Art from the heart:
the perceptions of students from widening participation backgrounds of progression to and through HE Art and Design

Caroline Hudson
Real Educational Research
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I am most grateful to the 48 students whose views on their experience of HE Art and Design are at the centre of this research. I am also very appreciative of NALN’s support of this research, particularly Mark Crawley, Maria Oliver and Maxine Walker. Thank you also to the CHEAD, particularly to Professor Frances Corner as Chair of CHEAD, for their role in supporting this work. I am grateful to the two HEIs, Townley and Norton, for facilitating access to the students. In the two institutions, I should like to give particular thanks to the two NALN Progression Managers, and to all staff who collaborated with this research, including giving up time to be interviewed. Thank you to Dr Anita Wilson for conducting a set of interviews at Norton; Sarah Connerty, Sherina Mack, Grainne McMahon and Nina Wigfall, for their prompt transcription of interviews; and Chris Chilton for ICT support.
I am very pleased to introduce the report _Art from the heart: the perceptions of students from widening participation backgrounds of progression to and through HE Art and Design_ commissioned by the National Arts Learning Network (NALN).

NALN is a national Lifelong Learning Network comprising specialist Arts institutions, working together to widen participation in higher education and to ensure a more diverse workforce for the Creative and Cultural Industries. In commissioning and disseminating this report NALN aims to build on the previous research by Dr Caroline Hudson and Jo Jamieson on widening participation in higher education Art and Design, commissioned by the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD) and Arts Council England. (Hudson and Jamieson, 2006). This new report has a significant focus on hearing the voices and stories — often very moving — of students from widening participation backgrounds. By listening to the student voice, practitioners can learn a huge amount about how HE institutions can respond effectively to the widening participation agenda.

I would like to thank the author Dr Caroline Hudson for her work researching and writing this report.

Mark Crawley
Director of NALN
May 2009
Executive summary

KEY FINDINGS

> These students from widening participation backgrounds drew on their rich life experience outside university, in the content of their work and in the skills they used in their HE courses.

> These students experienced major issues with the literacy demands of HE Art and Design, before and during HE. Institutional support did not meet students’ literacy needs systematically.

> Staff, across sectors, played often pivotal roles in these students’ experience of Art and Design. Students particularly valued critical feedback from staff, tailored sensitively to developmental stage.

> There were four broad patterns of transition to HE in the first year, though all students experienced issues with the initial transition.

BACKGROUND

Art from the heart is about the perceptions of 48 students from widening participation backgrounds of their progression to and through higher education (HE) Art and Design. The title of this report reflects the research’s focus on students’ voices, on their experience of Art and Design. The research has been commissioned by the National Arts Learning Network (NALN), a network of specialist Arts institutions which aims to widen participation in HE Art and Design. NALN commissioned Real Educational Research (RER) to:

> track the experience of different aspects of HE Art and Design of a sample of students from widening participation backgrounds, on a range of HE Art and Design courses at two NALN member institutions

> assess the extent to and ways in which students from widening participation backgrounds draw on their life experience outside university, in their Art and Design practice

> explore students’ views of the factors which support, and the barriers to, their progress

> track students’ views on the development of their Art and Design practice, over the first two years of HE

> analyse non-participation in HE Art and Design in one of the higher education institutions (HEIs), through a small number of student case studies.
At Townley and Norton, students on 10 degree courses were tracked:
» BA Fine Art (without pathways) (Townley)
» BA Fine Art (with pathways) (Townley)
» part time BA Fine Art (Townley)
» Fine Art Foundation degree (FdA) (Townley)
» BA Textile Design (Townley)
» BA Graphic Design (Townley)
» BA Ceramic Design (Townley)
» BA Fine Art (Norton)
» BA Interdisciplinary Art and Design (Norton)
» BA Graphic Design (Norton).

In 2006-07, preliminary research was conducted with Fine Art students attending Townley’s progression to HE course and National Diploma and Access students at Norton.

Methods
> Research methods consisted of:
» semi-structured, in depth, one to one interviews with students. Students were interviewed twice in the first year of HE (2007-08) and once in the second year (2008-09). 46 students were interviewed twice and one student was interviewed three times in 2007-08. 44 students were interviewed in 2008-09
» as part of the preliminary research 2006-07, semi-structured, in depth, one to one interviews with nine Fine Art students on Townley’s progression to HE programme and nine National Diploma students at Norton
» semi-structured, in depth, one to one interviews with 21 staff, two of whom were interviewed twice
» semi-structured, in depth, one to one interviews with two student mentors
» informal conversations with students, staff and student mentors, recorded in a research log
» analysis of students’ work in Art and Design
» analysis of students’ writing
» analysis of emails sent by students to Caroline Hudson (CH)
» analysis of documentation (e.g. course handbooks)
» participant observation of different HE teaching and learning contexts (e.g. a crit and a critical theory seminar)

This is because research is about the systematic collection, analysis and reporting of evidence, aspects of which may be intuitive to, say, professionals in the field.
As part of the preliminary research 2006-07, participant observation of Townley’s weekly sessions of the progression to HE course, and of National Diploma and Access course sessions at Norton.

- All interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed.
- Data were analysed using the qualitative software programme, NVivo.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE**

- 33 of the students were female and 15 were male.
- All students except for one were from socio-economic groups 4-8.
- 15 were from minority ethnic groups.
- 12 were students who have English as an additional language.
- The very large majority of minority ethnic students and students who have English as an additional language were at Townley. At Norton, there was one minority ethnic student with English as an additional language in the sample. Two of the three students from Townley’s progression course who did not progress to HE at Townley were from minority ethnic groups.

**FINDINGS**

**Student gain**

*As well as being useful for you, it’s (i.e. the research interview) a good soundboard for me.*

- Overall, students perceived that they benefited from the research. For instance, many students commented that they welcomed the opportunity to reflect in detail on the development of their practice and their experience of HE, in one to one research interviews.

**The influences of social class and family**

*I made my mum read it as well. I made literally everyone (i.e. in the family) try and read the Barthes essay. Not everyone really understood it, but I explained like the whole thing to everyone.*

**Social class**

- Some students from the same social class sub-group, as with two students who describe themselves as being from the underclass, had very different responses to and outcomes from education.
- Only a small minority of students described feeling out of place at university. This tended to occur at key transition points, such as at the start of HE, or when students were struggling intensely with HE.

**Family**

- According to many students’ accounts, networks of family and social class experience, with both positive and negative aspects, impacted upon students’ experience of HE Art and Design and education prior to HE.
- Students’ accounts highlighted that there was variation in the extent to and ways in which students’ families supported students’ engagement in HE Art and Design.
- Some families facilitated HE study through the following types of support: emotional, academic, financial and/or domestic. A small number of families provided systematic academic support, spanning different areas of course experience.
- Some students’ accounts suggested that the following family related factors did not facilitate students’ engagement in Art and Design:
  - family members not recognising the value of HE and of Art and Design
  - family members not having the cultural capital to support students’ studies
  - students having responsibilities as carers for family members
  - students having responsibilities to provide income for the family
  - the impact of critical family events, such as bereavement, on students.
- Those students who were carers or who gave financial support to their families tended not to question this.
- Some families’ attitudes to HE Art and Design became increasingly positive over time.

**Students’ strategies with social class and family**

- Across students, there was evidence of a range of strategies to manage the...
Students’ accounts highlighted the complex, important influences, positive and negative, of staff across all sectors (school, further education (FE) and HE) on progression to and through HE Art and Design. Some students could recall remarks, positive and negative, made by staff, in some cases decades previously.

Students’ accounts reveal their agency3, they also point to the limits of agency: strategies were not always successful.

Students’ use of their life experience in their work

It’s (i.e. the student’s practice) all sort of autobiographical.

The very varied life experience of students from widening participation backgrounds can increase the diversity of artistic practice across HE Art and Design as a whole.

These students from widening participation backgrounds drew on their rich life experience in the content of their work. Examples of how these students used aspects of their life experience in their work span, for instance, a taxi driver using aspects of his employment to explore working class Englishness, and a young4, female student using the contrast between her previous, negative self-esteem and her increasingly positive sense of self, in a project about her emerging identity.

These students also used many skills developed through wider life experience, in how they approached different areas of HE Art and Design. Useful wider life skills ranged from, for instance, the interpersonal (e.g. how to negotiate) to practical (e.g. skills in measurement).

The influences of staff

If it hadn’t been for that discussion with (names of tutors)... I would not know what my practice is now. It’s wonderful, really, really wonderful.

Students’ accounts highlighted the complex, important influences, positive and negative, of staff across all sectors (school, further education (FE) and HE) on progression to and through HE Art and Design.

Some students could recall remarks, positive and negative, made by staff, in some cases decades previously.

Students’ accounts of relationships with staff were positive in four principal ways, through staff inspiring students, challenging students, supporting students and influencing students’ choices within HE. The majority of students’ positive comments related to tutors’ roles in challenging them through critical feedback, tailored sensitively to developmental stage.

Some tutors demonstrated impressive skill in intervening positively at critical moments in students’ educational careers. For example, two tutors worked with one student who was feeling that she might leave HE, to develop her understanding of how her artistic practice could relate to her life. In 2008-09, this student’s achievement on her course was outstanding, and she also won a range of external commissions.

The research underlined the importance of staff making finely tuned judgements about the amount and nature of tutor support to provide for students. For instance, one student received a great amount of support from his FE tutor. In part through this support, the student gained a place on an HE course for which he was probably unsuited. The student did not complete the first year.

Some staff support took the form of creating clear boundaries for students.

Students’ reports of negative relationships with HE tutors principally related to perceptions of too little contact with tutors.

The literacies of HE Art and Design

When I got the brief, I thought, ‘What is this? It’s nonsense. God almighty!’ I just didn’t understand a word of it.

Overall

> Literacies are defined as the language, speaking and listening, reading, and writing demands of HE Art and Design.

> The majority of these students found the literacy demands of Art and Design a major challenge and talked a great deal about them, particularly in the first year.

> Many students had complex literacy profiles, combining strengths and weaknesses.

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3 This relates to an individual’s capacity to shape his/her experience.

4 The University Central Admissions Service (UCAS) defines a mature student as someone who is 21 or over at the start of his/her course. Young, as used in this report, therefore refers to students who are under 21 at the start of HE.
**Executive summary**

> Whilst most students experienced difficulties with literacy, across students, an impressively wide range of strategies was deployed, to attempt to manage the literacy demands of Art and Design. These reflect students’ agency, and the limits of agency, strategies deployed were not always successful.

> Findings raise the question of how student strategies may be disseminated effectively to other students.

> Highly selective examples of student strategies include:

- **the language of Art: catching up, recording and experimenting with new terms, and paraphrasing complex terminology**
- **speaking and listening: preparing a presentation in carefully thought out stages, to maximise the quality of content and delivery**
- **reading: making explicit a clear rationale for selecting texts from course lists**
- **writing: using peers’ writing as a model for essays, and writing creatively as an integral part of developing ideas.**

**Institutional strategies**

> Both HEIs had some mechanisms to address literacy related issues. These ranged from, for instance, support for dyslexia and English language, to some extra tutorial, phone and email support.

**Student and staff responses to institutional support**

> Students varied in their responses to institutional literacy support.

> Positive comments by FdA students on their weekly group crit particularly stood out.

> Most students accessing additional support highlighted its benefits.

> However, not all students took up the range of support they were entitled to. This was for a range of reasons:

- lack of awareness of available support
- delays in receiving dyslexia support
- optional support being scheduled at times when students could not attend
- students taking the decision not to take up support they were aware of
- students trying out support, but deciding it was not for them.

> To some extent, staff thought that the HEIs’ literacy support was adequate. For instance, some staff assumed that skills such as essay writing did not need to be...
taught at HE level and that students had been taught essay skills at school or FE college. From students’ accounts, these were largely misplaced assumptions. On the other hand, some staff underlined that institutional support for literacy, such as staff training, should be developed.

**Development of institutional support**

- Comparison of institutional support with students’ perceptions of literacy difficulties underlines that there was insufficient institutional support to address students’ literacy needs systematically, particularly as the majority of support was optional.
- There is a strong case for further development of institutional support for literacy in HE Art and Design, on a significant scale, through, for instance, core programmes for all students, contextualised to subject area.

**Progression to HE**

*It (the National Diploma) prepared me really, really well, perhaps even better than if I’d done a Foundation.*

**Routes to HE**

- Students had followed a wide variety of routes into HE Art and Design. Routes consisted of a variety of combinations from O levels, GCSEs, A levels, no formal school level qualifications, a National Diploma, the Foundation Diploma, Access courses, short courses and Townley’s progression course.
- Only a small minority had followed a traditional route of A levels and the Foundation Diploma.
- The large majority (31) of the 45 students at Townley and Norton had progressed straight from school to FE to university. However, even where students’ educational careers were uninterrupted, they had often had challenging educational and wider life experiences.

**Perceptions of the National Diploma and Foundation Diploma**

- Most students who had completed the National Diploma or Foundation Diploma were positive about both courses, including about the range of ways in which the courses had prepared them for HE. Students tended to highlight similar factors for both courses.

- In contrast to students, some HE staff thought that the National Diploma offers inadequate preparation for HE, in comparison with the Foundation Diploma.

**Townley’s progression to HE course**

- Overall, students were very positive about Townley’s progression to HE course 2006-07.
- They cited many benefits of attending the course, including developing their awareness of, for instance:
  - Townley, HE generally and specific HE Art and Design courses
  - how to work as an HE student, in terms of conceptual approach, technical skills and literacy skills.

**FE and HE interviews**

- At Norton, students’ experience of FE and HE interviews appeared to be positive, despite some students’ apprehensiveness about interview. At Townley, the experience was more varied.
- Two students who had progressed to HE through the NALN’s compact arrangements did not perceive, throughout the first year, that they had earned their university place. This highlights the importance of clarifying to students who enter HE through compact arrangements that they merit their HE place.

**School and college guidance about HE**

- Students’ accounts did not suggest that, on the whole, schools or FE colleges had provided them with a range of relevant information about HE, HEIs and specific Art and Design courses.
- Guidance from some FE tutors about portfolio preparation for the HE interview was also viewed as misplaced.
- A small minority of students, principally those who struggled at HE, perceived that their FE colleges had channelled them too much towards university.
- Some students’ decision making about HE did not appear to be based on academic factors.

**The first year**

*In the first year, they really do shove everything on top of you...and you just sink or swim.*
Issues with the initial transition to HE  
> Overall, these students reported issues in making the initial transition to HE in terms of:
  » understanding course expectations
  » (in some courses) managing the degree of independence required, in comparison with FE
  » working consistently over a project
  » managing their emotions in dealing with the unknown.
> To some extent, students’ initial experience of HE varied by HE course and HEI, and related to the:
  » availability and use of studio space
  » number of timetabled hours
  » degree of structure in course sessions
  » degree and nature of contact with staff
  » institutional expectations about attendance outside scheduled course sessions
  » degree of similarity to FE and school experience.

Patterns of student transition  
> Among these students, there were four broad patterns of transition to HE:
  » rapid transition: a small minority adapted quickly to HE, highlighting their artistic development and enjoyment of the course, in their first interviews in the first year (February-March 2008)
  » transition by the end of the first year: the large majority took most of the first year to adapt to HE. Towards the end of the year, these students were also positive about developments in their practice and their approach to work
  » transition after intense struggle: three students appeared to make the transition to HE by the end of the first year, after a particularly intense struggle during the year
  » ‘stunted’ growth: three students followed a pattern of ‘stunted’ growth, as described by one of the students. They did not complete the first year, though their patterns of transition during the year differed.
> Many students indicated that, within these patterns of transition, there were periods of ups and downs.

Students’ analysis of their artistic development  
> The large majority of the students, by the second interview in the first year, were very specific about the ways, conceptual and technical, in which their artistic practice had developed.

The second year  
I’m a lot more content with myself. I’m a lot more comfortable with my work.

Overall perceptions  
> Students thought that the demands of the second year were more intense than those of the first. The large majority of students preferred this.
> Several students commented that they were getting much better value for money in the second than in the first year.
> Most students highlighted that they had a much clearer understanding of HE expectations in the second than in the first year.
> Students tended to feel more settled about themselves within HE Art and Design.
> There was evidence of second year students changing their approach to work, and of putting subject learning into practice, based on the lessons of the first year.
> FdA students perceived that the second year was more independent than the first, and that the structure of the first year had prepared them well for managing the second year.

Second year transitions  
> Students on some courses have transitions to manage in the second year:
  » FdA students have to decide whether to apply for Townley’s bridging course to join the Fine Art BA in the third year; apply for a BA at another HEI; or complete their studies.
  » At the end of 2008-09, part time Fine Art students become full time and join the third year of the full time Fine Art BA.
> Both FdA and part time students voiced doubts about these transitions.

Looking beyond the HEI  
> There was considerable evidence of some students looking outwards, beyond the HEI, in relation to their artistic practice, in terms of:
  » undertaking work-based learning and work experience
  » developing their thinking about employment, through, for instance, the Norton business enterprise course
» developing plans to start businesses
» exhibiting their work
» winning and looking for commissions
» considering post-graduate study.

Dealing with downs
> Some students reported experiencing downs in the second year, such as:
  » not performing as anticipated in strands of the course
  » in the case of one student, deciding to defer his HE place
  » personal circumstances impacting upon students' engagement in HE.

A successful Art and Design student
> Across interviews, many students highlighted characteristics of a successful
  Art and Design student, from, for instance, commitment and passion for Art, to
  the capacity to be critical and reflective about Art. Students tended to focus on
  personal attributes, rather than detailed analysis of intellectual skills.

Non-participation
You're kind of shooed on from the Foundation into uni straightaway, when it might not be
the best thing for you... It seemed to be a fight to extract yourself.

> Case studies were developed of three students who were on Townley's 2006-07
  progression to HE course, but who did not progress to HE at Townley, for different
  reasons. By the end of the research, their paths had diverged markedly, further
  highlighting the diversity of educational and life experience among students in the
  sample.
> These case studies, and others used throughout the report, reveal the capacity of
  case studies to illuminate key issues. For example, one of these three students did
  not apply to Townley for HE, and deferred her place at another HEI in the second
  year. This student had consistently questioned whether she wanted to go to, and if
  she was ready for, university, citing access to resources as her main motivation to
  attend HE. By the first year of HE, existing, serious problems with accommodation
  and finance had become acute. This example pinpoints the importance of careful
  career guidance, based on listening to individual students about motivations and
  life circumstances.
1.1 OVERVIEW
This research is about the perceptions of progression to and through higher education (HE) Art and Design of 48 students from widening participation backgrounds. The title of the report, *Art from the heart*, reflects the research’s focus on students’ voices on their experience of Art and Design. The research has been commissioned by the National Arts Learning Network (NALN), a network of specialist Arts institutions which aims to widen participation in HE Art and Design. NALN commissioned Real Educational Research (RER) to:

- track the experience of different aspects of HE Art and Design of a sample of students from widening participation backgrounds, on a range of HE Art and Design courses at two NALN member institutions
- assess the extent to and ways in which students from widening participation backgrounds draw on their life experience, in their Art and Design practice
- explore students’ views of the factors which support, and the barriers to, their progress
- track students’ views on the development of their Art and Design practice, over the first two years of HE
- analyse non-participation in HE Art and Design in one of the higher education institutions (HEIs), through a small number of student case studies.

1.2 DEFINITION OF WIDENING PARTICIPATION
Across the literature, the term ‘widening participation’ has been used in an elastic way. In this research, widening participation refers to students who:

- are from socio-economic groups 4-8
- describe themselves, or are described by staff, as having entered HE through non-traditional routes. A traditional route in HE Art and Design is defined as the combination of A levels and a Foundation Diploma in Art and Design. Non-traditional routes include vocational qualifications (e.g. the National Diploma) and Access courses.

1.3 EXISTING LITERATURE AND THIS RESEARCH
There is a plethora of research on widening participation in HE. Existing evidence was synthesised in a major review commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (Gorard et al., 2006). Following Gorard et al.’s review, a significant group of seven studies was commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP):¹

HEFCE (Whitston, 2005) commented that research commissioned by the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD) (e.g. Hudson, 2006) was the first subject-specific research on widening participation. Since then, the NALN has commissioned four studies on different aspects of widening participation in HE Art and Design:

- qualitative research on creative careers and non-traditional trajectories (Taylor and Littleton, 2008)
- quantitative research on widening participation and post-graduate experience (Pollard et al., 2008)
- widening participation and admissions practices (Burke and McManus, 2009 forthcoming)
- this research.

There have been a small number of other studies commissioned on widening participation in HE Art and Design, outside the NALN and CHEAD, such as research currently being conducted by University of the Arts London (UAL) on transitions and widening participation (Sagan and Candela, 2009).

A relatively small number of longitudinal studies have been conducted on widening participation in HE, such as the ESRC TLRP commissioned study on the experience of disabled students of HE (e.g. Healey et al., 2006). In their study of middle class and working class students' experience of university, Crozier et al. (2008) tracked some students over two years. Taylor and Littleton (2008) interviewed Art and Design post-graduates twice, one year apart, on their experience of post-graduate study; in the second interviews, 11 of the original 29 participants were re-interviewed. This NALN research is the first study specific to Art and Design which tracks the experience of students from widening participation backgrounds of progression to and through HE.

This NALN research focuses on the voices of the students involved. ‘Voices’ rather than ‘voice’ is used, because in-depth, qualitative research has the capacity to capture subtle variations in perspective, both across different students, and, in a tracking study, within a single student’s outlook over time. This research’s emphasis on the voices of the researched derives from a well established research tradition (e.g. Soo Hoo, 1993; Nieto, 1994; Ruddock et al., 1996; Fielding, 1999, 2003; Fielding and Bragg, 2003; Fielding and Rudduck, 2002).

Because of this research’s focus on student voices, the research acknowledges as relevant, but does not structure the report around, a range of theoretical constructs used in some other research on widening participation in HE. This is for two reasons. First, it is because, as above, the report aims to place students’ voices centre stage. The author believes that some qualitative studies in which a theoretical framework is strongly emphasised in the report can run the risk of muting the voices of the researched. Second, this NALN research report is intended for a wide audience of practitioners, policy makers and researchers. Whilst there are some references to existing research in the findings chapters, frequent, explicit reference to academic theory would be inappropriate for this wide audience.

Theoretical concepts relevant to this research are outlined below, for readers to bear in mind, if they wish to, as they read the report.

Many studies on widening participation explore the relationships between identity, agency and structure (Ecclestone, 2007; Ecclestone et al., 2005). Different researchers offer differing definitions of the three concepts, and their relationships. However, the following may be considered as very broad summary definitions:

- **identity**: this relates to the continual making and re-making of self (e.g. Taylor and Littleton, 2008; Ecclestone, 2007; Ecclestone et al., 2005)
- **agency**: this relates to an individual’s capacity to shape his/her experience (e.g. Ecclestone, 2007; Ecclestone et al., 2005)
- **structure**: this relates to structural factors, such as class, gender and ethnicity, which shape, constrain and sometimes determine identity and agency in specific contexts (e.g. Ecclestone, 2007).

As highlighted by some researchers (e.g. Taylor and Littleton, 2008; Evans, 2002; Ecclestone, 2007), some conceptions of identity and agency have been criticised for underplaying structural factors. Evans (2002), in an ESRC study of young people’s transitions in HE, employment and unemployment contexts, develops the notion of bounded agency, to emphasise that agency is socially situated.

This NALN tracking study acknowledges the impact of structural factors, such as social

class and the culture of HE Art and Design, on the experience of access to HE and HE courses of students from widening participation backgrounds. At the same time, this study illustrates different aspects of agency demonstrated by many of the students, which enable them, to some extent, to negotiate structural factors.

Central to a number of qualitative studies on widening participation in HE is a socio-cultural framework derived from Bourdieu, emphasising concepts such as cultural capital, habitus and field. Again, different researchers define these concepts variously. Broad definitions are outlined below:

- **cultural capital**: the accumulated knowledge, skills, education and advantages which confer status and power
- **field**: field expresses the sets of social relations in a specific context (Colley et al., 2003). Bourdieu compares the field to a game with rules and competition (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Crozier et al., 2008). Players have varying knowledge of the rules and only some have trump cards
- **habitus**: individuals’ habitus relates to players’ differing dispositions to operationalise the field (Crozier et al., 2008). Habitus is an amalgam of agency and structural factors, such as class and gender (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Colley et al., 2003). Habitus is also an amalgam of past and present and is never complete (Reay, 1998). Institutional habitus, it has been argued (e.g. Reay et al., 2001), is collective and therefore less amenable to change than individual habitus.

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that novices learn from more experienced practitioners through ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ in ‘communities of practice’; i.e. Lave and Wenger emphasise the role of the social, rather than cognitive acquisition, in learning (Colley et al., 2003). This is relevant to Art and Design in terms of the focus on the studio, where the novice student has access to the expertise of tutors, technicians and peers.

### 1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### The two NALN member institutions

All NALN member institutions are specialist Art and Design institutions. The two NALN member HEIs participating in this research were selected in part because they both compare and contrast with each other. Both are in large urban settings but are in different regions. Both settings give students access to cultural resources, such as galleries, though Townley’s location probably offers access to a wider range of cultural resources. Both HEIs describe themselves as ‘selective’ institutions, i.e. overall, they have more applicants than places.

#### Period of fieldwork

Fieldwork started in the autumn 2006. This phase of fieldwork finished in December 2008 (when the students were in the second year of HE, or, in the case of part-time students, its equivalent).

#### The sample

**Overview**

48 students were tracked in this research. 26 were at Townley, 19 were at Norton, and three attended Townley’s progression course, but did not progress to HE at Townley.

33 of the students were female and 15 were male. All students except for one were from socio-economic groups 4-8. 15 were from minority ethnic groups. 12 were students who have English as an additional language. The very large majority of minority ethnic students and students with English as an additional language were at Townley. At Norton, there was only one minority ethnic student. This student had English as an additional language. Two of the three students from Townley’s progression to HE course, who did not progress to HE at Townley, were from minority ethnic groups. Students spanned a wide age range: the oldest was in her sixties and the youngest had progressed straight to university from school and FE college.
Clarification of fieldwork 2006-07
Townley
As Table 1 illustrates, FE students who were on Townley’s progression to HE course for a Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Foundation degree (FdA) in Fine Art were tracked from the academic year 2006-07. Students on Townley’s progression to HE course were from socio-economic groups 4-8 and at local FE colleges targeted by Townley. The students were on either National Diploma or Foundation Diploma courses. Townley’s progression to HE course had different groups, for different subject areas within Art and Design. It was not feasible to shadow students across all strands of the progression course. Fine Art students were selected at this stage, because it was considered that Fine Art could pose greater challenges for widening participation than courses such as Graphic Design, which have, arguably, a stronger vocational focus.

Norton
In 2006-07, preliminary research was conducted with students on National Diploma and Access courses at Norton. It was not feasible at this stage to identify and start to track students who would progress to HE at Norton in 2007-08. This was because students progress to a range of HEIs from Norton’s National Diploma courses. At the time of the 2006-07 fieldwork, students had not completed their university applications, so their choice of HEI was not known.

Clarification of fieldwork 2007-08
Townley
As Table 1 shows, students from Townley’s progression course who gained places at Townley for a Fine Art BA or FdA continued to be tracked through their first year. Students who had been on Townley’s progression course for other areas of Art and Design (Ceramic Design, Textile Design and Graphic Design) and who had gained places at Townley were incorporated into the research in the first year of HE.

At the suggestion of the part time BA Course Director at Townley, five part time BA Fine Art students with widening participation backgrounds were also incorporated into the sample. These part time students were in the third year of a five year part time course, equivalent to the second half of second year of full time BA.

