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*Visualising the experiences of working part time postgraduates: A meteoric juggling of worlds*

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# Visualising the experiences of working part-time postgraduates: A meteoric juggling of worlds

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## Abstract

Universities in the United Kingdom have witnessed, but largely ignored the continued decline in part-time mature students. Firmly focused on young full-time undergraduate learners the recruitment, retention and achievement of postgraduate Masters students has largely been left to chance. This study explores the individual experiences of five working part-time postgraduate students enrolled on a taught Masters course at a large northern post-1992 university. The thesis seeks to make their experiences visible and their voices heard.

Adapting visual narrative methodology, the participant stories of their experiences and transitions are retold and visualised. Creatively combining photo-elicitation method and geotagged experience maps the colour, vibrancy, depth of the stories comes to life. The data we co-constructed was analysed to provide both individual participant stories and a collective social worlds narrative of part-time postgraduate experience informed by social worlds perspective.

Returning to study the participants found themselves disorientated, overwhelmed and unsure of the expectations, practices and discourse of postgraduate study. It took varying lengths of time for the participants to feel more confident and stop questioning their entitlement and belonging in the part-time postgraduate world. The excitement and enthusiasm expressed by most participants provided some balance within their stories. All were positive about progressing their careers and transferring their learning into the other areas of their life. There was a definite message of transition and self-transformation as participants developed strategies to manage and embed the part-time postgraduate world within their individually patterned social worlds space (SWS). Each SWS comprised a unique constellation of social worlds, multiple memberships, borders, and intersections which affected how and to what extent the individual participated and performed their social roles in each social world. Without doubt becoming a part-time postgraduate learner was a meteoric juggling of worlds.

## Acknowledgements

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The participants who made time to tell me their stories.

My supervisors Dr Anne Kellock and Dr Karen Dunn, for standing back enough to let me find my way but being there with their endless encouragement and guidance.

My family for never doubting and giving me the space – ‘my homework is finally DONE’.

To Rachel, Mary and Barrie for giving me a helping hand.

## Foreword

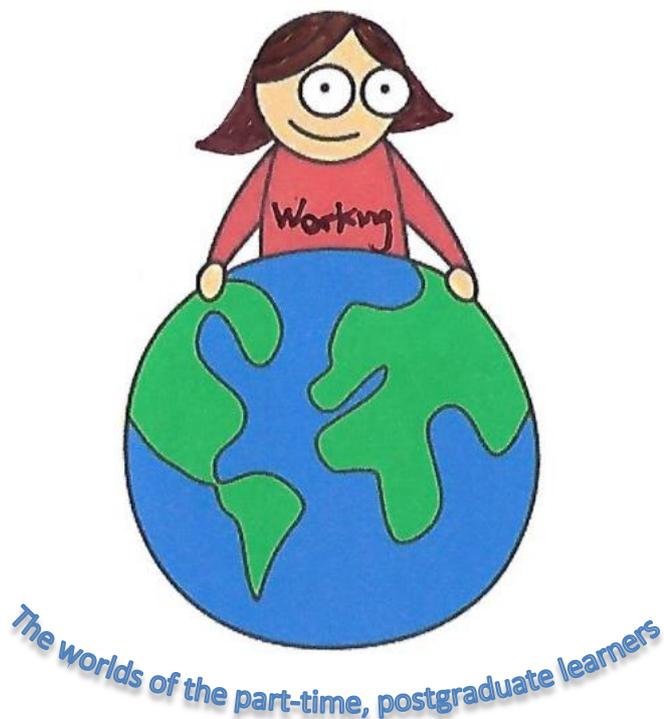


Picture if you will, returning to education to study part-time whilst concurrently working. According to the common discourse you would probably expect a number of things, 'learning while you are earning', 'spreading a full-time course over a longer period of time', 'committing an afternoon or evening to attend lectures', 'flexible distance-learning', 'working during the week and studying at the weekend', 'choosing how to study to suit your busy lifestyle'; in other words something separate that you dip into as and when you can dip out of your life.

You may not, however, expect to find as you enter the part-time-postgraduate world, the part-time-postgraduate world enters your life, pitching up like a distant relative, you

- have some recollection of them, but they are not quite as you expected or remembered
- must introduce them into your family
- must accommodate your visitor, but they do not necessarily make a great house guest
- are always conscious of your visitor being there
- can't just carry on as though they were not
- must adjust things in the home to help them settle in
- discover things from them you didn't know or had forgotten
- visit places together that you have not seen for some time or have never seen before
- find there can be benefits to having them around
- get used to them being there and spending time together
- secretly look forward to them leaving..... but kind of miss them when they are gone

You are about to enter,



# 1. Table of Contents

2.	Chapter One – The Research Problem.....	10
2.1.	Introduction .....	10
2.2.	Personal Rationale .....	11
2.3.	Situating the study, local context and background .....	12
2.4.	The Study .....	14
2.5.	Research Questions .....	14
2.6.	Aim of the study.....	14
2.7.	Study Outcomes.....	15
3.	Chapter Two – Literature Review .....	17
3.1.	Introduction .....	17
3.2.	Forgotten by Policy .....	18
3.3.	Hidden by homogeneity.....	21
3.4.	Lost in the crowd.....	22
3.5.	Unrecognised by assumptions .....	25
3.6.	Beheld by expectations.....	28
3.7.	Prevented by barriers .....	32
3.8.	Conclusions .....	43
4.	Chapter Three – Research Design .....	45
4.1.	Introduction .....	45
4.2.	Personal Philosophy.....	45
4.3.	Ontology.....	46
4.4.	Epistemology.....	48
4.5.	Methodology.....	49
4.5.1.	Narrative Inquiry .....	50
4.5.2.	Methods.....	53
4.5.3.	Ethics .....	63
4.5.4.	Trustworthiness .....	65
4.5.5.	Data Analysis .....	67
4.6.	Conclusion.....	77
5.	Chapter Four – Stories Retold (part-one) .....	79
5.1.	Introduction .....	79
5.2.	Juliette.....	80
5.3.	Claire .....	103

5.4.	Hettie .....	123
5.5.	Jayne .....	143
5.6.	Esme.....	166
5.7.	Conclusion.....	184
6.	Chapter Five .....	185
6.1.	Introduction .....	185
6.2.	Social Worlds Perspective .....	185
6.3.	Constellation Process Illustrating Social Worlds Space .....	187
6.4.	Stories Reframed (part-two).....	193
6.4.1.	Juliette – tactical management of the SWS (ninja in action) .....	193
6.4.2.	Claire – emotions and blending in the SWS.....	205
6.4.3.	Hettie – conditions for a perfect storm .....	213
6.4.4.	Jayne – overcrowding and conflict in the SWS .....	218
6.4.5.	Esme – control and reconfiguration in the SWS .....	225
6.5.	Social Worlds Narrative (part-time postgraduate experiences and transitions).....	235
6.5.1.	Social (World) Self.....	235
6.5.2.	Social World Business .....	237
6.5.3.	Social Worlds Space (SWS).....	247
6.5.4.	Conclusion.....	254
7.	Chapter Six – Conclusions .....	256
7.1.	Introduction .....	256
7.2.	Aim and Outcomes.....	256
7.3.	Key Learning.....	258
7.4.	Limitations.....	259
7.5.	Contributions (in outline).....	260
7.6.	Recommendations (future practice, pedagogy, research) .....	261
7.7.	Concluding thoughts .....	263
8.	References .....	265
9.	Appendices.....	304
9.1.	Appendix 1 .....	304
9.2.	Appendix 2 .....	0
9.3.	Appendix 3 .....	5
9.4.	Appendix 4 .....	6
9.5.	Appendix 5 .....	10
9.6.	Appendix 6 .....	11

## List of tables

Table 1 - Characteristics of the non-traditional learner taken from Zawacki-Richter et al (12015)	22
Table 2 - Facets of Mastersness (QAA, 2013)	36
Table 3 - Photography summary	58
Table 4- Transcript conversation table	70
Table 5 - ExpMap transcript conversation table	71
Table 6 - Exp Map Visual Table	72
Table 7 - Distilled character/story outline	73
Table 8 - Characteristics and types of participation in social worlds	247

## List of Figures

Figure 1 - Research Design: Adapted from Guba (1990) and Scotland (2012)	46
Figure 2 - Initial prototype of SWS constellation illustration	74
Figure 3 - Experience Map: <b>Julietty Land</b>	80
Figure 4 - Experience Map: <b>Treasure map of MSc</b>	103
Figure 5 - Experience Map: <b>Hettie's Islands of Hell</b>	123
Figure 5 - Experience Map: <b>The journey of juggling</b>	143
Figure 6 - Experience Map: <b>Dissertation World</b>	166
Figure 7 - Social world Space constellation and illustration process	190
Figure 8 - Example SWS constellation illustration	191
Figure 9 - Principles informing SWS	192
Figure 10 - Juliette: Social world Space Constellation Illustration	203
Figure 11 - Claire: Social world Space Constellation Illustration	211
Figure 19 - Hettie: Social world Space Constellation Illustration	217
Figure 12 - Jayne: Social world Space Constellation Illustration	223
Figure 13 - Esme: Social world Space Constellation illustration	233
Figure 14 - Home World Collage	239
Figure 15 - Work World Collage	241
Figure 16 - PT-Postgraduate World Collage	244

## Glossary/abbreviations

<b>Abbreviations used</b>	
Higher education	<b>HE</b>
Higher education institution	<b>HEi</b>
Part-time	<b>PT</b>
Postgraduate taught	<b>PGT</b>
Part-time postgraduate taught	<b>PT-PGT</b>
Health and social care	<b>H&amp;Sc</b>
United Kingdom	<b>UK</b>
Master of science	<b>MSc</b>
Narrative Inquiry	<b>NI</b>
Visual Narrative Inquiry	<b>VNI</b>
Photo-elicitation method	<b>PEM</b>
Experience map/experience mapping	<b>ExpMap/ExpMapping</b>
Social worlds perspective	<b>SWP</b>
Social worlds space	<b>SWS</b>
<b>Terms used interchangeably</b>	
Lecturer	<b>Academic</b>
Student	<b>Learner</b>

## 2. Chapter One – The Research Problem

### 2.1. Introduction

In introducing the thesis, the intention of this first chapter is to transparently situate the study. The contextual, professional and personal starting points of my doctoral journey are outlined. Together, these drove my pursuit of new knowledge, recognition of the research problem and identification of the emergent research questions. In setting out the starting point the reader is invited to '*join and trace*' this visual narrative inquiry in order that they can '*judge*' the study and any contribution the thesis might make in its answer of the research questions.

A global trend towards democratisation of knowledge, universal higher education (HE) and growth of the global knowledge economy provides the milieu of this study. Today's 'knowledge economy' is thought to very much depend on the production of workers with specialist knowledge and training (Gale & Parker, 2014). Postgraduate study has been progressively considered a vital conduit for the development of such specialist knowledge and skills becoming a more prominent focus of HE discourse (Christie, Munro, & Wager, 2005).

The exponential increase in the UK HE student population (McPherson, Punch, & Graham, 2017); which has seen the number of 17-30 year olds attending university rise to 47% (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015) certainly indicates universities have become increasingly effective in recruiting and satisfying the needs of young full-time learners. The same cannot be said however, for mature part-time postgraduate learners. The persistent focus on young full-time learners appears to be overshadowing and camouflaging the continued demise in part-time mature students. Part-time students tend to be studying for employment and upskilling hence, the potential benefits of part-time learning can extend to the learner's family, employers and wider society (Butcher, 2015a; Callender & Thompson, 2018; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010; Universities UK, 2013a). Ignored by government policy to widen university access in the UK and affected by the rising fees, changes in funding arrangements and competition for students (King, M., Saraswat, & Widdowson, 2015); it is fair to say that part-time postgraduate education has suffered over the years. Despite being highly regarded for their potential contributions to the knowledge economy and society, part-time

postgraduate learners appear to be largely forgotten by researchers, academics and policy makers alike. Assumed to be part of a continuation rather than transition in education, the recruitment, retention and achievement of postgraduate Masters students has largely been left to chance. Gale and Parker (2014) call for research to broaden the theoretical and empirical base, if the 'lived realities' of postgraduate students and their ability to navigate transition are to be fully understood and resourced. This study makes a contribution exploring the experiences of a small group of part-time postgraduate students enrolled on a taught Masters course at a large northern post-1992 university<sup>1</sup>. The participants are all homebased, mature learners concurrently working in leadership or management positions in the health and social care sector; combining part-time study with their everyday lives. The thesis seeks to make their experiences visible and their voices heard.

## **2.2. Personal Rationale**

The study holds personal relevance for me as a course leader of the taught Master of Science (MSC) programme and a taught doctoral student. I entered the study with a never dulling and very strong belief in the importance of learning throughout our lives. If we can learn how to learn we can make the most of the experiences, we have. Yet my learning as a child took place in an educational landscape in which learner passivity was dominant. I studied academic subjects which on reflection were poorly delivered by people who knew nothing about me. This didactic approach to gaining knowledge was all I knew, I left school underwhelmed and unsure that academia and learning were for me. But it was the experiential learning experiences and application of theoretical perspectives to practice in my nurse and midwifery training that rekindled my passion for learning and perhaps spurred me to move into education myself. Having spent a number of years teaching and leading full-time courses in higher and further education, when I took up a post focusing solely on part-time learners, I was forced to reconsider my practice, assumptions and approaches.

I began my doctoral journey with the rather pessimistic view that HE can 'disable' the learning of mature part-time postgraduates. Over several years I have witnessed as a student and an academic, educational institutions which lack focus on 'learning' and 'the learner'; HE is no

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<sup>1</sup> To maintain confidentiality – from this point in 'The University' will be used to refer to the specific university at the centre of this study

exception. Around the same time, I was leading a sponsored co-design project which focused on part-time learners, illuminating their stories and messages for academics and policy makers. The overwhelming message from that project in the words of those participants was "we might be part-time, but we are still a big part of the University". I took away from the project an overwhelming sense that part-time learners were second class and struggling to be heard. I have become increasingly aware of the landscape in which we study and live, and on bad days resigned to what I perceive to be the decimation of the public sector and specifically HE by political agendas and prevailing neoliberal ideology. However, as an individual educator I still hope that in some small way I contribute to a HE experience from which students leave with '*an increased capacity and desire to continue learning*' (Dewey 1966, in Bruce & Rubin, 2013). Dewey also held that, '*life is education*' (Dewey 1938, in Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). I have haphazardly come to realise that these two notions very much influence who I am professionally and personally. I firmly ascribe to a belief that *life is education* and from this I seek to *increase my capacity to learn and continuing learning about life*.

### **2.3. Situating the study, local context and background**

The University in question works with a wide-ranging community of students, staff and stakeholders within a complex diverse society. The University aspiration is to shape the future of students aiming to ensure that they become confident, creative, resilient, responsible and prepared for whatever they decide to do. This study explores the experiences of students undertaking a part-time taught Master of Science (MSc) programme for leaders in health and social care, during academic year 2016/17. In the same academic year as is typical for the course, the ages of the forty-seven enrolled students ranged from 26-55years. Furthermore, thirty-four of the forty-seven enrolled students were in receipt of organisational sponsorship. More detailed demographic data relating to the student enrolment for academic year 2016/17 can be found in appendix 1. Current or recent leadership/management experience is an entry requirement of the course, many students occupy a full-time position whilst concurrently studying. Historically, most learners tend to be doctors, nurses, midwives, allied health professionals, managers, project leaders and more recently social workers. In the most part, students on the course have benefitted from continuous professional development (CPD) funding from Health Education England.

*“This funding is provided to Local Education and Training Boards (LETBs) to allow NHS trusts to hold their own CPD budget that can be used to commission universities to deliver education and training, or they spend the funding directly with universities under Learning Beyond Registration (LBR) contracts” (Ousey, 2016, p.595)*

However, austerity measures resulted in the reduced availability and diminishing amounts of such funding. Like the Faculty in question, areas of HE with a high volume of public sector involvement have been particularly hard hit (King, M. et al., 2015). In 2016/17, without much warning and with little evidence of strategic planning at a national level, the above funding in England was subject to deep cuts of up to 45% (Greatbatch, 2016). NHS trusts had to quickly establish their absolute priorities for CPD moving forward; locally 'clinical focused' CPD was ring fenced and the MSc course in question excluded from funding eligibility. In September 2016, PG loans were made available, however, this was uncharted territory during the data collection period and not something the participants in this study accessed.

Balancing the differing and sometimes competing needs and expectations of the student, the workplace and the university can be challenging for academics (Jones-Devitt & Steele, 2014; O'Connor & Cordova, 2010); and as Lowe and Gayle (2007) note, improved understanding of the complex inter-relationship between employment, studying and home life is critical to developing evidence based policy. The thesis takes place at time when this tripartite relationship may be set to change if more students are required to self-fund their study. Local discourse suggests the MSc course recognises the prominence, connections and central focus of the workplace. The programme aims to foster a greater synergy between work roles and the academic curriculum. Delivery is via blended learning which has been increasingly used in HE over the last decade (Halverson, Spring, Huyett, Henrie, & Graham, 2017) providing pedagogic flexibility (McLinden, 2013). There is an expectation that students will be autonomous and self-directed in their learning. This is supported by and involves using the dedicated electronic learning platform. Informal use of social media is encouraged, offering synchronous immediate contact and the opportunity to develop support networks between peers and with some academics (Ng & Cheung, 2007).

This study takes place in one of the UK's largest universities. It claims to be a university which understands the aims and aspirations of the part-time student; providing courses designed to fit around work and home life. The University offers support throughout the learning journey to make sure all students get the most out of the experience and themselves. Imagine if in a mission to shape and transform student lives, The University wanted to hear about the student lives in which it is a small but important part and wanted in turn to be shaped by their stories. The thesis seeks to capture and authentically re-tell the stories of the participants which might in turn ignite conversations about the place and voice of PT-postgraduate learners in HE. In doing so, it is hoped that questions will be asked about the continual strive to ensure consistency which currently pervades HE and the resultant homogeneity which fails to see the learner in their life.

## **2.4. The Study**

**Title:** A meteoric juggling of worlds: Visualising the experiences of working part-time, postgraduates.

## **2.5. Research Questions**

- How does the life of the mature student affect their transition to education as a part-time postgraduate concurrently working?
- How does returning to education as a concurrently working part-time postgraduate affect the life of the mature student?
- How do mature students manage their return to part-time postgraduate study?

## **2.6. Aim of the study**

At the outset the aim of the thesis was to better understand the experiences and perceptions of part-time postgraduates transitioning between the workplace and HE. I believed at the time the literature did not fully account for the transitional experiences of working postgraduate learners. As the participants showed and told me about their experiences I came to appreciate the entangled intricacies and complexities of their transitional trajectories and postgraduate experiences which could not be isolated from their life. The literature to some extent did provide a 'fractured understanding' of postgraduate experience and transition but, how the pieces fitted together as a whole for the postgraduate student was missing. In order to understand the postgraduate experience and transition I needed to redirect and broaden my

focus to the student and how returning to study as a part-time postgraduate was storied into their life. The aim of the thesis therefore is,

*To better understand how a small group of part-time taught postgraduate students who concurrently work, story and manage their return to study.*

## **2.7. Study Outcomes**

The intended study outcomes are to:

- foreground the mature part-time postgraduate student voice
- to understand the experience of part-time postgraduate study storied within the individual life
- to select and justify a participatory methodology which would best capture the part-time postgraduate student life

Having outlined the starting point of the study, in brief the remaining chapters are arranged as follows,

**Chapter two** - provides a critical literature review which focuses on a relatively small and fractured but developing body of evidence around postgraduate experience and transition. The review also draws upon the more extensive and comprehensive work undertaken with undergraduate mature part-time learners who study part-time. The chapter closes with a reminder of the primary research questions arising from the local context but informed by the literature reviewed.

**Chapter three** - offers a detailed and justified account of the research design starting with my personal philosophy as the researcher which informed, influenced and helped me to align the whole research design. This chapter details ontological and epistemological standpoints that together with the methodology comprise the research paradigm underpinning the study. Justificatory consideration is given to how the research was designed to best understand the sense participants made of their postgraduate experiences. Finally, ethical considerations on which this creative participatory study relies are also included.

**Chapter four** - It is in this chapter the participant stories come to life as I construct and retell each in turn. Part one of the participant stories found in this chapter are organised in the following way; firstly the experience map created by the participant is included which depicts

the experience of being an in-work part-time postgraduate student for that participant. This is followed by the in-depth participant story which allows the reader to see, hear and visualise the sense each participant makes of their postgraduate experience. Through a series of the most prominent headlines the 'key messages the participant wanted us to know' are uncovered. In order to offer authentic and vivid stories, verbatim excerpts and photography are included throughout. My recap and *visual summary* of each participant story is then provided.

**Chapter five** – In chapter five, social worlds perspective (SWP) is introduced. It is in this chapter I introduce the notion of individually patterned *social worlds spaces* (SWS) and detail my development of a *constellation process* for analysing and illustrating the individual social world spaces. I then adopt SWP to reframe and analyse part two of the continuing individual stories. Following this a collective social worlds narrative of *part-time postgraduates who concurrently study and work* is then constructed.

**Chapter six** - the purpose of this chapter is to establish the learning from the thesis in answer to the research questions. The starting point is to acknowledge the study limitations and identify actions taken to deal with emergent ethical issues. The contributions to theory, practice and research are then reiterated before the emerging recommendations made and the final concluding thoughts expressed.

## 3. Chapter Two – Literature Review

### 3.1. Introduction

#### **Part-time postgraduate provision; time to get personal?**

In chapter one the scope and context of the research problem was introduced. This chapter offers a critical review of the experiences and transition of part-time (PT) postgraduate students in HE. An overview of the literature and review process is first provided before moving on to consider emergent themes in relation to PT-postgraduate provision and learners. Part-time postgraduate education is a small part of the HE landscape which has become overshadowed and left behind in universities where full-time undergraduate courses dominate. Assumptions, systems and policy aimed at the '*traditional majority*' prevail presenting challenges for postgraduates who concurrently work and study part-time. The purpose of the literature review is to establish what the evidence to date contributes to understanding this situation, whilst informing the development and design of the most suited methodology for the identified area of inquiry.

A selective critical literature review was undertaken systematically this excluded,

- studies and literature focusing exclusively upon full-time, young, traditional school leavers

The initial literature review undertaken prior to data production revealed a paucity of research exploring transitional experiences of postgraduate students. In contrast to undergraduate transitions, postgraduate experience and transition was noted to be overlooked (McPherson et al., 2017) and forgotten (Millward, 2015). Given the relatively limited literature available which focuses exclusively on postgraduates the review does include some literature relating to undergraduate, part-time, mature student groups with due consideration of the very nuanced and contextual nature of this area of enquiry. Returning to further review the literature during data analysis and the writing up phase of this study, a small surge of papers being published during 2017 and 2018 were discovered; many of the papers originate from Scotland, the wider UK and Australia.

Literature relating to the experiences and transition of HE students has evolved enormously over the last fifteen years (Bowles, Fisher, McPhail, Rosenstreich, & Dobson, 2014; Hatt & Baxter, 2003; Leese, 2010; Nelson, Kift, Humphreys, & Harper, 2006; Robins, Roberts, & Sarris, 2018). There are so many lenses through which to view the similarities and differences of student experience. Numerous combinations were noted in the socio-economic backgrounds, type of university, levels of study and modes of delivery, making for a vast and rich evidence-based discourse around the challenges and tribulations, that transition to university brings for many learners. Key themes emerging from the literature suggest part-time postgraduate provision and learners have become; forgotten by policy, hidden by homogeneity, lost in the crowd, unrecognised by assumptions, beheld to expectations and many find themselves unprepared and ill-equipped for the postgraduate experience. This chapter argues that to take more notice of part-time and postgraduate learners, it is time to get personal in our approach to part-time postgraduate provision.

## 3.2. Forgotten by Policy

### **Time to stop the erosion of part-time learners?**

In most European countries concern regarding the equity of opportunity to access HE has been a driving force and key policy issue during the last half of the century (Pinheiro & Antonowicz, 2015).

*"Higher education has been subject to more institutional reform in the past few decades than any other part of the educational establishment in advanced industrial states"(Ansell, 2008, p.189).*

It is purported that massification and employability agendas are designed to support industry providing a better skilled productive workforce (Lambert, 2009; Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009). Over a relatively short period of time many countries have seen the move from an elite system for the privileged classes to a mass enrolment system. But as the student enrolment levels in advanced industrial countries rose, public subsidisation of HE in some countries has fallen (Ansell, 2008) with radical funding reforms inevitably following. In October 2010, Lord Browne made recommendations for changes to HE funding and student finance arrangements. This prompted the most significant changes to the funding of HE in England for over fifty years. The financial reforms pledged to:

"deliver savings without cutting the quality of HE; balancing the demands of the universities with the interests of current students and future graduates" (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2011, p.2).

Indeed, the latest Universities UK report provides a clear indication that full-time entrants to UK universities increased during the reporting period 2006/7-2015/16. Undoubtedly the picture for full-time learners remains buoyant, with a high demand amongst younger students and increasing student satisfaction (Universities UK, 2017). It is noted this latest report confirms a record level of entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds in 2015–16. All of which suggests universities have become increasingly better at attracting and satisfying the needs of young full-time learners (Universities UK, 2017).

However, in exclusively focusing on the large number of young full-time learners, universities have arguably neglected their mature part-time learners. There is growing concern that part-time provision in UK universities has reached a crisis point. It is argued that along the way mature part-time learners, have become, 'lost' (Callender & Thompson, 2018), 'shoe-horned and side lined' (Butcher, 2015b) and generally 'squeezed out' (Butcher, 2018) of HE. There has been a continued decline (Universities UK, 2017) in part-time learners in HE constituting a national decrease of 51% since the 2012 tuition fee rise (Callender & Thompson, 2018). The absence of financial incentives has done little to help sustain part-time HE provision (Universities UK, 2013b). The latest figures determine that in 2015-16 the total UK university student population was 2,280,830 with less than 600,000 studying on a part-time basis (Universities UK, 2017).

According to the House of Commons briefing paper this decline in part-time student numbers cannot be solely attributed to the funding reforms. The paper claims the picture is more complex with a combination of factors including; increased tuition fees, the removal of funding for equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQ policy), uncertainty of economic returns on part-time study, the economic downturn, a decline in leisure learning and debt aversion among older students (Hubble & Bolton, 2017). Although international evidence unequivocally suggests debt aversion is a deterrent to further study (Wakeling, Hampden-Thompson, & Hancock, 2017), when turning attention specifically to postgraduate enrolments in England, this is yet to be determined. Following the elevation in fees in 2012 a questionably premature report in 2013 by HEFCE did identify debt aversion as the main reason

undergraduates were not planning to continue to postgraduate courses. However, in 2015 the first UK study found no direct indication that increased undergraduate tuition fees had subsequently acted as a deterrent to continuing to postgraduate study (Wakeling et al., 2017). The authors in this case recommend that postgraduate funding must remain open to further empirical question.

All that considered, it is questionable whether universities can afford to continue losing part-time learners who make up around one-third of the student population in the UK. Authors such as Butcher have pointed to,

"The lack of attention given to nurturing a vibrant, accessible, viable and student-centred part-time sector has resulted in critical decline" (Butcher, 2015a, p.55)

In the same year Nick Hillman the director of HE policy institute similarly warned this disastrous decline was "arguably the single biggest problem facing higher education" (Hubble & Bolton, 2017, p. 4). Although many of the entangled contributing factors can be considered out with universities' powers (Universities UK, 2013a), some culpability for the declining numbers has to be assigned to a long standing lack of awareness of the motivations and needs of part-time students (Hubble & Bolton, 2017). National HE policy has rendered learners who study part-time largely invisible and as a result poorly understood (Universities UK, 2013a). All of which points to a desperate need for UK universities to undertake a thorough overhaul of widening access policy to include part-time mature students and simultaneous review of practices and pedagogy which must enhance inclusive participation across the entire student population. Simply "getting the students in and leaving them to it does not work" (Crozier, Reay, Clayton, Colliander, & Grinstead, 2008, p.176).

In addition to personal and social barriers, studies with under-represented students have identified that institutional and structural processes also influence the student experience, engagement and participation in learning (Crozier & Reay, 2011). Indeed, the equality and fairness of such policy and pedagogy for part-time learners is now being questioned (Hubble & Bolton, 2017). Although individual academics and courses might attempt to recognise such diversity and try to ensure inclusivity, wholesale holistic alignment of policy and practice throughout Universities remains elusive (Corbin & Baron, 2012). There is growing criticism and pressure for this to be evident and widespread in the actual university practices and policies,

not merely the non-performative, institutional speech acts, which espouse equality and inclusivity (Ahmed, 2006). In other words, the focus needs to be more on 'doing the do' and less on 'doing the document' (Ahmed, 2007). A starting point might be to question assumptions which tend to see our student population as groups of homogenous learners.

### **3.3. Hidden by homogeneity**

#### **Time to really understand the diversity of part-time learners?**

The classification of students as homogenous groups full-time/part-time or non-traditional/traditional, is largely for the convenience of universities and considered by some to be a mistake (Woodley & Wilson, 2002). Arbitrary differentiations between part and full-time students tend to hold that, part-time students study at an intensity of at least 25 per cent of a full-time course (Office for Fair Access, 2017). The very attempt to differentiate between the two groups suggests there is at least some acceptance that students fit neatly into one mode of study or the other. The accuracy and usefulness of such temporal distinction is questionable given a large number of all students now combine studying with varying amounts of time working (Butcher, 2015b; Pollard, Newton, & Hillage, 2012).

Such binary thinking is even more questionable in terms of our students being traditional or non-traditional. Categories of non-traditional learners are variously defined and contested (Fragoso et al., 2013; King, M. et al., 2015) but largely differentiate non-traditional learners from the white, upper/middle class, 18 to 24-year-olds with a family history of attending (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). The term non-traditional is largely used in relation to groups of students that are in some way under-represented in HE (Fragoso et al., 2013) and present a high risk for university retention figures (Yorke et al., 2008). The German study undertaken by Zawacki-Richter, Müskens, Krause, Alturki & Aldraiweesh Muskens (2015), suggests the profile of non-traditional learners in HE tends to include those who,

1. did not progress from secondary education
2. most likely come from non-educational backgrounds
3. tend to older
4. have family and children
5. do not meet the conventional entry requirements for study
6. have previously undertaken professional activities and continue with this whilst studying

*Table 1 - Characteristics of the non-traditional learner taken from Zawacki-Richter et al (12015)*

Other literature also identifies a large proportion of non-traditional mature students are,

- female (Hubble & Bolton, 2017)
- likely to have social and family commitments (Guri-Rosenblit, 2012)
- come from less well-off backgrounds than those on full-time courses (Callender & Thompson, 2018)
- likely to have negative attitudes to debt (Callender & Wilkinson, 2013; González-Arnal & Kilkey, 2009; Mangan, Hughes, Davies, & Slack, 2010)

But the accuracy of differentiating between traditional and non-traditional students is questionable given students are often "traditional" in some aspects and "non-traditional" in others (Zawacki-Richter et al (2015). Non-traditional students are largely assumed to be educationally disadvantaged or impeded (Osborne, Marks, & Turner, 2004) by their situation (age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status). The morals of using such pejorative terms which pathologise and 'other' certain students, has long been questioned by some authors including Leathwood & O'Connell (2003), Reay (2002). There is growing concern that such terms are outdated, stale and prejudicial (Morley, 2010) serving only to mask the heterogeneity of the student population (Hockings, Cooke, Yamashita, McGinty, & Bowl, 2008). Stoten (2015) goes on to highlight the need for universities to discard such homogenous assumptions and recognise instead the individual learning journey.

### **3.4. Lost in the crowd**

#### **Time to learn from the small numbers to better understand the masses?**

Subsequent to buoyant undergraduate enrolments in the UK, the introduction of postgraduate degree apprenticeships and the availability of postgraduate loans, a potential for growth in the postgraduate market is noted. However, this potential growth may be countered by the

limited understanding and research of postgraduate experience and pedagogy (Charlton, 2016; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013). More recently there has been increased state involvement and growing pressure on universities to improve completion and retention rates which may lead to improvements in the postgraduate sector (Kallio, Kallio, Tienari, & Hyvönen, 2016). UK universities offer a diverse range of postgraduate programmes which can lead new careers across the private and public sector, enable upskilling and retraining of the workforce, or offer a route to postgraduate research (Pollard et al., 2012). Students enter postgraduate study at different points in their life but it is relatively rare to find students who progress from undergraduate study and remain at the same institution (James, 2018; O'Donnell, Tobbell, Lawthom, & Zammit, 2009). More often they will be moving on to study at a different university, possibly in a different country and some will have had a period of time away from study. Further it is seldom acknowledged that some postgraduate students may not hold a degree qualification or have studied at university before (Heussi, 2012), in fact 23% of PGT respondents surveyed by Pollard (2016) were educated below degree level.

In the academic year 2016/17 the higher education statistics agency (HESA) reported over 2.7 million enrolled students in UK universities. With only around 51,000 of these enrolled onto part-time Masters programmes, it is fair to say that these students are a drop in the ocean, relatively speaking. Despite being small in numbers the diversity of postgraduate cohorts is quite striking. With significantly variable life biographies creating a range of complexities, the needs of PT-postgraduates are currently unmet by traditional university systems set up for young full-time learners (Bunney, 2017). Based on the findings of two Australian case studies Bunney concludes "universities must take steps to prioritise engagement, support and retention at postgraduate level so that all students achieve quality education and employment outcomes" (Bunney, 2017, p.23). The study identifies a need for HE institutions to develop, flexible university systems, targeted postgraduate pedagogies, appropriate support mechanisms and further research (Bunney, 2017). Possibly still 'the most under-researched of all degree levels' (Drennan & Clarke, 2009); in the last 1-2 years there has been increased interest in the experiences and transitions of PGT learners undertaking Masters courses. However there remains a real need to further build a strong comprehensive body of knowledge which can provide a rich in-depth picture of PGT experiences and transitions.

To date, research with postgraduate learners has tended to utilise, semi structured interviews (Evans, C., Gbadamosi, & Richardson, 2014; Shanley & Dalley-Hewer, 2017), focus groups (Charlton, 2016; Heussi, 2012; West, 2012) and questionnaire (Bamber, Choudhary, Hislop, & Lane, 2017; Pollard, 2016). Mixed or multi-method designs are the most popular (examples include, Crisan, Geraniou, Townsend, Seriani, & De Oliveira Filho, 2018; Matheson & Sutcliffe, 2017b; McPherson et al., 2017; Mellors-Bourne, Mountford-Zimdars, Wakeling, Rattray, & Land, 2016; Tobbell, O'Donnell, & Zammit, 2008). Through scheduled conversational interviews, unplanned corridor conversations and field notes; James (2018) appears to be the first to conduct a narrative inquiry (NI) which stories the transition experiences of postgraduate learners. The study explored the experiences of five female Latin American students who were studying for a one-year Master's degree at a UK university during 2012-13. James advocates that researching the personal and unique stories of students in this way can help to move away from assumptions which "homogenise or even label groups of students" and appreciate instead "the wonderful and colourful diversity in our midst" and "the unique individuals that they are" (2018, p.52).

HEIs play an important role in not only widening access but also facilitating students with diverse backgrounds to fully participate and achieve. In universities systems set up for traditional young undergraduate students who study full-time, the challenges for PT-postgraduate learners look likely to continue. Perhaps the time has come to turn things on their head, time for universities to view and model provision through a mature PT-postgraduate lens. Understanding this small but diverse student population could help universities to develop the flexibility and inclusivity required by a modern heterogeneous student population. Put more succinctly, smart inclusive policy will follow,

*"If policymakers listen to those part-time students resilient enough to persist, answers are available" (Butcher, 2015a, p.55)*

This chapter now moves on to consider how such learners balance complex demands, as they negotiate and transition between the areas in their life.

### 3.5. Unrecognised by assumptions

#### **Time to reconsider postgraduate transition?**

As a recognised part of social life, transitions have become an important focus for educational research. For more than 20 years the transition of undergraduate learners during their first year of study has received widespread international attention (Halamandaris & Power, 1997; Johnson, Greer Cavallaro & Watson, 2004; Kouvola, Hernandez-Martinez, & Croft, 2018; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003; Reay, 2002). This extensive work determines the transition to university is a very particular and distinctive type of transitional process (Field, 2012). Despite considerable attention, however, there is no agreed-upon definition of transition (Ecclestone, Biesta, & Hughes, 2009). As such, transition is considered a process which entails moving and re-situating one's knowledge and experience from one context, area or field to another (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Tobbell, O'Donnell, & Zammit, 2010). Drawing further upon Lave & Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory, transition involves the renegotiation of practices and past memberships within the new situation or context. A full understanding of the historical and shared meanings of the practices in this new context will not necessarily be apparent to the outsider or new member legitimately rendering them to peripheral participation until such time as they can fully participate (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Tobbell et al., 2010). Learning to learn is an essential part of being a learner in the HE community.

"The goal of education must be to enable students to participate fully in those practices which are valued and lead to success" (Tobbell et al., 2008, p.16).

Transition is also noted to involve shifts in identity which often require redefining the meaning of that identity for the self and reformulating relationships between the self and others (Jetten, O'Brien, & Trindall, 2002). As the individual crosses over the boundary (Wenger, 1999) entering the new situation or group they will need to negotiate new identities and establish what is expected of them (Tobbell et al., 2010; Wenger, 1999). This involves a shifting identity that cannot be separated, either theoretically or practically, from the individual's wider identity (Tobbell et al., 2010). Hence in the transition to HE, students are required to reorganise the way they think about themselves as learners and social beings' (Huon & Sankey, 2002).

However, as noted in previous sections, in educational institutions proffered to favour the knowledge and experiences of young, white, middle class males (Thomas, L., 2002), those who do not fit into the 'traditional mould' are likely to find fitting in and belonging in HE challenging; for example those who are, working class (Reay, 2002; Sullivan, Handelsman, Towler, & Briggs, 2005), mature (Baxter, A. & Britton, 2001), or BME (Davies & Garrett, 2013). Such personal circumstances and cultural differences can be powerful barriers to transition or participation in practices valued by the institution (Hultberg, Plos, Hendry, & Kjellgren, 2008; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Transition is likely to be a challenging experience in such environments, requiring multi-linear and interactive negotiations (Tobell et al 2010), which take into account not just the university life but the wider life of the student.

The general lack attention and research surrounding postgraduates extends to consideration of their transitions within HE (Tobbell et al., 2008); in the last two to three years there has been growing momentum and interest in the study of postgraduate learners. The studies undertaken with PG learners have tended to focus on doctoral students (Larcombe & McCosker, 2005) and international students (James, 2018; Matheson & Sutcliffe, 2017a). With a few exceptions such as Heussi (2012), the needs of postgraduate home students undertaking a taught masters course have been largely ignored by researchers (McPherson et al., 2017; West, 2012). The scarcity of studies which have specifically considered the transition of home students embarking on PGT Masters courses whilst concurrently working is apparent in the literature.

The absence of research focusing on postgraduate transition had gone unnoticed until recently when the transitional difficulties of PGT students began to receive attention (Cluett & Skene, 2006; Symons, 2001; Tobbell et al., 2008). Tobbell et al (2008) and later West (2012) suggest the lack of interest in postgraduate transition is reflective of generally held assumptions that transition to postgraduate study is not as challenging. Tobbell et al (2010) further explain such assumptions are likely to consider postgraduate students have an established a level of learner expertise, the learning environment is unchanged and so there is no requirement to resituate knowledge in a new context. This rather naively implies the existence of a universal understanding of academic environments (Houdyshellm, 2017) and the move to PGT study a straight forward matter of continuation rather than transition.

More recently emerging research however disputes this (Heussi, 2012; Matheson & Sutcliffe, 2017a; Stagg & Kimmins, 2014; Tobbell et al., 2010). The survey undertaken by Stagg & Kimmins (2014) found little statistical difference between factors influencing the first-year experiences and transitions of undergraduate and postgraduate students alike. We know postgraduate learners are often mature, working and have family commitments (Stagg & Kimmins, 2014) and so like other mature students they may well find the transition to university challenging (Baxter, A. & Britton, 2001). Yet the connection between formalised learning contexts and the complexity of student lives in such learning environments, is not a consideration of HE policy and practices (Lawy, Bloomer, & Biesta, 2004). It may be time to think about transition of the postgraduate in a different way.

### **Taking a binocular view of transition and rebuilding the jigsaw?**

A problem evident in the literature is that university transition has been predominantly studied as a single linear movement with *university life* as the isolated focus (Hughes, Greenhough, & Yee, 2009). Referred to as *vertical transition* by Seung, Lam and Pollard (2006) or *diachronic transition* by Bransford et al (2006); this type of relatively infrequent transition relates to the formal (Ecclestone et al., 2009), predictable (Stoner, Angell, House, & Bock, 2007) movements between two successive contexts or activities (Hughes et al., 2009). Vertical transitions are often associated with a move from one educational phase or place to another (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007) involving a macro or major change (Stoner et al., 2007). It is vertical transitions which have received the most attention in the professional literature (Rosenkoetter, Whaley, Hains, & Pierce, 2001). Quinn challenges this traditional understanding of transition which fails to recognise the highly stratified and complex nature of transition in HE settings (Quinn, 2010). Seemingly, this view of transitions does not fully account for the transitional discrepancies that can be found between individuals making the same educational transition, at the same time, on the same educational course, at the same educational institution. Quinn's work disputes the prevalent notion of vertical transition as a rare event and anchored turning point both in time and place.

The participants in Quinn's study confer instead a vision of perpetual transition as an everyday feature, in which multiple movements into and out of university were normalised (Quinn, 2010). This second and complimentary view of transition considers *horizontal transition* (Seung Lam & Pollard, 2006) or *synchronic transition* (Bransford et al., 2006) to be the less

predictable (Polloway, Patton, Serna, & Bailey, 2001; Stoner et al., 2007). The numerous daily micro movements (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000) between two or more co-existing contexts or settings (Seung Lam & Pollard, 2006) can require the individual to maintain two or more possibly conflicting identities at the same time (Hughes et al., 2009). Horizontal transitions could help to explain how the idiosyncrasies outside university which make up each mature student life affect their participation in HE and educational vertical transition. Having received significantly less attention from researchers and policy makers, Hughes et al (2009) recommend further exploration and consideration of horizontal transitions which take place as life goes on for mature part-time students. As life goes on and part-time postgraduate study becomes part of that, learners are required to meet increasing numbers of expectations.

### **3.6. Beheld by expectations**

#### **Time to see the learner in their life?**

For many students, home, family, and work will be the significant areas of their life outside university. A significant number of mature students combine their home life and work with study (Abbott-Chapman, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004; Stone, 2008). Part-time study can provide an invaluable route for the many individuals with on-going commitments (Richardson & Stevenson, 2018). The findings from Pollard (2016) provide a reminder that the day to day responsibilities and ties of family and work leave mature postgraduate learners who study part-time with difficult choices. For those who study part-time, whilst juggling commitments in their work and home, the significant challenges that this combination presents will now be explored.

#### **Combing study and family life: Juggling skills required?**

Social circumstances are a clear consideration for mature students both in their decision to enrol and completion of HE study. The study by Pollard (2016) surveyed more than 10,000 PGT learners who were UK domiciled. The findings demonstrated that 79% were studying part time, a high portion were noted to be mature, 69% married or living with a partner, and 43% had dependent children. It therefore comes as no surprise that respondents identified balancing study with home and family to be difficult. The challenge of balancing family and

professional life with study has been identified in numerous studies (Fragoso et al., 2013; McCune, Hounsell, Christie, Cree, & Tett, 2010a; Stone, 2008). Family stability may be the most important influence on the HE transitions of mature students (Fragoso et al., 2013). Young children and unsupportive partners were found by Swain & Hammond (2011) to be a significant learning constraint. Time management is seen to be a key influence for many 'non-traditional' students (Abbott-Chapman et al., 2004; Stone, 2008) who are essentially time poor and as a result study and achievement can suffer (Butcher & Rose-Adams, 2015; Fragoso et al., 2013). Ultimately, attendance and study are likely to replace the time they spend with family or socially (Fragoso et al., 2013), hence adaptations to social relations are also required and choice is somewhat of a misnomer in the part-time student population (Butcher, 2015b). Some gendered differences in relation to the social circumstances of the learner were found scattered throughout the studies reviewed.

For many postgraduates, returning to study will be a drain on time and money (Tobbell et al., 2010) therefore likely to be a cause for concern in families. Outside the postgraduate literature, student concerns about family income and financial struggles are noted to be more closely linked to male students (Fragoso et al., 2013; Stone, 2008) whereas undergraduate females were more likely to be the primary carers of disabled or elderly relatives (Butcher & Rose-Adams, 2015) or young children (Fragoso et al., 2013). Returning to education is likely to necessitate changes to childcare arrangements (Pollard, 2016) which can lead to discontent in the home. Mothers have expressed particularly strong feelings of guilt when their studies take them away from helping younger children with homework or school events (Stone, 2008). The situation can become even more challenging when studying prevents parents from being able to provide additional support for their children during key transition (Fragoso et al., 2013) or exam periods. Consequently, mothers were less likely to feel in a position to spend time away from the home (McCune et al., 2010a) and more likely to experience overload when combining a family and work with study (Fragoso et al., 2013). This gendered disparity in the expectations of women in their family obligations and household roles is further acknowledged by Wolf-Wendel, Ward and Kinzie (2009). Changing patterns of socialisation and trying to 'fit in family and friends' are known to be sources of continuous guilt and tiredness for 'non-traditional' participants in HE (Fragoso et al., 2013; Tobbell et al., 2010).

But the picture is not entirely negative; some studies have noted more positive associations or benefits associated with partners and spouses taking on more child care (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010) and spending more time with children (Calderwood, Kiernan, Joshi, Smith,

& Ward, 2005). Benefits were also seen for mature learners with older children at the end of their secondary education or embarking on HE. Return to study could help to build ties, commonalities and healthy competition between the parent and young adult (Fragoso et al., 2013). In addition to the juggle of home and family life for mature and part-time learners, many postgraduates also juggle the commitments of their professional working lives; as they seek to enhance their career prospects (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2013; NUS, 2012).

### **Combining study and work: a necessary evil with potential benefits?**

Although a changing picture, historically part-time learners were recognised to be far more likely to also be employed than their full-time student counterparts. The literature confirmed a definite association between mature learners, part-time learners and postgraduate learners with paid employment. This relationship could be both challenging and beneficial. Kimura identifies that increasingly students come to HE with specific vocational goals (Kimura, 2014). Whereas Hewitt and Rose-Adams (2012) found the costs of HE presented barriers for undergraduate learners when employers did not contribute.

In addition, employers have also been found to influence postgraduate students in their decision to return to education (Pollard, 2016). Employer contributions to cover costs (Hotham, 2009), to support time away from work or to permit flexible working to accommodate study (King, M. et al., 2015; Pollard, 2016) can enable learners continue with their studies. Just under half the PGT student in the study by Pollard (2016) were in paid work with 61% working full-time. Some occupations and roles however, are noted to constrain learning and interfere with academic performance (Krause, 2005) for example, high level managerial roles (Pollard, 2016), being self-employed or intensive work occupations (Butcher & Rose-Adams, 2015). But for those who undertake work-related study being able to apply knowledge immediately to the professional environment can be both motivational and beneficial (Butcher, 2015b). Similarly, a study comparing two age groups of business management undergraduates found mature students were able to bring experience of work and real examples into their learning. The perceived relevance of knowledge and skills to future work was the strongest predictor of learning motivation and deeper learning in the mature student group (Lizzio & Wilson, 2004).

Very few studies have explored postgraduate professionals who concurrently study, an exception being Prince, Burns, Lu & Winsor (2015) who found reciprocal transfer of knowledge and skills between MBA study and work in a cohort of American students. A second study by Charlton (2016), currently one of the only studies in the UK, used interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore the perceptions of Human Resource Management professionals concurrently studying. Charlton refers to the participants as 'practitioner-students' to signify the primary importance of the professional role and identity over that of student for the study participants. Reiterating earlier findings by Carroll, Ng, Birch (2009) the pressures of work were felt by the time-pressed participants striving to be successful in their studies to justify the personal and employer investment whilst at the same time aiming to be successful in their organisational roles (Charlton, 2016). The study also determines the complex interactions between expert practitioner and novice academic. Finally, the benefits of closely aligned study and work practice were noted, as the practitioner-students adapted and concurrently applied their learning in both contexts.

Drennan and Clarke (2009) suggests that whilst PGT courses are not exclusively aimed at practising professionals they have become the flagships of professional education. Professionalism has indeed been found to be the most highly ranked facet of Masters study. Whilst some variance is evident, PGT healthcare students tend to self-rate their professionalism higher than other disciplines (Bamber et al., 2017); a logical finding in sectors where increasing public confidence is a professional concern (HPC, 2014). Mature PGT learners returning to study mid-career bring considerable professional experience and transferable skills to their study (Carroll et al., 2009; McVitty & Morris, 2012) and yet as explored in section 2.7 this does not necessarily help PGT learners in their pursuit of Mastersness. The tensions and benefits across the academic and practice boundary certainly have relevance for understanding the participants' experiences in my study.

To summarise, the limited ability of any individual or HEI to influence many of the social and familial situations faced is acknowledged. However, HEIs and academics with a genuine appreciation and nuanced understanding may be able to be more responsive in implementing what might be relatively small changes to their pedagogic practices and support structures. In turn this could avert a tipping point beyond which the only option may be for the mature student to withdraw. As we know, mature and part-time students need to be dexterous

(Butcher & Rose-Adams, 2015), possessing sheer determination and a desire to continue learning if they are to keep going through the difficult times (Stone, 2008).

### **3.7. Prevented by barriers**

#### **Time to rethink postgraduate pedagogy?**

For many students, barriers might exist in near-toxic combinations (Butcher & Rose-Adams, 2015). In addition to the personal and social factors previously considered these can also include institutional and structural barriers in HE which learners must navigate and circumvent. It is the barriers faced by learners in their university life which I now turn to. Like all students, those enrolling to PT-PGT courses, will be required to learn the game of being a postgraduate student in order to engage and participate in their new university life.

#### **Unprepared for the return to HE?**

With acknowledgement that postgraduates undergo some form of transition, there is growing evidence that many enter their university experience feeling unprepared for university life and study (Alsford & Smith, 2012). A survey of further education, undergraduate and postgraduate students found PGT students were the most likely to feel unprepared for their studies (Higher Education Academy/National Union of Students, (HEA/NUS)., 2013). Contrary to popular belief, there appears to be little difference between the factors influencing undergraduate and postgraduate transition in the first year of study (Crane et al., 2016; Stagg & Kimmins, 2014; West, 2012). Furthermore, the study by Lillyman, Saxon and Rawstorne (2008) indicates that prior undergraduate study can be a barrier to transition as students try to differentiate the expectations and academic standards at degree and postgraduate level study. Studying new subjects (Cluett & Skene, 2006) or transitioning between academic and vocation-based programmes which emphasise different areas or skills development (Hodsdon & Buckley, 2011) can add to feelings of unpreparedness. Yet academics pedagogy and university practices largely assume postgraduate competence and expect independent learning. This fails to recognise postgraduate student needs, undermines their confidence and leaves them further isolated (Crane et al., 2016; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013). As might be expected, postgraduates have variously reported their sense of shock and disorientation when returning to university.

### **A shock to the system and far from engaging?**

Starting university has been variously described as a culture shock (Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008; Crozier & Reay, 2011), thought to result from unfamiliarity with both the environment and the rules of engagement, and noted to have potentially negative consequences on emotional well-being (Pedersen, 1994). Related to this Davidson (2009) also describes the *learning shock* experienced by most learners as they transition into university. Learning shock is particularly noticeable in adults returning to study after a period of time (Gu, 2011) and in academic cultures which have an excessive focus on performativity and disciplinary power (Mann, 2001). Without doubt, the workload for PGT students is heavy and dense (Higher Education Academy, 2015; Symons, 2001; Zaitseva & Milsom, 2015). Course workload can be a major source of anxiety, burnout, surface level learning and compromise in achievement; the very antithesis of the espoused immersive, in-depth, engaged postgraduate experience (Lue, Chen, Wang, Cheng, & Chen, 2010).

In the survey conducted by Cluett & Skene (2006), 80% of students completing their first year of a taught Masters programme reported feeling overwhelmed, turbulent emotions and self-doubt on return to education. Mature students, particularly experience a culture shock (Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry, 2002) and part-time learners feelings of isolation and lack of connection to institutional or peer support structures (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2015). Students do however report more acceptable positive emotional responses including hopeful anticipation, pleasure, excitement and enjoyment (Christie et al., 2008; O'Shea, 2007; Reay, 2005; Stone, 2008) as they begin to feel more comfortable fitting into their new situation.

The on-going achievement and success of students is then very much linked to their participation and engagement (Hockings et al., 2008; Kahu, 2013). Wolf-Wendel et al for example determine,

"Engagement is about two elements: what the student does and what the institution does. Engagement is about two parties who enter into an agreement about the educational experience" (2009, p413).

This suggests that both students and universities should be open to a reciprocal relationship. The literature however tells a different story in which the practices of universities fail to engender mutuality or negotiate learner engagement placing the responsibility for adaptation

firmly at the door of the student (Tobbell et al., 2010). The reified practices observed in many universities require adherence and passive compliance by students, contradicting postgraduate study discourse which advocates autonomous independent learning by students who take responsibility (Fry, Pearce, & Bright, 2007). Considerations for the development of inclusive institutional practices and postgraduate pedagogy, which might limit the barriers that students face, are next considered.

