to identify and review their own learning skills constructively, including recognition of where they might have a ‘skills deficiency’ and to take steps to address this.”*

As such, reflection also supports the quantification of learning quality through its claimed ability to create transparency by promoting a greater level of awareness of what has been learnt (Jackson 1999, 2001b).

Both theoretically and pragmatically, reflection has therefore been seen as a multi-faceted learning tool. Researchers have offered evidence to support claims that reflection can be used to align theory and practice (Hinett 2003, Butler 2006, Knight & Yorke 2003); to bring depth to learning (Brown 2005, Marton & Saljö 1997, East 2005, Clarke et al. 2010); to enable the contextual transference of learning (Assiter & Shaw 1993); and to combine new knowledge with old (Moon 2001, Tymms 2009). Through its ability to make learning and knowledge transparent (Strivens 2004) it can aid increased self-awareness (Cottrell 2003, Clegg & Bradley 2006b), and promote employability (Jacobs 2005, Edwards 2005). For Assiter & Shaw (1993), reflection highlights learning achievements and deficiencies, whilst for Moon (2001) and Duffy (2007), reflection and reflective practice empower emancipation, autonomy, critical thinking and meta-cognition.

This cognitive aspect is significant in that it has been through this cognitive dimension, as proposed by theorists such as Dewey (1933) and Kember et al. (2000) that reflection has become most open to critique. As already indicated, issues of 'identity-building', graduate attributes and employability have commonly dominated the learning outcomes associated with the application of PDP. These in turn are characterized by trans-disciplinary skills such as communication, teamwork, and empathy. Self-efficacy, autonomy and self-regulation have also been considered educational outcomes in their own right, but whilst these represent a key ideological shift towards the education and production of 'self' (Clegg & Bradley 2006b), they remain difficult concepts to externally validate and measure (Knight 2001), driven as they often are by internal processes of self-awareness. The reliance on reflection within PDP has therefore been driven by the multi-dimensional nature of the achievements being sought and the difficulties associated with their assessment. In fact, for Jackson, PDP is little more than "*a framework for learning through reflection and action*" (2007, p.xii).

The nature, or natures, of that framework remain contextually situated but the influence of professionalization has been clear. Through a common perception of PDP as a route to performance enhancement, the use of PDP processes mirrors those within some models of CPD, recording achievement being located within particular frames of competence gathering (Roberts 2009). As a representation of a particular domain of practice and knowledge, this exercise is further shaped by a particular and dominant power dynamic in which members are driven towards a standard group consensus defined by a process of enculturation. As previously discussed through the work of Bernstein, disciplinary projection would ensure a similar picture in non-professional domains, attitudes towards the nature of knowledge and the journey towards its acquisition forming predictable social patterns of behaviour and expectation. Subsequently, whilst Jackson & Ward (2004) have asked practitioners not to lose track of the holistic aspect of reflection, according to Huntingdon & Moss (2004) this is exactly what it has done through the political and professional desire to reference and evidence what can potentially become abstract actions devoid of emotion.

For authors such as Bleakley (1999) and Haigh (2008), such problems are inherent within the professions because they are intrinsically normalizing in attitude. Through the legitimization of specific types of knowledge and outcomes, they act to control the ways in which their potential members think, and therefore reflect (Bleakley 1999). As such, learning becomes centred on the need to conform to particular professional expectations (Haigh 2008) and the true diversity of meanings as held by their members are effectively hidden within the use of supported protocols and terminology (Duffy 2007). For Bleakley in particular, the source of such an issue lies in the profession's pragmatic focus on action beyond self, what 'I' can do rather who 'I' am, the who 'I' am being normalized through the aforementioned protocols and organizational expectations. As such, it mirrors the previous discussion of Nonaka & Takeuchi's model of organizational knowledge and the ability to access knowledge through action alone.

Therefore, whilst the proposed list of potential benefits for reflection has proved extensive (see Duffy 2007, Roberts 2009), the validity of those benefits as

transferable between contexts may be questionable. For Roberts (2009), the issue returns to one of belief and assumption:

*“There appears to be rather less literature providing evidence to show that encouraging students to reflect improves their resultant actions. To some extent this remains an assumption, albeit one that is underpinned by a number of seminal pieces of literature.”* (p.634)

As such, the usefulness of reflection as a learning process may be founded not in evidence but in a contextually framed operational belief and the acceptance of particular views as ‘truth’. Once again the point returns us to the notion and role of externalization, and through this the work of Sartre. For Sartre, we cannot access ‘self’ through reflection because it is always retrospective, and through such a temporal displacement interpretation becomes rational, intellectualized and often external to the individual. It becomes shaped by expectation and appropriateness. In essence, it becomes functional as in Dewey (1933) and professional as in Schön (1983). As a meditative form of self-observation, reflection is something that we do implicitly as part of being human, recognizing and developing our identities through a process of negotiation from within the relationship between self and other (Demetriou 2000). However, as a specific and dominant aspect of contemporary education its demands for explicit, pragmatic and measurable outcomes for what are essentially subjective and internal processes subsequently raise questions over the equality held within such a negotiation.

Whilst critiques of reflection as a fragmented concept remain (see Bleakley 1999, Rogers 2001, Atkinson & Claxton 2004, Clegg & Bradley 2006), reflection as a pragmatic component of learning and practice has started to gain significant evidential support within both professional and academic areas (see Duffy 2007, Bullock et al. 2007, Roberts 2009). This is in part due to the conscious locating of reflection within the curriculum and the subsequent need to present reflection as possessing specific roles within particular assignments (Coot & Gedye 2006). However, through this process staff members may have become increasingly unwilling to extend PDP into the non-functional, affective aspects of ‘being’, even

where those domains essentially drive effective practice (Huntingdon & Moss 2004).

Subsequently, whilst Moon (1998) has suggested that learning cannot take place at all without some engagement with the emotions, Clegg & Bradley (2006b) express concerns that once reflection is made pragmatic and compulsory then it becomes an abstracted process that offers little to either staff or students. As such, whilst reflection has been seen as a route through which implicit learning is made transparent and explicit (Edwards 2005), Tomlinson (1999) and Eraut (2000) raise significant concerns regarding the ability of reflective practice to transform implicit information into an explicit form. Furthermore, Clegg & Bradley (2006a) suggest that through its subsequent reduction to rational pragmatics it effectively prevents access to the tacit dimensions of knowledge that must be made clear if knowledge is to be deemed transferable.

We are faced, therefore, with a position in which the professionalization of reflection can potentially be seen as forcing reflection into techno-rational functionalism in the guise of competence (Ecclestone 1996). And yet to extend reflection beyond its pragmatic context inevitably offers both staff and students certain ethical difficulties. Whilst the disengagement from values and ethics through the sole focus on pragmatic action may have been central to the growth of reflective practice (Ecclestone 1996), both Boud & Walker (1998) and Duffy (2007) point towards specific ethical concerns surrounding disclosure beyond the specific contexts being reflected on. As Duffy points out, to reflect properly is to open yourself to conflict, and this potential for conflict may be particularly difficult to manage in contexts that don't characteristically value reflection. As both Clegg & Bufton (2008) and Dyke et al. (2009) suggest, to reflect effectively the student must be engaged fully with the process, and as such they must see it as relevant to themselves. Why place yourself in a position of doubt and risk where it isn't commonly perceived as either enjoyable or necessary even in professional contexts, such as dentistry, where the practice is culturally embedded (Bush & Bissell 2008)?

### 3.5b. Recording Achievement

As we have found through the discussion of both the underlying motivations for PDP-as-policy, and reflection as a key process within that policy, two of the fundamental goals of the implementation have been the creation of educational transparency through a broader understanding of explicit educational outcomes that includes both product and process, and the transference of learning between different contexts (Assiter & Shaw 2003). These concepts have already been discussed in political terms through the related issues of personalization and objectification, and have in part been identified as aspects of the quality and accountability requirements lying at the heart of funding policy as a reflection of stakeholder pressure (Jackson 1999, 2001b). Inevitably, therefore, the ability to evidence student learning through the process of recording achievement has also found itself increasingly central to education in general, and PDP in particular as a route to greater student self-awareness (Stevenson 2006). Indeed, as Brown (2005) has predicted:

*“Tracking and recording student achievement will become increasingly important. So too will be the way in which such achievement is communicated one sector to another as students progress into work, training, further or higher education.”* (2005, p.2)

Written in such terms, it becomes clear that ‘recording achievement’ has not only been extended to meet the needs of a wider range of involved parties, but also in a form that relocates individual experience from past to future. Achievements can no longer be seen purely retrospectively but as part of a developmental process towards further and future accomplishments. This is very much in line with Jackson’s earlier comments regarding the need to shape Personal Development Planning around lifelong education, and it is through that lifelong agenda that reflection has become the dominant process in PDP-as-policy (Strivens & Ward 2010). Here, ‘recording achievement’ loses its fixed character and becomes *“part of a continuum of related policies and activities aimed at promoting an accurate record of personal*

*achievement and improving an individual's capacity to reflect upon and plan for their own development"* (Jackson 1999).

The ongoing storage of personal information is key to such a temporal relocation, and it is through the need for lifelong informational storage that the implementation of PDP as policy been aligned with HEFCE (2009) and JISC (2008) policies on technology within education, and the possible use of e-portfolios in particular.

Whilst portfolios of evidence have a long tradition within professional education, the general use of e-portfolios has occurred post-implementation of PDP-as-policy, and to some authors has been seen as a specific response to stakeholder demands (Miller & Morgaine 2009) and political pressure (Clarke 2009). Within an American context, many of those expectations have surrounded the concept of citizenship, with e-portfolios being used specifically to measure non-cognitive, socially desirable traits, often for entrance purposes (Yancey 2009). As such, in these instances E-portfolios have been implemented to specifically "*permit or support certain kinds of activities and preclude others*" (Yancey 2009, p.29). From this perspective, social skills are viewed as a particular style of competence (Skiba 2006).

Such intentions highlight the potential for e-portfolios to be seen as situated technologies, framed by the needs and purposes of those constructing them or shaping how they are constructed (Butler 2006, Roberts 2009). As such, there is no definitive form of portfolio other than to include processes such as reflection, evidencing and assessment (Moore & Parkes 2010, Stefani et al. 2007). For Butler (2006), this will always result in a tension between the student and the institution that ultimately denies the student ownership of their own reflective project, Smith & Tilema (2003) adding that when offered in a mandatory form they explicitly deny rather than promote effective reflection.

However, in literature, this is considered a minority view, with a majority identifying the role of e-portfolios very much in the same terms as PDP. They have been seen as supporting meta-cognition (Clarke 2009, Miller & Morgaine 2009),



reflection (Roberts 2009, Pellicione & Raison 2009), and greater learning depth (Butler 2006). For Brown (2002), e-portfolios help make tacit knowledge explicit, whilst for others, e-portfolios help synthesize knowledge from information (Skiba 2006, Clarke 2009, Joyce 2005). And yet it is perhaps their status as a process rather than product (Strivens & Ward 2010) that has offered e-portfolios their most tangible worth as repositories of personal competence and development on a lifelong level. Offering the natural bi-products of transference and employability, BECTA highlights their potential for e-portfolios to be flexible and relevant across time, arguing that:

*“With the emphasis on people as lifelong learners, different processes and outcomes will be more evident and useful at different stages of life and learning.”* (2007, p.8)

As such, they also retain the ability to offer a personal educational history, specific to the individual constructing them and irrelevant of institutional contexts (Strivens & Ward 2010, Roberts 2009). And yet, once again, there is a sense here that the discussion concerning e-portfolios remains conceptual and focused on its potentialities rather than actualities. In such a light, Yancey has commented on their reliance on pragmatic arguments (2009), while Reardon & Hartley, quoting research by Ayala, have commented that whilst many are advocating them as potential transformative technologies, the evidence for such a claim is lacking. As Reardon & Hartley comment:

*“Ayala (2006) noted that he reviewed three hundred articles and found that fewer than 5 percent provided any data from students about the impact of a portfolio program.”* (2007, p.83)

### **3.5c. Planning**

If, as asserted in Section 3.4a and again in 3.4b, reflection and recording achievement have been used to relocate the individual in an abstracted and theoretical future, so they become the key process drivers for planning as a means

of transferring the individual from an experienced present to a desired future. Whilst Davey & Lumsden (2010) suggest that planning is a secondary concern when associated with reflection, in terms of employability and lifelong learning the ability to predict future needs is crucial (Johnston 2006, East 2005). Naturally, the ability to relocate oneself in this manner is reliant on the ability of the individual student to bring clarity and realism to their own goals and ambitions (Clegg & Stevenson 2010). Thus, the ability to recognize areas for development and subsequently plan for its removal of developmental constraints has been central to both PDP as a policy and the NRA before it.

For Jackson (2001d), it is only through planning that reflection gains its future temporality and skills become transferable. While PDP highlights opportunities, it is only through planning that they become real. Certainly such a view again resonates well with professional models of CPD (Kumar 2010) and business models such as SWOT analysis (Cottrell 2003); indeed, Davey & Lumsden (2010) use SWOT analysis as a method of reflection. However, whilst Winters et al. (2008) have linked the ability to plan through reflection with improved self-regulation, Knight has equally raised concerns over the tendency for reflection and planning to establish a sense of contextual predictability that is essentially abstract (2001). They are concerns that have been supported by Bjork:

*“Our intuitions and introspections are clearly a poor guide to that understanding: for reasons that are not entirely clear, our intuitions about ourselves as learners are misguided and the trials and errors of everyday living and learning do not seem to inform or correct our intuitions in any substantial way.” (1999, p.454-55)*

In addition, Moir would take us back again to previous discussions concerning the political character of the initiative, promoting the idea that *“whilst there is a positive connotation with the notion of personal development, this is not simply about a neutral inner process in isolation but rather is related to wider political and policy related issues. Thus there is often a concern with the notion of individual self-direction and planning related to politico-economic aims such as employability and improving the nature of graduates as future employees in terms of national*

*competitiveness in the face of a globalised knowledge-driven economy*" (2009, p.133).

As Clegg (2010) adds, it is through the shaping of PDP processes within abstractions of time that political manoeuvring of individual narratives can take place. Similar concerns are raised by Brooks & Everett (2008) and by Anderson (2002), who questioned the value of planning as an educational tool when young people felt neither insecure nor out of control, planning being a fundamental part of their interviewees' lives. Once again we are further drawn back to the need to establish personal relevance, Brooks & Everett evidencing the unpredictable nature of student engagement with planning according to their own idiosyncratic pasts and motivations, an issue raised by several socio-cognitive psychologists (Schunk et al. 2000, Winters et al. 2008).

### 3.6. PDP and the ownership of learning

For many practitioners, PDP and its associated processes have become valuable learning tools. Monks et al. (2006) found that it promoted engagement and motivation in their business students, Turner (2007) at the University of Ulster found that it supported employability, and boundary management through reflection, whilst Rigopoulou & Kehagas (2008), adopting a business studies perspective, have used it to empower students to view their development as a matter of self-promotion and selling beyond their academic boundaries. However, when critiquing PDP as an educational intervention it is difficult to avoid the constructivist nature that has been offered as an essential part of the implementation's character. The 'situatedness' of practice has been shown to be a dominant theme within the conceptualization and application surrounding its implementation, but through this it has become framed within a set of inherent contradictions and inconsistencies. Philosophies have been offered that deny rationalist meta-narratives and combine them with psychological models that are both meta-narrative in form and categorically rationalist. In addition, references to socio-cognitive theories of meta-cognition and self-regulated learning have been offered as a route to greater autonomy and yet through their own arguments may deny autonomy in favour of a sense of agency that carries with it a strong sense of social preference. Authors have sought to free the potential of individuals and yet then define their potential within specific models of market expectation and employability, extensively incorporating management models of knowledge production and prescriptive human resource psychology. Finally, authors have been shown to discuss the right of the student to choose and own the processes offered while simultaneously seeking to embed and assess them (Atlay 2009) in ways that potentially deny choice and ownership.

Once again we return to tension that Sartre highlighted within the freedom to choose and the social forces that can act to constrain those choices. References to Foucault in the last section are useful here in that they framed community action within a particular context of power. In this instance, it is the particular combination of community and transparency that have driven some authors to suggest an explicitly political purpose to the use of PDP processes such as reflection to promote

particular social expectations (Digid 2005, Cohen & Prusak 2001). Communities drive consensus and it is through this sense of cohesion that individuals become obligated to the social context within which they live, the domination of their discourse being strengthened by the superficial control of the themes and terms on which consensus was originally built (Bernstein 1996). As such, as Brookes & Everett (2008) suggest that individual choice becomes constrained by their identification with the expectations that are shaped socio-politically.

Such a point may gain credibility through the publication in PDPUK of an article by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in which Taguma (2005) has spoken specifically about the role of PDP within the promotion of lifelong learning as a social capital model, and the role of minority leaders within the CRA and PDPUK to shape national policy agendas. Here, lifelong learning as an aspect of personal development becomes an explicitly political concern (Webster & Carmichael 2008), the significance of which demands greater external regulation to cohere PDP practices to strategic policy (Milner & McNair 2009).

Central to such concerns is the issue of external objectification, the subjective self being driven towards demands that are set by others that hold power over them. Here, transparency and information become symbols of power, through which we become merely objectified, and de-contextualized databases of competencies that are judged to be of value only by those agencies that have access to them (Tsoukas 1997). We thus become defined by information and are subsequently controlled by it, and its processes of construction. Ultimately the demands placed on us by objectification are ones of constraint, that we never reveal ourselves as information in entirety but only as a form of alignment with stakeholder and organizational aspirations (Stathern 2000).

So, central to transparency may lie the ability of the individual in question to accept the processes of objectification and externalization (Fendler 1998, Kumar 2007), self-worth becoming defined by competence in that competences express all that is valuable (Simons & Masschelin 2008). Here, the student is repositioned socially and economically (Shutkin 1998), regulation becoming introjected at a

micro-level and thus driving self-development towards self-surveillance (Gore 1998). In essence, through the rationalization and objectification of self that is inherent within certain models of PDP, governments may no longer be seeking to rule over us but through us (Simons & Masschelin 2008). Through it we may become entwined within capitalism, *“self-mobilization refer[ing] not only to the responsibility of the entrepreneurial self to mobilize its human capital, but also to the responsibility to capitalize one’s life in such a way that it has economic value”* (Johannesson 1998, p.411).

Similarly, lecturing staff may also become entrenched within the concept of nurturing human capital, Popkewitz (1991) commenting on the growing tendency for staff to define the quality of theory through its practical usability alone. Here, the students themselves become objectified not only by potential employers, but staff as their representatives. However, Marshall has raised concerns regarding an unfortunate dynamic within all such models that align themselves to the knowledge economy through social engineering as constrained by information, in that they are generally based on the assumption that students will willingly participate (Marshall 2008). He further comments on its manipulative nature and its lack of ethical intent, adding that:

*“The knowledge economy promotes an epistemological logic that overrides ethics and creates a consumerist model of the individual rather than one who is able to choose and act freely.”* (2008, p.150)

It is an argument that academically splits the modernist liberal from the post-modern neoliberal through its denial of autonomy and the right to choose. Individual empowerment shifts from the individual to the social in a particular form, from the internal to the external, and through this a model of education is created in which humanism and economics are merged within a model of human capital as demanded by knowledge brokers (Braun 1990).

For writers such as Kolb (1984), this is our natural state, commenting that our *“primary adaptive specialization lies not in some particular physical form or skill or fit*

*in an ecological niche, but rather in identification with the process of adaptation itself — in the process of learning. We are thus the learning species, and our survival depends on our ability to adapt not only in the reactive sense of fitting into the physical and social world but in the proactive sense of creating and shaping those worlds.”* (1984, p.1)

However, to discuss adaptation at a species level, as to discuss society at an organizational level, is to deny the systems of political and economic power that reside within them. Adaptation is offered in a neutral and collective form that hides the imbalances between the driving minority and the subordinate majority. Indeed, Foucault warns us against such concepts of evolution that seek to justify the passive normalization of individuals in this way, claiming that they ultimately categorize the individual as insignificant. As he further describes:

*“So long as the posing of the question of power [is] kept subordinate to the economic instance and the system of interests which it served, there [is] a tendency to regard these problems as of small importance.”* (1983, p.116)

The question being offered therefore refers to a possible interpretation of PDP as a neo-liberal technology, as a process of individual minimization in order to maximize a perceived social good, or a minority good if the equality between corporate, social and individual benefit aren't upheld. This is an important point in that once the political and moral grounds within PDP become explicit then by nature it also becomes contestable as a political and moral concern. As Coulby & Jones (1995) suggest, such a position may simply reflect a state of confusion that education finds itself in regarding the applications of modernism and post-modernism, but it would seem dangerous to assume that the two can easily sit together within a single model.

Much could be made of a pragmatic shift in educational policy-making, and a focus on practice as a way of controlling such differences; however, the argument may fail to recognize that even pragmatism reflects value statements. Mechanisms and policies cannot be argued to be neutral in their goal outcomes but must be

effective and useful in achieving something in particular. As Moir remarks, if PDP is essentially action-orientated it also implies an inherent question of '*action orientated towards what?*' (2009, p. 132). As Broadfoot notes, for liberals and neo-liberals, modernists and post-modernists, differences in eventual goal states would have to be reflected in different processes and systems of assessment. Subsequently, a question must surely be raised over the ability of the word 'situated' to unify what is potentially an intellectually, politically and philosophically incoherent, and therefore contestable, policy.



### 3.7. Moving Forward

Perhaps, as suggested by Jackson, theory and evidence remain a secondary concern to the pragmatic application of the beliefs that reflection, recording and planning are positive educational processes in whatever form they are applied. Through the socially driven acceptance of socio-cognitive psychology, and the alignment of personal learning with overtly political agendas such as employability, PDP processes cannot perhaps escape their inherently political nature. Where one member of staff may see cognitive transparency as an effective route for highlighting a personal or skills deficiency (Fry et al. 2002), another may see it as a form of social surveillance driven by the need to align learning to external demands (Stathern 2000). Where one sees personal autonomy and responsibility as a route towards greater self-confidence (Quinton & Smallbone 2008), another may visualize it as the state seeking to deny the negative consequences of its own actions or indeed its own responsibility for those actions (Moir 2009). Planning may support self-regulation (Haigh 2008, p.58) or establish artificial social norms (Sweetman 2003) within an abstracted temporal framework (Araujo 2005); life-long learning may ensure continued employability through the promotion of personal responsibility (Huntingdon & Moss 2004) or constrain individuals within an externalized, and often minority set of ideals and expectations (Coffield 1999); PDP itself may empower and motivate the individual (Jackson & Ward 2004) or constrain them within standardized social identities through the enforcement of socially desirable norms (Edwards 2002). Ultimately, whilst evidential support remains lacking (Rigopoulou & Kehagias 2008), perceptions of PDP may inevitably remain firmly entrenched within the educational, political and ontological views of the individual either studying or applying it.

Broadening the argument, widening participation has also been mentioned (Bowen et al. 2005, Buckley 2008, Haigh 2008), but widening participation is not a singular concept and as with PDP itself can be shaped explicitly by the underlying 'for-what-purpose' that accompanies it. Just as was revealed through the discussion of the preceding and influential NRA, is it about liberal, humanistic development, or is it about neo-liberal marketization? Both positions are possible but the discussion

isn't entered into and subsequently the debate is negated, lost in the invisible aspect of the transparent (Thorne & Kouzmin 2006). It is a point that takes us all the way back to Broadfoot's statements regarding the issue of balancing process with outcome and the educational agendas that each effectively hides. As has been suggested, it is difficult to avoid the power dimension of processes that identify preferred attributes and then effectively make them outcomes through transparency and assessment.

Beliefs, in this context, are always contentious and contestable, forming as they do ideologies that deny their own ability to normalize (Rosenow 1973, Kuhn 2008). As ideologies they also potentially become self-maintaining and defensive, rejecting evidence and theories that fail to support their underlying goals (Griffin 1998). They guide interpretation towards a single view even where numerous potential interpretations exist. As such, ideologies effectively become modern rather than post-modern through their efforts to control the individual towards those proposing them (Lyotard 1983). For Hugman, this is the inevitable outcome of post-modern thought and its failure to recognize Nietzsche's warning concerning the relativistic 'will to power' and "*the assertion of one's own will over those of others*" (2001, p.331).

Perhaps, ultimately, what this contextualization process has most clearly shown is that the implementation process has rarely centred on the student-as-individual. Even when framed within personalized learning outcome, expectations remain under the jurisdiction of staff, and as such personal learning is inevitably driven towards learning goals that may be congruent with or alien to the individual student and their particular experiences, expectations and motivations. As Peters has commented:

*"Higher Education (HE) policy on implementing PDP implied that students would be grateful recipients of whatever system an institution provided. Yet experienced practitioners [have] consistently reported a wide variety of responses, ranging from creative engagement, through compliance, to active resistance."* (2006, p.7)

In response, Peters (2006) has further suggested that the next step in research should establish a greater understanding of the intentions and motivations of students, particularly in an ever-widening learning context regarding age, gender and culture. Student perceptions (Peters 2006) and intentions (Mickelwight 2006) should be given equality with those of staff in both research and practice. It has been this goal that has effectively shaped this study, student motivations and experiences being offered as a central driver to actual engagement. The application of self-regulation theory challenges the community to question their members' individual assumptions regarding student motivations to learn and instead seek congruence with those individual motivations in actuality. As such, the study becomes centred on the theoretical positions of both Sartre and constructivist psychology, joined within the recognition of the concrete and active student as a driver of their own personal learning and self-development, rather than a simple conduit for social assumption and expectation. Here, PDP becomes an aspect of the concrete individual as a whole, the ability of the relevant processes and intentions of specific institutional departments to create change being seen in terms of their relationship with the holistic student.

Furthermore, drawing on such a discussion reinforces the nature of the Conceptual Review itself as valid, the situated nature of practice denying the reader the ability to legitimately compare individual research findings where the ontological and political context underpinning the research context have not been explicitly declared. Equally, where practice is fundamentally situated then case study becomes an appropriate research methodology, a thorough understanding of the research context being required for any explorations of changes formed within that particular context.

## **Section 4: Study Findings**

### **4.1. The Institution**

As has become clear from the contextualization process carried out in the previous section, whilst the adoption of the Progress File, and with it PDP, was agreed at a sector level, it remained a policy that would be fluid according to the particular institutional context within which it would be applied. Decisions at this level would therefore act to influence how staff would react to the implementation of PDP, and subsequently how students would experience and use it.

It is the aim of this section to examine the manner in which PDP was conceptualized within the context of this study, and how that conceptualization was interpreted and acted on by staff members. This will involve an analysis of both institutional literature and staff interviews in order to identify key policy drivers to the implementation and the staff response to those. In order to maintain contextual and interviewee confidentiality, full referencing for policy documentation will be withheld, whilst all interviewee names will be altered or codified where appropriate.

As already noted in Section Three, 15 members of staff were invited to interview as representatives of both themselves as employees of the institution and the individual departments within which their work was bound. Due to concerns with cohort morbidity this number exceeded the number of student cohorts that have been examined in detail in the following section, but the additional interviews offered valuable information regarding staff attitudes towards PDP and particularly their experiences of PDP as an institution-wide implementation. The findings from these interviews will be used to discuss policy within this section, but then also be used in the following discussion of the student experience to link those experiences to the contexts within which they were shaped. It should be noted that due to the time period between the implementation of PDP and the construction of this analysis, many of the staff members that had been involved with the implementation were no longer available for comment but a sufficiently wide range

of staff interviews have been drawn together to retain the validity, as it has been through the attitudes and interpretations of staff that the innovation has actually taken form.

In line with Braun & Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis, the aim of this process was to obtain a set of common areas of focus, or themes, through which practitioner attitudes towards the implementation of PDP could be described and discussed. These could then be linked to the interactive space that exists between both staff and their governing institution, and staff and their students. By avoiding the use of an underlying theory, the method focuses on the experiences and ideas of the individual and thus enables a contextual construction that remains grounded in the interview data alone, albeit it with an underpinning existential nuance.

As Braun & Clarke suggest, the processes of thematic identification and categorization are not easy, individual themes often proving complex and interactive (2006, p.82). Whilst thematic analysis utilizes a phenomenological epistemology (2006, p.81), the existential foundation further complicates the matter in that it limits the degree to which individual similarities can be viewed as coherent themes across groups. It is for this reason that those themes identified from the entire range of completed interviews could be viewed as general, but their ability to cohere the discussion into accessible and effective meaning units remains. Here, through a process of continued codification and thematic construction PDP practice becomes framed as a response to socio-economic and institutional expectations, a driver of academic and professional socialization, a method of managing and evidencing student learning, and a way of increasing student responsibility for their own personal and academic development. Naturally, within each primary theme will sit a wide collection of sub-themes and often these will be seen as overlapping according to the different contexts in which they are being viewed. Employability, for instance, could be viewed as a primary theme because it potentially appears in each major category; however, it is viewed differently in each and therefore treated as a secondary theme. The relevance of these different contexts will be discussed more fully when expressed as individual exemplars of experience, attitude and practice both within this section and those that will follow.

The institution in question is located in a small city in England. Its educational origins can be traced back to post-war professional training, its extension into higher education not taking place until the 1970s. Full university status was gained in the early years of the twenty-first century, but its vocational foundations remain an explicit aspect of its overall educational character. At the start of the PDP implementation process in 1999-2000 the student cohort was split almost equally between courses offering vocational degrees and those offering BA/BSc modular qualifications (2050 / 2200). In 2010-11, of the 10,000 registered students vocational/professional courses continued to represent a significant part of the institutional enrolment, with 33% of the overall cohort working within a single vocational/professional internal institute.

Although this work has placed considerable significance on the Dearing Report as both a driver of Personal Development Planning and a reflection of socio-political will, an emphasis on personal learning was building at the institution prior to the report's publication. Discussed explicitly by name in the 1992–2002 Teaching & Learning Strategy, the institution committed itself to a “diagnostic & preparatory framework” as part of teaching policy, a commitment referenced to Dearing, the HEQC Graduate Standards Programme, the QAA agenda for quality, and a subsequent focus on autonomy building and lifelong learning. A pilot date for the profiling tool was set for 1999 and it would be through this that the Progress File and Personal Development Planning would initially take form.