### Table 1: Summary of the Student Sample at Different Stages of Fieldwork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>TOWNLEY</th>
<th>NON-PARTICIPANTS AT TOWNLEY</th>
<th>NORTON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-07 (Pre-HE)</td>
<td>FE students on Townley’s progression to HE Fine Art course</td>
<td>Pilot research with National Diploma and Access courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time students: third year of part time course, equivalent to first half of second year of full time BA</td>
<td>BA Fine Art (without pathways) (2 students)</td>
<td>BA Fine Art (without pathways) (2 students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time BA Fine Art</td>
<td>BA Fine Art (with pathways) (2 students)</td>
<td>BA Fine Art (7 students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time BA Fine Art</td>
<td>BA Fine Art (5 students)</td>
<td>BA Interdisciplinary Art and Design (6 students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time BA Fine Art</td>
<td>FdA Fine Art (4 students)</td>
<td>BA Graphic Design (6 students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time BA Fine Art</td>
<td>BA Ceramic Design (1 student)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time BA Fine Art</td>
<td>BA Textile Design (3 students)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time BA Fine Art</td>
<td>BA Graphic Design (8 students)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09 (Full time students: second year of HE)</td>
<td>BA Fine Art (with pathways) (2 students)</td>
<td>BA Fine Art (7 students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time students: fourth year of part time course, equivalent to second half of second year of full time BA</td>
<td>BA Fine Art (without pathways) (2 students)</td>
<td>BA Interdisciplinary Art and Design (6 students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time BA Fine Art</td>
<td>BA Fine Art (5 students)</td>
<td>BA Graphic Design (6 students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time BA Fine Art</td>
<td>FdA Fine Art (4 students)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time BA Fine Art</td>
<td>BA Ceramic Design (1 student)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time BA Fine Art</td>
<td>BA Graphic Design (7 students)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I. i.e. students who had attended Townley’s progression to HE course, but had not started an HE course at Townley.
II. The 2 students on the BA Fine Art course without pathways did not complete the first year. However, they were tracked and re-interviewed in December 2008.
III. At the request of the part time BA Course Director, a further student, who had deferred her place in 2007-08 and returned to college in October 2008, was added to the sample.
IV. One Graphic Design student in the sample did not complete the first year of HE. It was not feasible to reinterview this student.
Norton
As Table 1 shows, in 2007-08, first year students were tracked on three BA courses at Norton: Fine Art, Interdisciplinary Art and Design, and Graphic Design. The three courses were selected to give access to students’ experience of a range of HE courses at Norton. The NALN Progression Manager liaised with Course Directors to identify students for the sample, using criteria outlined in the definition of widening participation.

Non-participants at Townley
In 2007-08, three students who had been on the Fine Art strand of Townley’s progression course, but who did not progress to Townley, were also tracked. Of these three students:
> one had not applied to Townley
> one had applied to, but had not gained a place at, Townley
> one had gained a place at Townley, but had not taken up this place.

Clarification of fieldwork 2008-09
A set of interviews was conducted in November-December 2008 with all second year students at Townley and Norton, and the three non-participants at Townley. This included reinterviewing two BA Fine Art students who did not complete the first year (2007-08) at Townley. However, it was not feasible to contact a Graphic Design student at Townley who did not complete the first year, to reinterview her. A further two Townley second year students said that, on this occasion, they preferred not to be interviewed, because of pressure of work, but they remain in the sample.

In 2008-09, it was not feasible to contact one student at Norton. Her Course Director advised that this student was experiencing considerable stress.

Course summary
As Table 1 above illustrates, students on 10 HE courses at Townley and Norton were tracked. The seven degree courses at Townley were: BA Fine Art (without pathways), BA Fine Art (with pathways), part time BA Fine Art, Fine Art FdA, BA Textile Design, BA Graphic Design and BA Ceramic Design. Students at Norton were on three BAs: Fine Art, Interdisciplinary Art and Design, and Graphic Design.

Research methods
Overview
Because this research focuses on students’ views of their access to and experience of HE, the central emphasis, at all stages of the research, has been on all the student data. However, data from students have been triangulated with staff data and CH’s observational data (see below).

Student interviews
In depth, one to one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students. Interviews were constructed around topic headings; see Appendix 1 for a sample schedule. Where students wanted to focus in particular detail on one area of the schedule, or to introduce other areas of experience into the interview, this was welcomed, because of the focus on student voices. At the same time, it was ensured that all topic areas had been covered by the end of the interview. All student interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed.

Nine Fine Art students on Townley’s progression course and nine National Diploma students at Norton were interviewed once during 2006-07. Students were interviewed twice during their first year of HE (2007-08), once in February-March 2008 and again in June 2008. Students were interviewed once in their second year, in November-December 2008. 46 students were interviewed twice and one student was interviewed three times in 2007-08. 44 students were interviewed in November-December 2008.

Caroline Hudson (CH) conducted all interviews, except for the first set of first year student interviews at Norton. Because of CH’s time constraints, these were conducted by Dr Anita Wilson, from Lancaster University.

There was some variation in the length of student interviews. This was for a range of reasons. At Townley, having checked with Course Directors which dates would be suitable for interviews, CH liaised directly with students to arranged all interview timetables, except for the first set of Graphic Design interviews. The Graphic Design Course Director scheduled

2 In the case of the part time students, the equivalent of the second half of the second year of the full time BA.

3 I.e. compared with, so that similarities and differences can emerge. Triangulation is one way of increasing the quality of data constructed.

4 Or, in the case of the part time students, in their third year, the equivalent of the first half of the second year of a full time BA.
these for 30 minutes each, so that they could be conducted within one day. These were the only interviews at Townley which were 30 minutes long. The large majority of Townley student interviews were over an hour. The longest was three hours.

Norton, where the Progression Manager and Course Directors scheduled interviews, initially considered that interviews should last half an hour, because of concerns about time demands on students. It was subsequently agreed that second year student interviews would last for 45 minutes.

Informal conversations
Semi-structured interviews were complemented by many informal conversations with students, recorded in CH's research log.

Observations
CH conducted participant observation of teaching and learning, and of students in the studio. CH observed Townley’s progression to HE course on a weekly basis. In students’ first and second year of HE, CH observed the following HE sessions:

> two crits
> a critical theory seminar
> a whole day session on Townley’s part time course, which focused on students presenting in groups on a collaborative project. The students suggested to the Course Director that CH should be invited to the session
> studio practice
> the BA Textile Design exhibition, in December 2008. This visit was made on the invitation of the Textile Design students.

Students’ work
Students were encouraged to bring their work to interviews, to enable them to talk in detail about the development of their artistic practice.

Students’ writing
Students were encouraged to bring examples of their Art and Design related writing to interview, or to email CH their writing. Examples of writing were analysed.

Focus group
In 2006, as part of the preliminary phase of research in Norton, one focus group was conducted with seven National Diploma students from widening participation backgrounds.

Supporting documentation
Supporting documentation, such as course handbooks, was analysed.

Staff interviews
In Townley, 16 members of staff were interviewed. Two members of staff were interviewed twice, once in 2006 (about Townley’s progression to HE course) and once in 2008. At Norton, five staff were interviewed in 2006, and four members of staff in 2008. All staff interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed.

Emails and phone conversations with staff
Data from staff interviews were supplemented by email and phone conversations with staff. Notes were recorded in CH’s research log.

Student mentor interviews
Two student mentors on Townley’s progression to HE course were interviewed in 2006-07. Again, interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed.

1.5 ETHICS
Overview
This research followed the British Educational Research Association Revised Ethical Guidelines (2004). This section outlines ethical issues pertinent to the research in relation to:

> informed consent
> confidentiality
> anonymity
> participant gain.

Informed consent
A range of methods was used to facilitate informed consent.

In the case of the progression to HE course and BA Graphic Design at Townley, CH talked through the research with the students as a group, giving students a briefing paper (Appendix 2), before interviewing them on a one to one basis. CH and, in the case of the first set of interviews at Norton, Anita Wilson talked through the research with all students at the start of their first one to one interview. Students were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and were then asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 3). Students were told that they could ask questions on an ongoing basis about the research. Some took up this invitation.

When CH explained about the research, CH told students that, once they had consented to participate in the research, they could withdraw this consent subsequently. Students could, for instance, decline the invitation to participate in an interview if, for example, they were experiencing particular stress, or if they had changed their mind about their involvement in the research. As has been highlighted, a very small number of students took up the invitation not to participate in an interview, because they felt under pressure at a particular point in time.

After each interview, CH sent students, either by email or post, the transcript of their interview. CH asked students to contact her by email or phone, between sets of interviews, if there was anything in their interview which they wished to amend or add to. CH asked students to bring the transcript of the previous interview to the next interview. This was partly to give students a further opportunity to add to or amend their previous transcript, and partly to use as a basis for discussing the recent development of their practice.

Confidentiality and anonymity
As part of gaining students’ informed consent to participate in the research, students were told that what they had said in interview would not be repeated to any member of staff in their HEI and that, in research reports and presentations, pseudonyms would be used.

Student gain from the research
As part of the process of gaining informed consent, CH outlined to students the potential ways in which they might benefit from participating in the research. Potential benefits included:

> the research interviews would give students practice in discussing their work in detail with an individual who was not involved in assessing their work as part of their degree course
> the research interviews would provide an opportunity for students to reflect critically on their work
> participation in a national research project, over time, could be included in students’ CVs
> CH would provide a written statement about the student’s involvement in the research, to support job or funding applications made by the students
> students’ contribution to the research could help to improve other students’ experience of application to and study of HE Art and Design, following dissemination of this research report
> students were given a £10 voucher on each occasion on which they were interviewed, in recognition of their time and input into the research.

Students were not asked explicitly about the extent to and ways in which they perceived they had benefited from participating in the research. However, many commented spontaneously and in some detail that they felt they had benefited from the research. Students’ comments made in interview include:

I was mentioning that the research was really helpful. I was telling (name of tutor) before that it gives another perspective. It enables you to talk about what you’re doing, and kind of make sense of it yourself by trying to explain it to someone else. It just gives you another, another chance to sort of explain, to tell someone and it’s kind of like a tutorial, because I’m explaining what I’m doing and you’re saying, ‘How does that influence you?’ and, ‘How does this influence you?’ and, ‘What happens in this area?’ and stuff like that, and it gives you another type of take on it. It makes you think. That’s really helpful. (December 2008)

I really needed it (the research interview) I think, really to be able to [pause], it is funny, because you talk about this stuff (i.e. your work) in another room, away from everyone else going on. I am able to see it (i.e. work) in a positive sense, which I haven’t for a long time, I don’t think. (December 2008)
1.6 METHODOLOGY: STRENGTHS AND ISSUES

Strengths

Tracking

Tracking the sample of students over time increases the quality of the data, in a range of ways. Tracking enables:

> students to comment in detail on their developing experience of HE, as developments take place, rather than, as in a one off interview, to give a retrospective account of a range of changes over time

> an individual’s comments to be triangulated over time. Comparing what an individual has said at different points in time helps to identify developments in students’ thinking

> a relationship to be built up over time between researcher and researched. This means that the data are probably of higher quality than if a one off interview had been conducted

> the researcher to clarify her understandings of comments made in one interview, in a subsequent interview.

Issues

> This phase of the research had to be completed by June 2009, at the end of the students’ second year of HE, as the NALN’s funded phase ends in 2009. This report therefore covers part of students’ HE experience.

> Because of resource constraints, this sample only includes students from widening participation backgrounds. This does not permit, as a comparative case study approach would have done, comparisons to be made with the experience of HE of students who are not from widening participation backgrounds.

1.7 DATA ANALYSIS AND WRITING

Analysis

Data have been analysed using the qualitative software package, NVivo. This enables, for instance, data coded under different themes to be retrieved readily. Data have been analysed using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), developing themes emerging from the transcripts. This approach was combined with the use of themes in existing literature.
Art from the heart

Use of student comments in the report

This report cites many detailed student comments. This is because the research’s central aim is to let students speak for themselves.

Much spoken conversation is very different to crafted, written text (Carter, 2008). People often think their way through what they mean, through speaking (Carter, 2008). People therefore often speak in unfinished and sometimes long sentences, with repetitions and hesitations. In this report, students’ comments are cited as they were spoken, to reflect students’ authentic voices.

In the report, there are more comments from Townley than Norton students. First, this is because there were more Townley than Norton students in the sample. Second, it is because, as previously discussed, the large majority of Townley interviews were longer than Norton interviews.

Emails

Emails have been quoted as written by students.

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

Chapters 2-5 explore themes which students highlighted were important, from pre-HE to the second year. Chapter 2 is about student perceptions of the influences of their lives outside university, in terms of social class and family, on their experience of education. Chapter 3 examines students’ use of their wider life experience, outside university, in their work in Art and Design. Chapter 4 discusses students’ views on the influences of staff, across all sectors, on their education. Chapter 5 presents students’ accounts of the literacies of Art and Design, in terms of the language of Art, speaking and listening, reading, and writing. Chapters 6-8 each take a specific stage of students’ Art and Design education: pre-HE (Chapter 6), the first year (Chapter 7) and the second year (Chapter 8). Chapter 9 presents detailed case studies of three students on Townley’s 2006-07 progression to HE course who did not progress to Townley, for different reasons. When reading Chapters 6-9, it is crucial that the reader also bears in mind relevant findings from Chapters 2-5, on generic themes.

Chapters 2-9 include some references to findings from existing literature which are relevant to these findings on student views. As previously highlighted, some readers may also wish to apply broader theoretical frameworks, outlined in this chapter, to this research’s findings, as they read Chapters 2-9.

The findings in Chapter 2-9 on students’ views are evidenced through a wide range of student case studies and many student comments. Each chapter concludes with a summary of findings and key questions raised by the chapter. The reader may wish to use these key questions to reflect further on students’ perceptions, their relevance to the reader’s own experience and how they may inform the development of widening participation in Art and Design.

1.9 LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Axiomatically, the period of NALN funding (2006-09) covers only part of the students’ HE experience. At the time of writing (March 2009) funding is being sought to track the students during their third year (2009-10) and their destinations for two years after graduation (2010-12).

1.10 KEY QUESTION FOR THE HE ARTS SECTOR

> How may the perceptions of students in this research and of other students be taken into account, in planning and implementing policy and practice on widening participation?
2.1 INTRODUCTION

In students’ accounts, three aspects of their lives outside university stood out. This chapter presents students’ perceptions of two of these three aspects: the influences of socio-economic status (SES) and family on students’ experience of HE Art and Design, in terms of application to HE and on course experience. Chapter 3 presents the third aspect of their lives outside university, exploring how these students drew on aspects of their experience outside university, in their work in Art and Design.

Whilst aspects of students’ accounts of family influence relate to SES, SES and family have been explored in different sections in this chapter. This is because students commented in considerable detail on their families. This chapter also explores strategies students used to manage the impact of SES and family on their experience of HE Art and Design. The chapter concludes with two case studies, to illustrate how many student accounts revealed a complex network of family and SES influences, including positive and negative aspects.

2.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Students’ perceptions of socio-economic status

Overview

Chapter 1 highlighted that all students except for one in the sample were from socio-economic groups 4-8. Some, but not all, of the students specifically commented on the impact of their SES on experience of their earlier education, access to HE, and HE itself. Where students did not comment on SES, this is, of course, not to say that SES did not impact upon these students’ experience of HE.

The underclass

Some research (e.g. Reay, 1998; Reay et al., 2007) underlines that there are different fragments of the working class. Two mature female students, Mariana and Pearl, specifically...
described themselves as from the underclass. Both highlighted how this had impacted on their experience of education, in a range of ways. Their outcomes have been very different. This highlights the differences within, as well as across, categories of social class.

Mariana was on the progression to HE course run by Townley, but did not apply to Townley. Mariana subsequently attended Waterpoint University, a large, new university, but deferred her place after the first year. Mariana frequently commented that being in the underclass meant that it was very difficult to gain access to any aspects of life, whether, for instance, education or accommodation, which members of other social groups, in her view, take for granted. Mariana observed that, because of her social class, she was trying to do things at a much later stage in life than her peers:

> Because I was born in the underclass, not even working class, underclass, real poverty, I just cannot get one hand onto that ladder. Always someone is unpicking my fingers for me and it’s like, okay, I have my own council flat now, but when you look at the achievements of my life, what can I really say that I’ve managed to do? I’ve got a council flat and I went to a shit uni and I’m 33, and it took all my effort. I had to fight, fight all the way for it, just to have something, this much (indicates a minuscule shape) of what normal people have. It’s been so difficult to move up the class structure. (July 2008)

Mariana is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9 on non-participation at Townley.

Pearl’s case was different. Pearl was a part time, mature student at Townley, who had had a successful career. Pearl had started out in what she described as the underclass, in a large northern city. Pearl went to the local secondary modern and, despite not being focused on school, gained good O levels. Though Pearl’s main aim was apparently to get a job, and though Pearl initially left school for employment after O levels, her employer persuaded her to return to school. Pearl tried to leave school again during A levels. However, this time a teacher visited the family home and persuaded Pearl to return to school. Difficult home circumstances meant that Pearl and her siblings were intermittently fostered. There was sometimes no electricity and little food at home.

Notwithstanding all this, Pearl gained a place at a prestigious university. Though Pearl loved Art, she did not study Art for her first degree at this university. This was because Pearl did not think that Art led to a profitable career. Pearl highlighted the class and regional differences between herself and her university peers. However, at least in her retrospective account, Pearl appeared well able to manage these differences. In her research interview, Pearl said that she was regarded as an ‘anthropological curiosity’ at this university. This did not seem to concern Pearl, though she may have responded differently whilst she was at this university. Clayton et al. (2007) outline that some working class HE students keep connections with their home, in part to protect their identity. Pearl underlined that she still maintained strong links with her family and had not tried to lose her old identity:

> I wasn’t consciously trying to mould myself, but I think had I been trying to, there would have probably been a lot more conflict as it were, the difference, there’d have been a lot more conflict, because I am close to my family and I stayed in contact with them. (December 2008)

At the same time, Pearl recognised that her HE experience altered aspects of her class identity:

> I hadn’t tried to be anybody else, you know, I hadn’t consciously thought to change my accent, but inevitably it changed. But, I, I’m considered posh at home, I’m considered to be a bit of rough diamond northerner down in the south, you know, the circles I move in. That’s just, you know, by attrition, really. (December 2008)

SES and experience of education

A number of students, particularly mature students, related their social class to aspects of their prior educational experience. For instance, Jackie, a mature student, described how the expectation (which she fulfilled) was that she would leave school after O levels and get a job. This was because no one in her family had done A levels or had been to university, and because her family needed the money. Jackie summed up this part of her account with:

> We were just very, very working class. (May 2008)

A small minority of students linked their social background and prior educational experience to a continuing sense of inadequacy, even years after they had left school. Annette, another mature student, had previously worked in an administrative post on a paper:

> Annette: I think because I didn’t go through the A Levels and college straightaway, it feels...
like there’s an awful lot to prove, and I don’t know if that leaves you until you’ve left the college (i.e. HEI).

CH: Can you say more about that feeling that you’ve got something to prove, because you didn’t do A Levels and college straightaway?

Annette: I think you feel, personally I feel inadequate. I haven’t gone through the educational system. I mean, at the time one of the reasons was I needed to work, and also I hated the way the educational system was... I still always regretted not, that I haven’t the same qualifications, and you did notice it when I worked at the paper, because all the admin staff were more from Essex and the East End. The editorial staff were all from more, probably more middle class and from the home counties. (February 2008)

However, having something to prove is not necessarily negative; Annette has a strong desire to achieve her potential.

Prior educational experience is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 on progression to HE.

Out of place at university

Bourdieu (cited in Reay et al., 2007) argues that working class students are like ‘fish out of water’ in educational contexts. In this research, only a small minority of students commented, over time, on feeling out of place studying Art and Design at university.

Nick, a mature student, underlined his working class origins on a number of occasions during the progression to HE course at Townley (2006-07). In Nick’s first interview in his first year of HE (March 2008), he highlighted how the gap between his social class and regional background, and the culture of HE Art and Design had challenged his sense of identity. The quotation below also shows that Nick views his struggles with the language of Art and Design partly in terms of this mismatch between his social class and HE culture:

I’m a working class man from the north. I don’t speak in this sort of terminology. It’s completely new to me and when I do use it I feel like a charlatan. I don’t know whether I’m using it in the right context, so then that element of doubt comes in, so I’m a bit weary. At the moment I think I’m between two stools. I’m sort of trying to attain the knowledge to speak knowledgeably about Art and different Art movements, but still dragged back by that little chip on the shoulder of, ‘What are you doing here? You know, you could be seen as a fraud. This isn’t really you.’ So it’s almost like this really big dilemma. (March 2008)

However, when Nick was asked for an example of when he had been aware of the class-related chip on his shoulder during his first year, he could not give a specific example. Instead, Nick related how the voice in his head telling him he did not belong had grown fainter and easier to deal with over the first year. Interestingly, in the research interview, when Nick said that the voice was on his shoulder at moments when he felt insecure, he held his shoulder and looked behind him, perhaps indicating how powerful this voice has been for him. At the same time, Nick identifies the voice as now outside himself:

The voice has become very, very shallow and tinny, and I’m finding that I do have skills, and my ideas are just as valid as anyone else’s and that’s given me confidence, and that confidence has sort of slapped that little voice down a bit. It’s on my shoulder and when I’m feeling slightly anxious or unsure of a situation he’ll come back... The little voice I tend to dismiss, and because the voice becomes so much less these days, I actually don’t acknowledge it anymore. It’s got to a point where it’s in there. In fact it’s not even in there. It’s out there but, so I don’t feel a need to register it as there on my shoulder anymore. (March 2008)

Five young women, three white and two from minority ethnic backgrounds, highlighted that they had been aware of the mismatch between their SES and the culture of the HEI, at the point of transition to HE. All indicated that this perception of mismatch had reduced over time. Indeed, when one of these students, Jo, was asked what advice she would give to a student broadly similar to herself about to start university, she commented:

When you meet students in the class when you first come here, maybe try not to judge them straightaway, because I was straightaway thinking they’re posh and they’re not going to want to talk to me, and I thought that they wouldn’t want to know me, but the class is so friendly. Obviously everyone thinks something when they meet someone, stereotypes them straightaway when they meet them, but then once you get to know them, you kind of realise that they’re just the same as you. (June 2008)

Ryan and Mario, two students who did not complete the first year at Townley, talked about the gulf between their backgrounds and those of their university peers and the culture of
the HEI. They commented negatively on disparities between factors related to their SES and the culture of HE, when they were struggling with HE. Mario, who never appeared to feel comfortable in the HEI, talked about this gap in more extreme terms than Ryan, and consistently over time, in both his first year interviews and his second year interview. Mario’s language, reflected in terms such as ‘outcast’ and ‘ostracized’, emphasized the degree to which he felt out of place:

I didn’t feel comfortable with them (his university peers). I felt they were in a different culture or background from me, and little things like this made me move away from the course. I could just tell right here I’m not meant to be here… Their knowledge and the way they think is different to mine. Whereas I come from the south part of town, like the ghetto, they come from quite rich families and posh areas. Some of them are really posh… I felt like I was the outcast… (July 2008)

In contrast, Ryan, who had initially enjoyed his HE experience, highlighted that he had become aware of a mismatch between his social class, and that of his university peers and the HEI’s culture, after having been absent from university because of personal circumstances for a month during term time. There is further discussion of Ryan and Mario in Chapter 7.

Inverted class issues
Florence, who was middle class, attended the progression to HE course at Townley because she was doing a National Diploma at one of Townley’s target local FE colleges. Florence highlighted that she had felt bullied by one of her FE tutors, because of her social class and because, once the students had included information about their previous education on their UCAS forms, the FE tutor realised that she had been to a private school. Florence described how this made her feel so under pressure that she stopped attending college and temporarily stopped loving Art. Florence was explicit that this tutor’s approach to her social class contributed to her decision not to do Art at HE and to turn down her place on the Fine Art BA at Townley:

Florence: I just felt like my teacher, he hated me, he absolutely hated me and I just, in a way I think that made me hate Art to be honest. I was getting really angry at him, because it wasn’t my fault that I’d been to a private school and I didn’t live in a council house…
CH: How much do you think that situation did colour your decision not to do Art?
Florence: Probably quite a lot, because I was getting angry at Art as well because, I don’t know why, I shouldn’t have been getting angry at Art, but I was just getting really annoyed at him. I was just thinking, ‘Well could this happen at university if I did Art and if your teacher doesn’t like you or they don’t like your work. I still love Art so much, and like looking back now I think it did really take me ages to really get over what happened at (college). (July 2008)

Florence also described how she felt out of place among her peers in the FE college, because of social class issues:

I sometimes felt like in the class I was a bit alone. All of the other students had been to these massive comprehensive schools, and they really got on with each other, and I felt like they almost didn’t like me, like they saw me as this person that they just shouldn’t go near because I’d been to a private school. I definitely felt that. (July 2008)

See Chapter 9 on non-participation for a more detailed account of Florence.
Academic support
Some literature (e.g., Clayton et al., 2007; Crozier, 2000) has argued that working class students do not perceive that their families can provide academic support for their HE studies. However, data from this research indicated that some students’ families provided support for course content. A range of family members provided support, in a range of ways. For instance, some parents provided contacts for students’ work experience. Some encouraged students to complete work to deadlines. Many students indicated that their families enjoyed looking at their work; a minority highlighted that family members engaged in discussion with them about their work. For example, when Laura’s family visited her in the flat she had just moved into, they were apparently more interested in looking at and talking about her work, than in seeing where she lived.

Jennie, a mature student, illustrated how children can also provide helpful sounding-boards. Jennie commented on the benefits of her three children and herself being in full time education, and how individual children offered different benefits to her. Jennie’s teenage daughter was apparently interested in the content of her Art. Jennie enjoyed discussing broader aspects of HE experience with her son, who had started university at the same time as Jennie. In one instance, family re-ordering had increased the family networks drawn into HE experience. Jacob described how he would talk through his work with both his resident step-father and his non-resident natural father, and highlighted that his step-father was particularly helpful in selecting material to include in projects.

Several students whose practice focused on performance and film had family members who participated in projects. For instance, one project by Ruth, a mature student, centred on herself wearing face masks in the bath. Ruth’s mother had taken all the photographs for this project.

Some students discussed the ways in which their families gave them support with the literacy demands of HE Art and Design. Jackie, for instance, related how her husband always read her essays, to check for coherence of argument and also for proof-reading errors:

(He (Jackie’s husband) has a very, he’s very akin to detail… a very much detailed person, you know, crossing the t’s and dotting the i’s. And he will read my essay, and he will ask questions, and say, ‘Well, I don’t understand what you’re saying here, because,’ or, ‘This isn’t clear,’ and ‘What are you trying to say?’ And he asks me questions about it. Well he helps me clarify it, because you do sometimes make assumptions that people will understand more than they actually understand. So that’s very useful. So in that respect he’s very supportive. (June 2008))

Though Jackie’s husband apparently struggled with conceptual Art, he had also become familiar with artists whom Jackie wanted to discuss with him, for her HE work.

Financial support
Providing accommodation, including a workspace, in the familial home was a way of reducing students’ costs in attending HE. For example, Abelia, a minority ethnic, young woman, described how she had taken over the family dining table as her workspace and how the house was full to bursting with her Art work. Clayton et al. (2007) argue that the working environment in the family home is not always appropriate; Abelia’s working conditions sounded far from ideal, though she did not question them. Madhu, a mature, minority ethnic student, described how she had been able to use a room in her parents’ house as a studio, whilst she had lived at home to save money. Jo, a young student, described how her father helped with the cost of materials by bringing her materials from work, particularly from skips at work; she used the latter as found objects in her work.

Domestic support
Accounts of students who lived at home revealed that some parents provided domestic support for students, both male and female. In some instances, this helped to make other potentially challenging aspects of students’ HE experience manageable. For example, Janet, a young woman at Norton, said that although she had a journey of over an hour each way to the HEI, this was usually manageable because her mother did the cooking, shopping and cleaning. Some of the mature students had a partner who undertook some of the domestic tasks, including some of the childcare.
Absence of relevant cultural capital

Whilst this chapter has explored the diverse ways in which families were actively involved in students’ study of Art and Design, some comments did suggest that some students perceived that their families lacked the relevant cultural capital to support aspects of their studies, as the following illustrate:

My family don’t really know about Art and all that.

My mum and dad, it’s not like they would know how to help me. I had to help myself and I didn’t know who to turn to.

The two students appeared to respond in different ways to their families’ lack of cultural capital. The first student did not appear concerned about the parents’ lack of knowledge of ‘Art and all that’. In contrast, the second comment highlights that the student felt lost because of her parents’ lack of artistic knowledge.

Caring responsibilities

A significant number of students were in a caring role at home for different family members, whether siblings, a parent or a grand-parent. For instance, Martinho had to spend time looking after a grand-mother who had had a stroke. Fahima described how she was not only responsible for doing a lot of housework, but also for looking after an autistic sibling. Although Fahima experienced this as time-consuming and challenging, it had also benefited her in developing her thinking about a potential career; she described how she wanted to teach Art in a special school.