### **A journey of isolation – misaligned expectations and impostership?**

The historical biographies and academic experiences postgraduate learners bring to their university studies influence their expectations and how they make sense of their current situation when returning to education. Student expectations and learning strategies are likely to be based on previous educational experiences (Biggs, 1996); for many postgraduates this will be past undergraduate encounters. But, as identified in section 2.4 (lost in the crowd), not all postgraduates will have previous university or degree experience (Heussi, 2012; Pollard, 2016). Mismatches between expectations and the postgraduate learning experience can create conflict, difficulty fitting in and delay or disadvantage learner progression (Byrne, M. & Flood, 2005). Some postgraduate learners have reported a general lack of appreciation by staff of the economic and competitive realities they face (Symons, 2001). It is important that universities and academics understand and respond to the challenges faced by today's students (Zepke & Leach, 2010); recognising assumptions and complacency may be holding back postgraduate learners.

Many postgraduate students experience anxiety from not knowing what is expected from them at Masters level study (see section 2.7). Feeling like novices again (McPherson et al., 2017). Bamber (2017) similarly suggests that the unclear expectations of Master's students can lead them to feeling ill-prepared and anxious. Conversely, if postgraduates are helped to identify their level of preparedness, additional support could be provided to help their transition (Morgan, 2013). In addition to the lack of preparedness for university, further challenge for postgraduate transition can be commonly held feelings of self-doubt and a lack of confidence. Many PGT students report feelings of anxiety, inferiority, and self-doubt (McPherson et al., 2017). This lack of self-confidence is particularly related to poor or no previous experience of HE and lengthy gaps between undergraduate and postgraduate education in mature students (Masterman & Shuyska, 2012; Pollard, 2016). In comparison to

their younger peers, mature students are known to have low expectations of achievement (Ribeiro, Gonçalves, Quintas, Monteiro, & Fragoso, 2013). For working practitioners who are concurrently studying as postgraduates there can be a marked difference between the confident professional seen in the workplace and the very different anxious, self-doubting learner in the university setting (Aird, 2017). Writing about her own experiences as a Masters student Aird confesses to feeling,

"useless and a dinosaur, like a fish that has been taken out of its bowl and thrown in the ocean" (2017, p.524)

Despite the experience and expertise that mature PGT learners bring, they often feel ill-equipped for this level of study (Cluett & Skene, 2006). As self-perceived academic novices, they are likely to fear failure, the unknown and possible self-exposure in returning to education (Newson, McDowall, & Saunders, 2011). For these students, in returning to the formal learning context they are placing their 'public and private neck on the line' as they step into the 'intellectual unknown' (Cantwell, 2004, p.12). Maintaining our assumptions and world views provides a degree of safety but when learners begin to challenge their views of self and question their ways of knowing, believing and feeling, the risk of exposure and failure is heightened (Cranton, 2002). This crisis of entitlement has been identified by O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) in learners who doubt whether they can live up to expectations, questioning their worth, capability and belonging as postgraduates. Such dips in self-concepts were more discernible when students had not studied for some time (Masterman & Shuyska, 2012) or had to critique long-held personal assumptions about self as learner (Willans & Seary, 2011).

Some learners find despite external evidence of competence they feel fraudulent in their role as student; a concept referred to as imposter syndrome by Clance and Imes (1978). The characteristics of impostership, which also include pervasive feelings of not being good enough to be a real student, may deter the learner from participating or contributing to learning activities which might expose their perceived intellectual inadequacy (Brookfield, 2006). Working in smaller groups, when concerned about being able to keep up with fellow postgraduate students, can be daunting (McPherson et al., 2017). Isolation and loneliness are a documented part of postgraduate experience (Ali, Kohun, & Levy, 2007) which can impact on learner self-esteem creating a barrier for transitional and educational progress (Chester, Burton, Xenos, & Elgar, 2013; Janta, Lugosi, & Brown, 2014). The need for postgraduates to have a sense of fitting in and entitlement is considered important for their psychological and

sociocultural adjustment (Gu, 2011). The third dimension, identified by Zhou & Todman(2009), is educational adjustment understanding what postgraduateness (McEwen et al., 2005) or mastersness (Jackson & Eady, 2008) constitutes. The enigma of Mastersness can be a definite and enduring source of anxiety for students (McPherson et al., 2017).

### **Mastersness a multi-faceted enigma?**

Notwithstanding the diversity in Master's degrees available in England, all are required to conform to the Qualifications Frameworks set out by Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The skills and abilities expected of all master's degree graduates include in-depth and advanced knowledge of the discipline and its practice, critical awareness and the ability to systematically and creatively solve complex problems and evaluate research (QAA, 2014). Making sense of all the dimensions of Mastersness, however, is not as straight a forward task as alluded to in the discussion paper by the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) project (QAA, 2013). The paper provides a framework of seven facets which underpin the concept of Mastersness (see table2)

<b>Facet</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Complexity</b>	recognising and dealing with complexity of knowledge
<b>Abstraction</b>	extracting knowledge or meanings from sources and then using these to construct new knowledge or meanings
<b>Depth</b>	acquiring more knowledge and using knowledge differently
<b>Research and enquiry</b>	developing critical research and enquiry skills and attributes
<b>Autonomy</b>	taking responsibility for own learning in terms of self-organisation, motivation, location and acquisition of knowledge
<b>Unpredictability</b>	recognising that 'real world' problems are by their nature 'messy' and complex, and being creative with the use of knowledge and experience to solve these problems,
<b>Professionalism</b>	displaying appropriate professional attitudes, behaviour and values in whatever discipline/occupational area is chosen

*Table 2 - Facets of Mastersness (QAA, 2013)*

Studies to date suggest Mastersness is perceived to be about changes in criticality and independence, approach to learning, the strong applied nature of study and assessment, staff-student interactions and relationships and in the short, intensive study period (McEwen et al., 2005; Shanley & Dalley-Hewer, 2017; Treby & Shah, 2005). The descriptors inform marking criteria for Master's courses, however, the difficulty in differentiating between the achievements of high performing undergraduate students and master's level is acknowledged (QAA, 2013). The boundaries of postgraduate study and Mastersness are further blurred given postgraduates are diverse and enter courses with very different levels of familiarity and ability in academic practices (QAA, 2013). Recognising and supporting the difference in starting points and the pace of individual learning can be difficult when it is generally assumed by universities that Masters students are HE experts (McPherson et al., 2017).

Although educators may be able to define the goal of Mastersness, the precise methods to get there are less explicit (Mistry, White, & Berardi, 2009). In a Masters course there is no advancement in the expected level of attainment, as is the case for undergraduate programmes in which learners progress from level 4 to 6. To muddy the waters further, the approaches to teaching and learning for postgraduates do not necessarily show significant difference or promote autonomous independent learning. Tobbell found didactic approaches rather than independent learning prevalent in postgraduate study;

“the practice of independence is encouraged by an absence of information rather than an active facilitation of helpful practices” (Tobbell et al., 2010, p.274).

Unsurprisingly, PGT learners are left feeling confused and anxious, like novices (McPherson et al., 2017) when trying to establish what it means to be a master's student and what is expected of them. A few studies have shown that although students and academics both consider critical thinking, dealing with complex situations and autonomy to be facets of Mastersness, their ranking of these is different. Academics place more emphasis on critical thinking, seeing it as the key feature of Masters graduates, whilst students rated the ability to deal with the complex situations they face as the key outcome (Mistry et al., 2009; Petty, Scholes, & Ellis, 2011). Crucially, it seems that developing critical thinking skills enables Masters students to solve complex problems and eventually find their own professional voice, feeling more confident expressing their own views (Shanley & Dalley-Hewer, 2017).

The SHEEC project draws attention to the pressurised experience of postgraduate courses (QAA, 2013) in which students start at quite different points, will learn and find their own voice at different paces, face a range of complexities entering as mature learners with existing commitments BUT all are required to demonstrate Mastersness in a short duration of time. Although the requirements of 'Mastersness' have been described in the literature it is not uniformly understood (Burke, Scott, Watson, & Hughes, 2011). The pathway to achieve the requirements and qualities expected of Masters learners remains uncertain with academic support often lacking in universities which fail to acknowledge that postgraduates have very similar educational and social transition needs to undergraduates (Bunney, 2017). O'Donnell et al (2009) refute the assumption that postgraduate study is primarily the ability to engage with learning at a higher level and not the mastery of new practices. Few postgraduates report difficulty with higher level learning materials but, for the majority, the challenges of academic writing, doing assignments, using libraries and time management, prove more difficult to deal with (Higher Education Academy/National Union of Students, (HEA/NUS)., 2013; O'Donnell et al., 2009; West, 2012). Hence universities and academics are challenged to acknowledge through the introduction of widespread pedagogy, practices and policy that PGT are not experts continuing their education but have similar transitional needs to undergraduate students which require specific support and pedagogies that articulate what PGT study is and how the learner can achieve this. Some of the emerging evidence that might inform the practices and pedagogies for PGT learning are now considered.

### **Removing barriers to learning**

Some of the barriers and challenges faced by PGT students, for example geographical immobility, lack of suitable transport options and the lack of support and encouragement from employers (Pollard, 2016) lie largely outside the direct influence of universities and academics. However, there are pedagogical, structural and cultural barriers within HEIs, for which they are responsible, that create isolation, undermine self-confidence and deter engagement of PGT students. The literature identifies that early and continued support, participatory learning approaches and assessment and feedback practices are key considerations which can help to alleviate some of the Mastersness challenges.

The lack of tailored induction and preparation for postgraduate study are variously reported to contribute to student impostership (Gordon, 2005; Whittaker, 2008; Willans & Seary, 2011)

and feeling like outsiders (McPherson et al., 2017). Hence, the common practice of late enrolments to postgraduate courses is questioned (Tobbell et al., 2008). Early and continuing contact procedures can positively affect mature students and help to relieve their fears about returning to education (Burton, Lloyd, & Griffiths, 2011). Suitably timed introductory and induction sessions which acknowledge the challenges of returning to study are noted to allay transition difficulties (Symons, 2001) and help postgraduate students make the most of their learning opportunities (Bamber et al., 2017). Hence pre-enrolment programmes (Willans & Seary, 2011) and spiral or longitudinal inductions (MacDonald & Gibson, 2011) are a recommended part of postgraduate transitional pedagogies. Early, targeted and continuing postgraduate support interventions could provide opportunity for mature adult learners to admit and be comfortable with feelings of impostership (Aird, 2017). Shanley and Dalley-Hewer (2017) recommend postgraduate inductions should include early exploration of 'discussion' as a learning tool for making explicit the cognitive processes of discussion and the relationship to master's level thinking skills. Similarly Bamber et al (2017) urges the use of approaches which help students to engage the 'facets' of studying at Master's level are necessary from the very start of their programmes.

McPherson et al (2017) report PGT learners would like a better balance between academic and social integration with some students wanting the opportunity to meet and socialise with other students prior to being formally inducted. Whether this would be the case for both full and part-time PGT learners is not clear, additionally the type of 'opportunity' valued may also vary between these two modes of PGT study. Peer support and relationships, social networks and friendships are all evidenced to positively influence individual educational outcomes and provide emotional and instrumental support particularly during stressful periods (Christie et al., 2005; Fletcher, Gies, & Hodge, 2011; Stone, 2008). Similarly positive relationships with students and staff can play a key role in learning how to be a 'successful' student (Johnson, Greer Cavallaro & Watson, 2004; Keup & Barefoot, 2005). Students progressing relatively quickly to postgraduate study within the same discipline and university appear to have an advantage over PGT students new to an institution in that that they reported more personal and enriching staff-student relationships (McPherson et al., 2017). Furthermore, although staff support is reported to help students resolve problems, the level and quality of that support can vary (Heussi, 2012). Additionally, we know that PT-PGT Masters students spend little time on campus, which can make it difficult for them to form relationships and support each other (Menziés & Baron, 2014). A finding echoed in other studies which identify mature

students with on-going responsibilities and established lives outside study, are likely to have less time to socialise with each other and do not expect socialising to be part of their HE experience (Christie et al., 2005; Kimura, 2014). Developing a support framework that integrates personal tutors, academics and fellow students can help to remove learners from their isolation (Stoten, 2015).

Given the diversity of postgraduate cohorts and their wide-ranging competence in navigating the academic world and opportunities for uptake, there can be no one size fits all for early contact and on-going support of PGT learners. Whilst a more targeted local approach is required for each course, university policy needs to reflect and enable this to happen in practice. In addition to the early targeted support, postgraduate pedagogy must consider the on-going approaches to learning and teaching within the PGT courses.

Despite the numerous personal and social influences that mature learners face (Tett, 2000), once settled they are likely to actively engage in their learning (McCune, Hounsell, Christie, Cree, & Tett, 2010b). Learning is dependent on social integration (Symons, 2001), with active and social learning being of crucial significance (Krause & Coates, 2008; Stagg & Kimmins, 2014). Mature students recognise the influence of academics and benefits of participatory pedagogic practices which can both help to build peer relationships inside and outside the classroom (Fragoso et al., 2013). The importance of maximising participation in discussion groups is stressed in the study by Shanley and Dalley (2017). The study findings confirm the invaluable opportunity discussion provides PGT learners, to practice articulating their ideas, use newly acquired language, rehearse what they want to say, interpret the views of their peers and integrate these ideas with their own. The authors advocate that discussion is an essential tool for building their knowledge and a strong motivator for active engagement. It is through these opportunities to participate and discuss with peers and educators that the lightbulb moments of what constitutes mastersness became apparent to participants as they found their own voice (Shanley & Dalley-Hewer, 2017).

Peer initiated social media is similarly reported by some students to be beneficial providing them with choice in how and when to engage; academics and HEIs are challenged to be flexible and not assume studying has to be done a particular way (Butcher & Rose-Adams,

2015). As Tarrant (2006) points out, students are changing their behaviour but rather than disengaging from their studies they are changing the way they engage. Flexible study is important to mature PGT students (Pollard, 2016). Time-pressed PGT students particularly those who concurrently study and work full-time, must make conscious choices about how and when they engage, adopting strategic approaches to learning (Papinczak, 2009). Although this approach to learning may not be considered ideal, for mature students it may well be reality and the only option for academic success. Hence poor organisation of the learning experience and course can play a key part in hindering PG transition (Heussi, 2012). Additionally, measures aimed at ensuring flexibility and choice can sometimes result in weak or loose framing which can create feelings of bewilderment and compound confusion adding further challenge rather than supporting learning (Crozier & Reay, 2011). Flexible options for engaging PGT students must allow them to make use of their metacognitive awareness and control strategies and take a more strategic approach, orchestrating and managing their study and learning (Weinstein, 1994).

Quite evidently the disparate needs of diverse PGT cohorts will not be met by traditional didactic teaching approaches (Bunney, Sharplin, & Howitt, 2015). Furthermore, in designing part-time programmes, academics are challenged to ensure they do not simply become cut back versions of full-time offerings (Butcher & Rose-Adams, 2015). It is also recognised that there is a decreased tolerance for lecture-style dissemination of information amongst some groups of students (Roehl, Reddy, & Shannon, 2013). Innovative participatory learning approaches have been shown to be more effective in teaching varied cohorts, for example, problem-based learning (Biesma et al., 2008), flipped classroom (Blair, 2012), co-operative learning (Hwang, Lui, & Wu Tong, Marian Yew Jen, 2008) and small group approaches (Fortin & Legault, 2010). Such active learning methods require students to use analysis, evaluation and synthesis (Bonwell & Eison, 1991), higher order thinking skills, typically associated with Masters level study. Adopting more student-centred approaches to learning has been found to improve postgraduate student engagement and enhanced learning experiences (Bunney, 2017). Students demand a quality learning experience with adequate and appropriate resources (Yorke & Longden, 2008). Levels of satisfaction for mature students relate to levels of contact time and the quality and style of teaching (King, M. et al., 2015). Tobbell & O'Donnell (2015) determine, the acquisition of PG knowledge is generally unproblematic, rather it is the academic practices surrounding that knowledge which present more challenge for postgraduates.

The single most problematic academic practice widely reported in the literature is that of academic writing for assessment. Assessment plays a key role in the mature learner experience part-time mature students report fear and anxiety (Butcher & Rose-Adams, 2015) which is particularly exaggerated around submission of the first assignment (Young, 2000). The literature indicates unfounded assumptions are widely made about postgraduate learner expertise. Expectations about their ability to write assignments and undertake accompanying reading (O'Donnell et al. 2009), contradicted by reports of postgraduate learners not knowing what is required and whether they are achieving (Tobbell et al., 2010), expressed the need for more support on how to write academic papers and essays (Heussi, 2012; Tobbell et al., 2008). Postgraduate learners articulate a need for contextualised learning support and course embedded academic learning skills to be part of the postgraduate learner experience (Stagg & Kimmins, 2014).

Assessment practices are reported to contribute to the enduring concerns of postgraduate learners working at Masters level which can prevent students from performing at their best (King, M. et al., 2015). Postgraduate students identified frustration and anxiety caused by delaying feedback until the end of the module, administrative arrangements around marking, and return of assignments (King, M. et al., 2015; Scott et al., 2011; Tobbell et al., 2010). Additionally, deadlines requiring the submission of multiple assignments at a single assessment point can be perceived by part-time mature students as a failure to recognise their needs and struggles (Butcher & Rose-Adams, 2015).

McPherson (2017) recommends HEIs dedicate more time and resources to clearly defining and explaining Masters level study. Their findings also demonstrate that students and staff expressed the need for an assignment, early in the semester, to give students a sense of their progress and adaptation to PGT level work (McPherson et al., 2017). It is these "reified practices" (Wenger, 1999) which mature students find challenging when combined with numerous other commitments that mature and part-time learners are juggling. Consideration of whether these prevent inclusivity and participation by all learners requires the consideration of policy makers. Much of the literature reviewed points to a need to develop postgraduate pedagogy which includes early, continued and targeted support for postgraduates, participatory learning approaches and due care and attention to assessment and feedback. Doing so could help remove some of the barriers to postgraduate learning.

### 3.8. Conclusions

The literature review has identified the urgent need for policy makers and academics to recognise and rectify the exclusiveness created by systems, pedagogic practices and expectations solely centred on full-time learners. The lack of financial incentives to recruit, retain and support the success of mature part-time learners means the benefits of HE and learning, which extend beyond the individual to families, communities, employers and society at large, are not being exploited. Equally, managers and academics in HEIs must recognise, understand and accommodate all their students. To do this, assumptions about homogeneity and the constant outdated differentiation of full-time and part-time or traditional and non-traditional students should be abandoned. Consideration must be given to policy and structures which genuinely understand how students fit study around other commitments but also how they fit other commitments around their study.

The scarcity of studies which have specifically sought to understand the transition of working PGT students is striking. The existing work reviewed above is important and informative but fails to provide any 'lived sense' of transition experiences of part-time students undertaking post-graduate study whilst concurrently working. It became apparent that the literature, like universities, tended to isolate and compartmentalise factors in the individual's life or the individual's university experience; in order to better understand how these isolated factors influence the learning experience, engagement, belonging or transition of homogenous learner groups. So, whilst this literature was important in helping me identify the factors affecting the experience of the students in my study, it proved frustrating in helping me reflect on and theorise the complexity and inter-relatedness of their lives and the issues which faced them as they attempted to navigate, work, home and university. Further research, exploring in-depth learners' wider life situations, together with their university experiences, will be an essential part of the evidence base required to challenge the widening participation and inclusivity rhetoric and help to reverse the very worrying downward trend in part-time student numbers in the UK.

Having reviewed the literature, the following questions remain insufficiently answered:

- How does the life of the mature student affect their transition to education as a part-time postgraduate concurrently working?

- How does returning to education as a concurrently working part-time postgraduate affect the life of the mature student?
- How do mature students manage their return to part-time postgraduate study?

The current fragmented understanding may in part be influenced by the types of methodologies and theoretical perspectives underpinning previous studies. In this study, therefore, alternative approaches and research designs were considered. Chapter three details the considerations which had to be thought through when choosing a research design capable of providing a holistic in-depth understanding of the transition experiences of a small group of concurrently working part-time-PGT students.

## **4. Chapter Three – Research Design**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This thesis aims to explore and better understand the experiences of a small group of taught postgraduate students who study part-time whilst concurrently working. To achieve this, the thesis creatively adapts visual narrative methodology to re-tell and visualise the individual participant stories of their experience. This chapter sets out and justifies the chosen research design including the ontological and epistemological standpoints, ethical considerations, methodology and methods.

### **4.2. Personal Philosophy**

The philosophical perspective from which I approach this enquiry is constructivism. At the most rudimentary level “constructivism is the notion that knowledge lies in the minds of individuals, who construct what they know based on experiences” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p 29.). Everyone is considered a knowing being who constructs knowledge that is personally meaningful (Cobern, 2012). Wanting to understand the beliefs, values and behaviours with an awareness of the historical and cultural context in which the experience takes place is at the very heart of constructivism. As the researcher I was mindful that each participant does not just see the world differently, they experience it differently (Waters & Mehay, 2010). Constructivism is my default position in approaching this study. It is the philosophical perspective which informs all the decisions I made along the way and helped me to explore how a small group of students made sense of their postgraduate experiences.

A holistic view of the research design is provided in figure 1, with a constructivist paradigm informing this study. A research paradigm is a basic belief system (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Scotland, 2012) made up of the study ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods. These are commonly regarded as related, sometimes in a linear fashion, (Evans, T. & Hardy, 2010) or hierarchical manner (Crotty, 1998). Guba (1990) additionally suggests the need to

ensure a holistic view of research in which the methodological decisions remain aligned and informed by such philosophical and paradigm viewpoints.

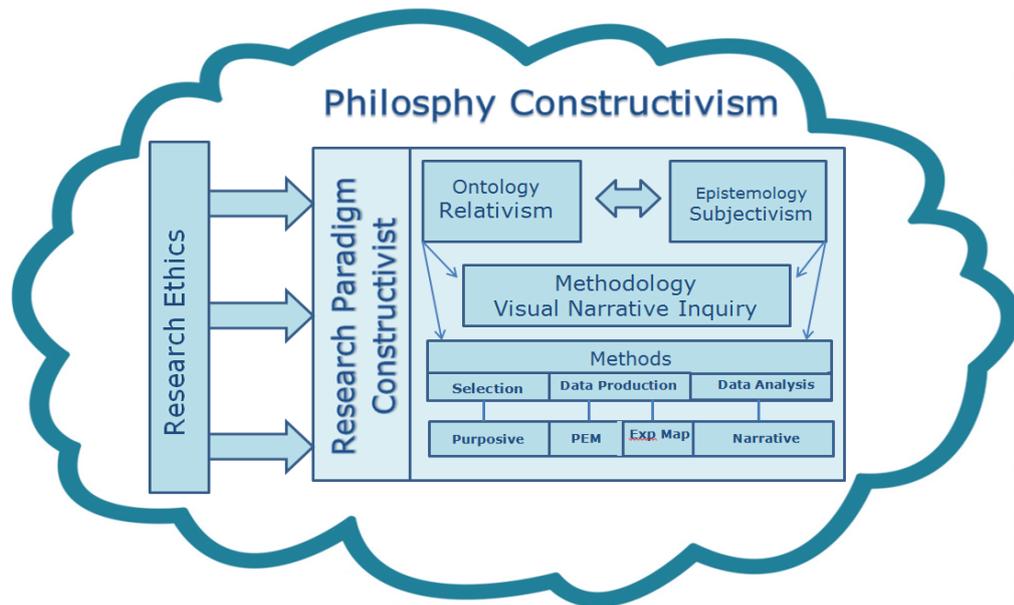


Figure 1 - Research Design: Adapted from Guba (1990) and Scotland (2012)

This chapter now moves on to explain each component and the relationships between them in order to make my positionality and standpoint transparent. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994) constructivist research is relativist and subjectivist the discussion therefore commences with consideration of this philosophical positioning.

### 4.3. Ontology

Ontology (being in the world) studies

“the nature of existence and what constitutes reality” (Gray, 2013, p19.)

Different ontological approaches inform how we understand and what we can know about the world both physical and social (Orme & Shemmings, 2010). In social research, ontology is more specifically focused on how we understand 'reality' and what exists within the social world, or in other words 'what is' (Scotland, 2012).

The ontology informing the positivist paradigm is generally held to be realism which hypothetically sits at the opposite end of the continuum to relativism; the ontological standpoint of the constructivist paradigm informing this study. Whilst realists see reality and knowledge as something external to our conscious thoughts, something out there, something we seek to discover, find and generalise (Gray, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

"Relativism is the view that reality is subjective and differs from person to person" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.110).

The intention of this study is to understand the experiences of a small group. Relativists contend reality is locally and specifically constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Ultimately

"there is no objective truth to be known" (Hugly & Sayward, 1987, p 278.),

given the relative, situated, partial, tentative and gendered nature of that truth or reality (Thomas, S., 2011).

What is real depends on the meaning we attach and so there will be multiple versions, all culturally derived and historically situated (Scotland, 2012). Hence the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individual participating in it (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Finally, given such influences, reality is not absolute but evolving and changing. This kind of reality or knowledge makes generalisation illusive. However, through gaining a deeper understanding, new knowledge constructed by this study may have some application or relevance for others. This kind of reality or knowledge evades measurement but,

*"Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted"*

(attributed to Albert Einstein)

The 'ontological position' we hold about reality and knowledge will consciously or indeed unconsciously affect our research at every point. In determining my ontological position to be relativist I am setting out the nature of the world and my place within it (Royse, 2007). I consider myself part of the world I inhabit not separate from it, my experience of being part of that world, my reality and knowledge will undoubtedly be both unique and similar to how others construct and interpret their reality. In setting out an ontological position in which

knowledge and reality is integral and constructed by the individual rather than separate and discovered, we are consequently informing our epistemological stance.

## 4.4. Epistemology

*Epistemology* is

‘the theory of knowing’ (Orme & Shemmings, 2010, p84.).

It is our perceived relationship with the knowledge we seek, in other words, epistemology is the relationship between the would-be knower and what can be known (Scotland, 2012). With a relativist ontological standpoint we construct and interpret knowledge; we cannot be external to that knowledge or truth. An objectivist epistemology, which asserts, that truth and meaning reside in the objects of study, external to the researcher and independent of any consciousness (Crotty, 1998), would clearly be misaligned with relativism and inappropriate for the aim of this study and research questions.

Instead, the knowledge relativists seek is actively constructed through our interaction in the world. As researchers we are part of that knowledge, its discovery and construction, and hence we must become immersed in the participants’ world and understand their experience of that world from their point of view. Taking a subjectivist epistemology, the qualitative researcher is the main instrument and must adopt an empathetic closeness or etic perspective in order to shine a light from within (Titchen. & Hobson., 2011) to understand what is being studied. I wanted to design a study in which I could interact and work with the participants to discover the knowledge and meaning constructed by each individual (Cobern, 2012) based on their experiences. Through my interaction with the participants I hoped to gain a deep insight of what the experience of returning to study as a working postgraduate meant to them. It is at this epistemological level I return to the work of Dewey and his view that experience (the very focus of the thesis) is relational, continuous and social. The notion of continuity with all experiences developing from and leading to new experiences is at the very heart of this study. Just as I want to understand the past that the participant brings to help me make sense of their experiences and what this means for their future, the same holds for me. I hold an emic

position as the researcher and, just like the participants, I am not a blank page. Acknowledging and embracing my subjectivity as an integral part of the study, I write myself into the story using, where appropriate, the first person. Readers are similarly invited to join the story bringing with them their own interpretations, responses and reactions.

### **In summary**

My research questions focus firmly on the individual's construction and interpretation of their meaning derived from their unique experiences of being in the world. Hence this study is informed by a constructivist paradigm. This choice is not about the ascendancy of one paradigm over the other but the complementary considerations of each world view (Thomas, S., 2011). In taking a relativist ontological position in which reality is temporal, evolving and can play itself out in a number of ways,

*“ I recognise that nothing in life is any more permanent or secure than an ocean wave, I am always riding the crest of the wave, when I accept the truth of this impermanence, I realise that all boundaries are human constructs imposed on the unpredictable, and therefore uncontrollable, process of reality”* (Bach, 2007, p.281)

By riding the wave, no doubt we play a part in the shape it takes and the direction in which the water travels or is repelled by our presence. In seeking to learn more and construct that reality or knowledge I cannot be external to it, so I adopt a subjectivist epistemology which emphasises the closeness, interaction and participation of the researcher and the researched. The differing assumptions of reality and knowledge should consequently be seen to inform the chosen methodology and methods of a study (Scotland, 2012).

## **4.5. Methodology**

Methodology refers to how we might go about finding out knowledge and conduct the research. It is more a strategic approach, than the operational techniques and methods for data collection and analysis (Wainwright, 1997). In explaining methodology, Guba and Lincoln (1994) determine it is how the researcher goes about finding out whatever they believe can be known. The criteria for choosing the most appropriate methodology for this study included:

- the ability to explore and value the similarities and differences in how the individual participants view their experiences
- the opportunity to work creatively and closely with time poor participants to co-construct, through our interpretations, the meaning of their/our experiences
- the ability to generate new knowledge that might inform pedagogy, academic practice and hopefully policy

All research aims to be undertaken systematically and rigorously but the hallmark of qualitative research methodologies is the flexible and contextual way in which it studies real-world settings inductively to generate rich narrative data (Patton, 1990; Punch, 2013). Shaping the methodology was a challenging journey for me personally but very much part of undertaking qualitative research in which

"there is no straight path, there are twists and turns and sometimes these pathways can lead into areas that are dark and unwelcoming, or not clearly visible" (Ellett 2011, p1.).

But in working through the decisions and dilemmas I hope the study is considered credible, transparent, well aligned and true to the participant's stories.

#### **4.5.1. Narrative Inquiry**

It was important for me to be able to convey and appreciate the nuances and build-up of each individual's life and their story over time. It is how the pieces fit together for each individual that interests me, how they are influenced by past experiences, how their perceptions change over time and in turn how all of that influences how they make sense of future experiences. After all it is our very life stories which make us who we are and what we will be. According to narrative researchers (see for example, Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ellett, 2011; Luwisch, 2006; Riessman, 2008) narrative methodologies provide a way of keeping intact the participant story as told from their perspective and in their voice.

It is in attempting to bring to life the participant's construction of knowledge from their individual reconstruction of experiences, in all their vividness and nuances (Clandinin and

Connelly 2000) that narrative inquiry (NI) was finally chosen. NI as conceptualised by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) arises from the Deweyan notion and personal standpoint 'life is education'.

*"Narrative is a meaning structure that organises events and human actions into a whole, thereby attributing significance to individual actions and events according to their effect on the whole" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p18.)*

Dewey advocated that we perceive things by a cumulative series of interactions. Seeing things in time is the focus of NI (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) given that the agreement of narrative inquirers that the events we study are in temporal transition (Connelly & Clandinin, 2008). People and events always have a past, present and future (Clandinin et al., 2007). NI deliberately attends to contextual detail, including names, dates, timing, events and specific locations to gain a sense of the phenomena which can change over the time of the study as it "delves into temporality" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2008, p.480). It is the person in context, therefore, that is the prime interest (Lindsay, 2006). Despite the similarities between interpretive phenomenology and NI which both seek to explore experience, it is their temporal intention which sets them apart (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives within complex 'storied landscapes' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). The social, cultural and institutional narratives within which the experiences of the individual are constituted, shaped expressed and enacted (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) form this landscape. Our positions within the cultural stories available are said to shape the personal stories that we develop about our lives and experience (Burck, 1997). More so than other qualitative approaches, NI posits attention to personal experiences, understanding narratives as social acts' that are timely and situationally produced and interpreted in a particular social context (Eerola, 2014; Ewick & Silbey, 1995). In the quest to understand experience as lived and told stories, NI has been increasingly adopted in educational experience research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It has been effectively used to study life changes and life transitions, for example; Bond & Koops (2014) explore identity emergence during a period of transition from teacher to teacher educator, similarly Edwards (2015) explores the complexities of identity formation as undergraduates make the transition to trainee teacher. NI has been rarely used however, to explore the experiences of postgraduate learners. The study by James (2013) is

the exception; adopting NI to research the postgraduate learning experiences of a group of Latin American students studying in a UK university.

NI includes a range of approaches, including, for example, autobiography, autoethnography, biography, personal narrative, life history, oral history, and visual narrative. Eventually, I was able to carve out a methodology that was participatory and shouts out the experience for all to know. Like Mattern (2015), this study draws upon and adapts visual NI (VNI).

#### **4.5.1.1. Visual Narrative Inquiry**

According to Bach (2007) visual narrative adds another layer of meaning to NI. Supporting this, Spencer discerns the visual

*“has an explicitness and immediacy which delivers multisensory impact.....It has an immediate and authentic form, which verbal accounts are unable to fully encompass”*  
(2011, p. 32).

For Bach, being a visual narrative inquirer is less about what is done by the inquirer and more about their way of being in their world (2007). As someone inclined to try and picture and converse in order to learn about something, I wanted to examine whether visualising experience could enrich our insights and understanding of the stories that participants tell about their experience. Storytelling plays a central role in the study, according to Benner (1994) people access their immediate experiences through structuring their own narrative in the stories they tell. Bach (2007) asserts the importance of the visual in what it means to learn or construct knowledge.

"Researchers and participants explore and make meaning of experience both visually and narratively" (2007, p 281.).

Our experiences are shaped by the historical, social, cultural and institutional narratives in which we are embedded (Bach, 2007). A central belief of VNI is that we all have a different angle of vision (Bach, 2007) from one participant to the next, each will undergo, react and story their experience differently. Visual research has the power to generate different accounts, fighting the familiarity and engendering de-familiarisation (Mannay, 2010). In doing so, the commonness and resonance across the stories also becomes apparent (Bach, 2007). In

VNI studies, photographs are often used by participants to visually communicate and construct their experience. Harper confirms the power of images to

“mine deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews” (2002, p.23).

This VNI study combines elicitation of stories from participant generated photography which is often referred to as photo-elicitation method (PEM). The second phase of data production, some months later, employed experience mapping (expMapping). Participants were encouraged to revisit and retell the story of their experience creating a holistic account through their experience map. Visual images are widely recognised as having the potential to evoke empathetic understanding of the ways in which others experience their worlds (Mannay, 2016). I wanted the visual participant stories and my visual narrative to awaken and rouse the attention of academics and policy makers who may have become desensitised to the real and everydayness of life for this group of concurrently working postgraduates returning to HE part-time.

In summary, VNI was adapted to provide a voice for part-time working students who are sometimes unheard in universities that are dominated by full time undergraduates. Narrative studies have the potential to make the invisible everydayness visible (DeVault, 1990). People tell stories all the time; our personal narrative essentially is our identity. In this study, the participants told their stories in two ways. Their VNI stories were told through participant generated photography and experience maps. Each phase of creative data production was followed by interviews or conversations, during which the participant generated data was discussed and shared (Mannay, 2016). I now move on to determine the methods employed in this study, which would allow me to gain the rich in-depth understanding required to answer the research questions.

#### **4.5.2. Methods**

The following section provides a more detailed account and rationale for the methods or specific techniques and procedures used to produce and analyse the qualitative data (Crotty, 1998) in this study.

#### 4.5.2.1. Recruitment

As the programme leader of the MSc course and leader of a module running at the time of data production commenced, access to the potential participants did not prove difficult. An abridged information sheet was initially provided and participation invited via the student virtual learning sites and student email system. I was mindful of trying to encourage participation without any of the invited participants feeling compelled or coerced in any way given my organisational position and existing relationship with them. As an insider-researcher, I was certainly very aware of the potential conflict arising from dual roles and identities (Eide & Kahn, 2008; Maxwell, 2012). Not asking too much from individuals in terms of recruitment and then participation was a source of unease for me and a very serious consideration in the study.

#### 4.5.2.2. Selection

Although sampling is frequently detailed in qualitative studies (for example, Baxter, P. & Jack, 2008; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006), in this study the reader will find the term '*selection*' has been chosen to replace the term '*sampling*'. The use and misuse of the commonly adopted quantitative term '*sampling*' has received attention from a number of authors (see for example, Polkinghorne, 2005; Thomas, G., 2011). Sampling infers that those chosen to participate are a sample or portion that shows the quality of the whole (Thomas, G., 2011); they are representative and the findings can be applied to a population because the participants fulfil the representative requirements of statistical inference (Polkinghorne, 2005). In contrast, participants in a qualitative study were *selected* because they could provide substantial contributions to understanding the experience under exploration. The focus of qualitative research is the experience itself not its distribution in a population (Polkinghorne, 2005). NI is best

“for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p55.).

The small sample size, in no way reflects the large quantity of rich data gathered. In wanting to understand how the experience was understood by particular people in their particular context, participants were purposively selected, as is commonly confirmed in qualitative studies including NI (Baxter, P. & Jack, 2008; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Holloway, 2007). This method of selection was adopted to ensure the participants would have a story to tell and the aims of the research could be achieved. The only selection criterion was,

- the participant must be a student enrolled on the part-time MSc programme or those recently completing the programme but awaiting graduation.

Initially, 13 students expressed an interest in the study and so full participant information sheets (appendix 2) were then emailed or given to them after which 11 people consented to taking part in the study. Five participants were unable to continue for work or personal reasons and one participant was withdrawn from the study for ethical reasons. Of the five participants who were unable to continue two were male. This left five female participants who took part in the study and told me their stories. The unintentional female make up of participant group is acknowledged to offer a female perspective and experience of part-time postgraduate study and something I return to in my recommendations for future research. The participants knew me in various capacities as, a module leader, programme lead, academic tutor, or dissertation supervisor.

The final five participants in outline comprised,

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Programme experience</b>	<b>Work environment</b>
Claire	At the start of the programme	Health Care
Hettie	At the start of the programme	Social Care
Juliette	At the start of the programme	Health Care
Jayne	In the second year of the programme	Health Care
Esme	Awaiting graduation	Health Care

#### **4.5.2.3. Data Production**

Mannay (2016) draws attention to and differentiates data collection from data production more commonly associated with visual creative methods. The latter is more representative of the active data production role of the participants rather than the passivity that might be denounced by data collection conducted by the active researcher. My primary considerations when thinking about how best to capture the participant lived stories were that data

production had to be participatory, effective, convenient, time efficient and work well for the participants.

The agency of students and participants is a fundamental value I hold as an educator and researcher. Throughout this study I have sought to address any perceived imbalance of power between the participants and myself. In NI, the researcher is always in and dependent on an inquiry relationship with the participants (Clandinin, 2006). It is recognised that the participant-researcher relationship is complex, fluid, symmetric and reciprocal (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In choosing narrative methods, my aim was to preserve and include all the voices and stories in a non-hierarchical manner, making my influence explicit but not dominant (Byrne, G., 2017). I acknowledge whole heartedly that this study is part of my doctoral submission. Although there are elements of participatory practice, the balance of power is certainly graduated towards me as the researcher (Mannay, 2016), despite well intentioned efforts. No claim is made here that that the study is truly co-design, but emphasis has been placed on inclusion and involvement of participants in the decision-making process to ensure that it is participatory. It is my perception that we have worked in partnership to produce the data.

Visual creative methods offer a way for the participants to choose what, when and how to represent their subjective worlds (Mannay, 2016). Accordingly, Pauwells (2011) identifies participatory studies seek to position the researcher as participatory facilitator conducting research *with* rather than *on* participants, in an inclusive joint enterprise. Ultimately, however, I am responsible for determining what methodological and operational implications should guide the decisions about data production methods; as such I considered it important that,

- the data production methods used would allow the capture of temporality, sociality and place which are used to bound NI (Clandinin et al., 2007)
- the participants are known to be time poor students trying to additionally undertake study
- participant stories would include areas of their home and work, gaining access to these areas as a doctoral researcher would be untenable

As suggested by Mannay (2016), visual methods provide an opportunity for participants' everyday lives to be communicated through their visual creation or their stories, moving beyond the today to include past lives and imagined futures.

#### **4.5.2.3.1. Phase One: Photo-elicitation method**

Photography was an obvious choice for data production for this VNI. I was keen to capture the experiences in a creative and non-written way given the above considerations. In the pilot study, PEM had been trialled and it evaluated well in relation to all three points. PEM provides a flexible and open enough method for the investigation of the somewhat nebulous phenomenon of 'experience' (Carlsson, 2001; Smith, Gidlow, & Steel, 2012). For some participants, photography can reduce feelings of self-consciousness and therefore encourage participation (Gabhainn & Sixsmith, 2006). Personal decisions are made by the participants who choose the places, objectives and motives of each photo (Smith et al., 2012). In turn the photos increase the opportunity for them to express their own conception (Carlsson, 2001), or portray their subjective reality (Martin & Martin, 2004) of that experience. However, without the photographer's interpretation, the meaning of the photograph cannot be fully understood (Kearney & Hyle, 2004) and the value of photograph is lost (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015; Smith et al., 2012).

#### **Participant generated photography**

The only specific direction given to each participant was in the invitation to take photographs which capture "*your individual experiences and perceptions of being an in-work part-time student*". From the pilot study, evaluation dates were also suggested by me so that the period of data production would include at least one university study day. I also suggested a 7-10-day period for the photography; some participants chose to extend this. Overall, photography was taken over a period of 7 to 21 days. In total 73 photographs were taken by the five participants. For each participant the number of photographs taken, people included and general context of each photograph is summarised in table 3,

Participant	Photo Context	No. of photos	No. of occasions people present	No. of occasions participant present	Total Photographs taken
Hettie	Home/family life	2	0	0	17
	Work life	5	0	0	
	Student life	5	0	0	
	Social life/events	2	0	0	
	Time	3	0	0	
Claire	Home/family life	7	2	2	13
	Work life	3	2	0	
	Student life	3	0	1	
	Social life/events	0	0	0	
	Time	0	0	0	
Juliette	Home/family life	6	0	0	17
	Work life	5	0	2	
	Student life	5	0	2	
	Social life/events	1	0	0	
	Time	0	0	0	
Jayne	Home/family life	3	2	1	13
	Work life	4	1	0	
	Student life	3	0	0	
	Social life/events	3	2	1	
	Time	0	0	0	
Esme	Home/family life	4	0	0	13
	Work life	2	0	0	
	Student life	6	1	2	
	Social life/events	0	0	0	
	Time	1	0	0	

*Table 3 - Photography summary*

Of the five participants, only one opted to use a loaned digital camera, the others chose to use their personal mobile devices. They also chose which photographs they wished to share with me and how they sent the photographs to me, opting to do this by email or Whatsapp. I then printed copies of all the photographs for each participant and took these along to their individual elicitation interview so that they could be easily viewed (Taylor, 2002). Each photograph had been given an identification number to allow clarification during the interview recording.

### **Photo elicitation interview**

Each participant individually met with me to tell me about their photographs and experiences. All the participants requested that for convenience we meet in their place of work usually at

lunch time or the end of the day. This possibly helped in the dissipation of any perceived power dynamics in our relationship. With permission, our conversations were audio recorded as were my immediate post-interview thoughts and observations. The interview duration ranged from 55 - 80 minutes. The purpose of this data production phase was to elicit descriptions and stories of the individual participant experiences (how things/experiences were, are and might be).

#### **4.5.2.3.2. Phase Two: Experience Mapping**

Phase two was consequently designed to continue exploring the individual experiences of the participants; this took place approximately four-five months later. The second phase was added to encourage participants to 'stand back', reflect and further explain their story as whole; in doing so the temporal intention was to gain a sense of if and how their storied experience and meaning making was constructed over time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The participants were at different stages of the MSc course which also allowed for some sense and comparison of the postgraduate experience over time. Although some guidelines and structure are an inevitable part of any mapping exercise, it is an activity that can encompass a great deal of creativity. Mapping can provide space for the participant to relatively freely choose how they would like to represent and portray their experience in the content, detail, emphasis, inclusions and exclusions, design and layout of their map (Trell & Van Hoven, 2010). Despite opening possibilities for the participant to make choices about the content and design, potential drawbacks are also noted.

##### **1. Artistic ability**

This can impact on the quality of the images and what might be included or excluded (Mannay, 2016). Visual and creative data production, incongruent with the everyday lives, can be uncomfortable and embarrassing for some participants (Abrahams & Ingram, 2013; Johnson, Ginger A., Pfister, & Vindrola-Padros, 2012). The students who did not take part in this phase may indeed have felt this and hence chose not to participate. The participants were encouraged to choose whatever details and by whatever means they wanted to create their map. I showed the following examples, which demonstrate varied artistic abilities and styles, but arguably still tell a story,

- The atlas of experience (Van Swaaij, Klare, & Winner, 2000)

- Island maps created by the participants in the study of new lecturer academic identity by King et al (2014)
- My personal part-time-postgraduate experience map which I had created using a collage style approach

Each participant was given copies of their PEM photography, a piece of flip chart paper and a range of materials, glue, scissors, coloured pens, stick it notes. An extensive range of printed visual images were provided for participants to use or not. These included symbols, pictures, icons, imaginary world back grounds and cartography symbols. The range of visual imagery was informed by the experience maps of Van Swaaij et al (2000) and the data produced from the initial PEM phase. Alternatively, I offered to source and print any images that were not included via the internet if needed.

## ***2. Mental mapping in a group context***

In recognition of the potential influence the group setting can have on what the participants add to their map and the ways in which they talk about it (Trell & Van Hoven, 2010), the participants were all offered the option to take part in the expMapping exercise, either individually or as part of a small group. Dates were circulated and the participants all opted to attend a joint experience mapping session.

## ***3. Resorting to recollection***

The maps created were not intended to be geographically accurate but rather a representation of how the participant viewed or understood their localised world (Mannay, 2016). A considered drawback of mapping is that there is no direct contact between the participant and the places they show on their map; instead they have to resort to using their recollections (Trell & Van Hoven, 2010). According to Collier (1957) (cited in, Harper, 2002), photographs have been shown to sharpen the participants' memory and reduce areas of misunderstanding. In this study each participant had their full set of their photography from the PEM phase to help in their recollection and allow reflection on any changes that might have occurred since the photographs were taken.

Participants were also invited to *geotag* their expMap, sticking whichever photos they wished at whatever point they felt relevant on their expMap. Conventionally geotagging is the process in which a photo is marked with the geographical identification of the place it was taken. It allows the creator of the photograph to show the places they have been and the things that they have seen. Geotagging is a way of storing location data with the photos, in this study it was used to store their experience story with their photo. Widely used by contemporary social media outlets, such as google maps and trip advisor, the photographer places the photos in the correct location so that the audience can visualise where they might wish to go and what it might be like.

I facilitated each of the three workshops, beginning with an introduction to identify the anticipated length of the session (45-60 minutes) and revisit matters of consent in relation to anonymity and confidentiality. The purpose of the session was outlined and the example maps introduced. With the permission of the participants the session was video recorded. Participants were reassured that the video camera would remain static recording how the experience maps were created and storied rather than intending to capture them and their actions. The focus of this phase of data production widened to what is it like 'in your (experience) world'; the participants were invited to create a map of their experience.

I purposely left the room a few times to make refreshments and collect any additional materials required allowing the participants space and opportunity to enter discussion with the other participants without me there. Once all the participants had completed their map, they were each asked as the creator of the expMap to provide a 'guided tour'. These were relatively short lasting between 5 and 9 minutes. Hence the participant created maps were used as tools of elicitation (Mannay, 2016) as they talked through what it meant to them to be a working PT-postgraduate student. Questions and discussion took place as each participant storied their expMap to their peers and me. This allowed comparisons in experiences and opportunity for support or guidance from those present. In addition it also allowed me to follow up and further explore my understanding from the initial tentative PEM analysis.

Trell and Van Hoven (2010) suggest that in using interviews or discussions to explain the maps, the value of the map can be overridden by the dominance of words. But this risk needs to be

balanced with the potentially valuable outcome of encouraging group dynamics and peer support when undertaken in a group context. The very act of framing images can help participants see everyday practices in new ways (Yamashita, 2002). This was certainly evident in all three sessions; the sharing of experiences and learning appeared to be valued, appreciated and positive, Claire and Hettie specifically commented on appreciating the time to have their stories heard and compare experiences with others.

In summary, when participants are asked to produce something visual, it is not just the image itself but the accompanying elicitation interview on which we predicate our understanding (Mannay, 2016). In this study narratives were elicited in unstructured conversational interviews in which participants were invited to tell their stories. They storied their experiences firstly through their photographs and then revisited and further reflected on their experience in the creation and guided tour of their 'experience map' which geotagged the initial photography. As recommended by Harper the participants were asked to literally and figuratively "show and tell" me about their lives (Harper, 2002). Conversational interviews were felt to be most appropriate given my existing relationship with the participants and our shared experience of being a part-time postgraduate learner concurrently working. It would have been unnatural to 'stand apart', rather I wanted to be able answer questions and share my story as a 'co-producer' of the stories elicited (Edwards, R. & Holland, 2013).

In using creative visual methods to elicit narrative the participants were able to choose what to capture and how they would recount their stories increasing the participatory nature of data collection (Aldridge, 2007; Donaldson, 2001; Wang, Caroline & Burris, 1997). The participants exercised independent choice in determining:

- what and how they wanted to represent their experiences
- the things that were important to them in the photographs and mental map
- if, when and to what extent, they focused upon the various aspects of their experience in the relatively unstructured elicitation conversations

Immediately following each PEM interview and experience mapping workshop, I audio-recorded my initial impressions and made reflective notes picking up on things that jumped out to me, things that seemed to be in keeping or different to the literature read at that point,

things that were unclear, and as the data production progressed, some comparisons and links between the different participants were made.

### **4.5.3. Ethics**

Ethics approval was sought and obtained from The University ethics committee (see appendix 3). Some attention has already been paid to the ethical considerations arising from my personal positioning, local context, epistemological standpoint, recruitment, choice of methodology and methods within this study. It is my view that the ethical principles of a good researcher are an enduring part of who they are and so ethical considerations continue beyond the submission of the final thesis. The principles of non-maleficence, beneficence, justice and power, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality are integral and run throughout this study.

"Ethical decisions are made on the basis of care, compassion and a desire to act in ways that benefit the individual or group who are the focus of the research" Clarke, Prosser and Wiles (2010, p82).

Most ethical considerations can be planned for and attended to via the on-going consent process. In this study the process began with providing each participant with sufficient information to make an informed decision about whether to consent and voluntarily participate in the study (participant consent form included in appendix 4). The information offers assurances to participants that personal information would be protected at all times.

The chosen visual participatory methods allow voices to be heard (Kellock, 2011) but can bring with them additional ethical considerations (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015; Close, 2007; Wang, C. & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Protecting visual identities and anonymity presents a significant ethical challenge (Smith et al., 2012; Wiles et al., 2008). My decision to include participant generated photography and small group workshops, prevented from me being able to guarantee participant anonymity and confidentiality was also an ethical consideration from the outset. Participant attention was drawn to this matter in the initial consenting process and repeated at the beginning and end of each contact point. In the ExpMapping sessions participants were further asked to respect the privacy and confidentiality of all who were participating but reminded them that this was not something I could ensure.

Despite being able to plan for many ethical considerations the emergent nature of qualitative research is also recognised (Hoepfl, 1997), making unexpected ethical dilemmas or traps a possibility (Carlson, 2010). With due consideration of their enduring ethical principles, qualitative researchers are required to respond with flexibility and compassion. An example of maintaining the core principle of non-maleficence whilst responding to an emergent indirect consent matter is now detailed. A recognised concern in studies of this nature (Smith et al., 2012; Wang, C. & Redwood-Jones, 2001), is the inclusion of photographs which are likely to depict identifiable people (Wiles et al., 2008). Approval was obtained for gaining indirect consent verbally where possible and the participant then confirming they had done so as part of the written consent process. In respect of this option to also blur out any identifying characters on the photography was also offered but not chosen by any of the participants. The practice of pixelating or blurring identifying features on photography is discussed by Wiles et al (2012), who argue that many researchers and participants find image manipulation and anonymization undesirable. They also conversely point to the future discomfort or distress of people whose images have unknowingly been placed in the public domain. Clearly this matter is particularly relevant for vulnerable individuals and children when consent is given by a third party for example a parent. Although not the case in this study, stakeholders including ethics committees may insist images are anonymised. (Wiles et al., 2012)

As the researcher I also have a responsibility to protect the participants in this study who gave indirect consent (Wiles et al., 2012). On further reflection and discussion with the Head of Ethics at The University, I was guided to ensure the non-maleficence of all participants by

- blurring all identifying characteristics and features
- using pseudonyms and changing names throughout

In choosing to protect the confidentiality of the children photographed, I could quite rightly be criticised for dismissing the rights of the directly consenting participants and their claim to knowledge (Gubrium, Hill, & Flicker, 2014). In doing so I also recognise this decision could be seen as failing to uphold the notion that visual data created by participants are 'owned' by them; as the researcher I may be considered by some to have no right to alter them (Wiles et al., 2012). I accept that this is not an ideal solution for participatory research and my intention to displace any power imbalance between the participants and myself. However I am reassured that in making decisions like this transparent, the reader is able to judge for

themselves the extent to which they feel such decisions limit the study. The integrity of the research and reporting of the thesis requires on-going attention to the guiding ethical principles previously identified. The next section outlines the criteria which have governed this study and on which it may be judged, accepting of course others may legitimately adopt other criteria in support or criticism (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999)

#### **4.5.4. Trustworthiness**

Narrative inquirers draw attention to the understanding that experience

“is always more than we can know and represent in a single statement, paragraph, or book. Every representation, therefore, no matter how faithful to that which it tries to depict, involves selective emphasis of our experience” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p.39).

As I construct the narrative to retell participant stories and provide a social worlds narrative of part-time postgraduate experiences and transitions in later chapters, I acknowledge these are inevitably partial, evolving and my interpretation. If undertaken at a different time, in a different social situation, for a different purpose, different stories and narrative inevitably would be written (Clandinin et al., 2007). Yet, the integrity of the data and analysis in any study must stand up to scrutiny and judgement. In the qualitative arena this has been widely debated, but the disparate literature lacks a definitive consensus on what makes a qualitative study trustworthy. Without demonstrating trustworthiness the findings of this study would lack the integrity required to impact on practice and or policy (Anderson, 2010; Hadi & Closs, 2016). Personally, positivist criterion (validity and reliability) are not considered relevant for judging the quality of this type of study. I would also question views that a predetermined single set of alternative criteria can be relevant when there is no unified ‘qualitative paradigm’. Ultimately this study is only trustworthy if the reader judges it to be so (Rolfe, 2006).