*“The [tool] seeks to embed profiling within normal student practice and academic life in relation to modules, personal tutoring and other learning experiences. The holistic, student-centred approach to personal development planning adopted means that it contains elements related to all areas of student experience at [the institution]. The emphasis is upon the educational benefits of personal development planning.”*

Links between the three concepts, the profiling tool, progress files and PDP were reiterated and reinforced within successive reports to the Academic Board between 2001–2003, at which point a looser approach to Personal Development

Planning was recommended in order to counter poor student comments and a problematic level of staff engagement. Potential concerns had first been identified through a pilot study for the tool in 1999 but despite a process of adaptation and development, these had not been fully overcome. The 1999 questionnaire study of 295 students across 7 subject fields had initially revealed that 44% of students within the pilot group were using the profiling tool; however, following its full introduction across courses within the UMS in 2001, further study identified an lack of student engagement driven at least in part by tutor concerns regarding the tool's cumbersome size. The tool took the form of a collection of formative, self-completion record sheets that covered 23 categories of learning skills across 4 competency levels. As such it was seen by a large percentage of those staff interviewed as too large and too time consuming:

*"There is a certain level of resentment from some staff, and maybe I fall into this category of thinking that we're going to build in PDP into this module but really I want to talk about (subject) and why should I give up half a session here and half a session there to talk about it."* (Richard)

By 2002/3, studies showed that only 28% of students felt that their tutors supported the use of the tool, with only 21% viewing it as of benefit to their learning. As one student explained:

*"I can see how PDP can be beneficial ... but the SQP seems to demand too much time from both myself and my tutors. In the first year a great deal of emphasis was placed on filling in the SQP, but it soon became clear that my personal tutor was not worried about filling it in and neither were my peers. So it has been left to gather dust."*

It was at this point that the support for the profiling tool appeared to falter through a lack of staff engagement, the institutional focus shifting more to the development of departmentally specific forms of PDP, a re-launch of the tutorial system in 2003/4 being seen as a key driver to the continued expansion of the progress file and PDP. Remarks in the 2003 Annual Report to the Learning &

Teaching Committee reveals a stronger push towards departmental specificity and systematic compliance building through *“the embedding of assessments based on PDP in subject programmes, the need for a proper audit of PDP activities, the need to clarify the role and responsibilities of the SQP/PDP reps and the need to remind HoDs that it is a departmental responsibility to make PDP work for their students.”*

As already discussed, the purpose of the aforementioned profiling tool was set down in the 1999–2002 Learning & Teaching Strategy in which the educational focus was set on the associated issues of lifelong learning, student autonomy and the *“aim to make practice explicit, systematic and coherent throughout the university college.”* Cohesion and coherence key themes within the institutions wish to support the student as an autonomous learner capable of working without institutional instruction, whilst also being capable of understanding and evidencing the learning that was taking place across such an extended period. As the report explained:

*“Autonomy in learning means that the learner is sufficiently sophisticated as a learner not to be reliant upon support from either teachers or structured learning tasks. If students are to be prepared to see learning as something they engage in beyond their period at college, then they must be provided with the skills and experience to operate independently of us.”*

Greater autonomy was seen as freeing the student from being reliant on their staff, whilst also preparing them for continued learning once outside of the higher education environment and the tutorial system was to be offered as the foundation to such an increase in personal responsibility. As such the institution committed itself to *“regular pastoral support for all students throughout their learning at the college, which will include a coherent and structured personal tutor programme that supports the development and presentation of a progress file.”*

By the 2002 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, these goals were being made more explicit, resource scarcity within the increasingly massified sector strengthening the need for learner independence, employability driving a greater focus on the explicit identification and development of cognitive and transferable



skills. As the report suggests, it was a major role of the progress file *“to support confidence, self-awareness and articulation of their achievements to employers.”* It was a direction that was to further support from the Student Union, who stated that they would *“support students in the personal development of skills and competencies outside of academic remit, encourage the use of the Progress Files... profile.”*

The period between the introduction of PDP at the institution and the context in which this study has taken place has seen an increasing focus on employability and entrepreneurship as key goals within its educational attitudes. As discussed in the 2007-9 Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy, the institution’s central aim became *“the development of strong employability, entrepreneurial and creative skills in our graduates,”* and in the subsequent 2007-12 Strategic Plan comments relating to PDP were restricted to the section titled ‘Supporting the Development of Employability, Enterprise and Entrepreneurship, and Community Involvement.’ As such the profiling tool, and with it the Progress File, was representative of a more widespread sector push for socio-political relevance, a point expanded on by Sheila, then employed to develop and implement the profiling tool, when discussing problems that surrounded its initial presentation to staff.

*“We still had the baggage of the enterprise in education strands, which was an incredibly powerful set of developments for higher education and reflected the Tories’ attempts to make higher education more business like. So we had the baggage and rhetoric of that. We had all the material about transferable skills which was again about trying to make higher education more focused on the needs of the economy and to make it more.”* (Sheila)

Such comments suggest not only a clear socio-economic relevance to the policy beyond holistic learning but also an underlying instrumentality to both the content and structure of teaching and learning at the institution. Drawing inspiration from active and published work on student-centred profiling, the tool’s original goals appeared to be linked to issues surrounding the growth of modular degrees and the potential for fragmentation that had resulted. As Gibbs had already suggested, profiling carried the potential to limit educational fragmentation by *“pulling together*

*otherwise disparate learning experiences*" (1995: p.65). As students were being asked to take greater responsibility for the construction of their degrees so profiling could *"encourage students to take responsibility for the construction of their own progression through undergraduate study by targeting the acquisition and development of skills and attributes practised in study for a... degree"* (Peters, Peterkin & Williams 2000, p.138).

It was an aspect of profiling that was of common interest of those staff within the UMS, which had been introduced in 1996. As one interviewee explained:

*"It's been forced on us with this modular scheme, not just in PDP but when I'm teaching I always try to bring in topics that I know they've been taught in other modules, so they understand the links and don't think that they can simply do one module and forget about it."* (Caroline)

In effect, PDP was seen as a way of preventing students from *"meandering through modules"* (Caroline), the tutorial system in particular *"getting students to collect their feedback, learn from what they're doing, thinking about how it fits in with where they want to go, thinking what skills they need to develop and making sure that they've chosen the right modules to allow them to achieve that."* (Caroline)

As suggested by Richard, PDP, and by implication the profiling tool itself, drives self-evaluation and, through that, modular choice shaped by a recognition of personal direction and an awareness of what was needed to achieve this.

*"I guess that this would then help them decide what modules to do next and so forth, and so it's reflective students trying to work out what they're good at, what it is they're less good at."* (Richard)

Whilst the potential benefits of PDP, and the profiling tool, had been recognized by many members of staff, this did not ensure active staff participation, resistance centring on the nature and format of the tool itself. As Sheila commented, the political origins of the approach remained a dominant feature.

*“Although there was a lot of consultation, it has to be said from 1997 to 1999, particularly about the skills list which was in there because people didn’t want to use a transferable skills list... they didn’t want to use what was then the QCA key skills list because they saw it as too ‘schoolsy’ and too strongly associated with the GNVQ’s and BTEC qualifications and their tick boxing of skills... I mean that there was a lot of discussion about what we should call them and we ended up calling them qualities because that got us away from the language of key skills and transferable skills, or attributes because some people thought that attributes could be changed whilst qualities were too ‘thatcherite’.” (Sheila)*

However, as discussed earlier, staff concerns were often more pragmatic than political, the tool being seen as too ‘cumbersome’, whilst for others the political arena was more internal than external. Early discussions surrounding the use of profiling tools had centred on professional models (see Assiter & Fenwick 1993); however, professional courses would prove resistant to attempts to alter practices that were seen as fundamental to the professional demands of their courses. As Cheryl explained:

*“Because we were already doing something of that ilk when the university took up the notions of PDP as a university wide thing, and this is prior to my time here, I believe it was argued strongly that we were already doing it and we didn’t want to join in to the university’s notions and discussions because we were meeting professional standards.” (Cheryl)*

For some the two positions did not sit in conflict with each other, and were too similar to drive a change in practice.

*“We do fall into line with UW regulations as well but it’s nonsense to ask students to do something twice. We are not saying that PDP is not for us it is and it’s fine but why do it twice. I don’t think that the differences are huge, it’s just format. I think that the principles fundamentally are very, very close.” (Claire)*

However, for Sheila the two models of PDP were fundamentally different, the institutional tool offering a far more generic and formative approach to learning development than those shaped by professional expectations. As she explained:

*“It was one of the things I was taken with at the start because I saw it as being related to, I suppose, humanistic ideals of what higher education is about, and it’s quite a traditional view of what higher education is about. So when you take that word out and replace it with professional you’re actually imposing a framework from outside, and in the worse case scenario you’re imposing on it the requirements of a professional body that this person has to fit... And when I bring up statistics about how many of their graduates end up in nursing or teaching in five years time, or in two years time, and therefore how well articulated their qualification is as a graduate as opposed to a teacher or a nurse, and then you can have some interesting discussions about the differences between personal and professional.”* (Sheila)

The institutional position therefore supported a generic form of graduateness and employability based on a lifelong model in which the careers of students would not be constrained within single professions, and yet professional departments would successfully resist the model based on their own individual needs. For Shirley, this was due to the historical significance of their department and the subsequent power that their cohort numbers provided them.

*“I believe it was argued strongly that we were already doing it and we didn’t want to join in to the university’s notions and discussions because we were meeting professional standards. Now I believe that (subject) took a similar stand and we were able to argue the stance because we are the lions’ share of the enrolments. They kind of backed off I think and let us do what we wanted.”* (Shirley)

Such resistance would prove prophetic, as in 2005 the direction through which PDP was implemented was altered to allow departments to shape their use of Progress Files and PDP to meet their individual disciplinary requirements as shaped within the QAA benchmark statement.

*“The decision was made that we would have these PDP Progress File guidelines across the institution, but that from now on it was up to the subjects to decide how they were going to support that. They could use the [profiling tool, but they didn’t have to, so this met I suppose the resistance that we had to the [tool] which was ‘well we can do it better than that, we don’t like those forms, we don’t want to use those documents’. We sort of turned round and said, well OK in that case, do it better than that and do it in a way that suits your subject... as long as you can show that at validation.” (Sheila)*

For Sheila, it was this moment that saw a drive towards a greater instrumentality within PDP as it became increasingly shaped by a range of political drivers within the sector. As such it was a period that changed the face of PDP at the institution.

*“I think one of the things about personal development planning is that it’s in its life it has been sold as the answer to a number of different strands as government policy has moved over the years. Those operating at a national level have been very good at positioning themselves in terms of saying, “well this is the answer to that problem”, and often I think that they’re right, but the problem of that approach is that it’s associated with different things at different stages. Some of them are not necessarily all that helpful to the cause because... when you’re selling PDP as a solution to a particular problem it narrows the focus, such as with employability, and then PDP just becomes associated with that. Back when PDP was first introduced at the institution, it was sold as the answer to transferable skills and making sure that they were in the curriculum... and I think that there were good elements to that because I think that a lot was done and a lot was achieved with the more explicit addressing of transferable skills, but ten years on people still talk about PDP as if it is just about skills and if it was an agenda that they didn’t like then PDP has been tarred with that brush and it’s very difficult to shake that.” (Sheila)*

In addition, Sheila raises concerns that the institution has also become blinded to different aspects of PDP that offer positive funding implications.

*"I don't feel that the university has grasped it as a possible solution to the concerns it has at the moment about retention and achievement, and again I would see investment in and engagement with students as individuals and their personal development as fundamental to getting them engaged with the university, and therefore keeping them here, and improving their achievement. It's in the words, personal development planning and recording achievement that those things should be going on, but at the moment PDP is not seen as the solution to that but is seen possibly as an awkward acronym that's got too much baggage to be proposed as the solution to that." (Sheila)*

For Sheila, therefore, PDP at the institution remains a diverse concept that promotes a considerable array of interpretations, and with those widely varying levels of engagement. However, she hopes that as long as students have to engage with the processes then the willingness of staff to fully participate beyond mere compliance loses significance. There are also signs that a more generic approach may yet become preferred as the modular scheme is abandoned in favour of courses in which staff members have more coherent and extended involvement. Many decisions regarding PDP at the institution have been made to avoid conflict with staff, and yet in doing so they may prevent the institution from effectively responding to what are seen by some as key educational demands. As Sheila explains:

*"I mean the current system still allows for quite a lot of choice in certain areas, apart from professional qualifications, and maybe we just got the balance wrong, we've gone too far towards choice and now we're moving back into the middle. It's not entirely prescriptive across the undergraduate scheme, but some prescription is valuable because it provides structure and scaffolding for the students... and so we can get less prescriptive as the years go on and offer more choice but often more within the subject than beyond the subject. That's sensible and is responding to customer requirements in terms of what the students want and what the professional bodies want. So it's difficult to say. The argument is that we're bringing, if we ever had the discussion at that principled level, that we are supporting students towards autonomy now, whereas before we were thrusting autonomy upon them*

*and they either coped or didn't in terms of making the appropriate choices. Now there's much less risk of the student not being able to make the right choice."*

What Sheila means by *'the right choice'* remains a significant question, here seemingly shaped by an alignment of personal and professional preference. Student decisions are not deemed appropriate until they cohere with staff and socio-political expectations, their ability to make those decisions 'correctly' not being revealed until aligned with those. It is a quotation that perhaps returns us to Arendt's view of institutional action as being persistently parental in nature and subsequently entrenched within the views of the dominant voice, here educational policy makers. However, in spite of a continuing rhetoric of possibility, be that professional, academic or socio-political, the willingness of staff to genuinely participate in the effective presentation of PDP is unclear. As Tabitha suggests, many staff have "*side stepped the responsibility of it because it's no longer central,*" the ability to disengage with PDP being empowered by an ever-decreasing level of discussion on the topic throughout the institution. As Nigel explains:

*"I mean I will be really honest here and say that I haven't got a clue of what the university policy towards PDP is. I could probably find it, but... no I don't know anything about it and I wouldn't know how that would translate at a student level."*  
(Nigel)

Meanwhile, some members of staff have proved openly cynical about the intentions underpinning the implementation of PDP. One interviewee saw it as merely "*... a whole new set of hoops that both students and staff have to jump through*" (Richard). For Richard, these were hoops that were not intrinsically directed at student learning but a route through which practitioners were being forced to reflect on their own practice and therefore make those practices open to assessment. PDP was therefore more an issue of quality than student benefit. In line with previous comments made from Norman Jackson, the two are not always seen as existing in conflict, Rebecca recognizing the connection between employability and university funding:

*“I think from the University’s perspective, from a selfish view from the University, yes we will want it to increase our students’ chances of getting a job because it makes our stats look better... we need to do more work on selling the benefits of PDP and for me I think that it comes hand in hand with employability, because for me that fits in with the universities strategic aims and a majority of the students aims. Yes they want to get their degree but usually they want to get that degree because they want that job.” (Rebecca)*

In conclusion, the implementation of PDP at this particular institution has been shown to be both fluid and variable; fluid in the agendas to which has been ascribed and variable according to the different ways in which different practitioners have, and continue to, apply it. The external political context has been recognized, and continues to impact on departmental policies, but often these have been redefined as internal issues of departmental autonomy and choice. Ultimately, the degree to which PDP has been given educational significance has depended on the external and internal departmental dynamics that shape each individual curriculum.

#### **4.2. Student Experiences**

The central focus of the previous section was PDP as an institutional tool to support student autonomy, and the manner in which that institution related to its implementation. The conclusion was reached that the institution set a policy context for PDP that was fluid according to the socio-economic and learning needs that it saw as of primary significance at any one time. In addition, it was also shown that the wishes of the institution were often mediated by needs and preferences of individual internal departments, often based around their particular professional and academic characters. Through the thematic analysis of a range of interviews, these variables were drawn into a set of key themes surrounding the implementation of PDP as a response to socio-economic and institutional expectations, a driver of academic and professional socialization, a method of managing and evidencing student learning, and way of increasing student responsibility for their own personal and academic advancement.



The aim of that discussion was to contextualize the learner experience within the institution's outlook on PDP, whilst also touching upon the role of staff attitudes as a powerful interpretive filter to the student experience of that position. In this section, the student will become the key point of focus, both in terms of their individual levels of developmental change during the study period, the individual statistical data for which can be found in Appendix 8.2, and the manner in which their experiences of PDP influenced their developmental changes.

As stated in the methodology section, the qualitative analysis aspect of the study has been founded on Giorgio's existential phenomenological method (Giorgio 1975). The method views experience, and with that learning and development, as holistic concern. It *"cannot be reduced to a specific content, but... must be understood in terms of the biography or history of the individual"* (Giorgio 1975, p. 97). As such, PDP can only ever be seen as a particular part of that learning and development, its range of influence being defined by its relationship with each individual's biography and the attitudes, motivations and expectations that each biography brings with it. For Giorgio, research must show a sense of *"fidelity to the phenomenon as it is lived,"* claiming that any dimension of the research must be *"understood within the lived context of the one living through the situation"* (1975, p.99). Individuals are not passive but active and intentional, and as such the research process must seek to *"capture the nature of a being who is also trying to understand and interpret his/her world, as opposed to the beings one attempts to capture in natural science research, which are inanimate and non-conscious"* (Zayed 2008, p.555). Here the statistics may indicate that change has taken place but not the experienced nature or meaning of that change, and as such quantitative data becomes essentially qualitative through interpretation. As such, full quantitative scores will be given in tabular form in the Appendices but only referred to within the analysis section when connected to the relevant individual lived experiences as reported.

Through the analytical process an attempt is made, albeit only partial due to a theorized inaccessibility of 'self' to 'self', to identify through themes what has changed, how it has changed and how that change has been revealed. This process is

descriptive, idiographic, holistic, immediate and intrinsically mediated within the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, existentialists such as Giorgo denying the ability of the researcher to bracket 'self' from the process. Giorgo defined this as '*double context*' (1975, p.99).

As part of the context building process that characterizes this study, the experiences of each individual in relation to both personal development and PDP will be contextualized within the cohorts to which they belong, and the practices, attitudes and expectations of those members of staff that have defined their relevant educational contexts. These factors will then be discussed through their relationship to the individual "*life-worlds*" (1975, p.100) of each student, data being discussed within the frame of cohort cases. Whilst Giorgo's method is founded on an existential philosophy, it allows for the construction of generalized themes as a stage of the analysis and it is through these themes that different experiences can superficially be compared.

### **4.3. Cohort A**

#### **4.3a. PDP: Module Character**

Cohort A is drawn from first year, undergraduate students studying a traditional academic science. The experiences of these students therefore fit within Clegg & Bradley's (2006a) academic model, course content, and with it PDP, being framed within discipline-specific skills as defined by QAA benchmarks. The nature of the degree is therefore fundamental to the interpretation of development and, even where transference and trans-disciplinary awareness is being sought, the primary focus remains on the specific characteristics of the academic discipline in question.

PDP processes have in this instance been designed to help the student to evaluate themselves against discipline benchmark statements, build a portfolio of evidence regarding their attainment, and construct an appropriate CV from them. The process is initiated in induction week through lectures that highlight both the processes being applied and the reasons for their application. Skills are then mapped against module outcomes and made explicit in course literature. In the course literature these skills are categorized in accordance with specific headings: mental qualities, intellectual skills, practical skills, numeracy & ITC, interpersonal skills, and self-management & professional development. Within this mapping matrix of 25 skills, 19 are subject specific, 3 relate to interpersonal 'soft' skills, and a further 3 to personal development, a breakdown that strongly reflects the prioritization of discipline specific skills as characteristic of the benchmark statements.

Participation in PDP is explicit and enforced, being supported by mandatory modules and tutorials, two of each being demanded in both semesters in the first year. Tutorial contact is evidenced through confirmatory slips that require tutor signatures as evidence of attendance, and tutorial content is then shaped within discussions of skills attainment, goal setting and assessment feedback. These slips are then added to the portfolio as evidence of skills attainment, the final portfolio of evidence then being evaluated within a capstone module in the final year, although not formally assessed. The goal of the capstone module is to enable the students to:

- Review their portfolio of evidence
- Reflect on the knowledge and skills that they have gained, and the ways in which those can be applied
- Prepare a CV
- Undertake a simulated interview
- Consider issues that may arise from those.

#### **4.3b. Cohort A Staff Perspectives (Barbara & Caroline)**

Two members of staff, hereafter to be known as Barbara and Caroline, were interviewed for the purposes of establishing a greater contextual understanding of the PDP provision within the course. Unlike a majority of the courses that will be discussed within this report, both staff members hold a long-standing engagement with the growth of Personal Development Planning, both within the institution and within community of practice events where attitudes and practice can be compared and discussed. Both therefore see themselves as part of the community of practice surrounding the introduction of PDP within higher education and yet both have struggled with that membership and the linguistic and conceptual confusion that they each see as characteristic of it. Indeed, for Caroline, faced with such a confused theoretical field and *'befuddled'* by the diversity of ideas and perspectives available on PDP, withdrawal from community engagement became fundamental to departmental consensus building. As they explained:

*"When we started I checked out loads of internet sites and got completely befuddled by it all. Then you speak to other people and it just gets worse and worse, but when we were working together within the department then it got a bit clearer because we felt that we were tailoring it to ourselves... and so it felt a lot easier and we didn't feel that we needed the outside support."*

In essence, for Caroline, if PDP was to be seen as congruent with the discipline, or rather those within the department representing it, then it had to take on a more critical and evaluative form. However, this was not the case for Barbara, who saw

PDP as a matter of 'graduateness'. For Barbara, the primary focus of PDP should lie less within subject specific skills, and more with the transferability of those skills to other contexts beyond the discipline itself:

*"I mean the students are given a list at the start of each module to tell them which skills are being covered and the course as a whole is designed to cover five or six skills that we knew any graduate with any set of modules would need to come up with. Now those are what we would call transferable skills because they are problem solving, being able to apply information from one context to another... so they are the more broadly 'graduate' skills."*

Here, PDP becomes a method of 'making-explicit', formalizing existing practices within a developmental frame (Calabro 2005), but equally it is through this point that Barbara & Caroline can be seen as indicative of the kind of variables that actively exist within the teaching staff as a whole. For Barbara, PDP processes such as reflection were holistic and adaptive, but for Caroline they were critically discipline-specific, objective and scientific.

Employability proved a similar area of disagreement. For Barbara, the integration of PDP with careers advice has been a crucial aspect of PDP presentation and yet to Caroline, unsure of what employers actually want, the links between discipline-specific skills and employability remains more tenuous, almost accidental:

*"Well our PDP skills are really practically based things, so they might be learning how to use certain types of apparatus so that when they go for jobs they already have those abilities there."*

To Barbara employability is a crucial aspect of PDP, but to Caroline it remains a possible addition to academic knowledge. To Barbara PDP engages with an innovative learning cycle, to Caroline it merely replicates scientific academic practice. In reference to Clegg & Bradley (2006a), to one it is framed by introspective internalization, to the other it is both projective and external.

Ultimately, however, it is Barbara that has led the formal introduction of PDP within the department and continues to drive its evolution within the staff team. It is a point that they recognize as influential through its subsequent reflection of self. As they comment:

*“I was responsible for putting that policy together so I probably coloured the policy partly by the way I see it, so it probably is personal to me... I’m always doing PDP in both a conscious and subconscious way cause I’m planning my career and I’m thinking about what I’m doing and I’m learning from my experience so in a way I’m doing [PDP].”*

Subsequently, whilst they view internal staff differences as playing a valuable role within the continual evolution of PDP within the department, they also acknowledge that some members of staff have disengaged from the policy in its current form. For Caroline, staff inconsistency remains a fundamental problem within the presentation and supervision of PDP. For instance, when discussing the significance of the tutorial system within the departments PDP provision, both highlight a historical struggle to ensure consistent staff/student contact. For both it is ultimately the tutor that is seen as driving student learning process, from understanding feedback to establishing outcomes and becoming reflective, and yet the final character of that driving force remains unpredictable. Referring to the process of collecting attendance forms to ensure student engagement with their tutors, and through that PDP processes and outcomes, Barbara comments:

*“I do wonder sometimes what goes on in these personal tutorials. Some people do it by the book and some people don’t even open the book.”*

Inconsistency within the presentation of PDP was therefore seen as inevitable within such a diverse team of academic practitioners; however, within this department it was the University Modular Scheme (UMS) that gave them greatest concern, Caroline being most forthright regarding the potential for PDP to mitigate problems caused by using the UMS:

*“So they might be a bit more focused at the end of it rather than just meandering through modules... it all ties in with our modular scheme really because they haven’t got a set path through... it’s a disadvantage of the modular scheme really so we can help pull everything in, in that way.”*

Inherent within their thinking was an explicit need to retain control of the learning process, to direct students towards outcome choices that are congruent with the discipline being studied. The mandatory nature of the implementation can be seen as a reflection of this, and the forced nature of the policy was evident in the thoughts of both practitioners. Enforcement is seen as necessary because it is seen as validating the presence of PDP in the curriculum, even though they accept that it potentially promotes disengagement. Basing their arguments on previous failures to establish the worth of PDP processes, Barbara hopes that enforced participation will drive authentic engagement once the benefits of the system have been realized. They are not sure that such a “*stick approach*” will work, but the effort remains a priority and ensuring tutorial attendance is a primary concern:

*“We build it in so that they can’t escape it... because you can always do all of these wonderful things through the personal tutorial system but they all fall by the wayside because the students don’t come... they have to go to those tutorials and once you’ve got them in here then you can do the PDP because you’ve got them trapped.”*

#### **4.3c. Student Experiences: Ann (24yrs)**

Feeling as though she couldn’t afford to study for a degree, Ann had joined a bank straight from school. At that time she had considered the position a temporary one; however, three years had now passed and she was feeling increasingly negative about her personal position. Over those three years she had come to realize that the work no longer suited her personal goals regarding family and home and that her only course of action lay in returning to academic study. Remaining at the bank was no longer seen as a valid option in that it was acting to block her ability to move

towards a chosen life-path. Where she didn't originally feel as though she could afford not to work, she had now realized that the decision to work from school had brought her little actual benefit. As such, any perceived risks attached to attending university were negated by their own lack of choice. Talking of their options, Ann commented:

*"With what I'm doing there's just no way, it just couldn't happen... so if I go to university I'm putting everything I expected on hold, so what if it didn't work what have I sacrificed?"*

Ann's decision to join the bank was now seen as an error and as such her confidence in her ability to plan and make decisions was particularly fragile. Ignoring parental expectations of continuing in education, she had joined the bank with little forethought and now carried with her an explicit acceptance that her current decisions could also be flawed. This was reflected in Ann's almost fatalistic assumption that she would need to take the first year twice in order to finalize her long-term study plans.

*"I fully intended to re-take the first year if I had to, because I wouldn't mind taking an extra year because it's taken me this long to get to university what's another twelve months?"*

What was significant for Ann was that she had made a decision and acted upon it, action being deemed more significant than the direction of that action. Making decisions made her feel more comfortable about her self, and by accepting the likelihood of failure she limited the amount of pressure that she could place herself under:

*"I've always had an attitude like you've always got to try something, and I convinced myself that if I dropped out it wouldn't be the end of the world as it would be more of a failure not to try than to try and then realize that it wasn't right."*

As with her job, Ann had spent little time thinking about where the decision would lead her. Having enjoyed the subject at school she viewed it as offering a



future career but with little conviction as to what that would be. Teaching science was mentioned but again without conviction. Employability was important to her but she had no clear idea of what that meant.

Psychologically, what Ann brought with her was a strong sense of self-efficacy (34) and a positive sense of Perceived Personal Control (+1). Central to these was a solid belief in her own abilities to communicate with others (+1.4), but this fell across the year (+0.6) as her ability to establish and maintain personal relationships was brought into question as she struggled to make new friends. Ann viewed a need to be friends with everyone as part of her personality but this had left her unable to cohere within a single group and she had failed to form a sense of belonging on the course. Age was offered as a fundamental dimension of this difficulty. As Ann explained, *“it would be easier to be thirty and doing it or eighteen because at my age I’m not really young enough to be wanting to go drinking but then I’m not old enough to be settled.”*

Large lecture groups also added to this lack of belonging as they minimized meaningful personal contact. This left her feeling like a *“number on the course”* and challenged her initial sense of interpersonal control. References to feeling like a number would return later when talking about the tutor system and the need to feel fully engaged with the members of staff on the course. It was a sense of isolation that was exacerbated through her initial decision to start on two courses with the intention to drop one once she had a clearer picture of her future path. Unable to unify with a single cohort, her ability to establish a sense of group belonging and loyalty was further challenged:

*“I’m very chatty, very sociable, very friendly but at university that’s been a downside because I chat with everyone and I don’t belong to a certain group. I don’t live in halls and I started doing two subjects. I’ve not had a secure group at university.”*

Finally, Ann’s loyalty to her partner’s sporting interests and existing circle of friends further limited her ability to mix outside of study hours and again this had

left her feeling disappointed by her failure to engage fully with the institution's culture. Part of this issue was identified as a matter of personal choice, once again reinforcing doubts over her ability to make effective decisions:

*"It was a shame because I wanted to come to university and I wanted to soak up everything... I felt disappointed but then I thought come on get realistic because you're not on the same page as some of the people and you're not going to want to do the same thing... I mean I could have got more involved so I obviously didn't want it too much."*

Through references to Ann's sociality we are drawn to a consistent theme within the interview, that being the impact of her personality on her ability to study, perceiving herself as "complex", prone to procrastination and academically insecure. Although making decisions was seen as reflecting an ability to act in order to take charge of her life, Ann didn't seem confident in the efficacy of the actions that followed. Yes, she was sufficiently confident in her decisions to resist the opinions of others, she had already refused to accept staff advice to "jump ship" from one of the courses, but she did not necessarily believe that her decisions would actually bring her the outcomes she desired:

*"Yes... I mean I've got a very complex mind because being twenty-four you just think well okay I've got three years of study. Everyone seems to be doing three years so if I want to get something else then I'll at least have to put in four or five years."*

Furthermore, by explicitly linking her perceived inability to both make decisions and work academically to the "complexity" of her personality, she consistently denied herself the ability to change. Therefore, whilst Ann's scores on personality malleability revealed a growing belief that the environment shaped personality (6 > 8), her attitudes to both herself and her studies seemed to more accurately reflect a growing belief in the non-malleability of intelligence (10 > 6), intelligence being the aspect of her "complexity" that she felt most insecure in. When asked directly about her attitudes to intelligence, Ann commented once again on its environmental fluidity; however, when talking about her experiences on the

course she consistently portrayed these as largely inflexible.

For example, the most repeatedly discussed expression of Ann's 'complexity' was her stated sense of disorganization, with particular reference to her efforts to simultaneously balance work and study. Indeed, this was seen as the primary influence on her poor scores across the year, poor time management and the demands of work being seen as the main reasons for her own lack of effort with her studies.

Once again, Ann had expressed a fatalistic view of her personality and the ways in which her personality has impacted on her work. It was a view that was further reinforced when discussing the work that she had completed in her PDP sessions. For instance, following a piece of personality work Ann had become aware of the benefits of structure to their study. Together with her colleagues, she completed a timetabling task to reinforce that awareness but by viewing her disorganization as part of her personality, to Ann it remained unchangeable and she therefore refused to make any effort to change it:

*"It's simple really, I know I'm not an organizer and I know that I should do a timetable but it's not my personality so I don't bother."*

Subsequently, whilst the functional connections between PDP and employability were being recognized through the interview process it was still not perceived as useful in areas that Ann saw as fixed. PDP could make her confident in running 'PowerPoint' presentations and evidence that skill, but it couldn't simplify her perceptions of personal complexity and the limits that her complexity applied to her potential to learn.

Ann also struggled with the evidencing process used within the PDP process. In order to evidence activity and learning, students were asked to take slips of paper to their tutors for signing, slips which would then be stored in a folder and act as evidence of skills building through the course. Often, the act of getting skills slips signed by tutors was necessary to complete an assignment; however, due to her lack of awareness regarding the purpose of the process beyond module completion, Ann

rarely linked the different skills together in terms of unified and holistic development. Academically, each part of PDP was perceived as existing in isolation from the others and the links between them remained unclear. Only areas such as assignment feedback were regularly commented on, and subsequently, as Ann explained, *“because PDP wasn’t really positioned we didn’t really link the dots.”*

Reflection was viewed in a similar manner. Ann recalled working with reflection but that work came at the very end of the year and as such she felt that it was linked to only one particular assignment rather than the course in general. Furthermore, she retained the idea that because their course was a science then reflection was incongruent with the goals and methods of the subject.