The majority of students with caring responsibilities did not appear to question these. For example, Mario, who, as discussed, did not complete the first year of HE, reported how his tutor had questioned Mario’s priorities when he spent time looking after his sick mother and helping the family to move house. Mario’s response was to ask himself rhetorical questions which underline his sense of family responsibility:

What do I do? Leave all my jobs? Leave my mother ill? Not help with moving house?”

(March 2008)
Financial responsibilities
A number of students, both male and female, had to contribute to the family income, as well as paying for themselves through university. As with caring responsibilities, students did not question this, though it undoubtedly contributed to multiple demands upon their time. Financial responsibilities to the family only appeared to contribute to critical situations for students, in a very small minority of cases. Ryan said that one reason why he did not complete the first year of HE at Townley was that his family had temporarily had extreme financial problems. Ryan therefore had had to increase his number of hours in paid employment. Elizangela, a young, minority ethnic Townley student, outlined her challenging situation, in her research interview in March 2008. Elizangela’s family expected her to spend a significant amount of time caring for 10 siblings and working in two jobs, and did not agree with her being at university. Though Elizangela highlighted how desperately she wanted to complete university, she stopped attending regularly and had to withdraw after the first year, because she did not complete the year.

Changes in family attitudes
Clayton et al. (2007) show that some working class students’ attitudes to their families change over the course of HE. In contrast, this research shows that, in some instances, family members’ initially hostile views on HE Art and Design softened over time. For the majority of students whose family members had initially opposed their wish to study Art and Design, opposition developed into at least acceptance, if not pride, once the student had gained a place or started studying HE Art and Design.

In Madhu’s (mature, minority ethnic student) case, her family’s change in attitude towards Art happened over a significant amount of time. According to Madhu, her family had initially not wanted her to study Art. Madhu therefore completed a degree in mathematics. However, after her degree and after working full time, Madhu still felt strongly that she wanted to study Art and Design at HE. Madhu therefore worked and saved to pay for a Foundation Diploma and then a second BA in Fine Art. Madhu highlighted a range of ways, such as support with accommodation at the family home, family conversations about artists and input into projects, in which her family have now become supportive of Art and Design:

“They’re (family) very supportive in their own way which sometimes can be quite funny, because they’ll see like on the Indian channels or the Pakistani channels on TV, they’ll be like, ’There’s so and so, and she’s an artist, and she’s the head of the contemporary art gallery in Lahore, or whatever, and do you know her?’ (May 2008)

Furthermore, Madhu indicated that her father now expresses surprise at her perception that he had initially opposed her preferences.

Critical family events
Several students outlined that critical family events had created challenges for their smooth progression into and through HE. For example, Nick’s mother was dying at the time of the portfolio review interview for the BA in Fine Art, which was part of the progression course at Townley. CH observed this portfolio review. CH’s observations corroborate Nick’s account that his mother’s imminent death had, understandably, affected his performance in interview; in Nick’s words:

“Hands up, I gave a really bad interview. I wasn’t here mentally or emotionally you know… My preparation was appalling… I was so distraught coming out of the BA interview, I just couldn’t face the Foundation (i.e. FdA) interview at all. I just wanted to get out of the college as soon as I was done. (February 2007)

Michele and Sara, two mature students, both described how their university work had been temporarily negatively affected by critical family issues. For instance, in the summer of Michele’s first year at university, her son left home to go into the Army. Michele found this initially hard to accept, because of the risk involved, and because Michele had hoped that her son would go to university. For a period of time, Michele could not sleep at night, and found that the transition cut across her university work.

2.4 STUDENTS’ STRATEGIES
Overview
Chapter 1 outlined that there is a debate in the research literature on widening participation about the relationships between structure, agency and identity. In this research, some students had strategies to help modify any potentially negative impact of their socio-economic status and their family life upon their experience of HE Art and Design. These strategies demonstrate students’ agency, and its limits; strategies were not always successful. This section outlines the range of strategies students deployed.
Drawing positives
Some existing research (e.g. TLRP, 2008; Reay et al., 2007) underlines the resilience of working class students. Similarly, in this research, a number of students appeared skilled in drawing positives from potentially challenging family experiences.

For example, Jackie (mature student) related how her brother had died very suddenly, in his 40s. This experience prompted Jackie to reflect on her own priorities in life and strongly influenced her decision to apply to HE to study Fine Art:

It’s a very life changing event that makes you sit back and think, ‘If I’m dead in four years’ time, I haven’t done half the things I want to.’ (March 2008)

Nick took a range of positives from his initially negative experience of the portfolio review interview at Townley, described above. First, Nick said that it prepared him to deal with challenging future interview situations. Second, Nick said that the portfolio review interview was one element in his becoming increasingly able to subdue the ‘little voice’ in his head, related to social class and also described above. This was because Nick had an explanation for his performance in the portfolio review, rather than being able to hold responsible his class-related internal voice:

My personal circumstances didn’t give that chance for that little voice to actually, I wasn’t hearing, ‘You did a bad interview because you’re shit.’ That was completely knocked to the side by the fact that I was dealing with the acceptance of my mother’s illness and then death, and that took prior concerns to anything that was going on in my head. So I think that was probably the catalyst of this little voice dying, the fact that I wasn’t giving into self destruction. I was actually looking at a bigger picture. I was looking at the complete desolation of my family. My mother was the focal point of the family... So I suppose the interview did change me. (March 2007)

Consciously making changes
A further strategy used by Nick to deal with the ‘little voice’ was consciously deciding to ignore it. This decision was based on Nick’s developing awareness that the ‘little voice’ was hindering his enjoyment of life and his growth. Nick’s observations suggest that his HE course has also been a catalyst in enabling Nick to suppress the little voice:

There was a time in my life when I realised it (the little voice) wasn’t helpful. In fact, if anything, it was stopping me from growing, and at the end of the day you have one life. What’s the point of listening to something that’s going to be detrimental to your growth? So I’ve decided it’s out there and I don’t need it. I’m having a bloody good life. I’m thoroughly enjoying the course. I’m enjoying what I’m becoming and there’s no need for that voice. So I don’t feel able to give advice to anyone else who has that little voice, apart from, ‘Start ignoring it. You know, just start bloody ignoring it,’ because it has no space in there, and once you stop giving way to it, it just fades and fades and fades. (March 2008)

Talking to self
Several students indicated that they gave themselves positive messages, to help them to deal with family related issues which impacted upon their experience of HE Art and Design. For example, Elizangela (young, minority ethnic student) related how:

There have been times when I thought, ‘I just can’t do this no more! Just forget it! I don’t want to do it no more,’ or ‘I just can’t be bothered.’ But after I think, ‘You just can’t give up! You definitely can’t just give up!’ For me to be in Townley, one of the greatest schools in Art and Design, how can I just give up? (February 2008)

Approach to life
Elizangela also related how seeing life as a test helped her to try to manage her family related challenges.

Standing up for oneself
Fahima (young, minority ethnic student) found the strength to stand up for herself, to resist her parents’ opposition to her wish to study Art and Design. This was even though Fahima described how, in her culture, the tradition was very much for children to obey their parents, and even though:

My whole life I don’t answer back... (March 2008)
Claire

Claire's accounts of family show that, in the earlier part of his teens, Marcus' family had had a negative impact on his education and on his well being generally. Over time, however, Marcus has learnt how to manage aspects of his family life and to use some to his advantage.

Marcus

Marcus described how, when he was at secondary school, he had made discoveries about his father, from his mother. Whilst Marcus did not state explicitly what these discoveries were, he implied strongly that these were very negative and stated that members of his family had 'criminal leanings'. Marcus lived in an area where there is not infrequently violence. When Marcus was 14, a cousin was murdered near Marcus' family's flat and Marcus and his younger brother were mugged. Marcus felt guilty because he did not intervene to help his brother. As a result of these family events, and also of being bullied at school, Marcus became agoraphobic.

Marcus emphasised that, ultimately, the complex network of challenges he has experienced relating to social class and family have strengthened him:
I feel like now it’s getting to the point where I’m starting to like reap in the benefits of it making me stronger. (November 2008)

Marcus stressed that being agoraphobic had given him plenty of chance to think, and that he was now drawing on this thinking, in HE Art and Design. Marcus described different ways in which he has become able to manage the impact of his family. Marcus observed that:

And I think you can come to a crossroads where you either decide, ‘Am I going to be like Mum and Dad? Am I going to not be like Mum and Dad?’ (November 2008)

Marcus apparently took a conscious decision that he was not going to live like his parents. His experience of the family living on benefits had made Marcus resolved to gain a well paid job:

Being unemployed and, and claiming benefits is a trap… and just totally lures you in. ... I’d rather starve than join, because I’ve seen the trap, what it does. It lures you in and then once you come off of it, they make it so difficult for you. Why would you want to get a job? (November 2008)

Marcus considered that, in some respects, his parents were manipulative. Marcus felt that his experience of their manipulation had helped to choose advertising as a pathway in the second year of the Graphic Design BA. In Marcus’ view, the extent to which advertising is about persuading or manipulating people is open to question.

Some existing research (Clayton et al., 2007; Crozier, 2000) argues that working class students can compartmentalise home and university. Unlike Claire, Marcus drew a firm boundary between home and his education. This was long-standing:

Marcus: I’m quite open with anyone else but my family.

CH: And how much of college do you share with your family?

Marcus: I don’t share that much really. The problem with school was that my brother was always in trouble, so my mum was always at his school. I just didn’t want her to come to anything, so like teacher-parent days, she wouldn’t come...

CH: Did she know about them?

Marcus: Sometimes she did and sometimes she didn’t. When she did, I would convince her that it wasn’t important and I would go by myself, or something like that. I just didn’t like it. I didn’t like it mixing. (November 2008)

At the same time, Marcus acknowledges that his mother is proud of his achievement in getting a place at a high status HEI.

Marcus’ older sister had had a more straightforwardly positive influence on Marcus. Marcus’ sister had achieved professionally. He explained that she had been a buyer for a large national fashion store. At the time of the research, Marcus’ sister was a manageress at a large, national health club. Marcus described both how they were competitive with one another, and also how his sister, though she had not been to university, provided a role model for him:

It feels like someone’s kind of gone that ladder before. It doesn’t fucking matter what they’d done. I’m doing it my way. But now it just feels nice to know that she could have done it, so I think I can do it as well. (November 2008)

2.6 SUMMARY

The influences of social class

> All the students, except for one, were from socio-economic groups 4-8.
> Some of the students commented on the impact of SES on their experience of education.
> Students from the same social class sub-group responded in very different ways to their social class, as the examples of Mariana and Pearl, who both say they are from the underclass, illustrate.
> Only a small minority of students described feeling out of place at university. This tended to be at key transition points, such as at the beginning of HE, or when students were struggling intensely with HE.
Case studies

> Two case studies, of Claire and Marcus, illustrate how, according to many students’ accounts, a network of family and social class experience, with both positive and negative aspects, impacted upon students’ experience of HE Art and Design and of education prior to HE.

2.7 KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE HE ARTS SECTOR

> How far and in what ways should institutions provide any support for issues experienced by students, in relation to social class and family?
> How should students’ positive accounts of family involvement in HE and of students’ strategies to manage issues related to social class and family be disseminated?
3.1 INTRODUCTION

The fact is that every artist ends up using everything that he really cares about. (Mark Wallinger, Observer Review, 15.02.09.)

Work tends to be generated from a very, very personal place. (Part time BA Fine Art Course Director)

(Ben Nicholson) related the laborious scraping that produced (his still lifes) to the recollection of his mother scrubbing the kitchen table. (Tate, 2009)

This sense of personal connection became my guiding principle with all these invitations to write (national poems). Once the subject had been suggested, I turned it round in my mind, until it showed some facet that appeared intimate to me. If no such facet appeared, I said I couldn’t do it. (Andrew Motion, Poet Laureate, 2009)

Diversity is central to Art and Design. (Sir Michael Bichard, keynote at CHEAD widening participation conference, 2005)

Art and Design is unusual among HE disciplines because it offers scope for all students, from widening participation backgrounds or otherwise, to use aspects of their life experience outside university, in their practice, as the first three quotations above point to. This is perhaps particularly the case in Fine Art, as the second quotation above highlights. Andrew Motion’s comment underlines that, to work creatively, it is essential to connect personally with the subject matter. As Sir Michael Bichard’s observation emphasises, because students are drawing on their life experience in their work, having students from widening participation backgrounds among an HE Art and Design cohort therefore enriches the diversity of practice within Art and Design.

Whilst there is much research on the experience of students from widening participation backgrounds of transition to HE and HE itself, there is a gap in existing research on how students use their life experience in the content of their work. In this research, there was much evidence of students using aspects of their life experience outside HE, some of which may be related to social class, in their practice. This raw life experience was transformed into artistic practice, through research and critical reflection by the student, critical feedback from tutors and peers (Chapter 4), integrating theory into the development of...
practice, and the student’s use of developing technical skills (e.g. editing video).

Students’ use of their life experience outside HE in the content of their work is explored in this chapter principally through five case studies. The chapter then considers students’ use of skills developed outside HE, in their artistic practice. The table in the final section summarises these students’ use of their life experience and skills developed outside HE, in the content of their Art work.

3.2 CASE STUDIES

Tony

Tony summarises the relationship between his life and work as follows:

It’s (his practice) all sort of autobiographical. All my stuff is work related as well. (February 2008)

Tony trained as a taxi driver to fund his HE studies. His training and job provide him with a rich seam of inspiration for his practice. In one project, Tony made a series of videos of his work as a taxi driver: of becoming qualified as a taxi driver in the Knowledge School and of his pink taxi in a range of contexts, such as in the garage, in the car wash, and on a range of routes with a range of passengers:

Well my first year here (at university) I was still doing the Knowledge, which was quite helpful really, because I see people making films of kind of all different subjects, so I thought, ‘Oh yeah, I’m just going to make one about the Knowledge, so I filmed everything that was involved in doing the Knowledge, and I came up with a big sort of video installation, and it worked out to be an 11 screen video installation. (February 2008)

Tony exhibited work about his taxi driving in Townley’s gallery, which had a large window onto a road, and at the Knowledge School. Tony used the exhibition in Townley’s gallery to take his project further. As well as having the videos playing continuously, Tony employed a taxi driver to sit in the window of Townley’s gallery, and to role play working in the Knowledge School. Tony was then filmed in the street, interviewing passers by on what they thought the messages of the film were. Tony’s family was involved in this project. Tony’s father, who was also a taxi driver, helped by doing some of the filming for the taxi project:

I always show them (i.e. his family) what I’m up to, and when I was doing the stuff in the window (of Townley’s gallery), my dad’s always been there to sort of give me a hand and everything, because he’s a cabby as well, he was quite into it. (May 2008)

Tony had further ideas for how to develop this project:

That’s perhaps going to be my next project, to get loads of people, passengers (in his taxi) and then giving them the camera. (May 2008)

However, the next project for the Fine Art BA was a collaborative project, on curating an exhibition. Tony again drew on his experience as a taxi driver. Tony described how, because of driving around the centre of town, he was very aware of different stall holders selling souvenirs, such as models of grenadier guards and tea towels depicting renowned sites, and how for some time he had been thinking of how to incorporate a stall holder into his artistic practice. In this collaborative project, Tony’s group used a large, derelict space for their exhibition site. Tony used skills probably developed through his professional role, in negotiating with a souvenir stall holder to be filmed with his stall in this derelict space. The first stall holder refused. Not deterred, Tony approached a second, who agreed to take part:

I’d seen a few stall holders, at first there’s one outside the (name of major gallery) and I thought, ‘I’ll go to him.’ So literally I just went up to him and said, ‘Is it all right to take,’ first of all I just said, ‘Is it all right to take a few pictures of the stall?’ And he was like, ‘No, I don’t want your sort. No, you’re going to drive my customers away.’ He was really rude, and I was like, ‘I just want to take some pictures.’ He’s like, ‘No, no, no.’ So I thought, so then I was like, he goes, ‘There’s one down the road.’ So I went, and then I saw (name of stallholder’s) stall in (major thoroughfare). And literally I went up to him…No, I went up to him and said that I was an Art student. [pause] I’ve got this idea to use his stall in a project. And he was like, ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah.’ He was like, ‘I’ve done things like this.’ I think he’s rented his stall out for films and that in the past. (December 2008)

Tony’s video contained images of the stallholder and his employee driving to the derelict exhibition space and setting up and running their stall. When the stallholder suggested that his employee could wear his England shirt, Tony declined, demonstrating judgement on the degree of Englishness to express in the project, and explaining in interview:
Tony outlined that his tutors had suggested to him that, in his practice, he was commenting on working class Englishness. Tony was going to meet with his tutors, to discuss this further and how to develop his final year dissertation on the subject of working class Englishness:

(My tutors) have both mentioned perhaps what I should do for my dissertation, about Englishness, what it means to be English. Working class white, and all that… That's what a lot, looking back at my work, that's what a lot of my work is kind of about. And now I've done this project, I can see little similarities coming out of my stuff… I think there's a voice definitely going unheard. It's definitely kind of white working class, I think. But is it just white working class? It might be black working class as well. (December 2008)

The quotation above shows that Tony was, at the time of the research interview in December 2008, reflecting on the relationship between class and ethnicity in his work. Tony reflects further on the essence of his practice, questioning whether his work is about Englishness or Britishness. Tony highlights the importance of improving how he expresses his ideas, linking the extent to which he is clear about his thinking, to his capacity to articulate his thinking:

Tony: But I've got to be careful where my argument's coming from. Because at the moment someone could probably, if they knew what they was talking about, could probably rip me apart, and I'm not really sure where I'm coming from. So that's, that's what probably lets my Art down at the moment. But in a way, I just like people to see it and make up their own feelings.

CH: What do you mean when you say, 'That's what lets my Art down at the moment'?

Tony: Well, because if I'm talking about my Art, I can say stuff about it, and I can say, 'Yeah, I got this stall ... and I put it in this deserted place, and I dressed up as a grenadier guard.' And if someone said, 'Why did you do that?' I'd say, 'Well, what I'm trying to say is that the English voice is going unheard in today's multicultural society.' But am I saying the English voice, or am I saying the white working class voice, or am I saying the working class voice, the British voice? I'm not sure. I don't think I'm saying British, because British can mean all the different people that have come over here anyway.

Tony summarised how use of his life experience in his Art provides a mechanism to challenge assumptions of who can take part in Art:

Tony as a guard was then filmed marching around the derelict site. This included Tony looking at the souvenir stall and picking up and looking at, not without a touch of irony, a model of a grenadier guard from the stall.

Tony summarised the relationship between his employment and this project:

Because when I'm working, I'm working, I don't want to be working, thinking, 'Oh, I'm doing this Art thing,' because I get too stressed. But it's kind of all entwined anyway, like, because I see the stalls every day, I see grenadier guards everyday, so it's like of fitting in...So it's all kind of interrelated, I think. (December 2008)

Tony showed his edited films of the stallholder and himself as a grenadier guard in the derelict space to the rest of the course, at the end of a course session CH observed in December 2008. Even though this took place at the end of the day, his peers were fascinated by the films, requesting, at 5.15 pm, to watch them a second time.

Tony summarises how use of his life experience in his Art provides a mechanism to challenge assumptions of who can take part in Art:
The found objects Nick subsequently uses in his clock piece are intimately connected with Nick’s mother. Nick’s discovery of the objects was also related to her death. Nick came across the objects in the kitchen, when he was clearing his mother’s house after her death:

Nick: ... The actual brief is to find metal objects, take the metal objects around with you, explore where we could use these objects, and devise some kind of interactive sculpture around that, and I was thinking particularly with losing my mum... I want to do something about time and timelessness. It's hard to actually explain. It's more a feeling piece than anything. I wanted to create something about mortality and life itself...

CH: Where did you get all this (i.e. the objects) from?

Nick: I raided my mum’s kitchen. This was an old cheese grater. Horrendous. (March 2008)

Claire’s strong family involvement in her HE experience has been described in Chapter 2. Claire’s family’s reported surprise about Claire’s achievement in gaining a place at a prestigious HEI was outlined. In all her research interviews, Claire talked in detail about her childhood. Claire felt she had achieved very little during her childhood, because of learning difficulties and medication which Claire took for epilepsy. Townley’s progression to HE course and Claire’s experience at HE have been crucial to Claire gaining confidence in herself. Claire centred her HE projects for the summer 2008 and for the first term of the second year around her developing sense of self.

Roland Barthes’ essay *Toys* enabled Claire to reflect on different strands of her childhood, which she had blocked off:

It just got me thinking about my childhood, which is a part of my life that I’d kind of not thought about, or just blocked off like a barrier. I’d built like a wall and never kind of thought about it, so I just put it all in a box saying, ‘That’s bad. Don’t go there.’ (December 2008)

In the summer project, the students had to make use of a Pringles container. Claire attaches to this ribbons and drawings, which represent some of her interests. To the ribbons, Claire

Nick used different aspects of his life experience in his practice. Some strands go right back to early childhood. Found objects are at the centre of Nick’s artistic practice. Nick related how his sister had reminded him that his interest in found objects had developed when he was very young:

My sister said, ‘Oh yeah, do you remember that day you went to the park with our mam and dad, and you were in a real state because they wouldn’t let you drag this branch home?’ ... I desperately wanted to take this branch home. And it was a huge bloody thing, the size of that table, and I was dragging it down the road and my dad was sort of like, ‘You can’t take that bloody log home,’ and I would have been really upset. And ever since then, I’ve just collected things. I mean, if you look in my studio at home, I mean, I say ‘studio’, I mean, it’s a bloody tip. But it’s my tip... (December 2008)

In his first research interview in the first year of HE, Nick described how he had used found objects to explore his emotions about his mother’s recent (2007) death. Nick’s technical awareness had developed through learning through error about which materials it was feasible to use. The following quotation also stresses how Nick needed to express his feelings about his mother, in his practice:

I went up north to visit where her ashes (his mother’s) were scattered, and they were scattered at a place called (name of town), which is a coastal area, and while at the beach there, I actually found this fantastic pig iron grate. I photocopied it, and I needed to do something with that, more as a memorial or memento to my mum really. But unfortunately the problems with that is it’s pig iron, and the sculpture tutor said, ‘Well, pig iron is incredibly brittle. If you’re trying to manoeuvre it or cast it in some way, it will break,’ so I sort of shelved it .... So I actually sort of decided to make a clock piece. (March 2008)
The size of the boxes reflects Claire’s previous sense of self:

I had little match boxes that I’d covered with paper, with nice paper... the whole idea was the match box was tiny, the small variety match box, because when I was younger I thought what I had to say wasn’t really valued... And so the reason that the size was so tiny was because what I’d believed what I’d had to say was insignificant. It didn’t really matter. (December 2008)

A ladder represents Claire’s previous goal-less journey:

That’s a ladder that I made out of matchsticks and, and some wood that I found lying around. It’s a ladder to nowhere. That’s how I felt that I was going, to nowhere. (December 2008)

Claire encases butterflies in the boxes, to symbolise her fragility and re-birth:

I’m showing fragility, fragileness of myself, in the work using, I’m using butterflies a lot in my work at the moment. I found them, they’re like butterflies that have been hand made from feathers and glitter. They’re really delicate, and I’ve encased them in boxes and stuff... Butterflies in Greek and Japanese mythology represent the soul, and they also represent like womanhood and stuff like that. I’m going to write ‘innocence’ and ‘fragileness’ and then ‘rebirth’ and ‘change’, because that’s what I believed in the butterfly was. (December 2008)

Claire is explicit that Art is integral to her increasingly positive sense of self:

It was more about me. I attached loads of string to this Pringles pot, and then attached little bits that maybe I’d found, or bags that had drawings on, or drawings that I’d done, or items that I’d found like leaves or ribbons. I love my ribbons. I attached that onto it, and it was kind of like a descriptive tool that describes me. It was kind of weird, because when you first looked at it, it looked lovely and pretty...but underneath it, I’d got hanging words, and the words, you have to go up and read them to find that they’re not all very nice. When I was very young, I had been told that I was lacking in confidence, ‘Claire can’t do this,’ and, ‘Claire can’t do that,’ and these words that have been related to me from a young age had kind of stuck in my head, and I couldn’t get rid of them, to a point where I thought all my childhood was a part that I didn’t want to go into, didn’t want to think about, and just ignored it kind of thing. I just didn’t want to think about it. So there were words like ‘lacking’, ‘special needs’, ‘writing’, ‘reading’, ‘illness’, ‘disability’, things like that and ‘fear’, other words like that, all wrapped up in other words that were good, because as I’ve got older, I’ve realised that I wasn’t completely useless. I could do stuff. They were words like ‘Art’ and ‘creativity’. (December 2008)
know, and why don’t you try and mix in the two together, and how would it be if the bird was tweeting an Indian song?” (May 2008)

In this video, Madhu used the family back garden as the landscape. Madhu’s younger brother provided practical help with the project. Madhu had to wait for a bird to film and he alerted her when there was a bird on a colourful tree in the garden.

Madhu described how feedback from a tutor in a crit led her to see her practice in terms of identity, and to a body of theoretical work to use in conceptualising her practice:

(M)y work also references a lot of identity and things like that, and I wasn’t sure at that point (second year of the part time course) what my work was about but he’d (the tutor) used the term ‘identity’, and I hadn’t realised that identity was the subject matter, which even now I’m still like thinking about it … so I went and read about identity politics within Art and that was what helped me to pinpoint what, because I think you make work, and you don’t necessarily realise the discourse that it actually sits within, until somebody actually specifically pinpoints that discourse, and I think that’s what he did and so that’s really helped. (February 2008)

The quotation above shows that Madhu was, to some extent, questioning the tutor’s comments. Three months later (June 2008), Madhu shows how she is drawing on her background but moving beyond, as she sees it, the specificity of the category ‘identity’:

I’ve realised I want to move slightly more into an open ended area, as opposed to identity which is quite, my identity and the music which is quite specific. Those are all almost background things. More the ideas of the reality and the imaginary… (June 2008)

Six months later, in December 2008, Madhu’s perspective on identity has altered. Madhu now perceives that the label ‘identity’ had compartmentalised her practice; she now sees identity as relevant to, but not the central message of, her practice:

He (the tutor) was compartmentalising it (Madhu’s practice) for himself….. And [pause] it helped me no end, because I was able to read about it, and, yes, there were similarities in what I was reading and it, it was proved quite funny, because that whole element of identity was discussing how you can’t articulate things that hadn’t had a language before, so (slight pause) you know, as they used to call it, black British Art didn’t have this language, so when people would look at it they weren’t able to articulate it, these white curators. … So it, so that’s what was funny to me, was that I was unable to articulate something, but when I read about it, that’s what they were complaining about as well, that there’s you can’t articulate your own culture and heritage which you’re naturally coming with, because if you were coming at it from a, you know, a Leonardo da Vinci, Italian Art, Renaissance Art way, nobody would need you to articulate that, because (slight pause) it would be understood, whereas when you’re coming with other influences, you need to be able to articulate them… But now I look at it, and this is why from now I’m thinking it, it’s funny for me, because I felt I’d compartmentalised myself just in that beginning stage to understand it, because I felt that that’s what I was being labelled. But now I realise that’s not really what my work’s about, but it’s, there is a basis in there. (December 2008)

Interestingly, Madhu’s comments show that she can read critically, and that she can both see similarities to her own experience in complex theoretical literature, and also, after reflection, distance her experience from theory, where appropriate. Literacies (language, speaking and listening, reading, and writing) are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Min

The case studies above are all of Fine Art students. There was evidence of students in other subject areas of HE Art and Design using aspects of their life experience outside university, in the content of their Art work. For example, Min, a BA Ceramic Design student, had the confidence to use the everyday in his life, in his Art. In the first project in the second year of HE, Min drew on his love of biscuits, and custard creams in particular. The Ceramic Design students went on a visit to the Wedgwood factory, with a project brief to make something with a contemporary design for Wedgwood:

Everyone thought of something in the shop (at Wedgwood) that they would like to copy or make again or remake, like mirrors and cups and stuff, but I went with my personal opinion, because I really like eating cookies and biscuits. So I created a cookie jar, just for fun. I don’t need to make nothing amazing like a mirror or something, so I made a cookie jar. So I went on finding out what’s like, what do I like about cookies, or what inspires me about cookies, because normal, conventional cookie jars are round and oval shape? And then so I went around checking out different shapes and different motifs and patterns.