The constructivist paradigm underpinning this study holds central beliefs that,

- individual construction of knowledge and understanding is based on experience
- everyone sees and experiences the world differently
- reality is subjective and differs from person to person

The reader is therefore urged to judge the overall trustworthiness by considering the authenticity, adequacy, plausibility and resonance of the study and findings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) for them and their thoughts. Strategies employed to increase the trustworthiness are now detailed.

The data production took place in two phases utilising two methods around 3-5 months apart. Allowing some comparison and tracing of any changes in the participant meaning and understanding of their experience (Creswell & Miller, 2000a). This triangulation of data also provides some substantiation of the data adequacy and the plausibility of my interpretation. Although substantiation of data is less significant in NI, given its attention to temporal transition when exploring people, places and events (Clandinin et al., 2007), participants were still asked to check and approve accuracy of the transcripts. I also attempted to check the congruency of my interpretation in phase two of data production to verify to some extent the plausibility (Curtin & Fossey, 2007).

Given the value constructivists place in the uniqueness of individual meaning, making replication of the study is not a concern. However, in order for the reader and other researchers to corroborate and substantiate the findings of this study in a different time and context (Carlson, 2010), thick and rich description is included to increase coherence and evoke feelings for and a sense of connection with the participants in the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000a). In a similar way the rich description of my 'research journey/story' aims to provide a detailed credible and diligent account (Anfara, Vincent, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

Given the central beliefs held by constructivist researchers, bias is not problematic when researchers "bring [their] preconceived beliefs into the dialogue" (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005, p.7). To this extent and in keeping with NI, I have written myself and my developing understanding into the thesis trying to make explicit for the reader how this has influenced the study. Further as advocated by Curtin and Fossey (2007), I include my evaluation of the study and make recommendations which might improve future research in chapter six. Without doubt all researchers have personal biases which could influence their interpretation of data (Creswell & Miller, 2000b; Strauss, Anselm & Corbin, 1998). A crucial role of the researcher is to demonstrate thoughtful, analytic self-awareness (Råheim et al., 2016); and provide enough

transparency, insight and detail about their researcher experience and their impact on the study. Failure to do so renders the reader unable to determine the relevance and possible application of the findings to their own context. The thesis has been written with this in mind and my reflexive accounts offered throughout. Given the duration of the study, this has only been possible through keeping and using a reflective diary to record rather than remove or bracket my "presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions during the research process" (Mruck & Breuer, 2003, p.3). My field notes, researcher reflective diary, photographic researcher diary, audio tape and video recordings have helped me to write the thesis and make transparent my decision-making, justification and personal position. The goal has been to provide an audit trail of the gradually altering methodology, reshaping analysis (Ortlipp, 2008) and development of theoretical ideas and concepts which help to explain the participant experience. The reader as the external reviewer is invited to determine the credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000a).

#### **4.5.5. Data Analysis**

The researcher diary/field notes that I kept throughout the study proved particularly useful in helping me to keep track of how I came to manage and analyse the huge amount of data produced in this study, which I now outline.

##### **4.5.5.1. Transcription and member checking**

The PEM interview recordings were transcribed using a university recommended third party service as recommended by Tilley (2003). I listened through each transcript at least twice line by line to check for accuracy making any corrections, taking into account my reflective notes made following each interview until I was confident that they provided an accurate representation of our conversations (McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003). The full transcripts ranged from 4,800 words to 8,170 words. To safeguard the trustworthiness of the transcripts each participant received their transcript by email with an invitation to make any corrections, ensure nothing of importance had been overlooked (Tilley & Powick, 2002) or any inaccuracies had been made (Davidson, C., 2009). Additionally, participants were invited to add or withdraw any of the content should they wish (Carlson, 2010). In all cases the accuracy was confirmed, no changes were made and all agreed to inclusion of the full transcript in the

study. I personally transcribed the shorter experience mapping transcripts which articulated the participants guided tour of their experience map. In effect these were a re-run or another way of telling the participant story which allowed me to check my understanding and interpretation of the PEM data. Hence it was agreed by the participants that it would not be necessary to provide a separate experience mapping transcript for member checking. Participants agreed that I could contact them if there were any discrepancies or points which required further clarification.

It is accepted that in converting a spoken conversation to written words, the verbatim transcript does not necessarily convey the emotional context or non-verbal communication which took place (Poland, 1995). In this study the transcriptions included some filler words, false starts and repetitive phrases (Carlson, 2010) to help convey the real-life character and contexts in which they story their experience. However, the transcription did not go as far as might be expected in a linguistic or discourse analysis in excluding non-verbal sounds or pauses, but it was considered inappropriate to work with cleaned up transcripts in which the disfluencies and slang had been removed or grammar corrected to aid readability (Riessman, 1993). Except for the video recordings, all the data was then loaded onto NVIVO. I wanted to keep all the data in one place and ensure as the analysis took place all the original data was kept intact alongside the developing analysis.

#### **4.5.5.2. Vertical narrative analysis (constructing participant stories)**

I then began the process of immersion and familiarisation with each person's story. I found my own ways to be able to continue my analysis whenever and wherever I could, using audio recordings and photography on my personal, password protected mobile phone and laptop, documenting the process and my thoughts within my researcher diary to ensure a chronological trail. I considered each participant story working through all the data produced by and with them including my field notes and reflection. Each transcript was read and listened to with the corresponding photography and expMaps physically visible at the time.

Using the NVIVO node facility the initial temporary constructs for each participant account were identified. Using an open coding approach every line and photograph was coded to the emergent constructs or codes. This approach, a recognised part of the analytic process, allowed me to take the data apart and examine the discrete parts (Priest, Roberts, & Woods, 2002), looking for consistencies and conflict in the codes within each story. In this stage of the data analysis the temporary constructs (nodes) were simply my initial or immediate thoughts for example, things that jumped out to me, sometimes things I was familiar with or had experienced myself, sometimes things I was unsure about or had not been part of my experience, the things I found interesting, or how things had been storied to me, phrases and metaphors used by the participant. As I worked through each participant account, constructs were identified that had been expected, for example, trying to fit in or difficulty getting to grips with academic writing and others unexpected for example learning spaces and gendered roles. Despite having undertaken qualitative data analysis previously I had not anticipated just how difficult it would be to then try to make sense of and organise so many inter-related constructs arising from the unstructured interviews.

I discussed my forming ideas during my supervisors and with colleagues. I noticed that although the coding had helped me dissect and become immersed in the stories and lives of the participants as is expected in open coding, the stories had become 'fractured' (Priest et al., 2002). Although I could read the words, see the photos, pull reports and even visualise the whole data set in NVIVO, I felt there was an impending danger of losing the sense of the individual; of not being able to see and hear the participant as a person leading a storied life in its entirety. Guided by my supervisors, I returned to the data and wrote an outline story for each participant establishing a timeline of chronological events such as previous educational experience, deciding to return to HE, starting the programme, and embedding study into the current life situation.

Working outside NVIVO at this point I used simple traditional ways to cut and stick words and visual images. I first went back to PEM data for each participant, re-listening to the audio recordings with the visual data physically visible on large boards. For each participant I then created a transcript conversation table from their PEM transcript adding the photography. I recorded and colour coded my interpretation in a final column (see examples in Table 4),

PEM Transcript Conversation Table		
Question	Evidence	Interpretation
<p>Q: I'm interested in part time students who are in work and their experiences of being in higher education so the photos were really a way for you to capture some of that, there's no set order, just as you want, as much or as little as you want and I'll hand it over to you.</p>	<p>A1: Do you want me to explain why I took each picture and what it means?</p>	
<p>Q: Yes, what does it mean, what does it capture?</p>  <p>P1</p>	<p>A2: Photograph number one (P1) is of my bike and my bike is what I use to get myself to and from university, I go on my bike quite a lot as well and it was just a kind of... it's about twelve miles and it's a kind of there's more effort than what you think to get to university, carrying all my bags and things like that on it so I just wanted to say that rain, snow, wind and sleet I'll still be on my bike. Don't get me wrong it's a labour of love, I love my bike but ...</p>	<p>Self-disciplined/  healthy lifestyle important/  committed/  High self-expectations/  driven  +ve feeling - Enjoyment</p>

Table 4- Transcript conversation table

I then repeated the process for the participant expMapping data, (see example extract tables 5 & 6)

Experience Map transcript conversation table		
Question	Evidence	Interpretation
So this is the "Treasure Map of MSc". So this is me I am the captain in my boat, this [gestures the figure of eight drawn on the map] is the kind of route that's been mapped out.		independent, determined, individual approach
Q: Mapped out by you or is it set out by other things?	A1: I think ermm, no it's not set out by me. If it was set out by me it would be straight to the X marks the spot [points to X on "Future Island"].	independent, determined, individual approach
Q: Right	A2: But I've got to navigate and circumnavigate the islands before I can get to where I want to go which is there the treasure on the map. But I've got to follow the route so first I go to my "Island of Guilt" where it's studying and that guilt from not not seeing the kids doing certain things, having to leave certain things and not been able to ring my mum up and talk to my friends and play with my daughter and my son. And then I will sail to the "Island of Pleasure".	Some constraints on self-determination - realistic views End goal focused self-awareness Guilt missing family time and participation for study, detract from one social world to another Guilt larger than pleasure

Table 5 - ExpMap transcript conversation table

Experience Map Visual Table			
			
CMEM1	CMEM2	CMEM3	CMEM4
			
<p>Individual expression of life space, rather than specific domains in her life Claire focuses upon balancing feelings associated with her participation in different activities and roles for either herself or others, and how each of these impacts on meeting expectations of self and others and consequential feelings of pleasure or guilt.</p> <p>Monsters -</p>	<p>Pleasure associated with self-time and activities she enjoys reading, socialising, keeping fit</p>	<p>Guilt associated with missing out on family time, not always being able to fit everything in and to the level expected.</p> <p>Guilt larger than pleasure</p>	<p>Self-awareness and being in tune with her feelings they acts like a feedback loop determining whether she is on track or striking the right balance.</p>

Table 6 - Exp Map Visual Table

Having worked through each participant data set I was able to establish and highlight in different colour what I felt were the main characteristics of each participant and key messages from their story. Through reacquainting myself with the participants, a snapshot character profile began to take shape and I began to further distil my ideas of how I was seeing and understood each character and story.

<b>wonder woman/Mrs incredible</b>     	<b>Modern family/mum</b>	<b>High self-expectations</b>	<b>Commitment</b>
	<b>Organised,</b>	<b>Self-disciplined, Independent</b>	<b>Self-aware, realistic Self-belief</b>
	<b>Driven - strives to do well and everything to best of ability Determination</b>	<b>Active - embraces/makes the most of things, opportunistic</b>	<b>Motivated, future focused</b>
	<b>Emotion</b>	<b>central participation</b>	<b>Living up to expectations</b>

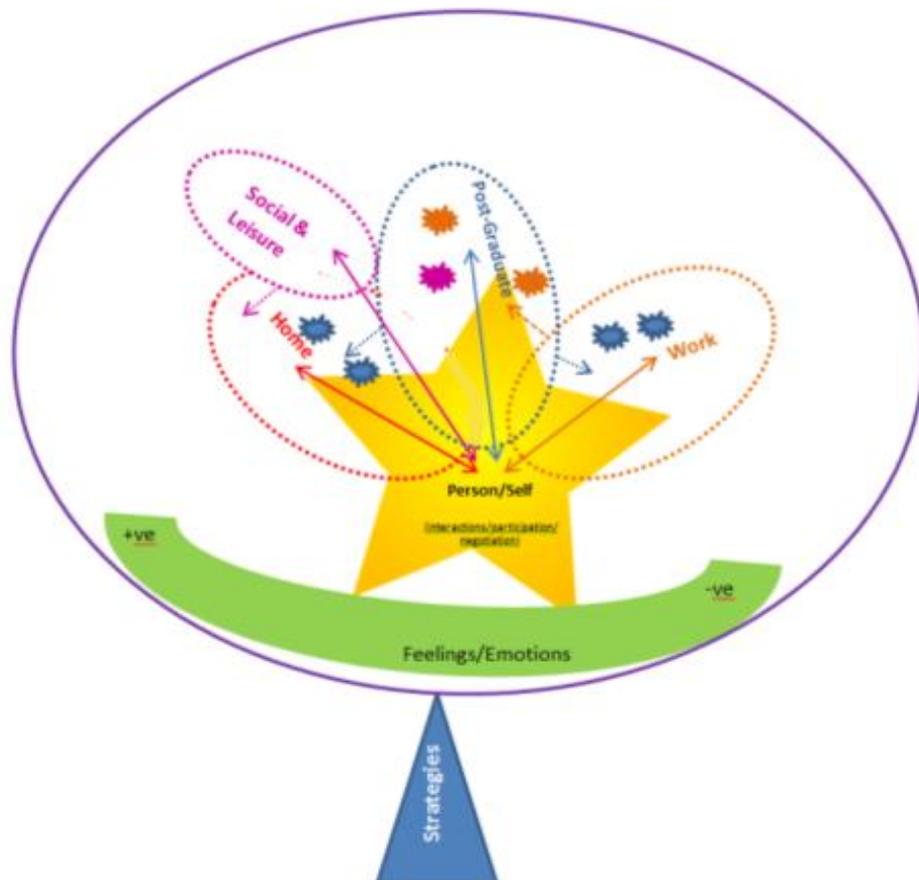
Table 7 - Distilled character/story outline

From this (see table 7) I distilled individual character/story outlines which eventually became part one of the participant stories found in chapter four, apart from Hettie's story. Both parts of Hettie's story are included as an appendix (5) in order to adhere to the specified word count. Part-one of the individual stories were then written up from the analysis tables and data for each participant chronologically considering their past, present and future directed headlines.

I had not really appreciated just how sensory and intuitive qualitative research can be. I used a variety of ways; electronic and physical, written, auditory and visual, to try and feel what it might be like to walk in the shoes of the participant. I found myself thinking about their homes, their work and their relationships, how things might be said to each other or how

things might play out in the different contexts they occupied. I edited each story several times until I thought it captured the sense I had made of the time we spent together and the data we produced. I used story headlines with key phrases to formulate in a coherent way what I thought each participant wanted me or the reader to know about their story and reasons they were telling their story (Earthy & Cronin, 2008).

Having written part-one of the participant stories I returned to the literature to help me make sense of things. It was in working inductively between the stories, data and literature almost in a grounded theory style that I eventually determined that social worlds perspective (SWP) could help me frame and explain the data. I began to feel as though I had a better understanding of the data as a more cohesive whole.



*Figure 2 -initial prototype of SWS constellation illustration*

It was during this stage I tried to visualise how each participant's life might look according to SWP. I eventually came up with a social worlds space (SWS) constellation illustration for each

participant. These were further refined during the horizontal analysis phase, figure 2 provides a draft example.

I continued the individual story but positioned the participant as a member of multiple social worlds in order to analyse their postgraduate transition and experiences as part of their wider life. I initially worked from and adapted the SWS constellation illustration, revisiting the analysis tables, data and headlines for each participant. The second part of each story was then constructed to tell the story of the participant SWS. Again this involved multiple redrafts until I was able to establish the overall plot of their SWS story, for example Juliette's story centres on her tactical management of her SWS. Along with the headlines the participants use to do this, Juliette's story headlining her regulation, repair and relaxation of the intersecting borders, her multiple social world memberships and her border crossing between the social worlds. The second part to each individual story can be found in chapter five.

#### **4.5.5.3. Horizontal narrative analysis (constructing social worlds narrative of experience)**

The above described vertical analysis had led to participant stories comprising two parts; their overall chronologically determined story (part one) and then the story of their SWS (part two). I now move on to detail the horizontal analysis process. This was taking place simultaneously but became the focus and written up subsequent to the participant stories. In the horizontal analysis process I moved between and across the individual stories to construct a collective narrative (Gudmundsdottir, 2001) of their postgraduate experience as part-time mature students who concurrently work. All the participants inhabited three distinct worlds, work, home and part-time postgraduate. I began to physically cut and stick all the collective story headlines and photographs to form a visual collage and written description of each world. The final collage and written description of each social world can be found in section 6.5.2.

Having described each of the social worlds, I then went back to individual SWS constellation illustrations to make comparisons with each other and the literature, so that I could extract and determine the interplay, interactions, synergies and conflict between these three social worlds. I also traced headline stories and photography which spoke about the emotional

personal journeys of participation, transformation and transition eventually constructing a collective social worlds narrative of the participants' part-time postgraduate transitions and experience which included (re)negotiation and flux at three interrelated levels; the social (world) self, the social world and the social worlds space. It is the exploration of the interplay between the constellation of social worlds which has not been studied previously; how the addition of part-time postgraduate study becomes part of a student's wider life and how in turn that wider life becomes part of their study. This part of the analysis focused upon the individual stories and what they told me about the three main social worlds inhabited by the participants, the transitions between the worlds, strategies used to juggle the worlds, multiple memberships and in managing all this, their perceptions of their evolving personal journey, transformation and changing self. The social worlds narrative of postgraduate transition and experience can be found in chapter five.

The analysis was the most frustrating but rewarding part of the study. As a neophyte narrative inquirer, the diversity and complexity of NI, coupled with a lack of detail on how data is narratively analysed (James, 2017) was at the time overwhelming. Although the vertical and horizontal process described above makes some contribution to this. Whilst there is probably a need for detailed accounts on how to undertake narrative analysis these can only be a springboard for ideas (James, 2017) and a way for other researchers to test the water. I have personally attempted to unravel the process of qualitative data analysis publishing a data analysis and verification tool (DAViT) (Clayton & Thorne, 2000). But I have now come to the opinion that there simply cannot be a formulaic approach, no short cut, no golden bullet. In the case of narrative analysis, this must be a personal intuitive wrestle to construct the narrative which tells the story and tells it well. To some extent, attempting to provide step-by-step analysis tools denigrates the intuitive, inductive nature of trying to make sense of the storied lives of human beings.

*"Guidelines, procedural suggestions, and exemplars are not rules. The human factor is the great strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis – a scientific two-edged sword." (Patton 2002, p.276).*

Despite keeping records, documenting and outlining the hundreds of hours spent undertaking this analysis over many months, the data analysis section of this thesis offers only a brief outline of my efforts to ensure a systematic and transparent approach to the data analysis. In summary but by no means linear this comprised,

- Familiarisation and immersion in the data
- Transcribing and correcting transcripts
- Member checking of PEM transcripts by the participants
- Data reduction and analysis
- Coding and re-storying the individual participant stories (part-one)
- Converting participant transcripts into conversation tables
- Visualising each individual participant story through a photo grid, snapshot profile, SW space diagram and story illustration
- Coding and re-storying the individual participant stories (part-two)
- Coding and narrative analysis of collective experience, using all the individual story headlines, photography and SW space diagrams
- Trace individual journey and transformation
- Social worlds collage and description
- Map SW space interplay
- Testing interpretation and analysis through supervision, conversations with participants, academics and students and revisiting the literature.

I have worked backwards and forwards within and across the individual stories to the point where I feel I have captured and relayed each individual story but added to this my interpretation and analysis which runs between. In doing so it is hoped that the reader is afforded enough opportunity and transparency to judge the trustworthiness and any possible transference of this study to their situations.

## **4.6. Conclusion**

In undertaking this study and writing the thesis,

"I attempt to be 'fully present' with 'warm heart' and 'still emptiness' to hear and see possibilities not yet lived" (Bach, 2007, p281).

Although 'present' and 'at times uncertain', I have been conscious of remaining open to hearing or seeing such possibilities, not only those arising from the stories, but the possibilities of determining the best alignment of methodology and theoretical frame to really see and hear those stories. I have written myself into thesis and chosen to draw attention to some of the messiness of social research with the intention that my researcher story might provide some reassurances and contribute to the research discourse.

In the end this study creatively adapted visual narrative methodology to re-tell and visualise the individual participant stories of their experience. Benefitting hugely from the colour, vibrancy, depth and life they each breathed into their stories, the photographs taken in the PEM first phase and the geotagged experience maps with guided tours in phase two. The chosen methodology and data production methods presented several ethical considerations some planned for and some emergent, but all were guided by the same robust principles which place the participant first and foremost. Similarly, strategies were embedded to ensure integrity of the study, its plausibility, authenticity and adequacy so that judgements can be made about its trustworthiness and any application or consideration in other contexts. The data we co-constructed was analysed to construct the individual participant stories and the collective part-time postgraduate experience narrative informed by the SWP.

In the next chapter part one of each participant story is retold. My intention is to afford the reader an opportunity to walk in the shoes of each participant to see, hear and feel each participant story constructed through a number of headlines which I consider to be the matters they wished to emphasise, the things they were figuratively pointing out to me and the metaphorical prods I was given in the time I spent with each of them.

## 5. Chapter Four – Stories Retold (part-one)

### 5.1. Introduction

As a co-producer of the data, a co-creator of the stories and on occasions a character in those stories, I now have the enormous responsibility to reshape, re-tell and create a coherent narrative (Reason, 1988). Numerous drafts of each story were written to ensure the darting, natural conversations from the two meetings with each participant were built into a chronological and congruent story; whilst striving to keep the story as intact and complete as possible

The participant stories which follow provide a rich and in-depth insight into the experiences of PT-postgraduate students concurrently working as they attempt to fit study into their life and in turn fit into a postgraduate world. The stories were captured at the mid and end point of the first semester in the academic year 2016/17;

- Hettie, Juliette, Claire were in the first year having completed the first module
- Jayne was in the second year having completed all the modules to that point
- Esme was awaiting graduation having completed the MSc course.

Each story commences with the experience map (ExpMap) created by the participant. The participant story is then told using a series of headlines which emphasise their key messages, using verbatim excerpts and photography. The data identification process used throughout chapter four and five is detailed in appendix 5. The story is then summarised narratively and visually through an illustration which captures the headlines and key messages pictorially.



Juliette was in the first semester at the start of the MSc course; she reflected upon events in her life leading up to her return to HE. Speaking candidly about her 'in the moment' experiences there was a lot to be learnt about how life was changing for Juliette as a working PT-postgraduate student. She did not venture very far into what the future may hold but provided a rich vibrant and emotional insight into her life at the time I met her; this very much centred around her family.

**"Everybody's very reliant on mum at home" - Family central**

Aged forty-eight, Juliette was first and foremost a family person, being at home, a mother and wife her central priorities,



*"At the heart of it we have got home-land" JLExMN1*

*"they're priority children.... children and housework has to be done so I can't get away with not doing that" JLPEMN87*

**JLExMP7**

Juliette described herself as having two children (daughter age 14, and son age 12), a husband and home. She told of a family life that might be described as 'traditional' in its structure, organisation and values,



**JLPEMP12**

*"That was getting the washing out, trying to do my washing* **JLPEMN24**

*"I've got ironing to do and the dinner to do"* **JLPEMN3**

*"I've done the packed lunches and the dinner and everything else"* **JLPEMN2**

*"I feel too guilty leaving my family unattended all day and my husband to look after the children"* **JLPEMN6**

Occasionally during our conversation Juliette appeared to question this traditional organisation within her family,

*"It's not my job to do the Sunday dinner but my husband is out on his bike on a Sunday morning...."* **JLPEMN2**

*"I just want to have a bit of time everybody else is doing their own thing and I'm in here in the kitchen"* **JLPEMN3**

*"I feel like as a woman in the family, I don't feel..., my husband would probably deny it but I feel I've got a lot more on than him"* **JLPEMN102**

From the start of our first conversation Juliette struck me as being someone who was enthusiastic and very much on the go, this was something evident throughout her story,

*"so it was me, the juggling lives again.... keeps me on my toes"* **JLPEMN 59**

*"Yes got to run"* **JLPEMN100**

The flip side I suspect was that Juliette also found it difficult to relax and could become overwhelmed by just how much she was fitting into her life,

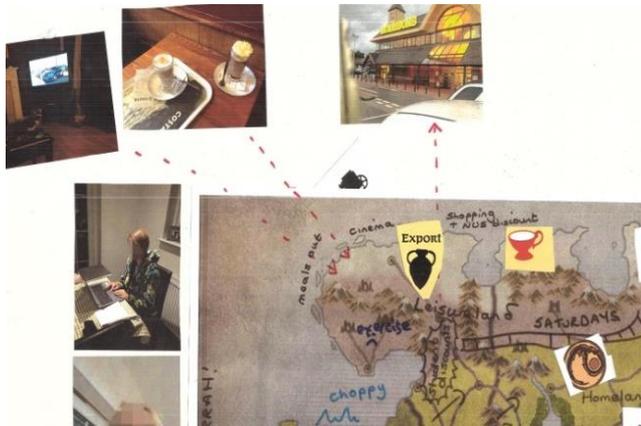


*“Right in the middle I suppose is my mental health because I do have anxiety and um it can be the point where I can’t concentrate properly on anything”* **JLExMM2**

*“I feel like I’m not fully relaxed”*  
**JLPEMN54**

**JLExMP3**

For Juliette, the weekends were reserved for spending time with her family; Saturday was leisure time, eating out, going to the cinema, shopping with her daughter and sister.



*“Then I have got my leisure-land I like to try and keep Saturday’s generally free”* **JLExMN1**

*“I like to go shopping and take my daughter and go with her to meet my sister in Manchester”*  
**JLPEMN21**

**JLExMP5**

With so much going on in her life, I was intrigued by Juliette identifying the day of the week from her photography, and I began to realise just how important having routine was to Juliette,



**JLPEMP16**

*“It might be a Friday night or Saturday night because there's a bit of wine there” JLPEMN19*

*“I'm in a routine ..... that looks like a Saturday, that looks like white shirts” JLPEMN29*

Juliette had definite expectations of herself and the central role she had in the family and home,

*“You know I am the one they come to rather than their dad. I suppose it's just a normal thing” JLExMP25*

*“It's a mixture of who's about, who wants me so it's about where am I most needed” JLPEMN22*

*“So I suppose most of it I have to be flexible round the family” JLPEMN2*

Juliette identified that she had a competitive nature and perfectionist tendencies,

*“I'm always somebody that likes to get all the work done as best as I can because I have this competitive feeling of obsessive competitiveness” JLPEMN53*

*“I have decided as well that I am very competitive” JLExMN1*

These possibly fuelled the high expectations she had of herself; having routine appeared to be important in making sure everything ran smoothly, everyone was catered for, all expectations were met and the home was happy and content,

*“Just on and off, on and off... come in from work, get the tea done, get this done get that done, everybody sorted” JLPEMN102*

*“Everybody's very reliant on mum at home and as the soon as something is forgotten it's like Mum you forgot to put something in my bag or mum you've done this” JLExMN22*

Juliette fully embraced everything she did; she fully committed and put her effort into doing things well. She had focused almost exclusively on her family for a number of years and they had come to rely on her always being available. As she told her story I was left in no doubt about just how important and cherished this area of her life was and her tenacity in ensuring home life was protected and nurtured. It was such strongly held family values which had taken her away from her career to focus on her family.

#### **"I put my career I suppose on hold looking after my children" - A career out of hibernation**

Aged eighteen Juliette first enrolled at university as a full-time student. Living completely immersed in her student life at the time Juliette was clear that working hard and fully committing to her study would be the route to success,

*“When I was at university when I was eighteen I felt like it was just black or white, all or nothing and I just had to feel that I had to work, work, work” JLPEMN45*

*“It was always, put a lot of work in, get a good mark” JLExMN7*

On completion of her studies and graduation Juliette went on to work as pharmacist until she had children at which point caring for her family become her priority,

*“When I had my children I went part time down to three days a week and I put my career I suppose on hold looking after my children...and they went to a school away from home so they couldn't walk home” JLPEMN*

Recently Juliette's children had both reached an age when they could travel to school independently, prompting her to return to full time employment,

*“Only now that they are in secondary school with a bus coming home that I can think I can do stuff now so I've gone back to full time work” JLPEMN 7*

Juliette had a primary office base but spent much of her time mobile, out of the office working in surrounding NHS practices,



*“This is what I see if I look out and we're just sat right next to the flow of traffic so that was more just a "this is what I do, this is where I am, this is my base" JLPEMN58*

**JLPEMP11**



*“[I am] quite mobile... I spend most of my, maybe 80% of my time is out on the road” JLPEMN51*

*“This is just my little car that I 'put' around in” JLPEMN50*

**JLPEMP2**

There was a sense of excitement as she spoke and through her photography she was keen to orientate me to her newly rekindled working life,



**JLPEMP3**

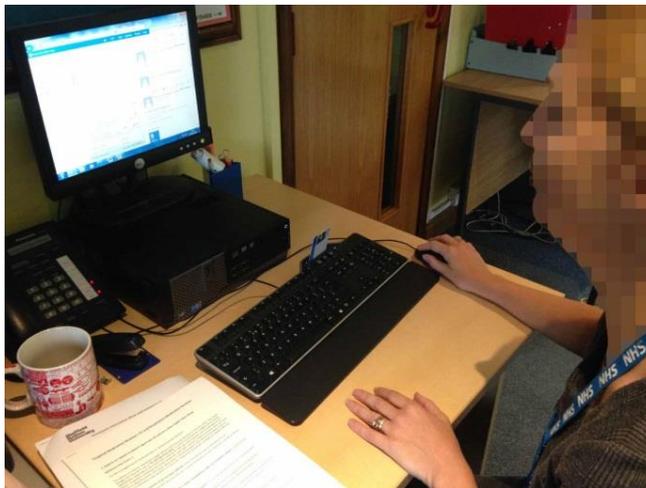
*“This is what I do during the day in my normal work so I've just come up the stairs and getting back into the office ..... so that was just a bit of here, I am here is Juliette going to work..... that's looking out of the office upstairs, looking at the traffic, so that's just a bit of the life, what I do in my work time”*

**JLPEMN50**

Her thoughts appeared to be moving towards re-establishing herself in the workplace and further developing her career,

*“Some of it was going back to full time work....I decided I wanted to be high up the scale so I've concentrated myself working here” JLPEMN47*

In returning to work full-time Juliette had become the main income earner in the household, a break from 'tradition' perhaps and something she was not entirely comfortable with. Her concern for others, their feelings and views was evident as she reflected,



**JLPEMP1**

*“I always feel even though I earn more than Simon, even though it's not about money, but I'm on a higher grade than my husband, I still sort of feel like, whether it's just I feel I don't want him to feel belittled by me so maybe that's a bit as well so I just want to be able to still do the "Mum" bit and the "wife" bit”. JLPEMN14*

Juliette made a number of references to how she thought others might perceive her, their assumptions and expectations. In the workplace this appeared to have some relation to her age and gender,

*"I think because our team has got bigger and there's new people coming in I didn't want to feel that I'd get left behind as an older Pharmacist who's waiting to retire, if that makes sense"* **JLPEMN45**

*"My identity has been like professional yet when I haven't got my professional anything on then I just go back to being plain old Mum who's getting older"* **JLPEMN72**

In the workplace examples above, but also littered throughout her story, Juliette referred to routine, structure and the expectations placed on her by those most immediate to her and wider society. Yet there were occasions when I heard a cheeky and humorous side to her story and I sensed that at times Juliette wanted to defy tradition, expectation and stereotypes. In part this promoted her decision to return to HE,

*"So [the MSc] it's a bit of my time"* **JLPEMN9**

*"[being a student] suddenly makes me feel a little bit more that... If it sounds like I'm being naughty comparing myself well, I don't just want to be a mum I want to be more than somebody who works as a receptionist somewhere"* **JLPEMN72**

Having concentrated on home life and her family Juliette had recently returned to work full-time, prompting her to re-evaluate her career and to some extent her identity. Although it was very clear that Juliette remained protective of family and home life there was a certain undertone of excitement in her story as she began to tell me about her return to HE.

**"Not the priority but it's still something that's important for me to do" - A right time to return to study?**

Perhaps with an element of having something to prove to others and herself, Juliette's decision to return to HE after nearly twenty years was also pragmatic. Her children on reaching secondary school age were more independent, financial support was available from her employer and precedence had been set by a colleague similarly deciding to pursue further study,

*"Only now that they are in secondary school with a bus coming home that I can think I can do stuff now so I've gone back to full time work, I've gone to do an MSc which there was no chance of doing this even last year"* **JLPEMN7**

*"I never thought I'd be able to do this course because of the cost, thinking that it would be a lot to expect the family to have to sacrifice but because it was funded and because*

*one of my other colleagues had done it, it was more like I had a chance to do it"*

**JLPEMN97**

Juliette was very certain about the commitment this would require ensuring her work did not suffer as a consequence of studying. Although her employer was supportive in allowing her the flexibility to attend study days like all other participants there was no allowance for this in her workload or reduction in expectations,

*"It is a big commitment to come out of my work [to attend university]..... We have all this work that we have to do in the year about looking at patient information and I know that if I don't keep up my line manager will be saying to me... " what are you doing going to university if you're not keeping up with your work?" JLPEMN98*

In Juliette's case there appeared to be further flexibility relating specifically to her role. Unlike the other participants Juliette had no direct line management responsibilities so there was scope to work around the study days without too much being unsettled,

*"I don't have to manage anybody, I do some mentoring but I don't directly manage them. So I manage my own workload.. if I'm not there that day I just catch up the next day. If I'm not there in practice on Tuesday I'll do it the next Tuesday there's not like "where's Juliette, where's Juliette?" JLPEMN73JRA7u*

In seeing her postgraduate study as something for herself, Juliette was keen not to disrupt the 'status quo' or 'create waves', phrases she referred to as we discussed becoming a part-time student.

*"It's a bit of my time and I'm trying not to cause too many waves" JLPEMN7*

*"It's [MSc] not the priority but it's still something that's important for me to do as long as it doesn't affect the status quo" JLPEMN89*

Juliette's return to HE was prompted intrinsically and extrinsically. In a pragmatic sense her life had reached a natural point of change with her children's increased independence and the support available from her work organisation. Things appeared well aligned for her to become a part-time student if this did not upset her family and their home life.

**"Not creating waves " - Learning from the past to make sense of the new**

Returning to HE, Juliette like other participants drew upon some of her previous university experience to help her make sense of studying part-time whilst working. For Juliette, studying as an undergraduate had been all consuming; she had recalled how it was 'all or nothing, work, work, work' and the pressure she felt to compete with others and spend as much time as they did studying. Juliette had also undertaken professionally orientated study four years prior to the MSc course and once again felt the pressure to dedicate a lot of time, attention and effort to her study. Although it was a relatively short duration CPD course, it had still taken her uncomfortably away from her family life,

*"I know the last time I did a prescribing course I think I went mad and I spent all the Easter holidays just writing, writing and Simon took the children out a lot of the time and I felt too naughty at the end of that"* **JLPEMN92** it w

Now it appeared Juliette's expectations of being a working mum and part-time student undertaking postgraduate study appeared more rounded. Like other participants her intention this time was to prevent study taking an overly dominant central position in her life,



*"I have got my student-life which I just try to keep it on the side"*

**JLExMN2**

*"I think because I'm not living with students and I'm not breathing students so you can just forget about it and go to work"*

**JLPEMN43t** balance it quite well, it seems to work.

**JLExMP6**

Juliette appeared very much aware of how her feelings of obsessive competitiveness could drive her to want to achieve,

*"I've got OCD"* **JLPEMN45**

*"I'm always somebody that likes to get all the work done as best as I can because I have this competitive feeling of obsessive competitiveness so it just keeps everything calm"*

### **JLPEMN53**

Returning to her story a number of times the sense I had was that Juliette wanted to avoid 'over indulging' in postgraduate study. She was determined to learn from her previous encounters and this time avoid expending too much time and attention to the detriment of the other areas in her life or upsetting the people around her. Despite a natural tendency for Juliette to always be on the go and embrace everything, she was making a concerted effort to protect her family life and not allow postgraduate study to become anything more than a small part of her time and efforts,

*"I feel like I can control everything now being a part-time student because it's not constant where I constantly feel I've got to compete against everybody. I do my bit but then I think I actually forgive myself because I know I have other things and I don't just have to spend all day studying, I've got my life and everything else as well"*

### **JLPEMN45e**

This suggested Juliette was going to have to make some difficult decisions and compromise her engagement, performance or achievement to accommodate everything else she had to fit in. Maintaining calm and balance had become possibly more important or a higher priority for Juliette as a working, parent, wife and now part-time student,

*"I don't want to risk having any waves being created so I just fit it all round"*

### **JLPEMN15**

*"I try to keep it smooth and calm calm"* **JLExMN30**

*"The course work is .... still important ... it's not the priority but it's still something that's important for me to do as long as it doesn't affect the status quo"* **JLPEMN89**

For Juliette, having a sense of control, structure and routine, was all part of how she maintained balance in the areas of her life. In the first semester Juliette had to develop ways to ensure her home, and family life, did not become too disrupted by her return to HE. Ensuring that the status quo was maintained and no waves were created at home was

imperative. The strategies she adopted included, being on call for her family, adopting a grazing approach to her study and keeping her study under the radar.

### **"I'm almost still on call" - Taking study in the home**

Juliette was careful in choosing where she studied in the home so that she was readily available for her children if needed; perhaps given her background in health care, she saw this as *'being on call'*. Juliette's husband had apparently taken a different approach when studying for an MSc, removing himself to study away from the family. However for Juliette this would only give rise to feelings of guilt and so was not an option for her,

*"He [Simon] used to hide himself in his office upstairs, our spare room, so he was just out of sight at night... I tried that once doing it upstairs and I felt really bad. JLPEMN7*

*"Yes [I] shut the door, took myself away and, and with me I feel too guilty doing that because I feel like I'm needed more". JLPEMNA8*

Instead Juliette chose to base herself in the family dining room, a central place in the family home although it could become noisy, distracting and so restrictive. She appeared resigned to studying in a less conducive study environment to reconcile the needs of her family and probable feelings of guilt.



**JLPEMP8**

*"I sit in the dining room and I think there's a picture of me here sat in the dining room where I've washed my hair and I've not even dried it properly and I've sat there in the dining room at night and I'm almost still on call, there I am" JLPEMN9*

*"Two children and when husband comes in it just gets very loud and I pack up because it gets too loud" JLPEMN2*

**A grazing approach to study - "I do it when there's a little window of opportunity" -**

A second strategy Juliette used was to regularly undertake course work and assessment preparation each week day evening usually for 1-2hours. This took place when her family were busy. Having a 'small and often' study policy protected the weekend for family time, as would usually be the case in their household,



**JLPEMP7**

*" [this is] me... so I do it [study] when there's a little window of opportunity I do my work"*

**JLPEMN6**

*"Yes between Eastenders and nine o'clock so nine o'clock my son goes to bed, he might be twelve but I till sort him out a bit before he goes upstairs so I know I've got a bit of a window at that time when I can get on"*

**JLPEMN10**

*"I try and do my work..... roundabout after tea time until 9 o'clock this is when nobody wants me nobody needs me"*

**JLExMP2**

Juliette also started to use her lunch time at work to undertake some aspects of her study away from the interruptions of family life. She had to plan ahead and make sure she took everything with her, but for Juliette this appeared to be usual '*custom and practice*',

*"I don't get paid for this twenty minutes [at lunch, so], I'm going to do my own work in that time"* **JLPEMN52**

*"I've started doing some homework coursework in my lunchtime... it benefits me because it means there's less to do at night and because this is my protected time away from children"* **JLPEMN51**

*"I take some of my assignment to work and I have a little look on... (names university*

*electronic learning platform) in my lunch time” JLExMP2*

In undertaking relatively small blocks of regular and frequent study, Juliette was able to maintain a sense of control and feel on top of things. Adopting this approach had further benefits in preventing her anxiety building up,

*“I think I'm a plodder, I'm not a last minute at all..... I'd end up not sleeping so I can't do anything last minute” JLPEMN6*

*“A chip awayer, it has to be done a little bit at a time I think I had done about half my assignment by the last [attendance] session we had, otherwise I would have panicked even though I had loads of time” JLPEMN79*

Participating in her postgraduate studies frequently and routinely Juliette appeared to find it relatively easy to pick up her work get immersed in her studies. In addition to her usual regular 'small and often' routine Juliette also told me about her occasional more ad-hoc attempts to undertake her MSc work whilst also carrying out her home-based activities. This is another occasion when I got to see Juliette's humorous side and immersive nature. We both laughed as she told me of the *burnt sacrificial beef* offering (pictured as burnt chicken in the visual summary of Juliette's story) which had resulted from breaking her Sunday morning study embargo to try and work on her assignment whilst preparing the Sunday lunch,



*“I'm cooking the dinner and I think "I'm going to try and do a bit of study while the beefs on". I forgot to put the alarm on and it looked a bit crisp when it came out because I was trying to do too much all at once” JLPEMN2*

*“I normally concentrate with it [study] full time and I've got all my attention on it.... yes it's easy [to*

**JLPEM17**

*get immersed] when you've got references everywhere and you just want to be able to keep going, you don't want to lose that momentum and enthusiasm" JLPEMN3*

It appeared that her strategies were working as she told me about how knowing the rules enabled her to sneak her study into the home, under the radar.

"They don't even notice me working [studying] now"

As she continued to perfect the art of fitting her study around her family when they were busy, it did begin to go un-noticed in the home,

*"I am just calm calm and they don't even notice me working now" JLPEMN28*

In being around the home and not depriving anyone of her time Juliette caused little disruption to her family and maintained an acceptable level of normality in their home life; something she had not managed when completing previous CPD study,



*"It's a little treat going out and it's family time as well" JLPEMN91*

*"Yes maintaining some normality, I know the last time I did ...a course I felt too naughty at the end of that" JLPEMN92*

**JLPEMP15**

Knowing the rules and what would be considered outside these was part of Juliette's skilful maintenance of calm. Studying at weekends or after 9pm were viewed as breaches,

*"I never like to work after nine o'clock, it stops at nine.... I don't intend to do that*

*because I like to watch telly [with] a glass of wine, not every night but definitely telly at nine o'clock" JLPEMN90*

*"My television with Simon my husband is not negotiable, that's what I do" JLPEMN91*

But the routines were not fully established and Juliette revealed occasions when she found herself disregarding her own rules,

*"I wonder whether I'd sneaked a bit [study] on Saturday morning because I say that I'm in a routine but then I sometimes [do]" JLPEMN29*

But this disregard and breaking the study rules, had to be covertly operated within the 'family first rule', which required knowing where the boundaries were and how much the rules could be bent,

*"I've sneaked a bit of work [study] in on Saturday morning there when it was quiet. It could have been my daughter is the main offender for wanting to go out, not my son. Maybe she was on a sleepover that day, or something where she wasn't thinking "I want to go out Mum" so that's been a bit of sneaky [MSc] work done then " JLPEMN31*

*"I can do a Sunday afternoon because Sunday is almost like homework day, that's classed as homework day so everybody has homework that day. I can do it at night time as long as I've done the packed lunches and the dinner and everything else because she's watching the television" JLPEMN22*

*"Yes not creating waves where he [Simon] would allow me to create waves but I think maybe there might be a bit of a cut off where he'd get a bit fed up after a while if I did, so I can do it, but I don't want to risk having any waves being created so I just fit it all round" JLPEMN15*

When stretching or breaking the rules, the art of reconciliation and negotiation were an important part of making amends and calming the waters. Her student discount card proved to be a useful tool for Juliette,



**JLPEMP13**

*"I'd just realised that I could get 10% off [at the supermarket]"*

**JLPEMN34**

*"It's an absolute benefit because I found lots of things since, I must have saved quite a bit and my daughter has benefited as well"*

**JLPEMN35**

*"I think it [being a student/studying] becomes accepted in the family because I've got that [discount card]"*

**JLPEMN36**

*"I kept saying "I've got discount if you want to get anything" and she's like "oh yes," so it is something that's definitely a win/win as long as it's not too much status quo upset that is a win having that now"* **JLPEMN37**

Juliette had developed strategies to contain her study, keep it as low profile as possible and not 'create waves' or disrupt 'the status quo' in the home. In doing so Juliette appeared to accept that she needed to regulate her participation and negate her competitive immersive tendencies. Being on call for her family, adopting a grazing approach to her study and keeping her study under the radar; appeared to be Juliette's ways of feeling less guilty about undertaking part-time study for herself, the strategies all helped her to 'forgive myself' and continuously juggle all her responsibilities.

### **"Going to University pulls you out of your life" - A constant juggling act**

The first semester was seen by Juliette to be a trial period of finding ways to adapt and fit in her postgraduate study without disruption. Certainly she felt being a working part-time

student pulled her away from her life, which required a great deal of flexibility and the ability to change and constantly juggle everything,

*"It's almost like a trial in a way to .... to feel how it fits in because I mean going to university does pull you out of your life"* **JLPEMN98**

*"I'm juggling my life more"* **JLPEMN1**

*"It's all about you juggling the balls"* **JLExMN22**

*"I'd like to feel that I adapt well to change and I like change and I don't not welcome it; but I feel my brain feels like it's really more of a non-change brain so I'm trying to bring it up to change"* **JLPEMN99**

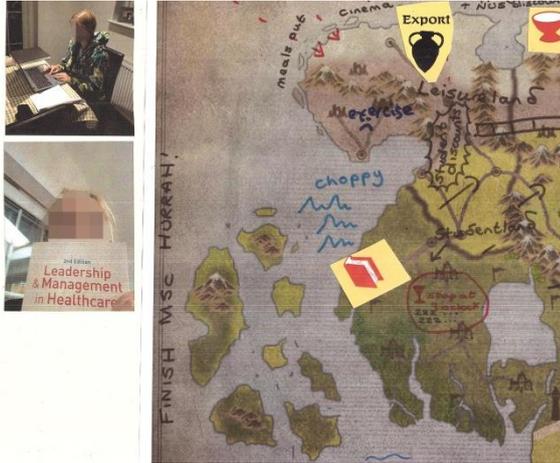
This had not always been easy and did not always work; she mockingly returned to the burnt beef incident,

*"Well it doesn't work with the cooking I've learnt, but things like washing, that is naughty I know"* **JLPEMN 26**

*"I am quite forgetful all the time feel like I've got to be perfect all the time and keep everything going and probably nobody notices but I feel like err I am not doing as well as I should be doing"* **JLPEMN 2**

*"....try to keep it smooth and calm calm I have the odd choppy day as I say when I forget something and I have to dash home.... forget my phone..... forget my memory stick.... I've done that a few times forgotten it so it's just keeping keeping everything going..... I don't know whether it will ever get [completely] better but it is getting a little bit better [but] I feel like other people can see that I am dropping a few balls"*  
**JLPEMN30**

Despite her attempts and the strategies to keep structure and boundaries in place, Juliette did still find that there was a danger of the study becoming more than part-time,



**JLExMP5**

*“I have got my student-life which..... sometimes I feel like it tries to encroach all the time into other areas it tries to get into work because at times I take some of my assignment to work ..... in my lunch time and it might just creep in when no one is looking on a Friday afternoon. So it encroaches into that sometimes and I have got to try and say don't do it and I try not to let it encroach into my family time because I have this really bad feeling of guilt if it does” JLExMN2*

*“I have got my leisure-land I like to try and keep Saturday's generally free and I say no working Saturdays it doesn't always work ..... So I think I will put a big wall up there”*

**JLExMN1**

As Juliette spoke to me it was not difficult to detect the emotional journey she was travelling. She had expressed feelings of guilt about being pulled away from other areas in her life and worry about not living up to expectations. Part of the change and adaptation as a postgraduate for Juliette had been about developing a more strategic, realistic but possibly compromised approach to her learning. This had been particularly challenging for Juliette as a self-identified perfectionist with a strong competitive drive. As alluded to previously, Juliette had been able to 'forgive' herself for compromising on where, when and how much she studied. It was apparent however that Juliette was conflicted by the possible compromise this might have on her grades and struggled to deal with her increasing feelings of competitiveness,

*“I don't feel like I've got to get a really high mark” JLEPMN45*

*"I feel that competitiveness is starting ....coming into my assignment. I think I can't be like that now because we are all not working from the same baseline. So what is the point of feeling like have I done any better than anybody else. I have stopped thinking I am going to tell anybody what mark I get" JLExMN3*

*"Yes it starts to make me think God I'm not going to get a good mark and I think no Juliette you can do as much as you can do ..... if I didn't have my children I would probably do far more work I will probably do an awful lot more work that I am doing" JLExMN6*

But as she later told Esme (another participant) and me about her first assignment grade, her 'compromised' learning position went almost unrecognised as she took a hard and unforgiving view of herself, clearly disappointed she poignantly recalled,

*"I got a shock well not a shock but I think a bit of humility comes in because if you are used to getting a high grade for things and doing well... I am used to working really hard and it reflecting in the grade I got well I worked really hard last time [first postgraduate assignment] and I sort of limped over the line so it's giving me a bit of Humble Pie" JLExMN7*

Such feelings however did not appear to overshadow her effervescent character or wanting to tell me about the positive emotions she also felt in becoming a working part-time student,

*"It's given me a new spring doing this.....I forgot the feeling that you get doing studying because you suddenly start feeling like I would say young again... you've just got so much more enthusiasm to do things more" JLPEMN48*

*"It does make you suddenly develop the learning brain it starts coming on again instead of the going to work/coming home brain" JLPEMN76*

Overall, Juliette gave the impression that despite the challenges she was happy with her decision to return to HE. She very much identified as a student at her university and was quite keen that others also recognised this part of her,

*" I got a zippy top so I've got a [names University] one here and you know what I feel very proud and I've worn it a few times.... I heard somebody the other day in Morrisons*

*I heard somebody say "how did she get in" and I thought that was quite funny really"*

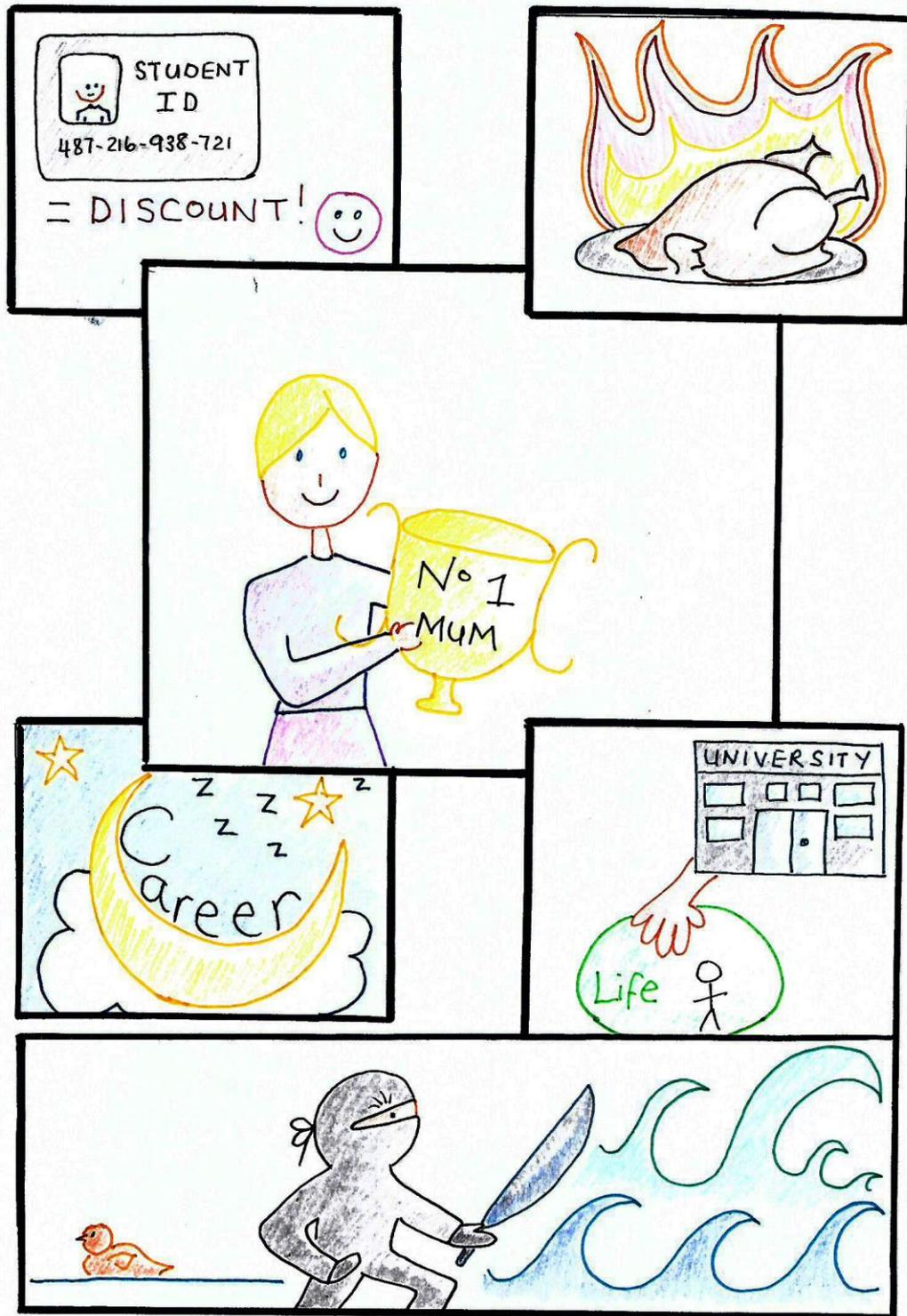
**JLPEMN68**

*"I suppose it's also a bit like identity, ....having that on suddenly makes me feel a little bit more that I'm not just like a Mum"* **JLPEMN72**

### **In summary**

Juliette's life appeared to follow a typical traditional sequence in which she progressed from school to university, graduating and working in the health care sector before having family and focusing on her home life. Having a recognised competitiveness disorder, she appeared well versed and skilful in ensuring she maintained some balance between the areas in life not over-indulging in one to the detriment of another. She had returned to work full-time and had plans to rekindle her career with her children now more independent this had prompted her to also return to HE. With change taking place she adopted a number of strategies to embed postgraduate study in her life without creating waves, upsetting others or failing to meet their expectations of her. Juliette's enthusiasm and energy counter balanced the guilt she felt in undertaking study and making time for herself.

# Juliette



## Visual Summary of Juliette's story

Juliette's story continues in chapter 5 using the SWP I further analyse how almost ninja like she tactically manoeuvred between the areas in her life managing roles and borders in her SWS.