As a functional tool, aspects of PDP were seen as congruent with the goals that Ann carried into her studies, in particular academic insecurity and employability. However, she did not define the value of PDP in either of these terms but rather as a possible solution to the lack of personal belonging that she had already discussed. In this instance, PDP had been constructed through the tutor system and for Ann the primary role of PDP was therefore to strengthen her relationship with her tutor. When introducing the topic of the interview, Ann explained that this was the only real benefit that she saw in PDP. However, in her experience, whilst it offered her a route for personal discussions with someone in moments of struggle, due to the role of slip signing within the system much of their contact was limited to simple form filling and signing to ensure module completion:

*“So, it’s helped but in some ways it’s quite an inconvenience because you have to get those meetings just to pass the course and you think ‘well I’ve got nothing to talk about’. You have to find someone just to sign the form to pass and so a lot of people find it really annoying.”*

In addition, Ann doubted whether anything meaningful could come from the ten-minute time slots that they were given for tutorials, the functional route being seen as the inevitable consequence of such a limited timeframe. In reference to the time constraints of the tutor system, Ann remarked that *“you’re only assigned ten*

*minute slots with them [tutors], if that, so if you've got anything that you need help with then there just isn't time. I mean, what we've done today and focus on problems they may have with their skills."*

Furthermore, Ann also questioned the inconsistency of staff in their attitudes towards PDP. Her initial lecturer had been very enthusiastic about the value of PDP processes in education, but at her first tutor meeting the PDP forms were presented as trivial and she knew that people were being passed by tutors even where there hadn't been any contact. Ann remained confused by the process and the role of the tutors in that process:

*"Even this semester actually, when we'd done a certain statistic test and carried out a certain experiment in one of the modules that we had to get signed to show, and we thought that we had to hand it in but when we went to hand it in she said no it's just for your files to show that you've done it, and we all looked confused."*

Ultimately, whilst Ann had recognized the functional value of PDP on the course, her interest appeared constrained to those areas that she saw as relevant to her initial goals, and the specific aspects of her personality that were perceived as open to change. Engagement would however rely on the ability of staff to convince her of its significance, and her lecturers had failed to do that effectively:

*"I think that it's definitely valuable... PDP should be promoted a bit more, as it's not really. You just see it as something that you do to pass your modules because they've said that if you don't complete your PDP then you're not allowed to move on."*

#### **4.3d. Student Experiences: Rose (18yrs)**

For student Rose, the dominant theme that was carried throughout the interview process was the de-motivating effect of failing to get into the university of her choice. Rose had successfully applied for a place on a more specialized course

but did not achieve the necessary examination grades to take up that offer. The resulting disappointment pervaded her entire outlook, on both herself as a learner and the course that she was now taking. As she explained:

*“I didn’t get enough for that [course] and this was kind of second choice... you know I might as well go to university because what else am I going to do and that sort of thing... So, it’s not really the course I want to be on.”*

It is a statement that reveals both her sense of disappointment and a perceived lack of choice and direction. The specialized course carried an explicit career path but the future now seemed far more vague, the outcomes of the second choice course being seen as too generic to provide a specific employment outcome at the end:

*“With that course I applied for you were applying for a set career path, whereas with this you’ve got loads of options and I think in a way it’s not specialized enough to get you a good career.”*

Furthermore, Rose felt trapped by that uncertainty. She commented that the most appropriate response to this would be to re-apply for the first course once the degree had been completed, but she had quickly recognized that it wouldn’t be economically viable *“to do another 5 year degree after this.”*

Her perception of the institution was therefore predominantly negative, and whilst none of her psychological scales changed substantially across the year, the general malaise that resulted was seen as having a profoundly negative effect on her engagement with the course:

*“When I first came to university I would say that I was more active, more energetic. I think I did a lot more with my time. I was more resourceful compared to how I am now to be honest. Since I came here I’ve become a lot less active, lying in bed, etc... lazy. I haven’t done as much work as I thought... a lot less work.”*

For Rose, the lack of academic expectations associated with the university was now seen as shaping her own attitudes within it, and this negativity was further projected onto her fellow students on the course:

*“I don’t want this to sound horrible but... I mean I came on to this course because I think that I only needed two C’s and a D to get on... and I found a lot of people I’m on with... ‘I mean really you’re on this course, you know, you’re at university’. Not in a horrible way but... I mean we were on an (subject) class where there were organs out and there was this girl next to me going ‘ohhh, organs’ and I just thought ‘you’ve chosen this degree surely you realized that you’d be doing something like this.’ I just thought, God, what type of people am I here with?”*

Initially, Rose explained her difficulties in terms of her own actions. Failure to obtain the necessary grades was seen as a result of her own inability to find the motivation to sustain the necessary levels of effort required to reach them. It is a concern that could be reflected in a relatively low but stable self-efficacy score (29) and a small decline in Perceived Personal Control across the year (1.0 > 0.8). In turn her identified inability to motivate herself was also seen as a reflection of her perceived intelligence levels, her continuing failure to find an adequate level of internal motivation reinforcing her perceptions of intelligence as a fixed quantifiable concept. Her entity scores on intelligence dropped accordingly (10 > 6).

*“In my first year I got two A’s and two marks of an A for my chemistry one, but in my second because I hardly put any effort in I failed nearly all of the exams and ended up with two C’s and a D... I mean if you’re born with maybe a bit more intelligence you’d probably have thought ‘well I am clever enough I just need to work’ rather than just leave it.”*

These comments would suggest that Rose’s failure to reach her chosen goals was perceived as relating to her own intellectual limitations; however, further discussions revealed a complicated paradox surrounding this position. Her scores on Perceived Social Control were initially low (-2.6) and Rose explained these in relation to her failure to access her initial choice of course:

*“That was where I was going, and when that was taken away and you can’t do anything about it I think that you don’t have as much control as you might think.”*

The nature of the phrase ‘taken away’ would suggest a psychological shift of blame from ‘self’ to an undisclosed ‘other’. Now, when questioned, her position shifted away from personal limit to a picture of personal misfortune that was isolated from the effort that she had successfully put in:

*“If you’d asked me a year ago I would have said that you have full control over your life, you know you can make yourself whatever you want... but when I applied for [subject] I’d done everything that was in my power to get into that, I had all the grades, I had all the work experience, everything you wanted but still didn’t get in... I did think that you could get what you want as long as you put the work in, which is what I’d done, but I still didn’t get anywhere with it so...”*

It is an interpretive position that may draw strength when attached to her comments surrounding self-regulation within the course. Rose was unsettled by the structure of the course because it allowed her “a lot more free time”, and yet rather than use the time to increase her self-study she rejected staff advice not to work excessively outside of university and extended her weekly employment beyond twenty hours. In part, the reason for her rejection of self-study could be explained by the belief that the course could be successfully managed without additional academic work, effectively she was working through the A level curriculum for a second time and was already confident in the knowledge being covered. However, the decision to work only within that content was also framed by a stated failure of staff to continuously reference self-regulated study. Rose’s motivation to extend herself was clearly linked to the ability of staff to continually point her in a particular direction:

*“I think they did try to explain that you need to do more reading around the subject but nothing was really said about that... for the exams I took, as far as I could tell, I didn’t have to do any reading around the subject to be taken and all the information for the exams would be given within the lectures.”*



The consequence of this may be seen in her fall in learning depth across the year (24 > 19) whilst her superficial learning score remained constant (25-26). In essence, as a result of her negative reasons for joining the course her attitudes towards it had become mechanistic and as such Rose had chosen to complete only a minimal quantity of work and at a minimal depth.

For Rose, her existential structures were framed within a pre-existing sense of both personal failure and stagnation. The negative view that Rose held of the institution and her fellow students re-emphasized that sense of failure and her inability to successfully plan and control her life. In addition, by merging intelligence with effort as concepts her sense of potential became increasingly constrained and she continued to show minimal academic effort throughout the year.

However, whilst Rose described her lack of motivation as a specific aspect of her intelligence, she remained optimistic that through the academic changes to come she would then respond positively. Success would come when the learning context altered to better suit her abilities and preferences in the following years. In many ways, even though she commented on her own sense of independence Rose remained reliant on changes within those around her to promote personal success.

Her experiences of PDP were equally conflicted. Rose perceived the reasons underpinning her academic failures as being, in part, beyond her control, the consequence of an intellectual character that lacked the necessary ability to self-motivate and a social context that equally failed to motivate her. Thus, she expressed herself as simultaneously independent and socially reliant, willing to work beyond the content being provided and yet unwilling to do so without what she saw as the appropriate level of support from both staff and students. And yet her independence was important to her and that sense of independence lay at the centre of her attitudes towards the PDP being offered:

*“At this age you should know what you’re good at, what you’re kind of doing. I don’t think that you should be coming here to figure that out, that should be kind of*

*settled. I'm quite set in my ways and I think that by the age of seventeen you should be completely self-sufficient."*

Subsequently, whilst Rose had been aware of workshops in reflective practice, reflection as a tool for personal development was deemed unnecessary, and rejected because it didn't build on academic knowledge. As she explained, *"I thought that it looked like rubbish so I didn't go to it... .. I mean it's not testing your academic knowledge, it's not testing what you've learnt, it's just something you've got to spend however long writing to pass your course."*

The point was supported through the discussion of a group presentation task that Rose had to complete and then reflect on. Fundamentally, Rose viewed group presentation as a form of skills acquisition, in part attributing an increase in her Perceived Interpersonal Control score across the year (+1.5 > +1.9) to it, but resented the reflective aspect and the need to comply with it in order to pass the module:

*"I didn't like that. I thought that it was a silly bit of work that didn't test our knowledge of the things that we're learning. It was just a silly bit of work that had to be done and I didn't see the point of it."*

Such a reluctance was exacerbated by the fact that only one reflective piece was sought throughout the whole year. In addition, tutor support was inconsistent and this led Rose to question the significance of reflection as a study process. Reflection was therefore seen as incongruent with the skills-based goals of the course, her own career ambitions and her sense of self-certainty. Reflection required a deep engagement with the topics being covered but the course was perceived as requiring only minimal depth for completion.

The functional and academically specific dimensions of PDP were; however, generally appreciated. Rose showed a good understanding of the PDP system being used and fully agreed with the skills focus of the portfolio, and the construction of that as evidence prior to CV building and interviews in the final year. However, she did not feel that the consistency of staff attitudes reflected this value, with only two

teachers showing a consistent level of enthusiasm. Furthermore, comments by those two members of staff only reinforced tutorial attendance and for Rose that is where the system broke down, in that in doing so it failed to support effective engagement. Tutorials became concerned primarily with getting slips signed to evidence her skills acquisition rather than to discuss concerns that she may have had in other areas of her course life. For Rose, this distracted tutors from their perceived primary function to support students in times of difficulty:

*“I’ve just had a couple of meetings... in fact I didn’t even manage to get a second meeting and they just said not to worry and that they’d put me down as a pass. I mean I did try, but my tutor couldn’t fit me in and I did try somebody else, and somebody else but they couldn’t fit me in, which doesn’t bother me because I’m fine with everything.”*

Meanwhile, the slips themselves were seen as being too easy to get approved and showed very little to potential employers. For Rose, simply completing a skills task would not ensure the ability to repeat that act at a later date or in a different context. She considered it misleading to tell potential employers that such skills had been fully acquired where that could not actually be guaranteed:

*“It’s like we got a skill for doing a PCR practical and if someone asked me to do that right now even though I’d done it one, and I’ve got a piece of paper, I don’t think that I could do that. So, I do think that they might be handing them out too leniently.”*

Rose clearly understood the value of PDP as described by two members of staff but this did not then lead to engagement, Rose describing PDP activities and processes as *“fannying around.”* The key to that rejection, however, seemed less to do with its purpose and more to do with the rigidity through which PDP was presented. The one drawback of having a rigid structure was that Rose saw it as limiting the independent learner process that staff were so explicitly keen on, their development always being driven by attendance to pre-set meetings and tasks. In essence, the system being offered was built on compliance and so members of staff

were denying the self-sufficiency of the students and their ability to strive towards goals of their own making.

*“I think... you shouldn’t have someone looking over your shoulder all of the time. As long as you’ve been given the constraints and been told that this is what you need to do I think it’s fine to be left to it because you will... I think as long as you’ve got the motivation then you’ll do it.”*

For Rose, the assumption that participation equalled engagement limited student participation. Returning to the significance given to their sense of independence, the PDP system being used was seen as treating her like a child, forcing her to participate rather than convincing her to engage with PDP based on its merits. Whilst PDP was seen as potentially valuable, Rose would not be forced to engage with it:

*“I just think that if you were going to review our PDP I don’t think that you should say that you are going to fail this module if you don’t hand in this piece of paper.”*

#### **4.3e. Cohort A Conclusions**

The purpose of the two preceding descriptions has been to highlight not only how two individuals have experienced the systematization and application of PDP processes within their learning environment, but also how those have related to the biographies, attitudes and expectations that have framed those experiences, and how the application of PDP processes has influenced, and been influenced, by individual relevance, individual relevance ultimately shaping the ways in which students respond to the teaching and learning expectations being made of them (Clegg & Bufton 2008).

Firstly, it may be useful to return to the key themes raised during the staff interviews, the themes that underpin the model of PDP being discussed. In those we found contrasting views on the main purpose of PDP and the ways in which PDP

could support learning. For instance, Barbara thought that PDP should actively support employability through skills transferability, whilst for Caroline, employability skills evolve from academic practice and are discipline-specific. As such, reflection for Barbara offers a holistic route to personal awareness, whilst for Caroline it is more suitable for the evaluation of academic performance.

For the students being interviewed, each valued a functional, skills-based approach to PDP because it concentrated on the academic content of the subject and added to their mutually fragile sense of direction. Both students also came to the course with a focus on employability although equally a lacked clear picture of what that entailed. For student Ann the connection between PDP and employability only arose through the interview process, but for Rose her focus on functional level learning reflected a pre-existing pragmatic position, personal development being considered an inappropriate area for development at this level of study and at their age. For both, their preference for skills-based learning was also revealed through their support for an evaluative model of reflection as suggested by Caroline.

Performance and academic knowledge were their main points of interest, even though their avoidance of personal issues such as malleability and efficacy may potentially limit their contact with characteristics that are commonly now seen as fundamental to employability, self-regulated, life-long learning. For Knight and Yorke (2003), such changes can only be driven through engagement with self, the beliefs and attitudes that shape the ways in which students engage with their study. The long-term result of such avoidance would be a resistance to personal challenge and a growing focus on superficial task performance (Dweck 2000), and a view of employability as *“the process of gaining a job as simply a matter of matching skills required and skills possessed”* (Holmes 2001). Such a lack of personal challenge may have supported both students to avoid the constraints on their learning that they brought with them to the course, and their inability to move beyond them, in this instance the failure of the environment to motivate Rose to work and the perceived complexity of Ann’s personality. For each, the functional focus of the PDP being applied may have acted to distract their attention from their limiting self-belief systems, and focus instead on performance measures that may not increase their

employability. As Edwards (2005) has suggested, *“most employers put strongest emphasis on the process of PDP rather than the documented outcomes. In other words, the process is key because it adds value”* (2005, p.3). Subsequently, where Buckley (2006) called for the use of PDP to create a process through which students can construct their own identities, in this instance it may be acting instead to reinforce a belief in ‘self’ that may be fixed ineffectively within their past and thus negatively impacting on their futures.

Indeed, as a cohort personality profiles changed very little, with a decline in the depth of learning proving the only scale approaching statistical significance (0.08), this may be seen as a consequence of an assessment system in which self-regulated learning was not seen by either interviewee as a necessary requirement for course completion. Such a limited potential for change may be seen as a reflection of the limited type of tasks on which that change could be built. For Clegg & Bufton, Ann’s experiences are typical of a traditional focus on issues such as time management, defining these as *“points of focus rather than analysis and evaluation, reflecting an avoidance of meta-cognitive and reflective capacities in preference for more mundane abilities”* (2008, p.437).

The difficulty raised by such rigidity was that the student acknowledgement of a desired product did not ensure engagement where it conflicted with their existing senses of self. Furthermore, for both Ann and Rose, negatives were drawn from the compliance nature of the processes being applied. Whilst it is not within the existential approach to unify different participants’ experiences, it is striking that both commented on the enforcement of the embedding process. Whilst research findings (see Cosh 2008) have supported greater embedding of practice within the curriculum to ensure engagement, for both Ann and Rose to do so through the tutor system forced tutors and students into a disinterested space where the functional role of slips signing became its primary function. Process once again became subservient to product and each openly preferred a traditional demand-driven and holistic model of tutoring, a view strengthened by student experiences of module completion taking place without actual attendance. Neither students, nor in their experience many members of staff, appeared interested in the acquisition of slips to

add value to the system, even where the ability to actually evidence their skills was once again seen as positive by both participants. For Rose in particular, it reflected an inability in staff to convince students of the system, enforcement reflecting their own failures to create departmental consensus and convince people of its worth.

In addition, from Rose's perspective, to enforce participation denied them their independence, compliance being perceived as implying student immaturity and an inability to understand pedagogy. Such perceptions ground the methods being used in behaviourism through the simple alignment of action with reward (Jervis & Jervis 2005), here slip signing with course completion. For Rose in particular, such a hegemonic process acts to constrain their sense of autonomy and subsequently drives participation at the cost of disengagement.

In spite of a system that sought to enforce participation, staff inconsistencies led both interviewees to doubt the validity of the practices being forced upon them. In spite of lecture content that promoted engagement with PDP activities, slip completion did not appear to be a priority for all staff, and the unwillingness of students to attend tutorials was mirrored by the willingness of staff to sign off students even when they had not attended. As such, the perceptions and expectations of those lecturers leading the drive towards PDP within the course were seen as incongruent with student experiences of them. Whilst Miller & Martin (2007) have commented that diverse and inconsistent practice may be inevitable between disciplines and departments, they have perhaps paid too little attention to differences within departments.

A clear problem with such staff inconsistency was that the PDP was effectively reliant on the tutor system and therefore could not be effectively enforced without the active participation of tutors. By divorcing PDP content from the lectures and placing it in additional workshops, Barbara and Caroline, as the core PDP constructors, were relying on student enthusiasm to attend those in what Ann saw as their own time. Such willingness would be difficult to achieve where the value of PDP was in doubt, and subsequently whilst Rose rejected the validity of PDP at an early stage, her negative perceptions would not be challenged in a tutor system that

itself hadn't engaged fully with those same processes. As such, the tutor staff on the course could be seen as complicit in Rose's interpretation of reflection and personal development as irrelevant to their work. Furthermore, from Rose's perspective, by separating PDP from the main curriculum content they had struggled to construct the links between theoretical concepts, practice and personal development that for many characterized the inclusion of PDP.

If we return to the arguments discussed within the introduction, it is also worth highlighting Rose's feelings about the slips themselves. For Rose they were signed off far too easily, the single act of performance being treated as a reflection of learning that could then be used when evidencing skills for future employment. For Rose, a single act was not of sufficient significance to make learning explicit, nor guarantee its potential to act across time and contexts. In essence, the slips were seen as making teaching explicit rather than learning, evidencing the benefits on offer rather than those that have been attained. In many ways their doubts reflect the opinions of cognitive psychologists Shoda & Mischel, who have questioned the validity of simple models of skills and learning transference, explaining that:

*"Meaningful patterns of variability can be recognised across different situations based upon factors such as internal and external belief and image within changing situations. Behaviours across contexts can only be replicated where such internal and external dimensions are equally replicated which is fundamentally difficult."* (2000, p.410)

Finally, it should be noted that even though there were six years between them age was seen as significant to both students. Rose saw the choice to enforce participation as insulting because it denied them their maturity. Meanwhile, for Ann, it was their age that limited their ability to change. For each, the processes through which PDP was offered, and indeed the nature of the processes themselves, were seen as inappropriate because they weren't congruent with the transitions into higher education that each was experiencing. The PDP that they were experiencing lacked personal relevance. It may be a valuable observation for a cohort with an average student age above 25.



#### **4.4. Cohort B**

##### **4.4a. PDP: Module Character**

As with Cohort A this group has been drawn from first year undergraduates, although in this instance studying a traditional humanities subject. Similarly, in line with Clegg & Bradley (2006a), their study is also shaped within an academic model, course content, and with it PDP, being framed within discipline-specific skills as defined by existing QAA benchmarks.

PDP is introduced primarily through an initial introductory lecture and then supported through the tutorial system, with five tutorial meetings being expected by staff within the first year. The tutorial aspect is fundamental to PDP engagement, each session designed to gradually introduce the student to the claimed benefits of reflection and portfolio building. Developmental processes such as SMART skills auditing and critical reflection are promoted as routes towards improved academic achievement and personal development, culminating in a final exploration of developmental objectives and potentials at the end of the first year.

As such, students are expected to engage with their tutors to drive forward their own conscious and rational educational and personal development. The language of this development is set by the introductory lecture, its terms and references drawing on the concepts of self-directed learning. Much of the language is framed in psychological growth towards a set of cognitive expectations and preferences, ranging from cognitive predictability and flexibility, to an awareness of sub-conscious traits through a conscious and rational focus. Career development is explicitly mentioned but the ways in which the discipline content relates to that remain unclear. 'Pebble Pad' is offered as the key portfolio tool for the course, although not as a compulsory requirement.

#### **4.4b. Cohort B Staff Perspectives (Karen & Richard)**

Strong similarities can be recognized between the staff attitudes expressed in Cohort A and Cohort B. Once again the tutor system was seen as the most appropriate vehicle through which PDP could be promoted and supported, but many of the other core characteristics of PDP remained open to disagreement. As with Cohort A, whilst both staff members again identified PDP as a response to the vagaries of the UMS system, substantial differences existed between them regarding both the purposes and processes of its formalization.

For Karen, author of the departmental policy and a long-term institutional collaborator with the introduction of PDP, its processes can be characterized as a gentle nudging towards greater self-awareness, a way of seeing life that mutually supports both their holistic development and employability:

*“I think that it is very much something that encourages reflection on yourself personally... somehow you have to get over the idea that we are constantly learning and reflecting and gathering new experiences and information, and if like me you forget about them then it’s also a way in which you can be a little bit more systematic in gathering that information and utilizing it well.”*

As such, PDP is seen as a mechanism, a structured process through which the student can maximize the benefits that study and university life can bring them. Initially, that was set around employability, but later in the interview they expressed concerns over its ability to cater for all student motivations in that form.

To Richard, however, it is about subject-specific development alone, reflection being an approach through which the student can engage with their own personal influence on the information that they are gathering and working with. Indeed, whilst they accepted that reflection must be a core dimension of academic study, its formalization towards employability was deeply resented due to its conflict with their own view of academia as pure study.

*“I mean from a students point of view if they’re doing a degree to get a job I can understand it but in my mind education is not just about that and I have difficulty with that functional view of education as if it’s simply about employability...”*

Such disagreements question the validity of simplified PDP types as offered by Clegg & Bradley, which are being used here as a stylistic device to bring some degree of clarity from a confused context. Furthermore, as with Cohort A, such comments add further strength to previously discussed doubts regarding the effectiveness of a community model for driving staff engagement where conceptual differences are not directly accounted for. Participation, in this instance, establishes neither practitioner consensus or student engagement where opinions and expectations remain inconsistent, ambiguity having been shown to drive student disengagement (Pollard & Triggs 1997).

In this particular instance, the differences between the two staff members were further accentuated by opposing views regarding the underlying focus of PDP as a policy directive. Whilst Karen characterized PDP as a way of making student learning explicit, Richard reversed the argument, explaining that PDP as a policy had never been about the students but about practice, and in particular forcing staff to become reflective practitioners in order to support accountability:

*“My guess would be that some academic staff, probably not in this institution, were highlighting a certain type of academic that wasn’t very good at engaging with their students and who whilst being reflective on their own work may not have been reflective of their teaching and not necessarily concerned with students reflecting on their own work...”*

It is a point that returns us to the image of students as passive participants within an educational system driven towards particular goals. As Simons & Masschelein (2008) suggest, if lecturers have become agents for the preferences of political and economic stakeholders outside of academia then it is the responsibility of staff to prioritize the skills and competencies that are deemed most valuable by

those bodies. As such, student and staff self-surveillance becomes the norm through which personal awareness and development become shaped (Stathern 2000).

Here PDP is being seen as an aspect of accountability and as such Richard has come to resent the policy and mistrust its formalization as an expression of political pressure above academic integrity. For Richard, PDP is only replicating much that already happens in academic teaching but through its formalization takes up an inappropriate amount of time and student attention:

*“There is a certain level of resentment from some staff, and maybe I fall into this category of thinking that we’re going to build in PDP into this module but really I want to talk about [the subject]...why should I give up half a session here and half a session there to talk about [PDP] when in actual fact I want to get the students to think about an issue within [the subject] which in my view already has some characteristics of reflection and students critical thinking bound up within it.”*

It is important to recognize ‘time’ as a significant issue in the implementation of PDP at a national level. It was always planned to introduce PDP nationally without reference to the additional resources that its application would require (Jackson 2001b), a problematic choice when considering the time-consuming nature of PDP processes (Turner 2007).

The consequences of the two perspectives being discussed could be found in the way in which the two members of staff viewed the processes utilized within PDP and then presented them to the students. For instance, whilst both valued reflection, distinct differences existed between how each approached it educationally. Karen assessed it, albeit with difficulty, because assessment brought it value in the eyes of the students, whilst Richard refused to assess it at all, even though the tutorial system being implemented was reliant on their agreement to do so. For Karen the formalization of reflection was damaging to the development of student autonomy.

References to the tutorial system offer a further insight into the varying perspectives of the two staff members. For Karen, the tutorial system was a way of

ensuring student engagement by making PDP an explicit and required aspect of the course. The use of the portfolio wasn't mandatory, indeed doubts were expressed regarding its suitability for the purpose, but consistency within the tutorial system gave the system some degree of gravitas. It is a view that relies on the willingness of their fellow departmental staff to see PDP as an issue of staff/student mutuality, merely asking the student to act as staff members do themselves. As they explain:

*“Many of my colleagues are sceptical and see this as box ticking... but that’s the philosophy of embedding, you know saying that we do this anyway and so we’re not asking you to do anything with the students that you wouldn’t anyway... the approach I’ll be taking with tutors, you know I’m not asking you to do anything beyond what you do already just to frame it rather differently that’s all... for the students benefit so that they can see how they’re doing.”*

However, for Richard the tutorial system is too idiosyncratic to support the application of such a vague conceptual entity. They openly express their unwillingness to participate fully in PDP as a part of the tutorial system, and suggest that the students won't use the tutor system in a way that will support its introduction. In short, drawing the conversation back to the introduction of the SQP, Richard sees the system as fundamentally flawed:

*“There are certain perceived limitations to the personal tutor system that operates here... my application of PDP through that process has been negligible I must say, partly because of the fact that there aren’t many students that use the system in the way in which the university may think they use it... I did go through the motions of reminding students of the need to complete [the SQP], and I still do remind them that if they have any queries about it then they can come and see me so that we can talk about the modules that you’re doing and so forth, but very little of it actually happens.”*

#### 4.4c. Student Experiences: James (18yrs)

The interview with James was characterized by exceptionally high levels of self-certainty, a characteristic that proved enduring across the first year of study (GSE 38, PPC 2.3, PPI 3.0). Offering extensive periods of international travel as an example of his highly evolved sense of independence and self-confidence, James saw this as the primary reason for his interpersonal successes at university. When asked if he had changed across the year, his answer was suitably upbeat:

*“No, I’m still the cocky, confident person that I was when I came. I’m probably one of the people, you know that are completely different because I’ve always been a really confident person. Like I went on the Costa Rica expedition in 2007 where I went out for the month pretty much by myself. So I’ve always had that feeling of independence and self-confidence when you’re meeting people. So, I don’t think that I’ve really changed all that much.”*

Unsurprised by the rise in his efficacy and control scores at the end of the year, James commented that by coping with new people and the new environment he had again reinforced his belief in his own abilities. Any drop in confidence levels at the start of the course were seen as inevitable, as was the return to pre-existing levels as the year proceeded:

*“No, it was just general nerves. I mean I knew that everything was going to be alright with me because it seemed so much like my old school, so friendly and everything, and so I knew that everything was going to be fine.”*

His confidence was therefore seen as an intrinsic quality of his personality and with that an enduring part of his character when dealing with others. However, through the interview it became clear that such high levels of confidence were at least in part supported by a need for contextual consistency. The university had been chosen because it reflected his previous school environment, whilst his attitudes towards his studies and the lecturers on the course, particularly in regard to the relationships that he had built with his tutors, again very much reflected those that he had been used to during their previous schooling.

*“Yes, I mean from joining sixth form you should be treated more like an adult because obviously you don’t have to be in education so you take it more seriously, but I think definitely... I mean I went to a private school where my parents paid and now I’m paying I expect not to be treated like a child.”*

His initial choice of course had also been based on historical academic successes rather than any clear sense of direction for the future, James’ current focus shifting from TV weather person to airline pilot. James believed that he would be successful at anything that he tried and had therefore chosen the subject because of what he perceived as its focus on academic transferability. Again, that choice had also been based on the positive relationship that he had experienced on a previous course. As James explained:

*“It was something that I’d been really good at and I really liked my course teacher at school and did really well at it...”*

What James was offering was an observational correlation between personal success and his relationship with staff. This perception gained more significance as the interview ran, the quality of the relationships around him, and the way in he was perceived within those, proving of particular significance to his decisions-making processes. Previous quotations have shown his resistance to being seen as a child, and the need to be seen as an equal by staff appeared once again locked in their previous experiences in private education and the power relationships that existed within that environment:

*“I think that some of the lecturers expect your respect like they would at school but they won’t give you some... students and teachers should be able to be more like best mates. You should be able to pop into their office at any time and not feel uncomfortable if you’ve got questions.”*

In spite of this stated need for relationship equality between staff and students, James felt that too much responsibility had been placed on the students at the start of the course, when James felt that the staff could have initiated more contact in order to help their students settle in. As he explained:

*“I mean we’re all new, 100 of us are new, but they know exactly how the university works, so if they were to break the ice a bit better then it would make the whole thing a lot easier.”*

Indeed, even though he only showed a relatively low level of perceived social control (+0.3), the point was of such importance to James that he joined the student union in order to address this concern.

For James, it was clear that although his psychological scores revealed a high level of confidence, that sureness was in part founded on the ways in which people viewed him and thus how staff saw him was of great importance. This sense of externality returned when discussing the tests which were part of the PDP process, tests that would reveal their levels of extroversion and performance. For James, people cannot be trusted to reflect on their own actions but require the views of others to bring those reflections objectivity. For James self-evaluation is inevitably grounded in existing self-perceptions that cannot be challenged internally because one cannot see oneself outside of oneself. As such, James thought that other people were better judges of you than you could be, ego leading you to judge yourself not as you are but how you perceive yourself or how you would like to be perceived. Subsequently James promoted the idea of a joint PDP process with the tutor staff, each offering evaluative scores, with ‘reality’ occurring through negotiation. The views of the tutor could challenge those of the student and change could be directed towards the way in which others see you.