(M)in
Min re-stylised the intricate design on a custard cream, to remove what he described as its ‘baroque’ aspect, and to give his design a more modern appearance. Min did not want people to realise the design was from a custard cream, but to tantalise them by making them aware it was something familiar that they could not place. When Min reflected on his own experience of eating biscuits, he realised that the shape of many cookie jars means that it is difficult to see what cookies are inside the jar and to put one’s hand in to get a cookie. This influenced the shape of Min’s cookie jar:

Because the conventional idea of a normal cookie jar is just, you put your hand down, and the radius for the top bit is always smaller, and plus when you put your hand in, you really can’t see it, and then there’s a reason why I did this shape. It’s so that once you put your hand in it, the base is wider so you can see what cookie you’re picking out. (November 2008)

Initially, Min’s tutor shares Min’s surprise about the design on custard creams:

I never realised there was a design on the custard cream until when I went like, ‘Whoa!’ Even my teacher was pretty surprised and he went, ‘I didn’t realise how much detail they put into a custard cream.’ And so then I copied the design and I re-stylised it. (November 2008)

Min’s tutor also helped Min to develop his ideas, by enabling him to articulate them, through questioning:

He’s (tutor) helped me quite a bit really. It’s like also the idea of, because I wanted to put like, changing my object and make it all modern and stuff, and he wanted to question why. And I told him it’s because the conventional idea of a normal cookie jar is just you put your hand down... (November 2008)

Min uses his emerging software skills to develop his ideas and save himself time in his work:

Then from there I drew half of it, and then I photoshopped it to the point where I can make it look to the style I want, and also I photoshopped the motif onto the pot, so I can see what it looks like already. So I don’t need to draw it out a hundred times, just to check it out if it’s smooth and everything... Working on the computer also helps, because if I wanted to change colours, I’d just change them in an instant. I’d just click it and, whereas if I had to draw it out I’d have to paint it again and again, just to see what colour it looks like, and it’s a lot of bother for me mixing the colours. (November 2008)
One of the instances that we had a situation was when someone in the group said, suggested we have, we operate it as a proper exhibition and have the public in and whatever. And, I can understand where she was coming from, but my concern was, how are we going to invigilate it? And 'I can't because I've got a child, so I can't possibly.' We've all got commitments, so either we all do it together, or we're not going to do it at all. So it was then trying to come up with an alternative, coming up with an alternative idea. And in this case what we said was, 'Well, why don't we offer it out to the students in the college?' (December 2008)

Jackie also used her project management and organisational skills in, for instance, ensuring that different group members took responsibility for different tasks, deadlines were set and met, and notes, including of action points, were taken of meetings:

Because otherwise, you can come back the following week and nobody's done anything. We've all gone away and said, 'Oh yeah, we'll do that,' but nobody's actually done anything. So we made sure that we did that and we did that in turns. (December 2008)

As the group were using a site with health and safety issues, Jackie suggested doing a risk assessment, before the tutor proposed to all the students that a risk assessment should be conducted. Jackie said that she found it straightforward to develop the risk assessment in appropriate detail, because of her previous professional experience. Jackie used previous experience of problem solving, when there was an issue with the lighting for the exhibition.

In relation to presenting work on this and other projects, Jackie highlighted that she can explain herself clearly and is confident about putting together and giving presentations, because of previous work experience:

We just recently just did one of our units on presentation, and we had to do a PowerPoint presentation, and because in my corporate world you did them so often, and that was a simple thing for me to do, whereas for others who had maybe not worked in the corporate world found it incredibly difficult to got, to have first mastered the PowerPoint system, which isn't difficult, but if you've never done it before, you know it's a mountain to climb. But I've also done public speaking, so I'm not nervous of standing up in front of people and talking, provided I'm talking about something I know about. (December 2008)
In Jackie’s previous professional role, she had worked in a systematic and questioning way. Jackie has learnt to tap into, rather than try to suppress, this approach in her HE Art and Design work:

My work is very methodical, because that’s the way I used to work professionally, and you can’t undo 18 years of the way you are, and I’ve tried to work against it. I try to work very spontaneously, but it’s just not working, so I’ve got to work to my strengths and I’ve realised that. So my researching skills, because my practice is all about place and its narratives, so I do a lot of research and investigation. Well, that’s what I used to do in my work professionally beforehand. So I’ve brought that, my skills of questioning things or asking why, and then finding out and maybe exploring other avenues, whereas I don’t, and I’m not taking things at face value and trying to get underneath them. So all of those kinds of skills I think I’ve brought to it. (December 2008)

3.4 Summary of How Other Students Use Their Life Experience in Their Art and Design Practice

Table 2 below summarises the ways in which a range of students draw on their life experience in HE Art and Design. Table 2 does not repeat examples presented in the case studies in this chapter. This table is in the main body of the report, not in an appendix, because the multifarious ways in which often very everyday aspects of life experience shaped students’ practice are central to this report. Table 2, like the case studies, emphasises the diversity which students from widening participation backgrounds can bring to HE Art and Design (Bichard, 2005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME AND SUBJECT AREA</th>
<th>USE OF LIFE EXPERIENCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Fine Art</td>
<td>Jackie’s fascination with place was at the heart of her practice, which she described as being about the narrative of place. Used places which spoke to her.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annette Fine Art</td>
<td>Initially, Annette avoided using her own experience. She shut away from it (using her life experience in her Art). I didn’t want to. It was more about the object, about putting something outside of yourself into it (the Art). I didn’t think I was really ready to put myself into it. Annette was working class from the south-east. She made a video aiming to break down stereotypes of the Essex girl.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruth Fine Art</td>
<td>Interested in body image and the presentation of self, as her own body shape had changed through medication she had to take. This was reflected in Ruth’s work e.g. she made videos of herself wearing a face mask in the bath. Described herself as having a deep-seated passion for film, which had led her to using film as a medium.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pearl Fine Art</td>
<td>Pearl’s background of growing up in the underclass on a large, rundown estate in a northern town helped influence her focus on: — socially engaged practice. I’m interested in overlooked spaces, I’m interested in interventions in say, for instance, the communal spaces in social housing developments.</td>
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<td>Aphra Fine Art</td>
<td>Was explicit that her work was autobiographical. She integrated her family and friends into a fairy tale: My work’s always been very focused on me so I was trying to get away from that actually, and from doing that I came back… I wanted to create my own fairy tale… with people in my life, my family, my friends… Experimented with faceless self-portraits, because that was how she felt about herself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abella Fine Art</td>
<td>Use of found objects as materials in work. E.g. use of newspapers found on public transport. Use of objects from daily life e.g. Argos catalogues from home in a project on young children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fahima Fine Art</td>
<td>Fahima was a minority ethnic student who had been an asylum seeker. Her country has a history of slavery. Fahima used the theme of slavery to explore identity: I wanted to do modern slavery, because sometimes you feel like you’re being locked up, and you’re just like there, and you’re being pulled every little area. As a child in her own country, Fahima and her friends had made many dolls. Fahima drew on this and on her questioning of her identity, in a project in the first term of the second year, making dolls to represent different roles of women. Fahima used recycled material with African designs, given to her by her mother, for some of the dolls. Fahima summed up the influence of her family on her work: My family they are the biggest influence ever, because every work I do is kind of like involving them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAME AND SUBJECT AREA</td>
<td>USE OF LIFE EXPERIENCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>Fine Art</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jo’s sister was a florist. Jo centred one of her first year projects around making flowers. Used found objects from a skip at her father’s work, in a project on her family.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maureen</td>
<td>Fine Art</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Used her garden in much of her work. As a mature student, she used photographs of herself in a project on ageing. Recycles materials e.g. uses the debris from printing as materials in and subject matter for work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gillian</td>
<td>Fine Art</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Her experience of different family members being demanding of her emotionally, in her project on emotions, during the first term of the second year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary Art and Design</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Based much of her work around her own interest in fashion and her wish to develop her part time job in Miss Selfridge into a full time graduate career in fashion retail.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jonet</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary Art and Design</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sara was very interested in community. Sara spent a great deal of time in a community centre, with her young son. Sara’s project in the first term of the second year focused on filming and drawing members of a community centre, and recording their naturally occurring conversations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary Art and Design</td>
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<td>Michele’s husband brought materials from the casino where he worked, for Michele to use in her second year project. Michele used aspects of the scenery of the local canal where she took the family dog for a walk, in some of her work in the first year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweli</td>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Incorporated family into a piece of work on tarot cards: My tarot cards was based on a story of my father and I used shoes to symbolise as each scene, and as well as my gridding, I used my shoes from a young age and I just sort of linked them all together. Swell’s comment below emphasises how she usually draws on personal experience and how she comes unstuck when she tries not to use her personal experience: I had to think about it (what to do for the project) for a long time, because I was thinking about other stories, but I couldn’t really come up with nothing that was good, so afterwards I thought, ‘Why don’t I do something that’s personal to me?’ Because most of my work, I like to relate it towards me and I like to make it personal to me, because I thought that it has more of an effect if it’s more personal to you, rather than having to do it on someone else.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marithea</td>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Used the context of the sports shop he worked in for a piece of work on grids, categorizing shoes in the stock room into grids.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME AND SUBJECT AREA</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Used photographs of family members, his home and family expeditions in Graphic Design projects. Used his religion (he was Jewish) in a project on Tarot cards. In a project on promoting an event, Jacob again drew on his Jewish religion, promoting the Passover.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Use of a traditional camera reflects Julie's long-standing interest in photography and her wish not to follow trends through only using a digital camera. Used her hobby of walking around town to take many photographs to use in her work. Photographed her grandmother’s hands. Used what she had observed over one day, in one project. Used her long term interest in Norse mythology in the first year project on tarot cards. Julie’s tarot cards centre on Norse Gods. For a first year advertising project on place, Julie used the area where she lived.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ardiana</td>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Used details of her journey to college, in one first year project. In a second year Graphic Design project, Ardiana worked on the theme of credit card fraud, as she had been a victim of fraud. In a second year project on T-shirts, Ardiana used the idea of the lines on her hands and their significance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marcus</td>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Used a bench in a park he and a friend had sat on regularly since early childhood, in a first year illustration project. Drew on his interest in psychology (in part from A level psychology, and in part from wider interest), in an essay on Freud.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Textile Design</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Used her enjoyment of walking round town and her interest in travelling, to take many pictures of foreign visitors and restaurants of different nationalities, for her summer project on Nomads. Used this as the basis for her designs for print in the first term of the second year, and for her course exhibition in December 2008.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Textile Design</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Used everyday objects as materials in her work. E.g. used beer mats from the pub she worked in. Knitted with elastic bands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennie</td>
<td>Textile Design</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loved the sea. Used photographs of the sea, taken on holiday, in her summer project 2008. Then used ideas emerging from the shapes and colours of the sea, in her work in Textile Design in the first term of the second year. Recycles everyday materials in her HE work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This chapter principally uses case studies, to demonstrate that rich life experience is a very valuable resource for students from widening participation backgrounds to draw on in their artistic practice.

Raw life experience is refined through, for instance, critical reflection; connecting theory and practice; and feedback from tutors and peers, as later chapters will argue in more detail.

Examples of how these students used aspects of their life experience in the content of their work span, for instance, a taxi driver using aspects of his employment to explore working class Englishness, and a young, female student using the contrast between her previous, negative self-esteem and her increasingly positive sense of self, in a project on her emerging identity.

As well as using life experience in the content of their work, students used many skills developed through wider life experience, in how they approached different areas of HE Art and Design. These skills ranged from, for instance, the interpersonal (e.g. negotiating) to practical (e.g. skills in measurement).

The chapter points to how the varied life experience of students from widening participation backgrounds can increase the diversity of artistic practice across HE Art and Design as a whole.

3.6 Key Questions for the HE Arts Sector

> How may the use made by students from widening participation backgrounds of their life experience, in the content of their work and in the skills they use in Art and Design, be developed further?

> How may positive examples of the use of life experience in the work of students from widening participation backgrounds be used in developing policy and practice on widening participation in HE Art and Design?
4.1 INTRODUCTION

Existing research comments on the complex, important roles of staff at school (e.g. Woods, 1996), FE (e.g. Gallacher et al, 2007; Crossan et al., 2005) and HE (e.g. Austerlitz, 2006) level.

In this research, students highlighted the important role of staff in their progression to and through HE Art and Design. Students commented on the influences, positive and negative, of staff from primary level upwards, though accounts chiefly focused on FE and HE staff. Students’ accounts of relationships with staff were positive in four principal ways, through staff inspiring students, challenging students, supporting students and influencing students’ choices within HE. In comparison to comments on FE and HE staff, there were relatively few comments on school teachers. This is unsurprising, given that contact with HE staff was current and contact with FE staff was more recent than with school teachers.

The examples discussed in this chapter underline the importance of staff, across sectors, being very aware that even comments made in passing to students can affect students long term; whilst some staff may forget what they have said, some students reported, in some cases decades later, comments made by staff.

4.2 SCHOOL STAFF

Overview

This section discusses the influences of individual school staff on students; Chapter 6 discusses the impact of school experience on students’ experience of progression to HE Art and Design.

Julie

Julie highlighted how a primary teacher had influenced her positively about Art and Design, whilst a secondary teacher had temporarily influenced against studying Art and Design. In the end, Julie realised that the option she had chosen, a vocational childcare qualification, did not suit her, and that Art was what she wanted to do. The strength of the primary teacher’s influence is underlined by the fact that Julie still thinks about her, in HE:

My teacher in Year 5, she was actually the first person to convince me that Art, because she was an architect as well as a teacher and she used a lot of creative lessons. I guess it was in her way of working as well and I just loved it. I used to stay at school until like five o’clock, just drawing or writing stories so she was quite a good influence. Even when I’m
wandering around now I still think of her... My Art teacher (at secondary school) basically told me that I didn’t have a hope in hell of getting into an Art uni, and I thought ‘Right, okay,’ so I just done the childcare thing... but I realised it wasn’t for me. (February 2008)

Pearl

Pearl, who has previously been discussed in Chapter 2, described how staff at school influenced her in both positive and negative ways. Pearl gained good O level results, despite being very disaffected at school. She described how she found the Head of Lower School’s response to her O level results offputting:

And I walked past with the bit of paper, and she said something like, ‘Who’d have thought it?’ You know, so if you want to think in terms of encouragement, you know, that, I was not in that bracket... and you know, I felt that as a slight, you know...dissing me. (December 2008)

However, after Pearl left school for the second time, at the end of the lower sixth, she is encouraged to return to school by a teacher’s visit to her home:

And I, I think at that stage, actually during the summer... one of the teachers did come to the house. And you know, they didn’t like coming down there, they didn’t, because they had to come onto the estate... You know, it was quite a big deal that they came down to the estate, to the house. And they came to talk to me because that’s where I was, and my mother was there, and I think somebody certainly said, ‘You should go back to school,’ you know. So there was, I suppose, that encouragement. (December 2008)

Pearl applied to a prestigious university, partly because she was influenced by a teacher’s positive comments about this university. Pearl highlighted that, whilst most of her school teachers were poorly qualified, some had reasonable qualifications and worked at her school apparently because of professional misdemeanours elsewhere:

And it turned out one of them had been to (name of the prestigious university), and I remember he got a third, but he was just full of how brilliant it’d had been at (name of prestigious university), just like, you know, a Butlins holiday camp. (December 2008)

Staff presented an interesting blend of challenge for, and moving support of, Pearl’s application to this university:

The teachers said to me, ‘Don’t be ridiculous (when Pearl said she wanted to apply to the HE!), blah, blah, blah.’ And I said, ‘Well, I’ll apply then,’ because I was being sort of a stubborn type...And, ‘If I can’t go there, I’m not going anywhere.’ So somehow in the end, we did put an application in, and then it was stumped at the last minute, because we discovered that you had to pay something like £50 for the entrance... And then I thought that was the end of that... And actually the teachers did a whip round, and they paid, which was lovely... It was just a wonderful thing for them to do. (December 2008)

Several decades later, Pearl remains very touched by the school’s generosity.

Claire

Chapter 3 referred to Claire’s negative experience of schooling. Claire outlined that she is still aware of negative comments made to her in childhood. For instance, when Claire felt apprehensive about the first HE assessment, she hears the voice of her primary Headteacher, which she thinks she will never escape from:

... my old Headmistress from primary school, in the back of my head, going ‘Oh, you’re useless.’... I think it’s always going to be in the back of my head. I don’t think I’ll ever get rid of it. (March 2008)

Claire’s body language indicated the continuing power of this voice; as she spoke, she held the back of her head.

4.3 FE STAFF

Inspiring students

One of Laura’s tutors taught her at FE and at HE level. Whilst all Laura’s interviews underline her deep-seated love for her degree course, the comment below indicates how this FE tutor has helped to inspire her.

She’s (the FE lecturer) been a really big influence on me... She still has the same effect on me that after speaking to her, I really want to go for it. (February 2008)

Jennie underlines how she hung onto every word of an FE tutor:
Martinho distinguished between his immediate and subsequent reaction to the tutor’s critical comments, and relates the limitations of his initial response to his youth:

At the time I was really pissed off. I worked damn hard for that. But looking back, we were growing up and he (the FE tutor) was cheering us on. I’m young. I’m 19, so I think I’m pretty naïve. (February 2008)

Supporting students

In an ESRC TLRP study of learning cultures in community-based FE (Gallacher et al., 2007; Crossan et al., 2005), learners commented on the extremely supportive relationships they enjoyed with staff. Some tutors felt that their role was more to provide support and encouragement for students, than a traditional teaching role. Gallacher et al. (2007) also point out that supportive relationships can lead some learners to become dependent on tutors.

In this study, some students were explicit about how much mainstream FE tutors had supported them. Though these students’ accounts highlighted that they perceived this support was positive, there was one instance in which this could be questioned. Mario (Fine Art BA student who did not complete the first year at Townley) stressed how much his FE tutor had supported him, through comments such as:

Our teacher was more like a friend. He basically held our hand and helped us so much. (March 2008)

Two members of staff at Townley suggested that the support this FE tutor had given Mario had masked, prior to HE, Mario’s issues with working independently and organising himself. In his interviews in the first year of HE, Mario related that, during the first year, he had seen and spoken by phone to his FE tutor on a number of occasions. This was to try, first, to find a way of coping with the challenges of HE, and towards the end of the first year, to decide what to do next:

Mario: He’s (the FE tutor) been helping me, trying to like tell me what I should do and who I should speak to.

CH: So what was your old tutor’s advice about what you should do and who you should speak to?
At (name of college) all the teachers are your friends. I don’t know if it’s because of our age, or because they’re Art teachers and they’re all so laid back, but they just turn into friends. (July 2008)

The ongoing support of the FE tutor did not enable Mario to complete successfully the first year. The example of Mario’s FE tutor raises the issue of how much support it is appropriate to offer students.

**Influencing students’ HE choices**

A number of students indicated that an FE tutor had influenced their choice of HE institution and subject.

Laura’s FE tutor had influenced Laura’s choice of subject area within Art and Design. Laura had previously been studying Fashion. Her tutor made Laura aware that her strengths lay in Textile Design:

*She was looking at my work, and she told me it was stronger in the textiles area. So I went forward and applied to textiles instead of fashion, and I’m really glad that I did that.* (February 2008)

Laura applied for Townley, because of its reputation, because this FE tutor worked at Townley, and because two of her other FE lecturers had been students at Townley.

**Keeping in contact with FE tutors**

A minority of students said that they were still in contact with their FE tutors, and that the FE tutors had some influence on their experience of HE. Mario’s ongoing relationship with his FE tutor has been discussed above. In her first year interviews, Laura described how, when time permitted, she visited her FE college to see the staff. This included getting feedback from the FE staff on her work for HE. Laura indicated that the informal staff-student relationships were part of the reason why she still returned to the FE college:

*At (name of college) all the teachers are your friends. I don’t know if it’s because of our age, or because they’re Art teachers and they’re all so laid back, but they just turn into friends.* (July 2008)

**Negative relationships**

Perhaps unsurprisingly, relationships with FE lecturers were not always smooth. Some students perceived that their FE lecturers had limited the range of their work. Students on a Foundation Diploma in an FE college thought that their main tutor was too focused on abstract Art, at the expense of figurative Art:

*So like our main tutor she was very, very fixated on abstract work, to the point where she really can’t function when she’s looking at something with things in it. It just freaks her out. She spent basically the two years we were with her trying to slap us down from that.*

A small number of students indicated that some FE staff lacked sufficient expertise about what to include in their portfolio for their HE interview.

One student described how he had had a fiery relationship with his main FE lecturer:

*I guess I had a run in with the tutor, pretty much with the main tutor, right up until about the end of the second unit, and there was only three units, so it was quite a lot of the time.*

The student was not afraid to speak out. He confronted the tutor, after which the relationship apparently improved:

*I confronted him about everything. I think he just realised that he might have been a bit unfair.*

Chapter 2 outlined how Florence was very distressed by her FE tutor’s inverted snobbery towards her middle class, private school status, and how the tutor’s approach had contributed to Florence’s decision not to study HE Art and Design. Florence is described further in Chapter 9.
4.4 HE LECTURERS

Overview

Unsurprisingly, students talked far more about HE tutors than FE tutors. Students talked more about the influence of tutors responsible for the practice strand of their HE course, than about critical theory tutors. Research identifies the importance students in community-based FE place on relationships with non-teaching, as well as with teaching staff (Gallacher et al., 2007; Crossan et al., 2005). In this research, some students highlighted the significance of their relationships with technical staff.

The importance for students’ development of students’ interactions with tutors in the design studio is well recognised (e.g. Austerlitz, 2006; Schon, 1984; Boyer and Mitgang, 1996). All the courses except for the BA Graphic Design at Towner were studio based. This created opportunities for much informal interaction between staff, both teaching and technicians, and students. In the part time Fine Art BA, this interaction was necessarily more limited, because the students were only in college for a week for the first four years of their five year course.

Previous research has emphasised the role of the tutor in the design studio as that of facilitator (Ochsner, 2000, cited in Austerlitz, 2006) or coach (Schon, 1987, cited in Austerlitz, 2006), and of the Art and Design tutor developing a community of practice (e.g. Drew and Shreeve, 2005). In this research, all teaching staff interviewed indicated that they saw themselves primarily as facilitating students’ learning. The part time BA Course Director commented on this role in most detail, relating her approach to the structure of the part time course:

What I try to do with the part time students is try to create a kind of community of practice, because I think the one thing that they don’t have is, if they have a tough tutorial, and I think they have to have tutorials of an equal critical level as the full timers, nonetheless they go away and they’re not in the studio again the next day to talk to their colleagues or to see a member of staff again … So our job is to try and find a way of structuring a supportive but critical environment for them to function in when they’re here … My role, it’s not some kind of didactic role. It’s as facilitator, to create this discursive space between this group of people, and effectively between them they discuss what Art could be, not what it is.

This research revealed that HE staff were sometimes unaware of their impact on students. For instance, one lecturer indicated to CH that two students she was supervising in the second year did not find it straightforward to integrate theory into their developing practice, and that she questioned how much they took on board her comments. Research interviews with the students revealed the value the students placed on their tutorials with this lecturer, and how they were trying to put into practice the range of suggestions she had made about their work.

Inspiring students

A small number of HE lecturers received extremely high praise from their students, as the following indicates:

I cannot begin to say how vast their (the lecturers’) knowledge is, absolutely incredible.

Some students on one course found one lecturer offered an inspirational role model, in part because the lecturer had come from a non-traditional background:

She (the HE lecturer) mesmerises me when she talks about work … In many respects, that keeps me going, because I think her background was very much, she started off, which was the non-traditional route, you know, leaving school, working in a (names type of company), and then deciding to do Art at a later stage as a mature adult. So there’s hope for me yet.

This highlights that, if some of the students from widening participation backgrounds take up roles in HE, they in turn may provide role models of non-traditional routes for their future students.

Challenging students

Students talked in most detail about how their HE lecturers challenged them through the critical feedback they provided. Students viewed tutors’ critical feedback, tailored sensitively to developmental stage, as crucial. Much of lecturers’ feedback related to experimenting, making connections, and integrating theory into practice.

For example, the three students on one course cited how two central planks of one first year lecturer’s approach were to tell students that, first, they needed to forget everything they
had been taught before HE and second, they should choose difficult options throughout their HE course. In other words, this lecturer challenged students by expecting them to embrace the unknown, managing any insecurities in this process:

I should be conquering my fears. (Name of tutor) said this to me recently as well, ‘The things that you think will be most difficult you tend to avoid, but the things that you find most difficult you need to do, because you will learn most from them.’ (February 2008)

The wisdom of confronting the difficult, in order to learn, is self-evident. However, it perhaps should be questioned whether telling students to forget previous learning could perhaps be worded more constructively, in terms of, for instance, building on previous learning, in order to move beyond it.

Two of these three students related how, in one group project, this lecturer had challenged their group to change the medium they were working in, from developing a story book, which they had some expertise in, to working on an animation, which they were inexperienced in:

About three or four days before our actual presentation we saw (name of tutor) and he said, ‘Yeah, this is good. I think you should do an animation,’ and we were like, ‘Oh my God! Three days before the presentation everything’s changed. All our plans have changed.’ So we were all feeling sort of, ‘My God! What do we do?’ sort of really panicking, and so we all got together, and just worked on it and worked on it….It turned out so much better than if we’d carried on just using the story book… I don’t think we would have done it if he (the tutor) hadn’t said. (November 2008)

A student on another course probably demonstrated the greatest alacrity in acting upon a tutor’s feedback:

And then we went to the crit, the mid week crit, and like she (the tutor) was saying I need to simplify it down, and then while she was talking, I was just kind of thinking, and then I was like, ‘Okay,’ and then I took it on board, and then while she carried on talking, I just kind of worked it all out…. By the time I left, I had the idea to do it…. I know that when I go to the crit and I hear the feedback, I take it all in, and then maybe by the time I’ve left, I’ve kind of re-come up with a new idea. (December 2008)

The FdA students all commented on how, in the second year, their tutor was consistently explicit about how they needed to link all their work, including theory with practice, throughout their second year; in Claire’s words:

We started this term. We came in on 6th October. We were told by (name of tutor), we all sat down in a room and (name of tutor) said that this year, if you link it to what you’re doing, the whole of the year, if you start off with this project that ends at Christmas, and then you have the holidays, then you go to work-based learning, which you’ve organised yourself, and then you’ve got your collaborative work as well, and then you’ve got your final presentation. If you link what you’re doing, so it’s like one big, massive project, that’s the best way to describe it. You find links, like with the elective, because we’re also doing an elective. (December 2008)

The mechanisms of weekly group tutorials, one to one tutorials and informal contact with teaching staff enabled these students, over time, to make often far from straightforward connections and to develop the coherence of their practice.

Feedback at pivotal moments

The following example illustrates how some tutors were skilled in giving students feedback at pivotal moments in their HE career. The tutor motivates Jackie, by enabling Jackie to understand how to place her life experience at the heart of her practice. Jackie was at the start of the third year of the part time Fine Art BA (i.e. the first half of the second year of a full time course):

I was that close (indicates a minuscule shape) to giving up, because I was really, really lost, very lost. I went to see my tutor. We had a tutorial and we sat down and she said, ‘Okay, tell me what inspires you,’ and I said, ‘What? About my Art?’ And she said, ‘No. Generally. What inspires you about life?’ And I said, ‘…I like things that intrigue me, that I can delve into, and I guess I’m investigating.’ And from that, we started to get me to think about using that in my work. If it hadn’t been for that discussion, I wouldn’t be here now…. Yes, and then everything started to fall into place and now I’m absolutely buzzing…. If it hadn’t been for that discussion with (name of tutor), and then one with (name of another tutor), I would not know what my practice is now. It’s wonderful, really, really wonderful. (March 2008)
Jackie’s observation that now she is ‘absolutely buzzing’ indicates the extent to which the tutors facilitated a key turning point for her. Jackie’s work develops rapidly after these crucial interchanges. By Jackie’s first research interview in March 2008 (the third year of the part time BA), her practice is well established as the narrative of place. In Jackie’s fourth year interview (December 2008), she discussed external commissions she has gained. The following extract from an email sent to CH in January 2009 demonstrates Jackie’s outstanding achievement, both on her course and in her commissions:

My library project (an external commission) in (name of town) went fabulously well. I had a wonderful email back from them thanking me for my work and offering me the opportunity to work with them again in the future. My next project that I’m presently pursuing is with the Costume and Textile Study Centre in (name of town) (another external commission). It’s one of the largest of its kind in the country, with a collection of textiles, shoes and documents spanning more than 200 years. Once again I don’t know how the work will look but I’m relishing the prospect of working with them.