### 5.3. Claire



Figure 4 - Experience Map: Treasure map of MSc

Like Hettie and Juliette, Claire was in the same first year course group, she was also a work colleague of Juliette based in a community health care setting. With a clear focus on the future and what that might be, Claire rewound on her experiences to make sense of being a working part-time student.

***"I wanted that difference, I wanted you to know" - Being a part-time student is different it means just that***

Claire started our conversation with her photograph of her bicycle parked up at The University. A keen cyclist and runner she emphasised her passion, self-discipline and commitment for cycling, exercise and a healthy lifestyle. As she told me about the additional effort she put in to attending the study days she very much depicted someone who has a great deal of commitment, drive and high self-expectation;



**CEPEM1**

*"My bike is what I use to get myself to and from university, I go on my bike quite a lot as well .... it's about twelve miles and ... there's more effort than what you think to get to university, carrying all my bags and things like that on it so I just wanted to say that rain, snow, wind and sleet I'll still be on my bike. Don't get me wrong it's a labour of love, I love my bike"* **CEPEM2**

Hearing this part of her story for the first time highlighted to me how much can go unknown in our routine contact and staff-student relationships. She went on to defend her decision to continue taking time for her exercise which she was able to fit around her family,

*" [cycling] that's really important to me and a slight addition to that, I go running and I did toy with the idea of not doing that and doing my essays instead and that was a real kind of battle and I spoke to another student and she said "if that's what you do then do it" so keeping healthy and maintaining that lifestyle is important to me but there was an element where I did think [about whether to sacrifice time spent running]"* **CEPEM3**

Claire was keen to illustrate how different it was returning to study as a part-time post-graduate; even though for her she was returning to study at the same university,

*"I thought if you looked at a picture... showed anybody who didn't know anything and said these are two pictures one's an undergrad and one's a postgrad who's working and part time I wanted that difference, I wanted you to know"* **CEPEM9**

*"I did my nursing degree at [specific campus named] as well.... Yes I've studied there before so it's a little bit familiar"* **CEPEM10**

As we moved on I asked how Claire viewed her relationship with the university and her student life. She again differentiated the intensity of feelings she had previously had as a full-time undergraduate at the university from the current more casual acquaintance she had as a part-time postgraduate,

*"Oh I lived and breathed it [before]"* **CEPEM12**

*Now I only really have a relationship [with the university] on the days that I'm in, does that make sense to you?* **CEPEM10**

*"I'm in and I'm focused and that's what I do and when I'm not there, I'm not saying I'm not focused on my studies but I'm not focused on the university"* **CEPEM11**

As a full-time undergraduate, Claire had studied for a degree and professional nursing qualification which had been an intense immersive experience. As a mature part-time student, studying a work related postgraduate course, the learning and qualification were more desirable than essential. Claire's next headline story was to identify that this addition could not be a central all-encompassing aspect of her life; it had to be considered as *part* of all the other priorities and responsibilities which now made up her life.

### **"The flip side of that was this will not impact your work" - Flexibility, finance, but no time**

Having progressed directly from school to university Claire had graduated and qualified as a nurse. Like all the other participants over time her role(s) led her to having more senior responsibilities. One year before commencing the MSc she had been seconded to a team leader/manager role based in a community health care setting. The change in role and taking on management responsibilities had been one of her motivators for returning to study. But

through our conversations her personal determination and drive which came through in each area of life had very much contributed to her decision,

*“I wanted to produce the best work that I could for both sides, I didn't want to let my every day work slip or sacrifice any of that but I also wanted to put as much as I possibly could into my university work”* **CEPEMN18**

*“I want to do it and I want to prove to myself that I can do it”* **CEPEMN52**

Like all the other participants Claire had been supported by her employing organisation financially and through flexibility to attend the study days. She also indicated that she was encouraged by the organisation and her manager to apply her learning within her new role,

*“On the whole they're generally supportive; it was a case of we will support you to do this course and we will allow you to put things in place that you feel were necessary in terms of what I found on the course and what I wanted to change”* **CEPEMN18**

*“I have had discussions with my line manager especially the learning outcomes of the assignment”* **CEPEMN19**

*“Because I'd got the new line management position, they wanted me to look at the team as a whole and if there were any gaps I could see because of my learning from university and to try and fill those gaps”* **CEPEMN21**

As commonly experienced, Claire found her work load and the expectations of her in the workplace remained the same. She was keen to ensure that her work was not compromised in any way through the additional MSc demands. As her story unfolded she revealed how she felt pulled between the different areas in her life,

*“However the flip side of that was this will not impact your work so I was very mindful that..... and that was made quite clear by my line manager that there was support but it would be not to the detriment [of my work]”* **CEPEMN18**

Although her study was work-related and work supported, Claire expected to commit her personal time,

*“There were some things I did want to implement and they were supportive but actually reading around the assignment and gathering the information was all in my own time”* **CEPEMN19**

*“Apart from the odd printing out because I'd emailed it to myself and thought I'd print that while I'm at work but that was the only time I did use work time” CEPEMN20*

Claire had the personal drive and commitment, along with the support from her employer. Although she did question whether at home the timing was right, she was not someone who would let such opportunity go by,

*“Is now an ideal time? [to return to study] I'm not sure, but I think I would have kicked myself if I had not taken it now because I don't know whether I would have had the opportunity later on down the line when it might have been more of an ideal time, so my family would have grown up and all that kind of thing but you know sometimes I've just got to grab the opportunity when I can” CEExMN13*

With the timing perhaps not ideal and young children at home, Claire moved on to relay how her home life and family consequently underwent some adaption.

### **"That kind of keeps me grounded and keeps me me" - Super powers and keeping a sense of self in a modern family**

Claire introduced her husband and children, a daughter and son who were both in primary education. As working parents their home life appeared to exemplify the modern, thriving, busy family unit. At home Claire had found ways to hold on to and combine exercise with family life. She discussed the value she placed on being able to commit some of her time to exercise as a busy working mum and wife. She also hinted at her attempts to avoid being completely swept up or lost in a busy 'modern' family life. Running and cycling helped her keep fit but also maintain some sense of herself and balance,

*“Running in the morning, I've always done it, I've done it for years, I thought that's my time and I put my music on and go for I don't know, as long as I can go for really before I've got to get back. To give that up would be giving up a little bit of something that kind of keeps me grounded and keeps me me, it's mine and nobody else's” CEPEMN5*

Family and friends were important to Claire; her next excerpt conveyed the effort she made to continue her home life roles and maintain relationships with others. Fitting in so much required almost super heroine powers.

*“I was trying to show you all the different aspects of my day and all the different priorities of my day”*

**CEPEMN41**



**CEPEMP6**

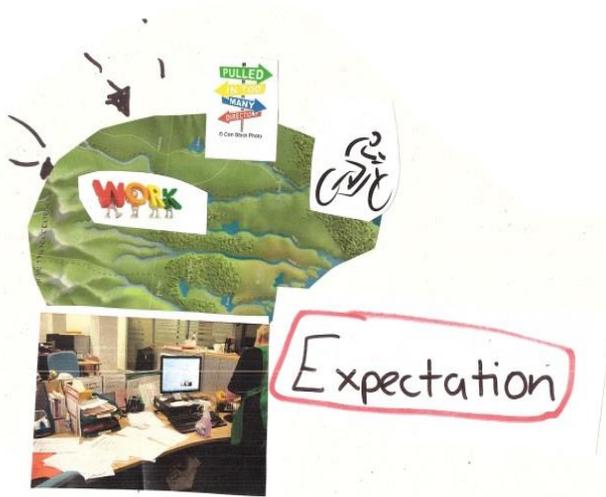
*“The phone which is trying to call my mum because she doesn't live in Sheffield, then there's My Little Pony which is trying to spend time with my daughter similarly with the lego my son, the candle represents some time with my husband, there's the washing up where I tried to do some house work and that's supposed to be a pasting brush because I was trying to do so baking, washing up, Costa coffee because I tried to meet somebody for coffee as well, my running stuff, I tried but I didn't get chance to read the paper but the paper's there, I needed to check some emails for work and then there's my badge”* **CEPEMN40**

In addition to cramming in the numerous family and friend related activities Claire, as anticipated, was now also required to include the MSc self-directed study,

*“Yes reading. But that wasn't something I didn't anticipate, I was braced for that”*

**CEPEMN43**

Living up to the expectations of many and being a modern working mum studying now was not easy and something Claire wrestled with,



**CEExMP5**

*“There is a certain expectation I put on myself to try and maintain a lively mum and the kind of lifestyle that I've got”*

**CEExMN4**

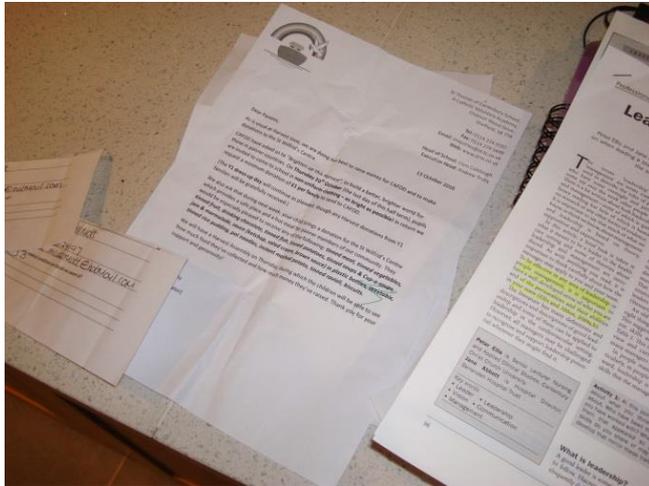
*“There's also societal expectations that because I am a mum I have certain things and responsibilities I have got to do and because I'm a wife there are certain responsibilities I've got and because I work and because I'm a nurse. The main expectations do come from myself but there are certain expectations that get put on me from others”* **CEExMN4**

As a result some things had to go. She had previously mentioned not being able to find time to read the Saturday paper and this extended to her bedtime reading. Claire reflected that spending time pursuing her personal interests had largely disappeared,

*“At night I do like to read a book before I go to bed. Yes a thriller or something and at the moment there's three books by my bed and it's whatever mood I'm in. If I think I just don't want to think about leadership I won't pick that book up it will be my thriller but probably every other night it's probably the leadership book”* **CEPEMN36**

*“Throughout the whole process it's been a sacrifice of my time more than anything else, some of the photos later on do mention that I've sacrificed other things but I think on the whole it's been my own time that I would have been spending by myself doing something”* **CEPEMN35**

Some things had gone and others just had to wait; being so busy all the time took its toll. Even relatively quick, easy tasks like school letters and paying lunch monies could become too much at times,



**CEPEMP7**

*"I had to read a letter that had come from school and then I had to sort some school slips out for the kids so by the end of the night I was just too tired ...to do that so I thought I'd leave them there and do when I get up in the morning"*

**CEPEMN44**

*"I had to go back onto the computer and logon for this or it was something else to do but even just signing the forms and putting them in envelopes, I was just like I can't face anymore"*

**CEPEMN45**

But some things remained an absolute priority; for Claire this was spending time with her family, even if it was now viewed as a treat and occasionally included some opportunistic study at the same time,



**CEPEMP13**

*"My treat of the week every Saturday was that myself and my daughter would watch Bake Off"*

**CEPEMN70**

*"On a Saturday afternoon we would sit on the couch and watch Bake Off, I am sat at the table trying to do work but trying to do that as well"*

**CEPEMN71**

*"Yes that was coming towards the*

*end of doing my assignment and it was one of those, I just wanted to read it and re-read it so yes, again it was opportunities.... I could do that”* **CEPEMN73**

Despite some opportunities for ad-hoc study in the main Claire had to purposefully make time away from her family to complete her assignments.

### **"The missing out of family life and the tug of war that I feel" - Family adaptations**

Returning to study had been accompanied by adaptations and changes in Claire's home life and how she spent her time. The adaptations extended to how family space was used and family time was spent along with some changes in family member responsibilities. The adaptation process was not without difficulty for Claire and her family; they were all still getting used to her being a part-time student. Spending time in the library at weekends inevitably meant missing out on things at home, and it would seem, returning to a home more messy than she would have liked,



**CEPEMP9**

*“These are my sons dirty football boots, this was a Sunday and he had a football match and I didn't go, I went to the library so.... I missed his football match and he scored a goal... So the first [issue] was the guilt of not ..going to football ... seeing him score and, secondly I came back and those met me at the door, muddy football boots..... the second [issue] was I come home and it was they can't even be bothered to tidy up, I've got enough on my plate without*

*having to come home and having to tidy up, why can't these boots be moved, slung in the garage or outside or whatever”* **CEPEMN51**

She continued,



**CEEMP10**

*“Yes, this was probably linked to the same day (P10) because when I came back from the library there wasn't any tea left for me”* **CEPEMN58**

*“It's a baking tray with no garlic bread and pizzas or anything on, just the crumbs because nobody knew apparently what time I was coming home.... it didn't matter what time I was coming home, I was coming home”* **CEPEMN59**

*“No we didn't have a very good evening none of us that night because not only have I tidied up and I came home and I was very hungry, I'd been in the library since before lunchtime and had nothing to eat then when I looked at the... yes they'd eaten the pizzas and garlic bread”* **CEPEMN60**

The conversation around the two photographs above really brought out that being a part-time working student meant Claire was pulled in so many directions. At the time she questioned whether her family realised just how much she was pulled and the amount of commitment and drive she needed; something she had expected but under-estimated,

*“There's two elements to this really, the missing out of family life and the tug of war that I feel I go through, but also the kind of woe is me kind of thing as well”*

**CEPEMN51**

*“I don't think they realise and I think I didn't fully appreciate how much commitment I'd have to give”* **CEPEMN52**

Claire's reference to her 'woe is me moments' was perhaps suggestive of some reticence on her part to relinquish her central position in the family and home.

However, Claire's story also suggested that even within the first semester the family were adapting collectively to their new situation,



*“This is myself and my kids, my husband took the photo and this is the island that I talked about and this is us all doing work, all doing homework”* **CEPEMN61**

**CEPEMP11**

Although adaptations were apparent in the home, Claire had to adopt both planned and opportunistic approaches to make the most of the time she could study.

**"I'll always have a specific time to study but I've had to be a bit more flexible" - Scheduled and ad-hoc study opportunities**

Claire had tried to establish a regular routine and scheduled periods of study on set nights Thursday and Friday 5.30-7.00pm after working hours. This was something she negotiated

with her line manager and offered advantages which included access to desk space, computer, printer, emails. Away from distractions and with things taken care of at home, the scheduled study periods allowed Claire to book herself out of the other areas in her life,



**CEPEMP3**

*“This is my desk obviously..... and it was just to say the original idea was that I work late on Thursday and Friday, [until] about half past five.....I .....down tools at half past five for this job and I .... pick up my study and work till probably seven o'clock or when I got kicked out basically”* **CEPEMN14**

*“I did say to my line manager "I am going to stop late but it's going to be for my study" and that was all agreed. It was mentally good as well because I could arrange the family and things like that and say right half past five”* **CEPEMN15**

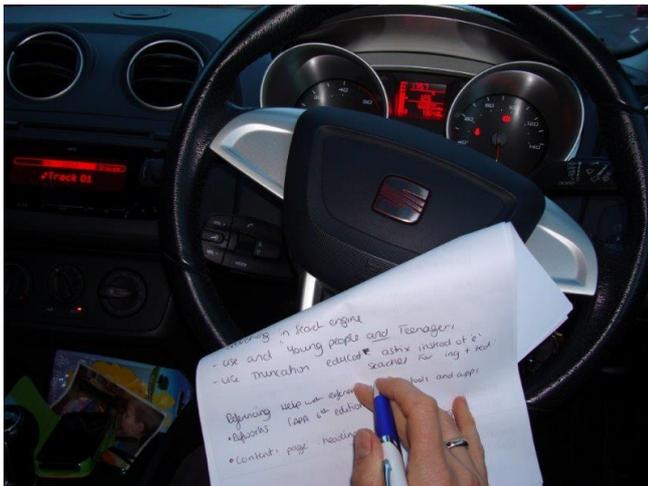
In a similar way, using The University facilitates on a Sunday provided a quiet conducive environment for her scheduled study time, albeit the more communal facilities did not quite have the same level of convenience as her work place,

*“I did go to the university library as well and I found that environment quite productive but obviously I'm at my desk every day so if I need to print off then I can print, in the library I've got to make sure I've got printer credits”* **CEPEMN16**

Despite her plans to contain her study in scheduled slots there was a limit to how much time Claire could spend away from home and work life. Claire supplemented this with an opportunistic and ad-hoc flexible approach something that she had not necessarily done as an undergraduate,

*“I’ll always have a specific time to study and when I did my degree I allocated time to study. I’ve had to be a bit more kind of flexible I think with knowing that I might not always get that half past five/half past seven study time and I might not always get the Sunday at the library so if there’s somewhere else where I can fit it in I will and I think I’ve had to be quite mindful of other opportunities where I’m not having to be away from all my commitments”* **CEPEMN33**

With determination, commitment and a continuous supply of reading materials, Claire ensured that she could opportunistically continue her MSc study in combination with other home life events,



*“I was waiting in the car for my daughter to come back from a party and this was just to say any opportunity to do a bit of study then I’ll take it so I had stuff in the car in case I was waiting in the car for anything and I think I’ll have a little read of that so that was just to say it’s any opportunity that I can get”* **CEPEMN27**

**CEPEMP5**

Having reading material around also served to act as a reminder and prompt for Claire; she was realistic about the need to be flexible when combining study with a busy home-work life,



**CEPEMP8**

*"There's one near the washing up bowl... also it's a kind of don't let this go Claire" **CEPEMN29***

*"If it's everywhere I can't avoid it so if it's in the car, at work, stuck in front of the washing up bowl then it's there and I can't run away from it" **CEPEMN30***

*"Any opportunity to study, read anything and the fact that I did put it all... around the house/car so that it was there .....I think this is something about ..... a happy medium.. that it can work, that it can be possible to do this" **CEPEMN83***

Claire also determined a difference in the type of activities undertaken in her scheduled and unscheduled study sessions. Scheduled time out was reserved for more intense reading and writing up assignments; tasks which require greater focus. Reading and note making which required less concentration could be undertaken unscheduled, ad-hoc, in-between and in combination with other activities,

*"Because it's in the car and I've got ten minutes to have a quick read and make quick notes ... I don't have to book my time but I have to do that in order to focus" **CEPEMN31***

*"Yes so the sitting down at my desk at half past five and going to the library was writing, writing parts/chunks of the assignment, not necessarily the full edited but what I'd read, what I'd read in the car, what I'd read and putting it down, bringing the small notes that I'd made" **CEPEMN32***

Not only had her postgraduate study taken up her time she also discusses how it occupied space at home.

## It's not crept in, it's galloped in" - Part-time study invasion and control

With ad-hoc opportunistic study taking place in the home, the family space also required some adaptation. Like a number of the participant stories, Claire's kitchen/dining area was no longer exclusively for home-based activities becoming a make shift study. Indeed Claire gave the impression the family space had seen a blatant invasion by the growing collection of study materials and resources, which her family appeared accepting of,



**CEPEMP12**

*"It's not crept in, it's galloped in"*  
**CEPEMN47**

*"There are bits all over, we've got a central island and it's all segregated now but mine's probably the biggest space"*  
**CEPEMN48**

*"One of the nights I was saying I am going to get this [part].... finished today I'd written and re-written it and it was on my dining room table and it was tea time and my husband said are we tidying up and I said no we're having tea on .... the kids sat at the table because it was the far end and we sat at the island because everything's out now, I'm not putting everything away to get it out, it's out now"*  
**CEPEMN49**

Studying in the family communal space Claire inevitably encountered interruptions and distractions which, like Juliette, limited what she could get done,

*"Yes and that was as much work I can do in that environment, it's quite limited because it's help me, what does this say, can you do this"* **CEPEMN63**

Using the family communal space and being seen to study had perhaps unintentionally exemplified and encouraged study in the wider household. Claire thought this was perhaps more the case for her daughter than her younger son,

*“When I say I'm going to university that's school to them, that's my school”* **CEPEMN70**

*“Because she'd not ever seen me, I'd done a bit of study at work and things like that but not”* **CEPEMN69**

*“My son had to do his [homework], I think you can see Lego not too far away so it's probably not too far from his playing but it wasn't a plan, my daughter sat there and I said "oh I'll do some work next to you”* **CEPEMN67**

As Claire talked further about her individual approach to studying part-time, she revealed an independent, organised and engaged approach to returning to HE,

*“I had a pile of articles that I'd used and I wanted to use again, there was another pile of articles that I thought may be relevant, another pile that I hadn't read so those had to go into an order and also had a specific reference that I kept even though I was using Refworks, I wanted to keep my own reference as well so that had to be on and then there had to be my laptop so yes you have to kind of set your stall out to make you set your mind up as well isn't it?”* **CEPEMN50**

With this commitment and planning Claire was confident enough to take control of completing and submitting the first assignment ahead of schedule. In doing so she had been able to reclaim some of the lost family time along the way,

*“It's like aah, I submitted it”* **CEPEMN74**

*“I did that on purpose I said I'm doing it because I want the weekend, that was my goal”* **CEPEMN75**

*“Not that we had anything planned but I just thought I want that weekend”* **CEPEMN76**

In addition to the relief of submitting early Claire felt that she had given herself the best opportunity to pass the assignment,

*“I really appreciated that weekend and I also I think I'm not one of those people to do that anyway but I think if I'd have left it to say the Monday or Tuesday to hand in and it did fail that would be my reason why it failed you know and that would be you failed because of that Claire, you rushed it and handed it in late and I didn't want that”* **CEPEMN79**

Understandably Claire was tentatively finding her way as a postgraduate. Completing the first semester and assignment was part of her benchmarking and trying to establish what was required at Masters Level study. However as she waited for the return of marks and feedback, she did not appear unduly worried in her assertions,

*There might be an element, if I continually fail an assignment there will be some point that maybe this is too much, maybe I can't do this”* **CEPEMN56**

*“Yes I'm hoping, obviously I'm hoping that I've passed it but perhaps if I do pass it that will be the I can do this and that's kind of put that doubt to the side”* **CEPEMN57**

Claire included a hint that she did see her learning continuing beyond the Masters Course and part of her 'Island of the Future'. When I asked about including 'never stop learning' on her experience map, Claire was a little hesitant in her response but confirmed what might be described as a life-long learning attitude. She also qualifies this in some way by detailing the integral informal and formal learning in her life,

*“Mmmm yes.. Well I think when I did my nursing degree I was doing my degree because I wanted to be a nurse and that was the end point. So I learnt and I studied and enjoyed it but I wanted to be a nurse. But then I was earning money and I was on the ward and I was enjoying it. I was learning at work but not learning from books I was learning from doing”* **CEPEMN10**

*“Yes I did attend study days and I have done odds and ends of study”* **CEPEMN11**

The motivation, determination and drive to achieve the very high expectations Claire had, were resounding features of her story,

*"I wanted to put as much as I possibly could into my university work"* **CEPEMN18**

*"I knew it was going to be a big undertaking and my motto was just do it just try and do it"* **CEPEMN30**

*"Nobody else has ever said Claire you need to prove anything, no family member, nobody at work nothing like that, it's me so if I come out with this Masters the grade will be irrelevant for me, it will be the fact that I've achieved this"* **CEPEMN52**

Claire's independent self-determining nature was further apparent in her guided tour of her 'treasure map of MSc'. Claire created a more bespoke and individual experience map, placing herself as the captain of the ship in a central position. As she introduced her world, she determined her sights were fixed on future horizons,



**CEExMP6**

*"The Treasure Map of MSc. So this is me I am the captain in my boat, this [gestures the figure of eight drawn on the map] is the kind of route that's been mapped out.... no it's not set out by me. If it was set out by me it would be straight to the X marks the spot [points to X on Future Island]."* **CEExMN1**

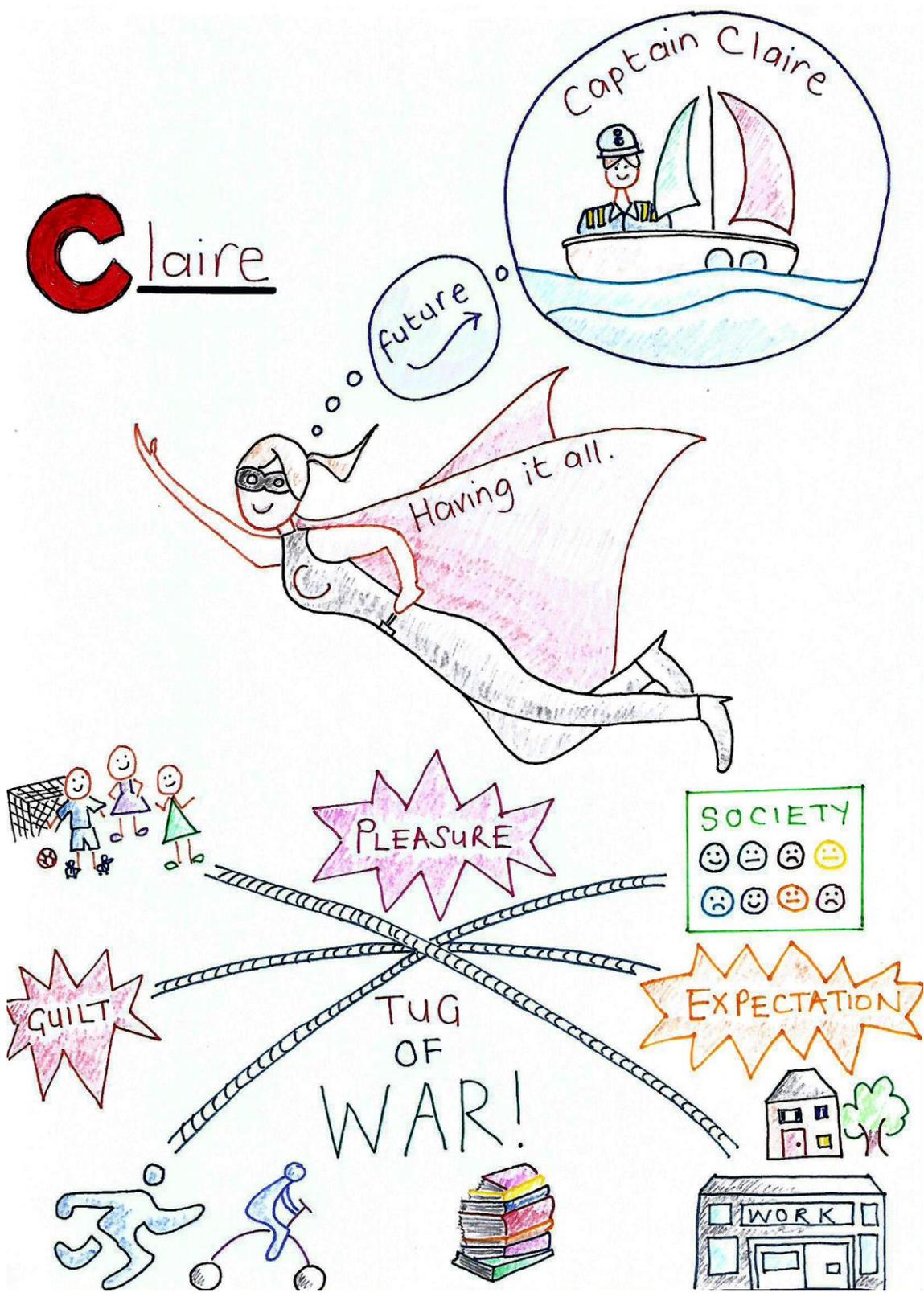
*"But I've got to navigate and circumnavigate the islands before I can get to where I want to go which is there the treasure on the map"* **CEExMN2**

Claire's story told of a really positive person who was giving part-time study her best shot clearly intending to add a Masters degree to the super powers she already had,

*"I think ... I can do it all and I think that's my thing, I can do it all, I want to prove that I can work at a high level, study at a high level, have a family, take care of the house, be a Mum, be a wife, be a daughter, be a sister, be a friend"* **CEPEMN53**

### **In summary**

To summarise, Claire wanted to make clear how different her part-time postgraduate experience was to being an undergraduate studying full-time. Studying, in addition to an already busy modern life, she found herself pulled between the numerous simultaneous roles; she wanted to excel and meet the expectations of each role. Missing out on family life, she would sometimes study on-campus at the weekend but also commandeered space in the family living kitchen area. Her family were adapting, making changes to their family time and how they used their family space. Clinging on to her exercise routines to keep her grounded she combined regular planned study time with ad-hoc opportunities. Self-discipline and commitment helped her remain focused on completing and graduating with a Masters degree. Less concerned with being a postgraduate student, it was the emotional undercurrents of studying part-time which surface most strongly in Claire's story.



**Visual Summary of Claire's story**

In chapter 5 Claire's story is further analysed using SWP to consider how she manages emotions, borders and multiple-memberships which creates enabling blended areas in her SWS.

## 5.4. Hettie

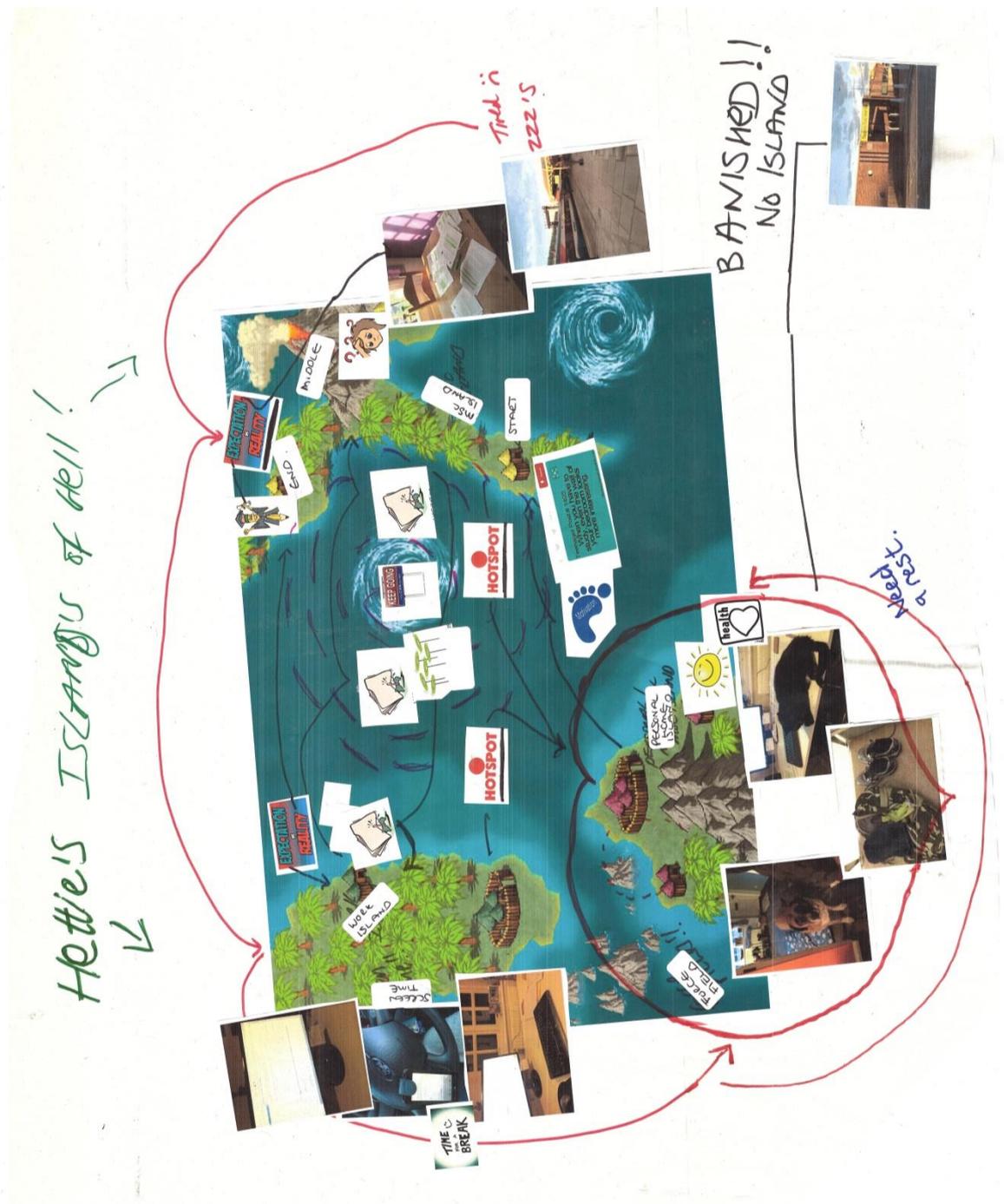


Figure 55 - Experience Map: *Hettie's Islands of Hell*

Following my introduction to the study Hettie launched into her story with excitement and enthusiasm, instantly introducing me to some of her past, present and future. The starting point and central part of Hettie's story was her working life.

**" I really believe in the work that I do"- Work a defining and central part of life**

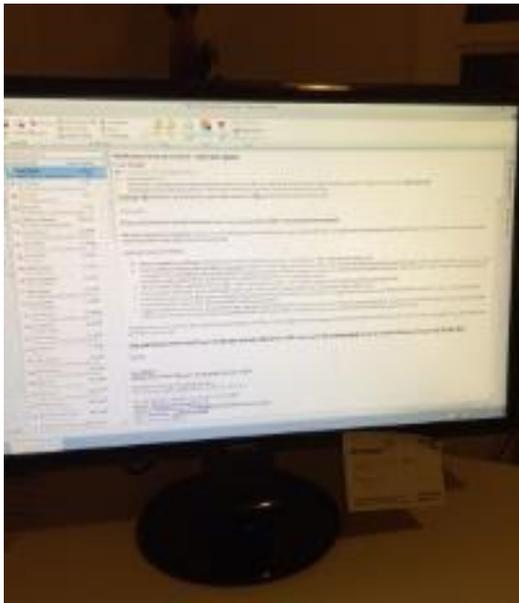
Hettie graduated eighteen years ago having completed a community work degree. Now forty-four years old she works full-time for a third sector organisation which provides women's services. Hettie values her professional identity and is committed to the type of work she is now leading within the organisation. She confirmed that her work is a central part of her life and gave the distinct impression that she felt at ease and quite self-assured in her role, even though the landscape was very changeable,

*"It feels like it has to be [priority/central] because a) they're paying me to be here, I'm here 35 hours a week and b) also .. that's what I went and did my degree in and I very much define myself in the work that I do because I really believe in the work that I do so I want to make sure that's right "* **HLPEMN28**

*"I'm very competent at work, understand what goes on. Stuff changes all the time but generally I feel quite in control of the sorts of things that are going on, you can generally forecast what's happening"* **HLPEMP49**

Hettie saw work as a priority and very much strived to do well and be proficient in her endeavours.

She clearly felt committed to this type of work and comfortable in the world of work. Hettie had a pragmatic outlook, was organised and self-disciplined with a definite preference for structure and feeling in control of situations,

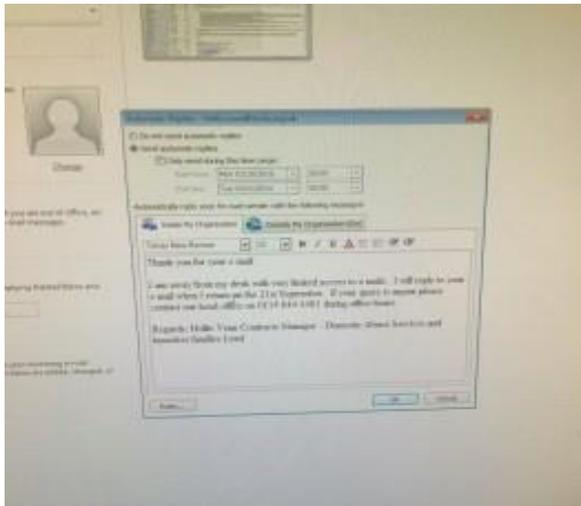


**HLPEMP8**

*“People's feedback about me would say that I'm very organised, I don't have to be chased for things and I guess that's a habit that I've got into over time because some things are not negotiable, you have to get them done on time and you have to make a decision about prioritising what's going to be done first and as I say I prefer to work first and play later”* **HLPEMN38**

*“Work does feel in hand because it has to be my priority the only thing I'm thinking about”* **HLPEMN51**

Hettie also spoke with commitment and compassion for the staff she managed. Her on-going sense of responsibility and accountability was certainly something she felt compelled to address when she knew she would be away from the office,



**HLPEMP 7**

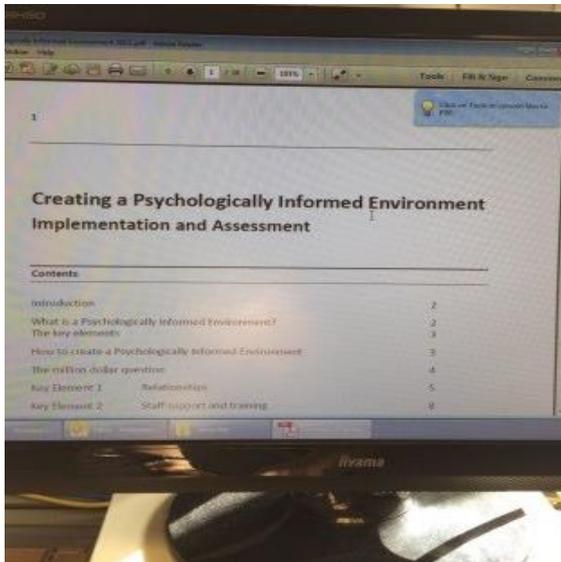
*“I wanted to make sure people knew I wasn't going to be at work ....I have to remember to put my out of office on so people know that I'm not going to be available”* **HLPEMN22**

*“It satisfies me in terms of responsibility that I've ... told people that I'm not available and I have given them an alternative contact if it's urgent”* **HLPEMN2**

*“Yes I'm still accountable”* **HLPEMN26**

Hettie conveyed a genuine interest in supporting her staff and their on-going development and to some extent this appeared to have been at least a contributory part of her personal decision to return to study. She later expands on this point when discussing how she has used her

learning to create and deliver a continuous professional development (CPD) session for her staff,



**HLPEMP13**

*"The way I work with my managers is around always looking at the medium and longer-term vision for their development. I've got some quite long-standing managers who I line manage so it's about what I learn I'll be able to devolve in some way to them as well for their development, so I felt quite excited about doing it"* **HLPEMN1**

*"The impact for work is, what I'm learning [is] being transposed into work"* **HLPEMN5**

For Hettie, life at work was demanding, busy and very much dominated her time and attention. With technology providing continuous access to her work, being able to leave work at work appeared to be difficult for Hettie. The pressure this placed on her was apparent as she drew attention to feeling tired, weighed down and in danger of not living up to expectations of others,



*"I'm waiting to go to my boot camp so I just want to have another last check on my blackberry about what those emails are saying and then after boot camp as well I checked when I got home"* **HLPEMN22**

*"looking at my work stuff so that I feel on top of work so that the next day when I've got to come to the MSc, I*

## HLPEMP17



HLExMP6

*have kept my emails as up to date as I possibly can because I'm then not going to be there for a day" HLExMN8*

*"There's the expectations that I am getting on with my work" HLExMN6*

*"It just feels like ..a time for a break you know I'm constantly looking at that - screens I've never looked at screens so much and I've put that "Screen Time" there" HLExMN6*

For Hettie her work was a central part of her life and identity. She was very much committed to the type of work she undertook and the staff she managed. Her strong sense of commitment and professional responsibility coupled with the use of technology meant that she took her work into her home to make sure she lived up to the expectations placed on her. It was her life at work and the priority this held for her that prompted Hettie to return to HE.

### " I'd be silly not to" - Making the decision to undertake part-time post-graduate study

In Hettie's case, the decision to undertake part-time post-graduate study was prompted by an unsuccessful application for promotion within the organisation. As the only internal candidate it was subsequently felt by the organisation that they should support her continued development. She appeared quite pragmatic in realising and taking up the subsequent opportunity to return to HE and study leadership and management.

*"I didn't get appointed, somebody externally did and as a result of that, what they said is that we realise we need to do something with your development..... so I felt actually I'd be silly not to take that opportunity up" HLPEMN1*

The organisation supported Hettie to study financially and by way of flexibility in how she organised her time to attend university on a part-time basis. The decision to study as a

postgraduate appeared to be 'careerist' in that she was seeking a qualification to progress in her current role or future proof herself in seeking alternatives,

*"I feel particularly with the current situation at work.... when potentially my job is going to be changing quite significantly. I think what I need to keep in terms of eyes on the prize with that is that this will benefit you, it will benefit you in your job anyway, but it also might enable you to get another job and I think that's what I have to keep the future focus on really"* **HLPEMN4**

When choosing a programme to study, Hettie's pragmatic nature was further evident in her preference for a course which allowed her to apply theory to her leadership practice,

*"I really like things that give you the opportunity to look at your theory and your practice, I like how those merge together"* **HLPEMN1**

*"I think if it was all theoretical I think I'd probably struggle because what I can see with the theory, I see how that relates to my practice....I can recognise what's going on there"* **HLPEMN18**

Hettie had taken an eighteen year break in study but made a few references to the favourable situation she felt she was in when deciding to embark on the Masters course. She had clearly given some thought to how her work and home life might be temporarily affected by her return to study. Hettie determined that in comparison to some people, less adaptation would be needed in her family life, further she points to having possibly reached a junction point in her future planning and focus,

*"I'd thought about what that would mean for me working full time and having life outside of work and I just took the view of well it is only three years, they're not going to be an easy three years .... I don't have some of the considerations other people have, I'm not a lone parent and those sorts of things"* **HLPEMN1**

*"I felt like it was a good opportunity to move into the next phase"* **HLPEMN1**

Prompted by circumstance and favourable timing, Hettie had chosen to return to HE and a course which she anticipated would strengthen her position in current role and organisation or any future employment. However, in doing so, it became apparent that this would take her out of her comfort zone away from security she associated with home.

## "My Island of comfort" - Home a safe haven

Although there may have been some uncertainty in her work world Hettie affirmed great certainty in her home life. She strongly portrayed to me the importance of having a life outside work which she shared with her partner, dog and cat. She considered herself lucky and asserts a home situation which might be considered amenable to the additional commitments of study. Hettie highlighted her decision was made easier by not having to combine work and study with having children. She also pointed out her partner routinely shared the household responsibilities with her,



**HLPEMP5**

*"We don't have children as well which .... made the decision easier. I've got a supportive partner in terms of sharing the stuff we do at home so maybe I don't have some of the considerations other people have. I don't do my partner's washing and ironing, I made that clear to him, he wouldn't do mine so it's like 'I'm not doing yours' so I just have mine"*

**HLPEMN1**

*"Knowing that my partner is home before me so he was going to be able to do stuff"* **HLPEMN10**

*"I think I'm at least in a better position than people who've got children actually; I feel lucky really that I can probably take that approach to it"* **HLPEMN2**

Outside work Hettie talked about spending time with her partner and friends; exercising and fitness appeared to be part of this,



**HLPEMP2**

*“My partner and I have dance lessons once a week because I'd always wanted to learn the quick-step and he bought me lessons and then I talked him to coming to them as well, so we go to that and it is something that I look forward to”*

**HLPEMN29**

*“I'll do my boot-camp or I'll catch up with friends”* **HLPEM2**

For Hettie the message was clear, her 'Island of Comfort' (home) was her precious place somewhere she could take sanctuary. It was her go to place when she needed to take refuge, a vital part of her experience map which she encapsulated with a heart,



**HLExMP1**

*“It is my Island of comfort that's why I have got a love heart shape around it so these are the things that are important you know to me and make me happy and helps keep me healthy”*

**HLExMN 2**

Hettie placed a great deal of importance and value on her health, happiness, and maintaining a sense of balance in life something that ran beneath the surface throughout her story. Despite this Hettie was realistic and resolute in planning and prioritising the areas of her life; although enjoyable, leisure and social activities were not her first priority,

*“I also recognise that I've got to come out of my island of comfort”* **HLExMN6**

“there's an element there around planning...we're talking about stuff that happens outside of work ....because it's like life doesn't stop, I still want to go to my boot camp sessions a couple of times a week” **HLPEMN22**

*“I prefer to work first and play later because I can enjoy my play later when I know I haven't got these things hanging over me”* **HLPEMN38**

Throughout Hettie's story there were a number of reminders that she was a very organised and self-disciplined person. For Hettie home was the retreat place where she could reset, re-balance and feel secure. As Hettie's story unfolds it became apparent that returning to HE and postgraduate study had unsettled the confidence she felt at work and the comfort and security she felt at home, suggesting that returning to study had disrupted how she was and felt in the other areas of her life

### **“The induction day ... scared me a bit” - Rekindling the past on entering the new postgraduate world**

Hettie appeared to enrol and begin the MSc programme with a fair appreciation of the probable commitment demanded by postgraduate study. Despite this the initial two-day course induction, had proved to be a bit of a reality shock; which prompted Hettie to reflect on her under-graduate experiences,

*“The induction day .. I think that scared me a bit because it's like Oh God... I think I'd probably over-simplified in my head how I'd be able to silo it out effectively and maybe what level my understanding might be at”* **HLPEMN1**

She recalled how university had changed and how uncomfortable she felt in the unfamiliar environment, alluding to the need for her to adapt and fit in,

*“Just going to the library was like oh God, this has really changed from when I was at university with the ref-works, the searches that you have and I've certainly found from that beginning right up until now has taken me out of my comfort zone in terms of how I feel and think about it and I'm very much somebody who does like an order and a structure”* **HLPEMN1**

Hettie very much appeared to notice her emotions and how these influenced her actions and thoughts. Like other participants she made reference to having internal self-coaching

conversations in response to her feelings. Despite being shaken by the induction, Hettie's studies did get off to a positive start,

*"I felt quite excited about doing it....I really like things that give you the opportunity to look at your theory and your practice, .....so I felt quite excited and optimistic about starting it I felt quite optimistic, interested and thought actually let's take a positive mind-set to this"* **HLPEMN1**

Yet Hettie's starting optimism appeared to be quite quickly quelled by her emerging self-doubt. She came across as someone who could be very hard on herself and this fostered her doubts. This was particularly apparent in her perceptions of her academic ability or sense of belonging in HE. Throughout our conversations I had a sense that Hettie was not entirely comfortable returning to academia. Despite being in the past, she drew attention to her previous elongated and less conventional route from school to University via an access to HE programme. She also drew attention to a lack of University attenders in her family,

*"I finished university about eighteen years ago ....I wouldn't say that I'm academic .... I went to university at 23, I didn't do A levels, I did an Access course"* **HLPEMN3**

*"I was the first one out of my family to go to university so it's not like I came from an academic family, my nephew has just started university but it's not like we had that understanding or tradition"* **HLPEMN5**

Hettie returns to her undergraduate experience making clear how emotionally charged this had been, making clear how some of those feelings had returned as she embarked on her postgraduate study,

*"I really flip-flopped then [as an undergraduate] around thinking "Oh God I don't think I can do this, I'm not clever enough to do this, I don't understand some of the things that are being said".... I've certainly noticed the feelings I have [now] took me back to when I started university .....so I do have those [same feelings] even though it was ages ago"*

**HLPEMN1**

In her first year as an undergraduate Hettie had to re-sit some assignments. As she told me about this episode she recalled vividly the intensity of her feelings as she awaited confirmation of the re-sit marks,

*"You know if you fail three then you have to get kicked off the course really because there's too much to catch up and..... so when the third assignment came back it was*

*when they used to hand it to you, I remember feeling my heart going through my chest and thinking oh God what on earth”* **HLPEMN53**

Although Hettie did not pass all her undergraduate coursework on the first attempt she remained committed and determined, going on to complete the degree along with her peers,

*“In the third year I just failed one in the beginning so I was able to re-do it to graduate with everybody so I do have those [worries/feelings] even though it was ages ago”*

**HLPEMN53**

At the point of returning to HE, Hettie described a life which has a central work focus counter-balanced by an active home and social life. As someone who was operating in her comfort zone and liked order and structure Hettie found the stark reality of returning to study daunting. Although excited and positive, as Hettie drew upon her past experiences her self-doubt was apparent as she began to question whether she would fit into university life again and whether she would achieve. Demonstrating her self-awareness but also self-critical tendency Hettie suggests that she wants to avoid some of her old undergraduate habits.

#### **"I can see some of those things happening again" - Avoiding old habits or past mistakes**

Our conversation naturally meandered to Hettie considering how her individual approach to study had changed in comparison to her previous HE encounter. She highlighted her frustration in finding her previous tendency to procrastinate and delay writing up assignments remained a possibility

*“What I've got frustrated about is I've spent a lot of time at the computer at the weekends since we started... and what I think I get frustrated about is I may be spending time doing that but actually it doesn't feel very productive so then I think I get a bit frustrated....* **HLPEMN12**

When I suggested to Hettie that this might be part of a preparatory or thinking process she was resolute in her response, again chastising herself as she replied,



#### HLPEMP4

*"Procrastinating..... to me there's a bit of a mental step between when I'm downstairs reading stuff I'll do a bit of that [procrastinating] because I know once I'm there at the computer I have got to start doing something"*

#### HLPEM13

*For me no, I know its procrastinating and I remember I did this at university, my house would be immaculate just as the assignment came out because you'd do everything not to do it and then eventually you'd accept you need to get on and do it so then the house would turn into a tip whilst the assignment was being done and then ... when you'd finished it [assignment] the house would go back to ..nice clean again. I can see some of those things happening again"* **HLPEMN14**

Now with work a central commitment taking a large proportion of her time there was perhaps less scope for Hettie to procrastinate. In addition, Hettie suggested that she was now generally more organised preferring to plan and structure her time so that deadlines at work were met and the jobs completed. This mind-set or approach appeared to now influence and change how she was going about her study as a part-time student,

*"I definitely would have stayed up late when I was at university [previously], I probably would have started stuff more in the evening and worked through till you know three o'clock in the morning...I can't do that now I work, that's not doable and I like a lot more sleep than I used to. That's why I need to be structured saying it's those weekends or some particular evenings .... I would have done stuff more at the last minute more when I was at university [before], that has completely changed because of how I work anyway, I don't want to be still writing it on the day that it's due in, I want to have finished it and known that it's done the day before at the latest really"*

## HLPEMN15

Hettie was in the first semester of the course and at this early stage trying to reconcile the amount of time she spent undertaking and thinking about work or study proved frustrating and overwhelming for her,

*“Having a lot on at work and just thinking about this was a bit overwhelming trying to make sense of it all”* **HLPEMN26**

A key message that comes out of Hettie’s story is trying to get a balance between the need to take a break and stop thinking about the MSc work but not procrastinating or delaying the coursework too much. She found some distractions are more welcome than others,



**HLPEMP12**

*“I'm aware that anything that takes me away from that [coursework] such as that [going to dance lessons] .... or taking the dog out for a walk I'm aware that, that delays it and then I get cross and frustrated with myself.. but then I think "what's the other option, you're literally going to be in the computer room from nine in the morning to ten at night, don't be ridiculous, don't be silly"* **HLPEMN31**

*“I've got the other distractions in the home they're a nice excuse to stop off from what I'm doing. If my dog tends to bod into the room that I'm in I'm going to automatically turn round and give him a fuss and have a bit of a break so yes that is a nice distraction”*

**HLPEM9**

Hettie attempted to separate the two competing elements of work and study to restore some sense of order through attention to planning and organisation. In the following excerpt she again indicates how her behaviours and approaches at work seem to transfer over and inform her study,



**HLPEMP1**

*"Which is where my board comes from, P1 is ... very much how I feel that stuff is compartmentalised"*

**HLPEMN36**

*"It makes stuff maybe more palatable in my head as well about how it feels. Whereas if I wasn't writing it down it would just feel a bit chaotic and jumbled but that's generally how I operate at work as well, I tend to use the tasks think in Outlook so I know roughly where I'm going and what I'm doing"* **HLPEMN3**

She moves on to relate how this transference of attitude and behaviours which make her efficient in the workplace might help her become more effective in her study.

*"What I'm hoping will happen is as time goes on I'm more adept" - Sacrifices and learning efficiencies*

Despite any passing temptation, Hettie was steadfast and self-disciplined in her approach; planning and setting goals for her study whilst re-negotiating her partner's expectations and her own,

*"That was my weekend goal, that was what was happening that weekend"* **HLPEMN6**

*"I keep the weekends for the MSc ... I've also had a conversation with myself internally ... some of those things that I like to do, I've pretty much said for October and up to the date in November [assignment] I'm not planning on doing anything [outside study] those weekends" **HLPEMN2***

*"My partner will say to me "why don't you just come down and watch a film or do you want to go out for a meal" and I've said to him "I can't enjoy doing those things when I*

*know I've got that to do" whereas some people will be those people who want to do my play first and work at the last minute, I'd rather do my work first and play later"*

**HLEPMN16**

Prioritising her postgraduate study inevitably led to sacrificing or putting on hold other areas of her life. As a result, it was her interactions and participation in social/leisure activities that had been curtailed or placed firmly on the substitutions bench,



**HLEMPM3**

*"The things I know I don't have to do I won't do, so you know like I won't go out with friends on a weekend"* **HLEPM33**

*"I've had to sacrifice some of the things I would have liked to have done but I know actually I wouldn't have enjoyed them if I'd been doing them [whilst studying]"* **HLEPMN43**

*"I will be glad when the summer comes because it feels like these things have been banished to "No Island" they're just gone you know social life enjoying anything you know"* **HLEXP MN3**

There were also indications that Hettie had begun to capitalise on sharing learning and resources to more efficiently fit everything in,

*"I have got a full time job now as well so how can I use that to my advantage in terms of what I do at work to help me with this and that's where I think that was quite helpful. I was looking for something else on [my assignment] ...and I came across, I'd forgotten we'd even done this [at work]"* **HLEPMN 16**

*"I'm starting to see those tenuous*



**LPEMP14**

*links but I probably don't understand them enough in a sophisticated or intellectual way fully” HLPEN22*

*“What I'm hoping will happen is as time goes on I'm more adept at being able to understand how to write the assignments so maybe it doesn't need as much time”*

**HLPEN33**

Unlike Jayne and Juliette, Hettie made no mention of any preferred learning space or the influence any specific learning space had on her studies. On university study days Hettie used the on-campus facilities outside her timetabled sessions. She would also undertake study in different areas of her home including the dining area and spare bedroom office. Equally she would regularly study on the train as she commuted to university,



**HLPEN11**

*“I stayed at the library as well afterwards” HLPEN10*

*I want to catch the train, I don't want to drive, that's a choice that I've made because actually I feel it could be more beneficial for me, I can do reading on the train and it's an opportunity to kind of switch off and think about stuff more productively” HLPEN34*

Hettie was getting reacquainted with herself as a learner and beginning to re-establish her own way, trying out and recognising what worked best for her at different times and in different contexts,



*"When I'm downstairs reading stuff"*

**HLPMEN13**

*"I have tried a couple of times to do it [studying] after work but I've just found that quite tiring to get into. So in the week is the stuff that I do so I'll do my boot-camp or I'll catch up with friends"* **HLPENM2**

**HLPEMP16**

Hettie did not appear to place any particular relevance on where she undertook her postgraduate study, however how she felt about being a working part-time postgraduate student was a hugely significant part of her story.