*“Some people are really hard on themselves and some are very sort of optimistic about their abilities, so it doesn’t give a fair... So that’s one of the issues with it, it’s very subjective and I could see myself as a five out five, but somebody else that was very similar to me could see themselves very differently ... I would also get the lecturers to do it themselves as well and assess you there at the time.”*

For James, whilst he appeared very confident in terms of his personal skills-set it was clear that his sense of self-worth appeared intrinsically founded on the appreciation of those skills by those around him which in turn made that confidence



vulnerable. Such an external sense of reliance also offered an explanation of his complex and often contradictory disappointment in the tutor system, on which PDP presentation was built. In line with his need for external approval, James saw the tutor system as inherently introspective and thus unable to drive personal development through clear and objectifiable outcomes; however, James also claimed that the outcomes used within the tutorial process were too “tick-boxy” to be sufficiently sensitive for the purpose of personal development.

Such contradictions may have been driven by perceived inconsistencies within staff approaches to both PDP and the tutorial system. James had built a very positive working relationship with his tutor and had seen them throughout the year for PDP sessions, but he also spoke of students who had hadn’t arranged any tutorials through the year and hadn’t been chased to do so by tutors. As James explained:

*“Yes, I mean I remember a tutor... she really pushed it but other lecturers aren’t really all that bothered... you know it isn’t crucial and it’s a voluntary kind of thing so people don’t do it and lecturers don’t believe in it... if you do it for extra value but your personal tutor isn’t actually interested and they don’t ask to see it then you ask yourself why you’ve bothered doing that. What a waste of my time.”*

This isn’t to say that James couldn’t identify the PDP processes and outcomes associated with their area of study. Whilst he initially denied having paid any attention to the concept, he knew that the main requirements of the PDP system being applied were located in all of the module handouts, and built into an initial lecture during Freshers’ week. James also knew that PDP in this instance referred to self-evaluation and skills development, and how those could be used within assessment feedback, and yet he still didn’t see PDP as useful. Its lack of compulsion allowed students to ignore it whilst the unreliability of the evaluations was seen as limiting its effectiveness.

For James, the lack of useful direction within the PDP process mirrored his perceptions of first year curriculum as lacking any genuine currency; students largely seeking only a module pass as their grades didn’t contribute to their degree. As

James suggested, their first year was therefore the year where most time was available for self-development, or at least the embedding of the processes that would lead to self-development, and yet without staff compulsion and engagement students would continue to see it in the same light as their studies during the first year; necessary but meaningless. For James, such a low level of expectation is inappropriate for university, a concern that has been raised by staff during discussions.

*“As [name] says, we haven’t got the first year right yet and he knows that and he’s trying really hard to make it work for everyone else.”*

For James, the result of such a lack of ambition within both the curriculum and the PDP processes being offered was that they failed to promote personal reflection and deep learning, learning depth having dropped by 8 points across the year. The need for personal extension wasn’t seen, particularly when framed by very strong sense of control and efficacy and the subsequent avoidance of personal challenge. They were feelings that also reflected James’ beliefs in the fixedness of personality and intelligence (4, 4). Indeed, much of James’ self-confidence was founded on his own unwillingness to challenge this, his ability to resist processes of change being of great significance to him and the evaluation of his character. As such, it was James’ self-confidence that empowered him to disengage with the PDP system. If the purpose of the process was to make him more self-confident then there was little point in taking part.

#### **4.4c. Student Experiences: Shelley (31yrs)**

Shelley expected this course to enable her to teach the subject that she was studying. She had a clear view of what she wanted to gain from the course, and the particular skills that would ensure the realization of her aspirations. Indeed, it was her ownership of a consistent and enduring set of study goals that she saw as driving her motivation to succeed. As she explained, *“I mean I wasn’t just ploughing through*

*it thinking well as long as I get a degree and get some job... I mean I've got here so that I can do that... I've always had a goal."*

Indeed, it was this sense of certainty in her beliefs that she referred to as her key motivational driver to study, whilst also acting to shape the way in which she approached that. The degree itself was seen as the primary stepping-stone to her chosen future and in turn that path was seen as a reflection of her personal character. As such, it framed her expectations of what would be demanded of her, that characteristic self-certainty acting to focus her attention on the academic skills aspect of her studies.

*"I think that I'm quite aware of myself and whatever already. I mean I know that a lot of people go to 'uni' saying "I don't know who I am' and then they're fine by the end of the course because they've learnt exactly who they are and what they want to do, but when I got there I knew what I wanted to do, I was very happy in myself and so it didn't seem all that important."*

Improvements were identified through improved clarity and planning within her work, a greater ability to research and answer the question at hand more specifically, and a more flexible approach to her academic practices. When discussing her attitudes to assignments, Shelley highlighted the need to spread her work across a wider timeframe in order to achieve greater depth, even though this was not reflected in the learning depth scores, which fell by 5 points across the year. As Shelley explained: *"I've decided to spend more time in the library, and give more time to my assignments, so as soon as I get them start trying to work on them even if I'm only doing little bits."*

Such reflections were founded on the recognition of change that had taken place within the transition between college and university. Some of these transitions acted at a very personal level, such as the need to increase, rather than decrease, her levels of application when struggling academically. Through such transitions Shelley commented on the reinforcement of her belief in the malleability of personality (8), although intelligence became seen increasingly as an entity concept

across the year (-3). When questioned about the differences between the two constructs, Shelley explained that intelligence had become specifically linked to academic outcomes alone but appeared ultimately unsure about the relationship between them.

For Shelley, academic outcomes were her primary driver and perceived her raised self-efficacy score (32/38) to be a consequence of the greater personal control that academic improvements brought her. Control and self-confidence were specifically associated with each other. Subsequently, the skills focus of the teaching and tutor staff was also seen as aiding such a development, although the role that PDP processes took within that was less clear. Shelley couldn't initially recall any references to PDP processes during her studies. Issues of PDP weren't experienced within her tutorials, or seen as relating to portfolio building. Furthermore, PDP processes weren't perceived as part of the assessment process, and had rarely been explicitly mentioned by staff. Tutorials in particular were largely framed within assignment completion and seeking help when students were confused, and neither of these were seen as part of the PDP model being applied within the module.

However, during the discussions it became clear that processes such as reflection had indeed played a considerable role in her perceived development, and indeed lecturer attitudes towards it were then expressed as clear and consistent. Indeed, when discussing how Shelley had changed, she specifically linked that to reflection on her academic work and the ways in which she approached the content and processes of her study:

*"I think it is reflection, because you think about what you did last term and think, ah well that wasn't probably the best way of going about it so we'll try a different way this time."*

For Shelley, the character of the PDP on the module was therefore characterized by academic support, and as such was congruent with the goals and expectations that she had held on entry to the course. Tutorials were experienced as an academic rather than a holistic concern, content being based on feedback, study

skills, research skills, etc., and whilst the module guidelines talked of work shaped to improve psychological characteristics such as extroversion, these were not mentioned. For Shelley, PDP, or the tutor support in which it was supposed to take place, was about skills building and performance:

*“What the reflection? ... well they said that if you do it then you’ll improve because you’re looking at your work in terms of what you’ve done, what you’ve done well, what you’ve not done well and how you can improve... you know, carry on with the good bits.”*

Once again, the adoption of reflection as a critical process was seen as a factor within the transition between their old and new learning contexts. As Shelley explained:

*“Well, it’s certainly helped me look at things in a different way. So something I knew at college I know more about now because I’ve looked at it from a different angle... just by looking at things in more depth, discussing it with other people and seeing how they’re looking at it, and thinking ‘wow, I didn’t think about it that way.’”*

However, this comment also highlights a key characteristic of her return to study. For Shelley, a primary fear surrounding her entry into higher education was a doubt surrounding her ability to make new friends. Indeed, her successes in integrating with a new social group were perceived as a major factor in both her perceived and measured self-efficacy increase (32/37).

*“I think that I’m more confident now because when I started this year I’d not gone to a new place with nobody I knew for quite a long time... So, I’m more confident in going to places I don’t know now, because I can go in and say to myself well I’ve done this before now and I can do it again now.”*

Furthermore, her age (31) was also perceived as limiting her potential for social activity, the ability to shift between different contexts being viewed as particularly challenging. Any desire to become socially gregarious was seen as constrained within the predictable and stable nature of her home-life and the way in

which that had shaped her social attitudes and expectations. To integrate she would need to gain greater personal and social flexibility, to be willing to lose existing friends and replace them with new ones. As such, the social and interpersonal areas of her development dominated the early stages of the interview, their perceptions of success both personally and academically seemingly tied to this particular aspect. Discussing her drop in perceived social control (-0.7), this was similarly tied to the tension that had developed through the demands of the course and the ways in which those impacted on her existing networks of friends. In essence, she did not control the development of her friendships but was constrained within the time and social constraints placed on her.

*"I've had less time to see other people so, obviously with the course work and that, so people I knew before I'm seeing less of and I have less control over that because I was doing work for uni..."*

Shelley had also become increasingly aware of her reliance on her parents for emotional and financial support, an awareness that raised her appreciation of them but equally further challenged her sense of perceived control. Again, her perceived successes were at least in part reliant on the actions of others, and through that sense of reliance her own empowerment was brought into question. Furthermore, due to the extent of the transitions being experienced, Shelley was reliant on that process being managed through tutorial and staff contact. Subsequently, for Shelley, processes that promoted interpersonal contact were given particular value, with tutor meetings and group work being referenced most often due to their potential for promoting informal as well as formal conversation within the learning environment.

If we return to the start of this section, it is worth noting that Shelley saw her increases in self-efficacy as being driven by a perceived increase in her academic skills base and the greater sense of control that this brought her. However, in this instance a rise in generalized self-efficacy has coincided with falls in all 3 areas of perceived control, a result that would lead us to question any intrinsic relationship between efficacy and control as perceived by Bandura.

#### 4.4d. Cohort B Conclusions

As with the academic PDP model offered within Cohort A, PDP processes were initially presented to Cohort B through an introductory lecture and subsequently supported through tutor contact. However, unlike the model discussed previously, these processes were not presented as compulsory elements in the course assignments. The 'student as autonomous learner' was seen as a key theme to the model and thus students were given far greater control over their willingness to engage with the model. Self-evaluation tasks were offered within the tutorials, and a portfolio system was suggested as an appropriate storage system for those, but neither had been formally required for module completion.

Through the use of PDP processes to promote student autonomy-building, the model sought to leave the students in a relatively isolated space between content learning and outcome, but the experiences of that space appeared very different for the two interviewees. For James, the focus on learner autonomy not only inappropriately freed staff members from their responsibilities to support their students but also prevented effective self-evaluation. Isolated self-evaluation was seen as being too subjective, decisions merely supporting existing perceptions rather than promoting greater understanding and change. The role of the tutor was seen as significant in that the tutor-tutee relationship could offer both an internal and external level of perception that could then be discussed and evaluated. It is a position that strongly reflects the views of theorists such as Bowskill & Smith (2009), who have written on the agentic nature of learning as shaped by social interaction, autonomy being represented as an inappropriate outcome where learning is fundamentally constrained by the environment in which it takes place and others within that environment.

*"Learning happens in a social world. Development involves conversation with others around shared interests, agendas and concerns... conversations help individual participate and to understand themselves in the social context in which they learn and reside."* (Bowskill & Smith 2009)

James appeared a reflection of this position, his self-esteem appearing to be wholly reliant on his social context and his ability to act within it. To work outside it therefore promoted disengagement. Furthermore, the explicit internal variability within the tutorial system, and the tutees' isolation within that, limited James' perceptions of the purpose and value of the PDP model. This point was built on through the lack of perceived reference to PDP processes in both lectures and the tutorial system, leaving a sense that the system lacked merit and a cohesive structure. As Ward (2010) has commented, "*we all know that learning is predominantly a social activity... we just need to ensure we recognize this in our support and development structures,*" and in this instance too strong a focus on autonomy building had served to deter participation.

The reasons underpinning James' observed reliance on social affirmation for his development appeared to be grounded in his previous experiences in education, within which the student-staff relationships were perceived as being more equal due to the financial foundations of private education. In addition, the ways in which he measured his sense of worth appeared to be constructed on the way that others viewed him and thus his ability to externalize and self-promote were seen as central to his self-esteem. The views of his peers, and his ability to act successfully within them, therefore took precedence over James' internal sense of self, which was seen as unreliable. Subsequently, he became unwilling to engage with processes that challenged that view.

Alternatively, for Shelley, the space for autonomy left within the system was perceived as largely beneficial, driving her to make structural changes in how and when she organized her work. Whilst initially being unable to recall any PDP content, through the discussion process she became aware of just how much her academic attitudes had changed in terms of where she applied her efforts. In particular, tutorial contact was seen as crucial to her ability to overcome her existing academic insecurities and subsequently the proposed space for autonomy had been negated by her need to retain contact, the academic self-efficacy that she was seeking being perceived as being reliant in part on that support. Where James had experienced and challenged the power dynamic inherent within the tutorial system because it



worked against his pre-existing expectations and psychological needs, Shelley had embraced the tutorial system because it was seen as congruent with her own. The tutor system supported academic advancement, and personal development was perceived as an issue that would naturally occur over time.

For both students, their experiences of the tutor system and with the PDP being driven through it was shaped by the ability of the tutors to respond to the particular needs that each carried with them. For both, engagement was also influenced by particular areas of certainty that appeared to make them resistant to processes that required them to challenge those pre-existing perceptions of self and the outcomes that they saw as products of these. As such, in this instance neither looked beyond the particular discipline being studied for growth. For Shelley, this was due to her pre-existing focus on a specific career path and the subsequent perception of her degree as a necessary building block towards that. Her character was perceived to be an inherent part of that choice and therefore development beyond academic skills was not perceived as relevant to her future. For James, meanwhile, his high levels of confidence, both personally and interpersonally, limited his perceived need to challenge himself on either level. The only thing that would stop him succeeding in the long term was the level of his qualifications.

For each, the tutor role was seen as crucial but their expectations of that system were very different. From James' perspective, the role of the tutor system should not be shaped within personal evaluation and development but should seek merely to establish and clarify course processes and expectations. The relationship between the tutor and tutee should be based on equality, tutors being available for contact at any time, with social and academic contact being perceived as of equal importance. Without equality, contact was seen to maintain an adult/child relationship that was seen as inappropriate. Alternatively, for Shelley, the tutor system should offer help of any kind as required, and should not be extended into personal processes where that is seen as lacking relevance to her future beyond academic study. Even where reflection was seen as a crucial process within her academic development, it did not necessarily belong within the tutor system unless attached to a specific academic query. Again, having already chosen a career, and

viewing her character as being part of that decision, Shelley felt that personal self-evaluation beyond academic skills would not be relevant as her initial choices revealed her inherent long-term suitability for the path chosen.

As previously discussed, following introductory lectures the module approach to PDP was designed to be founded on the tutor system, and where the two interviewees expressed a different set of experiences of that system so they also revealed a different relationship with PDP itself. For James, PDP processes were clear and well recalled, but as with the curriculum itself in the first year they were seen as too vague to be of use where they hadn't been linked precisely with the course content as necessary outcomes. Where the tutorial system was seen as primarily concerned with course clarification its inability to clarify the links between PDP and the course had driven the students disengagement from it. For James, one of the major changes required to drive student engagement with PDP was the need to make it compulsory, although in doing so he recognized that this would only reinforce the perceived adult/child character of staff/student contact and therefore also drive disengagement. Meanwhile, for Shelley, PDP was not seen as being related to the tutor system, the main goal of which was to promote change within students' academic skills and thus raise their academic performance. As such, they focused primarily on skills acquisition with processes such as reflection being seen in very functional terms and subsequently disconnected from the holistic core onto which the PDP model had been built. Where James had been conscious of PDP and therefore chosen to withdraw from it, Shelley had clearly benefitted from such processes but without consciously identifying them as part of her PDP.

In part, the interviewees' perceptions of the tutor system, and the PDP processes that had been built within that, appeared to lose value through both their own experiences of it and those of their peers. For both, PDP as a particular concept within their academic learning lacked meaning and this was heightened by staff inconsistency, perhaps reflecting one tutor's view that PDP has been applied to make explicit teaching rather than learning. It is a statement that highlights a perception of PDP as a tool for quality assurance through the enforcement of requirements that are seen as external to the institution (Clegg & Bradley 2006b).

Where only limited expectations were being made of first year students within their studies, so too were the expectations regarding self-development. For James, the position once again removed any sense of worth from the use of PDP processes such as reflection, and in the following year he expected to be too busy academically to engage with PDP with any serious intent. Lack of compulsion only added to his sense of irrelevance.

In part, the unwillingness of both participants to look beyond academic achievement once again highlighted the role of entity modelling in limiting the breadth of challenges that students would seek. However, whilst Dweck (2008) has argued that our self-beliefs and theories are acquired and constructed through life, for James and Shelley it would not seem as though they necessarily see themselves in those terms. Even if we exist in an ever-changing form according to such a process of acquisition, both James and Shelley considered themselves to be enduring and solid in nature. Having established levels of perceptual solidity within which they were content, and content with the decisions that were shaped by those, they then proved resistant to processes that brought them into question. For Shelley, this resulted in her manipulation of the module goals for PDP to reflect her particular career focus, even though the nature of the relationship between the skills being gathered and her chosen career path did not seem clear, or indeed had been made clear through the PDP process. Meanwhile, for James, his unwillingness to accept personal challenge appeared to force him to withdraw completely.

## **4.5. Cohort C**

### **4.5a. PDP: Module Character**

Cohort C was drawn from first-year undergraduate students studying a professionally specific degree that has been designed to lead to professional registration and practice. In line with Clegg & Bradley (2006a), their study has therefore been shaped within a professional model, course content, and with its PDP, being framed within external codes of practice, competency standards and QAA benchmark statements. The professional model concentrates on the development of particular competencies as associated with a particular field of employment. As such the projection of specific identities in line with its own organizational boundaries is a central concern, and these may function at a lifelong level through the acceptance of CPD as a key career driver.

In this instance, portfolio construction was the dominant method of evidencing the acquisition of these pre-requisite skills, behaviours, attitudes and identities. However, during the institutional implementation process, tensions arose between the institution's requirements for a generic model of graduate skills and the career-specific skills that were required by the professional body that would ratify the course. Subsequently, an agreement was reached to integrate those aforementioned professional skills within a graduate model in order to satisfy the requirements of both parties. Concepts such as teamwork, communication, transferability, meta-cognitive development and lifelong learning, concepts that are characteristic of models of employability and 'graduateness', are singularly evidenced through the context of the guiding profession. The degree to which those skills can therefore be perceived as transferable remains open to question.

As a fixed requirement of the course, Personal Development Planning, or here Portfolio, is introduced within induction and forms a core document for evidencing skills acquisition. Reflection, as congruent with Schön's model of professional reflective practice, also forms a key skill and is introduced at the same time. Both are assessed throughout the assignment process and a fixed timetable is set regarding

those assessments in combination with both professional placements and external monitoring from practicing professionals. The tutorial system holds great significance for the efficacy of the PDP in that tutors act to guide and support the professional and personal development of their tutees through the course-long portfolio document. Tutorials take place at least twice every semester, although members of staff are naturally open to more in accordance with student demand.

#### **4.5b. Cohort C Staff Perspectives (Samantha & Claire)**

As could perhaps be predicted from a teaching and learning context in which professional staff were fundamentally teaching towards themselves as models of professional practice, a far stronger sense of collective cohesion existed in the expressed views of staff as compared with the previous academic models. For both Samantha and Claire, the fundamental goal of PDP was the creation of effective professionals, as defined by the professional knowledge and skills associated with their particular field. Employability was established through course completion. Samantha in particular saw it as a reflection of herself as a reflective practitioner, academic and individual:

*“I only see [PDP] as a professional and career issue... as I said I see myself as a [role] first and a teacher second and I’ve already developed into the [role] that I am and so I’m always trying to improve, improve my skills... So I see my PDP here as very much about what I’m doing as a professional I suppose.”*

The comment reveals not only her absolute focus on the objectivity of skills acquisition, but also the setting aside of subjective differences in order to objectify performance. For Samantha, this objectification is driven by reflection and its ability to reveal internal motivations so that they can be acted upon. As she explains, professionalism often requires the setting aside of ‘self’ in order to ensure absolute objectivity within practice:

*“Especially when they’re so young, with school leavers coming in who have no life experience... some who do have life experiences that actually influences them negatively so they need to learn in a different way to put those experiences aside to be completely objective.”*

For Samantha, therefore, PDP offers the student control over ‘self’, a route towards personal self-management in order to maximize their professionalism and raise their subsequent status within that profession.

The need to strive towards performance and skills was also found in the views of Claire; however, the route towards those differed. Where Samantha had promoted a tutor-driven model that sought to improve performance through the objectification of ‘self’, for Claire such a level of personal awareness was seen as unnecessary. Her view appeared to be founded on the belief that the ability to become a good practitioner was already revealed through the initial choice of the student to join the course. As such, self-examination was not seen as essential to performance and she rejected the tutor-based form of the institutional model in preference for a ‘tick-box’ format that focused solely on the individual skills being demanded by the relevant professional bodies.

*“When they start the course they have a plan. Their plan is to become a [practitioner], and they focus on the professional qualifications rather than the academic in a majority of cases. So in some way... just looking at the bigger picture of having a plan of how you get from A to B our students already have that to a great extent.”*

As such, the personalization highlighted by Samantha becomes an aside to the simple acquisition of professional skills. For Clegg & Bradley (2006a), it is a position that has promoted a particularly functional view of PDP processes, such as reflection, within the professional domain. As long as the skills being promoted are seen by the students and staff as congruent with the appropriate and desired professional outcomes then engagement is perceived as being assured. However, the disagreements that can be found between the views of each staff member reveal an

internal contestation within the department, and whilst Samantha initially denies the presence of such a rift Claire recognizes both the presence of disagreement and the impact that this has had on student learning. As Claire explained, the course had been forced to change several times in response to the resistance of staff to the tutor model being promoted and their perceived desire to limit the development of student autonomy:

*“Yes, there are probably a couple of factions... you don’t want to be critical of other people’s style but you can make connections concerning the way people teach and the development of our junior students into adult learners.”*

Again we are drawn back to the use of PDP as a reflection of the individual identities of each staff member, and for Samantha and Claire this would appear to centre on the depth to which they related to their roles as practitioner and academic. For both interviewees the two identities were seen as confused, potentially existing in a state of conflict due to the placement of professional training within an academic environment. For Samantha, her decision to leave practice to become an academic had been a conscious part of her life plans and as such she felt that it was the responsibility of the academic staff to sell the vision of reflective, autonomous practitioner to the students and equally their failure when this doesn’t occur. The intellectual and theoretical development of their students was seen as their priority as academics. For Claire, her presence within academia was seen as almost accidental and subsequently her focus was more on the context in which her students would eventually work and the attitudes and skills that this required. It was not their intellectual ability that would define the careers of her students but the manner in which they would engage with their eventual workplace.

*“I do see people that work within [sector] and the only ones that make big strides are the ones that aspire to management and everybody else just stays the course... They don’t want [reflective practitioners].”*

As such, Claire argued that students won’t understand the relevance of reflection and that this will be reinforced during placement because it isn’t valued in

actual practice. Furthermore, for Claire, the nature of her relationship with her students is founded on whether they were seen as either an academic or a practitioner. As they explain:

*“The students don’t view us as proper practitioners, despite the fact that I’ve got over 25 years experience I am not a proper practitioner in their eyes because this is my territory and they’re out there in the real world... well, it’s about people’s perceptions of you.”*

The manner in which Samantha and Claire visualized the role of PDP in their teaching therefore appeared reliant on two things, firstly their perception of themselves as professionals and secondly their perceptions of the two professions in which they now worked. For Samantha, such a perception of professional incongruence between her twin roles as academic and practitioner cannot be justified, arguing that reflection is a fundamental practice within the profession, and as such it remains the role of both tutors and mentors to promote its development within the students. As she explains, reflective practice is a fundamental part of the profession and therefore it should be supported in both academic theory and practice:

*“Yes, students have sessions on it. Yes, students have sessions on it in the first year. All sorts of different reflective models to use, so yes we do talk to them and as I say it’s... um... it’s a skill required by [the profession] and so the [professionals] that are mentoring the students will also be used to being asked to reflect on issues... although some do it better and more than others. But it’s not something that is unheard of in the profession and so we’re not asking them to do something that we’re not doing within our own supervisory or practitioner reviews.”*

However, for Claire students are only focused on practice, and it is a focus that will be strengthened within their experiences of the profession. As such, functional skills should remain their main teaching priority. The profession is not characterized by reflection when practiced and furthermore, staff members are not doing it within either their academic or practitioner roles.



#### **4.5c. Student Experiences: Susan (22yrs)**

Susan had initially experienced a traditional academic background, leaving school to train as an interior designer at Art College. Unfortunately, having realized that she had chosen poorly she dropped out of the course after one term, and, after taking a further AS qualification at college, she eventually found employment in a retail position. In the five years that followed, Susan rarely changed jobs but slowly became aware that she was no longer enjoying work. She perceived her primary personal strength as her ability to interact with other people (IPC +1.6) and an identified need to care for others that had been consistently supported by family and friends alike. Susan felt that she instinctively placed other people first and considered her main role as helping others.

On returning to higher education, Susan's choice of course was therefore of considerable significance. Academically she expected to struggle. Historically, she lacked confidence in her academic skills and had subsequently perceived her ability to care and communicate as essentially scaffolding any potential successes within education. These were seen as the skills that she could rely on and would get her through to the end of the course.

In addition, Susan had traditionally struggled with motivation and application when learning. Courses had never lasted beyond a single year and she felt poorly prepared for a lengthy degree course. It was a fear that was to be reinforced by the nature of the portfolio process that formed the core of the qualification being sought, evidence building and skills acquisition being spread throughout the entire course. Self-doubt persisted through the first year, Susan considering leaving the course on several occasions before managing to understand the structural form of the process and its complicated combination of essays, reflective pieces, learning contracts, portfolios and staff signing-off procedures. For Susan, it was a complicated problem that was made more difficult to resolve by front-loading portfolio building at a time when placements were seen as a more threatening and therefore pervasive concern.

Concentrating on her academic weaknesses, Susan focused primarily on active learning but found that by doing so professional placements naturally dominated her learning experiences, and this drove her away from the academic learning context.

*“I really like the placement. I think I prefer the placement but it’s nice to come back here and... I’m a doing person anyway, doing stuff, I do best by doing it so I think that’s why I like placement more.”*

This did not reflect a dislike on her part of either academic work or the academic environment, but rather a perceived incongruence between academic learning and professional practice, or what staff would call the ‘professional-academic divide’. For Susan, it was a division that was reinforced by the study of significant professional issues and interests post-practice, a process that was seen as preventing them from establishing a coherent identity within which both held equal significance.

*“I think it’s a bit backwards to tell you the truth because I went on to (the section) without knowing anything about it... and we came back and five weeks after being there we came back for four weeks and we learnt about it. So the class were just sitting there saying well I did this, I did this, yes I know that... but whilst now I know the mechanisms about it and it all makes sense I was just doing what I was told not knowing what was going on.”*

It also made the relationships between the student and their practice mentor more complicated because the mentors could never be sure of the appropriate levels of discussion prior to the meeting. This created tension, not only between the mentors and their students, but also the mentors and the academic staff, and this was then projected back onto the students.

As we have already found within the staff interviews, this subject area carries with it a particular political character, conflict existing between the professional and academic contexts both in terms of how and what they teach and value. As Susan observed, the academic staff don’t have any say regarding the summative content of the portfolio, whilst the attitudes and expectations of academic and professional

contacts vary considerably. Susan commented that such levels of variation create a complicated dynamic for the student, with learning outcomes being experienced as specific to the particular staff member and the roles that they represent. The views of teachers gain significance when at university, but not when in placement, and with a large number of mentors being experienced within a large number of placements, so the complexity of that learning experience becomes more practically and educationally demanding for staff and student alike.

This fluid and dynamic dispersion of political power was of particular significance to Susan, in that poor relationships with early practice mentors had significantly damaged her self-confidence. Temporarily, personal doubts were raised concerning the very aspects of 'self' that Susan most valued. Founding her self-esteem on her ability to communicate successfully with others had left her vulnerable when facing a mentor who disliked her on their first meeting and effectively withdrew from their relationship. As a consequence of such unpopularity, Susan found herself working what she perceived to be an inappropriate number of evening shifts. It was during one of these that Susan suffered injuries during a car accident and it was this occurrence which she saw as the underlying cause for her drop in efficacy and control, her unpopularity and the consequences of that unpopularity reinforcing her sense of her interpersonal and contextual inadequacy (IPC -0.5, SPC -0.4):

*"I got really stressful but I don't know if that's part just the car crash. I'm sure it played a big bit of it, and also when I started placement I had a bit of trouble with a mentor before I even had them. I heard them bitching about me before they'd even met me, so I thought that put a bit of a downer on me and that was before my crash so I had that as well. I just thought Oh I don't want to go in."*

Furthermore, her confidence doubts were reinforced by staff inconsistency. Susan often found mentors and academic staff criticizing each other and yet when seeking reassurance from any one of them often found her castigated for being disrespectful to other professionals. For Susan, the boundaries within the team network were complicated, and within that complication she lost her natural instinct

for personal openness, wary of what to say to whom. Whilst their academic tutors were praised for helping her extricate herself from this initial situation, her reliance on others only reinforced her growing lack of perceived control. During the year her academic tutors were often changed and the uncertainty of contact that resulted once again reinforced the significance of the mentor relationship, even where it was negative.

There is a sense from the interview that by the second questionnaire, some of the potential decline in control and efficacy had been mediated, but for Susan the goal of recovery was to re-establish previous and preferred attitudes and behaviours rather than drive personal change beyond those. These were seen as her 'natural ways of behaving', a fixed set of boundaries that were characteristic of a fixed self or entity, a belief that may be reflected in her declining malleability scores for personality (7/5).

In terms of the Personal Development Portfolio, which had been seen as including institutional PDP, this carried several key consequences for Susan. The presence of the PDP was seen as a necessary, if superficial, requirement to be completed for professional registration. As a list of necessary skills to be evidenced it held worth in that it appeared congruent with practice; however, the excessive length of such lists and a lack of perceived clarity regarding what and how these would be assessed and evidenced reinforced Susan's existing academic insecurities and further strengthened the political significance of the practice mentor above that of the academic tutor. For Susan this was reflected in a mentor who told her to adjust her practice reflection in order to account for what the tutors were seeking rather than what she had actually experienced and discovered. The personal content of the experience was explicitly removed in order to meet the specific demands of the evidence building process as defined externally from the student.

However, again due to staff inconsistency, what staff perceived as important could be clarified only through a process of consensus building, personally asking as many staff opinions as possible and forming an interpreted picture from the many different views and expectations being offered.

*“Yeah... and what I do as well if I’m not sure about something and I hear students say that they thought you had to do this and then another says that they thought it was that... and I get really what do I do then, so I ask one tutor and then ask another, and then ask another just to make sure that they’re telling me the right thing.”*

As previously discussed, the role of the mentor within the students’ experiences of practice, and the assessment of that, was seen as disempowering academic staff. Professional attitudes to university work were essentially reliant on mentor attitudes, and where academic and mentor attitudes differed, so the professional context would dominate due to its increased relevance for the student. For Susan, such a recognition further exaggerated the significance of poor mentor evaluation, professional personality being perceived as of greater significance than academic achievement, particularly where only a D pass would suffice for course completion. There was no need to apply oneself academically, or challenge oneself to become more academic, where ultimately academic expectations remained low when compared with practical experience.