I submitted my library work as part of Unit 8 and received some very encouraging comments from the tutors (remarks such as “the works...are really outstanding”, “demonstrate a sensitivity to site and the institution” and “evidences a rigorous approach to research”) which meant more to me in many ways than the final mark (which was 86%) - although I was pleased with this also!

Changes in students’ approach to feedback

Students’ response to one HE lecturer’s critical feedback changed from the first to the second year of HE. This may in part indicate that some students’ understanding of the importance and nature of critical feedback needs time to develop.

Austerlitz (2006) highlights the impact of tutor feedback on students’ emotions. Overall, in the first year, students tended to interpret feedback this tutor gave them in a negative way. Some students took critical comments very personally, as the following examples suggest:

I feel like one of my tutors, she’s trying to put me down again. I feel like she’s just like don’t like me, and I feel like I’m going to get kicked out, and I don’t want to get kicked out.

One student was particularly fearful of feedback:

We got our feedback on Friday and it seemed okay, but before I went in there, I sort of like started crying. I was overwhelmed. I was just really scared.

In the second year research interviews, in contrast, students’ comments revealed how much they had come to value this tutor. The students appeared to have realised that the tutor voiced criticism in order to support them, to enable their work to be as good as possible. Several students’ comments revealed the significant role of this tutor’s feedback, when they were struggling with how to develop their work, as the following suggests:

I asked (name of tutor), because I didn’t really know how to present my research, ‘How do you present it? How do you say all of this?’ She was very helpful, because I had a one on one tutorial with her, and she was very helpful with that. She said that you could present it, make it link to your work, and she said, ‘Just write like how it helped you, using easy, simple words.’

The students felt able to approach the tutor for feedback, out of formal teaching sessions:

I was trying to strengthen the idea by making my research in comic form. I don’t know if it works, I’m going to have to grab (name of tutor) and ask her if it’s working or what if it’s not.

Students’ comments in the second year of HE also demonstrated that they sought the good opinion of this tutor:

Today I’ve got (name of tutor) to see ... So I needed to have everything there, for me to explain it to her what I’m doing, because I don’t want her to think that I’m not doing anything, and I am actually doing quite a lot.

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impressed with what I was doing, was making me feel good about myself and making me think, ‘Oh well maybe I can do this.’

Developing a mindset to receive critical feedback
Several students commented on the importance of developing an appropriate mindset to be able to take on board tutors’ critical feedback, as the following remarks show:

I don’t mind negative feedback, because it’s all part of life. You don’t have to be praised all the time. Sometimes you have to be put down ... You just have to learn how to be strong.

I think that some students can get a bit defensive with criticism, but constructive criticism is good. You need to react to it in a way that you can go forward, rather than defending the work.

Supporting students
Students’ accounts highlighted how they valued the support provided by HE lecturers and how, across HE lecturers, a range of support strategies was used. For instance, a number of students highlighted that one first year Course Director was, in their view, expert at seeing which students needed support at particular moments, including those students she did not teach. This Course Director would ring and email students who were experiencing difficulties, and encourage them to drop into her office to see her. This was to develop a better understanding of the issue and also to help the student feel supported. As one student said:

( Name of lecturer) always emails me and tells me to come to college, and do this and this... and she says, ‘Let me know once in a while what’s happening with you.’ And she’s told a couple of teachers to watch out for me, so ... she’s been very good. ... She hasn’t actually taught me. ... One day I went to have a lesson next to her office, and she saw from my face that I was tired, or there was something wrong with me, so she called me and we had a conversation. And after that conversation, that’s when she started worrying more about me. (February 2008)

Chapter 2 outlined that Michele and Sara, two mature students, experienced personal issues which cut across their HE involvement. Michele and Sara indicated that they had found the support provided by the Course Director invaluable, during these crises. Sara related how the tutor provided support through being sensitive to Sara’s personal issues, and also by helping Sara to manage her college work, by prioritising and planning:

What has really helped me in a difficult situation I am stuck in outside college which affects your work, was just being able to go and talk to my tutors and get support, and even use the counselling service ... And that just has made me feel really at home again on the course, just to know that they know that I have had a bad time and it is okay. One thing my tutor said to me is, ‘You know you can focus on these two projects and then we can reassess where you are at.’ So even though I am on target, it really helped me to take the pressure off me. (November 2008)

Michele not only indicated her appreciation of the tutor’s support, but also advised anyone in a broadly similar situation not to delay talking to a tutor:

Don’t be afraid to ask for help, because when I eventually put my pride down and said, ‘I can’t do this all on my own,’ and asked for help from (name of tutor), she was fabulous... I can’t say enough about that. She understood what I was going through and she helped me... You know, it was a case of, ‘Well, yes, we want you to finish the course. We want you to do well, and if that is what you have to do to do it, then we will help you do it,’ and they, she was really, really good ... (November 2008)

Some students’ accounts indicated that tutors’ support was in the form of creating boundaries for them. For instance, Pearl is very self-demanding. Pearl related how tutors have encouraged her not to push herself too much:

I think also they’re (tutors) quite helpful to me in terms of getting me to sort of scale back and almost do less... Well, because you know, I can be quite ambitious in my work and I can be quite hard on myself... So they sometimes protect me from, if you like, taking on board too much, doing too much. (December 2008)

Conversely, various students on one course highlighted how the Course Director created clear parameters for them in a range of ways, including about how much work he expected them to complete:

... (A) the beginning of the course this year (i.e. second year), our tutor said to us, ‘If any
of you have got a job,’ he told us to put our hands up, and he said, ‘Are any of you thinking of quitting your jobs now, after you have seen the amount of work you have to do?’ (November 2008)

Marcus said that, in the first year of HE, he did not feel that he had earned his HE place, because he had gained this through NALN’s progression work. However, at the end of the first year, a tutor’s comment helped to validate Marcus’ sense of himself as an HE student:

So I felt for the whole year that I was actually trying to prove myself, that I, I deserved to be there. And then the happiest thing that, that my tutor said last year was, I don’t even know how, why she said it, but she said, ‘You definitely belong here,’ and to me that felt that I’d got in... So by the end of the year, I’d felt like I’d done it. (December 2008)

Influencing choices within HE

Students’ research interviews were full of comments about how HE tutors had influenced choices they had made about their work, and there are examples of this in this chapter. There were also instances of tutors influencing students’ choices about courses they took within HE. For instance, Jackie was steered towards attending an additional workshop by her HE tutor:

At first actually I wasn’t going to attend, because (name of lecturer) asked us who didn’t want to attend, and I put my hand up and (name of lecturer) said to me, ‘I think you need to go on this.’ It was interesting that she actually singled me out. I felt, at the time I wasn’t quite sure and now I realise why, because it was actually relevant to my practice. (May 2008)

At Townley, BA Graphic Design students chose a pathway for the second and third year, at the end of the first year. Marcus highlighted that, because of the strength of his work, an advertising tutor had advised him to choose the advertising pathway, rather than illustration, which he had been considering. Marcus chose the advertising pathway, primarily because of the tutor’s advice.

Negative aspects of relationships

However, some students also highlighted negative aspects of relationships with some HE lecturers. These principally related to wanting more access to tutors, to discuss work.

Marcus highlighted that a supplementary reason why he did not select the Graphic Design or illustration pathways in the second year was because he had realised that there was relatively little tutor contact, because there were so many students on these pathways. A lack of tutor contact was commented on by other second year Graphic Design students at Townley, two on the Graphic Design pathway and one on the illustration pathway. Two of the three appeared able to manage the lack of contact, though they were not happy about it. The third student, Chango, highlighted that the lack of tutor contact was a factor in his wish to defer his university place.

Another student reported that she had missed the large majority of contextual studies lectures in the first year, because the lecturer had commented negatively on her essay:

I’m scared to go back there (the context lectures). I don’t feel confident with the tutor. (June 2008)

In the first year, three students on different courses at Townley reacted against being reprimanded by lecturers about lateness to a session. It was as if these students initially did not realise that punctuality might be a valid tutor expectation at HE level. Whilst one did not complete the first year and one deferred in the second year, a third realised at the end of the first year that she wanted to change her approach:

I think the first year, my first impression wasn’t really nice at all to (name of tutor) because I arrived late, and that impression followed me all the way to the end, so next year I need to improve my attendance. No matter what I do, I need to improve on that. (June 2008)

This chapter has given instances of some students feeling intimidated by tutors. Mario, who, as discussed, did not complete the first year of HE, described in June 2008 how he felt unable to talk to his tutor when he was struggling with competing demands of university and home, and with his lack of progress at HE:

I just feel that they might not understand me. What they may hear is not what they want to hear, and they might not support me as I might want, or they might not listen... The reason why I say that is because, in the beginning when I hear them speak, it’s like (sharp intake of breath), I don’t want to go to speak to him because, I don’t know, being scared he might make me upset. (March 2008)
It is likely that this, to some extent, reflected a mismatch of perceptions. In contrast, all Mario’s tutors expressed great concern about him to CH.

4.5 SUMMARY

Overall findings

> Students’ accounts highlighted the complex, important influences, positive and negative, of staff at school, FE and HE level, on students’ progression to and through HE Art and Design.

> Unsurprisingly, given their current phase of education, students commented most about HE staff and least about school teachers. However, some students could recall remarks made by school teachers, in some cases decades previously; most recollected observations were negative. This underlines the importance of staff awareness of how even passing comments, perhaps forgotten rapidly by the member of staff, may affect deeply the student concerned.

Positive aspects of relationships with staff

> Students’ accounts of relationships with staff were positive in four principal ways, through staff inspiring students, challenging students, supporting students and influencing students’ choices within HE.

> The majority of students’ positive comments related to tutors’ roles in challenging them through critical feedback, tailored sensitively to developmental stage. Students’ response to critical feedback from one tutor was very different in the second year, where they greatly welcomed the feedback, to the first, when they were sometimes fearful and defensive; this may highlight the importance of time for some students, in being able to handle critical feedback.

> Some tutors demonstrated impressive skill in intervening positively at critical moments in students’ educational careers, as the example of Jackie shows.

Negative aspects of relationships with staff

> Findings underline the importance of staff making finely tuned judgements about the amount and nature of tutor support to provide for students. Whilst the support provided to Michele and Sara enabled them to continue with their HE courses, the support given to Mario by his FE tutor probably helped him to gain a place on an HE course for which he may have been unsuited.

> Some support took the form of creating clear boundaries for students.

Negative perceptions of relationships

> Students’ reports of negative relationships with HE tutors principally related to perceptions of too little contact with tutors. Some students chose pathways on courses partly because of the amount of staff-student contact. Perceived lack of contact with tutors contributed to one second year student deferring his HE place.

> The mismatched perceptions of Mario and his HE tutors highlights the importance of staff making explicit the details of their roles and approaches to students, perhaps on a number of occasions.

4.6 KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE HE ARTS SECTOR

> How may the awareness of staff, across all sectors, be developed of the potentially powerful impact of staff, both short and long term, on students?

> How may good practice be developed in, for example, giving critical feedback, sensitively tailored to developmental stage?
This chapter examines students’ accounts of the literacies of HE Art and Design, in terms of
the language, speaking and listening, reading, and writing demands of HE Art and Design.

Literacies and HE Art and Design have, to some extent, been explored in previous research.
For example, in qualitative research conducted for the CHEAD, Hudson and Jamieson
(2006) found that the large majority of the 66 students, across the four institutions in the
study, talked in detail about problems with speaking and listening, reading and writing, in
HE Art and Design. Some studies have analysed student-tutor dialogue in the design studio
(e.g. Austerlitz, 2006; Coyne and Snodgrass, 1991, cited in Austerlitz, 2006; Goldchmidt,
cited in Austerlitz, 2006).

In terms of HE generally, the Nuffield Review of education 14-19 has found that university
tutors perceive that many HE students lack basic literacy skills (Wilde et al., 2006; Wilde
and Wright, 2007). Research, including international studies, on the Arts and Humanities
(Clerehan, 2002; Marland, 2003; Ballinger, 2003; Smith and Hopkins, 2005; Smith, 2002)
explores issues experienced by a wide range of students with the literacies of HE, and HEIs’
strategies to address issues. Some authors (e.g. Smith, 2002; Smith and Hopkins, 2002;
Ballinger, 2003) underline that some BA English Literature students experience intense
difficulties with making the transition to the literacy demands of HE. If students of English
struggle with the literacy demands of HE, it is particularly unsurprising that many Art and
Design students report intense struggles with aspects of literacy. This is because the study
of English centres around words, while the visual is at the core of Art and Design.

The following were contexts in which students discussed feeling challenged by the literacy
demands of HE Art and Design:
> the group crit
> one to one tutorials
> seminars
> lectures
> understanding the project brief
> writing in different genres (e.g. reflective journal, evaluation, notes on images, notes
  on research) to support practice
> writing essays.
whilst a small minority of the sample were students who have English as an additional language, a sizeable number reported that they were dyslexic.

all students had difficulties with some aspects of the literacy demands of HE Art and Design. The majority found the literacy demands of HE Art and Design a major challenge. All full time students talked in detail about the literacy demands of their HE course in their 2007-08 interviews, when they were in the first year. Some students talked slightly less about literacy issues in their second year interviews. This may indicate that they had grown more accustomed to course literacy demands.

This chapter first outlines students’ issues with the literacies of HE Art and Design. The chapter then explores students’ and institutional strategies to enable students to manage the literacy demands of HE Art and Design. The chapter concludes by presenting three case studies of students, to illustrate the complexity of students’ literacy profiles and, across students, the diversity of literacy profiles.

5.2 The Language of Art and Design

As in previous research (e.g. Hudson and Jamieson, 2006), many students commented that the theoretical language of Art was inaccessible. Some compared the language of Art and Design to a foreign language, for which they needed a dictionary. Some interpreted issues with the language of Art and Design in terms of social class, as discussed in Chapter 2. A small number commented in relation to a north-south divide. Comments included:

It’s completely different in the Art establishment and the way that you speak Art. You don’t talk about ‘I’m interested in.’ (It’s) ‘I’m engaged in’ and it’s a completely different vocabulary that you have to learn. ‘Currently I’m engaged in my practice.’ And it’s not ‘work’. It’s maybe ‘project’. And I’m still learning. I’m still trying to get all these words together. (third year part time student)

I’m a Yorkshire lass ... and I’m quite plain talking. (first year student)

They make everything confusing in big, fancy words. (first year student)

I like being told how it is. I don’t like all the flounce, flowery, sugar-coated words, and I find a lot of Art books where it’s flouncy. You know, use 10 words where you could use one. (first year student)

Their (lecturers’) language is way beyond my language. They (lecturers) talk as if they’re talking from a dictionary. I find it hard with the language and the words and the way they speak. They chat a lot of crap. (first year student)

Claire, who had an antipathy to mathematics, said that she had been intimidated by the use of mathematical terminology in life drawing:

I found that, because there were words like the ‘width’ and the ‘height’ and ‘grid’. I associate them words with maths, and me and maths do not get on, to the point where I give up to maths. I just don’t get them. I find it really difficult, because of the use of words like ‘scale’... I do not associate maths with drawing. I know there is maths with drawing, but it went over the top of my head, and I kind of shut down, because of the mention of those words like ‘scale’ and ‘measurement’. I just shut down and I didn’t want to know. (June 2008)

5.3 Speaking and Listening

Lectures and seminars
A small number of students were positive about lectures. For example, Laura highlighted that lecturers used visual aids to reinforce points made orally:

They do the lectures in a really good way, where you can sort of listen to them and sort of make notes at the same time, and because they have the images to back it up. I think Art students need visuals. They need to see things to understand them more. You can’t just explain things by word of mouth, because sometimes words can’t explain visual things, so it’s good they’ve got the screen as well. (June 2008)

In the first term of the second year at Townley, the students had to take an elective. This consisted of weekly lectures or seminars on a subject area and an essay. Whilst a very small number of students said they had enjoyed the elective, the majority expressed strong dislike of it. At the time of the second year interviews, the majority of the full time students had not found any connection between the elective and their practice.
A significant number of students commented that they found it hard to listen to and retain information from lectures. Because of the large number of students present in lectures, students tended to find it impossible to ask questions, even if the lecturer gave time for questions. Many did not appear to have effective note-taking strategies. These points are highlighted in other research (e.g., Marland, 2003; Smith, 2002). Some students in this research commented that they gained more from seminars than lectures, because seminar discussion made concepts more meaningful. Others were explicit that this depended on the skill of the person facilitating the seminar. Comments included:

When I listen to the lectures, I'm just a bit lost. (first year student)

I don't know the key points from a lecture to take down. (first year student)

I understand the seminar better than the lecture, because it's a good discussion of what people thought about the lecture and their knowledge from the lecture, and even if I don't know what the lecture was about, I have a rough idea, but then in the seminar I catch on better than the actual lecture, and I learn more actually from the seminars. (first year student)

Sometimes I feel like I don't take anything from the lectures... I feel like they're just randomly talking.... It's different someone talking with you and having a conversation, and someone talking at you and you're not understanding what they're saying. (first year student)

Giving presentations
The majority of students commented that they found it challenging to present their work orally to staff and to peers. This was particularly the case pre-HE and in the first year of HE, though issues persisted into the second year. A significant number found this an intimidating experience. A small number explicitly commented that they experienced ‘dread’ beforehand. Some highlighted that they were more articulate about their work in the research interview than in course sessions. Indeed, one student who was impressively articulate in research interviews commented that she strongly disliked presenting her work to tutors and peers. Comments included:

I still find it really difficult to talk about my work, because I'll know what I mean in my head, but I won't know how to explain it to other people. (second year student)

That quandary of not being able to speak. (third year part time student)

I'm a person that I hate presentations because I describe myself as shy. (first year student)

It's just so overwhelming having so many faces watching you (about presenting to the rest of the year group). (first year student)

I spoke alright with you (the researcher), but in that environment with loads of people with three tutors staring at me, it (presenting work) was like, ‘Oh, I don't know what I'm saying,’ and I just felt that I was explaining it wrong. (first year student)

5.6 READING
Understanding the brief
Some students, particularly some Graphic Design students, commented that they found project briefs difficult to understand. Unsurprisingly, these students therefore tended to misinterpret the brief:

I've got a habit of not understanding the brief and that's what I just did right now. I did the opposite to the brief ... because I couldn't really read everything to understand it. (first year student)

I've got a habit of not understanding the brief and that's what I just did right now. I did the opposite to the brief ... because I couldn't really read everything to understand it. (first year student)

One of the projects I failed was his (a lecturer’s) project. The project I didn't actually understand. I understood something else. (first year student)

When I got the brief, I thought, 'What is this? It’s nonsense. God almighty!' I just didn’t understand a word of it. (first year student)

Reading texts
Marland (2003) comments that, across HE, insufficient attention is paid to teaching students how to use textbooks. Smith (2002) underlines students’ difficulties in reading critically. In this research, many students commented on the structural, stylistic and linguistic inaccessibility of texts on course lists. As with lectures, many underlined the difficulties of retaining information they read and did not seem to have effective strategies to use when reading theory. Many seemed to read the minimum amount. It was as if many students did not realise that academic reading is conceptually challenging, and that parts of
the text often need to be read several times. Many students did not realise the importance of reading course books selectively, using the contents and any summaries as a guide for what to read in more detail. Some said that they did not know how to select titles from a book list. Students’ comments included:

> Sometimes, even when I’m reading the books that I need to be reading, a lot of the language that they use in the books goes over my head. (first year student)

> I don’t like to read really. I like, I’ve started to like to read books but informative books, I don’t really enjoy... I think maybe it’s the way they’re laid out or something like that. (second year student)

> You have to like read books off the reading list, but I don’t think I’ve really ventured into that as much as perhaps I should have, partly because I don’t really know what am I meant to do. I mean, I’ve got the booklist, but I don’t really know which books I’m going to be looking at. I mean, you could read all the books on the booklist and you might only need one of them, so it’s a bit strange in that sense. (second year student)

> It takes me a long time, and I have to read it a couple of times, because I don’t understand. (first year student)

> I find reading difficult, which is why possibly I stopped reading. I’m very engaged by it but it’s difficult. (fourth year part time student)

5.5 WRITING

Much research (e.g. Clerehan, 2002; Marland, 2003) comments on the difficulties of writing at HE level, in terms of, for instance, demonstrating independent thinking and using evidence effectively to argue a case. In this research, students commented most strongly on the difficulties of writing. Only two students, across the HEIs, said that they found essay writing straightforward. The majority said that they strongly disliked writing. Nearly all commented on the challenges of written assignments. A minority of students highlighted the contrast between their enjoyment of creative writing and their antipathy to writing essays for their HE course. One student commented that a strong dislike of writing essays had raised questions about whether to do the BA after the FdA. Students commented on many challenges relating to course writing, including:

> not understanding what is required in a piece of writing
> finding it difficult to make their reasoning explicit
> writing in a particular genre, such as writing a reflective journal about work-based learning
> understanding the marking criteria for an essay
> using the language of Art and Design appropriately in written work
> writing a bibliography
> having an antipathy to writing which stemmed from childhood
> motivating themselves to do written instead of studio work
> given largely negative feelings, motivating themselves not to leave writing to the last minute.

Comments about writing included:

> For my work-based learning, we had to do a reflective journal and I kind of missed the reflective bit of it. It’s quite hard to write in reflective writing and I didn’t quite get it. I’ve never done it before. (first year student)

> The written word will always feel second best, because I don’t feel comfortable with a pen in my hand. (second year student)

> Unfortunately, it’s the way academia is written. I thought I understood the (essay) question that I’d chosen. And I read it and reread it, and I worked to what I thought the remit consisted of... And it’s only this weekend that I’m starting to question, well, maybe I’ve misunderstood the question completely... And written work is not my forte. I really don’t like it, I don’t feel comfortable. I’m totally out of my comfort zone. And it’s making me question whether I, because I’d been thinking seriously about doing the BA... (second year FdA student)

The majority of the students did not seem to be aware that many successful writers find writing difficult. Only one student commented on the contrast between struggling to write an essay and subsequent satisfaction with the finished product:
It's only after, when you've finished the essay, after you've been through all the torture, you look at it and think, 'You know what? It looks good!' but you really hate it at the time. (first year student)

5.6 STUDENT STRATEGIES

Overview
While, overall, students found the literacy demands of Art and Design challenging, there was evidence of a wide range of strategies used by students, to attempt to manage these demands. As with strategies to manage family and SES related issues, discussed in Chapter 2, students' literacy strategies again point to students' agency. However, despite progress made through literacy strategies used, students still experienced difficulties with literacy. This highlights limits to students' agency.

The wide range of literacy strategies the students used raises questions about how these might be disseminated to other students, to increase other students' literacy expertise.

Strategies with language
Unknown terminology
Some students systematically recorded new terms used in, for example, lectures or reading. Some looked up the definition of the word, if one was not provided. Nick was explicit that he experimented with using new terminology:

I tend to stick to words that I know are specifically Art-based, like linear, motif, things that I know are part of a process, like sort of motif and linear are all part of mark making. So I feel comfortable in choosing those words as opposed to 'I'm making a mark'... It's almost like that big leap from junior school to senior school... It's the same meaning, but a more powerful word, a more intellectual word, I hate using that word, but unfortunately it's a more stronger word... I'm actually getting quite good at writing artists down and words that I don't understand, and the good thing is I'm actually sort of starting to use the Internet a lot more and particularly Wikipedia. Appropriation, I needed to find out what appropriation was... Someone actually mentioned the other week the word appropriation and I thought 'Mmmm'. (March 2008)

Jackie commented that she would write down what a tutor she particularly respected said about her work, so that she could reuse comments:

I find myself making notes of words to use, and it's almost like going back to school again and learning new words in a little team... That's an ongoing challenge. ... All of a sudden (the lecturer) will come out with a sentence, 'Well this is what I'd say about your work,' and you think, 'Let me write that down quick so I can copy that.' Do you know what I mean? It's just learning to talk. (June 2008)

Similarly, in a research interview, when CH reflected back to a student a summary of what the student had said about her work, the student said that she would use that summary, as recorded in the transcript, to describe her work in the future.

Claire's advice to an imaginary future student broadly like herself was always to use a notebook for new terminology and artists' names:

Also, take a notebook and a pen everywhere with you, because you're going to be given a lot of words and the tutors will be saying names. They'll be shelling out names to you. They'll be shelling out words that I've never heard of before, so take a pen, and don't feel afraid to ask how to spell it. (June 2008)

Paraphrasing
Claire's fears of mathematical language have been described. Claire described how she tried to deal with mathematical language by paraphrasing it, as she planned her drawing. Claire's account suggests that this strategy was not consistently successful:

I kind of turned the words around, if you like. I kind of said, 'Okay, it's a grid. It's a net, and I'm measuring that way and up ways, across if you like', and kind of jotted it all out and planned it. Some days I got it. Other days you didn't get it. It happened like that. It was very up and down. (June 2008)

Ignoring new terms
Conversely, some students said that they dealt with new terminology by ignoring it.

Speaking and listening strategies
Stages of developing a presentation
Three female students, one young and two mature, described how they divided preparing a presentation into various stages. These students were impressively organised, as Liz illustrates:
Developing speaking skills over time

Despite lacking the confidence to contribute to group sessions in the first year, Claire learnt to voice her opinion in the weekly small group crits in the second year. Claire perceives that the tutor is very surprised when Claire starts to contribute:

When we're a small group we, you haven't got the pressure of everyone staring at you. If … you have 20 people (approximate number on the course) staring at you where you have to say something, it's very, very worrying, nerve-wracking. ‘Oh God, I've got to say something. How am I going to say something?’ ... I speak now. I think I shocked (name of tutor) actually when I started speaking. I don't think she thought, obviously she knew I could speak, but I don't think she thought I could like speak in a, I don't know how to explain it, in a, like this, just like talking normally and having a point, and having a thing to say, and being able to answer questions in a way that makes sense, and knowing what you want to say really, and knowing what you want to do. I don't think I showed that before. (December 2008)

Fahima was another student who found speaking in course sessions very challenging. In her first interview in the first year (March 2008), Fahima described how she felt she had made progress in the presentation she had just given before the research interview. At the same time, Fahima recognises that her skills need further development, in terms of, for instance, saying more about her work:

I think today on the presentation, even though I felt like it wasn't good enough, because I need to deliver a bit more, but I speak up and I didn't let none of them cut me up, and I just speak on, because I knew I have to say it about my work. So I'm proud of myself today, even though I'm a bit disappointed that it's not worked. (December 2008)

A voice coach
Annette saw a voice coach on several occasions, to help overcome her fear of presentations. The voice coach worked with Annette, for instance, to improve her breathing, so that Annette could project her voice in situations where she felt apprehensive. In her research interview in December 2008, Annette outlined that she had stopped seeing the voice coach, because she could not afford sessions.
Reading strategies
Overview
Madhu, a part time student, is used as a case study to discuss reading strategies. This is because, though Madhu is dyslexic and says she finds reading difficult, she has developed a sophisticated range of strategies to support her reading for HE.

Selecting from the reading list
This chapter has previously outlined how some students did not know how to use a reading list selectively. Madhu shows a clear rationale in how she selects from, for example, the reading list for the seminar series on curation run for third year part time students. Madhu uses the text *Art and Theory*, for three clearly thought out reasons: because of its coverage of seminal figures; because it did not colour Madhu’s judgement about curation; and because it is a text for long-term use:

(Art and Theory) was on the reading list that (the seminar lecturer) had put. There was a whole bunch of other books that (the seminar lecturer) had put, and which I had taken a look in quite a few of them, but this one was the one that kind of stood out because of it’s, it wasn’t too, [pause] what’s the word, leading in terms of the curatorial element of it. I think some of the books were a little bit, for me [pause] I, I like it more, I think, more generally than so specific. And what was interesting about the Art and Theory was that it had this whole range, so you could pick up whatever [pause] article you wanted to [pause], I mean, I think it’s like one of those standard texts, because it’s literally got every single important person, you know, in it and articles. So he’s one to get, definitely, to keep. (December 2008)

Returning to previous recommendations
In the third year of the part time course (academic year 2007-08), Madhu highlighted that she had recently read some texts which had been recommended on the Foundation Diploma. At the time, Madhu had apparently thought these texts were offputtingly pretentious. Years later, at the time of the research interview (March 2008), Madhu felt that she was ready to benefit from these texts:

... (T)hat book, I tried reading it when she (the tutor) recommended it to me on Foundation, but I found it really kind of pretentious and Art talk and I couldn’t break into it. So then when I approached it this time, I thought, ‘Oh, it’s remarkably simple in comparison to again what I’d thought it was,’ but again, maybe that’s because there’d been an element of being exposed to ideas.