"It certainly has taken me out of my comfort zone in terms of how I feel and think" -  
Learning emotions and support

Hettie identified that she was *"emotionally reactive"* and found her return to study emotionally challenging. She referred to not being able to photographically capture *"Mr Messy in my head"* and gave the impression that her sense of control had slipped as *messiness* emerged leaving her starting to feeling unsettled. By our second meeting she certainly appeared more jaded, finding the affectual nature of learning quite difficult,



**HLEMP9**

*"It certainly has taken me out of my comfort zone in terms of how I feel and think about it [study]"* **HLPEMN1**

*"I need to keep motivating myself and not procrastinate which makes me feel like that [points to a confused woman image on the experience map] it also makes me feel very tired not just because on the days I come here I get up early to get the train but I'm tired because of thinking about that [points to MSc island/area]"*

**HLEXM6**

In the first semester Hettie looked for support and guidance from people with whom she had existing relationships; in doing so she illustrates again how one area of life (feelings and actions) can influence and run over into other areas of life.

*"We've got a new manager [at work] who I am struggling with, I've never struggled with a line manager in my life. I don't feel that I've got that support available either. I feel again probably a bit like when I was doing my degree not isolated as such but not huge levels of people I can draw on who will understand what I need them to understand to help me"* **HLPEMN56**

Although she joked about trying to recruit the help of her pets primarily it was her partner Pete who provided support.

*"I'm trying to teach my dog to do the ironing. Then the cat can cook my tea "*  
**HLPEMN32**

Pete was also a graduate and Hettie appeared to value his refreshingly different, complimentary and less emotive approach to academia and study. Her reflections possibly indicative of different approaches generally or perhaps gendered approaches to study.

*"What does help is he can be quite academic. ....He's a lot more of a thinker and cerebral I would say than I am so I think he's helpful.... very good with language and*

*words if there's stuff that I don't understand. Also the way he approaches thinking he is very critical in his thinking so can be more analytical.... Whereas I don't look at it like that I get drawn into what it's saying and think how do I feel about that. So it's been quite interesting to get his help in that way”* **HLPEMN57**

*“Whereas Pete doesn't get like that emotional..... I think he doesn't allow himself to get stressed by those sorts of things and he'll just look at it very objectively and ask quite probing questions whereas I suppose I feel the pressure with everyone, I need to understand what they're saying, I need to understand what that means”* **HLPEMN59**

*“... so he's quite good [to have] around I suppose. I think if there were two of me living in our house then I don't think it would be a very good thing but if there were two of him living in the house nothing would ever happen or get done”* **HLPEMN61**

In making comparisons between her partner and herself Hettie implied that she perceived a dissonance between her emotional and pragmatic approach and the expectations of academia and university life.

### **In summary**

Hettie had a strong professional identity with work being a key part of her life which had prompted her return to HE. Working full-time whilst concurrently studying part-time took her away from the comfort and security of her home life with her partner and pets. As work and study began to compete for her time and attention she began to feel overwhelmed, daunted and unsure of her postgraduate capability. Very much aware of her emotions, she balanced these with an aspiration to become familiar and efficient in academic writing and study. Becoming more efficient required Hettie to sacrifice and postpone her leisure and social time, along with the use of her self-discipline, planning and structured approach so that she could fit everything in whilst juggling the expectations of work and university.

Hettie



### Visual Summary of Hettie's story

Hettie's story continues in chapter 5 using the SWP I further analyse how Hettie attempts to tame the 'islands of hell' and survive the perfect storm created by the addition of a new social world in her SWS.



Jayne's story was captured around the end of the first semester in her second year of the MSc programme; having successfully completed all the modules she had studied at that point. Her focus was primarily on her past and current experiences, as she reflected on how some aspects of her life had changed. With a similar first headline to Claire, Jayne starts by telling me about the fullness of her life in which part-time postgraduate study has become a part.

**"All the other stuff that's going on in my life at the same time" - Studying a small part of life**

Jayne had taken photographs to emphasise that part-time study was something else she was trying to fit in,

*"What I tried to do when I was taking photos was to capture the fact that whilst you're studying all the other stuff that's going on in my life at the same time be it pleasurable or not"* **JOPEMN1**

A wife and mother of two daughters, Jayne's life was already very busy before her return to HE. Unlike the other participants who worked full time in health and social care; Jayne worked three days a week managing an area of health care in the community but also played an active part in the setting up and on-going behind the scenes running of their family business,



**JOPEMP13**

*"Before I started doing the university course, I would work three days here [community based healthcare] and then the other two days doing all the administrative stuff for our own business"* **JOPEMN7**

*"We set up our own business just over five years ago which I fully supported my husband doing, project managed all of that because he can do all catering side but didn't know about opening a business and premises and all that stuff so I did all that bit and invested a lot of time and effort into that and still now do all the accounts and all that"* **JOPEMN61**

She readily admitted to having a natural tendency to fill her time as much as possible but this generally did not result in having any time for herself,

*"I am quite a busy person anyway"* **JOPEMN79**

*"I will always fill my time I suppose"* **JOPEMN55**

*"I used to do.....stuff that I've now given up, .... I used to help with school, chair the school committee"* **JOPEMN54**

*"and I don't ever have any time to myself"* **JOPEMN52**

Rather ironically, the mindfulness classes she had started around the same time as her return to HE very quickly went by the way to make space for her postgraduate study.



*"P11 is about, it's mindfulness"*  
**JOPEMN48**

*"It's a class yes, a group and there's like a twelve week initial ... programme just about how to stop worrying about things and just to try and pace your life"* **JOPEMN51**

*"I went to the first bit and then I started Uni and then I didn't go to any more I haven't got time to do that"*  
**JOPEMN52**

### **JOPEMP11**

Jayne's part-time attendance at University was supported by her employer, who also provided financial support.

*"I've got support from work in terms of I get the day off to come to attend university and financial support"* **JOPEMN23**

*"The fact that I get the day off to go doesn't mean that I get [it] acknowledged in what*

*work I get, I just have to do it" JOPEMN25*

Jayne had taken a very business-like approach to planning her study particularly in the first year. She was very clear that all the additional self-directed study and completion of assessments fell outside her employed time. Instead she scheduled one day a week taken from time allocated for the family business despite acknowledging the MSc programme had direct relevance and application to her role in health care,

*"The course is very relevant to my [healthcare] job" JOPEMN20*

*"I find it really relevant, [but] I would never study in work" JOPEMN22*

*"Because I work three days I've never asked for any study leave" JOPEMN23*

*"I was going to do Uni one day and business stuff the next day, you know [in] the two days off" JOPEMN42*

Jayne described herself almost mechanistically switching between the different parts of her life. I suggested to her that it sounded almost as though she could push a button and switch from one part of her life to the next; she agreed,

*"Yes and I'm like that here [in the workplace], it sounds silly but I have completely different clothes that I'll wear for work because that puts me in work mode "right I'm in work mode now" and I'll come into work and do work stuff, yes so I am a bit like that I have to switch to the modes for what I'm doing" JOPEMN14*

In combining part-time study with home, family and two separate and fairly unrelated work lives, Jayne was keen to emphasise the amount of juggling she had to constantly undertake. Returning to HE her time management was purposeful, business like and ultimately meant that sacrifices had to be made at the expense of the family business and herself. However, it was her career in health service management that appeared to have driven her to undertake postgraduate study.

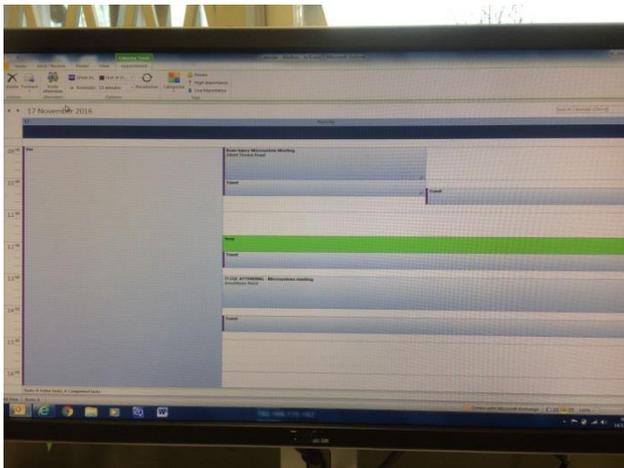
**"The competition out there and I'm not getting any younger" - Work a background driver**

For Jayne the decision to return to HE was personally driven by wanting to complete a degree but also career driven. Like other participants Jayne acknowledged the competitive nature of

the job arena and was concerned about getting overlooked and overshadowed by younger better qualified applicants,

*“It's personal reasons really, I think for my job as well probably. My last handful of jobs it's been on the person spec that you need a degree or an MSc... I've been able to get around that through experience it often says 'or relevant experience'....I did pass my first year at uni and I always put that down to show that I can work to that level, I just chose not to.... so I think part of it is a bit of a personal I've always said I would do it so I want to do it. And the other bit is actually the competition out there and I'm not getting any younger and there are people getting my experience and the qualification ... and then I'm automatically getting put on that pile that hasn't got it [the job] so there's that as well”* **JOPEMN20**

Although it was never a central part of our conversation, Jayne did tell me about her work and taking a new a role which had been newly created. However, there was very little to suggest that she felt unsettled or found things difficult in the workplace. At times, juggling her diary and university attendance proved difficult (possibly due to being employed part-time). Jayne had reached the decision that, whenever possible she should prioritise her learning, however, being highly committed to her job and organisation she was somewhat uncomfortable about doing so.



**JOPEMP8**

*“This is me juggling diaries”* **JOPEMN72**

*I'd got all these meetings that ... I was having to send apologies and actually on P9 I'm meant to be teaching as well so it was about the balance of me saying I can't attend those meetings, I can't teach on that day because I need to be at uni and it was that balance of do I support myself and my learning and get someone to cover my other stuff or do I do my job”* **JOPEMN73**

*“I've not missed [university days] but I am probably going to have to miss a*

*half day ... but again that's my choice, I could say no [to a work commitment] but it's here and I'd be leading it and I think it's really important for the organisation” JOPEMN75*

Jayne had a set base but also regularly travelled to visit other sites, but unlike some participants Jayne felt if anything this deterred any mixing of work and post-graduate study or reading,



**JOPEMP10**

*“I'm based here but the teams that I support and the other things are out and about... it's not masses of travelling at all ...so I hop on a bus and go ... but I think it was just about saying look my job isn't just sat behind a desk and could maybe just flick to do a bit of reading if I wanted to, I'm actually travelling and going to do other things, that's why I threw that one in I think”*

**JOPEMN78**

In her new role Jayne had greater responsibility for leadership and management which had prompted her to extend her learning and it appeared that the course was helping her in role the workplace,

*“I've always been in quite operational roles and this is more strategic I still need to do some operational stuff but learning how to be slightly more strategic and I suppose that's where maybe the uni stuff comes in” JOPEMN38*

*“It's also helped in terms of I now manage two members of staff ...and it's helped me look at that a bit differently and my style of management or leadership about how I maybe need to adapt so I find it really relevant” JOPEMN22*

Her experience map does not really feature work as a separate entity and only receives a fleeting mention in her guided tour. Perhaps underplayed or understated, the overall impression Jayne gave was that although undertaking a new role at a new level in the organisation this part of her life was relatively straight forward and settled. She had been able to take her postgraduate learning to change how she operated and thought in her management role. However, her story highlights that taking her approaches and skills from work to change how she operated and thought as a learner, proved more troublesome.

### **"It's about having a set place and a set time" - Fixed views and internal battles**

There are a few occasions when Jayne could be considered to portray a fairly fixed mind-set or approach, particularly about herself as a learner.

*"I think ... this is just how my head works. Just the kind of person I am I think"*

**JOPEMN57**

*"It probably is to do with the fact that I like everything to be right"* **JOPEMN82**

Like Juliette she identified as a perfectionist and whilst not necessarily obvious to everyone she also admitted to not being an overly confident person. Her lack of confidence was also evident as she recalled her difficulty in adapting to the changing learner groups in some elective modules; specifically recounting a time when the group had become dominated by clinically based peers,

*"People are from very different backgrounds... I was very conscious for one of the modules, everyone seemed very clinical and there was me and one other I think and all the conversations were going clinical and I found it really hard to adapt and I'm not from a clinical background"* **JOPEMN91**

*"I mean it was fine, there was nothing wrong with them but I just felt a bit like a fish out of water in that particular case I suppose"* **JOPEMN92**

Unlike her 'openness to change' in the workplace, Jayne suggests that in the university environment uncertainty and change made her uncomfortable. Having known parameters and regularity appeared to be linked to Jayne's level of confidence. She mentioned during our conversation the module she was studying at the time, questioning why it should deviate from

the single assessment point she had become accustomed to in previous modules. Although her tone and words were quite calm, Jayne came across a little irritated by what she perceived to be an unrealistic requirement which lacked appreciation of her life outside university.

*"I'm really struggling with this particular one because there are two assignments at the same time and I know there's a month in between but ..... you can't write an assignment in a month, you've got to do all the stuff before.... so I'm not quite sure, I don't really understand why for this module we've got two assignments and why it is the way it is, I'm struggling with that"* **JOPEMN95**

*"I kind of feel like you're getting that so let's throw another thing at you and see if you can handle this then, if you've got through that..."* **JOPEMN98**

Order and routine in the learning environment appeared to be a requirement for Jayne; she had quite fixed ideas about where she would undertake her study again suggesting that she liked set places and set times for set activities.

*"I have a little office at home and I tend to shut myself in there because I like to have all my books, I like to have everything around me and just be able to pack up and leave them there rather than moving around the house"* **JOPEMN3**

*"I like to have everything in the office"* **JOPEMN5**

*"It's about having a set place and a set time"* **JOPEMN6**

When I followed this up by asking Jayne about the possibility of perhaps undertaking her study downstairs, she confirmed the importance of a child-free, orderly learning space,



*"No because I've got kids and it would just... well P2 shows what chaos my lounge is normally in so it's just not really practical to be working downstairs"*

**JOPEMN4**

### **JOPEMP2**

Jayne had portrayed herself as a learner with a definite preference for familiarity, order, routine and structure in a learning experience. When her experience deviated from her well embedded expectations of learning, Jayne identified personal difficulty in being flexible, adapting or moving outside her comfort zone. There was possibly some internal conflict at play for Jayne as she tried to reconcile her expectations and the reality of being a working part-time student. Jayne makes obvious her hesitation and lack of confidence in the university or postgraduate context; I returned to the transcripts and photos a number of times to better understand why that might be.

### **"I probably portray that I'm quite confident " - An imposter lurking?**

Quite early in our conversation Jayne drew attention to having withdrawn from an undergraduate course at the end of the first year. I sensed possible hesitation by Jayne in revealing this as she decided not to elaborate at that point,

*"I went to uni 22 years ago, didn't do a full degree for various reasons but did a first year"* **JOPEMN13**

Having not graduated, Jayne's entry to the MSc course was outside conventional entry requirements for studying as a post-graduate and as such her academic ability perhaps 'untested'. It would be only reasonable for her to question her entitlement, participation and belonging as a postgraduate in HE where she admitted to feeling lost,

*"I'm a bit of a skim reader or if I*



**JOExMP**

*could watch it in a programme I would or if someone could just summarise it for me, that would be my ideal, if there's something happening in the news I wouldn't pick up a newspaper I'd just go can you tell me what's happened"*

**JOPEMN69**

*"I don't know if it's because I'm not particularly used to writing assignments. I didn't do a full degree so writing assignments, referencing, all the wide reading, theory and putting into practice was just a completely new concept for me. Whether or not I'm spending more time than your average student... I don't know, but that's been my huge learning curve"*

**JOPEMN9**

*"I'm just kind of, like I am in the middle of it all and what do I do now? I just don't know where I'm going and I just get a bit lost in the middle of the ocean"* **JOExMN4**

Later in our conversation, she came back to her previous university experience recounting vividly the negative feelings she still harboured about her under-graduate experience,

*"Even if I'd done my whole degree this is just a completely different thing, it doesn't resemble anything, but I don't have happy memories of that university"* **JOPEMN17**

*"No not at all, I hated it"* **JOPEMN18**

Jayne did not in any way confirm this had influenced her current her post-graduate experience but she did tell me it had motivated her return to HE,

*"It's influenced my decision to do it because I always said when I packed up Uni that I would want to do something at some point"* **JOPEMN19**

Indeed, picking through her narrative accounts Jayne outwardly portrayed an efficient, professional, and business-like demeanour. However she later alluded to the possibility that she had almost become accustomed to hiding any degree of vulnerability and how people perceive Jayne was not necessarily a reflection of how she actually felt,

*I'm not very... if I was to describe myself as not very confident I think there would be a few people who would go "you not confident" because I probably portray that I'm quite confident* **JOPEMN30**

Despite the credible grades she received, Jayne did not seem to perceive she deserved to be a postgraduate student, almost 'an imposter' in the academic arena. She confirms her reluctance to sharing her assignments or exposing herself to possible criticism from others, for example in her comment,

*"No I think it's because I think people will be critical about it, I think people will critique it a bit, I'm not very good at saying I've written this assignment and I got a good mark for it, do you want to read it? I think people might read it and go really, you haven't put this or that "* **JOPEMN31**

And so despite evidence to the contrary Jayne continued to doubt herself well into the second year.

### **"Peak of Panic" - Assessment crescendos and taming the panic**

Jayne told me about her first-year struggle to contain her part-time study physically, temporally and emotionally, signifying her expectations and reality of postgraduate study did not correspond,

*"I thought okay I'll do one day for the business and one day Uni what I found was it didn't really work like that because it was taking a lot more time than I expected to do my Uni stuff, far more than a day a week, particularly when my assignment had to be in"* **JOPEMN7**

*"Yes I am the kind of person that will just let it take over"* **JOPEMN58**

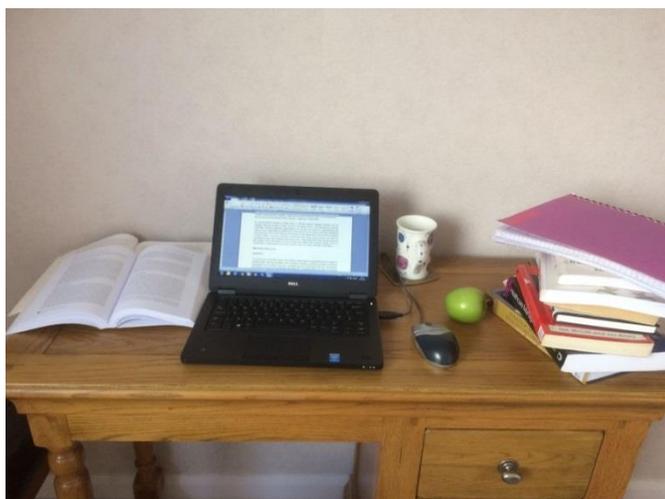
The time Jayne committed to self-directed study and completing assignments was beyond her expectations and the designated study hours identified in the module descriptors. Exacerbated by her perfectionist tendencies, this signalled to Jayne that she was not performing at the same level or speed as peers or as expected by the course. Consequently she felt that she was taking too much time away from other things which caused further conflict,

*“For me it is the time element of it... I don't think I appreciate... well it's a lot more self-study, I've never actually counted up the hours you know to compare to what it says at the top of the module [descriptor], I've never actually worked it out. It sort of says how many are self-learning but for me .. I know that there are people here who book three days off work and write their assignment in those three days and I just think I'd never do that - it took me three days to proof read and just tweak it **JOPEMN80***

Jayne developed her individual study approach through trial and error,

*“No it's either when the kids are in bed or out of the house, I can't do it when they're in the house, I've tried that probably twice I think when my husband's been off work at weekends” **JOPEMN15***

The first year had very much been about Jayne establishing some rules, order and routine. Whenever possible she scheduled and blocked out time to study treating it almost like a day at work,



**JOPEMP3**

*“I like to have a day, as the assignment approaches I have to because that's the only way I can get it done. But ideally with all my reading and stuff I like to go "right I'm not in work today, the restaurant stuff is going to have to wait, I'm going to do my study" I drop the girls at school, drive over to my Mum and Dads, pitch up there for a day and then leave in time to pick the girls up from school*

*and do that and that's how I like to do it... I like big blocks of time ideally"*

**JOPEMN9**

Introducing her daughter, Jayne confirms her intention to only study during the week. With her husband working in the family business most weekends Jayne was adamant that she wanted to spend time with her family caring for her girls.



*"I don't ever work [study] because my husband works weekends, so P12 is one of my daughters she loves baking"*

**JOPEMN58**

**JOPEMP12**

However in the lead up to an assignment submission point Jayne reluctantly had to fit in additional ad-hoc study time in the evenings when her husband was working and children in bed,

*"I'm not very good at doing an hour in an evening, by the time I come in, sort the kids out, cook tea and stuff it's ten o'clock when I sit down and get the computer out which I will do because I've got to but I can only do an hour, I can't do two because I'm up for work the next day"* **JOPEMN7**

Furthermore each time a submission point neared, she had to compromise on her study free weekend rule. Usually this would mean making alternative arrangements for her daughters, calling on the support of her family,

*"I never really work [study at the weekend] other than if my assignment has to be in. My last assignment I asked if they could get cover in the restaurant so I'm not relying on Mum and Dad so much so he [husband] got cover in the restaurant and he took them out for the day, he booked the weekend off work" JOPEMN60*

In Jayne's guided tour of her ExpMap, assessment points are part of the 'peak of panic'. In fact the assessment schedule was a constant focus throughout her story and could almost be described as a barometer in Jayne's life. I very much sensed the build-up of anxiety as the assessment submission loomed,



**JOExMP7**

*"Peak of Panic at the top here..... that's me doing an assignment" JOExMN2*

*"[I] got myself in a right pickle" JOPEMN52*

*"I've got a horrible January and February coming up with work and the Uni assignments, every assignment I have a breaking point where I just go aah can't do it" JOPEMN55*

Each peak of panic was then followed by relief for Jayne on receiving her grades which gave her the motivation and encouragement to continue. Panic was still part of her story in the second year of the MSc course; implying Jayne tended to revert back to her internal battles and self-doubt, despite increasing external evidence of her ability ,

*"I find when you get the result back and you've passed I find it really rewarding and I think right keep going" now I think I'm halfway through, right... so it is rewarding JOPEMN68*

*"I am really conscious... and quite concerned about it [current second year module] and I think even if I was to ask for an extension that's not going to help" JOPEMN99*

Jayne wrestled with trying to neatly contain or 'tame' her attention and time spent studying. She depicts the peaks of panic and troughs of reward as each assessment point builds and passes. As Jayne's internal conflict and self-doubt continued it was her family she turned to for support.

**"You have different reasons why you go to different people don't you? " - The importance of family**

Jayne did not seem to have much opportunity, drive, need or perhaps confidence to develop relationships with peers on the course,

*"I don't know if you get to know the people you're in a class with, you know like you could do a whole module but because it's only three days ... I'm seeing faces that I saw last year but I couldn't tell you where they work or who they are. You say hello but you don't really get to build those relationships but I guess that's down to the individuals isn't it as to whether they... do that" JOPEMN90*

Although she did approach academic module staff for support, Jayne was more comfortable in turning to her family who in their various ways supported her return to HE,

*"Depending on what module you're doing and what tutor you've got will influence my relationship, some are more approachable.... So for example I'll email you sometimes and kind of say can I just run this by you or whatever and I think certainly on a couple of modules last time I could approach the tutor and just say I'm really struggling with this, here's the structure what do you think about this I go to the library but I don't talk to anybody at the library, I just go, get my books and come out again" JOPEMN83*

*"They [family and parents] are [supportive] yes, also one of my brothers as well he's really good in terms of just giving me the positive, they both are but you have different reasons why you go to different people don't you? Yes my family are really supportive of me doing it" JOPEMN61*

Perhaps on a day to day basis she did not always feel that her study efforts were recognised or appreciated at home,

*"It's just not his [husband] bag at all, academic stuff but he can [help] in terms of taking the girls out"* **JOPEMN62**

*"I think he also struggles to understand how it could take so long to do, why you would give up your evening to read a book, he reads but not studying"* **JOPEMN64**

Certainly the end of her first year was marked by her husband arranging a celebratory night out which provided a rare opportunity to relax and socialise,



*"Basically when I passed my first year at Uni he got me a congratulations card and got me tickets to see Deacon Blue"* **JOPEMN43**

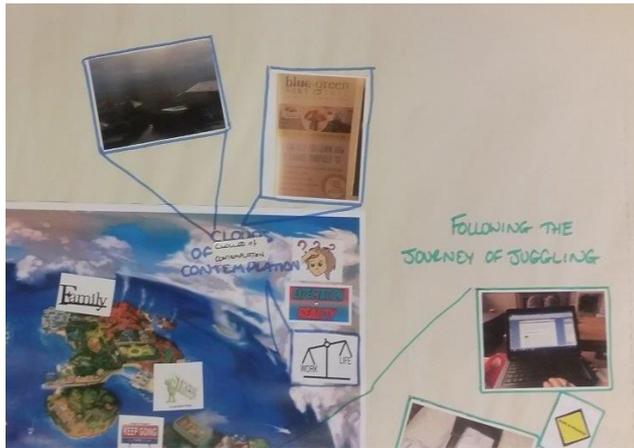
**JOPEMP6**



**JOPEM6**

*"Over here I've got I called it the Route to Relaxation - which is emm currently very underdeveloped but I did have a night out with my husband once, so I took a photo of it"* **JOExMN4**

Without hesitation it was her family that Jayne most relied on and turned to for support including taking time out of the family business to study, parents and husband providing child care whilst she studied and the moral support and encouragement of her immediate and wider family. Jayne grappled with taking time away from the family and relying on others for child-care which contributed in part to her feeling pulled and guilty. Jayne possibly perceived self-directed study as 'self-time'. On reflection Jayne considered prioritising her university attendance over her work or her family commitments a selfish act on her part and something she felt she should further rectify,



**JOExMP8**

*“ I don't think it is selfish but I'm going to use the word selfish because that's how I feel....I thought actually if I give the [workplace] enough notice they can cover me for teaching. No-one can do my Uni stuff for me, that's got to be me **JOPEMN74***

*“Clouds of Contemplation that I have ... looking at the kind of work life balance and looking at expectations vs reality and kind of just taking time out that's why I have got mindfulness... I took a bit of time out and that's me looking out of the window just trying to reflect on .... actually you've got an island with your family” **JOExMN3***



**JOPEMP 1**

*“It's kind of up here and looking down on this [family Island] going you've actually got a family there I don't know whether you have noticed that I haven't got any [family] pictures particularly which is really bad it's just kind of actually have you got this right and mmm I'm not quite sure” **JOExMN4***

Jayne certainly valued and drew attention to the support her family provided practically and emotionally despite having a limited understanding of the struggle and pull she felt. Yet she remained reluctant to further develop relationships with some academics and peers who might have had a better appreciation of the challenges she faced as a working part-time student. To some extent Jayne appeared to maintain a professional distance and possibly avoided being forced to reveal any insecurities or self-doubt to a wider audience.

**"Maybe it will become kind of nice and smooth and calm waters soon" - Redress and rebalance**

Completing the first year and 60 credits (Postgraduate Certificate) was a particularly significant milestone for Jayne. As she entered the second year she did quietly admit to feeling more confident in her own abilities and better placed to 'take herself in hand' using self-talk when needed,

*"Yes I suppose I have more confidence"* **JOPEMN93**

*"In the last module, it did make me think look you've felt like this three times before, you've always got it done, you know you'll get it because that's the kind of person you are"* **JOPEMN94**

Recommencing the local mindfulness group appeared to prompt Jayne to adopt a new approach to dealing with her assessment anxiety and make a little time for herself,

*"Anyway I decided to start again in September"* **JOPEMN52**

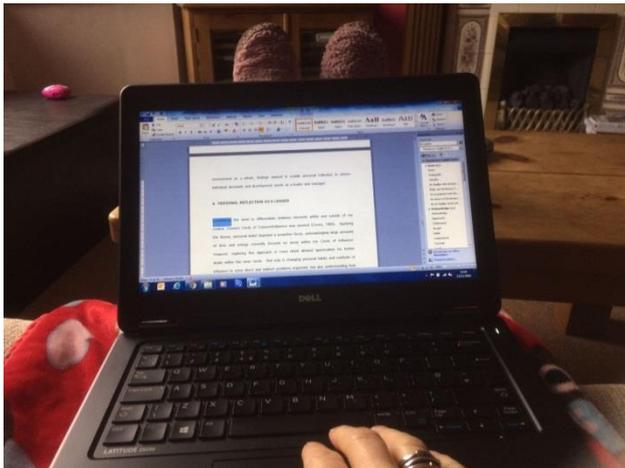
*"What I did notice was my last assignment ....I handled it very differently and thought you can either do this [panic] or you can do that [mindfulness], you always get it done so you will get it done, just stop stressing, go and have a cup of tea or go and do something... I'm going to keep doing that [mindfulness] so it is an hour... and that's my only hour that I have to myself during the week"* **JOPEMN55**

Although her confidence continued to waiver at times, it is fair to say her determination did not, although her reference to 'winging it' possibly suggestive of a belief that her place at university was accidental rather than deserved,

*“Actually I find this really hard being at Uni and that's one of the things I'll wing it, I can do it, I need to go and learn every bit I can from the attendance day” JOPEMN74*

*“Sometimes they look at me and think just give yourself a break but they know that I'm quite a determined person and I really want to do it [MSc]” JOPEMN61*

Jayne found later in the second year she was a little more flexible in her outlook finding it more acceptable and useful to add some ad-hoc reading to her scheduled block approach



*“I can do a little bit more of an hour here and there so I might do an hour and then make notes and stuff but I like to be able to do it for an hour sort of each day [whereas], if leave it a week then it's hard to get back into it” JOPEMN10*

#### JOPEMP5

Even when an unexpected celebration or one-off left-field events happened she was more comfortable working around these, taking charge and adapting to situations which were not ideal or different to how she would like. Like Hettie, she found it difficult to enjoy other things when assessment deadlines were imminent,



*“it [concert arranged by her husband] fell on that Saturday [pre-assessment weekend] and I was like 'no, no, that's my night where I've normally got my head in my books' but what it did was I thought 'no I'm going to enjoy it' so I just brought all my stuff forward a bit, I hadn't handed it in on the Saturday night but I'd got it more or less done, I just needed to top and*

**JOPEMP7**



**JOPEMP4**

*tail it on the Sunday and submit it but it was at a point where I could go out and relax and enjoy a night out" JOPEMN43*

*"when we were having this [loft conversion] done, in the evenings I was having to .... [use] my laptop on my knee in the lounge" JOPEMN5*

*"[with] my normal working space.. out of bounds I was having to travel over [to her parents] every day, well every time I needed to do any study, they've got a little desk and take my laptop" JOPEMN3*

Jayne identified the second year had signalled some change and she was feeling more at ease and settled,

*"With my learning like I say...[it] was a complete brand new concept, foreign, like "aah what am I doing?" .... obviously [now] I'm three modules down, well four now so coming back in September ..... I kind of knew where I was going, knew how to use the library, I knew the tutors so all of that has felt more comfortable because you're a bit more aware of it and I think all of that kind of thing has felt [settled]" JOPEMN89*

She also recognised a demise in her social life along with the need to start paying back some of the time and attention loaned to study. Her reflections suggested she was now able to pause, further refine her juggle, and restore some sense of balance,



**JOExMP10**

*"[points to Routes to relaxation] you know, that's where I want to be going, following these [Clouds of Contemplation] and I'm looking down that way thinking I kind of want to sort this out [Chaos Creek and Peak of Panic] and try and populate these [home and social life] a little bit more"*

**JOExMN5**

*"I can see it changing..... Chaos Creek is still a creek but maybe it will become kind of nice and smooth and calm waters soon and then I've got here 'Social life' is going off the edge of the page and that's kind of in my little imagination over here it's kind of yes it's not there"* **JOExMN6**

*"I can't say that I had loads of it particularly anyway not just through taking on University work but I do feel now that just doesn't happen because of all of these different juggles"*

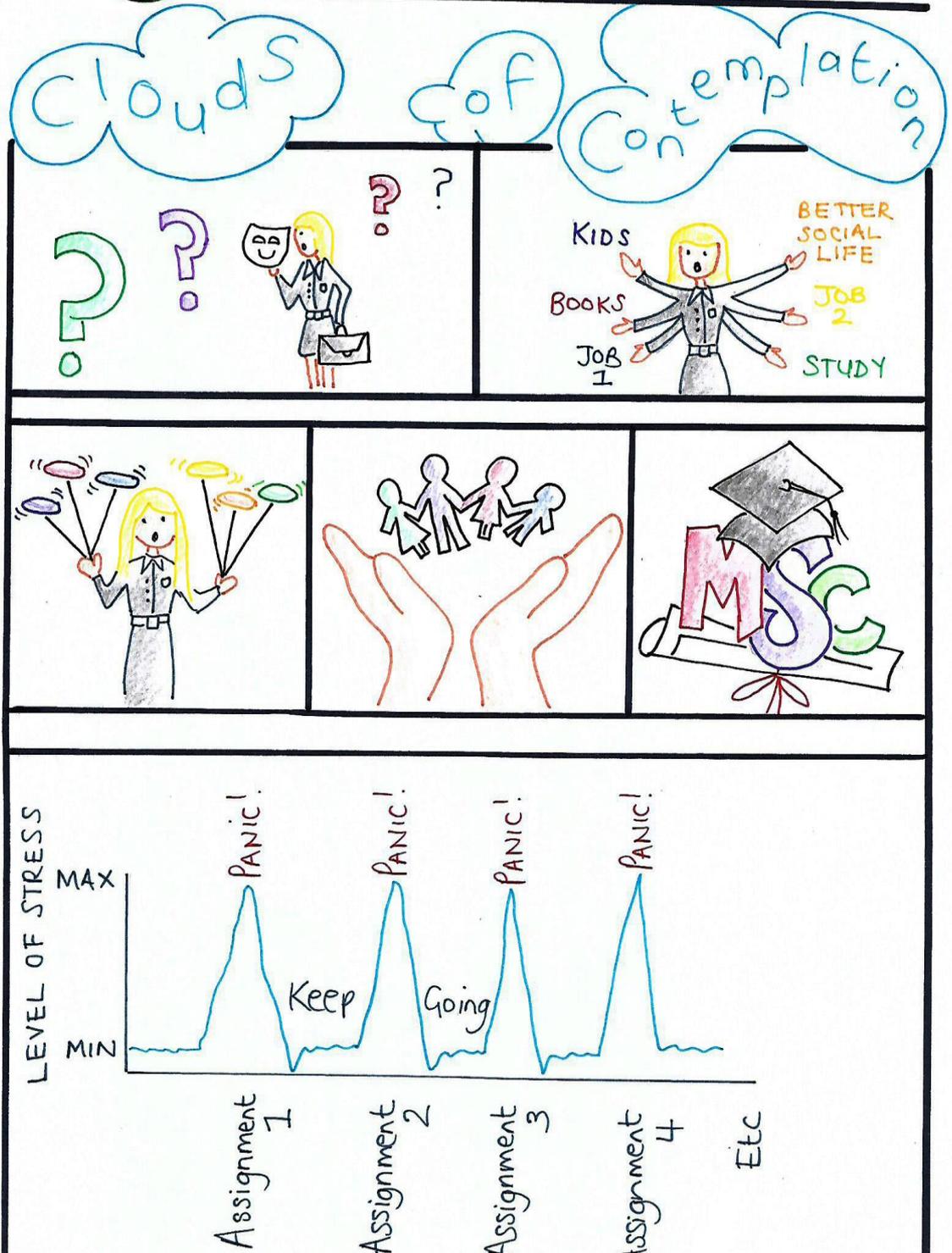
**JOExMN7**

### **In summary**

Jayne's story is somewhat unconventional in that she was not a graduate on entering the postgraduate world. Although she only directly links this to her decision to return to HE, she vividly recalled the negative feelings she held about her undergraduate experience. She includes implicit suggestions that this compounded her uncertainty and anxiety about her

academic ability and belonging in HE. She was a little guarded when uncertain, possibly maintaining a professional distance from others to avoid exposing her lack of confidence, academic insecurities or concerns. Instead, she received emotional and practical support from different family members but indicated that they could not fully appreciate her challenges and how pulled she felt juggling PT-postgraduate study. In effect, she initially created an illusion of what she thought and expected part-time postgraduate study should be. In the second year, despite some self-doubts lingering, Jayne began to question her structured approach to learning starting to make some adaptations as her confidence increased and she progressed on the course. She had possibly reached a point of feeling more orientated and settled in the PT-postgraduate world, allowing her to refocus, readjust and rebalance the competing roles and responsibilities in her busy life.

# Jayne THE JOURNEY OF JUGGLING.



## Visual Summary of Jayne's story

In chapter five returning to Jayne's story, SWP is employed to analyse the overcrowding and conflict in Jayne's SWS.

## 5.6. Esme

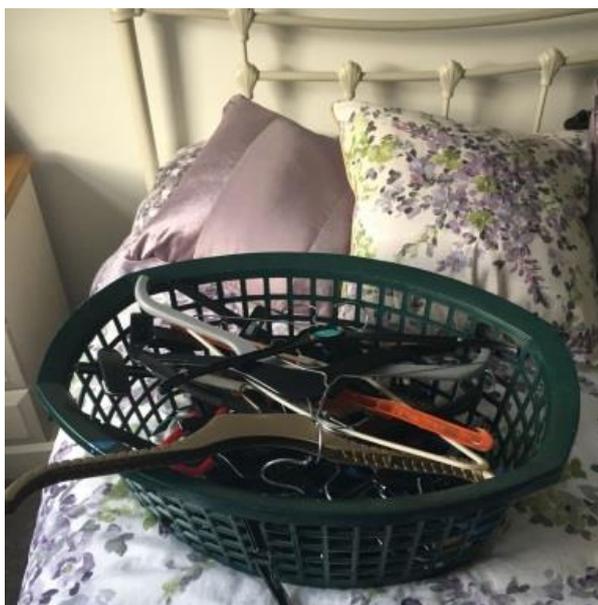


Figure 7 - Experience Map: **Dissertation World**

Unlike the other participants Esme had reached the end of the MSc programme. Having completed the dissertation her story was captured around the point of final graduation. Her story recounted the final dissertation year but in doing so she reflected on what had come before and hints at what might follow.

**"I am a completely different person" - Looking back a transformative journey?**

At the point of returning to HE, Esme's son was at University and her daughter was in secondary school. She indicated the whole family, including the dog, had to adapt to her having less time available and their home life not being quite the same,



*"Ironing was done at three/two o'clock in the morning or delegated to my husband, dog walking was delegated to my children"*

**ERPEMN4**

*"I am really quite an organised person and it was really distressing that it [home] was so messy"*

**ERPEMN5**

**ERPEMP2**

Esme had two teenage children who were studying and perhaps less dependent on her than some of participants with younger children. Certainly her son had some appreciation of how challenging returning to study could be for working parents.

*"My son....because he has seen how much of a struggle it was....it will make him continue [straight on to postgraduate study], yes he is wanting to do it now, he says oh I couldn't do it like you have having to juggle a family"* **ERPEMN28**

As Esme's story unfolded, the constant juggling act so prevalent in the other participant stories was much less apparent. Esme's primary storyline was without doubt the enormity of personal change and revelation she had experienced during the MSc programme.



**ERPEMP11**

*“P11 which is me in the mirror and I think I am a completely different person to three years ago” ERExMN35*

*“I think it changed ... how I am at work, how I deal with people, how I value people, but also it changed how I am at home as well. It has allowed me to help my son perhaps a little bit too much to write his dissertation, erm and also I think it has made those guys [children] feel completely differently about me actually like actually mum did do this” ERExMN26*

*“Discovering new things about myself, thinking about how I did view the world and how other people might view me as well really for thinking what I did and saying some of the things that I do say”*

**ERPEMN13**

Esme made it clear to me that returning to study had been transformative for her, personally and academically, which had a positive effect in both her home and work life.

**“I was amazed every time I submitted an assignment and I actually passed” – Postgraduate hesitancy and self-doubt**

Esme picked up on her return to education in both our discussions. She identified that she had previously completed a HE diploma and qualified as a radiographer. As a matter of principle, it would seem, she had not returned to complete a ‘degree top-up’ programme.

*“I completed a diploma for radiotherapy and I never did the degree top up because I never really agreed with it if I’m honest. I felt we should have equivalency and I didn’t want to do the degree” ERPEMN2*

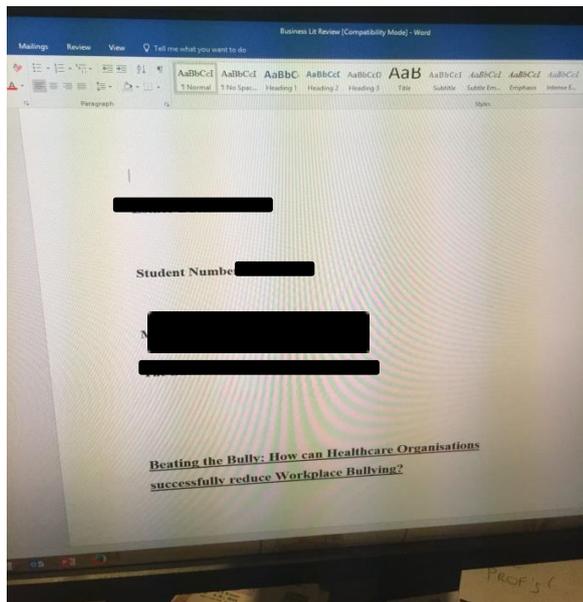
As she returned to University to study the taught Masters degree in a different subject she did so with some trepidation and self-doubt, which had been very palpable throughout the first year.

*"Certainly when I started the course was I don't know how to write academically I don't know how to reference, I don't have any formal leadership or management training"*

**ERexMN32**

*"I don't think much changed in the first year I don't think I was particularly confident in the first year, I think I was amazed every time I submitted an assignment and I actually passed"* **ERExMN49**

As Esme shared her story with another participant in the ExpMapping workshop, she offered some reassurances to Juliette acknowledging and normalising their feelings of doubt. Esme went on to identify a definite turning point at the end of the first year when her doubts began to subside and her confidence grew. Although not easy for Esme to explain or pinpoint specifically, a number of contributory factors are highlighted suggestive of her pragmatist nature,



**ERPEMP12**

Esme identified that her self-doubt had resurfaced in the dissertation year possibly as this represented another new area of study 'research'. Her hesitancy appeared to continue at least intermittently until the very end of the programme,

*"I think by the end of the first year something just clicked"* **ERPEMN50**

*"I honestly don't know, whether it was just confidence, actually I have done this and I do know what I'm doing"* **ERPEMN51**

*"I think they [assignments] were more contextual in the second year"* **ERPEMN53**

*"I don't know if it was time, if it was gathering skills"* **ERPEMN55**

*"I think it was extremely scary at first [starting the dissertation] to think that you were going to be started on this module and then cast out to complete it"* **ERExMN71**

*"[On submission of the final dissertation] I literally couldn't even press send, my husband pressed send because I couldn't do it"* **ERExMN32**

**"I lacked confidence in the beginning I needed to know that there was somebody there that I could just ask for help" - Learning the postgraduate game**

Esme found with increasing time and experience as a postgraduate learner she adapted and developed her academic writing and appreciation of critical thinking. As she gained confidence and began to recognise her growing skills and ability, her doubts about starting the MSc programme as a non-graduate declined.

*"In the first year I kind of had a quick sort of literature search, briefly read through everything and then started writing straight away whereas towards the end of the first year I spent much more preparation time, did a much better literature search, read all the information"* **ERPEMN56**

*"I gathered all the information before I started writing because nobody was really interested in what Esme thought"* **ERPEMN57**

*"And the referencing.....I was always panicking about was I formatting it correctly so perhaps as I got more used to just structuring an assignment"* **ERPEMN59**

On-going confirmation of her progress and the availability of support throughout the MSc programme had been important to Esme. This was another message of reassurance she conveyed to Juliette in the ExpMapping workshop. In doing so Esme alludes to having to expose her learner fragility, placing trust in the academics as she did so.

*"I think because I lacked confidence in the beginning I needed to know that somebody was there that I could just ask for help and that they weren't going to think that I wasn't capable of doing it. It was just going to give me some sensible answers and provide me with the skills just to carry on"* **ERExMN69**

*"You can always go and ask what did you mean by that, or what do you think I need to do to improve. So I think definitely always go back and ask, and never be afraid to ask"*

*for help. Or worry how many times you email”* **ERExMN31**

Probably more so than the other the participants who were at earlier stages in the course, Esme had higher regard for peer support and the development of peer relationships through the face to face contact in study days.

*“My colleague, who did her Radiotherapy MSc at the same time ...hers was all distance learning and I think she's missed out so much not having face to face interaction with the whole group”* **ERPEMN63**

In addition to being part-time, the MSc programme was structured to include a number of elective modules shared across two masters programmes and cohort years, which Esme considered to have benefits and draw-backs,

*“The part-time nature doesn't make it easy to develop relationships with peers just because they do change each time...you go to a different module. Although there were some people that I saw on several modules who I did develop a relationship with”* **ERPEMN65**

*“It was but it was quite nice to see familiar faces come back in but it was quite nice to get different dynamics every time”* **ERPEMN64**

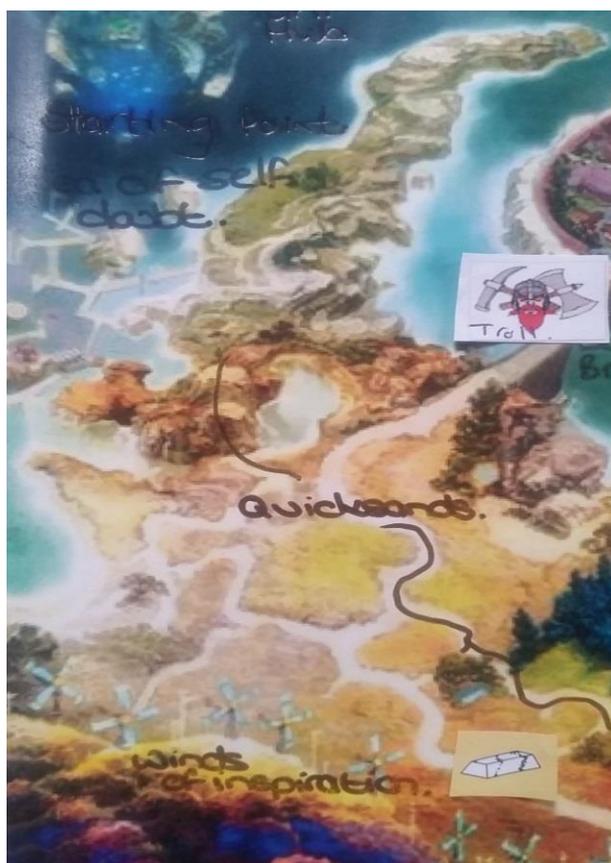
With increased confidence and support Esme found she was more comfortable participating in group discussions during University study days, which further reinforced her growing confidence and understanding.

*“Yes and I think the more you do contribute the more confidence you get, because you can test it out you understand it more don't you?”* **ERPEMN62**

As a non-graduate entrant to the MSc programme, Esme was initially sceptical and self-doubting as a postgraduate learner. Following a hesitant start, over the first year she began to establish what was required at Masters level and how to study part-time. She valued and accessed the support available from academics and peers; testing out and developing her postgraduate practice. Her story moves on to tell of her increasing trust in herself as a postgraduate in the final dissertation year.

## "You have got to trust in yourself" - Dissertation the final crusade

The dissertation phase was regarded by Esme as the final mountain to climb. She began with two years of postgraduate experience, a proven track record of increased grades, improved levels of confidence and self-belief and professional experience of leadership in healthcare. Despite all this Esme still had doubts about her starting non-graduate status and was initially daunted by the independent autonomous nature of completing the capstone research dissertation assessment.



ERExMP3

*"There is swirling sea all around, it's the "Sea of Self Doubt", because I kind of came from a point where I had done a diploma I have not done an undergraduate degree. So I think the whole three years have been err, well I am good enough, do I know what I am doing. So there is still a little bit of that starting [the dissertation]"* **ERExMN2**

*"It was extremely scary at first to think that you were going to be started on this module and then cast out to complete it"* **ERExMN71**

*"We had one starting lecture and then it was kind of go away, go and do it..., it felt like you were stuck there [at the beginning/start point] for a while thinking am I going to be able to do it?"* **ERExMN6**

She reflected on her apprehension around the dissertation proposal stage and the positive relief and boost she felt when gaining the required university approval to carry out the research project. Esme moved on to story her dissertation journey; the various points, barriers and facilitators along the way,

*“We have gone through Quick Sands, just kind of finding a question, finding out what I wanted to do, was it good enough? was it going to be ok? will I get a proposal through? erm all those kind of things where it just felt like I was never even going to get even started”* **ERExMN2**

*“Through the Winds of Inspiration. Just having, having self-confidence that actually I had got my proposal through, it went through pretty smoothly, and I felt like actually yes I do kind of have all the tools that I needed”* **ERExMN4**

Contemplating her own pragmatic strengths Esme began to trust herself. Even when distractions or unforeseen events occurred she remained focused and confident in her 'approved' proposal plan,



**ERPEMP6**

*“I had, set a time frame out with a really strict timeline and I had it laminated. I had one next to my desk at home, one next to my desk at work, and one in the kitchen. I used a score, so it said each month what I was going to be doing. And I knew that by the end month which was submission date....provided I had followed all that timeline, I could not fail to get to the end “* **ERExMN4**

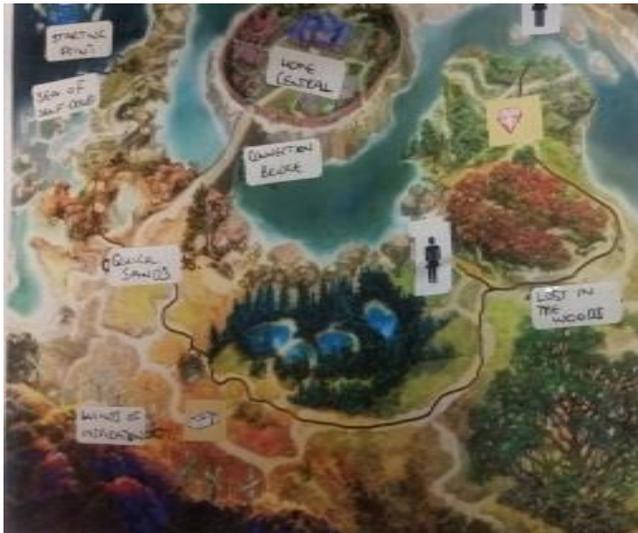
*“It's difficult with work, I just think work has to take precedent doesn't it and with staffing levels certainly in my department it would have been really easy to sort of think I'll do that next week. Having those rigid time plans and meeting points helped me say no I am going to get this done by a certain time”* **ERPEMN73**

*“Yes you have got to trust in yourself”* **EAEM35**

As Esme relayed her story it is apparent that her trust in herself had been tested by a number of 'stumbling blocks' during the final dissertation phase,

*"Lost in the Woods, where you come out of the proposal and I thought I knew what I was doing but then thought do I really? .....I have put other stumbling blocks in the Stepping Stones , Confusion Tunnel, Point of No Return" ERExMN7*

As Esme's dissertation supervisor there was some comfort for me, in knowing that she had trusted my guidance and support during some of the challenging times,



*"Lost in the Woods .... And the little, Lady Figures are Ann-marie, so always kind of there, it always felt like you had somebody, you knew exactly who to go to, that you were going to get the information you needed, that you could carry on, and it felt like she was almost kind of sat on my shoulder, no it was good" ERExMN7*

#### ERExMP5

The scheduled dissertation group meetings provided Esme with timed milestones, a measure of self-progression, valuable additional contact and moral support,



*"Base Camp ...which was kind of erm the[group] meetings that we had when everybody came" ERExMN9*

*"Feeling like you had to keep going and knowing....I..... had to complete the next bit to say... a) that meeting was going to be useful because I knew what we were going to be talking about the next bit, [and b] right I do weightwatchers so I have to follow weightwatchers because I have to*

## ERExMP6

*shame myself by getting on those scales at the end of the week and so it [group meetings] was almost like a little weigh in. I didn't want to go and say arrh do you know what I have failed, work got too much or the kids got too much" ERExMN11*

*"Actually that was quite useful to know that some people were ahead so had got through that bit and could give you tips, but also that you were doing ok, because there were people behind" ERExMN13*

*"I think we did support each other along the way which was brilliant"*

**ERPEM71**

But in comparison to the other stumbling blocks and challenges it was the 'point of no return' that visually appeared more ominous. It was much less comfortable for me as Esme's dissertation supervisor to hear when prompted, Esme expand on her experience of receiving my written feedback on her draft work. Clearly the impact had been significant and prompted her to temporarily return to her default position of questioning herself.