Therefore, for Susan the portfolio, and the processes that shaped it, lost personal significance. Skills development was perceived as little more than a tick-box exercise that lacked the temporal relevance to make it truly personal. Reflections that were being promoted academically were often being sought retrospectively, and as such they became abstracted away from the actual event, isolated within the skill itself and away from the context in which it took place and the personal dimensions of that. Reflection subsequently became grounded in academic essay writing rather than professional practice, reflective tasks being seen as reliant on practice but not necessarily appropriate to the practices being experienced. The ability for reflection to bridge the theoretical / practical divide was challenged by the temporal space between the two events.

As such, reflective practice was perceived as being more about points gathering within the portfolio than driving either personal development or effective practice. Reflective practice dominated academic learning; however, academic

learning was perceived as lacking congruence with practice, and through that so did reflective learning as an explicit endeavour. Abstraction reinforced superficiality and promoted disengagement even where it was perceived as a key part of practice. This is not to say that recording achievement within portfolios wasn't seen as significant, Susan recognizing the positive role that recall could play on practical and personal efficacy, but recording and reflection were not seen as necessarily mutual acts with a mutual purpose.

#### **4.5d. Student Experiences: Patricia (31yrs)**

Patricia returned to higher education already holding one degree and having established a career in caring. It was the caring aspect of the course that was the most powerful driver for her ambitions, the ability and willingness to care for others being seen as an enduring part of her character:

*"I think my jobs have always been with people. I've worked for charities, I've worked in children's homes, and so it's always been in the caring professions."*

A similar picture could be found with Patricia's academic expectations, which in spite of early ambitions would ultimately fall into line with her previous academic experiences. Facing a higher academic content than she had expected, her initial response was to set her goals on a 2:1; however, following poor early assignment feedback, her expectation fell back to a 2:2, the grade that she had achieved in an earlier degree in humanities. In response to a higher academic requirement her motivation to study subsequently became framed in the need to pass, a reflection of her primary drive to care for others. Patricia's quality of practice and the depth of the knowledge underpinning it became her primary focus, rather than the academic assignments on which the qualification would in part rely. Patricia referred to this change as *"learning to be gentler on oneself."*

*"I don't think I'm as hard on myself. At the start I was very much... because as far as the academics went it all linked back to my first degree that I got a 2:2 for. So as soon as I started this one I thought 'I'm getting a 2:1 this time', but first time I*

*didn't have kids and a husband and everything else so when I handed in my first bunch of assignments and they came back again as 2:2's I thought 'oh no', but it's alright. So now I'm just not as hard on myself."*

The mention of Patricia's family offers an insight into the contextual conflicts that she perceived as shaping her learning and developmental experiences. These conflicts would also be reflected in declining efficacy (-6) and control scores, with a particularly sharp fall at the interpersonal level (-1.1). As Patricia explained, at home she felt in control of her environment, her opinions holding sway over the decisions being made within that environment. In contrast, her experiences in the first year on the course have served to highlight her contextual passivity and her subservience to her academic tutors and practical mentors who exist in conflict with each other, and possibly the profession:

*"No, I think that there's a big difference between my personal life and my professional life. Personally I orchestrate my household ... and I'm very in charge of everything. Among my friends I was the first to get married, I was the first to have kids, I've been like the matriarch over everyone... So I've got, not control, but a lot of influence over all that, and then suddenly when I go into work I've got no control. So I go from having it all to having none."*

At home therefore she felt autonomous; at work, both in placements at university, she did not and could not. At home she felt open, social, engaging, but at work she perceived herself as private, and potentially isolated.

The conflict of interests that Patricia perceived as existing between academic and mentor staff was seen as challenging her self-confidence, not only because it threatened her existing sense of efficacy and control, particularly when dealing with people, but also because it challenged her respect for the profession itself. From Patricia's descriptions, mentors commonly saw teaching content as inappropriate, as unrealistic, and expressed that openly. Patricia felt that mentors lacked a genuine interest in their students and were too centred on risk management and practice compliance rather than on the advancement of practice itself. They were attitudes

that made Patricia question her role within the profession, and whether she too would become like that after qualification:

*“One of the older practitioners turned round to me on one of my shifts and she said something along the lines of ‘your learning is completely unrealistic’, and then she said umm... ‘I can’t be bothered with doing this any more, I think I’ll change wards’. So I said, ‘don’t you think it’s time to step out of the job?’ and she said ‘oh no, it’s still a well paid job’... I personally go home feeling, not jaded but really depressed because I get so worried that four years down the line... I’m going to have to turn round and say ‘oh, it’s just not realistic today, we just can’t do it’.”*

Unfortunately, Patricia felt that these were the attitudes that were shaping her evidence gathering, her assignments, and ultimately her learning. Patricia’s learning depth had increased (+14) but this was seen as a consequence of her own search for practical excellence rather than assignments, placements or her Personal Development Portfolio, which she saw as driving mechanistic learners. She didn’t need to work at such depth, but did so to maintain her own sense of self as a professional.

*“They just want you to know the basics. The rules are in this profession that if you want to qualify you have to prove that you’re safe to practice. You have to know how to do it, you don’t have to know why, but I’m not happy just to know how I want to know why, because when I come to meet a client like me who says ‘why are you doing that?’ I want to be able to tell them why.”*

Even reflection was perceived as supporting functional development alone. Taught explicitly, and perceived to be of value by staff if not necessarily by mentors and practitioners, Patricia didn’t feel it necessary to pass the course. Yes, it was something that was essential for excellence but not competence, something that she did naturally but didn’t need to succeed in professionally.

*“I think that some people, or students, will struggle with it because there are always going to be textbook practitioners, where they do it because they’re told that*



*they have to. Like certain injections that you have to give, its guideline, its protocol is that after a certain stage you give that injection and move on."*

Even if offered in a more expansive form, Patricia didn't feel that reflection alone could promote change in professionals with an existing functional perspective, that view being shaped by personalities that were similarly resistant to change or unwilling to make the choice to change, a view reflected in a decreasing personality malleability score across the year (8/4):

*"I think you're stuck with your personality, and you're stuck with the way things are if you don't make the choice to move on."*

As such, Patricia perceived reflection as being a forced element within assignments, a way of superficially extending learning beyond the tick box exercises held within the portfolio. It was an issue that was highlighted for Patricia through the lack of temporal congruence between reflective tasks and the contexts upon which they were meant to be reflecting. Often the skills that she was meant to be reflecting on weren't present in the relevant placement context, whilst at other times the experiences to be reflected on were so mundane as to make them devoid of any real personal relevance. Furthermore, for Patricia, these reflections were also largely abstract because their goal was to establish what the student would do in a particular situation when a professional practitioner, and yet that state hadn't been experienced and so any reflection could only be considered a best guess in a temporally abstract context.

*"The big thing that they wanted us to write about is what we'd do as a practitioner. But we're not practitioners and we're not allowed to do anything with it for at least another two years. So it's good practice but where they give us grades it isn't realistic because we're not allowed to go off... That's right. What would I do as a practitioner ... I don't know, because I'm not, I'm not doing it."*

And yet, whilst these abstractions were framed within practice, due to the perceived conflict between academic tutors and placement practitioners, academically driven reflection was also perceived as being too idealistic and lacking

any account for the policies and practices that will shape real practitioner decisions. As such, the reflective process was seen as ignoring the political nature of the workplace.

For Patricia reflection, as with all of the assessment procedures associated with the course, was subsequently perceived as superficial and functional. Although seen as essential professional practice, reflection became as much a tick-box exercise as the evidence-gathering practices that typified the portfolio. Strict PDP or portfolio structures were seen as aiding learning because they increase clarity but reduced learning by removing personal relevance, allowing students to work in areas that they find particularly relevant to them and their experience. Knowledge, and the search for knowledge, became framed in a pragmatic hierarchy according to use rather than interest, and through the constraints applied to the reflective process it was seen as merely driving a fatalistic acceptance of a particular type of practitioner. Furthermore, through such practices Patricia would often be brought into conflict with her own model of ethical behaviour, forcing client contact that she saw as inappropriate. As such, the portfolio of evidence actively drove unprofessional behaviour:

*“The tick box element is I think is horrendous. I appreciate that they have to get around it, I appreciate that we have to do certain things in a certain amount of time before we can qualify, but one of the elements was that before you can start doing it you have to witness it five times. And I was in the hospital and there was a client there and I was told quick go in but they didn’t know me from Adam I walked in, watched her and then left. You know, so that I could get that box ticked, and I thought that was disgusting.”*

For Patricia, who struggled with her self-efficacy across the year (-6), much could be made of her struggle to remain in control in contexts that were striven by interpersonal conflicts, inconsistency and politicization. Successful placements required positive mentor relationships, successful study positive lecturer relationships, and yet these were often framed within a theory / practice gap that could not be breached due to dichotomous views held by each party. In addition,

Patricia approached institutional staff for advice on how to manage such issues but was rejected, leading her to accept her isolated position and personal responsibility without the knowledge or power to overcome them. Lecturers were perceived as being too busy to deal with the concerns of every student. To pass the course, to become employable was seen as reliant on accepting placement practitioner views, to evidence practice as if they were positive role models even when they were not perceived as such. Alternatively, for Patricia, those wishing to act reflectively were choosing to leave the profession:

*“My first mentor is actually leaving the profession because of what’s happened, because she couldn’t be a reflective practitioner.”*

Indeed, Patricia often perceived staff as lacking interest in both their students and their assignments, signing evidence sheets without even reading them, or even checking that they belonged to the student in front of them. For Patricia, her goal had been to maximize her abilities as a professional practitioner and yet the system, both academically and practically, was not seen as supporting such a goal. PDP was merely a precursor for CPD, a way of reinforcing contextual constraint and maintaining minimal expectations.

*“I think that the professional side of it is a bit of a Mickey-Mouse task, because when we qualify we have to do it all the time... we have to do it every year to get our permission to practice. We have to pay for the privilege as well. So doing it now means it won’t be such a shock to the system when we have to do it, but actually our answers are a load of rubbish.”*

#### **4.5e. Cohort C Conclusions**

As explained when previously discussing the institution’s interpretation and response to the sector’s demand for PDP, those courses aligned to specific professional bodies offered the implementation process particular difficulties. These were framed around the need to differentiate between generic and specific

competencies and the ability to transfer those developed professionally to areas of employment that are not in themselves professional. Cohort C, as an explicitly professional course, aligned intrinsically to a particular career path, has clarified this complexity through the way in which it has been shaped to define the processes and outcomes associated with generic forms of PDP within its own character. The focus of the course is essentially introverted, shaped towards its own specific expectations and devoid of consideration of contexts that may exist beyond itself as a profession. The staff and students alike hold a firm focus on a singular working goal, their *“employability potential”* (Conroy et al. 2008, p.1) constrained within the construction of a single and consensual future.

Central to the implementation of PDP was the need to support student acceptance of CPD as lifelong professional practice. This was expressed by both members of staff, although their models of the ‘professional’ appeared to be different, one focusing on the broad spectrum of self-development that frames the acquisition of specific competences whilst the other focused more on evidencing the skills themselves. For each, their position reflected their self-perceptions based on their own experiences as professional practitioners, differences in focus that reinforced a perceived conflict in the relationship between education and practice. For one, competence acquisition was in itself a developmental process, but to the other competence was more of a product to be evidenced, process and product being aligned in a single concept. Constraint, however, is a central part of the process, Huntingdon commenting that PDP within the professions must always *“codify reflection as a route to particular attitudes in learners, adoption of life-long learning as the norm and personal responsibility as a key component of this, whilst producing a particular output”* (2004, p.53). In essence, the final output will always remain the primary goal.

The conflict between the two positions was clear to both students, the perception of competence as product dominating their experiences. Both were equally critical of the stance, both arguing that it was not the outcomes in themselves that shaped them as a professional but the journey to those outcomes. Here, those journeys had been founded on the self-perceptions that each saw as

fundamental to their entry into the profession. The ability to care was seen as an a-priori to their entry onto the course, and as such the ability to be perceived as a 'carer' was central to their choices and actions. For one this revolved around their need to communicate effectively, for the other it was about the strength of their underlying knowledge and the controlled support that they could offer through that, but for each "*mere submission of a PDP or CPD record [cannot be seen as] evidence of engagement with the process*" (Dyke et al. 2009, p.62).

In part, the differences in attitude and expectation that typified their experiences of the student-staff relationship acted to reinforce their need for self-reliance based on their existing attitudes. For Patricia, being left without academic support regarding issues with the views of her mentors left her feeling isolated from both parties and subsequently left her questioning the value and reliability of each. Without being able to legitimately question her underpinning beliefs, Patricia was left with an enduring sense of process superficiality, evidencing skills becoming associated with a specific temporal context, in this case a means to pass the course. Thus, again in line with the findings of Dyke et al., processes such as reflection became "*mechanical*" and "*meaningless*" (2009, p.62), Patricia perceiving them as ultimately unnecessary for professional registration and practice.

Within one of the staff interviews, a further point of interest was raised through their attitude towards age. As Samantha indicated, young students require education in reflective practice in order to self-evaluate their sub-conscious, lacking the life-experiences to establish this prior to course commencement. Meanwhile, for older students, it was required to counter their inherent subjectivity, to promote an objective outlook on self. Setting aside the possibilities of self-evaluating the sub-conscious, Zayed (2008) arguing that subjectivity can only ever have partial insight into self, it was clear that neither student appreciated the relevance of personal enquiry because they already saw themselves as possessing the key personal attributes required for the profession: the desire and ability to care. Each lacked the motivation for personal self-examination at such a level, focusing instead on the professional skills that build on their existing personalities.

To discuss the adoption of a competence focus within the course, leads us back to the conflict that has already been highlighted between the internal teachers and the external mentors and placement staff, a conflict that was actively avoided by academic lecturers. For Boud & Walker (1998), discipline-specific, professional education is characterized by a process of enculturation that is implicitly driven by teachers who already exist within that culture; however, in this instance it was explained by both students that teachers and mentors taught from and towards different models of the same profession. Mentors were often experienced as critical of reflective practice, avoidant of the idea of autonomous practice and focused on submissive heteronomy within a risk-full environment. Lecturers, or at least some lecturers, valued a more developmentally-driven model of personal engagement with competencies but were found to be unwilling to contradict their counterparts. For both students, being left as isolated practitioners-in-the-making in such a position of conflict inevitably impacted on both their confidence and sense of control, leaving them uncertain of how to respond to their peers in either situation. For Patricia, this was of particular relevance because it countered her own normal way of being, her own trait for control, and yet the power issues that surrounded the discipline were not perceived as valid content within her portfolios. Self-awareness in that sense was not perceived as valuable as it wouldn't contribute anything to her final pass. Again, in terms of the potential for the Personal Development Portfolio to promote personal enquiry and self-awareness, this was constrained by the students' perceptions of 'self' as inherently suitable for the profession, and the perceived superficiality of the process that failed to challenge those students to question those fundamental self-perceptions.

Key to the discussion of inter-staff conflict within the teaching environment, and the ways in which that impacts on students' perceptions of PDP process, are the subsequent influences that those conflicts have applied to the concept of reflective practitioner. For both students, this issue was highlighted through a temporal concern that tied reflection to abstracted experiences, and a power balance that failed to support it as necessary for either assignment completion or practitioner status. This issue can be split into several areas of influence. Firstly, placement

mentors were commonly found to be actively dismissive of reflective practice, indeed for one of the students a mentor was leaving the profession due to such an attitude in the workplace. Secondly, again for many mentors but equally through the perceived attitudes of some academic teaching staff, the technical focus of the portfolio-building process turned students away from reflective practice due to its limited role within course completion. Finally, the lack of perceived congruence between placement content and reflective endeavour strengthened the perception of students of reflective practice as a marginalized, academic process with limited relevance to post-qualification practice.

Part of the concerns expressed were associated with the compliant nature of the portfolio process, Smith & Tilema (2003) highlighting the constraints that mandatory involvement can have on the reflective process. By denying the role of 'self', and setting it within processes that lack temporal or experiential validity, the process of reflection becomes constrained within superficial and mechanical analysis of competence as product. Where Moon (2004) suggests that reflective learning expresses an intention to learn from experience, the 'what' in that learning is strongly constrained within the expectation of others that ultimately act to define the products being sought. Where staff within professional education seek to structure learning in such a way as to support the personal challenge that ultimately drives reflective practice, it is clear from these contributions that such a structure, if initially in place, has been lost within the inconsistency and conflict that has defined the learning context. It remains unclear as to what degree the adoption of reflection as a learning device is reliant on existing personality traits, a propensity to challenge oneself and one's convictions and beliefs (Roberts 2009), but for both students within this particular cohort, such a challenge is neither extensively supported or valued. For Patricia, deep learning is seen as the product of an existing personality driver for control, rather than a process of self-revelation and response.

## **4.6. Cohort D**

### **4.6a. PDP: Module Character**

Cohort D was drawn from postgraduate students studying for a professional single year, postgraduate qualification that has been designed to lead to professional registration. As with Cohort C, Cohort D is founded on a professional model of learning that concentrates on the development of particular competencies as required within a particular field of employment. The projection of specific identities in line with its own organizational boundaries is a central concern, and in this instance portfolio construction is the main method of evidencing the acquisition of these pre-requisite skills, behaviours, attitudes and identities.

At its core, the course is delivered around a set of external standards that demand a high level of self-evaluation and understanding. A continual process of reflection and evaluation requires the student to question not only their professional skills, but also their personal and professional values and beliefs in relation to the professional expectations being asked of them.

Built within a framework of academic learning and placement experience, reflective practice plays an essential role within the course, which is assessed through a diverse range of written essays, practical presentations, an extended research project and the completion of a Personal Development Profile. The PDP, which is viewed as a summative tool, represents a constant factor throughout the academic year, and is intended to link theoretical and practical understanding to improve self-awareness and evidence the growth of the students as flexible, reflective, and autonomous professional practitioners.

The nature of that 'practitioner' is driven by both direct professional contact and the socio-political climate within which the profession sits, linking personal growth to the immediate and general contexts within which they must work. As such, the PDP is used to promote and maintain a working dialogue not only between the course tutors and their students, but also the students and the particular demands that each placement asks of them. In this way the PDP may be seen as



actively supporting the alignment of the individual student with the expectations of the profession as a whole and the contexts in which they work.

Therefore, as with Cohort C, the focus of this PDP is strongly centred on the profession, and the concept of employability is constrained within this. The degree to which these skills are considered transferable beyond that profession is largely ignored due to the professional aspirations of the student cohort.

#### **4.6b. Cohort D Staff Perspectives (Sandra & Felicity)**

As found in Cohort C, which was also working from a professional perspective, the similarities and differences that surrounded individual staff perceptions of PDP appeared to be shaped by the different ways in which individual staff members viewed the professional standards to which they were working. Specifically here explicit variations in focus could be recognized between Sandra, who constrained learning to the standards themselves, and Felicity, who viewed the primary learning goal as lying beyond them. Both saw their main focus as the creation of effective practitioners, and the need to evidence the acquirement of the skills needed to ensure that, but the route to such a status was reflected in a range of expectations and aspirations.

For Sandra, the professional standards, as evidenced within the PDP, represented the fundamental purpose of the course, they were the end point of study:

*“Really it was a tool for reflection, looking at how they evaluated their learning and how they put actions in place for improvement... They know what they are achieving, they know what they are aiming for and they know where the benchmark comes.”*

As such, details regarding those standards, and the specific processes and attitudes that drove their attainment, became the main focus of the interview. Where such skills were to be standardized, so too were the students themselves,

linkages between theory and practice being set at a functional level to ensure benchmark competence rather than dispositional or psychological change. Ownership of the work was centred on the ability of the student to align themselves with the skills being asked of them, evidencing those being their responsibility.

*“We were already operating a PDP which was a professional development profile which were closely related to our industry standards...They were aware of the fact that it was in the public domain and that it was a document that could be used to track their development against those industry standards... and for the people who would contribute to it, it would be their ownership, it would be their responsibility to initiate entries and that it would be used to gather feedback from mentors in the workplace and their tutors who supported them in placements.”*

Furthermore, for Sandra, the superficial nature of the standards were beneficial in that they both limited the range of student types that they had to cater for on the course, and constrained the course outcomes to practice alone. This in turn lowered the academic pressures on the students and raised potential achievement. In this vein, for Sandra, reflection, or reflective practice, was constrained within the skills that were being sought and avoidant of the personal growth that underpinned them. As Sandra explains, this is very much in line with the assumptions being made of the student through recruitment:

*“To a certain extent I think that it’s part of the nature of the students that we recruit that they all want to be a [practitioner] and with that comes a training programme which is tied to a set of standards that are national standards on which there is no negotiation so in a sense the type of students that come on our course almost know – part by prospectus, partly by open days, partly by induction, partly by the interview process – what they’re coming in to.”*

For Felicity, however, this attitude represented only the starting point of the learning process and far from its end. Effective practitioner performance was not merely centred on skills but the dispositional qualities that underpinned them. PDP in this form was not designed to manufacture a particular ‘type’ of practitioner, but

to scaffold personal enquiry towards a better understanding of the students' own moral values, beliefs and aspirations. Reflection was part of a journey towards the discovery of self-identity both personally and professionally rather than a functional tool within the evidencing of skills.

*"I mean a lot of it is about wanting the students to develop a personal philosophy about [the subject] by the time they leave, because as I said, they can have the best subject knowledge but can they actually go in and use the skills they've got to manage and develop and support [the role]."*

Subsequently, Felicity was explicitly critical of the limited nature of the standards and the minimal expectations of development that were held within them. It was too easy for students to meet those standards and remain only mechanistic and mediocre practitioners, and as such the system was failing both the individuals and the profession as a whole. Talking about one student, Felicity commented:

*"My worry was that she thought 'well, just tick that box', because I asked what she thought she was getting out of it in terms of you as a practitioner and she said that she hadn't thought of that."*

For Felicity, the mechanistic form of the PDP further created an unfortunate tension within the learning context through its intention to simultaneously promote and constrain student growth and autonomy:

*"I know, I mean it's a very top-down model... you must stick to this model. Where's the negotiation? Where are the values and what's driving those standards? Ultimately, whose outcomes are they and whose agenda is it? And very often... it's someone else's agenda and it's an inappropriate set of outcomes."*

Subsequently, whilst Felicity recognized her own desire to promote a specific 'type' of practitioner that reflected well on the institution, she also recognized that in doing so she was acting to limit the nature of the practitioners that qualify.

In addition, where Sandra saw staff attitudes as being constrained within the standards and their functional expectations, Felicity was far more open about the

internal differences within the department and the ways in which those were expressed to the students. According to Felicity, such variations are inevitable where the terms being used, such as reflection, are so open to creative interpretation.

*“We had a staff development day... it was the whole of the institute... and it was on reflective practice. And again, at the start we all had a discussion about our own definitions of reflective... and we actually couldn't come up with a definition of reflective practice because everybody had a different view on it. I mean what we could agree on was that as a result of reflective practice we become, hopefully, better practitioners by challenging our own thinking, but actually as we went round each group within the institute they each had their own spin... we came up with lots of characteristics but we couldn't come up with a single meaning.”*

Ultimately, Felicity managed the course but still recognized the unpredictability and inconsistency of staff and student engagement with their PDP, superficial clarity hiding the key differences in understanding that only become explicit when attempting to shape learning within it.

*“Well that's what I've said to you, but you could be having this same conversation with somebody else and they might not be aware of where we do our PDP. I'm thinking globally about all the things we do on our course, but actually it's a really good question, and I'm sitting here answering the question thinking 'is that what you mean?' I mean are my perceptions of what you mean by personal development the same, and are you thinking, 'well, that's not what I mean'. I mean it's all about what are our definitions of personal development planning... and one persons definition might be well they do an action plan, whilst somebody else might be talking about intellectual and moral development, and somebody else might be talking about planning against the standards. So, you've a least three models.”*

#### 4.6c. Student Experiences: Sarah (23yrs)

Sarah joined this postgraduate course immediately after completing her undergraduate studies and the difference between the two contexts was immediately apparent to her. Undergraduate study was perceived as spacious and lacking immediacy and drive, whilst the postgraduate learning environment was experienced as far more assessment driven, requiring greater focus and a willingness to take responsibility for one's learning. The need for greater self-reliance was perceived as the driving force behind her greater self-efficacy (+4) and Perceived Personal Control (+0.6) as low initial academic expectations were replaced with an increasing sense of academic belief:

*"We've had to rely on ourselves more in terms of the planning and... there's just been more pressure and you've got to do it, whereas before you had a longer period of time to do work and now... it's where I want to be. I want to be a practitioner..."*

As the comment suggests, Sarah's increased sense of motivation was reinforced by her growing sense of professional purpose. Having entered the year lacking confidence in her ability to communicate in and with groups, and feeling reliant on existing friendships to get her through, when her friends left the course it was this sense of purpose that spurred her on to work alone. Employment within her chosen profession required the completion of this course and that was to prove motivation in itself to face and accept the challenges set by the academic and practice environments.

Whilst the nature of the course and its professional outcomes were seen as driving her developmental changes, Sarah also highlighted the role that her partner had made on that as well. Sarah married during the year and her subsequent sense of self-validation was seen as a major contributory factor within her personal development, although it was also seen as a contributory factor in her low malleability scores for both intelligence (6) and personality (4). Marriage promoted her self-acceptance and an appreciation of self as a constant and predictable

concept across time. Such validation didn't require personal change; indeed, it was seen as positively disempowering it.

With regard to her other identified areas of change, Sarah's explanations largely concentrated on the relationships that existed between the academic and professional learning environments, and the perceived incongruence that appeared to exist between the two.

Academically, learning was experienced in blocks, interspersed with placement experience. Its goal was seen as seeking to link theory and practice through reflective exercises, essays being seen as driving personal engagement beyond the Personal Development Portfolio. Although centred on reflection, this approach was seen as superficial and as such unable to support reflective practice. Reflection was acknowledged as improving both academic and professional achievements, but for Sarah this had been manipulated into specific patterns of writing designed to achieve specific academic outcomes, and as such had become a chore. Subsequently, even though Sarah was experiencing increasing academic success, her initial feelings of negativity towards reflection in learning, a negativity formed during her undergraduate study, remained largely in tact:

*"When you're doing your assignment writing they do say 'put in what you believe, and why'... but it is very much, you know, these are the standards you have to meet to pass these tests, and we're doing this so that you can pass those tests."*

Furthermore, time constraints on academic assignments were seen as too tight and subsequently staff attitudes were seen as too outcome-specific, Sarah often being told what to say in order to pass. Subsequently, learning depth decreased significantly (-18), and surface learning increased (+10), as the need for personal engagement with the tasks became constrained by staff efforts to ensure course completion. As Sarah explained:

*"In terms of the assignments you just have to give them what they want to pass... they said you just have to pass, and if you don't pass then we'll help you pass..."*

*It wasn't an option for us not to pass. Those people who didn't pass were simply told what to put in them to pass."*

In part Sarah's perceived negativity had been reinforced by her experiences of what she saw as a fragmented learning environment. Teaching content often lacked synchronicity with practice experience, and without the appropriate temporal associations Sarah struggled to make the necessary connections between teaching theory and practice. As Sarah explained, without the relevant teaching practice experience theory often made little sense and the tasks that staff set to link the two remained largely abstract.

This perceived lack of academic depth, and the subsequent drop in learning depth, reinforced her focus on the pragmatic side of her placement experiences, and her increasing reliance on her placement mentors. Initially, Sarah had experienced a very negative mentor relationship, but had come to rely on their help to complete her portfolios, and with that seek professional membership. It was only here that reflection made sense as a driver of effective practice; however, the focus of reflective practice in placement was perceived as being the creation of evidence, the acquisition of competencies, and in that form it was perceived as little deeper than that experienced academically. Sarah didn't feel that professional reflection impacted particularly on personal development outside of that context, age being seen as more significant for that purpose.

It was a view that was indeed supported by one of her mentors, who told her to specifically view the course in functional terms, to work with the structural rigidity of academic expectations because it would only be after qualification that true professionalism would emerge through experience. Ultimately, there is always a limit to what you can teach and after that it's down to trial and error, reflective practice and experience. Sarah concluded that practitioners were ultimately living in conflict with the systematic rigidity of the professional, a conflict that made all parties complicit in a level of dishonesty surrounding competence acquisition. It was a view supported by experience when Sarah found her mentor helping her to

fabricate evidence to support academic expectations, whilst also supporting the use of publications designed for such purposes:

*“I’ve got a book... it’s a trainee practitioner’s survival guide and it will give you examples of how you can meet [the standards]... But if we can’t meet one then the practitioner will say, ‘well I’ll have a think about that, I’ll get back to you’ and they’ll think or go and ask someone in the workplace.”*

The mentor system was therefore profoundly significant for Sarah. Where she perceived incongruence between academic and placement learning, the view of the mentor would take priority, even where this negatively impacted on her assignments and her mental wellbeing.

*“I did have a breakdown at school in the beginning. My tutor came in and I just said that I find it so hard because the environment is so flexible and it’s not structured enough, and they said that I’d just have to do what the organization do, which is what I do now. And then the university, even though it’s not to their original sort of ideas of practice, you’ve just got to stick with what the organization.”*

Together with the manufacturing of evidence, to which all parties appeared complicit, Sarah perceived evidence-building as largely artificial, abstract and superficial, and subsequently the PDP on which professional membership would rely was also seen as being of limited use. In developmental terms, such contextual conflicts carried a double-edged sword for Sarah. Changing contexts and the diverse expectations that each carried taught her to be more fluid, more flexible, and as such raised her confidence in herself as practitioner (PPC +0.6, GSE +4).

*“I don’t think [PDP] has much impact. Only that... I feel more independent now I suppose, I don’t know, I couldn’t tell you why. Maybe it’s just age... umm... so in that way more confident, more...”*

However, it equally made her feel vulnerable to those contexts, unsure of how to behave with different people within those contexts and ultimately subservient to them. Subsequently, both her interpersonal and social sense of perceived control fell



across the year (-0.7 / -0.5). In response, her reliance on her sense of perceived personal solidity was reinforced in order to guard against the ambiguities and inconsistencies that were being asked of her both academically and within her professional placements.

#### **4.6d Student Experiences: Elizabeth (40yrs)**

For Elizabeth, this has proved a difficult year. Although she was keen to express her experiences within her academic and placement environments, much of this was expressed through references to her immediate social context and in particular the way in which she has come to interact with her family. Centred on the diagnosis of her father with cancer, much revolved around a process of personal reassessment regarding her perceived roles as mother, wife and daughter. How she would be viewed both immediately and retrospectively became a common theme throughout the interview.