Using alternative texts for inspiration
A small number of mature students, whilst not enjoying the suggested theoretical reading, were confident about incorporating into their thinking writers they had discovered through their wider reading. In the following account, Madhu demonstrates that her reading ranges from returning to a further text from her Foundation reading list, to other texts she has discovered. Though Madhu has previously said she finds reading difficult, her reading interests are serious and long standing. Madhu’s comments also reveal the importance of students being prepared, first, to reflect on texts over a period of time, to increase their awareness of their significance, and second, to recognise that people do not necessarily read consistently; there can be periods of activity and inactivity:

Madhu: Slavoj Žižek has been quite a big influence, because of his discussion. He breaks it down into the symbolic, the real and the imaginary, and so that’s been quite influential, especially because we were also looking at Mulholland Drive and David Lynch. So that was another element that I’ve been reading quite heavily, so. And I’d also read Kafka’s The Trial at the same time, so there was a lot of, kind of heavy, bureaucracy type reading done.

CH: And how did you select Kafka’s The Trial?

Madhu: That actually is something I’ve always wanted to read. I really like, I’m very interested in Dostoyevsky, and I’d read Kafka’s Metamorphosis and when I did my Foundation course, because that was on our reading list and I hadn’t quite understood it. I mean, I’d read it, but it hadn’t made that much of an impact. And then afterwards, when I kept thinking about the story and relating it to other things, things would come up and I’d think, ‘Oh yeah, that’s like Metamorphosis.’ It started to sink in about how interesting and pertinent he was...I used to read quite a lot, but I hadn’t been reading literature for a very long time, and I kept picking up books and starting reading them and getting bored by them, and so then I picked up this one and I, and it was the first whole book I’ve read in ages, so I was very, it got me interested. It was like a thriller.

CH: And why do you think you haven’t been reading much literature for quite a while?
Writing strategies

Focusing on writing

A number of students focused on developing their writing skills. Nick, for example, commented in his first research interview in the first year of HE that, in spite of his antipathy to writing:

I'm transforming my writing skills … (March 2008)

Nick had recognised the importance of making his thinking explicit by writing, in order to achieve at university. Nick's status as a mature student may have helped him to realise what 'play(ing) the game' consisted of, at a relatively early stage of HE:

What I've realised, and what I have to start doing and I am doing, is writing things down, because obviously the only way tutors can assess how you grow is by you problem solving, writing down ideas, how your ideas expand on paper. You've got to keep a conscious record, and I realise that I'm going to have to do this for university. Once I leave university I can do whatever I want and how I want, but I've got to play the game. So I've started to play the game by making notes, drawing what my ideas are. (March 2008)

Targeting the essay

A small number of students said that they had aimed to give more attention to essay writing in the second year than they did in the first year. For example, Laura did badly, as she perceived it, in her first year essay. Laura learnt from this. Laura said she had spent a lot of time reading and making notes for a second year essay on Freud, and going through Freud with a friend on another course at Townley. Abelia, who was dyslexic, found writing essays particularly difficult in the first year. Abelia also found it difficult to motivate herself to do her essay in good time. In the second year, Abelia had additional tutorials. Through discussion with the tutor and her own reflections on her organisation, Abelia completed a draft of her essay a week before the deadline. This was so Abelia could see a further support tutor to go through the structure and technical accuracy of the essay with her. Liz commented that, because she had left her essay to the last minute in the first year, in the second year she had learnt from this experience, and had set herself a timetable.

Use of the marker's feedback

Madhu emphasised that she found essays very difficult. Madhu used critical feedback on
her essay for the seminar series on curation, to reflect on the issues with her essay. Madhu said that, without tutor feedback, she struggles to reflect critically on her essay. Madhu appeared unaware of the function of different parts of an essay:

Madhu: So basically she (the lecturer) said, ‘Yeah, your, your introduction needs to be stronger in terms of setting out your stall, and really clear, so that when you do make your argument, you are then pulling people on your side for your argument.’ I think my introduction was a bit wishy-washy.

CH: Right. Had you thought that before you handed it in or when you got the feedback?

Madhu: Only when I got the feedback. I hadn’t thought, I mean I think this is what I think I mean. I have a difficulty in [pause] being able to see what I’ve written subjectively, if that makes sense. (December 2008)

Peers as a model
Madhu used the writing of a student whose essays received high marks, as a model in terms of learning, for example, how to construct a bibliography.

Notes to record points
Several students discussed how they used a notebook to record points from lectures and seminars, or quotations, both of comments made by lecturers and from their reading. For example, in the summer of 2008, CH attended a seminar in the series on curation, for third year part time BA students. CH observed Madhu making highly effective use of her notebook. The lecturer made a point. Madhu connected this immediately with a point she had heard in another lecture, by using her notebook as a reference tool. Madhu then used the connection between points from different lectures, to raise a question which generated class discussion.

Notes to develop ideas
A minority of students, including some students who struggled with aspects of writing, described how writing notes was integral to developing their thinking. For example, Annette wrote an extremely thorough diary on a daily basis, when she was on work-based learning:

I write everything down quite meticulously, because that’s the way of getting the ideas through... It’s just so it’s all documented... and it was a bit of security as well, because it was a way of like keeping a regime inside it... I have so many ideas, and they come from so many different places, that it’s quite important to get it all down, and I haven’t got a great memory. (March 2008)

Michele and Ruth reported how they often have ideas in the middle of the night, which they record in a notebook. One student wrote to articulate emotions she subsequently drew on in her work, saying:

It doesn’t always come from a very happy place. (June 2008)

Writing to reflect
A number of students said that they used writing as a tool for critical reflection. Critical reflection principally related to the development of practice. However, Nick used writing to help him reflect on the interaction in a second year group crit. Nick was challenged by a peer and labelled ‘sexist’ in the group crit. Nick related how he had been taken aback in the actual situation, though feedback from his peers subsequently indicated that Nick had handled the situation well:

I wasn’t prepared to be attacked and I wasn’t prepared to defend myself. But talking to one or two students afterwards, you know, they said, you know, I carried it off well... (December 2008)

This oral reassurance was not enough. Nick used the recording of the group crit on his dictaphone to write out and reflect on the conversation:

Thank God I had a dictaphone with me... In my sketchbook, I wrote down the whole conversation, you know, who said what... ... why, blah, blah, blah. And I needed to reread it and sort of write down my own thoughts... (December 2008)

Writing and organisation
Fahima, who is dyslexic, had struggled with organising her work in the first year. In the second year, Fahima wrote herself lists of tasks related to her course, and ticked off those she had completed. Fahima brought a list to her research interview in December 2008, and

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8 Madhu probably means that she finds it difficult to see her work objectively.
added to it items raised through the research interview. CH subsequently observed Fahima using a list when she was working on her own in the studio.

**Obedience to a genre**

Jennie, one of the two students who reported finding essay writing straightforward, commented on her recently developed awareness of the characteristics of academic writing and the paradoxical freedom of writing in a particular genre:

>(T)hat essay, looking at it now and looking back on what I’ve written, a few years ago, I would have thought, ‘Oh no, that would take me ages to write like that,’ but in fact what I have been learning is basically the obedience to a certain style and academic writing. You follow through that. That’s a lot of it. In that sense it’s quite liberating. (June 2008)

**Employing writing support**

One dyslexic student chose not to take the support he was entitled to within the HEI. Instead, he employed someone outside the HEI to type up his essays. The HEI was apparently aware of this.

**Automatic writing**

Marcus tried automatic writing, as a source of inspiration for his practice. Marcus aimed to write for 24 hours without a break and was disappointed that he only managed to write for seven hours.

**Playing down essays**

Conversely, a number of students described how they managed to deal with their dislike of writing, by not focusing on essays and by leaving them to the last minute. For example, one student commented that he aimed only to pass the essay; so long as he achieved a pass, he was not motivated to improve his essay writing skills.

**Family support for literacy**

Chapter 2 described some students’ use of members of their family to provide support for the literacy demands of HE, through, for example, proof-reading essays.

### 5.7 Institutional strategies to support literacy

**Existing literature**

A large body of research evidence discusses HEIs’ support strategies for students from widening participation backgrounds, including literacy support. Some research, including the Arts and Humanities research discussed at the beginning of this chapter (Marland, 2003; Clerehan, 2002; Smith, 2002; Ballinger, 2003; Smith and Hopkins, 2005), considers HEIs’ literacy support for all students, not just those from non-traditional backgrounds. Across studies and HEIs, there is a vast array of support mechanisms, including:

- teaching reading skills for non-narrative text
- a writing website, with lecturers’ guidance on the types of writing required on their courses, interactive tasks for students and sample assignments
- a Speak-Write project, to develop oral and writing skills in tandem
- language and academic skills tutors working with subject lecturers
- a course on understanding university learning
- mainstream and additional classes where academic skills are integrated into course content
- mentoring programmes which include a focus on literacy
- staff training
- conducting formal and informal diagnoses of literacy difficulties, and guiding students into support programmes on the basis of this
- role plays, in which academic staff act out interaction in different HE contexts, such as tutorials. Role plays incorporate examples of positive and negative interaction in different contexts
- academic staff making explicit the characteristics of good essays
- collaborative development of an essay in class, with immediate tutor feedback
- development of literacy teaching strategies, contextualised to specific subjects, on reading, small group discussion, in-class writing and vocabulary development
- a resource kit for staff, including strategies to teach literacy skills, evaluation approaches, teachers’ notes and workshop materials
- an assignment primer for students, including guidelines and practical exercises.

**The HEIs’ support**

In this research, the two HEIs’ support for literacy included:

- dyslexia support
- English language support
The majority receiving additional support highlighted its benefits, as the following illustrates:

*It takes me a long time to read it (a set text) and I have to read it a couple of times because I just don’t understand… She (the support tutor) went through it with me and sort of highlighted what I needed, where it’s important… Once she was reading it out loud and I followed it through, I understood it more. (June 2008)*

However, not all students took up the full range of additional support they were entitled to. This was for a range of reasons.

First, in some instances, lack of take up related to lack of awareness. HE staff said that all students had had support clarified to them. However, some students who would probably have benefited from support did not seem to be aware of what was available.

Second, whilst student support was centrally located at Norton, just inside the entrance to the HEI, some Townley students did not know where the relevant offices were for different types of support. For instance, one dyslexic student’s second year interview was held near Townley’s dyslexia office. The student commented that he had previously not known where the dyslexia office was, but that he might call into the office after the research interview.

Third, some support took time to be implemented. The majority of students assessed as dyslexic highlighted a gap between starting the course and receiving dyslexia support. One student had a particularly frustrating battle with the local authority over his dyslexia funding. Interestingly, once he had received confirmation of the dyslexia support, he did not take up all the support.

Fourth, some students commented that they could not access optional literacy support because of when it was scheduled. For instance, a mature single parent was unable to attend evening study skills sessions in her second year at Norton, because of childcare. Some students reported that an optional study skills class was scheduled when they had a course session.

Fifth, some students were aware of support, but chose not to follow it up. For example, a support tutor at Townley made contact with the students, through a group meeting and
texts and phone calls to individual students, to offer help with, for instance, essays. However, not all students who struggled took up this offer. The two Fine Art BA students who did not complete the first year had extra tutorials scheduled for them; they did not attend these consistently. A mature student who found literacy very challenging said that, as she had coped for years, she would leave the support for younger students to take up.

Sixth, some students had experimented with the support, but felt it was not for them. For example, one dyslexic student had had one meeting with a dyslexia tutor. However, she felt that she did not get on with the tutor. She has not attended further sessions.

Staff views of support
Staff perceived that, to some extent, the support currently offered is effective, as the example of a lecturer who reports Laura’s satisfaction with the re-worked briefs suggests:

Laura said to me, one of the NALN students, ‘Actually (name of HE lecturer), do you remember I said in my last tutorial that I was given a brief that was so broad, I didn’t understand the language, the academic language? I couldn’t read through the lines, but now they’ve restructured it, and they’ve given you pointers, and they’ve given you helpful words, and books and referencing things.’ So they have actually made the briefs a lot easier for students.

Whilst several staff indicated that essay writing skills were not formally taught to students, they did not perceive that this was a problem. This was because the HEI apparently assumed that students would have been taught how to write an essay at school or FE level.

However, several members of staff highlighted that they thought there should be more on-course literacy support available for NALN and other students from non-traditional backgrounds. For example, one Course Director underlined the need for more staff training, a point also highlighted in other research (e.g. Hudson, 2006). This Course Director pinpoints an issue specific to Art and Design; she questions how the professional development needs of the large number of Associate Lecturers (ALs) in Art and Design may be met:

Staff need to be trained more. Associate lecturers need to be aware of dealing with students of different backgrounds, different learning abilities, and I’m quite keen on that anyway, but we have practitioners coming in from outside, and we had one advertising tutor, and he was quite taken aback with the huge variety of talent, high to low, and he wrote to me afterwards, and said that he realised he would change his teaching to incorporate the weaker students, because you can’t train him. You can’t take him to a session on WP. So how does that information get disseminated to that person? And that goes on all over Art and Design.

Another Course Director highlighted the potential value of metalearning about effective interaction in different HE Art and Design contexts:

CH: Is there any teaching that’s explicit, to prepare students to deal with the group dynamics of the seminar, or the group dynamics of a crit, and how to present yourself in a crit?

Course Director: No, but I really like the question and I think, ‘Wow, that would be great!’

Development of institutional support
When students’ many detailed, strongly held views about the challenges they experienced with the literacies of Art and Design are set against the institutional support currently available and taken up, there is a strong case for further development of institutional support for literacy in HE Art and Design, on a significant scale. This is further underlined when support available is compared with findings of existing research about, for instance, making support available to students from all backgrounds, even in subjects such as English, where it is reasonable to assume that, overall, students have stronger literacy skills than in Art and Design. These students’ observations underline that optional, often short term input on literacy in Art and Design is insufficient and that there is a case for implementing core programmes for all students, which address different aspects of literacy, not in a one-off session, but in a series of sessions, over time.

5.8 Student case studies
Overview
This section presents three case studies, to illustrate the complexity of students’ literacy profiles and, across these students, the range in students’ capacity to cope with the literacy
The first case study, Jackie, presents a student whose literacy profile is unusually strong. Annette demonstrates a profile of strengths and weaknesses, with unusual literary interests. The third case study, Jo, illustrates a student who, at the time of the first year interviews, was struggling with all aspects of literacy.

Jackie

Whilst Jackie commented on some challenges in learning the language of Art and Design, she has very good literacy skills, in part through her previous professional experience.

Chapter 3 discussed the relationships between Jackie’s strong presentation skills and her management of group dynamics, and her previous professional role.

Jackie highlights that she finds essay writing straightforward, because it is formulaic and because she did a lot of writing in her previous career:

*Very straightforward (writing within Art and Design) in many respects, because I did so much writing in my profession. When you’re writing reports, you have an introduction, you have a main body and then you have a conclusion. And in many respects I stuck to that format when doing my Art assignments, and it seems to work.* (March 2008)

In Jackie’s interview in the fourth year of the part time BA, she talks about her great interest in an essay she has recently completed, on curating her dream exhibition. Jackie’s main struggle was not writing too much. Jackie deals with this difficulty by editing down and by structuring her essay thoughtfully, so that the four areas she chooses are varied:

*It was very hard to keep it down to 2,500 words... Oh, I struggled. There was, you could, you could choose four or five pieces for the exhibition, and I started with five, and ended up with four, because it just got too much. Because if you’re looking at artists, and artists previously that influenced them, and then, artists of today that have been equally influenced by the piece that you’ve chosen... it can get, take quite long. But I kind of split it into four areas. One was, mainly taking from the time when Art was changing, which was really the 60s and 70s. So I talked about a piece that was performance Art. I talked about documentation as Art. I talked about using the everyday item. And the final one was critiquing the institution.* (December 2008)

Unlike many of the students, Jackie is exemplary in her time management when writing essays. Jackie related how she usually completes her essay a month or two ahead of the deadline!

Jackie writes well in other genres, apart from the essay. For example, Chapter 3 highlighted that, unlike her peers, Jackie knew how to write a risk assessment, as part of the curatorial unit. The following quotation demonstrates that Jackie understands the importance of being appropriately explicit in a risk assessment:

*You don’t just put bullet points down. You have to put, you know, proper explanations about the risks... ... and what you’re going to do to address those risks, and who’s going to actually do it. So there’s a three point plan with it.* (December 2008)

Jackie keeps detailed written documentation of her practice. This is partly because Jackie is aware that, in writing future funding applications, she may have to produce supporting evidence. Jackie also keeps two notebooks, one for ideas and one to record the titles of works and quotations.

Jackie is prepared to re-evaluate her perceptions of the relevance of strands of the course. For instance, Jackie indicates that her view on the relevance of the seminar series on curation to her practice has changed over time:

*CH: Was the work you did in those seminars useful in the unit you’ve just done this term?*

*Jackie: Well they were, because, and strangely enough, because what she (the lecturer) presented to us was alternative ways of producing work and alternative ways in which an institution presents the work. And it was because of that that it made you, it didn’t hit home to me at the time, ...but actually what she was doing was giving us a lot of groundwork of thinking, beyond just the paper on the walls or sculptural things. Because there are other ways that you can do it, and there are other ways that you can question the institution of a gallery or presenting work... That was a real big learning point for me.*
I hadn’t appreciated how important those lectures were. (December 2008)

Literacy was at the centre of some of the commissions Jackie was undertaking, in addition to her HE course. For example, Jackie’s project with the city library, discussed in Chapter 4, reflected Jackie’s very thoughtful, creative approach to literacy. This commission aimed to encourage people to read books which had not been taken out of the library in the past year. To interest people in the texts, Jackie selected some of the dedications in the books, which Jackie perceived had particularly thought-provoking narratives behind them, and displayed these in the library. Jackie also stimulated people’s interest in the books, by unsettling people’s conceptions of what they expect when they look at a book. Jackie made a video of books with the spine facing inwards:

But you can’t see the, the titles of these books. You don’t know what’s in them. You have no idea what’s in them. And it really was commenting on the fact that there is an awful lot of books, a lot of knowledge, information that people don’t look at. They don’t borrow it... And then what I did with that, was I interjected with the panning shot of the books with dedications from books that had not been borrowed for a year.... And some of them were very much like, um, er, ‘Oh, thanks sincerely for your support,’ etc. etc. but some were very poignant. Because one was dedicated to all the people who, who had laid down their lives in Tiananmen Square. And this is a quote. This is a dedication in a book that hadn’t been borrowed in the last year. To me, there were a lot, a lot of stories behind that... (December 2008)

Jackie also demonstrates her confidence as a facilitator of a group session where she has not previously met participants. At the library’s request, Jackie ran a session for visitors to the library on the books which had been neglected.

In a future project, Jackie aims to use letters her husband recently discovered, between his parents. Jackie has read all these letters, and plans to present them in edited form.

Annette

Annette, a mature, dyslexic, part time BA student, was one of the students who was fearful of giving presentations, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Her strategy of enlisting the support of a voice coach to attempt to address this has also been outlined. Annette discussed in detail her negative feelings about presentations in all her research interviews. In the most recent interview (December 2008), Annette was beginning to question if one of the issues she struggled with was having too much to say. Although Annette prepared in detail for the presentations, her notes were too detailed for her to be able to follow when speaking. Annette would welcome more support for presentations:

I know we spoke about the public speaking, and then the difficulties of that. I don’t feel like I am getting support with it. If it is something necessary that we have to do as a practising artist, then I am really concerned that I fail with that. And even though perhaps to other people, they might think it is fine, I feel quite distressed about it, and I would rather do a good job with that, and I am here to learn. (December 2008)

Annette objects to reading merely to synthesise, rather than to challenge, theory:

I think this is one of the reasons that I have held off on plunging into the theory so much is because I don’t like the idea that you are, you are smoothly guided into someone else’s view, into their world. I do feel aggravated sometimes when people kind of, they spout someone else’s theory. (December 2008)

Annette is probably unaware that students who ‘spout someone else’s theory’ are probably less able to think critically than she is.

Even though Annette is dyslexic, writing is of central importance to her in her Art and Design degree. Annette’s very detailed work experience diary has been referred to earlier in this chapter. Annette also reflects on texts she reads for the HE course, by writing about them in a way which incorporates her emotional response to the text. This is often in poetic form. This writing then helps to provide a link between the academic text and Annette’s own practice:

I started to go into my own, I take lines of what has been said in the book and then read them back in my own parts... I have to try and use my own emotions and my own cast in words, and this gives me ideas of what I want to make next, how it is going to seem. (December 2008)

In an email in January 2009, Annette reflects on the importance she places on writing, and on the relationship between her writing and dyslexia:
I’ve been thinking about how writing has become an integral part of my practice. I’m using this more with sculpture (equally as much) as a process of working and feel that this has turned into a mode of dialogue with myself that is pushing my ideas so much further and building a faster momentum. With regards to how I can do so much and enjoy this whilst being dyslexic, I have realized that this is a kinetic activity for me to work with, as I can touch type (little did I realize at 14, when I took the office skills class at school, that this would be so useful for my artistic development).

In the curatorial unit, her group’s project focused on merging their practices. One of the students wrote a detailed play called *The Caretaker*, for his contribution to the exhibition. Annette, with his permission, altered the text, including changing the genre of it, aiming to make it more accessible for the reader:

> It started off as prose, but then I went through this version. It was so dense and such a lot in it, that it was quite a bit to pick out parts that were interesting, because we spoke about hinging the whole project on this narrative. So gradually I went to do this. And I think it might be a result of dyslexia as well, I often break words, text down and it turns into this type of poetry. (December 2008)

In her most recent interview (December 2008), Annette commented that she wanted to extend her writing:

> I am going to go ahead with the writing more, and perhaps think about how that, how it would be shown with the other works.

Annette then experiments further with genre. Annette attached a piece of creative prose to her January 2009 email. The prose, like her previous poetry, is a mechanism to link theory and practice. It was deliberately written without punctuation, and the language used was intensely poetic:

> I’ve attached my latest workings which reflect on a piece I made a short while ago. This was made in response to the writing of Pierre August Birot, who I’ve enjoyed reading immensely. I’ve wanted to experiment with other styles of writing.

In her interviews in the third year of the part time BA (2007-08), Annette commented that she found essay writing difficult. Annette was studying for a National Diploma in Graphic Design at the same time as her Fine Art BA. For her National Diploma course work, Annette wrote three essays over the summer 2008, followed by her BA essay for the curatorial seminar series. Annette commented that the experience of very regular essay writing had improved both her confidence and skills in this genre.

Jo
Jo was dyslexic and struggled with all aspects of literacy. For instance, Jo had a crit just before her first research interview in the first year (March 2008). Jo described how she had been unable to answer any of the questions the tutors had asked her:

> I was standing there, like I’m going to run out of here. I was going to run out of that. I didn’t want to talk… They (tutors) probably don’t get it (Jo’s work) because they didn’t understand what I was doing, because I didn’t explain it well enough … because I’m really bad with that especially.

Jo also comments on her difficulties with writing, giving as examples problems she has had with writing a project proposal, and the grade she received for the one piece of written work completed by the time of the first interview in the first year (March 2008):

> The written work I kind of just passed.

Jo received feedback that she needed to include more detail:

> I think just general things, like talk in more detail, which is hard for me to do, just to talk in detail and reflect on myself more. I just kind of knew what I’d left out. (March 2008)

By the summer, Jo had received more positive feedback for a piece of writing she had submitted. Jo had initiated support from a friend outside college for this:

> I think they (the tutors) were just happy about my writing, the way I’d come out. It was written better… I got a friend to read over it for me, to correct spellings for me, and then talk to me about it as well, not just do it and give it to me back. They talked to me about where the spellings were wrong. I wanted to do it, but I was a bit worried what they’d say, so I have to like email it to them and say, ‘I don’t want to be there while you read it. Just
Many students said that they found it challenging to give presentations about their work. Some highlighted that they were more articulate about their work in the research interview than in course sessions.

Many students commented on the structural, stylistic and linguistic inaccessibility of course texts. Many did not have effective reading strategies, including how to take notes. Many students did not know how to select either titles from course lists or what to read within a text. Many appeared to read the minimum amount.

A number of students who found writing essays difficult enjoyed writing creatively to develop their ideas in Art and Design.

Whilst most students experienced difficulties with literacy, across students, an impressively wide range of strategies was deployed, to attempt to manage the literacy demands of Art and Design.

On the one hand, these strategies reflect students’ agency, and raise questions about how student strategies may be disseminated effectively to other students. On the other hand, there are limits to the effectiveness of students’ strategies; despite progress made through strategies used, students still experienced literacy difficulties.
Highly selective examples of student strategies include:
- the language of Art: looking up, recording and experimenting with new terms, and paraphrasing complex terminology
- speaking and listening: preparing a presentation in carefully thought out stages, to maximise the quality of content and delivery
- reading: making explicit a clear rationale for selecting texts from course lists
- writing: using peers’ writing as a model, and writing creatively as an integral part of developing ideas.

Institutional strategies
- Existing research highlights a wide range of institutional strategies to support literacy, across subject areas, and with students from all backgrounds.
- Both HEIs had mechanisms to address literacy related issues. These ranged from, for instance, support for dyslexia and English language, to some extra tutorial, phone and email support.

Student responses to institutional support
- Students varied in their responses to institutional literacy support.
- Positive comments by FdA students on the value of their weekly group crit particularly stood out.
- Most students accessing additional support highlighted its benefits.
- However, not all students took up the range of support they were entitled to. This was for a range of reasons:
  - lack of awareness of available support
  - delays in receiving dyslexia support
  - optional support being scheduled at times when students could not attend
  - students taking the decision not to take up support they were aware of
  - students trying out support, but deciding it was not for them.

Staff responses to institutional support
- To some extent, staff thought that the literacy support provided by the HEIs was adequate. For instance, some staff assumed that students had learnt essay writing skills at school or FE college; this assumption was misplaced.
- However, some staff underlined that institutional support for literacy, such as training for staff, should be developed.

Development of institutional support
- Comparison of institutional support with students’ perceptions of literacy difficulties underlines that there was insufficient institutional support to address students’ literacy needs systematically, particularly as the majority of support was optional.
- There is a strong case for further development of institutional support for literacy in HE Art and Design, on a significant scale, through, for instance, core programmes for all students, contextualised to subject area.

Case studies
- The chapter concludes with three case studies to illustrate, first, the complexities of individual students’ literacy profiles and second, the diversity of literacy profiles, across these students.

5.10 KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE HE ARTS SECTOR
- What should effective support for different aspects of literacy consist of?
- How may student take up of optional literacy support be increased?
- How may students’ strategies to address their literacy needs be disseminated to a wider student group?
6.1 OVERVIEW
This chapter examines progression to HE, in terms of students’ accounts of patterns of progression; the extent to which National Diploma, Foundation Diploma and Access courses prepared students for HE Art and Design; the role of Townley’s progression course in facilitating access to HE; experience of the HE interview; and students’ awareness of HE.

6.2 PATTERNS OF PROGRESSION TO HE
Students had followed a wide variety of routes to HE Art and Design. Only a small minority had followed what may be considered a traditional route of A levels and the Foundation Diploma. Other routes included:

- GCSEs and a National Diploma
- A levels and a National Diploma
- GCSEs and a Foundation Diploma
- no formal qualifications at school level and an Access course or Foundation Diploma
- short courses and an Access course
- a degree in another subject, professional experience and an Access course or Foundation Diploma
- the Foundation Diploma or National Diploma and Townley’s progression course.

Taylor and Littleton (2008) report that many students in their sample had experienced fragmented educational careers. Of the 45 students at Townley and Norton, the large majority (31) had progressed straight from school to FE college to university. The minority (14) had had at least one break in their educational career. Reasons for fragmentation included:

- having to work to support self
- having to work to support family members
- having to work to earn money to pay for HE
- not recognising the value of education
- having a family
- having a break in education because of mental health issues
- having a break in education because of experience of failure e.g. being rejected for a Foundation Diploma
- family opposition to HE Art and Design.
Marcus argues that he came to terms with being rejected by Townley for the Foundation, in part by not being self-pitying. Marcus also rationalised that originally he had not planned to stay on at school after 16 or go to university. Marcus said that he had been arrogant at school. Marcus therefore used the rejection to teach himself never to be complacent, but always to want to achieve more. Marcus applied for and completed a Foundation Diploma at an FE college. Through the FE course, Marcus attended the progression course at Townley.