*"Point of No Return" ERExMN7*

*"After I got my first draft back, and I thought 'arrgh do I know what I am doing? It felt like I had got a long way to go at that point" ERExMN8*

## ERExMP5

Esme was both pragmatic and realistic in her account of the peaks and troughs of the dissertation experience. Although at the time I was unfamiliar with her metaphoric use of 'Mario Land'; her challenge-reward analogy was obvious,



**ERExMP2**

*"I have put little "Gems" and "Jewels" and they are over on "Gem Island"... they are, when you have gone through a difficulty and you come out of the other side...you think yeah I have kind of negotiated that and I kind of know where I am going. You get like a little gift, so some of the gifts were [points photographs], how I saw people at work [P8], or how I looked at different pieces of materials that I had gathered together [P10], so how I was looking at the world, how I was helping my children with their dissertation[P9] so these are all gifts that I got from completing the journey and it almost seemed like I had to go through a rough patch before I got a little gift. A bit like Mario land **ERExMN6***

Esme conveyed that despite entering the final dissertation phase of the MSc well positioned and with a clear track record of her academic ability and progression, self-doubt still lingered in the background. Again she valued and accessed the support of academics and peers, portraying a balanced account of the challenges and rewards of the final MSc climb. Each challenge that Esme overcame reaffirmed and authenticated her belonging and entitlement as a PT-postgraduate learner. Her determination and resilience appeared to contribute to Esme

believing in herself and her ability to successfully complete the dissertation. One of the messages I took from Esme was how immersive the experience of PT-postgraduate study had been and once over there was a further period of readjustment taking place.

**"It had taken my life over and actually I didn't realise what it had given" - Bittersweet finale, letting go**

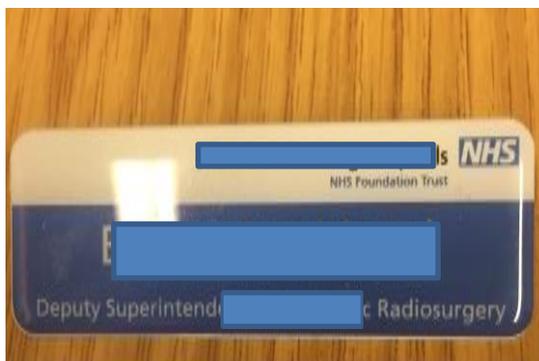
Extrinsically motivated Esme had embarked upon post-graduate study with aspirations of career progression. Her motivation to continue and complete the Masters programme became much more intrinsic, self-fulfilling perhaps even a little self-indulgent,

*"I think when I started it I thought it was more for work and more for career progression but I think [now] it is more for me really"* **ERPEMN34**

*"Kind of like a purpose that I was doing something for me that was not my kids, not my family, not even my work really it was something just for me"* **ERPEMN10**

*"Yes it had taken my life over and actually I didn't realise what it had given"* **ERPEMN9**

By the end of the MSc course she had successfully secured a promotion which she significantly attributed to her postgraduate study,



**ERPEMP7**

*"It's definitely changed my career pathway"*  
**ERPEMN31**

*"I think a lot of the reason I got the new role that I'm in is because I was completing a leadership and management MSc so without it I don't think I would have got the role"*  
**ERPEMN30**

*"I would ever have had the confidence, there's any chance that I would have gone for that role without doing the MSc"* **ERPEMN32**

Signalling the end of her postgraduate encounter, the final submission of the final assessed dissertation piece was a significant and memorable but bittersweet occasion. The mixed emotions evident as Esme reached 'Submission Summit',



**ERExMP6**

*"It was total euphoria submitting"*

**ERPEMN20**

*"I made him [husband] submit it and I kind of stood there and went is it done? and he said yes it has sent and I just burst into tears. Absolutely burst into tears. I said to him 'is it over?'"*

**ERPEMN21**

*"It was so emotional, to think that I had let my baby go and I really didn't want to"* **ERPEMN22**

Esme completed the programme in the minimum three-year period; a significant achievement in itself. Her sense of distance travelled and personal achievement was clear in her comments, and a little reluctantly in front of Juliette during the ExpMapping workshop she admitted to achieving an overall distinction when graduating with the MSc.

*"My grades were not brilliant in the first year, and there was a good jump in the second year"* **ERExMN32**

*"I did get a distinction"* **ERExMN33**

She had excelled and completed the MSc with the highest possible recognition. For the new Master of Health and Social Care Leadership, a period of celebration began which continued for some time,



*"That is the point where I submitted, there is a Champagne bottle on the desk, and I went into Party Town which is kind of where I am now still"* **ERExMN16**

**ERPEMP3**



*"I had all my family there at graduation"*  
**ERExMN17**

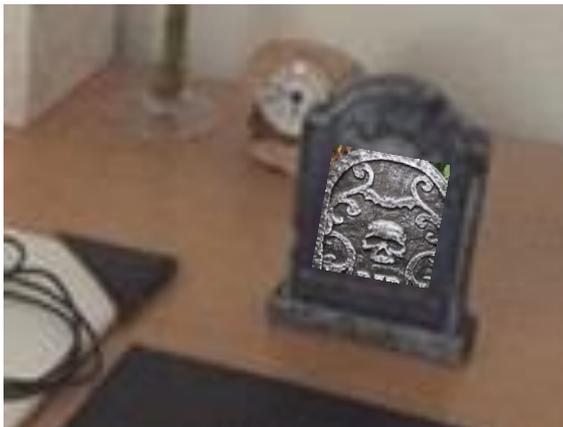
**ERPEMP13**

**"Never say never" - Not goodbye just so long?**

Amongst her elation and celebrations Esme found that she missed the challenge and rhythm of the looming assessment deadlines,

*"I do really miss having a go and having something to work towards and having something just for me really"* **ERPEMNA34**

Injecting humour into our conversation she talked about feeling a little lost and 'bereft'; not quite ready to say goodbye,



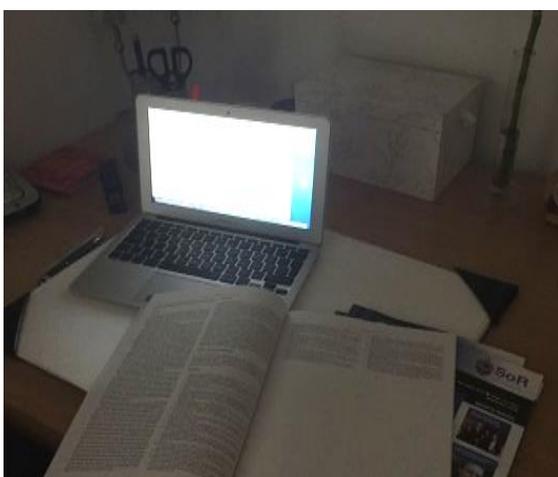
**ERPEMP4**

*“That was all I focused on, getting my life back, getting my desk clean and that's what I thought I wanted but quite quickly that's how I felt, it was Halloween, I don't have gravestones hanging around my house”* **ERPEMN7**

*“I felt a bit bereft really almost like I'd lost something that I really valued but I didn't really realise I valued it at the time”*

**ERPEMN8**

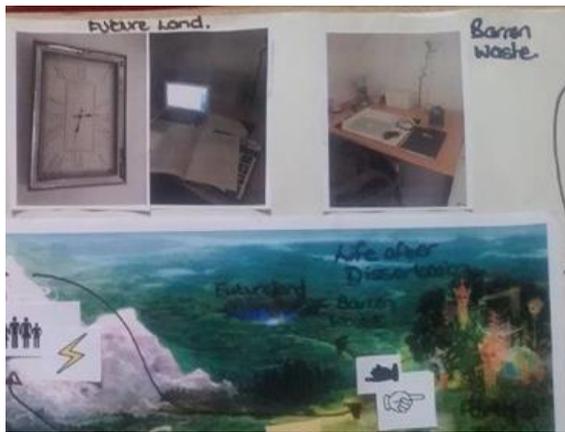
She aspired to publication and dissemination of her dissertation work and perhaps Esme was not quite ready to shut the door on the postgraduate world,



**ERPEMP5**

*“[P5] is me starting to think about writing it up to be published.....that is...my New Years' resolution* **ERPEMN33**

*“I want to publish because it was the extended role of the radiographer so I do want to get it out there, no matter how much I do say I do want to get it out there and get excited about it. I am still stuck there Barren Waste”* **ERExMN19**



*"We're [also] .....planning a presentation now for a group of radiographers and then we're hoping to take it further into a conference"* **ERPEMN79**

### **ERExMP7**

Probably for all sorts of reasons she was finding it difficult to say goodbye but also difficult to justify continuing with her new-found fondness of academia,

*"I am in "Barren Waste" at the moment. I know what I want to do, I want to write it all up. But in-between him [son] handing in his dissertation and partying I am finding it really difficult, to make myself get back into it"* **ERExMN17**

When I asked Esme about her continuation of academic or educational pursuit it sounded to me as though she was leaving the door ajar when she responded,

*"Never say never"* **ERExMN30**

**"What you have got out of it at the end is worth any amount of tears definitely" - The end justifies the means**

Despite the ups and downs, Esme's reflections were very much positive; her sense of achievement apparent and her messages intending to offer encouragement and inspiration

*"Yes you are managing to juggle all those things and keep your family afloat and keep going to work and you know doing a really good job at work"* **ERExMN 24**

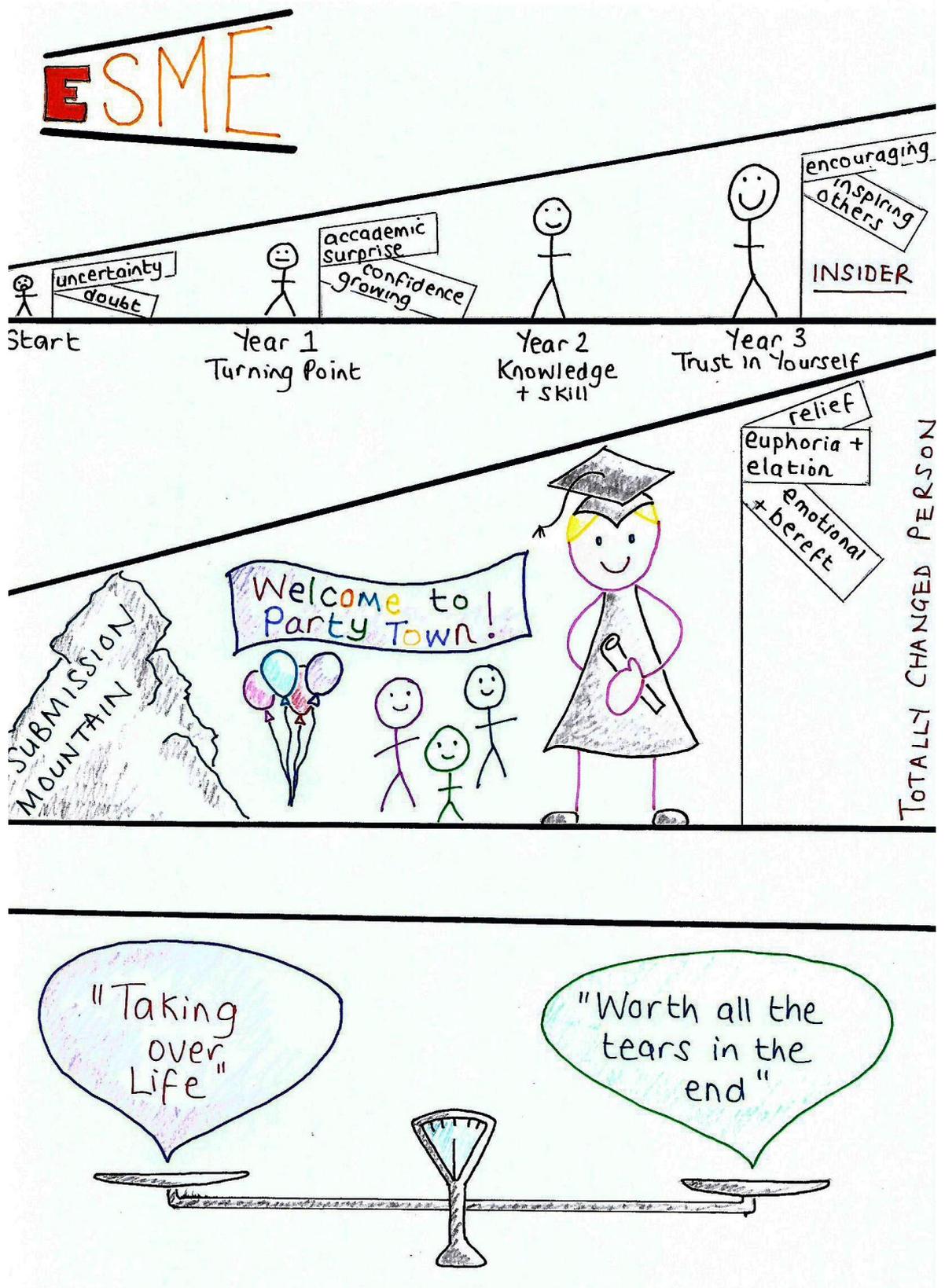
*"Yeah mum did do this and mum did well at it, and it's an inspiration to them isn't it?"* **ERExMN27**

*“What you will find is what you have got out of it at the end is worth any amount of tears definitely* **ERExMN25**

*“It's a major gift at the end of the day because.. especially as a mum, you are allowing yourself that journey. Like for better or for worse that's your gift to yourself and you are going to get so much out of it”* **ERExMN23**

### **In summary**

On returning, Esme had embraced HE and had very much engaged in becoming a PT-postgraduate learner. Over time her self-doubt subsided, confidence increased and she began to trust in herself. Becoming completely immersed her personal transformation and investment came through strongly and her message appeared to be one of active encouragement others. Having graduated, there was some reluctance on her part to let go and readjust, but it was clear that she felt her time as a part-time postgraduate learner had resulted in lessons and changes in her family, home and work.



**Visual Summary of Esme's story**

Through SWP in chapter 5 Esme's story offers further insight into the strategies she used to take control, reconfigure and align her SWS.

## **5.7. Conclusion**

The photography and ExpMaps provoked vibrant, compelling stories of the everydayness of the participant lives which had come to include PT-postgraduate study. Initially disorientated, overwhelmed and unsure of the expectations, practices and discourse of postgraduate study, it took varying lengths of time for the participants to feel more confident and stop questioning their entitlement and belonging. The participants balanced their stories with positive interpretations of their postgraduate experiences which emotionally included feeling excited, enthused and more confident in other areas of their life. They were also positive about being able to transfer their learning which affected their participation, influence and relationships in other areas. There was a definite message of lives in transition and self-transformation. The participants in their own ways developed strategies to manage their increased roles and responsibilities; this becomes the focus of analysis in section 6.5 as I construct a collective social worlds narrative of part-time postgraduate experience as a part of the wider life of each participant.

## 6. Chapter Five

### 6.1. Introduction

The previous chapter included part one of each participant story and their individual sense making of their postgraduate experiences. My introduction to social worlds perspective (SWP) came late in this study after data production and during the data analysis phase. In turn, the reader has an 'unconventionally late' introduction to the theoretical perspective which came to underpin the thesis. This chapter commences with an outline of SWP, before making two contributions to the SWP discourse, firstly in adding the notion of an individually patterned social world space (SWS) and secondly in detailing the *constellation process* I developed to illustrate and analyse each story.

The chapter then moves on to include part two of the individual stories which reposition the participant as a member of multiple social worlds in order to analyse their postgraduate transition and experiences as part of their storied life. I also explore the strategies used by the participant to manage and reshape their SWS. The final section of this chapter then draws together the individual stories to contribute a collective social world narrative analysing the experiences of this small group of mature part-time postgraduates who were concurrently working. This details how they collectively storied their social world identities (self), participation and transitions between the multiple social worlds and roles, the interactions and intersections of those social worlds, which were both synergetic and conflictual, and the strategies used which influence the sense of balance or imbalance in individually patterned social world spaces.

### 6.2. Social Worlds Perspective

Part one of each participant story found in chapter four, tells of the roles, responsibilities, expectations, people, places each participant was fitting into their lives along with part-time study. The literature reviewed and the theoretical frames explored when writing the stories at that point had not sufficiently captured or helped me understand the less tangible structuring and fluidity woven within each story. Eventually a paper by Kazmer and Haythornthwaite (2001) pointed me the social worlds perspective (SWP). The study, like this one, found participants refer to this 'juggling' of multiple roles and responsibilities as they encountered the new on-line world through a distance learning programme. Commenting on the earlier

work of Clarke (1991) the authors advocate SWP recognises and helps to frame and understand the inherent complexities of human social organisation. Furthermore, SWP facilitates description of the spheres of activity and exploration of an individual's experience in its entirety, lacking

“the affective baggage of the often imprecise term *community* and allows description of spheres of individual activity without necessitating the attainment of intangible, group-orientated experience" (Kazmer & Haythornthwaite, 2001, p511).

This also resonated with me in that I had considered communities of practice (CoP) theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Despite the more recent recognition of 'existing community members' 'constellations' and 'border crossing' within the COP theory, this sense of 'community' was not the focus of the individual stories told or the individual paths each participant appeared to be treading.

The concept of social worlds is rooted in the Chicago symbolic interactionism tradition (Shibutani, 1955; Strauss, Anselm, 1978; Unruh, 1979). According to Strauss (1978) social worlds are universes of discourse which are profoundly relational. More specifically

"social worlds are amorphous and diffuse constellations of actors, organisations, events and practices which have coalesced into spheres of interest and involvement for participants, it is likely that a powerful centralised authority structure does not exist" (Unruh, 1980, p.277).

Social worlds act as contexts for the activity or work carried out, the organisation of which evolves through negotiations amongst the social world members (Gerson, Elihu M., 1983). Social worlds are not necessarily defined by formal boundaries, membership or spatial territory (Unruh, 1979), however, through commitment and participation in the social world shared perspectives are developed that contribute to individual and collective identities (Strauss, Anselm, 1978). The borders of a social world can be **physical** (defining *where* domain relevant behaviour takes place), **temporal** (differentiating *when* time is spent in each social world and *how* our time is divided) and **emotional/psychological** (determining the *rules* which dictate the thinking, behavioural and emotional patterns appropriate to domains and roles) (Clark, S. C., 2000; Hall & Richter, 1988). The boundaries can be either perceived or actual and are created by both the individual and the social world setting.

It could be seen from the conversations, experience maps and photography that participants storied their lives into three distinct areas home, work, university each with a specific purpose and main activity. Each contained a social world committed to certain activities with shared ideologies about how they go about 'their business' (Becker, 1982). As PT-postgraduate students, the participants were 'traversing and transitioning' between the social worlds which pattern their individual life juggling the multiple and changing roles and memberships held at any one time. Yet the literature review had revealed little about how these worlds combine in the daily lives of PT-postgraduates. Phelan suggests SWP is generic and transcending in providing a framework which can help educators to think more holistically about learners, the strategies they use to traverse boundaries and the structures and practices of universities which could require students to give up or hide important features in their wider life (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991).

### **6.3. Constellation Process Illustrating Social Worlds Space**

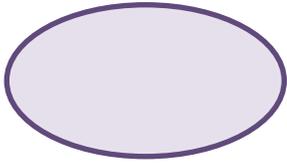
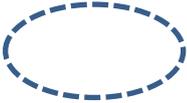
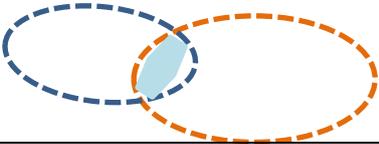
Heterogeneity, fluidity and multiplicity in the different areas of life which we all inhabit are the epistemological assumptions which embed SWP (Bogardus, 2012; Muggleton, 2000; Tovey & Adams, 2001). Trahar suggests "people and their stories do not always 'fit' the theory" (Trahar, 2013, p.xiv). SWP enabled me to foreground the individual with enough theoretical structure to frame the inherent chaos of the entangled and evolving stories without being heavily prescriptive or too restrictive. In doing so this chapter now makes a contribution to understanding how SWP can be used to promote awareness and frame postgraduate experience and transition and promote awareness of the dynamic nuanced complexity of this experience for each part-time postgraduate learner. SWP provided a frame which then allowed me to delve deeper into postgraduate experience as a social world and each participant as a member of the PT-postgraduate world. Adopting SWP, I returned to the individual stories where I was able to frame each dynamic, evolving participant story to further examine the social worlds they inhabited.

Inductively I moved backward and forward between individual stories and SWP (Clarke & Star, 2008; Strauss, Anselm, 1978) but also touched upon Field Theory (Lewin, 1939), Border theory (Clark, S. C., 2000; Hall & Richter, 1988), and Social Identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel,

2010), to establish that each participant story evidenced a constant state of (re)negotiation and flux. The individual self was subject to transformation and change influenced by experiences of participating in multiple social worlds. Contributing to the SWP discourse, it is argued here that a third layer of flux and renegotiation takes place. Each participant story illustrated a uniquely patterned and managed constellation of social worlds and borders which I refer to as a social world space (SWS),

1. Social (world) self		<b>Transformation and changing self</b> - the stories provided evidence that participants were changing and transforming personally and academically.
2. Social world		<b>The business of Social worlds</b> - a number of differences and similarities were evident in perceptions, values, expectations and practices of the participants and others as members of home work and the PT-postgraduate social worlds
3. Social world Space		<b>Individually patterned constellations</b> - each participant story illustrated an individual constellation of multiple social world memberships, transitions, border management and crossing.

I developed the following *constellation process* to build up the layers in each participant story including the interactions and negotiations at play in the above three inter-related levels of the SWS.

<p>The <b>Social world Self</b></p>	
<p>Treads a path through the mosaic of Social worlds constructed by society. Creating a <b>Social world Space</b> that is individually patterned</p>	
<p>This comprises a number of <b>Social worlds</b> each generating ideologies about how their work and associated roles should be undertaken (Clarke, 1991). Each Social world and associated social roles have borders which demarcate and differentiate it from another Social world (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, S. C., 2000; Clarke &amp; Star, 2008). In the PT-postgraduate World, the primary focus and specific activity is postgraduate study, the members of a social world take on the associated social role (postgraduate learner).</p>	
<p>Some Social worlds remain separate; their activities and roles highly contrasting, their borders strong, inflexible and impermeable (Ashforth et al., 2000)</p>	
<p>For other Social worlds the activities and roles will show less contrast, the Social worlds and roles can intersect or integrate (Ashforth et al., 2000) to form <b>blended areas</b>  which are no longer exclusively one world or the other.</p>	
<p>Social world borders may be <b>flexible</b> expanding or contracting in response to the demands of one domain over the next,  this can be a source of conflict (Hall &amp; Richter, 1988).</p>	
<p>Borders may be <b>permeable</b> allowing elements, or permeations  (objects, thinking, attitudes, behaviour etc) from one Social world to enter another .</p>	

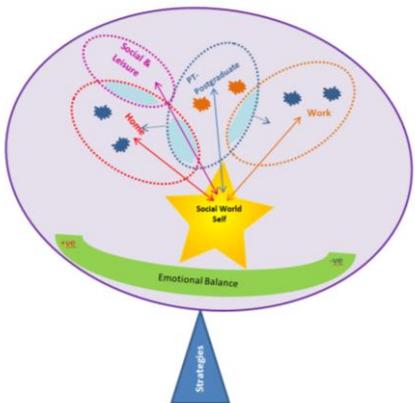
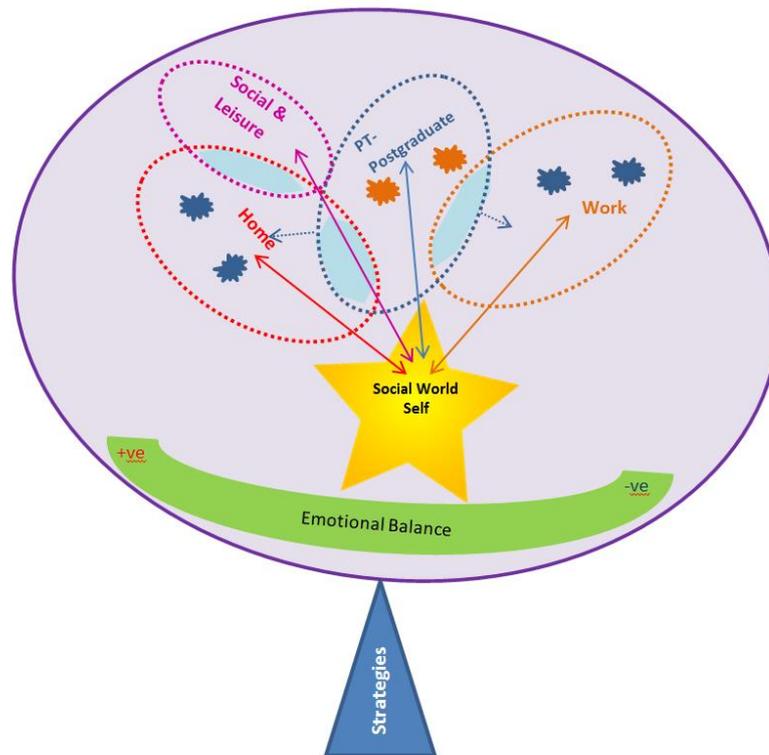
<p>The individual member might <b>participate in</b> </p> <p>and occupy <b>Multiple Social world Memberships</b> and therefore social roles</p> <p>This will require continual review and on-going adjustment to avoid or resolve any conflicting expectations and competing demands of each Social world</p>	
<p>In multiple-membership situations participation may be put on hold or temporarily cease to restore some order and balance. Alternatively participation may reduce or become less frequent </p>	
<p>Multiple-memberships and changes in the SWS can be conflictual or synergetic, affecting the individual's emotions positively or negatively and their overall perception of <b>emotional balance</b> or harmony in their SWS</p>	
<p>The individual will develop and rely on a number of underpinning <b>strategies</b> which they use to manage the SWS and maintain a sense of emotional balance</p>	
<p>Membership and participation in any given Social world is dependent on the constellation of orbiting Social worlds in the SWS at any given time.</p> <p>An example SWS constellation illustration of a PT-postgraduate concurrently working might therefore be represented as such, (e.g. in Juliette's case)</p>	

Figure 8 - Social world Space constellation and illustration process

The stories suggested that for each study participant their SWS was made up of similar social worlds (home/family, work, university/postgraduate); but these were arranged, intersected and interacted in different ways. Constantly in a state of (re)negotiation and flux, the SWS of each study participant could appear quite different; almost like the changing patterns viewed through a kaleidoscope, one movement or twist created a different constellation.



*Figure 9 - Example SWS constellation illustration*

SWP gave me a frame almost to pause what I was seeing and hearing in the stories and take a snapshot of the SWS ‘kaleidoscope pattern’ for each study participant which I could illustrate as a SWS constellation.

SWS affirms and contributes to SWP theory as outlined by (Clarke & Star, 2008; Strauss, Anselm, 1978), in drawing upon and adapting Lewin’s field theory and life space principles (Burnes & Cooke, 2013; Lewin, 1939). As recommend by Clark (2000) in her work/family border theory, I have borrowed from Kurt Lewin some of the notions regarding life space (Marrow, 1977) to make the following assertions about the SWS,

- like the lifespace, the SWS is individually patterned
- like the lifespace, the SWS comprises a number of distinct areas

- unlike the lifespace, which is made up of psychological domains, the SWS comprises Social worlds differentiated by borders which vary in their flexibility and permeability and so interactions with each other

The table below now sets out the principles which inform my notion of SWS,

SWS principles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SWS presents a holistic view of the individual and their multiple-memberships of synergetic but at times conflicting social worlds they inhabit and the corresponding social roles they hold.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At any given moment in time, a person's participation in any given social world is influenced by the combination of Social worlds orbiting their SWS.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each social world is subject to change and as they are constantly intersecting and interacting with each other, they create a SWS that is in a continuous state of dynamic flux and equilibrium.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New or unfilled needs or social roles in a given social world disrupt the SWS equilibrium affecting the self, their emotions and participation as they transition between the roles and social worlds.</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using a range of strategies, the individual monitors the permeations and manages the borders between the Social worlds to restore a sense of balance.</li> </ul>

Figure 10 - Principles informing SWS

The fluidity and flux at each of the three interrelated levels can be seen in each participant story which follows. Each story contributes further understanding of their individually patterned *social worlds spaces* (SWS). Hettie detailed conditions which appeared to create a perfect storm in her SWS, whereas Juliette's story confirms more tactical management of the SWS. Claire tells of the emotional pull and blending of multiple social worlds making up her SWS and Jayne the overcrowding and conflict that occurred in her SWS. Finally Esme's story illustrates how SWS can be balanced, controlled and reconfigured. Each story concludes with an illustration of the participant's SWS constellation and summary.

## 6.4. Stories Reframed (part-two)

Each individual story is now reframed to position the participant as a member of multiple social worlds detailing the strategies used by each participant to manage and reshape their complex and dynamic individual social worlds space.

### 6.4.1. Juliette – tactical management of the SWS (ninja in action)

*"I have got my student-life which is just try to keep it on the side but sometimes I feel like it tries to encroach all the time" - What happens on the borders? Regulation, repair and relaxation*

Juliette began her guided tour by introducing Julietteyland; a mass of land which was divided into seven interconnecting territories. Each territory demarcated a social world and the primary activities undertaken in each; Juliette started with a reminder of the central prominence of home and family in her life,



*"This is my map it's Julietteyland at the heart of it we have got home-land" JLExMN 1*

*"So um then I have got my student-life which is just try to keep it on the side" JLExMN 2*

**JLExMP 1**

The two remaining territories specifically demarked on her map but not featured in her initial introduction were Work land and MSc islands. It was very apparent that the largest collective area in Juliette's SWS was home life which comprised four of the seven territories home, family, school and leisure. It was a well-established central part of Juliette's SWS, with traditional roles, systems and structures in place. Although bordering other domains, Juliette's home world had become well protected with distinct physical and temporal borders established.



**JLExMP 5**

*“There's my packed lunch bag so it's just put those on the kitchen table, the dining room table is here, end of the day, get on with the cooking and then that goes next to the table”* **JLPEMN 77**

*“I accumulate all the white shirts for school and wash them all at once at the end of the week”*

**JLPEMN 30**

*“Children and housework has to be done”* **JLPEMN 87**

*“also shopping”* **JLPEMN 88**

*“television with Mark my husband, family time”* **JLPEMN 91**

*“All the cooking to do or the ironing and getting everybody sorted out for school make sure their bags have everything in”*

**JLExMN 6**

The second largest area was Work Land which appeared visibly different to the busy, varied and interesting terrain of the home life territories. By contrast Work Land was visually quite barren, with very little to see. Juliette did not focus too much on the specifics of her work life, more how she combined it with study. The rituals, routine and accepted practices were however an intimated to be part of this,



**JLExMP 2**

*"I'm just looking at the emails in the practice with a drink of course.....I've come back from my practice and this is what I do during the day in my normal work"* **JLPEMN 50**

*"We have all this work that we have to do in the year about looking at patient information"* **JLPEMN 98**

*"We are allowed to use the internet in our own time"* **JLPEMN 55**

Although home and work were connected, a definite border ran between the two. With the exception of professional journals entering the home there was little else in Juliette's story to suggest that permeations occurred between home life and work life. Similarly scarce, was any sense of interconnection between Juliette's home and work worlds; other than financially, they appeared to be two quite separate domains in her life. Furthermore, Juliette did not indicate the two domains collided negatively or interacted positively, apart from Juliette transitioning between the two worlds that was where the connection appeared to end. This suggested that Juliette had a strong, well maintained and controlled border between work and home.

At the border between home land and work land there appeared to be little movement or flexibility. Quite clearly the borders of student land were more flexible, less robust and not easily maintained. In Juliette's story this appeared to be largely in the favour of student land,

*"I have got my student-life which is just try to keep it on the side but sometimes I feel like it tries to encroach all the time into other areas.....it might just creep in when no one is looking on a Friday afternoon.... so it encroaches into my work and I try not to let it encroach into my family time"* **JLExMN 2**

*"I like to try and keep Saturday's generally free and I say no working Saturdays it doesn't always work"* **JLExMN 1**

Student land was represented visually as a small and subsidiary part of Julietteyland connected to both Home Land and Work land. Juliette's illustration suggests that at the border between student land and home land there was a good amount of movement and flexibility in the border itself. Like Jayne and Hettie, Juliette initially found herself spending more time than she anticipated or liked in the PT-postgraduate world trying to re-orientate herself to academia and academic writing. She attempted to determine what was expected of her in the new PT-postgraduate world and familiarise herself with the behaviours and narratives operating within it,

*"I think sometimes we tend to think other people know more than you... and ....maybe get somebody that's in your group that's had a bit more experience and says the talk already and you think oh god" JLExMN 10*  
*"and so like people sort of talk a little bit of the talk .... they talk in the right words so yes I feel like I have learnt something from the first one [module/semester] , I feel like I am getting there" JLExMN 13*

*"but I think I suppose I feel like it seems to take me a lot of time to write anything and I look back at it I seem to need to change it because my English isn't very good" JLExMN 14*

*"it's almost like a trial in a way to see how you feel to get the feedback, to feel how it fits in" JLPEMN 98*

*"actually ...I think I got a shock...I think a bit of humility comes in because if you are used to getting a high grade.....I am used to working really hard and it reflecting in the grade I got well I worked really hard last time [first assignment] and I sort of limped over the line so it's giving me a bit of Humble Pie and it's not like the stuff I have done before" JLExMN 7*

Spending too much time and over indulging in one social world had consequences for the amount and standard of participation in another social world. Consequently she developed borders and rules around border crossing to limit and balance the space each social world occupied in her SWS; keen not to upset her relationships or compromise on her standards of participation at work but probably more importantly at home. Initially, it resulted in Juliette needing to constantly monitor, repair and re-establish the borders or rules around border crossing. In our second conversation however, Juliette indicated that such vigilant border control, to protect her family and ensure her continued level of input, was becoming less

necessary. Her family were adapting to her border crossing activity and the roles and expectations within the home were starting to evolve,

*“One is twelve and one is fourteen nearly fifteen and the older one I feel a bit guilty for because she ... will do all the packed lunches when I am busy doing something so I feel bad and then my son ....has let me put him to bed for years and erm well he is like twelve years ... [but] it's only just in the last few days he is just going on his own”*

**JLExMN 24**

*“I say are you sure you don't want me for anything and they say no no no mum, and so I've got now maybe between six and nine to get things [Msc work] done..... emm it's better now so I can just think oh three hours a night, three hours a night, em, and then it sort of builds up and I can have Saturday off”* **JLExMN 26**

But as the matriarch of the home life territories, this was not entirely comfortable for Juliette herself,

*“the family are getting used to me now working in the house oh you're doing that again and they are not saying Mum I need you they are just getting on with”* **JLExMN**

**13**

*“I think my problem is .....it's hard for me to let go, ”* **JLExMN 23**

*“It feels funny whereas my husband will say - just let em get on with it, they are old enough, it's me, it's my problem, I think I just need to be there”....* **JLExMN 24**

*“Now I don't think that they need me it seems that they have just got used to me not”* **JLExMN 26**

With genuine concern for other members in the home and work land, key members (immediate family and work manager) to some extent or other became border keepers. Although there was nothing to suggest that they did this directly or intentionally, it was certainly Juliette's perception that only a certain amount of compromise would be acceptable. This then influenced her participation and border crossing between the social worlds.

***"I just want to say I am not doing any more ,then I think the next day no I am going to keep going" - Multiple Social world membership***

Juliette's story highlighted, as a border crosser with multiple social world memberships, she had varying degrees of peripheral and central participation in each social world. Although a new member of the PT-postgraduate world, Juliette developed a sense of identification, autonomy, belonging and affiliation reasonably early. She appeared quite resolved to making steady progress, 'plodding' and 'chipping away' towards increased competence and more central participation as she established herself and became more oriented to life in the PT-postgraduate world.

Membership of the PT-postgraduate world would be for a set period of time and Juliette made no secret of her membership being very much secondary to Home and Work worlds. Yet to some extent membership of the PT-postgraduate world acted to legitimise and facilitate her taking a more central membership and participation in the Work world.

*"I do find that even this course as I'm doing it makes me feel more confident to change and more aware of my actions at work because I'm a leader in my own lead area and I'm a mentor and I do certain leadership things but I'm suddenly conscious of my behaviour a lot more now, of maybe negative things that I need fine tuning" JLPEMN 74*

In adding the PT-postgraduate world to her SWS Juliette was keen to not upset her relationships or compromise on her standards of participation at work. Probably of higher importance was ensuring she did not do this in the Home world where without doubt she had an insider core membership and was highly influential in maintaining and adjusting the borders. Juliette was quite evidently completely immersed and occupied a central position in the Home world. In the Home world she felt responsible for creating, ensuring and protecting the experiences of family members. Juliette was the central go-to person and the guardian keeping everything structured and running in some kind of order,



**JLExMP 1**

*"I like to try and keep Saturday's generally free.... I can do everything the rest of the week but Saturday's is my leisure time. So I think I will put a big wall up there"*

**JLExMN 1**

*"It's all about you juggling the balls, it is because I seem to be everybody's very reliant on mum"* **JLExMN 22**

Juliette quickly identified the importance of calm which largely stemmed from having a range of preventative and maintenance strategies in place. Juliette recognised that she was the linchpin in the mass of connected home life territories holding things together. As a result and although counter intuitive for Juliette, she did indicate a need to pay attention to herself and her personal or inner calm. Self-discipline and self-talk appeared to be strategies which helped her to divert or deal with any unrest and maintain the calm,



**JLExMP 7**

*"Right in the middle I suppose is my mental health because I do have anxiety and um it can be the point where I can't concentrate properly on anything....so I have to have calm"* **JLExMN 2**

*"I can only do what I can do and then I start to feel like I'm getting a bit stressed so I've got to just calm myself down again and just think right calm and not feel like it's all too much. At the minute I think I'm doing a lot work to keep it going and keeping it calm"*

**JLExMN 6**

*“so it's just keeping... everything going I have to try and put myself first and make sure I've got myself organised and they all seem to be thinking about everybody else in the family” JLExMN*

*“I like to say 9 o'clock is my finish as well because I know that after that I can't sleep if I stay up too late working so I say right it's going to be 9 o'clock” JLExMN 1*

*“I allow myself [time off from MSc study], last weekend I handed my work in on Thursday night and I had a weekend of not thinking at all about work” JLPEMN 95*

Between student land and MSc islands (the finish/graduation point) Juliette had included a strait of choppy water suggesting she did not anticipate it would be all plain sailing ahead. Yet she appeared to be coping and very much compelled to get there,



**JLExMP 6**

*“I do have anxiety and um it can be the point where I can't concentrate properly on anything I feel like I am working quite calmly at the minute I do get occasionally choppy when I start thinking about having bad nights when I haven't done any work I feel really bad or things aren't going very well and then I feel like I just want to say I am not doing any more .... I should just pack it up and say that's it no more and then I think the next day no I am going to keep going, keep going, and it will all calm again” JLExMN 2*

Like Claire in some ways, the waters on Juliette's experience map were representative of emotions sweeping around and between the different social worlds in her SWS. Unpredictable and turbulent at times, they could wash over the various social worlds effecting, delaying or preventing her multiple-memberships in the interconnected social worlds.

***"So that was stop being a student, start being a Mum fast" - Border crossing the multiple daily transitions between the different social worlds***

As Juliette storied her experiences from her photography in our initial conversation I had been reminded of the 1970's children's cartoon Mr Benn; a character whose adventures take a similar pattern through different worlds but always end with his return to normal life. In a similar way Juliette's story portrays her leaving her house and family life, enjoying travelling into and participating in different worlds, taking on a different character and role; before returning to her normal life and world almost unnoticed by those at home. Juliette's experience map very much drew attention to her transitions which she identified through the directional arrows she added.



**JLPEMP2**

*"I'd legged it up in the car to pick her up because she'd been doing an after-school event so that was stop being a student, start being a Mum fast" JLPEMN 58*

*"I am still doing pickups occasionally from school and drop offs every morning so I am dashing still to work every morning and dashing to University on a Tuesday because it is really busy on a Tuesday so I need to get there fast"*

**JLExMN 1**

*"my identity has been like professional yet when I haven't got my professional anything on then I just go back to being plain old mum" JLPEMN 72*

*"I suppose it's also a bit like identity" JLPEMN 68*

*“so having that [zippy top] on suddenly makes me feel a little bit more that I'm not just like a mum”*

**JLPEMN 72**

The transitions were often prompted by changes in physical environment including the clothes, car, and locations but facilitated by routine foreplanning and preparation. For Juliette this usually included taking a packed lunch and reading materials/course work almost everywhere she went,



*“there's my folder which has all my course work in and I've brought to work to be doing a little bit during the day and there's my packed lunch bag”* **JLPEMN A77**

*“I've got a mug and I think it's a Costa mug so I bring it in with my little packed lunch”* **JLPEMN 81**

**JLPEMP9**

In part, the ExpMap depicted the routine and regularity of Juliette's SWS, but also a sense of movement, embroiled activity, participation and numerous transitions which she makes between the different social worlds she inhabited.

Juliette's SWS was in a state of flux. Having focused whole heartedly on her family and occupying a central position in their home world everyone had become reliant on mum. She played an integral role in creating and nurturing their home life whilst ensuring the everyday functioning of it. Her membership in this world far surpassed any other. Her increased membership in her Work world and then addition of PT-postgraduate world had created ripples and uncertainty in what had been a very settled and calm SWS. Having kept home and work very separate the PT-postgraduate world appeared to be occupying the space in between. The boundaries had become fuzzier allowing spill over and permeation between the worlds. Initially Juliette was seeking to restore the division and traditional order to avoid unrest in the Home World. However, Juliette's story began to change and things began to settle into a new shape and ensemble in her SWS as she managed the borders and multiple transitions tactically almost ninja like.

## Constellation of SWS

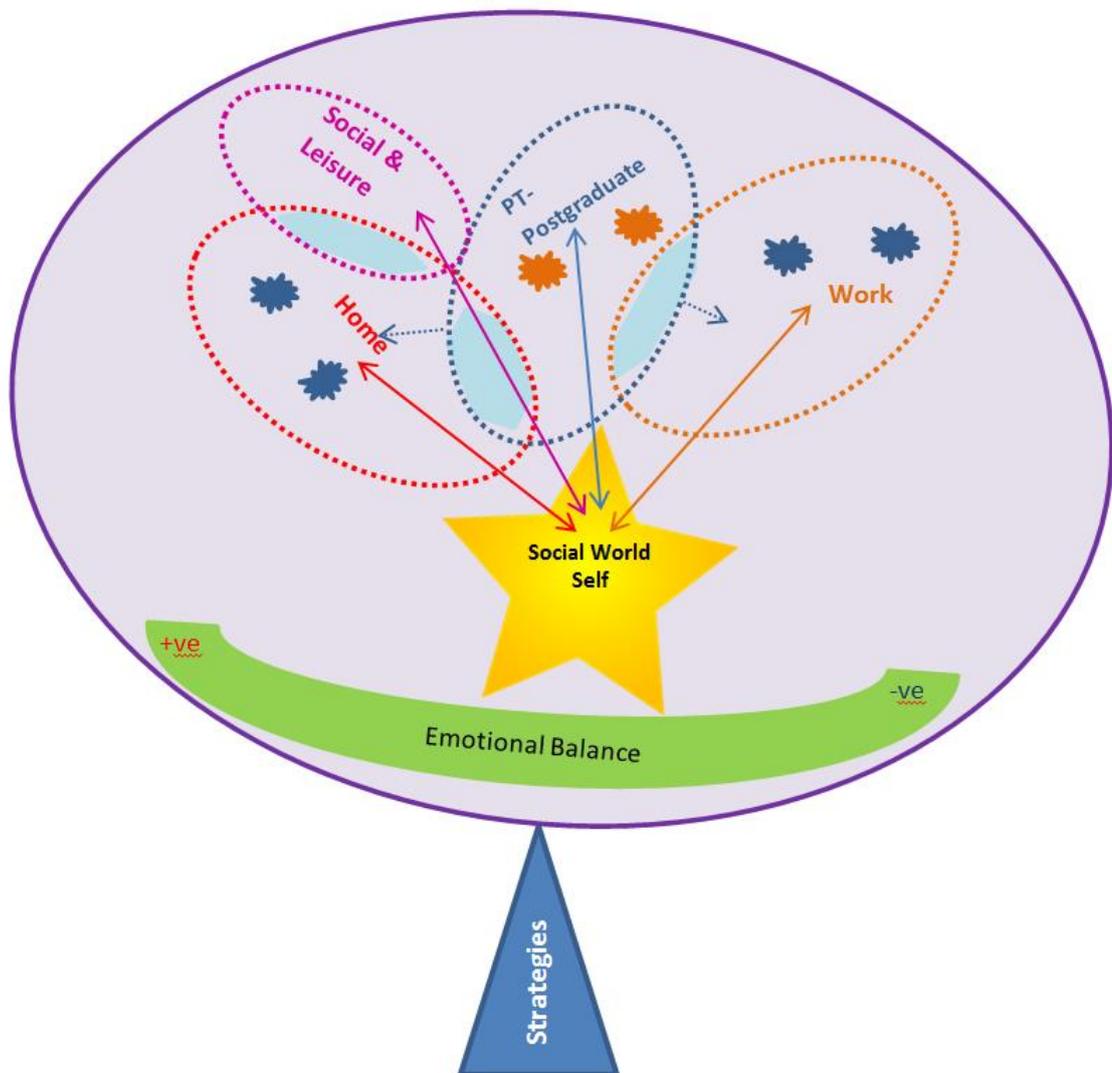


Figure 11 - Juliette: Social world Space Constellation Illustration

### In summary

Juliette's SWS had already started to take a different shape when returning to full-time work and refocusing on her career. In doing so she had been prompted into entering the PT-postgraduate world which appeared to enter her SWS encroaching into her previously very separate home and work worlds. Juliette quite quickly established strategies to temporally contain her study and keep it low profile. Operating almost undercover Juliette appeared well versed in ensuring that calm, order and a sense of normality was maintained by not allowing herself to over-participate in the PT-postgraduate world. The borders were tactically and

skilfully managed to prevent the PT-postgraduate world over dominating her fairly balanced SWS.

## 6.4.2. Claire – emotions and blending in the SWS

*"I've got to navigate and circumnavigate the islands before I can get to where I want to go" - Emotional under currents*

In our first PEM conversation, Claire had detailed her different social world memberships, her transitions, participation, relationships and interactions with the members in each world. Claire took quite a different approach to visually representing and mapping her experience and as she gave a guided tour of her world this became more noticeable. This part of Claire's story moved on from the business of social worlds as she spoke more of the intangible aspects which had perhaps eluded photographic capture. Her tour conjured a story of embarking on relatively short passage and vertical transition to postgraduate. As she set sail she could see the destination visible on the horizon which she illustrated as the Future Island to represent completion of the MSc. She knew that in order to reach the final destination and its 'treasure' she would have to manage the strong emotional undercurrents as she made the multiple daily micro transitions between the social worlds,

*"I've got to navigate and circumnavigate the islands before I can get to where I want to go which is there the treasure on the map" CEEsMN 2*

*"this [gestures the figure of eight drawn on the map] is the kind of route that's been mapped out not set out by me" CEEsMN 1*

The islands acted in a similar way to marine cardinal marks indicating hazards, in this case guilt, pleasure and meeting expectations,



**CEEXMP 4**

*First I go to my "Island of Guilt" where it's studying and that guilt from not seeing the kids, doing certain things, having to leave certain things and not been able to ring my mum up and talk to my friends and play with my daughter and my son. And then I will sail to the "Island of Pleasure" **CEExMN 2***

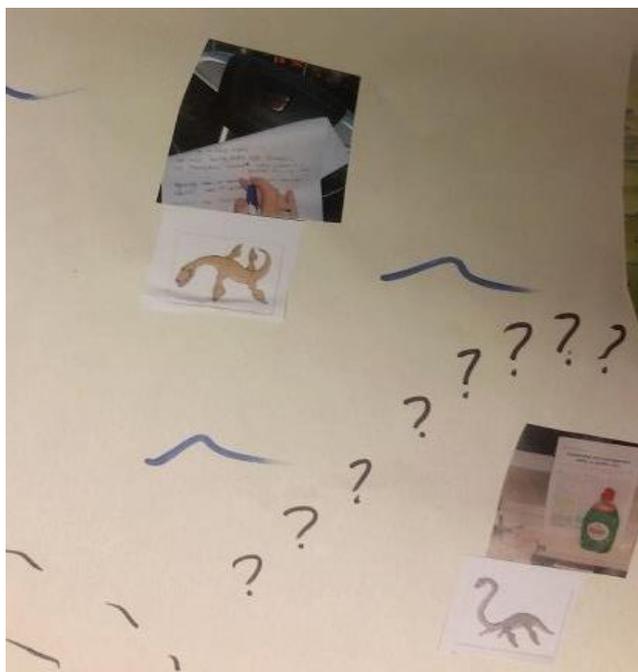
*I've only called in there once and as you can tell it's quite a small island compared to the rest this is where the things I do like to do are. So fitness and reading, have a drink, socialise, go on my bike, exercise. And then I'm back to the guilt because I have been to pleasure. But then I've got visit the "Island of Expectation" of me. So the expectations of work erm, I have also put another bike there because I think there is a certain expectation I put on myself to try and maintain a lively mum and the kind of lifestyle that I've got **CEExMN 3***

*And and then it's going backwards and forwards between expectation and guilt **CEExMN 4***

The hazards in effect were her emotions and feelings which appeared to provide a feedback loop and helped Claire to keep her participation in the multiple social worlds in check and relatively balanced.

***"Missing out of family life and the tug of war that I feel I go through"- Coping with the strain of multiple-membership***

In a social world space encompassing flexible social world intersections and multiple-memberships, Claire inevitably felt a pull or 'tug of war' as she constantly and frequently transitions between the domains. This was a key message coming out from her story,



*The missing out of family life and the tug of war that I feel I go through* **CEPEMN 52**

*Well the "Monsters" .....are getting past the tug-of-war of guilt and family, making sure I'm studying correctly and make sure I got a home life that is still working and still going on* **CEEExMN 8**

**CEEExMP1**

In order to maintain her multiple-membership and a sense of some balance in her social world space, Claire adopted strategies that enabled her to deal with the tug of war she felt. This included a system for borrowing and paying back time

***"I'm hoping to graduate and have friends and family, have a dance" - Borrowing time, the end justifies the means?***

Like other participants, Claire identified in the build up to the assignment submission point she had borrowed time and directed her attention away from her family towards the PT-postgraduate world,

*"On a Saturday afternoon I am sat at the table trying to do work".....* **CEPEMN 71**

*"Yes that was coming towards the end of doing my assignment and it was one of those, I*

*just wanted to read it and re-read I” CEPEMN 73*

Borrowing or re-routing time and attention from the Home world to the PT-postgraduate world in this way required a system of pay back or compensation. Claire worked ahead of the assessment cycle and submitted early meaning that after the relief of submitting she was able to reclaim some time for her family,

*“I think maybe [missing is] a picture that shows a bit of relief, it's like aah, I submitted it”. CEPEMN 74*

*“Yes and it actually felt a little bit different as well that weekend, I've not got that assignment and because I've not started the next module as well can't believe how light I felt really” CEPEMN 78*

Claire also intimated the temporary and finite period of her membership in the PT-postgraduate world meant she could remain focused on her future and restoring her SWS. The end appeared to justify the inconvenience and sacrifice along the way along with an expectation that she would then readjust her SWS as she existed the PT-postgraduate world,



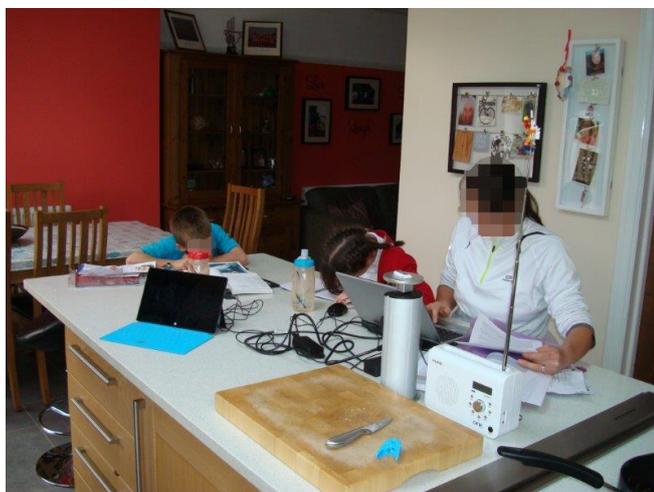
*“This is obviously where I want to go which is the "Island of the Future" where there is going to be a more cohesive family life and I'm hoping to graduate and have friends and family, have a dance and and I'm going to have some kind of social lif” CEEsMN 6*

**CEEsMP7**

***“This is us all doing work, all doing homework” - Collisions, synergies and permeations***

The story told by Claire included her multiple-membership and transitions between the different social worlds in her SWS. Although the worlds were separate in their activities and purpose, they intersected and interacted. Initially, this led to collisions as Claire tried to juggle and differentiate the social worlds. The collisions happened when two or more worlds were competing for attention and or time. Claire also suggested that following a period of

adaptation, synergies had developed and the intersecting borders were more positively blended,



*“This is myself and my kids, my husband took the photo and this is the island that I talked about and this is us all doing work, all doing homework”* **CEPEMN 61**

#### **CEPEMP12**

The synergies between some social world activities, flexible use of physical space and the permeations found between the social worlds, all suggested that blending of social world intersections could also be compatible.