Born to parents within the armed forces, Elizabeth felt as though she had been raised to dominate those close to her, a sense of domination framed by intellectual and dichotomous absolutes. She perceived the world in terms of black and white, right and wrong, a hard and rational place in which emotions were seen as a taboo. For Elizabeth this gave her strength, and that strength gave her a natural power over her partner and children, who she saw as inherently weaker. Subsequently, her world was centred on power and her self-confidence was built on her ability to control, and due to the power that she had experientially held over those around her she entered the course with what Elizabeth recognized as arrogant expectations of success that were academically, professionally and personally inappropriate. As she explained, it was in part working through this arrogance that has had the most profound influence on her across the year:

*“At the time, looking back, I was confident, possibly too confident... in my abilities to progress through the course smoothly... through the course I’ve gone down and really had my confidence knocked. But then on reflection going through it,*

*it was a really bad time but then coming through the other side of it, reflecting back on it, I learnt so much more about the course and what I was doing but also my strengths as an individual.”*

At the centre of these difficulties lay a pre-existing personal inflexibility that made her reliant on others for setting the rigid environments in which she was most comfortable. The course had been constructed around a self-regulated learning model that required the student to set their own learning framework and organize their work around that, but Elizabeth had initially proved too inflexible to achieve this. Her work suffered and her perceived self-efficacy scores fell (-7). Placement experiences were particularly challenging as the fluidity of each situation constantly made her question the validity of her attitudes and expectations when facing a new and demanding professional role. Historically, she had some experience of caring for autistic children but Elizabeth found few similarities between that and her placements. These were perpetually fluid and demanded a level of personal and individual responsiveness that she couldn't initially offer, her resulting inability to cope with the need for flexibility impacting on her sense of interpersonal (-0.9) and social control (-0.7). As Elizabeth explained when contrasting two of her placements at different locations:

*“The [manager] that I was working under was ‘this is what we’re doing, this is where we’re going, if you don’t like it you know tough. You’ve got to do it my way or it’s the highway.’... the second placement, they were just... they were just so creative, very cross-curricula, and it was all [client] led where before it had been [professionally] led. And that really undermined my confidence in what I felt I could contribute to it, because I... well I’ve always been brought up to be a team player but I wasn’t a team player. They were carrying me and I didn’t like the fact that they were carrying me.”*

Clearly, with her academic, personal and professional contexts conspiring to raise doubts about her personal attitudes and behaviours, reflection became a dominant theme within the discussion. Elizabeth had experienced reflection and reflective practice during previous undergraduate study but at the time perceived it

to be an “airy-fairy”, almost “hippy” concept with little practical use. However, within the year it had become the primary driver of her self-development and learning, academic routes that promoted reflection proving to lie at the centre of her learning. In particular, diary-keeping practices were seen as the most appropriate focus for her efforts, even where these lacked tutor and mentor support and reduced their attention on key processes such as their PDP.

*“It would be really, really good, from my perspective if we had to keep a diary, more of a progressive reflective diary each day. You know, just a paragraph about [an activity]... and then adhere these standards to that rather than having to fill out a form for those standards. So that you’d get more out of it and people can see how you progress.”*

Elizabeth knew that the academic staff members were single-mindedly focused on their Personal Development Portfolios, but reflection wasn’t seen as a constituent part of those and subsequently Elizabeth felt that these lacked the potential to empower academic, personal and professional change. For Elizabeth this was only possible through her course files, which were both reflective in nature and largely kept away from the scrutiny of staff; indeed, she had received criticisms from staff for applying too much effort to the file above her PDP:

For Elizabeth, because of its ability to support self-examination reflection had therefore become the primary learning process on the course, and its significance was not restricted to academic or professional study. As she explained, by applying reflection habitually to all aspects of her life she could open all of her roles and attitudes to examination, and with that change.

*“I’ve never stood up to my dad... you know he was God, head of the family, ‘we’ve got to do that and this is where we’re going’, but now I’m like ‘but have you thought about this, and this, and this?’ So it’s changed the dynamics that made me, the dynamics of my family.”*

As the comment suggests, for Elizabeth the results of this process were significant but often also confused. The expressed excitement around driving change

were not reflected in scores that supported the view that personality could change in this way, malleability dropping by 3 points across the year (7/4). This in part may be due to the perceived inability of those around her to change at the same time, to respond appropriately to her own growth. However, it may also reflect a sense of confusion between intellect and personality. Elizabeth describes a new intellectual outlook, a new flexibility, but equally she expresses a need for those views to be dominant, to control. Professionals are not 'good' unless they reflect as she does, and relationships became evaluated according to the ability of others to reflect. In relation to their social behaviour, reflection had again become dichotomous in itself.

Interestingly, measures of learning depth have been used to offer an insight into the value of reflection, but in this case whilst reflection was clearly a significant personal process for Elizabeth, learning depth fell (-18). She saw this as being the result of the types of assignment being used and the significance of the PDP, which as previously discussed was not perceived as requiring reflection. The perceived over-emphasis of the PDP, which she saw as an evidencing tool for skills acquisition in order to obtain professional membership, was seen to disengage the student from the developmental process.

*"I think the only document for me that are valued are my [course code] files, because you go through the first one and you think 'oh my god, you mean I did that... I mean it's meant to be a reflective document about your journey and looking at it, because I've kept mine separate my PDP... There's no, for me, scope to acknowledge any... above my skills base... what I'm thinking or my philosophy or the changes I've gone through."*

For Elizabeth the PDP is a particularly blunt and superficial tool, the superficiality of which has made her unable to differentiate between good and bad practitioners. Reflection was the only process that could achieve that but within the contents of the PDP this wasn't necessary; indeed, due to the temporal spaces between placement and academic learning much of the evidence given was perceived as either abstract or even manufactured. For Elizabeth, the focus on the PDP was experienced as demoralizing as it denied expression of the most valuable

areas of change that she was going through, a level of expression that she developed through her course file but added nothing explicit to her grades.

*“It’s just a bureaucratic hoop that I feel I have to jump through and complete, whereas my [course code] is mine, it’s my work. It’s almost like art I suppose, where everything changes and synthesises and you adapt, you reflect, whereas the PDP is just based on skills. For me, but I don’t feel that I have any ownership of it. Now whether that’s because I don’t put in... I’m not saying that I don’t put any effort in to it because I certainly do but blood, sweat and tears have gone into my [course code] folders compared to my PDP, and I don’t feel that to judge someone on their PDP is enough.”*

Whilst the year has proved particularly challenging for Elizabeth, a challenge that has resulted in both a fall in confidence and control and a steady rise back towards a position of comfort, reflection has been her primary concern. The course, and particularly the placements within the course, had challenged her to either change or fail and within that decision lay the foundations for a holistic change in attitudes, behaviours and self-perception.

*“Something comes along and pops in and you think you’re grasping at straws to hang on, but going through that has enabled me to gain a wider perspective of it I think, and to build upon my character as an individual and to know where my strengths lie, and where I need to continue to develop as a professional.”*

#### **4.6e. Cohort D Conclusions**

As a cohort, quantitatively little has changed across the year in terms of the psychological traits associated with self-regulated learning. And yet the experiences of students on the course raised some significant issues surrounding the use of PDP processes within a professional environment.

Firstly, it should be noticed that these student experiences have carried the most explicit references to constructive alignment so far, the allowance of personal

learning spaces to achieve particular competences typifying the approach. As Biggs explains:

*“The standards model is designed to assess changes in performance as a result of learning, for the purpose of seeing what, and how well, something has been learned... The point is not to identify students in terms of some characteristic, but to identify performances that tell us what has been learned, and how well.”* (1999, p.13)

Constructive in this sense refers the process through which the individual student accepts responsibility for aligning their personal identities with those required by professions through a specific focus on performance. It extends Brabrand’s (2007) educationally functional enquiry, *“How can we make sure our students learn what we want them to?”* and extends that into ‘being’.

As discussed in the introduction, it is a statement that reflects an issue of power within the professional context in particular. From the experiences of the students it can be seen that space was left within the curriculum to drive autonomy, to make students accept responsibility for their own learning. However, efficacy and control were perceived as being threatened by the common perception of individual submission to the conflicting academic and professional requirements of the course. Space within the curriculum drove autonomy but that was not deemed a requirement for course completion and thus students were not perceived as being given a valued route for its acquisition or expression.

For staff, this overt issue of power was deflected through the professional nature of the course, membership being seen to imply a common educational goal to guide a specific ‘type’ of student to become a particular ‘type’ of practitioner through the acquisition of generalized and externalized standards. Both are then seen as enduring characteristics of the institution itself and presented for marketing purposes as being typical of its professional vision. As Hultqvist (1998) argues, success for the student relies on their willingness to conform, or comply, with that view and self-regulate self in that particular form. As such, they become subject to the normalizing will and power of others, a concern hidden within the securities and

insecurities of the profession itself and the awareness of submission being lost in a discourse of benefit and certainty (Foucault 1983).

Both interviewees were aware of this situation, each recognizing the normalizing and standardizing focus of the course and the teaching staff on it. Such perceptions were reinforced by the superficiality of the processes being asked of them, evidence of competence being commonly viewed as both abstract and manufactured. The PDP process was seen as little more than a tick-box exercise, whilst the need to reflect in assignments could be circumnavigated by staff intervention where it threatened completion. Lecturers would often provide the answers for assignments, whilst placement mentors would often help the student fabricate evidence where it hadn't actually been gained through practice. Furthermore, due to the structure of the course, academic reflection was always seen as temporally incongruent with actual experiences, and yet even though the abstract nature of the results of such a process were readily identified, the students remained passively complicit with them for functional purposes.

Processes such as reflection therefore potentially offered little to the student where it wasn't deemed as specifically necessary for course completion, its use appearing more reliant on individual personality and the motivations within which it was being applied. For one student it had a positive role in managing significant life changes, for the other it matched their own need to know and explain, to establish the confidence to act at a level beyond those standards. To neither was it necessary to pass, but compliance was assured through their desire to become qualified practitioners. Student autonomy was countered by contextual submission and excessive staff inputs that guaranteed success, so the depth promoted through reflection is negated and the shift towards depth becomes ultimately reliant on individual motivations to study.

It is a significant point that Elizabeth became habitually reflective and saw this as both shaping the changes that took place in her life and helping to align that new self with her perceived future. However, this habituation did not extend to areas where it wasn't deemed as necessary, or couldn't extend to assignments, including

her PDP, where it wasn't perceived as necessary by the staff. Attempts to raise meta-cognition become constrained within a degree of external input that effectively removed personal responsibility and passively bridged the spaces between theory and practice. Teaching in this model may not support self-regulated learning but actually contradict it, Boekaerts (1995) explaining that it is the habituation of process that builds student confidence in their ability to self-regulate it and therefore accept it as fundamental to their way of learning.

Key to the student experiences was the perception of inconsistency, both within the academic and placement support, but also between lecturers and mentors. Not only was this perceived as reinforcing the students' sense of helplessness to context but also forced them to choose a point of contact that suited their own beliefs best. In this instance, both students identified their mentors as their primary point of contact, and equally that in doing so the potential influence that could be asserted by lecture staff was damaged. Where reflection was seen as being located primarily within academic study, as it was with one student, so its significance as a contributory practice was also diminished.



## **4.7. Cohort E**

### **4.7a. PDP: Module Character**

Cohort E was drawn from a single-year postgraduate course shaped within the perspective of employability (see Clegg & Bradley 2006a). By remaining focused on workplace expectations, the skills promoted through the course possess a generic quality and may therefore be considered in line with institutional expectations regarding 'graduateness'. Employability in this instance isn't framed within the specific requirements of a particular sector but within a general attitude towards employment, and therefore transferability is considered central to the outcomes of the course.

For the purposes of this study, the inclusion of Cohort E offers an insight into a learning model that only supports PDP as an informal concern. Constructed around 6 individual modules, no specific PDP framework has been utilized, and whilst issues such as reflection, self-evaluation and evidence-building are promoted throughout these modules they are only dealt with as personal development processes within the first. Here, self-awareness is driven through the adoption of SWOT and SMART target setting, but where the students utilize those within their studies remains their individual responsibility. Whilst considered beneficial by staff, they do not form an explicit part of any marking scheme on the course other than the first module. As a reflection of this decision, references to personal self-evaluation and awareness only appear explicitly in the assignment outcomes for module one, and implicitly in module two. In terms of assessment, assignments are dominated by written reports, although peer activity and presentation work are common throughout and may implicitly drive soft skills such as teamwork and communication.

### **4.7b. Cohort E Staff Perspectives (John & Nigel)**

For Cohort E, PDP would appear a long-term intention rather than an immediate actuality, although any ambition for its inclusion would be potentially muted, with both Nigel & John commenting that far too much has been expected of

it within the institution. As both suggested, students always focus on the qualification itself rather than the integral skills that may implicitly make it up, and neither see it as appropriate to expect otherwise. As such, they would appear in conflict with both their immediate institutional expectations and those of the wider socio-economic drivers that have shaped those.

Equally, the final form of any proposed implementation of PDP would appear uncertain. Currently, John, as course leader, perceives Nigel as a symbolic representation of the course PDP in that he runs the one module that explicitly contains PDP processes. Nigel views PDP as a way of extending the individual as a holistic endeavour, allowing the student to think beyond the course and decide on their future paths in line with greater self-awareness and improved motivation. For Nigel, self-awareness is a route to happiness through its ability to promote positive choice making, employability being an aspect of that but not necessarily its primary one:

*“It’s very important, very important, vital I think in the development of [profession] and increasing personal effectiveness is personal awareness, what to do with that knowledge and how to react to the issues that arise from that self-analysis. It’s vital to professional effectiveness and also being a good leader, and that’s what my teaching is all about... To improve people’s self-awareness, and so as to enable them to be more effective in their lives, both family life and their work life, and to be happier in their life so that they’re a square peg in a square hole or a round peg in a round hole.”*

As such, whilst both members of the department see external validation of the course as holding the greatest significance, Nigel sees it as constraining the individual student within professional bonds that may not be appropriate to them:

*“We recently had an interview with some external verifiers from the [professional body] and that was horrifying because how on earth can you design assessments coherently if they can only be linked to the activities that they do at work. How can you do that without defining incredibly tight learning outcomes... you*

*can't and you end with a portfolio approach, and I think that the portfolio approach has its advantages and its disadvantages and they have their place but to say that it's the only way I think is very wrong."*

However, in spite of the acknowledged validity of this observation, in terms of its future within the course, John sees it as an explicit educational tool with a distinct and explicit role within student employability:

*"I think that's the first thing that we'd have to do with undergraduates to make it worthwhile for them, and then link it into the marking scheme and then also link it into employability. I think that would be a way forward and ensure that the content and marking scheme would all be nicely intermeshed."*

For John, greater student objectification and externalization will be essential for any future course development, not just for their employability but to also reflect employer outcome expectations as a primary funding driver within education. As they explained, this would be a vital part of rewarding potential employers for supporting the post-graduate course:

*"For this kind of course, every assignment is work based. It's work based for two reasons; a) for them to mix some practical skills with their academic theories and because we are not just here to impart knowledge upon them but to ensure that they can actually apply this knowledge; otherwise it isn't much use to them. Secondly, it should give them a practical pay back to the employer in return for employing them. I mean, employers have done a huge thing in taking on these interns and I think that it's a way of paying them back. I emphasize to them that the skills that they'll pick up on the course."*

For John, PDP is less about holistic development and more about functional skills acquisition and forming experiential bridges across professional areas that students hold no actual experience of, allowing greater self-awareness to build perceptions of experiential transferability.

Whilst the levels of significance given to them differed, professionalization and employability were seen as key educational outcomes for both members of staff. However, both retain issues and concerns over the extensive use of reflection within the course. For Nigel, the key to using reflection within an educational setting is to manage particular psychological constraints that may promote difficulty for both the students and their lecturers. Functionality and task specificity is therefore used to constrain reflection within particular areas of task focus, humour for Nigel being of particular use to deflect student attention away from serious psychological issues that can inevitably rise from self-evaluation. As he explained:

*“First of all, there’s self-awareness... It is not a psychology module so we don’t go into the depths of the psychological aspects of self-awareness, that’s far too deep and we want people to look more at the practical aspects of self-awareness. Then we teach them a variety of self-development techniques. Then we want them to consider the objectives from dealing the issues arising from the analysis of their self-awareness, and then an action plan... it’s not enough to be reflective because there must be an outcome and your objectives cannot just be something that has been picked out of the ether but should be connected to their analysis and that’s a key part of the process.”*

Such an approach aligns itself well with John, who views reflection as a route for functional consistency and professional reinforcement. As he explained, formality is essential because without it the correct processes and attitudes aren’t reinforced:

*“Well if people don’t become critical evaluators and reflectors they’re going to be liable to accept anything and will probably do the wrong thing without recognizing that it isn’t correct, so we have to keep reinforcing principles... I think you can change people’s approaches and attitudes to learning but there has to be a continual process of statement and reinforcement in place to achieve that... they have to be able to see the value of change and the values associated with personal development.”*

#### 4.7c. Student Experiences: Rachel (24yrs)

When joining this course, Rachel already possessed extensive university experience having already completed both undergraduate and Masters courses in history. Administration work had followed but was not seen as offering a sustainable root to employment and subsequently Rachel had recently rejoined the university as part of an internship scheme. The course being discussed was a compulsory part of that internship, but was also seen as an excellent opportunity to extend her employability skills, employability proving the central focus for her learning goals.

Rachel's role was that of project manager and she saw it as crucial for her development because it demanded a host of new skills that were seen as beyond those that her academic background had provided. The course was therefore seen as enabling her to check the skills and knowledge that she was gaining through study against the requirements of that role. Rachel viewed herself as instinctively motivated, viewing challenge as an opportunity and successes as a reflection of her ability to utilize new learning within her particular working environment, a motivation that brought personal relevance to her study.

*"On (module) we were thinking of ideas about how to create opportunities in our department and a lot of the ideas I came up with were actually taken on board by the department. So it did really help... it completely opened my eyes to things that I never thought I could do, and it did it in a quite nice."*

The office environment also brought with it mentor support. This was particularly true of course content that specifically related to personality testing, which was an area of study that was of interest to Rachel's line manager. Congruent with her own beliefs, Rachel felt encouraged to use the modelling system within the office environment to both understand the ways in which she thought and predict the behaviours of others, to bring greater certainty to the experienced complexity of office relationships.

There is a point of contradiction here in the ways in which Rachel approached the issue of personality malleability and the concept of 'typing'. Across the year her

malleability scores for both intelligence and personality rose by four points and represented a view that we are open to change on both aspects. For Rachel, this had been shown through her ability to cope with the steep learning curve associated with her new position, to challenge her fear of group communication and to work pragmatically where her background had been largely academic. She had learned to be flexible, to be responsive to the changing needs of the new working environment, and yet her preference for personality scales perhaps offers her predictability and certainty. Rachel also talked about herself in absolute terms, as a blend of 'types', and responded to co-workers according to the perception of 'type', such decisions shaping the way in which she behaved in meetings and the office:

*"I remember doing the self-perception test and I found out that I was a cross between two of them... so that probably explained why sometimes I'm more confident than I am in other instances... I look at them and think well they're probably more that personality, and so perhaps there's a certain way that I could talk to them, give them an answer in a way that they'd be happier about."*

Whilst this last point reveals some degree of conflict in Rachel's model of 'self', it also reveals an inherent willingness to use increasing self-awareness as a developmental tool. Although as previously discussed self-awareness wasn't an explicit goal of the course, Rachel placed great significance on its presence within the first module of the course. Shaped around the use of SMART and SWOT analysis, the inclusion of self-analysis within the study process was seen as raising engagement because it raised the perception of relevance. Rachel felt part of the subject, part of the learning process, as though she could own the own her studies and link them to both employment and the personal development. As Rachel suggested, such an explicit focus on self-awareness would represent a valuable teaching and learning process for first-year undergraduate students, a process that would challenge students to question their own self-perceptions and direct their learning and development through self-evaluation.

Reflection was therefore a key learning and developmental concept because it increased self-awareness and evaluation, allowing her to understand what she has to

offer and what she could offer with the appropriate attention. Subsequently, her learning depth score rose by 8 points across the year.

*“Yes, because I think that when you know about yourself it’s easier to see what you actually offer, because I think originally I that... I think that when you see your self and you identify your strengths and weaknesses you can see what you can offer to the department as well as people on the course who you work with.”*

Rachel’s new position had taught her lot about the requirements of work, and the different ways in which individuals respond to those, but reflection helped her identify her own ways of responding and the routes through which those behaviours could be changed in order to make them more effective. It is a process that she recognize as both challenging and potentially uncomfortable, particularly when seeking the opinions of people close to her, but necessary for maximizing personal effectiveness in the workplace.

*“I remember (name) asking us to ask people that you like, and I asked my mum about my strengths and weaknesses and it’s all the things that you know about yourself but don’t always want to admit them. Like you’re a bit disorganised or sometimes you say things that are on your mind in perhaps not the best way.”*

The single note of caution that Rachel added to her comments on reflection highlighted the significance of allowing that reflective process to be wholly relevant to the individual. Facing a new working context, and a new academic context with different and often fluid demands, Rachel prioritized reflection due to its congruence with her immediate needs, motivations and desires. During the course Rachel had struggled to apply reflection to areas that seemed to lack relevance to her workplace, and as such considered it important that staff create the space within assignments to allow students to actively create such associations, and thus promote engagement.

In reference to the developmental patterns revealed through the questionnaire tasks, whilst the general self-efficacy score rose only slightly (+1) and her personal perceived control score actually fell (-0.4), Rachel considered her rise in

confidence to be the most significant change. Work demands had set her a considerable range of new challenges, including attending meetings and conferences, and she was proud to have managed such a steep learning curve. Having recognized behavioural concerns such as her quietness in meetings, she had forced herself to contribute and found the responses of others to those contributions positive.

*“I know that when I’m in a big group I can be quiet in the group... So I think I was quite shy in the first and I didn’t want to say anything in case... but I remember when I did the self-perception questionnaire and it said that I can be like this and it came up with the plant which showed that I could add creativity and be more individual, and I just thought well I might as well say something because somebody else might be thinking it and hasn’t got the confidence to say.”*

In addition, others in her office had explicitly commented on her increased self-confidence, whilst the project that she was managing concerned raising self-efficacy within particular social groups and this had subsequently become an area of personal interest. Furthermore, working in office-based groups, and reinforced through small group work on the course, her confidence in working with other people was also lifted, as reflected in a higher score for perceived interpersonal control (+0.5).

Learning and working within a more diverse group had clearly had a positive effect on Rachel’s perceived worth, and yet this was tempered by the recognition that this learning environment would always be safe for her:

*“Well it’s been working with the same people. It’s not been insular but it’s been working with the same type of people. So if you’re a student then you’ve been working with other students. I mean when I worked in an admin job it was me and a few other females and so you don’t meet the range of people.”*

Through the internship system the actual experience of diversity was perceived as minimal, each individual being seen as shaped within the same academic environment, driven on in similar directions for similar reasons. The impact of such a



sense of security was seen as a slight drop in her sense of social control, although not to the point of negativity. Searching self was seen as raising both uncertainty and independence, highlighting an inability to control oneself but not others. Age was seen as being a significant factor in this. Social control was seen as being temporally specific with increasing age, using family anecdotes to support the idea that social networks inevitably increase with age. Whilst these brought Rachel a stronger sense of independence and responsibility through greater perceived maturity, the learning-working relationship feeling more appropriate for such a stage in life, the subsequent awareness of contextual and social complexity and the demands that it makes of you acted to highlight a sense of personal powerlessness. More demands and more responsibility were seen as resulting in less control and greater insecurity.

#### **4.7d. Student Experiences: Mary (23yrs)**

For Mary, attendance on the course was a perquisite element of a public sector position that she had accepted at the start of the year. Arrangements had been hurried. Having previously been working abroad within the tourist industry, Mary had been given only a few days to arrange her relocation and start both work and study. Initially she had lodged with a family, where she spent time with a girl of the same age, before moving out on her own. Although Mary was only 1.5 hours from her hometown she had been initially nervous about her lack of friends but felt sufficiently confident in her interpersonal skills to feel comfortable with her new situation.

In spite of the urgency of the relocation, neither the job nor the course was given particular significance. The potential for the course to offer Mary new skills was acknowledged but attendance was still driven by compliance rather than interest. Whilst the position itself offered her the chance to establish a career path within the public sector it was not her intention to stay within this role in the long-term, and indeed she was already looking for new employment elsewhere. The

position was seen as a temporary stepping-stone to future employment and the course was a necessary element of that.

The low level of personal motivation significantly influenced the way in which she approached her academic study, essay work in particular being characterized by low levels of learning depth (-16). Following an initial struggle to identify the learning outcomes being sought, assignments were generally completed according to formulas set down by staff and in single weekend bursts. How they were written seemed to mean more than what was written and as long as she passed consistently, the grades didn't concern her. There was no motivation to read around the subject because Mary wasn't sufficiently interested in it to do so, and this promoted superficial learning.

*"I didn't understand the management format of essays as thoroughly as what I do now. Now I know, especially with (name) and how he went through the essay... he basically told us how to write it and I ended up getting seventy percent, and I think that with all that help 'this is how you write the essay'... we got it for the first one but not as much as for the others. In (subject) it seems to me it's the way you write the essays rather than what you put in there that gets you the mark."*

This limited view was continued through her first module, which included the only content to engage with self-awareness as both an academic and pragmatic process. However, once again the limited ambitions that Mary carried constrained her ambitions to engage fully with the content being presented and as with the essay assignments, SMART and SWOT analyses were considered in formulaic terms, and subsequently completed towards what were perceived as staff expectations.

*"It was a bit of a task and I used to change my answers to try and fit in with what they wanted. But I don't think that told me about myself very much because I think that I'm quite target driven and according to his questionnaire I'm not target driven at all... but I prefer targets so that I know when I've done something well."*

For Mary, the rejection of such tests did not only stem from her lack of motivation, but a denial of the relevance of such an approach within academic

learning. For Mary, self-awareness and discovery are more appropriately located in outside experience. Here, the topic being studied related to the acquisition of skills for a particular context, and how to manipulate those skills in order to maximize their efficacy in the workplace. As such, self-awareness wasn't seen as a credible area of study, competence and 'self' being seen as separate concerns.

Furthermore, the results gathered from them contradicted her own existing sense of 'self'. The tests had shown a tendency to avoid targets and yet Mary considered the acceptance of targets as characterizing her working history to date. Indeed, it was the perceived lack of targets in her current job that had been causing her most irritation. For Mary, the mismatch between the findings and her own experiential history stripped the tests of legitimacy and prompted Mary to further disengage from seeking self-awareness through the course, even though she scored particularly highly on intellectual and personality malleability (11). For Mary, she was open to change but not within this particular context.

For Mary, her personal history was perceived as playing a significant role in her attitudes and behaviour. She had left university with a degree but decided to go straight into employment. Working in tourism she travelled the world, largely alone, nurturing her sense of independence and self-confidence (+29). She saw it as her natural way of thinking, but this was borne not from the institutional context but experience post-study. For Mary, it is the natural behaviour of students to isolate themselves from society, to exist in a bubble, and by doing so they avoid meeting the diversity of tasks and people required for personal development until they leave the academic environment. University by its very nature holds back personal development. Furthermore, coming from a larger university campus, the nature of the institution being discussed was also seen as limiting development. Seen as too introverted, too quiet, and with too many students studying from home, Mary suggested that its lack of student diversity inevitably exaggerated the negative personal influence framed within academic study.

To strengthen this position, Mary considered the largest personal change to stem directly from her workplace rather than the course that she had treated with

relative disinterest. Through her work with community organizations she had gained direct experience of how people can take control of their lives through social and political action, how they had found ways to change their own lives.

*“It’s really opened my eyes in this job because I work with a community group... and they’re a community level response to tackling the climate change opportunities for people in the area, and I’ve done a lot of reading around community led responses to issues such as climate change and how powerful they can be... So I would suggest that’s the explanation for that because it’s shown me how passionate people are about issues out there and if they do get together like [the community group] has... So I think that’s probably proven to me that socially you can be more powerful.”*

As such, Mary’s sense of Social Perceived Control had become extremely high (+2.6), passion and the willingness to accept challenge being seen as the driver to personal control. With this in mind, Mary felt that voluntary and political work should be promoted more strongly at university to link academic and personal growth, particularly in the first and second years when they have free time.

*“Your first year is where you are going to gain your confidence in relationship building skills. The first year for me was where it all changed so much, from college to university.”*

#### **4.7e. Cohort E Conclusions**

As previously discussed, Cohort E offers a particular insight in that the curriculum lacks a formal approach to PDP, attempts to include it being made informally at the start of the course to establish positive behaviours and attitudes in line with an employability focus. As such, its presence as a control group may be contested, such a decision relying on a personal interpretation regarding what constitutes a sufficient quantity of processes to be considered significant. Certainly, in line with the views of the module leaders, it wouldn’t be considered a formal and

structured contribution, any perceived benefits being founded on the willingness of students to continue to engage with such processes after only a brief period of formal work and a lack of compliance seeking behaviour from staff. Following the first module, the course focus remains firmly on report writing assignments based on a strict mechanical structure.

As with the other cohorts discussed here, the generalized cohort statistics reveal only minimal average change across the year, and yet the two interviews highlight very contrasting ways in which different students can interact with the course, and the PDP processes held within it. This is to be expected, research revealing a complex relationship between individual histories and personalities to create *“complex idiosyncratic combinations of experiences, abilities, beliefs, attitudes and motivations”* (McCune & Entwistle 1999, p.6). As such, learner attributes are formed prior to course entry and these act to shape how each student may view the learning process differently, Ashworth arguing that, *“... the different understandings that students have, prior to instruction, launch them on a trajectory of interpretation within which they perceive instruction, leading to very varied outcomes as far as their perspective on the material is concerned”* (2004, p.157).

In this instance, the course offers a postgraduate qualification, and as such each participant possesses a different academic history intertwined with his or her own social history. For Rachel, the qualification represents the conclusion of a long history of academic study through undergraduate and Masters levels, and is now driving a clear career route into project management. For Mary, the course also forms part of her employment duties but she has returned to education from a period in employment. The ways in which each relates to the learning process are fundamentally different, and subsequently so are the styles with which they engage with the course content and outcomes, PDP processes included.

What is common to both has been the immediacy of their reaction to self-examination and evaluation. Having experienced a focus on self-awareness on the first module of the course, each set down an enduring response to it within their remaining study. For Rachel there was no need to revisit self-analysis as a

developmental tool because self-awareness had already been recognized as an effective strategy for coping with the new demands and experiences offered by her work. Personality tests had offered her a framework for her interpersonal communication within the office, and increased her sense of control. Reflection had become part of her learning routine as she sought to relate that learning to 'herself as 'project manager.' For Mary, however, disengagement was almost immediate and absolute. Assignments were perceived as functional, and her attitude to personality exercises mirrored this.

Processes such as reflection were not supported throughout the course structure but were deemed positive or negative according to the individual motives and experiences of each student. Where Knight & Yorke (2003) have suggested that issues such as motivation can only be strengthened by the creation of a culture across an entire programme, the use of a single module at the start appeared to fail to engage those historically disinclined to participate with PDP processes through a recognized lack of commitment to them within the course content itself. Subsequently, student acceptance of developmental processes became reliant on the very self-perceptions that reflective practice is supposed to be challenging in order to establish worth. Here, the two students found themselves at very different developmental stages. The confidence of one was being built introspectively, comparing self against context in an immediate fashion. The confidence of the other was already solid, the course being perceived as functional and personal change unexpected. They both represent malleable personalities, they both willingly accept challenges, but the natures of the educational challenges being sought differ considerably.

If we consider the call for holistic education that has accompanied the use of PDP processes, Ashworth has commented on the associated need to see the learner beyond cognition, to see them as *"a role player with an emotional and motivational engagement in the setting and a fragile personal identity"* (2004, p.157). Here we are brought into contact with two fundamental aspects of the course context being discussed, the appreciation of the whole student and the perception of identity as a fragile concern. Certainly, it is noticeable as with many commentators on reflection

and reflective practice that for the lecturers interviewed, both are unwilling to approach practice beyond the professional context in which they are teaching. In essence, as they put it themselves, they are not interested in the very contextual aspects of their lives that frame their students' attitudes towards learning and practice, which remain their private concern. The subsequent focus on functionality is seen as protecting both the student and the lecturer, and reinforces the concept of identity as fragile.