Fahima

Fahima (dyslexic, minority ethnic student), who progressed straight from school to FE college to Townley, had experienced a number of challenges in her educational career. Fahima’s family came to England when Fahima was 10. Fahima could not speak any English; as she said:

*I didn’t even know there’s a language called English until I stepped in this country. That’s when I know.* (March 2008)

Fahima said that, at primary school in England, no one taught her to read. At secondary school, Fahima’s skills in speaking English improved, through speaking English with friends. Fahima now wishes she had asked for help with her literacy difficulties at school:

*In school, actually I never used to talk. I kind of feel bad now. I wish I used to talk, and ask more, and ask them, ‘Would you help me? I can’t read or write,’ rather than having hidden things and kept them to myself.* (June 2008)

At school, Fahima had enjoyed Art, but her father wanted her to study Information Communications Technology (ICT), not Art, after GCSEs. After school, Fahima attended an FE college for three years. For the first two years, she studied ICT. As Fahima’s dyslexia was at that stage undiagnosed, she found ICT very difficult. However, Fahima still concealed her literacy difficulties:

*When I went in college, it’s more like no one knew again, because I was hiding it really well. I ended up doing ICT for two years and finished the whole course, without one teacher of mine knowing that I can’t read or write properly.* (March 2008)
Alongside her ICT course, and unknown to her college tutors, Fahima attended an Entry to Employment (E2E) course. Fahima enrolled on E2E, not because she wanted a job, but because she desperately wanted to increase her confidence and improve her English, through interacting with young people.

In the end, Fahima stood up to her father, as Chapter 2 outlines. Fahima studied Art in her third year of college. It was not until then that Fahima was diagnosed as dyslexic. Initially, Fahima misconstrues dyslexia:

I just find out about dyslexic in 2007, when I’m about to finish college. That’s when my tutor was like, ‘Your reading work,’ he said, ‘is really bad and you need someone to help you,’ and he started telling me about dyslexic. And I’m thinking, ‘What is a dyslexic? Is he like disabled or something? I’m not disabled.’ And I’m trying to deny it. (March 2008)

Fahima’s confidence was boosted when her FE tutor selected her to attend Townley’s progression course. Fahima relates how she did not get a place on the Fine Art BA, but gained a place on the FdA. In the BA interview:

I was so scared, I nearly, I couldn’t even speak. I couldn’t even say nothing. I was like, ‘Eerr, mmm,’ and I think they can see it, like I had really bad communication skills and I couldn’t explain my work ... When I just finished the interview downstairs, I started crying and she (the NALN Progression Manager) said, ‘You can come back for the FdA interview.’ (March 2008)

Fahima at that stage did not know what the FdA was; the NALN Progression Manager facilitated her access to the FdA interview.

6.3 PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATIONAL DIPLOMA AND FOUNDATION DIPLOMA

Some research (Hoelscher et al., 2008) questions the extent to which vocational education and training prepares students for HE. Other research (e.g. Sinclair and Connor, 2008) highlights the need for HE admissions staff to develop their knowledge of the content and assessment of vocational qualifications. They argue that a lack of knowledge may create negative attitudes towards students with vocational qualifications.

In this research, most students were, overall, positive about their experience of the Foundation Diploma and National Diploma. Unsurprisingly, there was some variation across colleges and courses in how much students perceived that they had gained from their Foundation Diploma or National Diploma. For instance, one student highlighted that her experience of the National Diploma had been unsatisfactory, because the main tutor had left during the course. Overall, however, Foundation and National Diploma students highlighted similar points about the extent to and ways in which the two courses had prepared them for HE Art and Design. Across students’ accounts, the following points were identified about ways in which the two courses had provided preparation for HE:

> developing skills in working with different media (particularly stressed at Townley, and by National Diploma students)
> developing skills in working with different software (particularly stressed at Townley, and by National Diploma students)
> developing knowledge about different artists and artistic traditions
> giving some experience of gallery visits
> providing some support in developing writing skills
> giving experience of working under pressure. Some students commented that the pace of the National Diploma intensified in the second year
> challenging students and so enabling their work to develop
> developing students’ independence
> learning about different HE Art and Design courses (point made by one National Diploma student).

Comments about the Foundation Diploma and National Diploma included:

At Foundation I realised that I was really, really up and running. By the time it came to the third term on Foundation, I knew I could do great things if I really, really go for it.

It (the National Diploma) pushed me to the limits.

There was a lot of work on my ND, so obviously I was doing my work all weekend and sometimes after college, so that has prepared me for the workload (at HE).

When you come from A levels, you copy other artists’ work, and it’s really guided, what you do in your work, but when I did the ND, it was more like you were guided by yourself,
than everyone else doing the same project. I learnt how to use Photoshop and I learnt how to screen print. And I think that some of the people who come here (HE), even from Foundation, a lot of people in my class have never used Photoshop before, so I was at an advantage there. I’ve done screen printing and mono printing, and lots of different print techniques that a lot of people won’t have done … it (the National Diploma) prepared me really, really well, perhaps even better than if I’d done a Foundation, because it was over two years, and obviously between the ages of 18 and 20, you do change and learn a lot. Doing the Foundation, you’re doing lots of little things, but over the two years of the ND I learnt so much. And sort of eases you into it (HE).

When I first started my ND, I was in A level mode … but my sketch books ended up being completely just my own work, all my own drawings and paintings and sort of developments. I realised that I can do whatever I wanted, instead of following guidelines. I could just pour out anything and develop from that.

It is interesting that the observations above highlight the independence of the National Diploma. In contrast, some lecturers stressed the extent to which the National Diploma is structured, largely because it is brief-led.

Some students at Townley particularly valued the skills, such as the use of Photoshop, taught on the Foundation Diploma and particularly the National Diploma. This was because, overall, these students perceived that at Townley there were insufficient workshop opportunities to develop skills. In contrast, students at Norton tended to stress that there were plenty of workshops. Staff at Norton also stressed that facilities and workshop opportunities were good.

Min had done a National Diploma and then a Foundation Diploma. Min saw the National Diploma as more brief-led than the Foundation course. Min implied that, in his view, the greater freedom of the Foundation was better preparation for HE than the more structured National Diploma. Other students who commented on National and Foundation Diplomas were not in a position to make comparisons through experience of both.

A small number of students who struggled in the first year of HE explicitly highlighted a disjuncture between the National Diploma or Foundation Diploma, and HE. For instance, Mario, who did not complete the first year of HE, commented negatively on the independence of the Fine Art BA, in comparison to the greater structure of the National Diploma, saying:

It (the National Diploma) wasn’t somewhere where we were just chucked on our own. (July 2008)

Mario also attributed his lack of theoretical knowledge to having done a National Diploma.

Aspects of students’ accounts of the ways in which the National Diploma and Foundation Diploma prepared them for HE implicitly conflict with students’ accounts of the difficulties of transition to HE, explored in Chapter 7. Interestingly, students did not tend to suggest that FE courses should change, to increase the smoothness of transition to HE.

In contrast to student views on the relative merits of the National Diploma and Foundation Diploma, some HE lecturers perceived that the National Diploma gave inadequate preparation for HE Art and Design, in comparison with the Foundation Diploma, as the following tutor comment suggests:

I think he (a student) did a BTEC or something like that, so it’s a totally different level, a shift in how Art is talked about and thought about … I think that it is a stretch sometimes for, it is that sort of capacity to make connections between disparate things, references and become critical really, a quite critical way of looking at the world.

6.4 ACCESS COURSE

The large majority of students who had done an Access course were mature students who had lacked formal qualifications and who had had gaps in their educational careers. It is therefore unsurprising that these students tended to highlight that the Access course had been important in building their self-confidence. Some of these students commented on how much they had developed through the Access course. For example, Jackie, who already had a BA and Master’s in personnel management, observed that the Access course had changed her conception of Art:

It was great. It was such an eye opener. I’d always thought of Art as painting or sculpture. I didn’t realise there were alternative ways of expressing. I just found the idea of conceptual Art just incredible, just mind blowing. It was just so interesting and I developed quite a lot then. (March 2008)
Jackie commented that her awareness of the strengths of her Access course, including how far it prepared her for HE, has increased since she has been at HE.

Some students’ accounts highlighted that the Access course, like the Foundation Diploma and National Diploma, had developed valuable skills; as Sara said:

_I think if I hadn’t done the Access Course I would be really lost. I’ve got to say that, ...because I had a real taste of all the, like photography, print, all the different areas in the college. So I was familiar with that and that’s just given me a kick start, because I didn’t have to worry too much about totally new ground._ (March 2008)

### 6.5 TOWNLEY’S PROGRESSION TO HE COURSE

**Introduction**

Townley ran a progression to HE course, as part of NALN. This consisted of a summer school, weekly sessions at Townley during the autumn and spring term, a portfolio review and some support in applying to Townley. The summer school and weekly sessions were run by experienced HE tutors. In 2006-07, the main focus of the progression course was on Fine Art, though there were some sessions in other subject areas. The progression course has since expanded to cover a wider range of subject areas.

In 2006-07, the Fine Art weekly sessions focused on developing students’:

- studio practice
- knowledge of artists
- independence in visiting galleries
- capacity to link theory and practice
- understanding of the HEI
- understanding of different Art and Design HE courses
- portfolio to support their HE application
- capacity to discuss their studio work and how its development has been influenced by research.

Through the portfolio review process, students received further guidance about which HE course it would be appropriate for them to apply for, and how to develop their portfolio, and their skills in discussing their work.

**Selection for the HE progression course**

Students in local FE colleges with low participation postcodes\(^9\) were targeted to participate in Townley’s progression course. Students’ accounts indicated that selection methods varied across FE colleges. Some FE tutors specified that students should be first generation HE. In some, the FE tutor apparently selected the strongest students. In others, the FE tutor asked students to volunteer. Where this was the case, some students’ comments highlighted that they opted into the progression course in a casual way, whilst others had a more focused approach:

_‘So I thought I might as well._

_‘I was like, ‘Yes! Go for it!’_

_‘So I thought, ‘This is a great opportunity!’_

**Benefits of the HEI’s progression course**

Overall, students who had attended the progression course were very positive about its benefits. Across students’ accounts, perceived strengths spanned conceptual, psychological, social and practical benefits. Students’ accounts highlighted that the progression course was important in:

- developing students’ confidence, by enabling them to see that they could aim high
- motivating students to want to attend Townley
- giving experience of the HE interview process, through the portfolio review
- developing students' speaking and listening skills, through the focus on discussion
- developing students’ understanding of HE, Townley and HE courses
- helping students to understand the importance of an independent, proactive approach to Art and Design
- providing experience of new areas of and skills within Art and Design

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\(^9\) Low participation neighbourhoods are the bottom 20 per cent of wards ranked by the rate of participation in higher education (HESA, 2008). Corver (2005) notes the correlation between low participation neighbourhoods and areas of social and economic disadvantage.
then sorted into two rooms, one for those who had gained a place and one for those who had not gained a place.

On Townley’s progression course, in 2006-07, the portfolio review took the form of a mock interview, where students were interviewed in pairs. Several students reported that this experience was very negative, because they felt out of their depth. Two students who did not progress to Townley still felt undermined by the mock interview experience, even two years later (see Chapter 9). In contrast, Nick used the initially negative experience constructively, to address some long term insecurities arising from his social class, as discussed in Chapter 2. Furthermore, having learnt from the initially negative experience of the portfolio review, Nick was able to do himself justice in the actual HE interview:

*When I closed the door after the interview, I knew I’d given it as best as I could… I didn’t feel stressed as much as I thought I would, particularly after the mock interview, which was horrendous. The actual interview I felt coherent. I felt that I was getting my ideas and thoughts across.* (March 2008)

One HE lecturer commented:

*I remember we gave that advice that year, because you (i.e. CH) were present at one advice session (i.e. portfolio review), and it felt to us like a lead balloon. It didn’t go at all well… We’ve gone through something since, which is fairness in selection training, and a wodge of stuff now on admissions procedures, the handbook basically on admissions.*

Some staff reported that the portfolio review has since been tailored to meet the specific needs of students coming through a NALN progression agreement, at the stage of the progression course when the review takes place.

Experience of actual HE interviews at Townley appeared to vary, principally by course. Students on three courses reported that the interviews were relaxed and more like a conversation than they had anticipated. In other subjects, students reported a more challenging experience. Chapter 4 reported Marcus’ perception, which lasted for much of the first year, that he had not genuinely gained a place at Townley, because he had been on Townley’s progression course. Claire commented that, during the first year of HE, she had been concerned that she had been offered a place at Townley in error:
When I was at home over the holidays, I wrote that I was walking on egg shells the whole of last year, thinking that someone was going to realise they’d made a mistake and say, ‘You shouldn’t be here.’ (November 2008)

In contrast, students tended to report positive experiences of FE and HE interviews at Norton, despite feelings of apprehension beforehand. A couple of students commented that they did not have appropriate work in their portfolio at the HE interview.

6.7 DECISION MAKING ABOUT HE

The complexities of HE choice should not be under-estimated. A significant body of research reports that HE choice is related to class, ethnicity and gender (e.g. Reay et al., 2001; Reay, 1999). Some research (e.g. Ball et al., 2002; Reay et al., 2002) examines the impact of individual institutions on HE choice. Ball et al. (2002) found that the quality of input schools provided on HE choices varied by type of school and was class-related. For instance, private schools provided better guidance than state schools. School influence on HE choice interacts with the influences of family, peers and wider consumer culture (e.g. Reay, 1998). Evidence (e.g. Clayton et al, 2007) suggests that many working class students tend to choose local universities. In Taylor and Littleton’s research (2008), few students had received helpful careers advice about Art and Design.

As outlined earlier in this chapter, one benefit students in this research highlighted about Townley’s progression course was that it developed their knowledge about Townley and about different courses it offered. Overall, most students did not highlight that schools and colleges had equipped them with a range of relevant information about HE, HEIs where they could study Art and Design, or specific Art and Design courses. Furthermore, some students and staff commented that schools and colleges did not always have expertise in what students should include in their portfolio, as the following staff observation indicates:

They come from certain colleges, where some of the work is presented a bit schooly, so it doesn’t look Foundation enough. It doesn’t look sophisticated enough.

A small minority of students perceived that their FE college had channelled them too much towards HE. One of these students had been on Townley’s progression course but had not applied to Townley (Chapter 9). Chango, who had considered withdrawing from Townley during the first year, and who then deferred in the second year, commented:

You’re kind of in a sense brainwashed, because everyone wants you to go to Townley. Everyone wants their students to leave that college and go to Townley, but then you forget that, do I want to go to Townley? (November 2008)

Chango infers that college staff may want students to gain places at Townley, in part to strengthen the reputations of colleges and college staff. The third student’s observations, in her second year interview, reflect those of Chango:

I’m glad I’m here and at the same time I wish I wasn’t. I mean, because our tutor at college, she went on about how amazing Townley is, and that it would be amazing if you could get in. And I just think she wanted, I don’t know if she just wanted to be known for a couple of her students getting into Townley, because it’s a really prestigious Art college, or if she really wanted us to go there, and really gain stuff from there, and really like the place. (November 2008)

It is important for college staff to give guidance which centres on the needs of students, rather than on their own needs.

Pearl’s account epitomizes the extent to which choice of HE can relate little to academic factors. Chapter 4 discussed how the example of a school teacher who had been at a prestigious university planted seeds about this university in Pearl’s mind. Pearl decides to apply to this HEI for reasons which are logical and thought through, but which relate to her financial and life circumstances, not to any sense of academic excellence:

And I found out about grants and the amounts that were involved, and I worked out that it was the same amount pretty much as social security, as unemployment benefit. So I, I now started thinking, ‘Well, hang on a minute, that’s pretty much the same, and you can learn some things and you can, you know, frankly move away, get away’… (Name of HEI) just looked the best, you know. It had the accommodation, that you had cleaners coming to your room. You know, I’d cleaned houses from top to bottom. I had jobs. To me that just seemed like a little unbelievable really, but a paradise. And you know, with all the pictures, there were lots of trees and nice buildings. It was like nothing else that I knew… I mean, to me, it was just, you know, it was an exit route, you know. But if you’re going to
Students had followed a wide variety of routes into HE Art and Design. Routes consisted of a variety of combinations from O levels, GCSEs, A levels, no formal school level qualifications, a National Diploma, the Foundation Diploma, Access courses, short courses and Townley’s progression course. Only a small minority had followed a traditional route of A levels and the Foundation Diploma. The large majority (31) of the 45 students at Townley and Norton had progressed straight from school to FE to university. Even where students’ educational careers were uninterrupted, they had often had challenging educational and wider life experiences, as two case studies illustrate.

Perceptions of the National Diploma and Foundation Diploma

Most students who had completed a National Diploma or Foundation Diploma were positive about both courses, including about the range of ways in which they perceived that the courses had prepared them for HE. Students tended to highlight similar factors for both courses. Students’ accounts of how these courses had prepared them for HE implicitly conflict with students’ perceptions of the difficulties of transition to HE, explored in Chapter 7.

In contrast to students, some HE staff thought that the National Diploma provides inadequate preparation for HE, in comparison with the Foundation Diploma.

Townley’s progression to HE course

Overall, students were very positive about Townley’s progression to HE course 2006-07. They cited many benefits of attending the course, including developing their awareness of, for instance: Townley, HE generally and specific HE Art and Design courses how to work as an HE student, in terms of conceptual approach, technical skills and literacy skills.

FE and HE interviews

At Norton, students’ experience of FE and HE interviews appeared to be positive, despite some students’ apprehensiveness about interview. At Townley, the experience was more varied. Two students who had progressed to HE through NALN’s progression agreements did not perceive, throughout the first year, that they had earned their university place. This highlights the importance of clarifying to students who enter HE through compact arrangements that they merit their HE place. Students’ accounts did not suggest that, on the whole, schools or FE colleges had provided them with a range of relevant information about HE, HEIs and specific Art and Design courses. Guidance from some FE tutors about portfolio preparation for the HE interview was also viewed as misplaced. A small minority of students, principally those who struggled at HE, perceived that their FE college had channelled them too much towards university. Some students’ decision making about HE did not appear to be based on academic factors.

6.9 KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE HE ARTS SECTOR

How do students’ positive reports of the National Diploma compare with other evidence on the extent to which the National Diploma prepares students for HE Art and Design?

How may students’ positive accounts of Townley’s progression to HE course be utilised, to develop similar approaches in other HEIs?

How may students be equipped with detailed, accurate information about HE, HEIs, and specific HE Art and Design courses, in order to make informed HE choices?

How may it be ensured that students progressing to HE through compact arrangements understand that they merit their HE place?
The first year

7.1 OVERVIEW
The chapter explores the following aspects of students’ accounts of their transition to HE: the initial transition to HE; the relationship between HE course and HEI, and students’ transition; different patterns of student transition over the first year; and ways in which students perceived that their work had progressed, over the first year. The chapter should be read alongside earlier chapters which analyse the influences of social class and family (Chapter 2); students’ use of their experience in their work (Chapter 3); experience of the literacies of Art and Design (Chapter 4); and relationships with staff (Chapter 5).

The views of part time students are not included in this chapter. This is because part time students did not have any research interviews when they were in the equivalent of the first year of HE. Some students who were in the first year of HE in 2007-08 compared aspects of their first year experience to that of the second year, in their second year interviews (November-December 2008). Where relevant, these retrospective observations are included.

7.2 EXISTING EVIDENCE
A plethora of literature explores transitions, across all phases of education (e.g. Ecclestone, 2007, 2005; Hayward et al., 2005; Colley, 2007; Lam and Pollard, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Evans, 2002). Ecclestone (2007, 2005) examines similarities and differences in work on educational transitions, from research, policy and practice perspectives.

A significant strand of the literature examines transitions to HE. Some research (e.g. May and Bousted, 2003) highlights that the first term of HE is particularly crucial in students’ transition to HE. Other studies (e.g. Clerehan, 2002) argue that transition to HE can take the first two or three terms. Within Art and Design, Hampton and Blythman (2006) focus on FdA students’ experience of the first two terms at London College of Communication (LCC). Some research (e.g. Quinn, 2006) considers failed transitions to HE. Whilst Ecclestone (2007, 2005) problematises the concept of transitions as risky, a considerable amount of evidence presents the very wide range of initiatives implemented within HEIs, to facilitate transition to HE (e.g. Clerehan, 2002; Smith, 2002; Marland, 2003; Ballinger, 2003; Smith and Hopkins, 2005; Gorard et al., 2006).
7.3 ISSUES IN MAKING THE INITIAL TRANSITION TO HE

Overall, in this research, students reported issues in making the initial transition to HE in terms of:

> understanding course expectations
> managing the degree of independence required
> (in some courses) managing the relatively few hours of timetabled contact with staff, in comparison with FE
> organising and motivating themselves to work consistently over a project. The large majority of students, whatever course they were on, initially struggled with working consistently, over the number of weeks scheduled for a project
> managing emotions, in terms of being in an unknown context.

Some students’ comments convey initial responses of confusion and bewilderment. The sense of disorientation was particularly strong among Townley students, whose comments included:

I think I’ve not necessarily matured, but I’ve kind of grown in my Art practice. At the beginning of the year I kind of lost it. I lost the momentum to get on with work, and for someone who has been very, my sketch books since secondary school and college had been, when I’d been working on them, I’d be doing five pages a day and more over the weekend... But here, coming here, I felt very lost at the beginning, and I didn’t know what they wanted. I just felt very like the expectations were too high and I couldn’t reach them. I would have liked some examples, because hadn’t seen any sketch book work. I found it quite difficult to figure out how I was meant to be working. I think I was getting conflicting advice. I just shut down and I didn’t want to know. (June 2008)

I found the first term quite confusing and a bit all over the place, and wasn’t sure what was expected of me ... I felt a bit like I couldn’t actually produce anything. (March 2008)

When I first started college (i.e. HE), I just found it difficult to manage my time and everything, but gradually, gradually I’m getting into the habit. (February 2008)

As far as the course goes, it’s slightly less structured than I wish it was... When I found out about how the course was structured, initially I was happy about the fact that it was independent, so I could do as I please .... But because it’s not highly structured, because from going from college with having a teacher there with you all the time ... it’s kind of difficult, because it’s very, very independent, and it’s harder to stay on track. (March 2008)

7.4 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN HE COURSE AND HEI, AND TRANSITION TO HE

To some extent, students’ transition to university depended on their HEI and HE course. Overall, there were fewer hours of formal input in the first year of HE than had been the case on students’ FE courses. However, in some, but not in all, courses, students were expected to be in the studio for most of the time when not in taught sessions. At Norton, there were clear expectations that students would be in the studio when not in lectures, seminars or tutorials, for four days a week. When students were in the studio, they had frequent contact with tutors. Students at Norton underlined that lecturers often followed up students if they were not in the studio when they should be. Students at Norton therefore perceived that they had a lot of contact with lecturers. They did not tend to comment that their HE experience was too unstructured, even though they experienced issues with the transition to HE, such as learning to work steadily over a number of weeks on a project.

At Townley, there was more variation in students’ initial perceptions of the degree of structure and staff contact in their HE course. On the Fine Art FdA, there appeared to be a strong expectation that students would be in the studio when not in lectures. In Textile Design and Ceramic Design, the students needed to be in the studio the majority of the time, to use the equipment. The Ceramic Design tutor perceived that the Ceramic Design BA has a family atmosphere. He attributed this to the relatively few Ceramic Design students, in comparison with student numbers on many other courses, and to the strong staff support in the studio. In Graphic Design, however, because of space limitations, the students did not have a studio space. There was therefore not the culture of working in the studio. The Course Director highlighted that the lack of studio space is underlined to potential students on open days and that students are told not to apply if they want their own space. However, it was as though some students had not internalised this. A number of Graphic Design students commented negatively on the lack of studio space in their first year interviews. In the two Fine Art BAs, the students had studio space, but the four BA Fine Art students did not use tend to use it. This therefore reduced opportunities to benefit from tutor and peer feedback, and also cannot have helped these students to perceive themselves as integrated within HE.
Course content and ethos also impacted on students’ transition to HE. For example, as previously highlighted, students on one course reported that a lecturer for whom they had great respect told students at the start of the first year to forget everything they had been taught before HE. Initially, students struggled with this, as the following account shows:

(The lecturer) has taught us to work in a way where you put all that aside (explaining concepts), and just come up with new and original ideas, and the only way you can do that is to push all your preconceptions aside, and to work without telling a story. It’s difficult but, it’s very difficult, because I’m so used to working the way I was taught at the other college... I came to the college knowing that I’d have to learn a lot, but I expected to learn a lot of processes and a lot of techniques, but it was learning to change your mindset which I wasn’t expecting. (March 2008).

The Townley BA in Fine Art (without pathways) started with a week’s group activity, where students worked with no furniture in the room and no materials until the second half of the week. The main resource was a 2D A4 sized piece each student had developed over the summer 2007. This collaborative project contrasted with subsequent activity:

We expect students to, from week two, really to get on with it, and to do their own thing, to be self motivated and through negotiation, through tutorial, discussions to ... develop their work. (BA Fine Art Course Director)

Another tutor highlighted that this contrast might be difficult for some students to manage. This is likely to be particularly the case at the start of HE, when students’ sense of disorientation is likely to be particularly intense:

Maybe where some students might need more support is that sort of initial explosion where there’s quite a lot of interactivity with each other and tutors (i.e. the first week), to then suddenly there being virtually none and having to get on with their own work.

The start of the BA Fine Art course was very different to the beginning of the BA Graphic Design course at Townley. The BA Graphic Design Course Director explained that the first term focused on inducting students into a range of areas. Her comments make explicit the similarities between the first term of HE, and college and school experience:

The (first year) course starts off as being a diagnostic experience. So they can try lots of different things. So the curriculum is very open and broad, and at that point it’s an introduction to the subjects of Graphic Design, photography, printing, drawing, animation, interactive design, graphic ideas and illustration. So students have quite a gentle induction. As long as they turn up on time and are where they’re supposed to be, they tend to settle in quite well, because they’re managed in large groups of 24 and it’s not unlike FE. It’s not unlike secondary school. They have to be where they’re told to be.

The Fine Art FdA also began with a series of inductions, followed by projects with clearly structured briefs. When reflecting on differences between the first and second years of the FdA, Claire highlighted that these inductions had been very useful and that the structure of the brief-led projects had been appropriate for students, at the stage of starting to clarify their practice:

I think those first couple of weeks (i.e. in the first year) where you’re being inducted into the print room and metal work and all of that, it’s really helpful, and then brief-led projects with (name of tutor) are amazing, and (name of tutor) are amazing. They really make you focus ... All of that I think is really helpful and it’s needed for some people to find where they are. (December 2008)

Three of the four FdA students commented that they were glad they were on the FdA, not the BA, because of the FdA’s greater structure.

Students’ reports on variations in course experience at the start of HE raise questions about whether there is scope for more continuity in experience across courses, and perhaps across institutions.
revealed some of the following: great enjoyment of the HE course; intense pleasure in their
development in HE Art and Design; a love of experimentation; and an analysis of what
success in the creative industries consists of, combined with the student’s determination
to succeed:

I know I have to face the fears and do things out of my comfort zone... I feel like if I work
really, really hard, then I’ll be better off at the end of it... And if you want to get noticed
in this industry, you have to be really competitive and work really hard day and night,
and that’s what I want... People who get noticed and who end up doing well and are
successful, this is their life. They devote their entire lives to it, and they spend day and
night doing it... They live and breathe it, and that’s why they are successful. I feel I want to
do that. I’ve got time. I’ve cut off other commitments in my life so I can do this. (February
2008)

I don’t like people telling me what to look at. I like to kind of explore my own thing... Like
the tutors are totally free about it. You can change the brief however you want, which
is great, because it gives me a chance to experiment more, especially in illustration and
photography, and they seem to applaud more if you actually look outside the box... How
are you going to explore and experiment, like push the boundaries, if you are just doing
what is the norm anyway? (February 2008)

I’m starting to feel things changing. I actually feel very enthused and I’m actually getting
a real buzz from coming to college, learning things, putting my ideas into practice. It’s
now that I’m able to put all the skills that I’ve learned in the past into fruition, and sort
of actually let things, you know, seeds that I planted long ago are starting to grow... My
learning curve is curving nicely... I feel as though my growing in the past two months
particularly shot up. (February 2008)

Though these students’ perception of gain from HE was rapid, this did not mean that they
did not find some aspects of Art and Design, such as its literacy demands, very difficult.