The borders between the social worlds exhibited varying degrees of flexibility and permeability. For example, Claire would complete her study after work hours in the workplace. To do this she established and maintained a strong temporal border switching activities and transitioning between social worlds even though no physical border had been crossed. The work world in effect hosted the PT-postgraduate world activities, blending was noted to occur as the activities undertaken no longer belonged exclusively to either of the worlds,

*“So on Thursday and Fridays I finish my job, log off and then log back on to study or to work towards my assignment”* **CEPEMN 14**

The borders between the social worlds also exhibited a good deal of permeability allowing objects from one world to be found in another. Permeations could be detected across each of the social worlds that Claire inhabits,

*"I'll leave it [PG reading] in the car and there's one near the washing up bowl or something" CEPEMN 29*

*"At the moment there's three books by my bed, probably every other night it's probably the leadership book" CEPEMN 36*

*"I needed to check some emails for work [at home] and then there's my badge" CEPEMN 40*

The physical permeations such as piles of articles and reading around the house and the emotional permeations when she was unable to shut off from thinking about the PT-postgraduate world were at times seen as interruptions or infringements,

*"It [assignment and reading materials] was on my dining room table and it was tea time and my husband said "are we tidying up" and I said "no we're having tea on ..... we sat at the island because "everything's out now, I'm not putting everything away to get it out, it's out now" CEPEMN 49*

*"If I think I just don't want to think about leadership I won't pick that book up"...CEPEMN 36*

But other times the permeations appeared positive, acting as reminders of her multiple-membership and making for smoother transition between roles and better efficacy in use of time available,

*"I'll leave it [PG reading] in the car and there's one near the washing up bowl or something and also it's a kind of "don't let this go Claire" CEPEMN 29*

*"I thought if it's everywhere I can't avoid it so if it's in the car, at work, stuck in front of the washing up bowl then it's there and I can't run away from it" CEPEMN 30*

Claire drew attention to fitting part-time study into existing responsibilities. Seizing an opportunity to extend her learning and qualification, she recognised that with young children and a relatively new role at work the timing was not necessarily ideal. Taking a very positive, self-determining and flexible approach she developed strategies to embed study and the PT-postgraduate world into family life and wider SWS. Not wanting to compromise the other areas and roles in her life, she found the burden of expectation and feelings of guilt challenging. However Claire seemed to have a prevailing sense of the temporary nature of her PT-postgraduate world membership. She focused very much on the end justifying the means keeping the end goal and future firmly in sight.

## Constellation of SWS

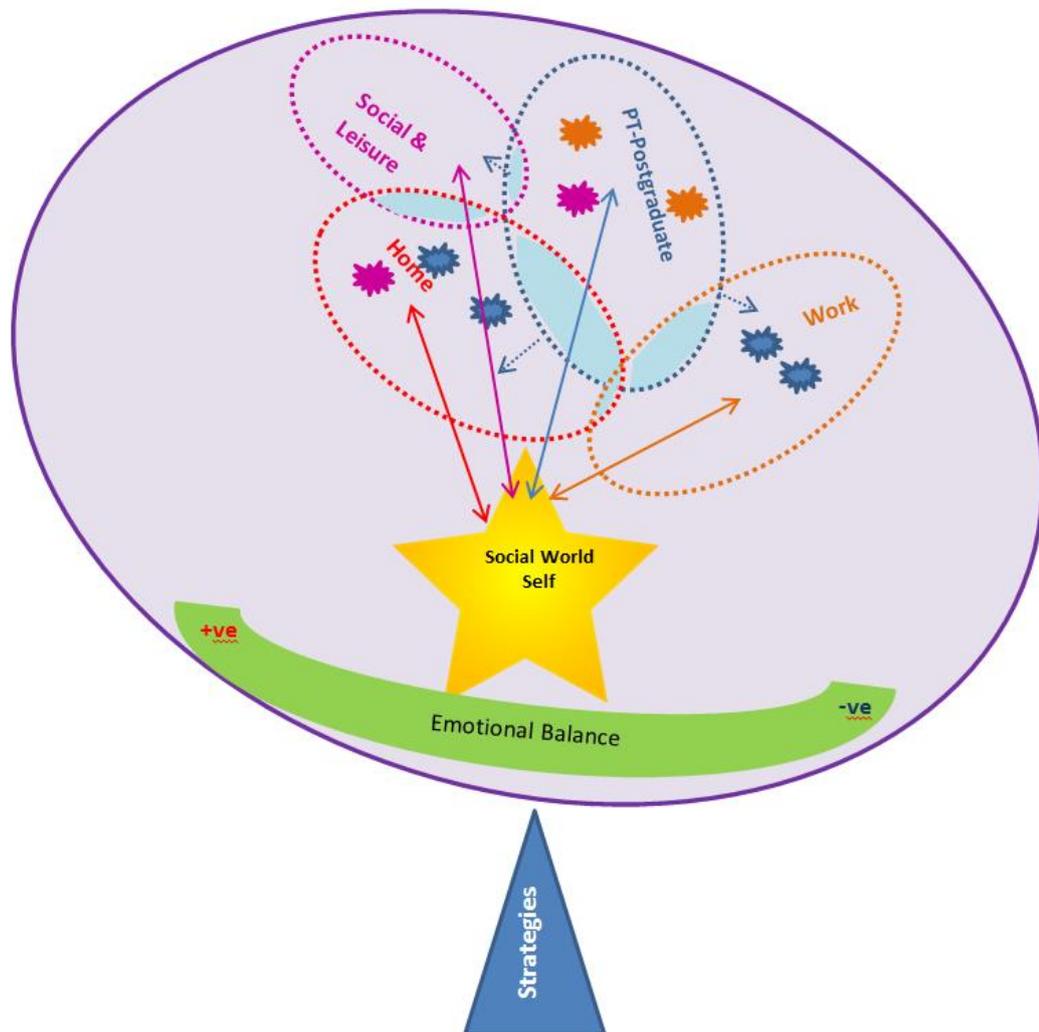


Figure 12 - Claire: Social world Space Constellation Illustration

### In summary

Like Juliette, Claire actively participated in four main social worlds, home, work, PT-postgraduate and social/leisure. It was their intention to ensure their social/leisure participation was maintained, not allowing the PT-postgraduate world to completely dominate that made their SWS different to other participants. Permeations of Claire's continued participation in the social-leisure world could be observed in the home and PT-postgraduate worlds as Claire negotiated cycling and running routines into her SWS. Uniquely in this group of participants, blending was observed in Claire's story across all the social world intersections as she was adept at re-arranging her participation and multiple-membership, embracing

flexible temporal and physical borders and transitioning between the social worlds. It was the emotional pull and permeations that she found more challenging. Recognising the synergies within her SWS and the perceived future benefits of her PT-postgraduate membership she was largely able to reconcile her emotions and maintain a reasonable sense of balance.

### 6.4.3. Hettie – conditions for a perfect storm

***"They are very separate things it helps me to keep them separate because they do merge" –  
Conflictual intersections?***

When asked to 'show us inside your world' Hettie commenced her guided tour with a rationale for the background 'landscape' she had chosen,



*"I picked this one [imaginary landscape] because I quite liked that the islands are quite separate"*

**HLExMN 1**

**HLExMP 5**

The different social worlds in Hettie's life were represented as islands and her expressed need to differentiate and largely keep them separate. As someone who liked structure and feeling in control, being able to at least mentally separate the different worlds or domains, appeared to be a strategy for creating some order in her SWS. In starting the course and entering the PT-postgraduate world the complexity of her whole social world space had increased. She quite quickly had doubts about the reality of being able to separate or differentiate between the social worlds despite her preference to do so,

*"They are very separate things it helps me to keep them separate because they do merge, but when I am thinking about them I keep them separate"* **HLExMN 1**

***"When I'm trying to do the work [study at home] this cat particularly does like to hop up or start pestering" - Blurring of the boundaries***

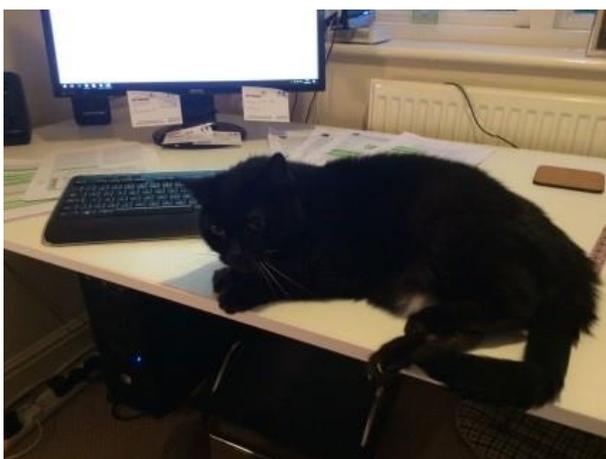
Hettie appeared flexible and adept at undertaking the activities of a specific world outside their usual or primary location. Work activities such as checking emails and updating diaries were commonly undertaken in her home or social & leisure worlds; reading and preparation

for study days on the train or at home. Indeed the physical external environment largely appeared insignificant to Hettie. She did however find controlling the amount of thought, time and feeling given over to each social world much more troublesome. In her commitment to both work and study it became difficult to maintain very strong affectual and temporal borders and so permeations and spill over across the different social world could be seen. The combination of trying to become orientated to the new practices coupled with her self-doubts about her academic ability lead to Hettie spending long periods of time trying to make sense and participate fully in the PT-postgraduate world,

*“We had a day coming up and knowing that I spent the weekend before probably not making a huge amount of sense of what I was trying to do and probably having a lot on at work and just thinking this was a bit overwhelming trying to make sense of it all”*

**HLPEMN 26**

Hettie frequently undertook activities associated with the PT-postgraduate world at home, suggesting flexibility in the physical borders. The PT-postgraduate world on occasions became dominant using or borrowing space, time and attention, the home world acting as a donor or host domain. In effect, at times the home world became a blended social world area no longer exclusively one world or the other. Members of the home world occasionally straying over into the space she had set aside to study. They provided a reminder of the need to regulate herself, avoid over participation in the PT-postgraduate world, push back affectual and temporal borders and resume some balance,



**HLPEMP 3**

*“Yes ... when I'm trying to do the work [study at home] this cat particularly does like to hop up or start pestering and actually that's quite a nice distraction because it does tell you that there are other [things] ... you don't have to have your nose to the computer the whole time, it is useful to have a break and particularly as my partner wasn't there ... I think it's trying to balance out [participation]”*

**HLPEMN 8**

In our first meeting, Hettie's story was suggestive of some tension as she tried to figure out how her multiple-membership would work and accommodate the new social world. In her experience map, the tension was noticeably heightened and more overt; I was left with a stronger sense of the imbalance Hettie felt with this new constellation of social worlds in her SWS.

***"There's that vortex going on between those two" - Conflictual and Competing Social worlds?***

Increasing her social world memberships unbalanced Hettie's social world space causing collision and intersection between social worlds she preferred to keep separate. She describes the "vortex" which created hotspots as the Work world and PT-postgraduate world collided and competed threatening her life outside work or study, her "comfort island" (home world). It was possible that as the PT-postgraduate world and work world were very closely related in their leadership and management focus this may have created a cumulative effect for Hettie temporally and emotionally. As a gate keeper of her home world Hettie left me with the image of her trying to calm down or whip into shape two swirling tornados which I include in the concluding visual representation of Hettie's story in chapter four,

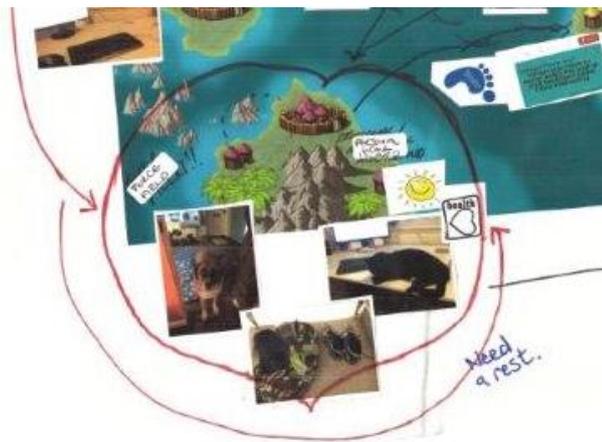


*"it feels like there's loads of work here and there's loads of work there and then [I am] in this vortex which is what all these lines are. I've got to keep going, keep spinning all those plates you know there's that vortex going on between those two [Hettie's Islands of hell]". HLExMN 6*

**HLExMP 4**

Her Home world (island of comfort) was already threatened by work which held a central position in her life and was known to permeate her home life making demands on her time outside work. In returning to study and adding the new PT-postgraduate world within her SWS resulted in further competition for her time and attention leaving Hettie feeling that her Home world was under attack. Her lack of control and desire to establish some temporal and

affectual rules and borders to protect her island of comfort was visually represented in Hettie's ExpMap which included a "force-field" to deter the unwanted "invasion".



Because it is my Island of comfort that's why I have got a love heart shape around...it's almost like this love heart is a bit of a force field around **HLExMN2**

### HLExMP 1

For Hettie adding a new social world and the accumulative unbalancing affect this had in her SWS created conflictual 'vortex' conditions almost a 'perfect storm' which left Hettie overwhelmed in the first semester. In response to the initial collisions, conflict and blurring in the SWS, Hettie tried to combat the lack of balance and structure by creating and re-establishing temporal borders and rules to restore some order and control of the borders and limit unwanted permeations between the social worlds.

Hettie's story emphasised work to be a central and dominant part of her life and identity that was balanced by her home life outside work. She conjures up a sense of belonging and talks about comfortably participating and transitioning between the two. When the opportunity of support to return to HE presented, Hettie made a pragmatic decision to embark on the Masters course. She entered the PT-postgraduate world having thought about what this might mean albeit on a temporary fairly short term basis. The relevance for her future career, her excitement and receptivity to learning about leadership and management were tainted by the initial shock and reality of being back in academia. Disorientated and unsure, Hettie begins to establish new ways of becoming a flexible and efficient learner. Hettie's commitment and self-discipline were apparent as she encountered a range of emotions and dealt with the difficulty of trying to contain the almost boundary-less PT-postgraduate world and restore some balance in her SWS.

## Constellation of SWS

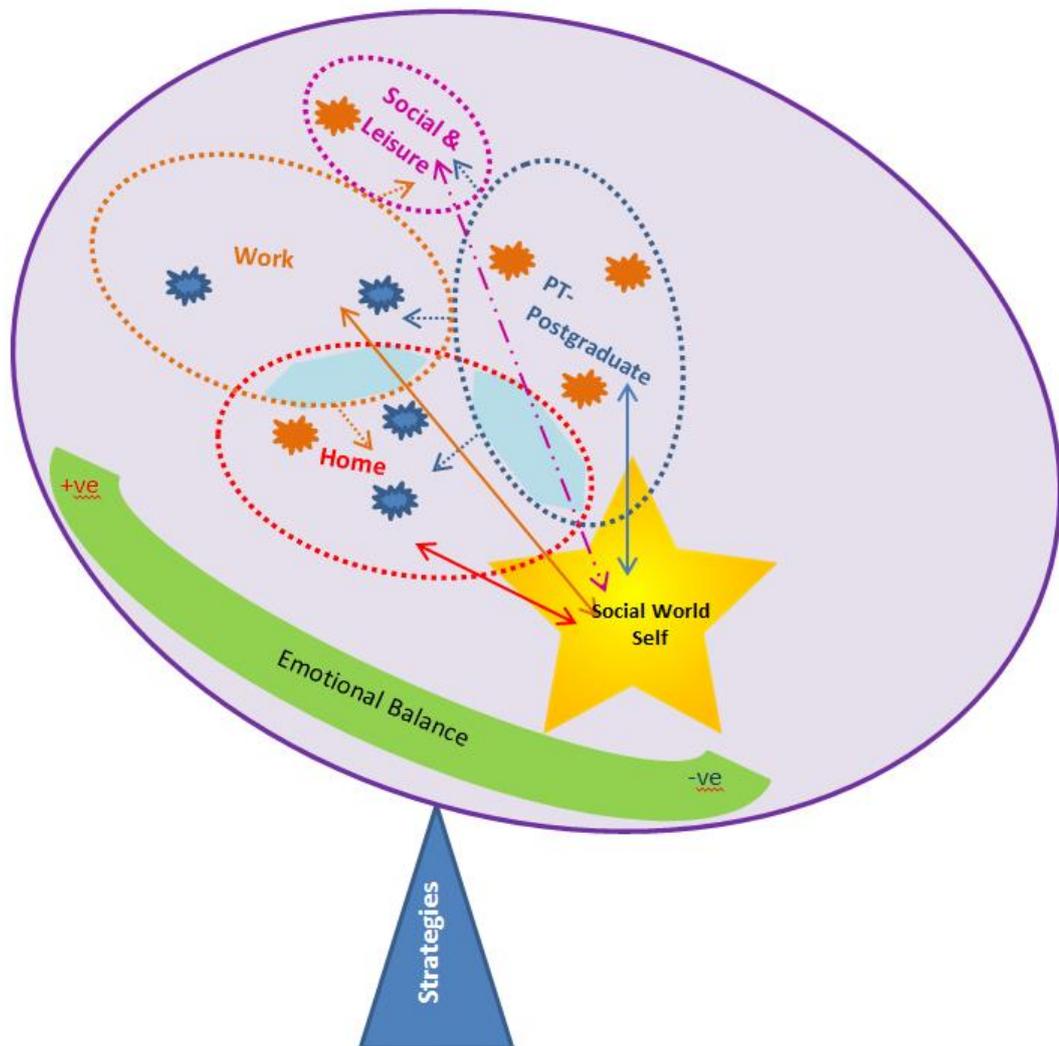


Figure 13 - Hettie: Social world Space Constellation Illustration

### In summary

It can be seen in the above SWS Constellation that Hettie storied her participation in four social worlds work, home, PT-postgraduate, and social/leisure. She had told me about the disorientation she encountered as a new member of the PT-postgraduate world (see chapter four); in continuing her story the following headlines point to conflictual intersections, blurred boundaries and competing social worlds which appear to create a perfect storm in her SWS. Although she draws upon a number of strategies to manage her SWS there is a sense that she does not feel the balance is yet right and this impacts on her participation and transitions between social worlds.

#### 6.4.4. Jayne – overcrowding and conflict in the SWS

*"For me it's all this kind of needs splitting up" - Busy Life, separate worlds*

Jayne's life-space was crowded and so could become chaotic as she continuously transitioned between the different social worlds juggling her responsibilities and participation in each. Physically the social worlds were quite distinct and separate. Even though her participation in PT-postgraduate world activities predominantly occurred in her home which acted as a host environment this was usually in a separate and demarked space in the bedroom office or at her parents' house.



*"For me it's all this kind of needs splitting up [indicates a separation of Family Island and Peak of Panic with all the juggling to the side] and just making it more even [separate] .... you know" JOExMN 6*

#### JOExMP4

Trying to install some order and balance in her participation; Jayne attempted to further separate the social worlds through creating temporal borders between home and PT-postgraduate world with limited success,

*No it's either when the kids are in bed or out of the house, I can't do it when they're in the house JOPEMN 15*

*I thought "okay I'll do one day for the business and one day Uni" what I found was it didn't really work like that because it was taking a lot more time than I expected to do my Uni stuff JOPEMN 7*

Managing the psychological borders similarly proved challenging, permeations between the social worlds were evident as Jayne highlighted,

*"It was a beautiful day and I was just looking outside their window thinking I'm stuck inside studying and I just want to be out in that lovely day"* **JOPEMN 2**

*"I don't see it as two separate things. As much as I do it at separate times and I would never study in work I think they're relevant"* **JOPEMN 22**

*"I think ... this is just how my head works "I should be in studying, I've got an assignment instead of bobbing off to do this [mindfulness classes]" but then when I'm there I think "actually I need this time to just sort my brain out a little bit"* **JOPEMN 57**

Jayne certainly determined that there were links between the PT-postgraduate world and her health care work world. A unidirectional transfer of learning and resources from the PT-postgraduate world permeated and enhanced her participation at work,

*"Yes so I think I feel like I'm definitely bringing the uni stuff into my job rather than the other way round if that makes sense"* **JOPEMN 39**

*"I've gone back to work and thought I've got all that in my assignment and I pull it out and put it in a report"* **JOPEMN 22**

Although there are some other implicit links between some of the social worlds, Jayne preferred to keep them separate. It appeared likely, therefore, that the members of each world would have limited awareness of the other domains. Participating in social worlds that were generally considered very different and separate appeared to make it difficult to talk to members in one world about the other,

*"Yes so I have got the same Islands but I don't have any bridges going between them"*  
**JOExMN 1**

*"He [husband] can't do anything... it's just not his bag at all, academic stuff"* **JOPEMN 63**

*"I think he also struggles to understand how it could take so long to do, why would you give up your evening to read a book, he reads but not studying"* **JOPEMN 64**

However, family members were supportive of her PT-postgraduate world membership and there was nothing to suggest that they questioned her ability or belonging in the social worlds they did not inhabit.

***"I say it was a complete brand new concept, foreign, like aah what am I doing?" - On the peripheries?***

Perhaps more guarded or reserved in our conversations than some of the other participants Jayne did not disclose too much detail about her Home or Work worlds. Her focus was much more about constantly transitioning between the social worlds in her SWS. From this I did not get any sense of Jayne having a primary identity or central dominant position in the social worlds she occupied. Her story did however suggest that she was least comfortable in the PT-postgraduate world. When she described the PT-postgraduate world it was from a relatively peripheral standpoint, almost at times a visitor in a strange land trying to acclimatise or get her bearings, trying to work out the language,

*"If someone said what relationship have you got I'd say I'm a student, I attend ten days a year and that's probably how I'd describe it"* **JOPEMN 86**

*"I think with my learning like I say it was a complete brand new concept, foreign, like "aah what am I doing?"* **JOPEMN 89**

*"I've never been one to particularly read anything.... I find it quite challenging"* **JOPEMN 69**

In the second year Jayne intimates rather than making outright claims that she was becoming more autonomous and comfortable in the PT-postgraduate world. However, there remained a sense she was only venturing as far as necessary in her tenuous relationship with peers and to some extent academic staff,

*"I think depending on what module you're doing and what tutor you've got will influence my relationship, some are more approachable"* **JOPEMN 83**

*"Don't know if you get to know the people you're in a class with... I'm seeing faces that I saw last year but I couldn't tell you where they work or who they are. You say hello but you don't really get to build those relationships but I guess that's down to the individuals isn't it as to whether they do that"* **JOPEMN 90**

Perhaps the combination of participating in two quite different work worlds and her strong commitment to her family and home world Jayne felt compromised and pulled; to a point where she questioned her ability and entitlement in the PT-postgraduate world.

*"Journey of Juggling" because I'm doing trying to do so much, with what's going on in terms of my work, my home life, the juggling and that's our own business and that's me doing an assignment, I'm just being pulled in all different directions in juggling"*

**JOExMN 2**

Whilst there were certainly hints that in the second year Jayne became less peripheral, there was a also sense that Jayne had moved away from her initial fixed or set ways of thinking about and approaching her learning and PT-postgraduate world membership. Although she did not come across as having reached a point of real comfort or central participation, her commitment and determination to finish the MSc course was evident. The PT-postgraduate world may have been rewarding but she does not describe it as an enjoyable place.

*"Generally I try and put uni first because I think... it [is] ten attendance days a year maybe, something like that ... the organisation have paid for it so they're supporting me... it so I think actually for me I'll do that"* **JOPEMN 76**

*"I could stop if I wanted to but actually I'm not and actually I find it really rewarding and I think "right keep going"* **JOPEMN 68**

*"Mmmm, ..... do I find it enjoyable?"* **JOPEMN 67**

*"I keep thinking I've chosen to do it... So maybe rewarding, I don't know I'd use the word enjoyable"* **JOPEMN A69**

Having entered the PT-postgraduate world as a non-graduate, Jayne primarily told of her struggle to become orientated to the expectations and practices of academia during the first year. Possibly sticking to what she knew from her Work worlds, she initially adopted a business like, structured and scheduled approach to her learning and studies. This created conflict when her expectations and reality were not compatible. She very much appeared to battle her well established approach and feelings about her entitlement, belonging and capability, despite the increasing external evidence as she successfully completed all the modules she undertook. Uncertain in a world she hardly recognised she remained dubious on the peripheries and perhaps under the radar of peers and academics. Borrowing time and

attention from her Home World and Family business she relied heavily on her immediate family for support and practical help but felt guilty in doing so. Our second conversation took place around half way through the MSc course, where Jayne's guided tour and experience map reflected a corner had been turned. She appeared to have reached a point at which she was able to question and address the dominant position her 'part-time' study had come to occupy. Better equipped and orientated she began to refocus, readjust, refine and rebalance her multiple-membership. Perhaps more settled and established she had started to move away from the peripheries.

## Constellation of SWS

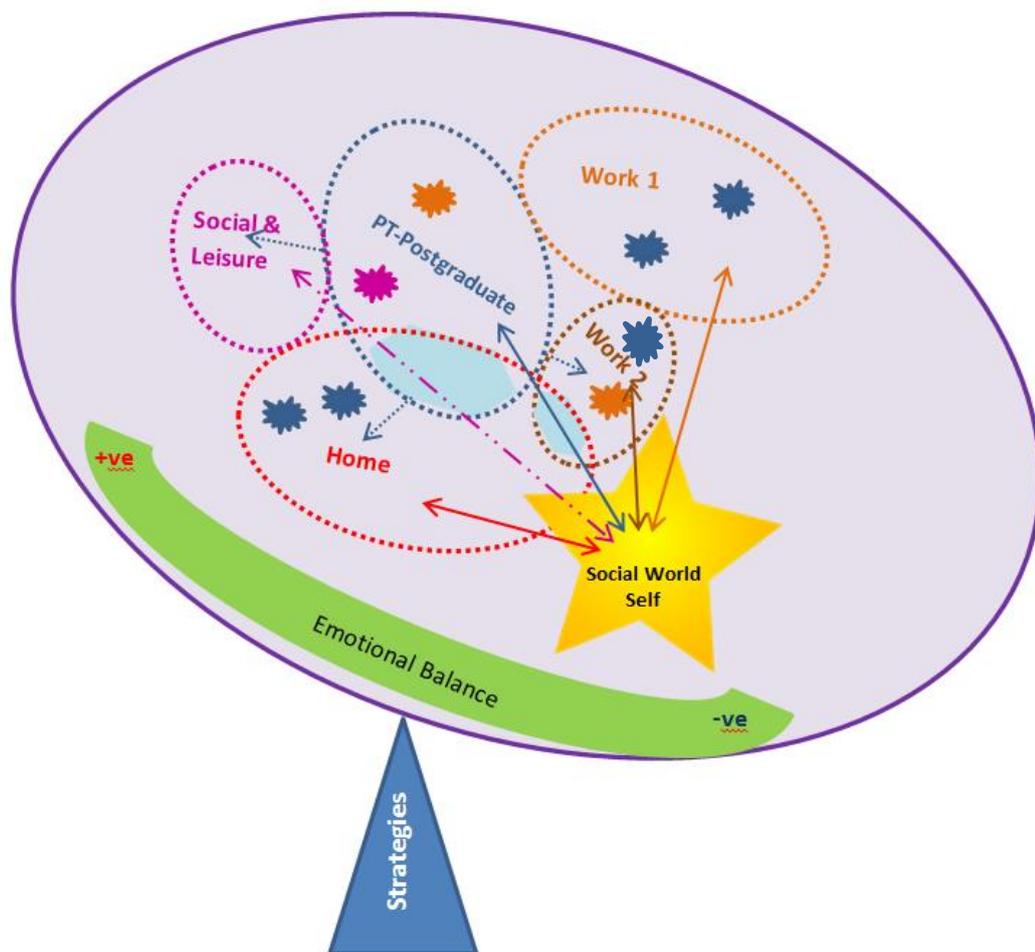


Figure 14 - Jayne: Social world Space Constellation Illustration

### In summary

The business and overcrowding in Jayne's SWS was apparent in her primary headline which detailed 'all the other stuff' that has happening in her life of social worlds space. Jayne like Hettie was finding it difficult to maintain her participation in social and leisure social world(s). In the second year of study feeling more settled and a little more confident in the PT-postgraduate world Jayne identified occasions when the mindfulness sessions she attended as part of her leisure and personal time had positively permeated the PT-postgraduate world and enhanced her participation. It was not clear whether Jayne had fixed ideas about her participation in the PT-postgraduate world as a result of the overcrowded SWS and this was her default strategy for managing the competing social worlds. Or whether having such fixed ideas and an aspiration to keep the different social worlds separate which reduced

opportunities for alignment and positive blending of social worlds. Either way, fixed ideas appeared to contribute to the sense of overcrowding and lack of balance Jayne talked about.

### 6.4.5. Esme – control and reconfiguration in the SWS

*"Everything kind of got shoved out of the way" - Shifting priorities and forgotten worlds?*

Not noticeable during either of our conversations but consistent throughout her story, Esme's SWS included only three social worlds making no mention of the social/leisure world membership something the other participants had wrestled to maintain. Although not depicted on the ExpMap Esme did talk about her Work World which had taken for granted high priority status.

*"I just think work has to take precedent doesn't it"* **ERPEMN 73**

Her experience map like other participants included a solid and central Home World (Home Central) but for Esme in the dissertation phase this had become almost entirely engulfed by the PT-postgraduate world.



*"Yes it had taken my life over"*  
**ERPEMN 9**

*"I have got my "Home Central" with a tiny little connecting bridge, because I did feel like I did cut myself off a little bit just to get it done."* **ExMN14**

**ERExMP1**

Indeed, Esme did not include any reference to participation in a Social Life World (extended family, friends, socialising/personal leisure activities). Other participant stories particularly those at the beginning of the MSc very much centred on embedding the new PT-postgraduate world as an addition in their social world space. Whilst there are hints that Esme similarly might have wrestled with similar juggles it was certainly no longer the focus of her 'dissertation world' story,

The PT-postgraduate world was favoured by the flexible borders and intersections with home and work worlds,



*“Yes I never seemed to have enough hours in the day when I was writing my dissertation....everything kind of got shoved out of the way”*

**ERPEMN 3**

**ERPEMP1**

Esme (and her family) appeared to have adapted and at least in part this included a temporary acceptance of expendable activities or memberships being rejected or delegated. In working through a process of prioritising and reprioritising participation and responsibilities in her SWS, Esme spoke about a SWS perhaps more finely tuned to only the essentials by the end of the dissertation stage.

***“You have to trust yourself” - Ever decreasing circles from peripheral to central participation in the PT-postgraduate world***

Through increasing immersion and familiarity she had developed an inside understanding of how the PT-postgraduate world operated. She had come to know the expectations and level of participation required as well as the value the benefits of her membership. Esme's story suggested the final dissertation phase was the very central core of the PT-postgraduate world, possibly even a PG sub-world in its own right. The dissertation phase signalled and legitimised her central participant status bringing with it increased autonomy. Despite her initial hesitation and feeling daunted ('sea of self' doubts'), Esme began to feel more at home and trust herself to take control of her participation.

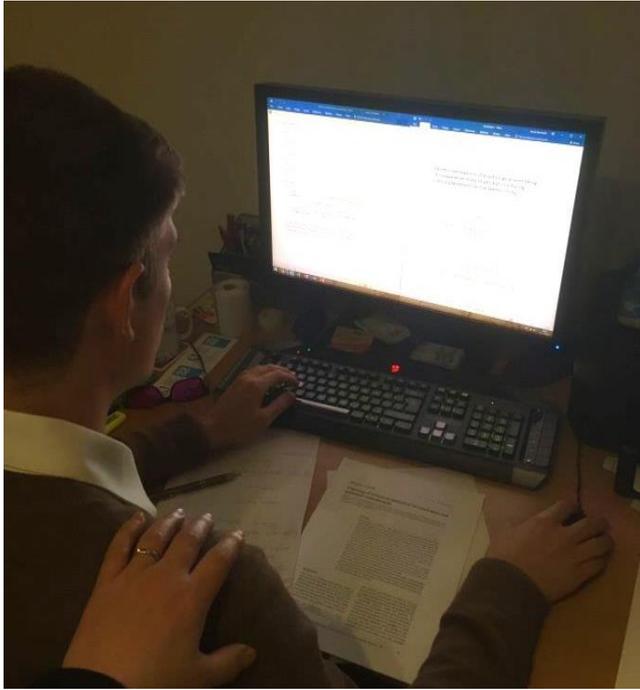
Over time Esme had developed intimate knowledge of the PT-postgraduate world and close relationships with other members (the dissertation peer group and academics). As a central

participant of the PT-postgraduate world she was then equipped to embrace the idea of guiding the experience of other members. There were suggestions that within the dissertation action learning sets and in providing a guided tour of her experience map to Juliette a more peripheral member at that stage, Esme was helping to create and shape the PT-postgraduate world. Certainly Esme's story articulated a substantial amount of personal investment with commitment to the on-going activity of the PT-postgraduate world and encouragement to other members including her son, peers and Juliette. Herself a recipient of personal change, Esme began to shape the experiences of other social world members.

***"I'm more able to speak to people without feeling that I don't have anything to say" - Transferable currency positive permeations***

For Esme the borders between social worlds were permeable allowing for reciprocal and transferable resources and learning. This appeared to facilitate Ether's multiple and complimentary membership and daily transitions across reasonably peaceful borders. Esme spoke about synergies between the social worlds which to some extent shared similar values and activities.

As Esme entered and participated in the PT-postgraduate world, her growing experience, learning and confidence helped her to shape, enhance and further legitimise her roles and participation in the other two social worlds. At home in her parenting role, she spoke about role modelling and her positive reinforcement of the value of studying and learning, which she felt in turn would shape the experience and understanding of both her children,



*“Aaron really appreciates my help and just that we can speak on the same level”* **ERPEMN 43**

*“We have lots of.....chats about his latest assignments and where he should go [with them] and this is my daughter so hopefully I'll be able to help her .... she just about to take GCSEs”* **ERPEMN 44 & ERPEMN 45**

*“It's kudos for him having a Mum that knows what he's talking about”* **ERPEMN 47**

#### **ERPEMP9**

Similarly Esme applied her learning from the PT-postgraduate world to shape her relationships with her team in the work world. She illustrated this in her photograph of different fruit which she felt illustrated her changing approach to the diversity within her team before commenting further on her application of learning



*“I work within a very diverse group of individuals and I think that completing the MSc has shown me how diverse they are to appreciate the diversity and to recognise that how my leadership and management affects them”* **ERPEMN 27**

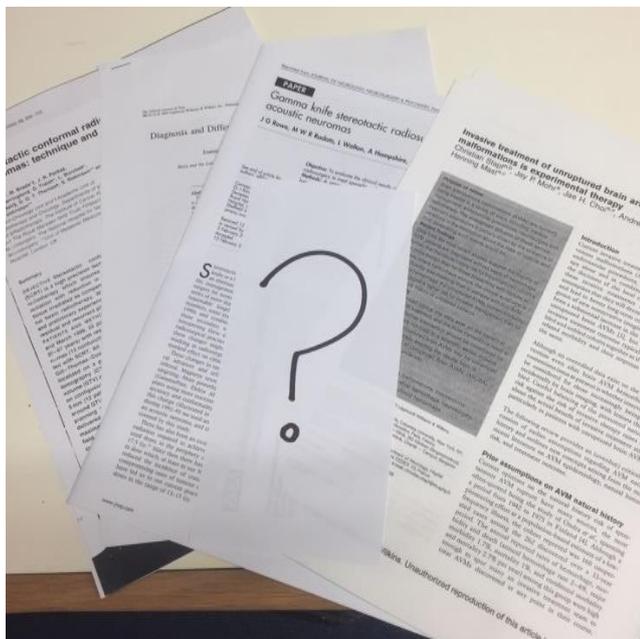
#### **ERPEMP8**

*"I think some [members of the team] because they know that I have completed the course I kind of have backing without having to explain what I'm doing" ERPEMN 24*

*"I'm more confident, I'm more able to speak to people without feeling that I don't have anything to say, I feel I have more back-up in that I do have the skills and knowledge to speak confidently" ERPEMN 36*

*"I think everybody that works with me would think [I have changed] for the better because going back to that (P8) I do think that I appreciate people much more than when I began" ERPEMN 39*

Along with her enhanced critical thinking and decision making skills from the PT-postgraduate world which she could then use to direct, drive and shape service provision at work,



**ERPEMP10**

*"Yes I do definitely question things more.... is what I'm reading relevant to my place of work and what I do and could I incorporate something like that"*

**ERPEMN 18**

*"That allowed me just to explore strategies surrounding workplace bullying and I have definitely applied that and I think the department is much better for it because I've been able to suggest different strategies, incorporate things but also back up why I want to do this and why I think it will help and I think things have improved" ERPEMN 22*

***"It's kind of got a little "Troll" on the bridge I think that was probably me keep shutting the office door" - Border Checks, claiming time and space***

Esme confirmed that as she reached the analysis and writing up stage of her dissertation she needed to protect and maintain the temporal and possibly physical borders of the PT-

postgraduate world more fiercely, to defend against any unwanted interruptions or permeation. She appeared to feel justified in not responding to any emotional pull or expectations from her other memberships in the home and work worlds.



**ERExMP4**

*"It's kind of got a little "Troll" on the bridge I think that was probably me keep shutting the office door"*

**ERExMN 14**

*"I think it was just easier to do that, I booked a couple of blocks of time off from work, when I knew that my daughter was at school...That was me time, I wasn't going to do any housework, I wasn't going to put any washing in the washer, that was me time to just get going. I found it really useful"* **ERExMN 16**

Having embedded the PT-postgraduate world in her SWS Esme went on to complete the MSc and graduate. Her story moves on to the readjustments in her SWS as she departed the PT-postgraduate world and terminated her membership.

***"I felt like I'd got so many extra hours in the day" - Departing the PT-postgraduate world, readjusting the social world space***

Esme's story highlighted that she had invested a great deal in the PT-postgraduate world. As she prepared to leave she began to look forward to re-instating some of the previously expended activities and responsibilities that had been sacrificed for the PT-postgraduate world.

*"This was my initial life after finishing the dissertation..... they're things actually bizarrely with ironing, I quite enjoy and find quite relaxing and it was suddenly I felt like I'd got so many extra hours in the day to get out and walk with my dog"* **ERPEMN 2 & ERPEMN 4**

*"I get to do my housework, get to do things in my free time"* **ERExMN 17**

*"That was my dream to get my desk back, my life back"* **ERPEMN 5**

*"That's what I thought I wanted but quite quickly"* **ERPEMN 7**

This signalled to me that as Esme was leaving the PT-postgraduate world behind she was in the process of repaying the home world for the time and resources previously borrowed to accommodate the PT-postgraduate world in her SWS. However, given her high regard for the PT-postgraduate world I was uncertain whether she would regard such activities in the same light or if they could refill the space left by the PT-postgraduate world,

*"I didn't realise what it had given"* **ERPEMN A9**

*"I'd lost something that I really valued"* **ERPEMN 8**

*"I suppose kind of like a purpose"* **ERPEMN 10**

It sounded as though Esme's PT-postgraduate experience would possibly continue to influence her membership of other Social worlds and so to some extent continue to pattern her SWS for some time come,

*"I didn't really realise I valued it at the time"* **ERPEMN 8**

*"I didn't realise how much I'd enjoyed it, how much I'd sort of changed"* **ERPEMN 12**

*"I think it changed my whole outlook on how I am"* **ERExMN 26**

*"It just gives you confidence"* **ERPEMN 37**

*"I think I am a completely different person to three years ago"* **ERPEMN 36**

Esme's story drew attention to her experience of the final dissertation phase of a taught Masters programme. In doing so she touched upon entering and orientating herself in the PT-postgraduate world. The accompanying challenges for her personally and the adaptations this meant for her family and home world receive mention. Esme balanced this with her increased recognition of some shared values, transferable learning and ways of thinking which were seen to positively reshape her membership in the home and work worlds. There was a sense that in Esme's case at some point the social worlds she inhabited became relatively aligned and her multiple-membership and daily transitions more streamlined.

Primarily Esme told of her personal transformation. From initial hesitancy and self-doubt, she learnt how to be and managed expectations, coming to positively regard and embrace the setbacks or challenges along the way. Esme's story details her heightened self-awareness and self-belief in the new social world. Her participation became much more central and arguably she was then in a position to encourage and guide newer entrants and members. Esme had invested and succeeded in the PT-postgraduate world but with that her membership expired and she was forced to begin the process of leaving and letting go. Celebration was followed by a period of starting to once again reshape and reconfigure her social world space.

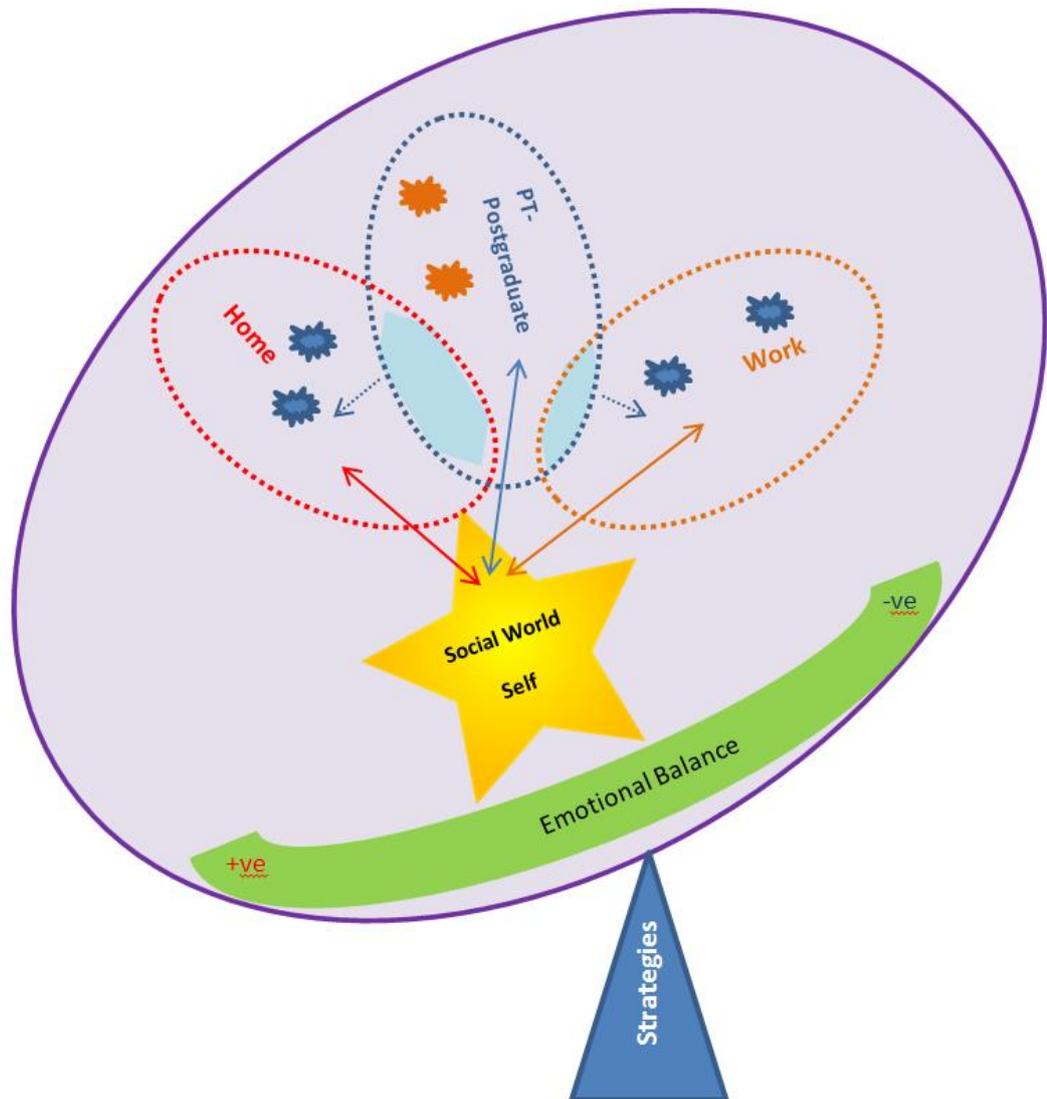


Figure 15 - Esme: Social world Space Constellation illustration

**In summary**

Esme's story differed from the other participants in focusing predominantly on her final dissertation year. There was a definite sense that her juggling act had become more refined or less intense. A number of contributory conditions appeared evident in her story, her priorities had shifted and social world memberships mattered less than for other participants. Her SWS was noticeably less crowded by the three social worlds although this arrangement and the flexible borders were noted to favour the PT-postgraduate world. Permeations between work and PT-postgraduate world were evident in how Esme's new thinking, knowledge and skills from the PT-postgraduate world permeated and influenced her membership and participation in the work world. Such permeations appear to lead to a blended intersection between the two social worlds on completion of MSc when working on presentations with colleagues and

possible publication. Esme reflects very positively on her time spent participating in the PT-postgraduate world and the strategies she used to maintain balance and order in her SWS. Confident in each of the social worlds she inhabited she was in control and it appeared Esme had created a positive aligned SWS albeit; as she exited the PT-postgraduate world it was a SWS set for further to reconfiguration.

The stories collectively evidenced that when two worlds intersect, competing for time, resources and physical spaces, participants made difficult choices in prioritising membership and participation needs or deciding which resources could be borrowed from other social worlds. During the period of orientation resources and participation were redirected to the new PT-postgraduate world. However, when the flexibility of the borders was felt to favour the PT-postgraduate world at the expense of others, in this study mostly the home world, border management strategies were used to reduce the border flexibility and rebalance the SWS.

Furthermore, as social worlds intersected, some borders were also found to be permeable allowing thinking, behaviour and physical objects from one social world to move into another. Similarly members of one social world (pets and family in this study) wandered across borders often unintentionally. The permeations and migrating border crossers were considered positive and welcome when this enhanced the study participant's multiple memberships, but negative and a distraction or intrusion when this inhibited their multiple memberships.

When participants viewed border flexibility and permeability negatively the blended areas were found to be disabling. The lack of exclusivity between social worlds caused confusion, uncertainty and conflict signalling the SWS was at that time misaligned and unbalanced. This was found to occur when the PT-postgraduate world and membership was added to the SWS. When participants viewed border flexibility and permeability positively an enabling blended area developed between the two social worlds. In such SWS situations, the lack of exclusivity between social worlds was beneficial/complimentary and a possible sign the border management strategies employed were effective and the SWS relatively aligned and balanced. This was not evident in the stories during periods of orientation when a new social world entered the participant's SWS.

## **6.5. Social Worlds Narrative (part-time postgraduate experiences and transitions)**

In the final section of this chapter I contribute a collective narrative of PT-postgraduate experience focusing on the three identified inter-related and dynamic levels, social world self, social world and SWS.

### **6.5.1. Social (World) Self**

Adopting the views of Hoyle et al (1999) and Mercer (2007) within this study, the self as a Social world member constitutes a dynamic and reflexive system open to change and re-negotiation rather than fixed entity. According to Tajfel (2010) it is from our belonging to social groups, together with the emotional significance and value we attach to the membership that we construct our social identity and more complex self-concept. Reconstruction or re-storying of the social (world) self to include PT-postgraduate learner was evident in the participant stories. Motivations for becoming a PG learner and member of the PT-postgraduate World related to a desire for growth and change academically, personally and professionally. In part at least each participant was returning to HE as a mature student to resolve some form of missed opportunity or unfulfilled potential (Britton & Baxter, 1999). Hettie had missed the opportunity for promotion; Juliette had missed the opportunity for earlier career progression. Esme and Jayne both missed the opportunity to leave University with a degree. There was a sense of dispositional imbalance between the sort of person they were and what they felt they could achieve (Dawson & Boulton, 2000). Their stories concur with Mercer (2004; 2007) the process of renegotiating the self, arose from a desire to achieve something that could have been done at an earlier stage, had their situation been different. For Jayne her unfinished business with university had lingered as something that she always intended to change, something she intended to rewrite or indeed reconstruct.

On a professional level the participants were returning to HE in an attempt to change how they were viewed by employers and colleagues (Walters 2000). With concern that they would not be recognised (Britton & Baxter, 1999) in an increasingly competitive job market, the participants were attempting to change their career situations (Dawson & Boulton 2000). Driven by academic, personal and professional motivators the participant stories shed some

light on their perceptions of a changing self. As the stories unfold the motivation to continue and complete the course was much more intrinsic, intertwining academic and personal fulfilment Mercer (2007).

### ***Changing the self - academic growth and fulfilment***

In returning to education and becoming a member of the PT-postgraduate world the participants brought and renegotiated their expectations and understanding of self as a learner from previous experiences, but refashioned this within the PT-postgraduate world. The participants in this study related their accumulating participation and increasing orientation in the PT-postgraduate world to increasing self-confidence and self-esteem. There was no suggestion of any sense of entitlement amongst the participants as identified in some studies (Gillespie Finney & Zachary Finney, 2010). Rather the stories align with the survey by Bunce, Baird and Jones (2017) which found an entitled consumer attitude to be less prevalent in mature student groups or those who do not have full fee responsibility. Far from any a sense of entitlement, the participants like other postgraduates experienced a lack of preparedness (Alsford & Smith, 2012) and shock (Christie et al., 2008; Davidson, M., 2009). They were uncertain of the appropriateness and validity of their opinions, their relative social status (Jhangiani, Tarry, & Stangor, 2015) and sense of belonging (Stagg & Kimmins, 2014) in the PT-postgraduate world.

The participants sought to make social comparisons and determine what was required of them (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Van Lange, 2008) in terms of the attitudes, behaviours and academic ability and skills required at Masters level (McPherson et al., 2017). Mastersness or Postgraduateness is not uniformly understood by students or academics (Burke, P., 2010), certainly for the participants this remained elusive for some time. Self-doubt was found to resurface at points throughout the participant stories usually around assessment submission. The academic confidence of the participants remained fragile certainly more capricious and gradually incremental than constant. There was an expressed aspiration for Mastersness apparent from the outset of the course and self-reported growth in academic confidence by the more longstanding students Jayne and Esme. Such increased self-confidence and esteem is a recognised key benefit of academic success amongst mature female students (Bowl, 2003; Pritchard & Roberts, 2006). The participant stories provide some corroboration of this and

how this increasing self-confidence was transferred into other social worlds and influenced participation in other worlds.

### ***Changing the self - personal growth***

Academic growth and confidence was associated or accompanied in some stories by an enhanced sense of self; and in other stories by (re)negotiation of the self in other social worlds. Juliette for example did not want to be '*plain old mum*' were returning to HE provided an opportunity to rediscover the self (Britton & Baxter, 1999) which over time may have been lost in the home and family world. For Claire it was more the desire to not lose the self in the modern family and contemporary life and her determination to '*to keep grounded, to keep me me*'; that was a part of her story.

The most vivid story of personal growth was relayed by Esme having completed the MSc; she testifies to discovering things about herself, having a complete change in her outlook, changing how she viewed the world and other people, and changing how she thinks. Growing academic awareness had facilitated a development of skills and attitude which Esme drew upon in other social worlds. Esme's story particularly concurred with Mercer's study (2007). Esme viewed returning to education as a mature learner as a period of development, change and growth of the self. Further the main headline from Esme's story '*I am a completely different person*' signifies the transformative self-development she experienced (Adams, 1993). Increased academic knowledge and confidence was reported by the participants in this study to have resulted in personal and professional change. This reflects a number of earlier studies which similarly identify the interrelated nature of academic and personal growth for mature students enrolled on access courses, foundation and first degrees (for example Mercer & Saunders, 2004; Mercer, 2007; Walton, Cohen, Cwir, & Spencer, 2012). The stories told in this study relate to a different academic career point and a higher level of study, but similarly describe personal and academic growth. The findings here suggest that the combined academic and self-growth in the PT-postgraduate world led to a different sense of self or a re-negotiated self (Mercer, 2007) in other areas of the participant's life and the social worlds they inhabited

## **6.5.2. Social World Business**

The frequently used sociological metaphor 'world' situates the individual and their roles in society (Hermanowicz, 2005). A social world is seen as a unit of social organisation which is diffuse (Unruh, 1979) but helps us to understand society, its grouping and processes attempting to account for behaviour in terms of the sociocultural environment (Strauss,

Anselm, 1978). The organisation of valued beliefs, orientations, rules, thought patterns and actions pertain to the central purpose or business of the social world (Clark, S. C., 2000; Gerson, Elihu M., 1983). Some social worlds are held to be mandatory, certainly in this study and in the wider literature these are considered to be home and work; whilst the optional social worlds generally consist of leisure/social/sport (Kazmer & Haythornthwaite, 2001, p511). In this study the participants became part of a new optional social world, that of the PT-postgraduate study. The participants were storying, renegotiating and re-storying the self as they participated in each social world. Their stories provide testimony to the commitment and participation in each social world which in turn contributed to their individual and collective identity (Strauss, Anselm, 1978). This section now offers a collective narrative summarising the home, work and PT-postgraduate worlds identified in each individual story, comparing accounts of the members, organisations, events and practices associated with each social world (Unruh, 1980)



In the home world, participants depicted the everydayness of home life which carried on regardless; celebrating birthdays, undertaking household chores, socialising, treats, school runs, children's activities, parties, football, exercising, families, pets and all the ordinary events which take place in the home and leisure/social areas. The home world was required to fit around their participation and membership around other social worlds. All participants reported the regular need for replacing family time or participation in the home world with study (Fragoso et al., 2013) and for some participants also to undertake work (Derks, van Duin, Tims, & Bakker, 2015).

However the participant's roles and responsibilities in the home continued along with the self-expectations and the expectations placed on them by family members and wider society. They felt pulled out of their home life and guilty about this. Juliette, Claire and Jayne were parents and primary carers of young children (Fragoso et al., 2013), they found it particularly difficult practically and emotionally to spend time away from home to study (McCune et al., 2010b). However Claire and Juliette did reflect that being a learner again provided a positive role model for their children. For Esme's older children this carried kudos and led to new conversations.

In telling their stories, the variations and similarities in the business, values, structure and organisation of each home world came to light. Collectively, the home world was associated with health, happiness, comfort, and love; this part of their life was very much about being with and having relationships with those closest to them.