However, in neither case have the students placed their sense of identity at risk, their responses to those processes being shaped by the congruence that each felt existed between those and their individual attitudes and expectations. For Rachel, self-examination and evaluation were necessary to enable her to reach a state that she had already identified as desirable. Alternatively, for Mary, the strength of her self-perceptions on entry to the course negated the perceived relevance of self-examination, as what it offered was not deemed to be of valuable or necessary. As such she chose to act in such a way as to complete the relevant tasks academically without engaging with them holistically, and the temporally specific nature of the PDP content being used within this particular course freed her to do so.

## Section 5: Discussion

### 5.1. Introduction

The purpose of this evaluative exploration has been to trace the direction of an educational innovation towards the goals that can be seen as inherent within the innovation's initial construction, the promotion of discovered wisdom as built through the implementation process and focus on what issues need attending to in order to perceive the innovation as successful (Weiss 2005). With Personal Development Planning, this process of evaluation has been applied to an innovation that has sought to manage what Saunders has called "*a crisis of confidence in the capacity of higher education to deliver a much more relevant graduate in terms of their knowledge, skills, capacity and habitus*" (2011, p.79). Furthermore, it has also encountered what Saunders has also noted as the tendency of higher education practitioners to resist such a description, rejecting what are perceived as enforced relocations of their disciplines towards external and non-academic drivers, the diversity of programme and stakeholder foundations adding to the complexity of the contexts being examined.

In this instance, this project has also brought an additional factor to the evaluative process, that being the student as active recipient of the innovations in question and the ways in which the individual student actively shapes the relationships through which such programmes are presented and experienced. Here the evaluative question initiating the exploration has been re-stated by relocating the question from what society or the sector deem as worthwhile to the more relativistic position of student perceptions of value, and with those their subsequent willingness to engage fully with the innovation being examined. Practice has not been seen as a method of establishing patterns of routinized thought within particular socio-cultural domains (Saunders 2011), patterns directed toward clear "*rational-purposive*" managerial and practitioner expectations (Saunders 2011, p. 2), but as a single driver within a multi-faceted and idiographic realm that reflects each individual's experiential world. The dynamics of power that exist within such a



process of routinization no longer sit between two approximate collectives but between individuals striving for their own autonomy.

Drawn from within the research process, it is a position that strongly reflects the Satrean focus being applied to the nature of the individual at the heart of the study and references made to the innovation as pseudo-Rogerean in nature, seeking to recognize the implicit link between learning and development without the explicit recognition of the need for individual congruence within that process. From a Rogerean position, to ask the learner to strive for things that sit outside of their own sense of self would naturally be resisted (Rogers 1969), and as we have found, this has indeed happened in several of the cases being discussed.

Again this has been a crucial point within this particular evaluative process. References have been made to political expectation, psychological theory, educational philosophy, discipline character, and the practices that have been shaped through those influences; however, at the heart of these lies the beliefs and attitudes that underpin those choices as significant and the relationship between such ideals and those of individuals receiving them as proposed wisdom. As such it is the relationship itself between staff and students that has been placed at the heart of this evaluation, and the ways in which that relationship, and the systematization of that relationship, have shaped the efficacy of the practices being applied. This comment should not imply the existence of a single character to this relationship, a claim that would be incongruent with the existential focus on individual uniqueness that grounds this work; however, it is proposed that through this discussion the ways in which PDP models and processes have or have not actively engaged with the personal development of individuals may be brought to light. Thus, PDP as a policy intervention can be discussed without abandoning the idiographic ground on which the study has been built, each interview and data set revealing a unique process of engagement between person and policy.

Naturally, with such a focus, whilst it may have initially benefitted the discussion to simplify the complexity surrounding the implementation of PDP, by placing interpersonal relationships at the centre of the final discussion it would now

seem inappropriate to do so. Whilst each influence previously discussed will continue to be seen as an active influence, they now reveal themselves as implicit aspects of the complex relationships being explored, intertwined with the many facets that make up the socio-psychological fields that exist within each individual. Sector views of autonomy and agency can no longer be seen as existing independently from individual perceptions of 'self' as agentic or autonomous, political and professional conceptualizations of employability now sit in negotiation with those seeking to be employable and individual expectations and assumptions surrounding that term. Where a need to change has been defined by sector and staff as necessary, efficacy can no longer be framed by the term in itself but how the term is presented and received by the individual, and the processes and beliefs that frame both the presentation and receipt. As such, evaluation is no longer focused on practice as protocol or method alone but on the exploration of meaning and understanding at the point where presentation and receipt meet.

## **5.2. Congruence**

Following previous points regarding the views of Rogers, in which 'self' naturally strives for internal and external congruence, and Sartre, in which 'self' strives towards 'self' through autonomous choice, congruence would seem a natural starting point for the evaluation process. In both models, 'self' takes a political form through the negotiations which 'self' must engage with in order to construct and maintain itself, congruence being revealed through the power to both resist or accept those views or people that they consider to be 'other'. Belief and motivation allow this to be accepted by the student as beneficial where the negotiations of meaning previously discussed are seen as reasonable within the students' individual psychosocial transitions between past and future. Here engagement and disengagement are framed in the ability to align presented expectation with existing identity, or convince the receiver that they would benefit from change because it offered an opportunity to identify 'self' and therefore strive towards it more effectively.

In this study, student resistance through incongruence appeared to reveal itself through several dimensions. At the most simple level, PDP explicitly requires the student to perceive their academic learning and personal development as simultaneous and cohered. Learning is not only about content, but also process and motivation. And yet for many students this awareness was neither congruent with their prior educational experiences or their expectations of the discipline into which they were seeking entry. Challenging the students to work beyond the subject reflected a direct challenge to both their reasons for being at university and they ways in which they had envisaged university as a concept. Students such as James in Cohort B, and Rose in Cohort A, clearly shaped their learning behaviours around events that had occurred pre-higher education, and these events set boundaries to their expectations of study, which without particular reference to by staff remained resistant to change. In part, as suggested by Clegg & Bufton (2008), this was tied to a temporal focus of the students that disabled their ability to look into the future beyond their immediate course of study, but whilst some staff predicted student engagement with PDP once the need for employment approached, this did not promote engagement with PDP during the early periods of study. As such, processes such as reflection were too often rejected as the habitual element of thought that initial theorists such as Norman Jackson saw as essential for lifelong market flexibility post-academia. This is not to say that students did not find processes such as reflection useful. For Elizabeth in Cohort D, reflection was seen as a major factor in their life changes across the year, whilst Rachel in Cohort E found the potential for reflection to raise self-awareness fundamental to the application of learning to her parallel working context. However, for the remaining interviewees reflection was perceived as either inappropriate to their academic subject or too mechanistic to require personal engagement.

At a more internal level, it could also be seen that whilst most models of PDP supported some concepts of psychological development, these were again often rejected by students where those externalized 'ideals' were seen as challenging or contradicting student perceptions of their own personality types. Such findings support previous research by Lucas et al. (2004) in which students' perceptions of

skills and the relevance of those appeared inherently tied to individual perceptions of personality type. For instance, Ann's view of herself as intrinsically complex supported her rejection of cognitive change at the limited level of time management even though she recognized such a change as valuable. Establishing purpose and meaning was not strong enough to threaten the existing nature on which she had established her views of the world. Psychologically, this was a profound dimension of the findings. It was clear that for students such as James, Shelley and Patricia, their biographies were central to their perceptions of confidence and control and as such each student had resisted challenges to aspects of their characters that were seen as fundamentally beneficial. Furthermore, students, as revealed in the comments by Susan, often behaved strategically to establish tutor relationships that matched their own expectations and motivations, thus again resisting challenge. Naturally, it must be recognized that where incongruence promotes resistance so congruence promotes engagement, although in saying this we are forced into a position of passively accepting engagement and disengagement as beyond staff control completely.

The inability to promote change where it doesn't match pre-existing student experiences and attitudes represents a significant concern for the potential successes of PDP as an educational intervention. It has been argued that PDP, or more accurately the processes brought together under that title, were seen as a tool for redefining the purpose of the sector in favour of particular educational and socio-economic outcomes. That purpose was drawn from a *belief* in the need for students and staff to remain fluid according to *any* socio-economic outcomes demanded of them, to "*prepare graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future*" (Barrie 2005, p.1). These are views that have been reflected clearly in work produced by Norman Jackson of the PFIG, whose early work from within that body would reflect the same need to educate students to respond to an abstract future that is both unpredictable and fluid (see Jackson 2001b, 2007). PDP was offered as a way of promoting such student flexibility; however, the attitudes of individuals in this study would suggest that the ability of the sector to drive such developments in the face of student resistance remains questionable. In line with Peters' comments on student

passivity, if it has been assumed that staff members could transmit this belief downwards onto their students and find that belief unquestioningly accepted then this was mistaken.

## **5.2. Depth**

Such concerns over the ability of educational innovations to motivate student development in a particular, and perhaps idealized form, inevitably leads to a discussion of the routes through which the benefits of those changes are passed on to the student. As we have already commented, for many practitioners student engagement with aspects of PDP becomes predictable as course completion nears and employment becomes a primary focus. However, if PDP as an educational innovation is to be regarded as a driver of cognitive cultural change on a lifelong level the lateness of this engagement would appear problematic, the lack of cognitive enculturation inevitably replicating previous failures to promote psychological change through education.

Findings from this study would appear to suggest that in part the origins of such an inability to drive developmental change lie in tensions within the sector regarding the processes and products of education. It is a concern that was highlighted within the Conceptual Review when discussing PDP both as an isolated innovative model and a progression from the NRA. As Broadfoot suggested, the tension remains due to a stakeholder focus on process-based competencies and the need to evidence the understanding and use of process as an acquisition of skills. It is a perspective of learning and development that is strongly socio-cognitive in nature, Bandura stating personal efficacy and confidence to be founded on performativity within particular social contexts.

Problems associated with the treatment of process as skill have perhaps been best highlighted through discussion about reflection. The contested and interpreted natures of reflection and reflective practice have proved consistent themes throughout this thesis, the formalization of reflection fundamentally shaping the

manner in which students have perceived those processes. For instance, work by Moon (2001) describes the route to effective student engagement with reflective processes as explicit assessment. It is through formal assessment that reflection is given institutional value and it is this that subsequently promotes student engagement. There are many methods offered to establish explicit forms of reflection but for Moon, the key is to focus on linguistic form (2004, p. 13), how to verbalize reflective outcomes. However, as Sumsion & Fleet (1996) suggest, to do so may inevitably *“benefit those who recognize the rules of the assessment strategy to a greater degree than those who may be more reflective but fail to adopt such a rule-based method.”* In addition, it may be argued that to establish fixed linguistic codes may also serve to both make reflective products personally abstract (Stewart & Richardson 2000), and promote dishonesty through the use of specific codes to improve grades (Bulman 2005).

In part it could be argued that the failure to appreciate reflection as a learning process may stem from its particular origination in the professions, and the manner in which the process is used within that context. Discussing their interview findings gathered from lecturers in Health & Social Care, Clegg & Bradley (2006) concluded that such professions had *“strong traditions of reflective practice and PDP as part of continuing professional practice”*, and that *“practitioners in these areas had ready-made discursive frameworks within which to articulate their views”* (2006, p.60). As such, research findings from professional areas of study may not be transferable to other academic areas within higher education and may offer the sector an inappropriate level of confidence regarding the potential benefits of raised levels of reflective practice. Subsequently, where Monks et al. (2006), in a study of nursing students, found reflection within PDP to support module choice, and a greater understanding of how life and learning goals co-exist, Dyke et al. (2009) in a similar study of their pharmacy students found the functional approach favoured within the professions to be too mechanical to reflect authentic personal engagement. Here, the completion of portfolios of evidence could not be assumed to represent authentic engagement with a holistic learning process. It is a position that reflects Bleakley’s position on modern attitudes to reflection that may act to create thinking

without the genuine engagement of the thinker in question. For Bleakley, such an approach “squeezes out passion, intuition, and imagination” (1999, p. 325), “doomed to engage in a series of warped and twisted forms of reflection, where introspective reflectivity comes to parody itself as self-surveillance. Not only does the watcher come to watch the watcher, but this spiral into thinking about thinking also becomes a simulation of thinking” (1999, p. 325).

Again we are brought back to the aforementioned tension between summative and formative assessment and the need to redefine process as skill. Whilst some students clearly acknowledged the benefits of reflection as a tool for raising the ownership and relevance of their learning, in several interviews reflection was described in strictly mechanistic terms, and this was as true within professional cohorts as those on academic courses. Within the professional cohorts, a mechanistic view of reflection appeared to dominate teaching, and yet this clearly limited student engagement where reflection was no longer deemed necessary in order to pass the course. Staff didn’t want their students to fail and so lecturers and mentors worked in a way that constrained the need to work beyond a professional minimum, and this included manufacturing evidence where required. The demand for actual student engagement was perceived by a majority of the students as minimal, and where they chose to reflect extensively on both their academic and placement work, students often perceived it as unappreciated by staff. In essence, where significant learning was identified as originating from beyond the academic environment, members of staff were not perceived as willing to engage with that learning where it wasn’t shaped through the protocols that staff had put in place.

Alternatively, within the academic domains, students such as Rose in Cohort A, and Mary in Cohort E, found personal self-awareness to be a separate and largely irrelevant aspect of academic endeavour and thus rejected reflection as a valuable process. Where the concept of employability was mentioned, career and discipline appeared intrinsically linked, and subsequently discipline-specific skills dominated student expectations of learning. Subsequently, whilst Killingly (2006) has suggested that students will inevitably drive the focus on self-development through employability, there is little evidence to be found here that this will be the case

where students focus on degree attainment alone and the PDP processes being offered lack the specific focus to change such views. Similarly, whilst Cartledge (2007) has spoken of the need to engage with PDP processes at an early stage to help students *“both feel part of the University before they arrive, aiding their transition... also enables them to reflect on the skills they need to develop and the kind of activities they can become involved in at university to achieve their goals,”* it is the nature and depth of that engagement that appears to determine their potential to drive personal change. The significance of student individuality, in terms of the nature of their engagement with PDP processes, has previously been highlighted by Bufton (2007), however, whilst Anderson (2008) has highlighted the need to value one’s ‘graduateness’ as a transparent aspect of self, the willingness of first-year students to see their established identity in such terms remains questionable. It is a point that may highlight the potential incongruence between what the lecturer wants of their students, and what the students want of themselves.

Similarly, recording achievement in terms of discipline skills gained some support but this did not necessarily result in evidencing beyond assignments or evaluation and planning to respond to that evidencing process. Only James appeared to value generic skills transferability, but this in part seemed to be a reflection of his own lack of a clear career direction and an unwillingness to plan for one as supported by historically high levels of efficacy and control.

What is of interest here is that whilst the presence of PDP would imply some degree of focus on inner process, the dominant experience of students in all of the cohorts was a summative one. It is of value in this instance to note that at a very general level depth of learning fell across the year in almost every cohort, a finding perhaps best supported by a common student perception of depth as unnecessary. Overall, the student perception of study superficiality appeared to be particularly entrenched where the first year of study replicated the work that the students had done prior to entry and therefore failed to promote deep engagement with knowledge that students commonly felt that they already possessed. Inevitably perhaps, function was perceived as dominating process, and as Cassidy & Eachus



note, *“an education system which does not reward meaningful or deep learning is likely to undermine the performance of active learners”* (2000: p.311).

In these circumstances, it is unclear to what degree students should have been expected to self-regulate as a learning behaviour. Central to cognitive models of learning and development is the acceptance that that knowledge must be personally built and not passively accepted. Existing schemas must therefore be recognized within the process as the foundations of such constructions, and the process of schema manipulation towards specific goals is driven through the maintenance of schematic equilibrium, if knowledge doesn't fit existing schemas so we must adapt to ensure a match and disperse stress (Sjoberg 2007). Here, we find another level of incongruence between constructive alignment as preferred by the QAA and the assignments chosen by staff to evidence academic learning. Formalized through the work of John Biggs (1999), Constructive Alignment seeks to integrate personal learning histories and motivations with specific educational outcomes. However, where the assignments were rigid and the information given by lecturers sufficient for assignment completion, then students commonly failed to see the need for personal engagement of any great depth. Furthermore, this situation built on a pre-existing expectation that the teaching in higher education would replicate that of previous school study by providing all the knowledge that would be required for course completion.

### **5.3. Staff-centric expectations & the influence of professional/academic identity**

As should be expected from the key drivers of the implementation process, the role of staff attitudes and expectations within the implementation of PDP-as-policy has been significant. When reflecting on his early efforts to promote the acceptance of PDP as an educational innovation, Norman Jackson commented:

*“All too often little consideration is given to the richness of the underlying motivations, values, beliefs, personal creativities and identity that underpin the sense of self-efficacy that drives and energizes what we do.”* (2007, p.xiii)

Referencing socio-cognitive psychology, the key aspect of this comment is the association of self-efficacy with action, the tendency to act in ways in which we are confident. If skills do not prove to be transferable, as Bandura originally suggested, then this would imply that teaching is inevitably staff-centric to some degree, framed as it is in the beliefs, attitudes and expectations of the teacher.

To a degree, some students could be seen to be replicating the views of the staff with whom they had come into contact, adopting them as models for development. But to phrase this development as staff changing the views of their students would appear to be mistaken. Often the negotiated shift in student self-perception required to create staff-student congruence was only slight, a point that was reinforced by the actions of some students to build relationships with staff that best suited their own ideals and therefore offered less challenge.

In part such a conclusion has been drawn from the very limited levels of interpersonal contact that appeared typical of the first year experience. As a consequence of the strictly formalized nature of course outcomes and at times tutorial contact that appeared focused solely on forcing participatory compliance and outcome completion, any discussions concerning the need to shift from a focus on outcome to one of process, to see the self as central to the personal developmental, rarely appeared to take place.

Furthermore, where staff members alone framed the acquisition of skills as educational outcomes, so the need to persuade the student otherwise rarely appeared to emerge. Indeed, where slip signing was considered as evidence, and staff members were seen by students to be signing for meetings that never actually took place, then such arguments where they took place lost credibility with students. Similar failings were found within the professional contexts, where mentors would help manufacture evidence and lecturers would supply specific answers to ensure assignment completion, thus denying the need for either deep engagement or self-regulation.

Again we return to a mismatch between the holistic motives for using PDP processes such as reflection and the assignments through which it would be applied. Whilst Somervill (1993) had predicted a greater shift towards student-centred and collaborative learning in response to the influence of enterprise within education, teacher practice had remained largely teacher-centred and summative, actual student engagement being perceived by a majority of the students as minimal.

The point being made here is that ultimately, all participants in this study appeared to adopt a relatively defensive position aimed at maintaining their pre-existing sense of self. At each level of the hierarchy discussed - sector, institution, department, lecturer and student - each was characteristically defensive of its own perceived identity and sought to control practice as a reflection of those perceptions. Definitions of autonomy, if at all relevant, were then constrained within those perceptions and the subsequent manner in which practice was controlled in order to project and maintain those beliefs.

If we start at the broadest point, a picture was initially painted of a sector potentially in conflict with an increasingly invasive political interpretation of education as a source of socio-economic capital, political will being potentially enforced through funding and the need to respond to external stakeholder expectations. As such, whilst historically the sector may always have acted as a socio-political agent in some form, the perception of higher education as an autonomous body may be seen as having been explicitly challenged for economic and political purposes. Policy from within the institution being examined would reflect such a socio-economic re-positioning in outlook, employability and entrepreneurship gaining progressively more significance post-Dearing. Furthermore, in line with QAA pressures for quality and accountability, the clarification of both practice, and the outcomes of practice, would also prove increasingly dominant within institutional guidelines. Indeed, PDP in this instance was established as a progression from efforts to install a profiling system to evidence 'graduateness', which has been described in this work as a defensive effort on the part of the sector to define its own socio-economic worth pre-employability (Barrie et al. 2009). Unfortunately, at this institution, for those promoting the

implementation of PDP as a pedagogic tool, this historical connection between PDP and the skills perspective that was commonly viewed by staff as underpinning the aforementioned profiling tool has continued to harm staff participation even where pressure to use the tool no longer exists.

For Bernstein (1996), the sector's need to shift its fundamental motivations in this manner has been the result of identity introjection, the natural process through which a system comes to reflect the context within which it exists. Even where a social body may perceive itself as autonomous, through the pressures placed on it both implicitly and explicitly it inevitably becomes agentic as it acts to replicate and project those same pressures onto members of that body. The PFIG, when implementing PDP as policy, may be seen as acting in a similar manner. As already discussed, whilst there have been calls for the sector to be responsive to the needs of employers and stakeholders, in actuality it has proved difficult to define what either of those terms mean, definitions of employability and what employers actually want from education proving particularly problematic (Clegg & Bradley 2006b). Indeed, it was a point made by Caroline when discussing the PDP outcomes being sought in Cohort A.

The emphasis on belief, and the projection of belief, is important, and has proved significant in the findings from this study. Even in general thematic terms, whilst authors such as Boud & Falchikov (2006), Yorke & Harvey (2005) and Croot & Gedye (2006) have supported the marketization of education for social and economic good as both necessary and inevitable, others have rejected such a move as both an inappropriate challenge to academia and a misuse of social power over the individual student (Bleakley 1999, Stathern 2000). Where these beliefs in the fundamental purposes of higher education differ so do both practice and the willingness of individual members of staff to adopt practices that are not congruent with those ideals. As identified within previous educational interventions such as the NRA, the conflicts created between these two positions, and the inability or unwillingness of the sector to explicitly recognize the tensions that exist between them as valid (Broadfoot 1998), have historically negated efforts to force educational change. Subsequently, as predicted by Barnett (2003), philosophical and conceptual

fragmentation has been shown to hinder efforts to implement educational policy, and it may have been for this reason that the primary focus of the implementation group lay in the promotion and acceptance of a consensual belief regarding the fundamental role of higher education.

However, evidence from this study would suggest it to be a mistake to view fragmentation in such grand and explicit terms. Certainly, as suggested by the work of Clegg & Bradley (2006a), different domains of knowledge revealed different attitudes towards the application of PDP processes; however, when searching beyond those superficialities it was difficult to identify any substantial levels of staff consistency regarding the specific goals and outcomes associated with those processes. Similarly, teachers have themselves been categorized as 'types' (Bastick 2000), the approaches of individual staff members to teaching and learning being shaped primarily by the personal balancing of internal and external need, patterns within those decisions leading to particular styles of teaching (Shaw 1995). However, as with Clegg & Bradley, on closer investigation this study would suggest 'typing' to be a matter of theoretical convenience, styles of teaching being personalized by the manner in which each individual staff member viewed the domain in which they were working, and their individual role within that area of knowledge.

As already discussed, this was of particular significance within the professional areas of study. For academic cohorts, such as those studied in Cohorts A & B, differences in perspective revolved most commonly around employability as being either generic or domain-specific. In both cases, those staff members who considered themselves to be in charge of the interventions application felt the goal of PDP to lie within employability as a generic and transferable concern. However, these views were often countered by lecturers who perceived the future of students only in terms of the subject-specific skills that were traditional aspects of their particular academic areas. Furthermore, for Richard, the intervention had little or nothing to do with the future of students but merely reflected the quantity and accountability agenda that lies at the heart of the work of the QAA (Barnes 2010, Salter & Tapper 2000), and as such he was unwilling to participate with the

intervention even though he was aware of his contractual agreement to do so. There is a sense of this functionality throughout the interviews, and in particular those within the academic cohorts, evidence of PDP provision often appearing far more important to staff members than the outcomes of that provision. For instance, for Barbara in Cohort A, enforced participation was utilized even though she saw it as damaging the quality of student engagement, slips completion evidencing teaching as much as learning.

As mentioned, professional domains were the more complicated. In particular, individual perceptions of the professions themselves were shown to be fragmented, and subsequently lecturers acted to shape their roles within student learning towards the individual perceptions that each held. For instance, in Cohort C, an inconsistency in provision and support seemed to arise from confusions surrounding the roles of lecturers as either teachers or practitioners. Here, Samantha had made a conscious decision to leave practice to become a lecturer, but for Claire the transition had occurred almost by accident and self was still located primarily in practice. Subsequently, whilst Samantha defined reflection as a tool to objectify the individual in order to replicate her own personal model of the professional as an ideal, for Claire, reflection merely had to help evidence the acquisition of skills. Indeed, for Claire, practice in the workplace wasn't characteristically reflective, mentors reinforcing a more pragmatic and functional approach during placements, and thus constraining the ability of lecturers to promote reflection as a valuable process.

In both instances, agency was the common goal above autonomy, assessment being used to constrain student development within the pre-set expectations of the professional body in question. Whilst each lecturer and practice mentor held a different perspective of that profession, so each also remained focused on constraining professional development in the model that they individually preferred. Similar patterns were found in Cohort D, in which the breadth of student learning appeared to be shaped by the manner in which staff members viewed the standards on which the programme had been built. Here, Sandra saw those standards as necessary and sufficient for practitioner qualification, only those functional skills

being mentioned requiring explicit education and evidencing. For Felicity, however, those standards were not the end point of the learning process but the point at which learning started. Practice would grow from the values and ethics that would ultimately stem from those standards where the students were given sufficient space to reflect on them as part of themselves.

The influence of staff inconsistency is a significant point where the socially orientated psychological theories discussed within the Conceptual Review perceive lecturers as role models, persistent and consistent behavioural exemplars (Maggioni & Parkinson 2008). Staff inconsistency in the implementation of PDP processes has been seen as a consistent factor within research on student disengagement (Miller & Martin 2007, Crawford 2008, Bell & Calabro 2005), with direct correlations being found between staff and student attitudes (Cosh 2008). As Brennan & Shaw (2003) initially showed, staff attitudes towards PDP are highly influential on student engagement, and yet staff members have been found to consistently struggle when faced with conceptual confusion and a perception of challenge to their own values and competencies (Brown et al. 2005).

Furthermore, and also in line with the cognitive theorists already discussed, for PDP processes to drive learner development may also therefore require an intense quantity of quality contact (Shoda & Mischel 2000), an intensity that may be inappropriate where PDP has been implemented without the perceived need for additional resources (Jackson 2001b). Previously discussed work on learning depth by Biggs et al. found its roots within Scandinavian education and yet these systems have been historically founded on elite minorities and high resource investment (see Linblom-Ylänne 2004), neither of which translate to the massified system and struggling finances that characterize the UK context. In this instance, tutor contact was limited, whilst staff inconsistency again shaped the activities taking place within tutorials to the particular expectations of individual staff, few of which were perceived by students as driving personal development as an academic, or even professional, concern.

The potential for tension between PDP engagement and staff inconsistency have again been highlighted here, although staff were not universally aware of such differences. Again, in Cohort D, Sandra denied the existence of difference within the team, the professional identity to which they were tied being seen as a unifying factor between each member. However, Felicity specifically commented on the inability of the department to reach any consensus surrounding the meaning of reflection, and the inevitable impact that this failure would have on the student experience of learning. Indeed, the interview process itself further clarified the complexity of the concepts being discussed as Felicity struggled to produce a coherent definition of personal learning, commenting that:

*“I mean, are my perceptions of what you mean by personal development the same, and are you thinking, ‘well, that’s not what I mean’. I mean it’s all about what are our definitions of personal development planning... and one person’s definition might be well they do an action plan, whilst somebody else might be talking about intellectual and moral development, and somebody else might be talking about planning against the standards. So, you’ve a least three models.”*

Again, Sandra’s position would appear to be partly defensive. When discussing the possible introduction of the institutional profiling tool, Sandra was forthright about the department’s political resistance to the tool’s implementation and their right to resist enforcement due to their perceived significance within the institution as a whole. As such, the professional identity of the department set it aside from the academic context that was seeking to impinge upon it, identity introjection not being drawn from the institutional context but the professional context beyond the institution.

The impact of identity was not, however, just influential within the professional courses, but also those teaching traditionally academic subjects. This impact was born from a fundamental assumption regarding the nature of the students that wished to locate themselves within particular subject domains. By wishing to join a particular profession or field of study, student personality and motivation was assumed to be generic at the point of joining, and equally generic at



the end through the creation of a particular 'type' of graduate. This was replicated in the academic courses, enrolment being seen as denying diversity. Indeed, for Caroline & Barbara in Cohort A, and Karen & Richard in Cohort B, a singular benefit of PDP systems was to maintain and support particular academic identities in the face of the University Modular Scheme, which had given greater control to the students in terms of their module choices. As such, as with the professions, a goal of the PDP processes being adopted on each course was to constrain personal development within the identity that was seen by staff as being characteristic of the subject in question, or more accurately their individual perceptions of those identities.

#### **5.4 The inconsequence of agenda**

What has framed the discussion thus far has been the personal nature of personal development and the key role that the student must inevitably take within their own growth. It is a point that potentially limits the ability of any sector to legitimately perceive itself in terms of particular social roles and interests, such grand statements being constantly defined and redefined within the socio-psychological milieu into which those expectations are placed.

At the start of the contextualization process it was contested that employability lay at the heart of the implementation of PDP-as-policy, Yorke & Harvey (2005) describing the need for employers to be acknowledged as primary stakeholders within the educational process as a key driver in recent educational developments. Equally, referencing Clegg & Bradley, doubts were raised over the validity of employability as a single entity to which the sector could easily align itself. As Scott had previously suggested, to present an incoherent concept as an outcome creates profound difficulties both in their systematization and assessment. In essence, without form the application of that concept becomes bound within interpretation, opinion and belief.

For staff at this particular institution, and indeed the students whether influenced by staff or not, the term appeared significant but also strongly situated. Much of the discussion surrounding the benefits of PDP was related to the agentic role of the student within their own lifelong context, skills being seen as essentially transferable as knowledge became defined as trans-disciplinary; indeed, for the institution in question the graduate skills profiling tool on which PDP had been initially built was constructed with skills transference at its core. For authors such as Coot & Gedye (2006), it is the defining role of the sector to develop employability through professional self-awareness and evaluation as a reflection of modern socio-economic forces. As they explain:

*“The workplace of the early twenty-first century is one that is characterized by rapid change... In a volatile job market it is important for you to be able to understand your professional development needs and be in the habit of acting on these needs.”*

However, for a large majority of staff and students involved in this research, understandings of employability were constrained within the subjects being taught. This was particularly explicit within professional cohorts, one cohort actively dismissing institutional requirements for skills transferability in favour of their own particular and specified outcomes, but even within the traditional academic cohorts studied, the same singularity could be identified. They had, as Holmes predicted, shaped employability within a simple skills-matching process.

This was often reinforced by student expectations, challenges to work beyond the subject reflecting a direct challenge to their reasons for being at university. In part, as suggested by Clegg & Bufton (2008), this was tied to a temporal focus of the students that disabled their ability to look into the future beyond their immediate course of study. Authors such as Kumar (2005, 2007) have envisaged a future in which portfolios of credentials will form the heart of employability, PDP driving the portfolio-building process. For Kumar:

*“The intelligent society will inevitably be a credential society, one where certificates of competence become necessary passports in a more temporary and mobile workplace. We will move through life accumulating portfolios of competences and intelligences.”* (2007: 146)

And yet this view did not reflect the attitudes of either staff or students, and whilst some staff predicted student engagement with PDP once the need for employment approached, this promoted engagement with PDP neither during the early periods of study nor post-employment. What became clear was that models of PDP built on staff expectations would only be ensured of engagement where those expectations were congruent with the expectations and self-beliefs of the students working within them. Where the two parties lacked similarity then student resistance to the PDP processes being applied could be seen as an inevitable response. This is in line with Knight & Yorke’s recognition that within traditional pedagogies *“motivation and control are often confused and students are driven towards outcomes and behaviours which they do not value”* (2003: p.13). To be meaningful, PDP processes and systems must be meaningful to the individual student, or have sufficient depth to create meaning through contact with them. Within this study, few staff appeared to wish to support engagement at the necessary depth, and where students did engage with the processes of reflection, self-evaluation and planning then they did so because of an existing need to do so or in response to life concerns beyond academia that forced them to do so, as in the case of Elizabeth.