The world of work for the participants in this study included a primary base and for some participants regular travel, with mobile or flexible working of the physical locations and working hours. As a result, transport, technology and time management feature heavily in their stories. For Hettie mainly but also Claire, communication technology facilitated continued connectivity outside work; a noted development in our modern society which blurs the boundaries between our work and non-work lives (Derks et al., 2015). Work was a core and defining part of the participant's life. The centrality and priority that work occupied did vary between participants. In Hettie's case, work was a pinnacle, defining and at times invasive part of her life. For Juliette having recently brought her work and career out of hibernation it was an expanding part of her life which was becoming a more central priority. Working in health and social care, the requirement for continued professional development and learning meant that the participants had all received some financial support via their employing organisation. Although beneficial and well received, there is recognition that this can place additional pressure on students to succeed and achieve to a high level on both fronts; work and university simultaneously (Charlton, 2016). Certainly in this study the expectations on the participants in the workplace remained the same; there was an assumption that they would manage their workloads and time around university attendance undertaking the necessary study and preparation for assignments in their own time. In contrast to the study by Kazmer and Haythornthwaite (2001, p511) in this study all participants were undertaking work-related study and were committed to ensuring their participation in the work world was not adversely affected by returning to part-time study; a finding reflective of practitioner-students in the recent study by Charlton (2016), who reported the pressure to be successful in both worlds. In this study each participant spoke about the reality of living up to self-expectations and those held by others; in managing such expectations they were constantly juggling and prioritising the competing demands and responsibilities of their multiple-membership.

The employing organisations and individual participants were definite beneficiaries of PT-postgraduate study; this included using and sharing learning resources back in the work place and the application or transference of learning between university, the workplace and individual roles. Echoing the findings of (Charlton, 2016; Kazmer & Haythornthwaite, 2001, p511), the participants in this study identified a synergy between what was learnt in the PT-postgraduate world and what was valued and rewarded at work. In their stories the participants were noted to apply and test theory and their formal learning in the workplace

claiming this increased their effectiveness or ability in their leadership/management role. Hettie and Esme reported the ability and opportunity to directly apply their new knowledge was a learning motivator (Lizzio & Wilson, 2004). This appeared to play an important part in their integration of the two social worlds.

The participants told me about a work world in which they were comfortable and confident but could not rest on their laurels; they had a thirst for increasing their knowledge, skills and qualifications to survive in a competitive work environment. They stressed the flexibility their positions afforded to manage their workloads to facilitate university attendance and an acceptance that the self-directed study and assessment work would be undertaken in their own time outside work. For the participants in this study the work world was the place in which they were completely professional and committed to doing the very best they could for the organisation, service users and their colleagues.



In entering the new PT-postgraduate world the participants told of their excitement and enthusiasm but also their hesitancy, self-doubt and disorientation as part-time students returning to education after some time (Aird, 2017; O'Donnell et al., 2009). For varying lengths of time they felt shell-shocked, 'scared' (Pekrun et al., 2002), like 'fish out of water' (Aird, 2017) or visitors in a 'foreign' land. The realities of postgraduate study and Mastersness were a shock; the challenging, all-consuming nature and amount of time they needed to commit was unexpected. Not sure of what was expected of them they questioned whether they were good enough (Brookfield, 2006), feeling particularly uncomfortable when working in mixed groups with postgraduate students who had been studying longer.

From the initial encounter they were clear that PT-postgraduate study was different to any previous experiences of HE. Some of this difference was attributed to determining what Mastersness entailed but also that life continued at full force alongside the fast pace and intensity of the masters course (Higher Education Academy, 2015; Symons, 2001). They each found ways to become orientated to the practices and expectations of the PT-postgraduate World and found ways to embed and integrate the PT-postgraduate world within their SWS. Certainly the first semester and the first year of part-time study threw up challenges, conflict and a sense of being pulled in numerous directions. They faced difficult choices (Pollard, 2016) as they juggled commitments and responsibilities whilst establishing the sacrifices and priorities necessary to become efficient and effective learners. There was a definite rhythm and tempo to their postgraduate experience determined by the assessment cycle, the peaks and crescendos accompanied by increased panic and borrowing time and resources from other areas in their life. Relief and reassurance then followed each assessment submission point allowing them to refocus and concentrate on repairing (Kazmer & Haythornthwaite, 2001, p511) and recommencing the responsibilities and relationships elsewhere.

The participants trialled and tested their individual approaches to study; regular, small, scheduled periods, akin to a grazing approach, worked for some particularly in the early part of the assessment cycle. For others regular scheduled longer blocks more famine and feast style proved useful and almost mandated in the immediate period prior to assessment submission. In addition Juliette and Claire tell of seizing opportunistic moments for study and how they planned (Kazmer & Haythornthwaite, 2001, p511) and facilitated this to make the most of available time. With continued experience the participants became more flexible, switching and combining approaches to suit the time available and the point within the assessment cycle.

Entering and engaging in the PT-postgraduate world required (re)negotiation with members in the other worlds of work and home. Whilst supportive, members in the work place made no allowance or reduction in work loads or work hours. This placed additional burden and heightened the requirement for adaptation in the participant's home world to accommodate their return to part-time study and membership of the PT-postgraduate world. Combining or switching between the activities and roles of one area or world whilst inhabiting another was commonplace. To achieve this whilst not disrupting relationships or breaking the rules of the home world, participants adopted strategies which allowed them to participate in the PT-postgraduate world 'under the radar' or 'undercover'. Juliette and Claire both spoke about the roles of family members changing and all told me about changing routines in the home world as a result. At times those closest to them in the home and work worlds acted as gate keepers. Knowingly or not they would enable or allow, prevent or deter the participant from crossing the border or spending too long away from their active involvement at home. Furthermore, the participants were also influenced by their own emotions feeling guilty and torn; for Juliette, Claire and Esme this was related to their perception that returning to study was self-indulgent and something for them. To varying degrees, the participants were focused on the end point of their part-time studies; all depicted perceived and actual difficult encounters, barriers and deterrents which must be overcome along the way. But as they did so they gained in confidence and began to see the fruits of their learning, its application in the workplace and home and so there was a general consensus and sense that the end justified the means. The PT-postgraduate world was the place they felt challenged and stretched, vulnerable and exposed, overwhelmed and doubtful, enthused and alive. The participants valued the learning and skills they developed and could use in the other areas of their life. Although not always easy to personally reconcile this was their time, this was a place 'for them'.

Drawing further on the SWP, this study now explains how the participants made sense of and managed the interaction with and interplay between social worlds, maintained and crossed borders as they transitioned between the social worlds in their SWS.

### 6.5.3. Social Worlds Space (SWS)

According to Clarke (1991) each social world has a dispersed group of social world members who generate ideologies about how their work should be done, building debate and discourse about their activities and the activities of other social worlds which may affect them. It has been established through the participant stories and earlier in this chapter that not only did the participants enter the PT-postgraduate world but the PT-postgraduate world entered their life and SWS.

I was interested in how the individuals in this study 'trod their own path' navigating and transitioning the mosaic of touching and interpenetrating social worlds which make up society (Gerson, Elihu, 1978). In listening to their stories I began to understand that as each individual participant 'trod their own path' they were in effect carving out and managing an individually patterned constellation of social worlds which I have referred to as their SWS. In contributing to the social world discourse it is suggested here that the SWS is the individual's array of orbiting worlds (Kazmer & Haythornthwaite, 2001, p511) and 'orbiting processes' (Strauss, Anselm, 1978). The findings of this study identify that this multiple-membership resulted in precarious juggling of roles and multiple daily micro 'horizontal' transitions across the borders between the social worlds. Managing and renegotiating the SWS was a constant challenge evident in each participant story next explored more fully.

#### ***New membership - orientation in the PT-postgraduate world***

Orientation to the social world according to Unruh (1979) is the level to which the person is a member of the Social world, the extent of their understanding and belonging in that social world. In entering the PT-postgraduate world and taking up new membership participants all experienced some degree of shock and disorientation accompanied by self-doubt or self-conflict. Unruh (1979) further advocates four social types of members found trans-situationally across social worlds

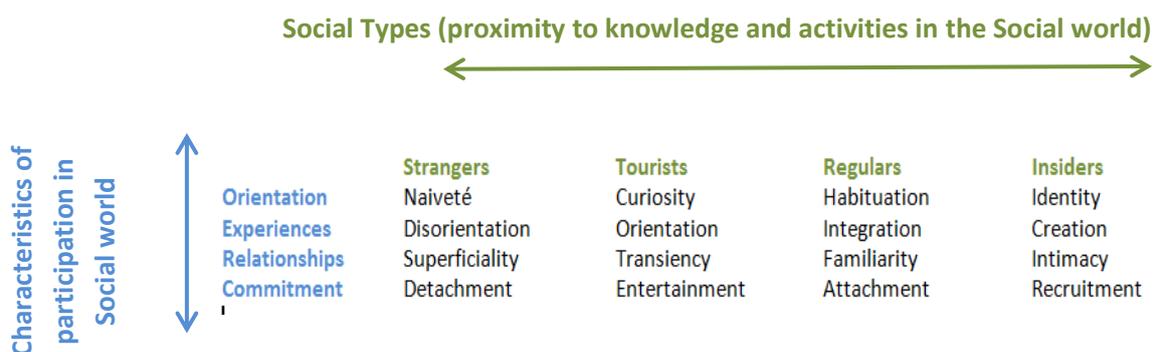


Table 8 - Characteristics and types of participation in social worlds

The social types detailed by Unruh relate to the members proximity to the Social world, knowledge, roles and activities (Unruh, 1979) and the level or degree of participation as a member of the social world. To some extent the work of Unruh is supported by the participant stories in this study, as they entered the PT-postgraduate world some might have been considered *strangers*. Naively, they brought along some of their usual ways of thinking from other social worlds which they had to wrestle with and adapt in the PT-postgraduate world. Jayne for example thought of study and herself as a learner in a relatively fixed way, Juliette thought of her family as almost dependent on her being at home. Perhaps more accurately, they were initially *tourists* when they had entered the PT-postgraduate world with some appreciation of what it might entail and a curiosity and commitment to know more. Participating on the peripheries, the participants spoke about their uncertainty, being unsure of what was expected of them and a desire to know how the PT-postgraduate world functioned and how they could better participate. They had to learn how to be in that world, determine what was expected and how the pieces fit together so that they could begin to make minor adjustments and become more confident and autonomous in their participation. Through routine regular participation and feedback, the participants began to move from the initial peripheral positions towards a more central participation and a *regular* membership (Unruh, 1979). Esme's reflections provide some confirmation that with increasing participation and confidence a more central position in the PT-postgraduate World could be occupied.

Esme described her situation to have moved beyond the point of seeking acceptance and familiarity. She found she 'trusted herself' and was able to direct her own participation but also contribute to and influence the participation of other members. Although her membership of the PT-postgraduate world had presented many challenges as it came to an end she recognised something positive, something she valued 'what you have got out of it at the end is worth any amount of tears definitely'; she was keen that others would too. According to Unruh (1979), Esme may well have become an *insider* in the PT-postgraduate world. The PT-postgraduate world like any other will include a core of highly involved people but also marginal participants (Strauss, A., 2017). It is fair to say the participants found their membership of the PT- postgraduate world very intense becoming at times virtually all absorbing and consequently their multiple-memberships had to be managed.

### ***Multiple-memberships - the precarious juggle***

Membership of the PT- postgraduate world was in addition to established and ongoing activities, roles and memberships of other social worlds. Use of the juggling metaphor was noted by Kazmer and Haythornthwaite (2001, p511). Metaphorically in this study, participants similarly referred to 'plate spinning' and 'juggling'. The juggling and spinning aptly conjure up the multiple participation and micro transitions of the PT-postgraduate learners which are analogous with the thoughts of Strauss (1978); in that most social worlds involve orbiting process, moving from one to another, retaining both or dropping the original, plus simultaneous membership. Participants in the present study agreed that it was their home and family world that had to compensate for the new addition and their participation in the PT-postgraduate world. They highlighted the ways they had found to accommodate study within their daily routines but they still had concerns about failing to meet expectations and the guilt associated with this.

Juliette, Claire, Hettie and Jayne drew attention to the conflict and guilt associated with juggling multiple roles. Mercer and Saunders (2004) also found this to be the case but for students who were parents this was particularly the case limiting the time or opportunity to block study time. Without question the stories are a testament to the difficulty in negotiating and finding a balance between ensuring one's own academic progression and maintaining other pre-established roles and responsibilities (Mercer & Saunders, 2004) at the level expected. Feeling selfish about making time to participate in the PT-postgraduate world was evident in the stories of Juliette, Claire, Jayne and Esme. One resolution was for the participants to work when children were in bed or family members otherwise out of the home, using their own time not the time they usually spent with others; a finding which is also common to other studies (for example, Mercer & Saunders, 2004). Family roles were found to adapt in order to accommodate the PT-postgraduate world which in itself became a double-edged sword, for both Juliette and Claire signalling a possible and perhaps unwelcome change in their home status. They both expressed some concern about relinquishing or making their extensive parenting and home roles partly redundant (Walters 2000). The stories from Claire, Juliette and Esme do offer some balance to this in their identifying the merits of PT-postgraduate membership in becoming a role model for their children.

As they entered the new PT-postgraduate world the participants tried to benchmark and authenticate their membership by making the social comparisons (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Van Lange, 2008) comparing their ability, engagement and performance with that of others. For the participants in this study as the new social worlds was added to their SWS the increased multiple-memberships gave rise to increased fear that they might fail to meet their personal expectations or those of other members and gatekeepers in the social worlds.

Just as studies of undergraduate students have shown (for example, Palmer, O'Kane, & Owens, 2009), being a member of the PT-postgraduate world required great commitment, tenacity and perseverance to overcome the challenges and deal with arising emotions. The positive influence of self-talk and mental imagery on motivation and performance is noted in a variety of context (Neck & Manz, 1992). The participants were very aware of their emotions; Juliette, Hettie, Claire and Jayne utilised self-talk or self-coaching cognitive strategies to ensure they remained motivated, positive and determined during challenging times, whilst Jayne and Esme suggested that they noticed a turning point something numerous studies have also confirmed (O'Shea, 2014; Palmer et al., 2009). For Esme it was at the end of the first year and in Jayne's case this came well into the second year when they found their juggling act had become more sophisticated, refined and if required adaptable.

Despite frequent and regular participation in the PT-postgraduate world for the participants in this study, this was mostly remote and in isolation, their contact with other social world members was indeed *part-time*. Integrating with peers in mixed course year groups could be exposing (McPherson et al., 2017) particularly for new members of the PT-postgraduate world. Jayne and Juliette both noted being conscious of the different student backgrounds and experiences when attending University study days. Despite this the participants in the most part felt comfortable and increasingly more confident with the immediate circle of peers and academics. Esme puts forward a much stronger case valuing and appreciating the mutual support of a strong peer group. However, unlike some university students, this group of participants had not left behind their homes and relationships, the other social worlds they inhabited; they had not discontinued or put on hold other core memberships. It would seem their desire for belonging in the University was perhaps different too, more about belonging on an academic level rather than personal level. They did not seek social support from peers or academics within the PT-postgraduate world that went beyond facilitating their participation in the PT-postgraduate world. This raises questions about the commonly and readily accepted standpoint in the literature that belonging is a desirable and aspiration of all

University students. If students have well-established and continuing social world memberships the concern may be more around not wanting to feel excluded than a strong need 'to belong'.

### ***Transitions and border crossing - a blurring of lines***

The borders define "*the point at which domain-relevant behaviour begins or ends*" (Clark, S. C., 2000, p.756). Individuals transition between the different social worlds and their social roles as they surmount the different borders (Van Maanen, 1982); this might be in crossing a physical border and physically moving from one social world to another, crossing a temporal border switching roles and so social worlds at certain times, or indeed crossing an emotional or psychological border becoming mentally concerned with another role or social world (Clark, S. C., 2000; Hall & Richter, 1988). The border crossing and transition might be planned or imposed; the latter could be self-imposed or indeed imposed by the actions of members from one social world intervening in another (Hall & Richter, 1988). The participants in this study told stories of how they continually transitioning between the social worlds. It became apparent that although it may have been preferable for Jayne, Hettie, Juliette to maintain distinct strong borders between the social worlds orbiting their SWS this was not always possible.

The physical borders of the social worlds all showed some flexibility primarily favouring the PT-postgraduate world which had no single primary site or location, no formal physical border. The participants described a PT-postgraduate world that was often amorphous and difficult to contain. The participants identified that as part-time students the majority of study and learning took place outside the university, in the home, work place, cafes, on public transport and in cars. These spaces usually associated with other social worlds acted as host domains for the PT-postgraduate world activities to be carried out. This allowed or indeed forced the participants to switch between roles and activities without necessarily changing locations. Participants spoke about switching and transitioning backwards and forwards between either their home or work activities to their postgraduate activities and vice versa without crossing a physical boundary. The physical location remained the same but they had crossed temporal or emotional borders in switching between roles. With a flexible attitude, careful planning and the use of technology this was usually seen to be positive blending and synergistic. Conversely, the blending of borders could also be viewed negatively, when this created

confusion and caused challenges for the participants seeking to keep their different social worlds well defined and separate.

Temporally, the borders were also flexible usually in favour of the PT-postgraduate world. The participants like those in Pollards' (2016) study had to make difficult choices about how and when to spend their time undertaking PT-postgraduate work, spending more time than anticipated doing so. Much of the first semester or indeed first year was a period of trial and error, in which they continually tried to establish and review temporal borders. They told of their varying degrees of success in establishing and managing temporal borders of the PT-postgraduate world in order to protect the other areas of their life, particularly the home world. Finally membership and participation in the PT-postgraduate world was found to be an emotional encounter. Hence emotional/psychological borders and rules were established and managed to determine when and which thinking patterns and emotions were appropriate in one domain but not another (Clark, S. C., 2000).

The different border types were similarly described by the participants to be permeable allowing for elements or permeations from one domain to pass through the border into another (Hall & Richter, 1988). For example, the temporal and physical borders set by the participant for studying at home were permeated mostly by partners, children and pets. They prompted (imposed) transition back to the home world and associated roles; interestingly these were viewed as both interruptions and welcome distractions. Emotional/psychological permeations were also noted between the different social worlds. Jayne adopted her business-like attitude in the PT-postgraduate world, similar in Hettie's story she commented on her feelings about her workplace influenced how she felt about her study. Whilst Claire and Juliette both encountered difficulties switching off their thinking from the PT-postgraduate world when at home or work. It is further suggested that participant emotions acted as a feedback mechanism causing participants to adjust their engagement and participation in each social world.

The participant stories were stories of the meteoric juggling of social worlds to develop some sense of balance and order in their social world space. Relationship and border management along with flexibility to switch between multiple different social roles were the most talked

about and essential strategies that the participants depended to achieve or establish at least points of balance.

### ***Terminating membership and exiting the PT-postgraduate world***

The commitment required of the participants in the PT-postgraduate world meant other activities, roles or even entire social worlds (personal leisure) had to be curtailed or even rejected. The first year was a time when this could be trialled and refined. All participants looked forward to completing the course and were able to accept the temporary changes for the relatively short and defined period. They all identified obstacles, barriers and challenges that they might need to overcome in order to achieve this. The ExpMaps brought these to life in several ways with the inclusion of mountains to climb, monsters to overcome and dangerous waters to navigate. In Esme's story, by the dissertation phase her membership and participation in multiple social worlds had been refined and finely tuned and her SWS appearing to be well aligned and balanced. Understandably then with so much time and emotion personally invested, Esme had some regrets about terminating her membership and exiting the PT-postgraduate world and her postgraduate student role. Despite having looked forward to completing for some time prior, on leaving the PT-postgraduate world she missed having something just for her.

Exiting the PT-postgraduate world prompted a period of readjustment and contemplation of future social worlds which might include continuing academic activities when disseminating her research. According to the postgraduate survey by Bullen and Reeve (2011) the barriers to publication identified by respondents were lack of time (62%), lack of staff support (35%), and low confidence in ability to write (29%). For those regarding time as a barrier, work demands were commonly cited (90%). This suggests as the door to one membership closes the social world space readjusts, roles are re-prioritised and flexible borders re-established. Esme was the only participant to have completed the Masters course; awaiting graduation she was preparing to make the final exist. With the vertical postgraduate transition complete her daily horizontal micro transitions would no longer include the PT-postgraduate world. For the other participants the continual transitions and border crossings were a dominant part of their PT-postgraduate story.

#### **6.5.4. Conclusion**

There was an overall sense from the participant stories that as social worlds intersected the border flexibility and permeability could be mutually beneficial or indeed singularly advantageous. The participants found strategies and processes for redress and rebalance of the time, resources, attention and emotion borrowed by the PT-postgraduate world so that they were able to maintain relationships and live up to expectations of their multi world memberships. The participants acted as border keepers of the social worlds they inhabited creating temporal, physical and emotional borders creating rules to maintain these. But also in turn they found other members of the various social worlds would similarly acted as border keepers and developed explicit or implied rules for the participant to abide by. Juliette's story exemplifies the skilful art of negotiation and communication needed to test the borders set by her family, before they would question her participation in the PT-postgraduate world. Consciously or not members of one social world facilitated or deterred boundary crossing and imposed some of the transitions (Hall & Richter, 1988) the participants made between the different Social worlds and their social roles.

Participation in the social world effected and was affected by the sense of self in relation to the practices, values, organisation and business of the social world. The participants in this study were members and border keepers of different social worlds. They created and managed the boundaries between the different social worlds to enable their multiple memberships. Making multiple daily transitions they crossed the borders between the social worlds juggling the expectations of each to carve out a unique social world space which was in a constant state of flux and equilibrium. The participants continually adjusted and prioritised their roles, responsibilities and participation as they managed the borders and their transition between social worlds.

In this study the borders appeared more fuzzy, flexible and permeable than the earlier SWP suggests; technology, transport and wider societal views undoubtedly having a role to play. The participants in this study entered the PT-postgraduate world with well-established and well-practised strategies which in the most part enabled them to cope with the juggle of a changing and dynamic SWS. Echoing the words of Jacobson and Kaye (1993) achieving balance meant making choices; balance was more than good time management it was good border management within the SWS.

From the findings it is further argued that in returning to study the participants sought to become members of the PT-postgraduate world, which created flux for them as individuals as

they negotiated a new social role and (re)negotiated social self. Each participant spoke about a period of orientation to the PT-postgraduate world which was of varying length. During the orientation to the new PT-postgraduate world period they were not only learning how to participate as a new member they also had to work out how to embed the new social world within their SWS, managing the intersecting borders and their multiple transitions between the social worlds in order to regain some sense of SWS balance.

As members of the PT-postgraduate world their participation was influenced by the (changing) social self which in turn influenced their participation and self in other social worlds (home and work predominantly). The SWS is a unique constellation of social worlds, multiple memberships, borders, intersections and blended areas affecting how and to what extent they participated and performed their social roles in each social world. Without doubt becoming a PT-postgraduate learner was a meteoric juggling of Worlds.

## 7. Chapter Six – Conclusions

### 7.1. Introduction

#### **Part-time postgraduate study a meteoric juggling of worlds**

In drawing the thesis to a conclusion, in this chapter I finally examine and reflect on the research journey. The chapter has been organised to reflect the Deweyan theory which informs NI, commencing with *the past*, I return to the intended outcomes of the research revisiting the underpinning theoretical perspective and the subsequent research design. From that past I move onto *the present* outlining key learning from the resultant individual stories and the PT-postgraduate experience narrative; the limitations of the study are also included at this point. Finally, I consider what the thesis might offer *the future*, reiterating the contributions to knowledge and making recommendations for how the emergent knowledge and learning might be applied to future stories by academic educators and researchers.

### 7.2. Aim and Outcomes

The aim of this study was to better understand how a small group of part-time taught postgraduate students who concurrently work, study and manage their return to study.

The outcomes identified to achieve this aim were to:

- **foreground the part-time postgraduate student voice**

Chapter two draws attention to the continued demise of part-time students and assumptions made about postgraduate learners which render part-time postgraduates almost forgotten and unheard in universities. Social worlds perspective (SWP) introduced in chapter five offered a different lens for me to address the 'fractured' nature of the literature which appears to detract from hearing the voices. This study preserves and foregrounds the individual to awaken and rouse the attention of academics and policy makers who may have become desensitised to the real and everyday life of concurrently working postgraduates returning to HE part-time. The participatory creative visual methods detailed in chapter three allowed the voices to be loudly heard and their story visualised.

- **understand the individual storied experience of part-time postgraduate study within the student life**

From undertaking the vertical narrative analysis detailed in chapter three, individual stories were written in two parts. Part one of each story chronologically retells the overall participant story which had come to include a return to HE as a part-time postgraduate concurrently working. In part two of each story is reframed using the social worlds perspective (SWP). It is at this point the thesis contributes the notion of each participant inhabiting and managing their own individually patterned social worlds space (SWS). Together the two parts of each participant story offer emotionally intense individual stories detailing the entangled complexities of part-time postgraduate study as situated in the everyday life of the participant. This is then further explained and analysed in the collective social worlds narrative of part-time postgraduate experience found in chapter five.

- **select and justify a participatory methodology which allows others to walk in the shoes of the PT-PG student life**

Chapter three details the research design and ethical considerations which enabled the voices to be heard and stories to be seen. Creatively and uniquely visual narrative inquiry (VNI) has been adapted to co-produce data in two phases which took place 3-4 months apart. Initially photo-elicitation method produced numerous participant generated photographs of everyday life. The photographs then elicited rich in-depth stories during the conversational individual interviews. Phase two included three participatory workshops each attended by 2-3 participants. The participants created collages which portrayed to others *what it is like in their world*, they then gave a verbal guided tour of their experience world map. The experience maps uniquely geotag the PEM photography to help a would-be bystander or tourist better understand the experience of living in that world. The combination of visual methods allowed the co-construction of colourful, vibrant and rich stories and collective experience narrative found in chapters four and five. Chapters three and five also outline why SWP was adopted to complement VNI preserving the individual experience and stories. SWP worked well with VNI, resonating and aligning neither being dominant or over bearing. Both recognising the temporal, social and space/place dimensions of human experience.

### 7.3. Key Learning

#### **Part-time postgraduate experience and transition: Key Learning from the stories and social worlds narrative.**

The participants were all very clear that being part-time and a postgraduate was different and they were keen for others to recognise this. Returning to HE they became members of the PT-postgraduate world in addition to their existing memberships of the home and work worlds. Their PT-postgraduate world membership was different it was optional and would never be the central all-encompassing aspect of their life. It had to be considered as a *part* of all the other priorities and responsibilities.

The participants told about the adaptations their families made to accommodate their membership of the PT-postgraduate world. The participants felt pulled and guilty, some felt selfish spending time and participating in PT-postgraduate world. They were also mindful and concerned that they would not be able to live up to their own high expectations, those of people close to them or wider society. With continued participation in the PT-postgraduate world the participant stories began to include a sense of increased self-confidence and personal learning which shaped, enhanced and further legitimised their roles and participation in their home and work worlds. Certainly not seen as a continuation of their learning they felt unprepared and unequipped for their transition to postgraduate study and Mastersness. As their academic skills and understanding of Mastersness developed their stories were noted to evidence a vertical postgraduate transition.

The participants also made numerous daily micro horizontal transitions between a number of different activities and roles in their life. The different parts of the participant life can be thought of as distinct but amorphous social worlds which provide the context for the activities and roles they carry out. The constellation of social worlds, which I refer to as the individual's SWS, was always evolving, subject to flux and equilibrium being made up of complimentary or indeed conflicting social worlds. The participants had to constantly manage and reshape their SWS making difficult decisions about their commitments, responsibilities and roles. Some were postponed, delegated or discontinued, others like work or spending time with family remained absolute priority. They developed and refined strategies to manage and emotionally

balance their SWS. They found places to study and ways to juggle this whilst maintaining the status quo and their relationships in the different social worlds. They were proficient negotiators borrowing or re-routing time, attention or resources from one world for another. They skilfully developed, maintained and adjusted the boundaries between home, work and PT-postgraduate worlds. The participants confirm in their stories that they see their experience of postgraduate study as a part of their life not a detached part-time undertaking. Being a postgraduate learner became part of their meteoric juggle and individually patterned social worlds space.

## **7.4. Limitations**

Matters relating to the ethics and integrity of study have been discussed in section 4.5.3 but in concluding the study the inherent limitations common to NI are now reiterated. The participants in this study were leadership and management students, all were female, employed in such roles in the health and social care sector which has a strong culture of lifelong learning. This study is a snapshot of five individuals' storied sense making and hence generalisation and replication are neither intended nor possible.

The participants did not provide a narrative neatly, logically and chronologically packaged as they told me their stories. We "make sense of random experience by the imposition story structures. That is, we select those elements of experience to which we will attend, and we pattern those chosen elements in ways that reflect the stories available to us" (Duff & Bell, 2002, p.207). My role initially, one of co-creator of the story, became one of interpreter, analyser, translator and narrator (re)constructing their individual stories and then a collective experience narrative. In doing so the narratives are only my representation of the participant's storying of their experience. My choices and representation, most certainly coloured by my views personal, political and cultural, have a limiting effect on the research. In working with the participants, getting to know them both as the researcher and an academic, it is my perception that we developed friendships and mutual respect. I was very much aware of and particularly mindful of this during the writing up of the findings and thesis, consequently I chose my words carefully. I also situated my representation of the narratives within the context, chronology, structure, headlines and themes I decided. Although I have remained rigorous and systematic with every effort and intention of accuracy and authenticity I acknowledge that the thesis comes from my lens; ultimately it is the narrative I have chosen to show.

## **7.5. Contributions (in outline)**

Through the generous donation of participant stories, it has been possible to momentarily glimpse into individual experiences and what it meant for the participant to be a working part-time student in the postgraduate world. We are reminded by Stauffer and Barrett (2009) that narrative inquirers need to be attentive to and “make explicit, the social significance of their work and the larger body of literature to which their inquiry makes a contribution” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 485). This takes me to the “so what?” (Clandinin et al. 2007) and the four main contributions this thesis makes which may in turn in some small way shape future part-time postgraduate narratives, academic practice and pedagogy.

The first contribution the thesis makes in chapter two is to step outside the literature and focus on full-time undergraduate student experience and transition. Reviewing the literature, the thesis contributes and adds strength to the slowly growing recognition that there is a need for postgraduate pedagogy which recognises postgraduate transition and challenges the acceptance that postgraduate study is simply a matter of continuation for the learner. Chapters four and five build further on this contribution to challenge the dominant 'monocular' view that transition to HE only concerns a macro 'vertical' unidirectional process. Instead, the thesis offers a 'binocular' view of transition combining the widely accepted 'vertical' lens with a 'horizontal' lens, drawing attention to the additional numerous multidirectional daily micro transitions made by the postgraduate learner. To better understand the transition of each postgraduate it must be understood as a part of the individual's' storied life.

Secondly also in chapter five, the thesis makes a unique contribution being the only study which has taken a SWP theoretical lens to study the experiences and transitions of the postgraduate learner. This contribution adds to the SWP discourse offering the notion of individually patterned social worlds spaces which include the different orbiting social worlds each individual inhabits, their participation in each social world, their multiple-memberships and roles, their management of the intersecting borders and transitions they make between the social worlds. The SWS is a dynamic and fluid constellation which requires continual oversight and review in order to maintain a sense of emotional balance. The thesis confirms

the usefulness of the SWP in framing the fluidity and continual juggle of demands and expectations for concurrently working part-time postgraduate learners.

Chapter five finally includes a third contribution explaining the SWS constellation illustration process which was developed. The process can help to visualise and analyse the individual's SWS. In this study it helped me to tease out and consider inherent complexities, conflict and compatibility of combining study with work and home life. The experience mapping part of the data production really facilitated this, bringing to the surface how the borders and relationships of each social world were viewed managed by the participants.

A fourth and final contribution is made in being the only study to use a creative visual narrative approach which combines and 'geotags' PEM photography within an experience map. Chapter three outlines how asking the participants to use the photography and provide a 'TripAdvisor' guide for would be visitors to their experience world, encouraged them to step outside their experience for a moment and focus on trying to get others to really understand and appreciate what it meant to be in their SWS. In combination, the data production methods helped me to better understand the individual participant experience within their own context and over time. This data production approach worked extremely well with time-poor participants. Hettie and Claire commented on the positive experience of being able to share their stories with each other and me. It had encouraged them to spend some time thinking about their experiences and offered some reassurance in hearing the echoes of their story in the stories of others, despite their circumstances on the surface appearing quite different.

## **7.6. Recommendations (future practice, pedagogy, research)**

As I learnt more about the participants and their postgraduate experiences, I naturally started to make changes to my individual practice and make changes to the Masters course I was then leading. Others may wish to consider the following recommendations,

- Introducing an early, structured, elongated spiral induction and support processes for postgraduates, which acknowledge the emotional nature of postgraduate transition and seek to clearly identify what Masters level study is and how this can be achieved.

- Early (formative) assessment and feedback on academic writing and expectations of Masters level study to help guide postgraduate learners and reduce feelings of not being good enough or not knowing what is expected.
- Evaluating of the merits and shortcomings of postgraduate students from different year groups and courses being brought together to study shared modules. Where this is considered generally beneficial, preparing the students in advance and possibly avoiding this until after the first assessment point would seem good practice. Ensuring support and training for academics in the facilitation of learning in such diverse and exposing groups.
- Introduction of a personal tutor system for postgraduates to offer continued and on-going support which highlights progress and understands the individual life circumstances which may affect or influence this.
- A change in mindset to focus primarily on the individual's life and appreciate how part-time study may only be a small part of this for a limited period of time, but it can impact positively and negatively across all the other parts of the student life.

Considering the previously set out contributions to knowledge and the thesis more generally, further recommendations are made for future studies

- Further and continued research should be undertaken with PT-PGT learners in different contexts to help build a rich picture and evidence base to inform the development of specific postgraduate pedagogy and policy. Given the female nature of the stories and experiences in this thesis, it is further recommended that future studies actively seek to hear the stories of male part-time postgraduates who concurrently work.
- Further use of the SWP Perspective to study postgraduate transition taking a binocular view which considers how the vertical transition and horizontal transition trajectories intersect and interact within the SWS.
- Further testing the notion of SWS and use of the SWS constellation illustration process in future studies. Possible use of the constellation illustration process as a tool to explore transition and determine appropriate support for postgraduates.
- Further testing and use of PEM and Geotagged Experience Mapping to understand the complexities of experience.

In this chapter, consideration has been given to how the study design and underpinning theoretical considerations were brought together to address the intended study outcomes and better understand how a small group of concurrently working part-time taught postgraduate learners storied and managed their return to study. Visual narrative inquiry permitted foregrounding of the part-time postgraduate student voice. Stories were co-produced using creative participatory methods which included PEM and geotagged experience mapping which allowed me to see and hear in rich detail the everydayness of what it was like to live in the life of each participant. The considered limitations of the study are included before outlining the four contributions to knowledge the thesis makes. The chapter finally includes recommendations for *future* practice, pedagogy and research.

## 7.7. Concluding thoughts

As I prepare to exit the PT-postgraduate world myself I have taken the opportunity to capture my main reflections on the study and my personal journey in appendix 6. Overall, I do not think I have changed my view that HE can 'disable' the learning experiences and transitions of mature part-time postgraduate learners. However, I think I understand more about why this might be the case,

- University systems and policies are designed for full-time students and it is largely assumed simply elongating the period of study for part-time learners is sufficient to meet the very different needs of part-time learners.
- There have been very limited attempts to understand the transitions and experiences of PT-postgraduate learners. Those which have fail to study and understand the experience and transition within a storied life.
- Assumptions are made that returning to HE as a mature part-time postgraduate is simply a continuation in learning. In making such assumptions the complex combination of vertical and horizontal transitions found in this study go unnoticed; leaving postgraduate students to flounder and fit part-time study into their life and their life into part-time study.
- Assumptions are further made that Mastersness is an understood concept resulting in insufficient attention and support for students to clarify and understand the enigma and arising expectations.

The participant's in this study shared a common characteristic in that they were studying a part-time. They were also united in their motivation to achieve a Masters qualification which might protect or open new opportunities in their career. But that is where any commonality stopped. Attempting to group together seemingly similar learners in any other way fails to capture the uniqueness of the individual experience. Participants each developed strategies to manage and embed the part-time postgraduate world within their individually patterned social worlds space (SWS). Each SWS comprised a unique constellation of social worlds, multiple memberships, borders, and intersections which affected how and to what extent they each participated and performed their social roles in each social world. It is recommended therefore, strategy pedagogy and research to better understand and improve the transition



and experiences of part-time postgraduate learners must resist homogeneity. In this respect this thesis makes a contribution, bringing to the fore powerful emotive words, images and stories to momentarily pull the reader inside the worlds of five working part-time postgraduate learners. If this thesis has in anyway disrupted your thinking, it has served its purpose.

*The worlds of the part-time, postgraduate learners*

## 8. References

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## **9. Appendices**

### **9.1. Appendix 1**

**Participant demographic data**

Student no.	Year of Study	Year of Programme	Final year (Yes/No)	Highest entry qual - full	Year last attended Institution	Funding Source (stu) - full	Age on entry to course	Ethnicity - name	Gender	Socio-economic group	Disability - name	Disabled Yes / No	Learning Contract Yes / No
3	1	1	No	Diploma at Level 3		No award or financial backing	43	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
4	1	1	No	Masters degree (UK)	2006	No award or financial backing	48	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
5	1	1	No	Professional qualifications at Level 6	1999	Student's employer	38	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
6	1	1	No	Professional qualifications at Level 6	2010	Student's employer	41	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No

8	1	1	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2004	Student's employer	40	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
9	1	1	No	Postgraduate Certificate	2005	Student's employer	45	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
11	1	1	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2005	No award or financial backing	35	WHITE	M	5-Lower supervisory and technical occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
13	1	1	No	Postgraduate Certificate		No award or financial backing	43	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
17	1	1	No	Postgraduate Diploma	2007	No award or financial backing	35	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
18	1	1	No	Diploma of Higher Education (DIPHE)	2015	Student's employer	51	BLACK - AFRICAN	M	2-Lower managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
19	1	1	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2006	Student's employer	40	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No

20	1	1	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2012	Student's employer	45	WHITE	F	2-Lower managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
21	1	1	No	Postgraduate Credits	2013	No award or financial backing	40	WHITE	F	2-Lower managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
24	1	1	No	International (Non-EU) Degree		No award or financial backing	55	ASIAN - PAKISTANI	M		NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
26	1	1	No	14-19 Advanced Diploma Level 3	2002	Student's employer	37	BLACK - AFRICAN	M	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
27	1	1	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2002	Student's employer	38	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
29	1	1	No	Masters degree (UK)	2012	Student's employer	40	WHITE	M	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
33	1	1	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2009	Student's employer	49	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No

34	1	1	No	Professional qualifications at Level 7	2012	Student's employer	48	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES	Yes	No
35	1	1	No	Other Qualification at Level 6	2000	Student's employer	50	WHITE	M	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
42	1	1	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2014	Student's employer	39	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTY EG DYSLEXIA	Yes	Yes
43	1	1	No	Postgraduate Certificate	2014	Student's employer	36	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
44	1	1	No	Degree (UK) with honours	1998	No award or financial backing	44	WHITE	F		NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
45	1	1	No	Degree (UK) with honours		No award or financial backing	26	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No

46	1	1	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2011	Student's employer	54	BLACK - CARIBBEAN	F	2-Lower managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
47	1	1	No	Professional qualifications at Level 7	2001	Student's employer	41	WHITE	F		NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
1	2	2	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2009	Student's employer	43	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
2	2	2	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2015	Student's employer	38	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
7	2	1	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2000	Student's employer	37	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
10	2	2	No	Masters degree (UK)	2007	Student's employer	49	WHITE	M	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No

12	2	2	No	Other Qualification at Level 4		Student's employer	41	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
14	2	2	No	Degree (UK) with honours		Student's employer	47	WHITE	F		NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
15	2	2	No	Masters degree (UK)	2011	No award or financial backing	35	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
32	2	2	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2012	Student's employer	42	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
36	2	2	No	Doctorate Degree (UK)	2011	Student's employer	44	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
39	2	2	No	Degree (UK) without honours	2012	Student's employer	26	WHITE	F	2-Lower managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
40	2	2	No	Masters degree (UK)	2014	No award or financial backing	47	WHITE	M		NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No

41	2	2	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2013	No fees	42	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
16	3	2	No	Degree (UK) with honours	1995	Student's employer	44	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
23	3	3	Yes	Degree (UK) with honours	2007	Student's employer	37	WHITE	M	2-Lower managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
25	3	2	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2014	Student's employer	29	WHITE	M	2-Lower managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
28	3	2	No	Degree (UK) with honours	2011	Student's employer	30	WHITE	F	1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
30	3	2	No	EU (Non-UK) Degree		Student's employer	38	WHITE	M		NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
31	3	3	Yes	Diploma of Higher Education (DIPHE)	2001	Student's employer	44	WHITE	F	2-Lower managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No

38	3	3	Yes	Professional Qualification at Level 3	2009	Student's employer	51	WHITE	F		NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
22	4	3	Yes	Degree (UK) with honours	2005	No fees	46	WHITE	F	5-Lower supervisory and technical occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No
37	5	3	Yes	Masters degree (UK)	2001	Student's employer	42	ASIAN - INDIAN	F	2-Lower managerial and professional occupations	NO KNOWN DISABILITY	No	No

## 9.2. Appendix 2

### Full participant information sheet



### Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

#### 1) Title of Project

##### **In-work part-time students in Higher Education**

You are invited to take part in the above research study. Before you decide I would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear.

#### 2) Why have you asked me to take part?

Invitations to participate have been sent to students currently undertaking or recently completing the MSc leadership in Health and Social Care at SHU. I am interested in understanding your experience and perceptions of being an in-work part time student.

#### 3) What will I be required to do? Where will this take place? How often will I have to take part, and for how long?

If you decide to take part in this phase of the study you will be asked to give your written consent for each phase once you are happy that you have had sufficient information. Please ask me any questions or to clarify anything you are unsure of.

#### **Phase One – Individual experiences of being an in-work part-time student (photography and discussion/interview)**

I. If you decide to take part in this phase of the study you will be asked to capture photos which illustrate "***your individual experiences and perceptions of life after part-time HE study***".

- After study - What is different? What stays the same?, What has changed?
- How is your life similar or different now you have completed the programme ?

Given that official graduation and ultimate completion of the MSc programme takes place 21<sup>st</sup> November, it seems a timely opportunity to collect the photos for a period of 7-10 days around this date. If you are agreeable I will provide guidance and further details and then ask to you to consent before you take part. You can choose to use a loaned camera or use your own device if you prefer.

II. You will then be asked to send only the photos you are happy to be used in the study to me by whatsapp, email or using dropbox (or by other similar means if you prefer).

III. I would then like to discuss your photos with you in a one-to-one discussion/interview which will take place at a time and place convenient to yourself. I can book a private room on either University campus site. If you prefer I can meet you somewhere more convenient to you or at your work. The interview will usually take 40-60 minutes.

**Phase Two – Collective experience of being an in-work part-time student (focus group concept mapping exercise)**

- IV. If you decide to take part in this phase of the study you will be asked to meet up in a small focus group which I will facilitate. With consent the photographs and themes identified in phase one will be available for the focus group to discuss. We will work collaboratively to determine the best way to capture, illustrate and map **the collective experiences and perceptions of being an in-work part-time student**. I anticipate that this will take a few meetings starting January 2017 but no more than 3-4 hours in total.

**4) When will I have the opportunity to discuss my participation? [Debriefing]**

It is possible that you could feel some discomfort from participating in the interview or focus group session because the stories behind your photographs may be very personal. However, you do not have to share or discuss anything you do not wish to discuss and you are free to stop the dialogue at any time.

Immediately following the individual interview and the focus group activity I will be available to discuss anything about your participation that was difficult or uncomfortable. If for any reason you wish to discuss this further I will provide you with contact details for support that is available within the University.

**5) Who will be responsible for all of the information when this study is over?**

As principle investigator I will be responsible for ensuring the information and data is stored and destroyed confidentially after six years.

**6) Who will have access to it?**

Only myself as the researcher will know your real name, and this will be kept separate and confidential from all other data. However should any safeguarding issues arise this will have to be addressed following University guidelines.

With your permission the one-one interviews will be recorded and transcribed by a third party transcription company. Once you have checked the transcript I will remove all identifying information.

Faces of people and any organisational identifying signage or architectural features will be blurred out of any photos if verbal consent was not obtained by you.

The audio recordings and photographs will then be stored securely according to SHU protocol.

**7) What will happen to the information when this study is over? [How long will raw data be kept for? Will it be passed on to other people or used in other studies?]**

On completion of my doctoral studies all audio recordings will be destroyed. The photos and transcripts will be stored securely according to SHU protocol for six years, as they might be useful in future research for comparison and then destroyed.

The documents relating to the administration of this research, such as the consent form you sign to take part, will be kept in a folder called a site file or project file. This is locked away securely. The folder might be checked by people in authority who want to make sure that researchers are following the correct procedures. These people will not pass on your details to anyone else. The documents will be destroyed six years after the end of the study.

**8) How will you use what you find out? [Report, publications, presentations]**

This study will be written up as part of my thesis for submission and examination for my doctorate studies.

I also plan to disseminate the findings internally within SHU and externally to; academics, researchers, students and other stakeholders including workplace organisations. It is possible that the anonymised findings might be used in future comparison studies.

**9) Will anyone be able to connect me with what is recorded and reported? [Statement of confidentiality, details of coding system to protect identity]**

You will not be identified by name, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym. This will be used when storing, coding, or writing up the findings. Please be aware that by their very nature photos provide context and background information, hence you are asked only to submit photos which you are happy for me to include. If the photos include other people please ask their consent before sending the photos to me.

Participants will be asked to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of every focus group member. Please be aware that there is no way to absolutely guarantee this outside the focus group meeting.

**10) How long is the whole study likely to last?**

The two phases of data collection will be undertaken between October 2016 and March 2017.

**11) How can I find out about the results of the study?**

If you would like to receive a copy of the study findings please provide an email on the consent form.

**12) What if I do not wish to take part? - Participation is totally voluntary**

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you wish to take part in this study. Please be reassured that your decision will in no way influence your studies or our relationship during/after your studies.

**13) What if I change my mind during the study? - You are free to withdraw**

You might decide you wish to withdraw some or all of your participation in the study. This decision will in no way influence your studies or our relationship during your studies.

- I. You will choose which photographs you submit for discussion in the one-to-one interview. Following this you will then be asked to confirm which photos you consent to me using in the study and dissemination. You can choose to withdraw any or all of your photos.
- II. If you wish to withdraw any/all of your interview contributions please contact me within 7 days of receiving the transcript for verification.
- III. If you take part in the focus group in phase two it will not be possible to withdraw an individual's contribution to this collaborative activity.

**14) Do you have any other questions?**

**15) Details of who to contact with any concerns or if adverse effects occur after the study.**

If you have any queries or questions please contact:

**Principle investigator**

Ann-marie Steele, Tel: 0114 225 6516, Mob 07702211246 Email:  
a.steele@shu.ac.uk

Senior Lecturer in Leadership and Management

Centre for leadership in Health and Social Care

Sheffield Hallam University

30 Collegiate Crescent

Sheffield S10 2 PB

**Alternatively, you can contact my supervisor:**

Dr Anne Kellock Tel: 0114 225 4605 Email: a.kellock@shu.ac.uk

Senior Lecturer in Children and Childhood

Sheffield Institute of Education

Sheffield Hallam University

10210 Arundel Building

Howard Road

Sheffield S1 1WB

If you would rather contact an independent person, you can contact

Professor Ann Macskill (Chair Faculty Research Ethics Committee) [a.macaskill@shu.ac.uk](mailto:a.macaskill@shu.ac.uk);

Room UO803, Unit 8 Science Park, Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield, S1 1WB

Name of study: In-work part-time students in Higher Education:

Version number of information sheet: completers

Date of information sheet: 25/10/16



### 9.3. Appendix 3

#### Ethics Committee approval letter



Our Ref AM/RKT/D&S-263  
6 July 2016

Ann-Marie Steele  
Sheffield Hallam University  
Faculty of Health and Wellbeing  
Collegiate Crescent Campus  
Sheffield

**INTERNAL**

Dear Ann-Marie

#### **Request for Ethical Approval of Research Project**

Your research project entitled "**In-work part-time students in Higher Education: A visual case study**" has been submitted for ethical review to the Faculty's rapporteurs and I am pleased to confirm that they have approved your project.

I wish you every success with your research project.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ann Macaskill".

Professor A Macaskill  
Chair  
Faculty Research Ethics Committee

## **9.4. Appendix 4**

**Participant consent form**

## Participant consent form

<b>Study title:</b>	<b>In-work part-time students in Higher Education:</b>
<b>Chief investigator</b>	Ann-marie Steele
<b>Telephone number</b>	
<b>Participant name</b>	

	<b>Please read the following statements and put your initials in the box to show that you have read and understood them and that you agree with them</b>	<b>Please initial each box</b>
1	I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet dated 25/10/16 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	<input type="text"/>
2	I understand that my involvement in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving any reason, as detailed in section 12 and 13 on the participant information sheet.	<input type="text"/>
3	I understand that the information regarding my personal identity will be kept confidential but also that I might be recognised from the photos.	<input type="text"/>
4	I confirm that I will ask for verbal permission of anyone included in the photographs I take. I confirm my consent to sharing the images in the focus group concept mapping activity (phase 2) and with a wider audience as detailed in section 8 on the participant information sheet.	<input type="text"/>
5	I agree to take part in this study  Phase one (photography, one-one interview)  Phase two (collaborative concept mapping activity, focus group)	<input type="text"/>  <input type="text"/>

### To be completed by the participant

I agree to take part in the above study

Your name

Date

Signature

If you would like to receive a copy of the pilot study findings please provide an email:

My supervisors contact details should you need them can be found below,

Dr Anne Kellock                      Tel: 0114 225 4605                      Email: a.kellock@shu.ac.uk

Senior Lecturer in Children and Childhood

Sheffield Institute of Education

Sheffield Hallam University

10210 Arundel Building

Howard Road

Sheffield                                      S1 1WB

Filing instructions		
1 copy to the participant		
1 original in the Project or Site file		
Name of investigator	Date	Signature
A. Steele		

Name of study: In-work part-time students in Higher Education: A visual case study

Version number of information sheet: completers

Date of information sheet: 25/10/16



## 9.5. Appendix 5

### Data identification

#### Participants

Juliette	JL
Hettie	HL
Claire	CE
Jayne	JO
Esme	ER

#### Phase One Data generated via photo elicitation method (PEM)

Photo elicitation narrative response	PEMN - each response then numbered
Photo elicitation photography (by participants)	PEMP - each photograph then numbered

#### Phase Two Data generated via experience mapping (ExM)

Experience mapping narrative response	ExMN - each response then numbered
Experience mapping photography (by AMS)	ExMP - each photograph then numbered

In order to ensure clarification for the reader I have made the following minor adaptations to the of the verbatim narrative excerpts,

any additional words I include are differentiated with the use of brackets [ ].

any removal of words for example when the conversation moves off point but then returns, I indicated with a series of full stops .....

## 9.6. Appendix 6

### Personal Reflections

The whole purpose of the study was to foreground the PT-postgraduate voice. I took a personal journey accompanied by five very time pressed, busy people, Claire, Esme, Hettie, Jayne, and Juliette. They were all individually juggling their careers, study and lives, dealing with all the rewards and challenges that brings; but they felt it important enough to spend a considerable amount of their precious time sharing with me a snapshot of what it was like to walk in their shoes. The biggest responsibility for me has been to ensure that the choices I made sufficiently repaid their enormous investment in this study and me.

Just as they returned to education to undertake postgraduate study with their ideas and expectations, I came to this study with my ideas and proposals. The final thesis is nothing like the mixed methods study I thought would be needed to shake the views of academics and policy makers when I first sat down in the Doctoral classroom in January 2014; I have the participants of this study to thank for that. As they told me about their experiences, the power in their stories turned everything on its head for me. It was their voices, their pictures, their stories which helped to direct and re-direct me as I personally travelled what has felt like a very twisted path with a number of turns and dead-ends along the way. Whilst the study has been an uphill climb there have been so many vantage points and lessons learnt along the way. Relying on the guiding ethical principles and participatory values I learnt how to deal with emergent issues and the responsibility of having such close but enriching relationships with the participants. It has been difficult and frustrating but I have come to recognise and value the ambiguous, sensory and emotional nature of narrative inquiry. I have also developed the confidence to acknowledge and accept the insight I contributed as a narrative researcher. The biggest learning point is a reiteration of the thoughts of Esme during her dissertation, *"you have to learn to trust yourself"*. I think I have eventually learnt to do this, trusting my gut when it was telling me things were not right or indeed when they were, accepting there was no short cut, being patient, dealing with the setbacks and coming to embrace the messiness. This is not about failing to get things right or not doing the right thing, as a novice narrative inquirer it has been about getting into the best place, to get the best view, to be able to shine a light from within the rich, emotive, colourful and complex stories I was gifted.

It is the ability of NI and, particularly for me VNI, to really see, hear, feel the stories as a whole, as made sense of by the participants that has been the jewel in the crown. This has

most certainly been enhanced by choosing the SWP to underpin and frame the inherent complexity. NI and SWP both recognise experience as a dynamic evolving entity constantly in a state of flux. In turn, both offer sufficient fluidity to explore how the individual makes sense of their changing situation through their historically and culturally situated participation and experience.

Through VNI I have also had to be open to and embrace a more creative style of writing than I would ever have imagined possible at the start of this study. This required me to recognise and revisit the influence my 'disciplined health care background' has had over a number of years. We can never enter anything as a blank page but I have attempted to erase and blend in some of the previously well-defined hard lines to approach my writing in a more blended way trying to evoke in the reader shades of resonance and empathy, arouse emotions and sentiment; encouraging the reader to maybe think differently about those individuals we meet who briefly engage in a different world that of the part-time postgraduate learner.