## Section 6: Moving Forward

Central to this discussion have been concerns surrounding the potential for incongruence that exists between the staff expectations that have acted to shape the application of PDP processes and the experiences and motivations of the students receiving those views as wisdom. At times this has been framed as a discussion of student resistance to process and outcome enforcement, but more commonly student/staff conflict has been shown to be found in differences of opinion regarding the types of knowledge that each value and the personal reasons that underpin those judgments. Where psychological change has been identified by the research, the actual experiences that were perceived by the students as the drivers of that change were often viewed by staff as lying outside of their educational remit and subsequently set aside from the development process as an evidential act.

Ultimately, whilst PDP-as-policy has reported to be focused on the processes of education, it is the outcomes of those processes that remain a priority to a majority of staff members in the study. Again, this also returns us to the issue of power where the outcomes given significance by staff continue to dominate the process irrelevant of how those outcomes are viewed by the student, student submission being largely assumed as present simply through the action of joining the cohort. Power, in this instance, is framed by the staff control of developmental outcomes as reflections of their own personal judgments of worth. However, the ability of staff to express and enforce that power has been hindered by the fragmented manner in which their views cohered within their individual departments. PDP processes as an expression of staff or institutional power has become a constant theme within this thesis, attempts to shape student development being defined by the linguistic shift from personal to personalized learning.

Naturally, only limited conclusions can be reached from a study of this kind. The study is in part built on the academic assumption that the first year of student academic life represents a key developmental stage. Karen in Cohort B, and Barbara

& Caroline in Cohort A, saw the final year as more significant. For these lecturers, students only recognize the relevance of the developmental work being done throughout the course as they near its end, relevance in this case being shaped within the concept of employability, or perhaps more accurately the need to get a job. The two statements are not the same. Meanwhile, within the professional courses that have been studied, through an assumption of motivational universality, standards and skills rather than the developmental work that underpins their acquisition has become the primary focus of the courses and as such no year can be considered more or less significant than those around them.

The need to study first year students is grounded in the greater developmental breadth that has been implied throughout the implementation process of PDP as policy, personal development that is 'lifewide' involving a significantly greater range of influences within a substantially more complex learning environment than traditionally sought. Furthermore, it was deemed only possible to recognize the influence of the sector from a point at which it had none. Naturally, to study these same students and staff members across an entire cohort life would have been valuable, but in this instance no students were willing to extend their involvement on such a scale.

Equally, it has never been the goal of this study to necessarily set down recommendations from its findings, concentrating as it has on the subjective experiences of students. However, this does not mean that conclusions cannot be reached that in turn don't imply recommendations, or at least imply the need to act if the practices shaped within PDP as policy are to be accepted by staff and promote developmental change within students.

Whilst the need to project a single view of education onto the sector appears tied to the foundations of the implementation process, the error in such a goal may be the perception of unified institutions, or more specifically unified departments within institutions. Generalized departmental identities appeared to drive particular goals for the PDP processes that each would apply; however, internal variations have been shown to deny these same departments the ability to promote engagement

both with those processes and the many systems within which those are built. Where academic and professional identities have provided a superficial sense of cohesion through which staff participation with the implementation of PDP processes can be evidenced for institutional purposes, the internal variations in belief that can be found within all departments explored within this study would surely negate such claims in actuality. Where staff claimed conceptual cohesion, this was consistently refuted by students, staff variations often being perceived by students as a route through which they could also avoid challenges to their pre-existing sense of identity.

Furthermore, staff assumptions of the universality of student personality and motivation as shaped by cohort membership has proved equally mistaken. Even within the professions, where a single career outlook may frame the course, the route to professional membership clearly does not mean the same thing for all students and yet the pedagogic systems built to ensure success appear to presume the presence of an inherent student similarity of character and purpose.

Two things appear to dominate these findings. Firstly, the desire of departments to balance new and existing identities as reflections of a changing sector and a static academic or professional area of knowledge. In each, autonomy is expressed as a desire and yet neither in actuality appears to seek it, agency within the aforementioned departmental identity being the primary goal. If, as Pitt suggests, autonomy relates to an *“independence from external influence and freedom of the will”* (2010, p.2), then seeking to tie it to the worldviews of either staff or socio-political preference promotes a version of ‘autonomy’ that remains contextually specific (Schinkel 2010). As such, they inevitably exist in a contested field defined by *“choices that express the internalization of oppressive social forces and those that express one’s genuinely reflective considerations”* (Atkins 2006, p.206). Autonomy as a term has been used significantly both in policy literature and institutional guidelines, and yet the meaning of the term would appear to have been changed in such a way as to maintain a connection to humanistic traditions within the sector whilst building on new political expectations that seek social-economic cohesion. Identity, as discussed, would appear inherently defensive.

Secondly, the need to perceive individuals as systems in their own right, shaped and motivated within a complex biography in which the education system is but a single dimension. The individual, as Sartre would suggest, becomes a system in this instance because they are themselves a product of an integrative complex of socio-psychological factors, choice mediating the outcomes of the relationships that exist between them. Difference is not a matter of “*idiosyncrasy*” as Biggs would suggest, but a fundamental aspect of the individual towards which the educational system is reaching.

What is clear from these findings is that each system, organization and individual consciously or unconsciously perceives their needs as dominant, their own identity as strongest. As such, within the political struggle that ensues between them students may or may not accept PDP models of compliance, they may or may not see reflection as a useful process, they may or may not see the developmental aspect of education. Subsequently, congruence between the two parties would be a fundamental requirement for effective engagement of both students and staff with PDP as policy, and the processes that have become intertwined with it (Tymms et al. 2013). But to establish congruence requires communication and clarity, and processes that seek to bridge the gap between the two parties, or the many parties if one questions the validity of any body to be perceived as unified. What appeared lacking in this instance was the will of both parties to seek a position of congruence and the staff resources to enable a process of communication to be established through which agreement could be negotiated.

Too often PDP concerns were tied to tutorial systems in which staff could offer only a small amount of time for the student on a minimal number of occasions. Even within the professional cohorts, staff appeared unwilling to discuss issues that did not relate to the acquisition of standards, mentors proving the most regular point of contact for the students. Similarly, in Cohort E, the quality of PDP contact was constrained within the explicit need of the lecturer in question to avoid any psychological concerns that didn't relate to study. Such an avoidance would appear understandable, based on a perception of self as unable to manage such issues;

however, it isn't clear how personal development outside of outcomes can occur without some support in these particular areas.

From this position, it may be worth ending on an anecdotal point. Two years after completing staff interviews I happened to meet Karen at an employability conference. Karen had been in charge of creating and applying PDP in Cohort B, but when we met she opened the conversation with the comment that she still didn't understand what PDP was about and she didn't know what to do with it. Even when identified as a PDP enthusiast within the institution, Karen remained confused about the policy, unsure of the beliefs that underpinned the approach and unsure of how to locate it within her teaching. In part this reflects Cowan's (2011) comments about 'life-wide' learning and concerns regarding the perception of such innovations as bolt-on attributes to existing practice, framed within existing perceptions and expectations of the teacher-learner relationship. If we return to the points by Clegg & Fry at the start of this work, in which they described the concept of PDP as "vague" and "chaotic", it became clear that without conceptual clarity, a 'belief' is insufficient to drive practice where there is no consensus as to where that practice should be directed and for what purpose. Without clarity and consensus the communication between staff and student cannot begin, and remains reliant on the inherent congruence that can exist between the two but cannot be assumed.



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## Section 8: Appendices

## 8.1. Research Schedule

Research Stage	Period
1. Literature Review	October 2008 – November 2013
2. PDP categorization & cohort selections	October 2008 – February 2009
3. Contextual Analysis, including management interviews (Sheila). Lecturer Interview Preparation	October 2008 - February 2009
4. Lecturer Interviews	February – July 2009
5. Student Questionnaire Construction & validation	February – September 2009
6. Lecturer Interview Transcription	August – December 2009
7. Running Student questionnaire v1	October 2009
8. Lecturer Analysis	December 2009 – April 2010
9. Running Student Questionnaire v2	March 2010
10. Student Statistical Analysis	March - May 2010
11. Student Interview Preparation	March 2010 – May 2010
12. Student Interviews	May 2010 – June 2010
13. Student Transcription	June 2010 – October 2010
14. Student Analysis	June 2010 – April 2011
15. Unified Cohort Analysis	April 2011 – January 2012
16. Final writing up	January 2012 – January 2014
17. Thesis Submission	January 2014

		2008				2009				2010				2011				2012				2013			
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## 8.2. Ethical Framework



### ETHICS CHECKLIST FOR STAFF/POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

This form is intended as an initial checklist for students/members of staff undertaking a research project. Ethical approval must be obtained prior to starting research with human subjects, animals, human tissue and literary or artistic works with human or animal subjects.

<b>Researcher:</b>	Mark Tymms
<b>Email:</b>	m.tymms@worc.ac.uk
<b>Institute:</b>	Education
<b>Status:</b>	Research Student
<b>Supervisor (if PG student):</b>	Dr. John Peters
<b>Project Title:</b>	Is Personal Development Planning delivering on its pedagogic claims? The student experience of PDP at a UK university.

#### Checklist

	Yes	No
1. Does the study involve research with human participants who may not be able to give fully informed consent (e.g. children, vulnerable adults, employees, those with a pre-existing relationship to the researcher)? <sup>1</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. Will invasive procedures be part of the research (e.g. blood sampling, temperature probes)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. Is there any foreseeable risk to the participant (physical, social, psychological, emotional or financial)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. Does the research involve access to, or the collection of, sensitive/confidential data from other organisations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5. Will the study require information about unlawful activity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6. Will the study involve prolonged, high intensity or repetitive testing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7. Does the study involve deception?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8. Does the study involve NHS patients, staff or premises?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9. Does the study involve testing of animals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10. Will financial inducements be offered?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

#### Signatures

**Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Supervisor (if applicable)<sup>2</sup>:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Hol (if applicable)<sup>3</sup>:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>1</sup> Please note that this does not include projects using general data about people in which individuals cannot be identified.

<sup>2</sup> Please note that a PG student's checklist must be agreed and signed off by the principal Supervisor.

<sup>3</sup> Please note that a member of staff's checklist must be agreed and signed off by their Head of Institute (Hol).



## Ethics Approval Form

### GUIDANCE NOTES

**PART 1** of this form is to be completed by any researcher (staff or PG student) who has answered 'YES' to one or more questions on the "Ethics Checklist" and forwarded to the relevant Institute Ethics Representative.

**PART 2** is to be completed by the relevant Institute. If the project is approved at this stage, Part 2a is completed and a copy of the form is forwarded to both the Graduate Research School and to the researcher. Ethical Review is now complete. If it is not approved, Part 2b is completed and a copy of the form is forwarded to both the Graduate Research School and to the researcher. The researcher now has the opportunity in Part 2c, if he/she chooses, to address any issues raised by the Institute. Once Part 2c has been completed the form should be forwarded to the Secretary of the Institutional Ethics Committee.

**PART 3** is to be completed by the Chair and/or Secretary of the Institutional Ethics Committee. If the project is approved at this stage, Part 3a is completed. If it is not approved, Part 3b is completed. In both instances, a copy of the form is to be forwarded to both the Graduate Research School and to the researcher.

## Ethics Approval Form

### PART 1 – Details of Research Project and Ethical Issues

<b>Researcher:</b>	Mark Tymms
<b>Email:</b>	m.tymms@worc.ac.uk
<b>Institute:</b>	Education
<b>Status:</b>	Research Student
<b>Supervisor (if PG student):</b>	Dr. John Peters
<b>Project Title:</b>	Is Personal Development Planning delivering on its pedagogic claims? The student experience of PDP at a UK university.

**Project outline** (give brief details of the aims and objectives of the project and the methods that will be used; if the research involves human subjects you must detail the selection process, sample size and type, exclusion criteria and if the subjects will be paid an *honorarium*):

**Aims:**

To identify, quantify the impact and evaluate the experiences of PDP for first year undergraduate students at a single UK university.

**Objectives:**

1. To identify the range of PDP approaches being practiced within a single UK university.
2. To quantify and compare changes related to PDP claims in self-efficacy, autonomy (locus of control), self-belief and approaches to learning for students across one academic year in a single UK university.
3. To gather qualitative data regarding student understandings and experiences of PDP and their influences on the aforementioned dimensions, across one academic year in a single UK university.

The implementation of the UK Higher Education Progress File represented a unique learning and teaching project, it aimed to provide each student with a transcript of achievement and a means of Personal Development Planning (PDP) by which the student can reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and... plan for their personal, educational and career development (QAA et al, 2001). Full implementation of PDP is claimed to provide a means of scaffolding student learners in ways that develop students' self-efficacy (Bandura 1993), locus of control (Rotter 1966) and self-regulation (Schunk 2008). By promoting a move away from content based models and placing students at the centre of learning, the potential therefore exists for PDP to transform the HE student learning experience (Broadfoot 2006).

Unsurprisingly, given these claims, and its agreed presence within the HE environment from 2005, there have been repeated calls for more robust evaluation of PDP in the UK (Gough 2003). Initial enquiries, from the systematic literature review (Gough, 2003) through to more practitioner focused enquiry (Clegg 2004), have suggested positive impacts on student learning but also raised significant issues concerning the complexities inherent within both the process and evaluation of PDP. Certainly, the complexities of the issue should not be understated. While the purposes and benefits of PDP have been defined by a sector appointed implementation group, which includes the QAA (QAA 2001), by allowing HE institutions to independently regulate their PDP provision, both at an institutional and programme level, the student experience of PDP has become open to a wide range of political, institutional and individual opinions, objectives and agendas (Clegg & Bradley 2006). In addition, a rapid and varied introduction of e-portfolio support has further added to the confusion.

To date, experimental studies of PDP have often failed to address real-world implementation issues (Clegg 2004) whilst much practitioner evaluation has lacked the necessary rigour (Gough 2003). Subsequently, a paucity of research exists in which the student perceptions of the PDP

process, and its quantifiable outcomes, are effectively examined. It is therefore the aim of this study to examine both the proposed outcomes associated with PDP and the detailed experiences of students with regard to its implementation, a process which should illuminate whether or how engagement with different PDP practices and processes are enhancing student learning experiences as outlined by the sectoral agreement

The proposed project will therefore seek to utilize a mixed method approach, though which both student outcomes and perceptions can be identified. Initially, a qualitative survey of lecturers based on snowball sampling will be undertaken, the aim being to identify the range of different modular, assessment and tutorial processes being implemented within a single institution, as well as the variations in emphasis which individual lecturers bring to the PDP process, commonly incorporating issues of employability, academic learning and professional development (Clegg & Bradley 2006). These findings, together with a study of supporting documentation, will then form the basis of a purposive sample of subject areas and provision styles, specifically implicit and explicit approaches ; concentration on this dimension being used to enable the study of non-participating students where explicit or modular approaches allow a distinct withdrawal. Overall, it is the intention of the study to recognise 12 suitable student groups, two from each institute within the University.

In the second phase of the study, first year students registered on the previously identified groups, and involved in introductory PDP activities, will then be asked to complete a confidential questionnaire designed to evaluate their initial levels of self-efficacy (Schwartz 1993), locus of control (Paulhus 1983), student self-belief (Dweck 2000) and approaches to study (Entwistle et al 2002). These personality based dimensions have been chosen because they not only reflect the expected outcomes as stated by the sectoral agreement, but also the more individual areas of focus within PDP, as previously mentioned (Mantz & Yorke 2003). These findings will then be used as a base point against which changes in these dimensions can be quantified through the use of the same questionnaire at the start of the second year. It is not the intention of this study to use the second scoring as a final level, but focus will be applied instead to the degree of change between the two, thus reflecting PDP as a process rather than an end goal. Similarly, the complexities involved in isolating any educational processes from its social and environmental context has also been recognised, however, it is partly for this reason that a third phase of study will be carried out. This will take the form of a smaller qualitative interview study designed to not only understand the student experience of PDP but to also recognise the individual factors which could have contributed to changes within the aforementioned dimensions. Students for this part of the study will be drawn from volunteers within the overall study, a convenience sample, their willingness to participate being shown through an appropriate area on the second questionnaire. The

size of the overall sample cannot be determined until the initial qualitative work has been completed and the relevant groups identified, although it is hoped that 12 study groups will offer a minimum of 240 students for subsequent study. No payments will be made for their participation in this study.

What ethical issues came to light in completing the ethical checklist?

1. Where the study is perceived as university research, lecturers may feel compelled to take part in the study.
2. Lecturers may be unwilling to express their actual views and practices if they feel that any findings would be available to the University, and in a form which may enable the disclosure of their identities.
3. Students may feel compelled to take part in the study where their lecturer is present upon its presentation and completion, i.e. during lesson periods.
4. Students may feel unwilling to participate where they fear disclosure of any findings to lecturing staff, particularly if in potentially identifiable form.
5. Students may not participate if they fear that any disclosure will lead to specific judgement statements, such as statements of intelligence.
6. Students may feel unduly pressured to complete both parts of the study or to involve themselves in the interview process, where they feel that it would benefit their interactions with staff members.

How does your research design address these issues?

1. Lecturing staff will be fully briefed as to the nature of the research being proposed.
- 2 Lecturing staff will be assured of their rights to both refuse participation and withdraw prior to student involvement.
3. Lecturer confidentiality will also be assured, all interviews being coded by alphanumeric letter at report stage and storage.
4. Students will be initially informed that the study has been designed to test the changes which PDP brings about within students. It will not be specific about the nature of these changes, but students will be assured that they do not reflect judgement areas, such as intelligence.
5. Students will be informed that it is a two part study, that they are free to refuse participation and that the information gathered will not be made available to staff at any stage of the study.
6. Student confidentiality will be assured in advance, participant identities will be codified by numbers during both report and storage stages.
7. Students will be assured of their rights to withdraw at any stage of the research, and will be offered debriefing, if desired, at the end of the third study phase.

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Supervisor (if PG student): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### 8.3. Lecturer Consent Form

Researcher: Mark Tymms

Department: Graduate Research School, University of Worcester

Contact Tel. 01905 855 240

Supervisor: John Peters, ADPU

Research Title: Is PDP delivering on its pedagogic aims?

Research Goal: To explore the provision of PDP at the University of Worcester from an experiential perspective, seeking to understand the effectiveness of PDP provision within the university with regard to enabling positive cognitive change.

Interview Goal: To obtain a detailed view of the diversity of both PDP provision itself and the staff opinions that drive that provision at the University of Worcester.

Interview process: The interview will be based on a series of topics that will have been provided to you in advance. It will take approximately 45 minutes to complete

Confidentiality: All interviews will be dealt with in the strictest confidence. At no time will the interviewee name be released and all statements and opinions will be presented anonymously within the final report. Data will be stored in a secure place and will not be accessible by the university.

Participant Rights: Participants have the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process.

All participants' information will be treated in the strictest confidence.

All data will be presented anonymously.

#### Declaration:

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions presented above. I am aware that any interview content will be treated in the strictest confidence and presented anonymously where required. I am also aware that I can withdraw from the research project at any time.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_



## 8.4. Questionnaire (psychological scales) & Student Consent Form

SQ1

My name is Mark Tymms. I am currently working on a PhD into the impact of university study on personal development, and was wondering if you would be willing to help me with my research. As part of that study I am asking a range of first year undergraduate and taught postgraduate students to complete the following questionnaire twice, once today and once again at the end of the year (or module where appropriate). This will then be followed by a small number of interviews to discuss individual educational experiences in light of these findings. If you would also be willing to be interviewed please could you tick the box at the bottom of the form.

Researcher: Mark Tymms  
Department: Graduate Research School, University of Worcester  
Contact Tel. 01905 855 240

Confidentiality: All findings will be dealt with in the strictest confidence.  
No individual data will be shared with university lecturing staff.  
Participants have the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process.  
Full debriefing will be available after the second questionnaire should it be required.  
All data will be stored and presented anonymously through coding, with data being stored either on the 'C' drive or offsite to ensure participant confidentiality.

For further information please feel free to contact me at any time on the contact number above.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you studying at the University whilst living at home

YES / NO

**Participant Declaration:**

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions presented above. I am aware that any information will be treated in the strictest confidence and presented anonymously where required. I am also aware that I can withdraw from the research project at any time.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional Interview:**

Further to the questionnaire study, I would also be willing to be interviewed regarding my educational experiences at the University of Worcester.

Please tick.

I would like to thank you for your participation in my study.

**Section 1:** There are no right or wrong answers. Using the scale below, please place a ring around the score to the right of each statement that corresponds best to your own opinion.

1. Not at all true      2. Hardly true      3. Moderately true      4. Exactly true

1. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.	1	2	3	4
2. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.	1	2	3	4
3. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.	1	2	3	4
4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.	1	2	3	4
5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.	1	2	3	4
6. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.	1	2	3	4
7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.	1	2	3	4
8. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.	1	2	3	4
9. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.	1	2	3	4
10. I can usually handle whatever comes my way.	1	2	3	4

**Section 2:** There are no right or wrong answers. Using the scale below, please place a ring around the score to the right of each statement that corresponds best to your own opinion.

1. Strongly Agree      2. Agree      3. Mostly agree  
4. Mostly disagree      5. Disagree      6. Strongly disagree

11. You have a certain amount of intelligence, and you can't really do much to change it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. You can learn new things, but you can't really change your basic intelligence.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. You can't really change what kind of personality you have. Some people have a good personality and some don't and they can't change much.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. You can do things to get people to like you, but you can't change your real personality.	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Section 3:** There are no right or wrong answers. Using the scale below, please place a ring around the score to the right of each statement that corresponds best to your own opinion.

-3. Strongly disagree      -2. Disagree      -1. Mostly disagree      0. Undecided  
+1. Mostly agree      +2. Agree      +3. Strongly agree

15. When I get what I want it's usually because I worked hard for it.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
16. When I make plans I am almost certain to make them work.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
17. I prefer games involving some luck over games requiring pure skill.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
18. I can learn almost anything if I set my mind to it.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
19. My major accomplishments are entirely due to my hard work and ability.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
20. I usually don't set goals because I have a hard time following through on them.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
21. Competition discourages excellence.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
22. Often people get ahead just by being lucky.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
23. On any sort of exam or competition I like to know how I do relative to everyone else.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
24. It's pointless to keep working on something that's too difficult for me.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
25. Even when I'm feeling self-confident about most things, I still seem to lack the ability to control social situations.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
26. I have no trouble making and keeping friends.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
27. I'm not good at guiding the course of a conversation with several others.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3

28. I can usually establish a close personal relationship with someone I find attractive.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
29. When being interviewed I can usually steer the interviewer toward the topics I want to talk about and away from those I wish to avoid.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
30. If I need help in carrying off a plan of mine, it's usually difficult to get others to help.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
31. If there's someone I want to meet I can usually arrange it.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
32. I often find it hard to get my point of view across to others.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
33. In attempting to smooth over a disagreement I usually make it worse.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
34. I find it easy to play an important part in most group situations.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
35. By taking an active part in political and social affairs we, the people, can control world events.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
36. The average citizen can have an influence on government decisions.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
37. It is difficult for people to have much control over the things politicians do in office.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
38. Bad economic conditions are caused by world events that are beyond our control.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
39. With enough effort we can wipe out political corruption.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
40. One of the major reasons we have wars is because people don't take enough interest in politics.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
41. There is nothing we, as consumers, can do to keep the cost of living from going higher.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
42. When I look at it carefully I realise it is impossible to have any really important influence over what big businesses do.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
43. I prefer to concentrate my energy on other things rather than on solving the world's problems.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
44. In the long run we, the voters, are responsible for bad government on a national as well as a local level.	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3

**Section 4:** There are no right or wrong answers. Using the scale below, please place a ring around the score to the right of each statement that corresponds best to your own opinion.

1. Almost never true of me      2. Sometimes true of me      3. True of me half of the time  
4. Frequently true of me      5. Almost always true of me

1. I find that at times studying gives me a feeling of deep personal satisfaction.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I find that I have to do enough work on a topic so that I can form my own conclusions before I am satisfied.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My aim is to pass the course while doing as little work as possible.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I only study seriously what's given out in class or in the course outlines.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel that virtually any topic can be highly interesting once I get into it.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I find most new topics interesting and often spend extra time trying to obtain more information about them	1	2	3	4	5
7. I do not find my course very interesting so I keep my work to the minimum.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I learn some things by rote, going over and over them until I know them by heart even if I do not understand them.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I find that studying academic topics can at times be as exciting as a good novel or movie.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I test myself on important topics until I understand them completely.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I find I can get by in most assessments by memorising key sections rather than trying to understand them.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I generally restrict my study to what is specifically set as I think it is unnecessary to do anything extra.	1	2	3	4	5

Please turn over

**Section 4:** Continued.

13. I work hard at my studies because I find the material interesting .	1	2	3	4	5
14. I spend a lot of my free time finding out more about interesting topics that have been discussed in different classes.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I find it is not helpful to study topics in depth. It confuses and wastes time, when all you need is a passing acquaintance with topics.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I believe that lecturers shouldn't expect students to spend significant amounts of time studying material everyone knows won't be examined.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I come to most classes with questions in mind that I want answering	1	2	3	4	5
18. I make a point of looking at most of the suggested readings that go with the lectures.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I see no point in learning material that is not likely to be in the examination.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I find the best way to pass examinations is to try to remember answers to likely questions.	1	2	3	4	5

**Section 5:** This section refers to what you expect to get from the course. Once again there are no right or wrong answers. Using the scale below, please place a ring around the score to the right of each statement that corresponds best to your own opinion.

1. Very Little      2. Some      3. Quite a Lot      4. Very much

*I am expecting the course to help me...*

1. Acquire a broad general education	1	2	3	4
2. Acquire job or work related knowledge and skills	1	2	3	4
3. Write clearly & effectively	1	2	3	4
4. Speak clearly & effectively	1	2	3	4
5. Think critically & analytically	1	2	3	4
6. Analyse quantitative problems	1	2	3	4
7. Use computer & information technology	1	2	3	4
8. Work effectively with others	1	2	3	4
9. Vote in local and national elections	1	2	3	4
10. Learn effectively on my own	1	2	3	4
11. Understand myself	1	2	3	4
12. Understand people of other social, racial & ethnic backgrounds	1	2	3	4
13. Solve complex real-world problems	1	2	3	4
14. Develop a personal code of ethics and values	1	2	3	4
15. Contribute to the welfare of the community	1	2	3	4

Thank you very much for your help.

## 8.5. Interviewee Statistics

<b>8.5a. Cohort A</b>	Score A	Score B	Change
<b>Ann (Age: 23)</b>			
Schwartzner Self-efficacy	34	35	+1
Dweck Intelligence	10	6	-4
Dweck Personality	6	8	2
Paulhus Personal LOC	8	6	-2
Paulhus Inter-personal LOC	2	-8	-10
Paulhus Social LOC	-5	-6	-2
Biggs Deep	24	25	1
Biggs Surface	22	20	-2
<b>Rose (Age: 18)</b>			
Schwartzner Self-efficacy	29	30	+1
Dweck Intelligence	10	6	-4
Dweck Personality	6	8	-2
Paulhus Personal LOC	7	10	3
Paulhus Inter-personal LOC	1	3	2
Paulhus Social LOC	-4	-3	1
Biggs Deep	24	19	-5
Biggs Surface	26	25	-1

<b>8.5b. Cohort B</b>	Score A	Score B	Change
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<b>James (Age: 23)</b>			
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Schwartzner Self-efficacy	32	36	+4
Dweck Intelligence	7	4	-3
Dweck Personality	4	4	0
Paulhus Personal LOC	12	17	+5
Paulhus Inter-personal LOC	24	30	+6
Paulhus Social LOC	-1	3	+4
Biggs Deep	33	25	-8
Biggs Surface	17	17	0

<b>Shelley (Age 23)</b>			
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Schwartzner Self-efficacy	32	37	5
Dweck Intelligence	10	7	-3
Dweck Personality	8	8	0
Paulhus Personal LOC	13	12	-1
Paulhus Inter-personal LOC	9	8	-1
Paulhus Social LOC	12	5	-7
Biggs Deep	35	30	-5
Biggs Surface	20	16	-4

<b>8.5c. Cohort C</b>	Score A	Score B	Change
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<b>Susan (Age: 21)</b>			
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Schwartzzer Self-efficacy	30	29	-1
Dweck Intelligence	8	8	0
Dweck Personality	7	5	-2
Paulhus Personal LOC	14	9	-5
Paulhus Inter-personal LOC	12	7	-5
Paulhus Social LOC	-1	-5	-4
Biggs Deep	32	29	-3
Biggs Surface	20	21	-1

<b>Patricia (Age: 21)</b>			
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Schwartzzer Self-efficacy	31	25	-6
Dweck Intelligence	8	10	2
Dweck Personality	8	4	-4
Paulhus Personal LOC	5	8	+3
Paulhus Inter-personal LOC	12	1	-11
Paulhus Social LOC	-10	-6	+4
Biggs Deep	23	27	+4
Biggs Surface	24	26	+2

<b>8.5d. Cohort D</b>		Score A	Score B	Change
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<b>Sarah (Age: 23)</b>				
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Schwartzzer Self-efficacy	36	33	-3	
Dweck Intelligence	10	4	6	
Dweck Personality	8	5	-3	
Paulhus Personal LOC	13	19	+6	
Paulhus Inter-personal LOC	13	10	-3	
Paulhus Social LOC	3	-4	-7	
Biggs Deep	39	38	-1	
Biggs Surface	19	29	+10	

<b>Elizabeth (Age: 31)</b>				
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Schwartzzer Self-efficacy	37	30	-7	
Dweck Intelligence	10	10	0	
Dweck Personality	7	4	-3	
Paulhus Personal LOC	20	19	-1	
Paulhus Inter-personal LOC	10	3	-7	
Paulhus Social LOC	16	10	-6	
Biggs Deep	23	23	0	
Biggs Surface	5	5	0	



<b>8.5e. Cohort E</b>	Score A	Score B	Change
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<b>Rachel (Age: 24)</b>			
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Schwartzzer Self-efficacy	30	31	1
Dweck Intelligence	6	10	4
Dweck Personality	6	10	4
Paulhus Personal LOC	14	6	-8
Paulhus Inter-personal LOC	7	11	4
Paulhus Social LOC	6	1	-5
Biggs Deep	13	20	7
Biggs Surface	9	9	0

<b>Mary (Age: 22)</b>			
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Schwartzzer Self-efficacy	29	29	0
Dweck Intelligence	10	11	1
Dweck Personality	10	11	1
Paulhus Personal LOC	11	11	0
Paulhus Inter-personal LOC	8	5	-3
Paulhus Social LOC	11	26	15
Biggs Deep	18	8	-10
Biggs Surface	15	10	-5