Transition by the end of the first year
The majority of students’ accounts suggested that it took most of the first year to adapt to
HE and for their work to start to develop significantly. A number highlighted the emotional
turmoil they experienced during the first year. For instance, Jennie reflects on her sense of
being overwhelmed in the first year, from the vantage point of the second year:

In the first year, they really do shove everything on top of you...and you just sink or swim.
And I think it’s as simple as that. I think that’s really how now, looking back on it, at the
time I know it felt bit like that, but now I really know that. (November 2008)

Many students brought their work to the second research interview in the first year (May
- June 2008). Many discussed in specific detail the range of ways in which their work had
developed, in terms of:

> learning to use different media
> learning to use different materials
> learning to use different software packages
> learning to use a sketch book as an integral part of their approach to work
> changing their approach to use of colour
> making connections with theory (in terms of gallery visits and using lectures,
seminars and course readings) in their practice
> using critical reflection to become more aware of and to refine their work
> learning to incorporate tutors’ and peers’ feedback into the development of their
work (see Chapter 4)
> learning from mistakes
> feeling more confident about their work
> feeling more like an artist
> developing their thinking about employment
> learning to present their work orally (to some extent) (see Chapter 4)
> reading more (to a very limited extent) (see Chapter 4)
> developing their writing skills (to a limited extent) (see Chapter 4)
> being selected to contribute to the NALN summer school at Townley.

For example, one Textile Design student’s comments show how, over the first year, she has
internalised technical skills specific to weaving:
I think I’ve achieved quite a lot in terms of learning technical processes such as the weave and the print, which is what I came here aiming to do... If you’ve never done it (weave) before, it’s really, really difficult at first. I remember feeling really panicked when I first started doing it because it all seemed so complicated. There were so many different threads and ways that you had to put them in a certain pattern.... But with all the guidance that they gave us, after a while it was like we’d been doing it all our lives, but because you’re doing it from nine o’clock in the morning until eight o’clock at night. Sometimes we’re in that weave room and you’re just doing it repeatedly, and you just learn by repetition and it becomes quite therapeutic. (June 2008)

Some of this group of students, as with the students who had adapted rapidly to HE, expressed delight in their development over the first year. Some commented that they had not forseen aspects of their development. In the following, Abelia appraises her growth in terms of increased experimentation with materials, use of her environment, use of a range of colours, and abstraction. Abelia’s remarks convey her intense sense of pleasure in her growth:

I’ve never really gone out and used different colours like this. I’ve never done anything like this. I was really coming out of my comfort zone. I just did it as an experiment and I was really surprised. I thought it was really good. My thinking has changed. I’m not sticking to the most obvious things. I’m trying to experiment with different materials and just trying to be different. I just look back, and most of my work in the past, I wouldn’t do anything abstract like this ... I’m really impressed with myself to think this far! I was able to think about different things and use things around me, because I just feel like wow! I can’t believe I was capable of doing that really. So I’m really impressed, and hopefully I’ll get more ideas like that. That would be brilliant. (June 2008)

Some students who perceived that their work had developed over the first year still felt, at the end of the first year, that they had not used their time effectively. Whilst in the first interview in the first year (February-March) some students commented negatively on the limited number of hours of formal teaching, by the second interview in the first year (May-June 2008), most of those who had struggled to work consistently had stopped being critical of the HE course structure. Instead, they had taken more personal responsibility for their approach to work. Students who were still not working consistently by the end of the first year had tended to set themselves the goal of working productively in the second year. Comments included:

I feel I haven’t been as productive as I could have been. I have been doing the work, but most of the time I leave it until the last minute.... While I don't appreciate the fact that we don't have that many tutorials .... when I do become an artist in my own right, I don't have anyone to kick me in the arse. But I am a very laid back person and I do tend to procrastinate. So I didn't feel any extra drive. So I do intend for next year, and for the summer holiday as well, to do something, rather than just wait around for the last minute. (June 2008)

At the beginning I found it very hard. I feel like I’m not being pushed to do the work, so yeah, and I need to push myself and not be lazy. Sometimes I leave things until the last minute. I’ve got time. I’ve got time. (May 2008)

I need to step up my game now. (June 2008)

Transition after intense struggle

In their first interview (March 2008) at Townley, two students revealed that they were experiencing considerable difficulties with HE and that they were worried about being removed from their HE course. Their second interviews in the first year contrasted markedly with the first. By June 2008, whilst still perceiving that their work needed to develop considerably in the second year, they were delighted at their development. For each student, contrasting comments from each set of interviews are set out below. By the second interview, the first student cited below even feels in a position to comment critically, in terms of development of ideas, research and documentation, on the work of a friend at another university:

Student one

You know, you start to worry about yourself, I feel like I’m going to get kicked out and I don’t want to get kicked out. I love this place. (March 2008)

I can improve next year, because I feel I know what work to do and what they expect of me next year. I don’t need someone to tell me, ‘Oh, you need to do this,’ any more.... Sometimes I look at my friend’s work in another university and I’m thinking, ‘If you were here, they would be kicking you out a long time ago, because sometimes I’ll be asking her,
Chango described how a support tutor who had recently come into post contacted him during the summer term 2008. Chango had found it helpful to talk through issues:

Yeah, it was a relief to get out my opinion. At the time I was having so many second thoughts about the uni. I got all my opinions out and also I felt kind of happy to say it, because I knew a lot of people wouldn't. (June 2008)

‘Stunted’ growth
Overview
Three students followed a pattern of ‘stunted’, as one of them put it, growth. Elizangela struggled intensely with combining family and job responsibilities with HE, and did not complete the first year of her BA. As discussed previously, Mario and Ryan, two BA Fine Art students at Townley also did not complete the first year. However, their transition to HE followed very different patterns during the first year, as illustrated through the case studies below.

Mario
Mario struggled with the demands of HE throughout the first year. Many of the reasons for this have been discussed elsewhere in this report:

> the degree of independence required on the Fine Art BA
> Mario’s perception that the HE tutors were intimidating, though tutors were very concerned about Mario
> the contrast between the BA course structure and tutor relationships, and the particularly supportive relationship Mario had enjoyed with his FE tutor
> Mario’s perception of being an ‘outcast’ in HE, in terms of HE culture and peer relationships
> difficulties with the theory and language of HE Art and Design
> needing to help with the family move
> needing to look after his mother when she was ill.

Mario was dyslexic. He found it extremely difficult to organise his work and to manage the literacy demands of the BA. Over the year, Mario missed course sessions and deadlines. Mario failed the first essay, commenting subsequently that he did not have any dyslexia support at this stage. His dyslexia support began near the end of the second term, just before the March research interview. The fact that support was not in place for most of the
first year is likely to have compounded issues Mario experienced in making the transition to HE. Mario’s great difficulties with organisation are reflected in, for example, the fact that he forgot where he was supposed to meet the dyslexia tutor. Apparently Mario went to the wrong site at Townley and so missed a support session. Furthermore, moving house resulted in Mario losing some of his coursework and so not receiving a grade.

As well as attending HE, Mario did two evening cleaning jobs during the week, throughout the first year, and did not arrive home until 11pm. Mario described himself as someone who needed a lot of sleep and commented, in both his first year interviews, that he was always tired and that he found it difficult to get up to do university work in the morning.

In March 2008, Mario described himself as being ‘at risk’ of being removed from the course, commenting:

> I’ve got the bollocking already and spoken to them (the tutors), and since January, my aim was to fix up.

Mario was unable to put this into practice, even though his girlfriend and family apparently wanted him to complete the BA. In his interview in June 2008, Mario took responsibility for his performance at university. For instance, Mario summed up his experience of the first year:

> I wish I could just turn back time. I just wasted time, but I can’t turn back time. I think I’ve really kind of messed up.

At the end of the summer term 2008, Townley sent Mario a letter telling him that he had not completed the first year, but that he could repeat the year, if he wished. Mario did not receive the letter straightaway, as he had moved house. Mario did not respond to the letter.

In his interview in November 2008, Mario said that he was working full time during the day in retail. In the evening, he worked in one of the cleaning jobs he had done during his first year at Townley. Mario had moved out of the family home to live with his girlfriend. They were planning their January 2009 wedding. Mario commented that, though he wanted to return to HE, he had not had time to find out about HE courses, because of the amount of time he was working in paid employment. Given his commitments and organisational issues, it seems unlikely that Mario will be able resume HE studies successfully in the foreseeable future.

Mario’s case study raises a range of questions. These include, in outline:

- whether Mario should have started the Fine Art BA
- whether extreme tutor support (as with Mario’s FE tutor), can be counter-productive
- the importance of HE tutors understanding that struggling students may misinterpret tutors’ approach to them. It is therefore important that HE tutors make explicit their support for students, perhaps on a number of occasions
- the timing of dyslexia support
- how to enable students to balance effectively the demands of their HE course with their extra-university commitments to employment and family.

Ryan

Ryan’s withdrawal from HE followed a very different pattern to Mario’s. Ryan summed up the changing pattern of his HE experience as:

> (In the first term) Everyone else was complaining and saying, ‘Uni is so crap. Uni is so …’ I mean, I felt it in my heart like it was really good. I was really enjoying it, and the course was really good for me. I felt that right deep down inside. It’s just during that January, February bit, where it broke off all connection with me. My work was developing in the beginning. I think it was going somewhere, but then it just stunted and went nowhere. (June 2008)

Ryan was considered one of the strongest students on Townley’s progression course. The BA Fine Art course tutors were surprised that Ryan did not complete the first year. Ryan and his tutor both commented that they had had a good relationship; in Ryan’s words:
Given Ryan’s previous strengths in Fine Art; contrasting pattern of performance in the first year to Mario; ongoing contact with peers at HE, after leaving HE; reduced complexities in family and employment commitments; and greater distance, in terms of time and emotions involved, from his uncle’s bereavement, it may be more likely that Ryan will return to HE studies than Mario. At the same time, Ryan, like Mario, has difficulties in communicating effectively with HE lecturers, given that Ryan, like Mario, has not contacted Townley since receiving the letter about not completing the year.

7.6 SUMMARY

> Overall, these students reported issues in making the initial transition to HE in terms of:
  » understanding course expectations
  » managing the degree of independence required, in comparison with FE
  » working consistently over a project
  » managing emotions in dealing with the unknown.
> To some extent, students’ initial experience of HE varied by HE course and HEI, and related to the:
  » availability and use of studio space
  » number of timetabled hours
  » degree of structure in course sessions
  » degree and nature of contact with staff
  » institutional expectations about attendance outside scheduled course sessions
  » degree of similarity to FE and school experience.
> Among these students, there were four broad patterns of transition to HE:
  » rapid transition: a small minority adapted quickly to HE, highlighting their artistic development and enjoyment of the course, in their first interviews in the first year (February-March 2008)
  » transition by the end of the first year: the large majority took most of the first year to adapt to HE. Towards the end of the year, this group of students were also positive about developments in their practice and their approach to work
  » transition after intense struggle: three students appeared to make the transition to HE by the end of the first year, after a particularly intense struggle during the year

However, around Christmas 2007, Ryan’s uncle died. Ryan was extremely affected by the family bereavement and missed three weeks of the HE course in the spring term 2008. Whilst Ryan had previously felt he had little in common with HE peers, he had managed this situation. After his return to college, Ryan started to feel more uncomfortable about the differences between himself and his peers. Ryan described how, when he returned to college, he was trying to get back into a pattern of regular attendance at HE, when a tutor reprimanded him in front of his peers for lateness to a session. Ryan had apparently been held up by delays with public transport. Ryan summarised his response to this:

> It was just really hard to get over that, and it’s in front of your peers. (June 2008)

After being reprimanded publicly by the tutor, Ryan stopped attending HE.

At the end of the academic year 2007-08, Townley sent Ryan, like Mario, a letter saying that he had not completed the year and that he could repeat the year, if he wished. Like Mario, Ryan’s family had moved house, so he did not receive the letter straightaway. Like Mario, Ryan did not respond. In Ryan’s interview in June 2008, he commented that he would be happy to repeat the year. However, in his research interview in November 2008, Ryan related how, because his family had needed his financial support, he had been doing a full time job in retail. Ryan had therefore not as yet been able to return to HE. However, it appeared that Ryan’s family were now keen for Ryan to return to university. Ryan was still in contact with peers from the progression course at Townley, who were apparently encouraging him to return to HE. Ryan stated that he was considering contacting the HE Fine Art tutors, but that he did not know how to go about this:

> I thought, ‘I have to call Townley.’ I don’t know. I’m a bit nervous about that. I don’t know. It feels weird, because it’s like when I do call, it’s like, I have to be, ‘It’s me, Ryan. Do you remember me?’ or something like that. It just feels really weird. (November 2008)
'stunted' growth: three students followed a pattern of 'stunted' growth, as described by one of the students. Three students at Townley did not complete the first year, though their patterns of transition during the year differed.

Many students indicated that, within these patterns of transition, there were periods of ups and downs.

7.7 KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE HE ARTS SECTOR

- Should there be greater consistency across courses, and perhaps across institutions, in students' initial experience of HE?
- How might students' awareness of HE expectations most effectively be developed?
- How might different patterns of student transition to HE be supported effectively?
8.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter on students' development in the second year of HE is based on the accounts of:

> full time students at Townley and Norton of their first term in the second year
> part time students in Townley of their third year (equivalent to the first half of the second year full time BA) and the first term of their fourth year.

8.2 DEMANDS OF THE SECOND YEAR

The next year (i.e. the second year) gets much harder... It's tougher for everybody. It ratchets up a gear. (Course Director, Townley)

Although many students thought that the demands of the second year were more intense than those of the first, a number of students were explicit that they preferred this. Perhaps paradoxically, the greater demands of the second year helped some students to deal with issues experienced in the first year, in working effectively over the course of a project: regular, demanding deadlines can help to increase focus. Several students commented that it was only through the greater demands of the second year that they felt they were getting value for money from their university experience. It was particularly Graphic Design students at both Townley and Norton, and Min, the Ceramic Design student at Townley, who commented that the pace of the second year was quicker than that of the first year, and that tutor expectations about student output were higher.

The points above are revealed in comments made by Marcus and Martinho, who, as previously stated, had chosen the advertising pathway in the second year, in part because there was plenty of tutor contact on this pathway. Marcus, in spite of the more demanding course timetable, took on extra college commitments, to maximise gain from university:

It's (i.e. the second year) got plenty of, [pause] well for one, it's busy. The thing I didn't like last year was that I had to take on two briefs every fortnight (i.e. instead of one) to feel like I was doing something. This, this year, it's like Monday, I have a tutor, Tuesday, I have elective, Wednesday, I have another tutor who gives me a brief for Friday, Friday I meet that tutor and we're handing in a brief, and then he's given us another brief for the next Wednesday. Then on Monday we've got to hand in a brief that the other tutor's given us. Tomorrow, we're going to have another tutor that I'll be meeting for the first time, that'll start giving us longer briefs than just weekly ones. But, so it's very like that (clicks fingers to indicate speed), very quick, and I think so far we've had about 15 or
16 briefs including, because I took photography as well, so there’s briefs on Monday for photography that you have to do for like either one week or three weeks. Then I also joined a writing workshop on Thursday. And I joined the exhibition, the second year exhibition organisation kind of team, so this year is very busy. And I like that. (Marcus, November 2008)

It’s a lot more work than last year. But it’s better. Last year was a bit laidback... If you’ve got more stuff to do in a shorter period of time, then you sort of feel like you’re really working hard and getting your investment. It’s worth it. And you’re learning. You learn more, you know, because, you know, you see your tutors a lot more often and you learn more. Yeah, you get your money’s worth, yeah. Because, yeah, I mean, just in the last year, I’m into five something thousand pounds of debt, you know... I’d rather, you know, feel the pressure and do well, than not feel any pressure and do little. (Martinho, November 2008)

In contrast to Marcus and Martinho, Jacob felt that he was not responding well to the pressure of the second year:

Quite stressful (i.e. the second year), a lot more work. And everyone’s, like, really upped their gear and everyone’s really competing against one another and the work is, like, really to a high standard ... I thought it would really be the same as the first year, but obviously not. (November 2008)

Jacob appears to have been unclear about expectations in the second year; this may have helped to increase his stress.

BA Graphic Design students at Norton had explicitly been told, at the start of the academic year 2008-09, that they should expect to work much harder in the second than in the first year. Liz’s comments reveal that demands had increased:

This year is a lot harder than last year. There is a hell of a lot more work, like it feels like it is double to be honest, and basically it is just finding time to fit it all in. I did want to get a job this year but I have just not got the time. (November 2008)

B.3 CLARITY ABOUT EXPECTATIONS

There was a lot of evidence that these students perceived that, overall, in the second year they had a much clearer understanding of HE expectations about approach to work than had been the case in the first year, as the comment below reveals:

Last year was such a blur for a lot of us. A lot of us felt we were stumbling around and weren’t really sure what was asked of us. But this year, it feels completely clear...I know where I’m coming from. I know what’s asked of me. (November 2008)

B.4 EMOTIONS ABOUT THE SECOND YEAR

Overall, students’ description of their emotional response to the second year suggested that, whilst unsurprisingly they still experienced challenges, they felt much more settled about themselves within HE Art and Design. For example, one student highlights that he is more confident about his work. This is even though he thinks that his doubts about conceptual Art mean he does not fit within a perceived HEI blueprint for practice:

I’m a lot more content with myself. I’m a lot more comfortable with my work. I feel I’m able to discuss my ideas in a coherent way. I’m confident and comfortable with the work I make, even though I don’t necessarily fit, think it fits in with what’s being taught. I don’t actually mind, as long, to me, it’s more important that I’m happy with my work. (November 2008)

Several students mentioned feeling calmer in the second year than in the first, as in:

I am very calm actually. I’m not really panicking about anything. I’m just doing my work, what I need to do and I think things are going well, very well actually, and I’m really proud of my own progress. (November 2008)

B.5 CHANGING APPROACH TO WORK

There was also considerable evidence of students being proactive in relation to lessons they had learnt about their approach to work in the first year, in terms of, for instance, focusing consistently on work, and approaching tutors and support tutors for help. For example, throughout one student’s second year interview, she demonstrated that she was building on her errors in the first year, as the following excerpt reflects:
In her second year interview, Anna also shows that she approaches mistakes as creative possibilities:

“It’s basically, um, a technique called ladder, but I made a mistake so I only knitted maybe ten rows, and I took it off the machine, and then it sort of curled up like this, and I thought, ‘Oh, that’s really something I can use for my sleeves,’ because I wanted these sort of loops and bits hanging down, so.” (November 2008)

### 8.7 THE PART TIME BA

The part time BA Course Director at Townley highlighted that one advantage of students from widening participation backgrounds completing a Fine Art degree part time over five years is that this gives plenty of time for development:

“Because there’s a long time. Five years is a long time for them to develop that, and I think in that sense part time is a really good route. The longer route is better for the students who have not been aware of that you can have an intellectual debate or discussion.”

Overall, the part time students often demonstrated sophisticated skills in terms of, for instance, critical reflection; making connections, sometimes unusual, between theory and practice; articulating a coherent, original artistic practice; and/or demonstrating striking confidence in placing their own experience at the heart of practice. It is the case that, whilst their 2008-09 interview took place at the same time point as full time students, relatively, the part time students were further on in the second year than the full time students10. This may help to explain the part time students’ often well honed skills. It may also relate to the Course Director’s observation that part time students have, over their degree, two years longer than full time students for reflection and development.

10 The part time students were in the equivalent of the second half of the second year, whilst the full time students were in the first part of the second year.
8.8 THE FdA

FdA students commented that the second year of the FdA required a greater degree of student independence than had been the case in the first year. Students perceived that this independence was reflected in, for instance, less tightly defined briefs and by tutors facilitating, rather than directing, students’ work. Students’ accounts revealed that the greater structure of the first year had prepared them well for the independence required in the second year:

Last year, a lot of it was brief led. A lot of it was brief led, and you know, we obviously had to put our own stamp on the brief, but it was still quite confined in many ways. This year felt a lot more free flowing. I mean, if you actually look around the class, there’s no work that is similar to anyone else’s. (December 2008)

It’s (the second year) very, you’re leading it in a sense, and the tutors are more giving advice instead of leading you. They’re giving advice and they’re asking you whether it’s working, instead of them telling you, ‘No it’s not working.’ I think last year, it was very led by the hand and we were guided. I think some people might have needed that. I kind of needed that, because I wasn’t really sure what my practice of making work was. I didn’t know what I was about, whether I wanted to do drawing, sculpture, all of that. Then the second year is much more just you making your own practice. (December 2008)

8.9 MANAGING TRANSITIONS

Overview

Whilst all the second year students, except for Chango, had made the transition to HE, there were further transitions for students on some courses to manage.

Transitions and the FdA

At the time of the second year research interviews, the FdA students were deciding whether to apply for Townley’s bridging course, to enter the BA Fine Art course in the third year; whether to apply for the third year of a BA at another HEI; or whether to complete their studies with the FdA. Unsurprisingly, this uncertainty prompted considerable self-questioning. Questions included those which tried to understand how an FdA related to other degrees:

Whether, sort of, the academic side or the Art world sees this as a degree or, like I say, if I pass the course, is it a degree? Is it not a degree? Is it just an FdA, whatever FdA stands for? It’s like, it’s all those little questions. I still haven’t found the answer. (Nick, December 2008)

Whilst Claire’s confidence had developed greatly over the FdA, thinking about whether or not to apply for the BA caused her to question her ability:

It’s (the BA) a level higher type thing and I’m like, ‘I might not get in.’ And I’m thinking, still thinking that I might not get in. There’s a chance that I might not go and be able to do it. They might not like what I’ve got or something like that… I’d love to do it, and I probably will try and do it, hopefully. It would be amazing, but I have this weird feeling that it’s not going to happen. (December 2008)

Transitions and the part time Fine Art BA

As previously highlighted, at the start of the fifth year of HE, the part time Fine Art BA students join the third year full time BA Fine Art students at Townley. The part time students’ fifth year of study is full time. In their interviews in December 2008, and in the course session attended by CH, the students demonstrated considerable uncertainty about this transition. This was for a range of reasons. A couple of students, who had worked full time, were anxious about how they would manage financially in the fifth year. CH observed that the part time students were a closely knit group who supported each other intellectually and emotionally. For example, in the session attended by CH, course members had very stimulating discussions about Art, all day, with course tutors in the role of facilitators. Understandably, students felt apprehensive about losing their group dynamics, and becoming part of a much larger course. Furthermore, the BA Fine Art they were joining had pathways; there was considerable discussion in the course session about which pathway individuals should select.

8.10 LOOKING OUTWARDS

Overview

There was evidence that, in the second year, some of these students were focusing on looking outwards, beyond the HEI, with aspects of their Art and Design practice.
Work-based learning and work experience

The FdA Course Director arranged students’ work-based learning in the first year. In the second year, students were expected to arrange it themselves. The three FdA students interviewed in the second year had very clear ideas about what they planned to do for work-based learning. Nick had arranged to work with the artist Hew Locke, because he, like Nick, used found objects in his practice. Claire was going to work with young children in the library where her mother worked. Claire was going to run workshops on making boxes with young children, building on her project on expressing her aspects of her identity, discussed in Chapter 3. Fahima planned to do her work experience with children with disabilities, because she wanted to teach and because her younger brother was autistic.

The Graphic Design students at Norton were starting to think about what they wanted to arrange for their work-based learning, which apparently took place in the summer of the second year. BA Graphic Design students at Townley were having very initial thoughts about work-based learning.

The FdA students appeared to have grappled with thoughts about their future employment more than many other students at Townley. For example, Nick’s experience of first year work-based learning, working with the Arts in a mental health charity, had complemented his prior employment working with people with disabilities. After the first year work-based learning, Nick thought that he might work with the Arts and adults with mental health issues after graduating. However, going to a talk by Hew Locke had led Nick to reflect that there might be a role for him in the Art world, because of broad similarities in their practices. Nick therefore arranged the second year work experience with Hew Locke, in part to explore what this role might be.

Norton’s business course

All students at Norton had to attend a weekly seminar on how to run your own business, during the autumn term of the second year. The majority of students perceived that this was useful in terms of planning for their work experience and the business course was useful. The course has made Liz aware of how much there is to consider in starting a business, and of specifics, such as costs and copyright:

> The work experience and talking about all of that it does make you think about employment, because we do business studies as well. We have got to think of our own like business and make it up, and see how much it will all cost to set up, so it makes you think about it, yes. It is a really important part of the course, because if I left uni, I wouldn’t know where to start...There is so much to think about when you have got to set up for yourself. There is all like the copyright issues and stuff like that. I mean it just doesn’t make you think about it until you do it. (November 2008)

Liz says that she learnt a great deal through the business course, even though she already has experience of different aspects of business, such as costings, through working in her father’s caravan re-upholstery business (Chapter 3).

Though Karen, who wanted to start up a café with an Art gallery, found the business course dull, she acknowledged that it was useful. Karen viewed the business course as a means of finding out about whether her business plans were feasible:

> I mean lately we are doing a thing called Enterprise Studies and some, sometimes I find it really quite, well, boring, to say the least, ‘cos a lot of it is figures, facts and figures and things like that. But on the other side of it, like my shop idea, I’m using that for it and I’m trying, you know, I’m seeing if it’s actually feasible to do that, you know, looking. And it will be interesting to see at the end of it what it actually looks like. I will be able to do that. And I think it’s quite useful. (November 2008)

A minority of BA Fine Art students did not think that the business course was helpful to them. One of these students, Heather, felt pressurized by the course:

> I think it was the enterprise, because I got really stressed in that class, because [pause] she’s obviously trying to help us, and trying to get us to think about how we could market ourselves and things, but I don’t believe that you can really market yourself as an artist, unless you’ve got a little shop, and you’re painting boats and things like that, which isn’t what, the sort of Art which I would want to do. (November 2008)

However, the business course had an impact on Heather’s planning for the future, though the impact was probably not that intended by the course. In her first year interviews, Heather had mentioned that she was considering going straight on to do an MA, after completing
the BA. When asked about this again in November 2008, Heather said that the enterprise course had changed her thinking about the MA. The course had made Heather realise that she did not want to use her artistic practice to earn her living. Heather, at the time of the second year interviews, was planning to go back to college after graduation, to do a beauty qualification. Heather planned then to use employment in this field to finance her MA.

Paul, another Fine Art student, highlighted that, whilst his initial response to the business course was fairly negative, he could identify useful aspects of it when he reflected further:

Paul: But generally in the lecture (business) it’s quite obvious stuff.

CH: When you say quite obvious, what kind of things have you found quite obvious?

Paul: Actually no, that’s not entirely true, because we learnt about copyright that I didn’t know. But I knew some of the things, but then generally everybody knows some things, don’t they? (November 2008)

Business plans

A small minority of students showed that they had thought in some detail about starting up their own business. The example of Karen has been cited above. At the time of the second year interviews, Min, a BA Ceramic Design student, was considering developing a ceramics business based in the UK and in Vietnam, his country of origin. Min had a clear rationale for involving Vietnam: cheap labour, his contacts with factory owners and his knowledge of the country:

I was thinking of either going to Vietnam or something, back to there, back to my own country, and then, because employment is pretty cheap, the making of ceramics is cheap down there, I would like to make it and then get it manufactured there, and then also selling it back in this country for a decent price. I know people there who own factories and stuff already, so they kind of talk to me about it all the time. If I have an idea, I always tell someone who is close to me, and they always tell me, ‘Oh have you looked here?’ and then from there I always research a bit and then talk to, go find further information. (November 2008)

A couple of students demonstrated strategic thinking in highlighting that they planned to work in an organisation initially after graduation. Then they planned to use that learning, as well as their HE experience, to start up their own business, if there were no attractive opportunities for development within the organisation. For example, Marcus said:

I will probably go to an advertising agency, probably try and get some work experience for maybe six or seven years, and then I’d like to stay with somewhere for quite a period of time. See if there’s opportunities to build my way up, but if there wasn’t, I think after six and seven years, I would like to start my own business in advertising, and just try and utilise the skills that I may have gained from the business aspect. (November 2008)

In his first year interviews, Marcus was adamant that he did not want to be a ‘struggling artist’ and that he needed ‘to get (his) business socks on.’ Marcus attributed this perspective to his experience of growing up in a family on benefits.

Exhibitions

By the time of the second year interviews, Townley part time Fine Art BA and BA Textile Design students had had exhibitions of their work. For both courses, the exhibition had been the focus of activity throughout the first term of the academic year 2008-09. The Textile Design students had worked in two out of the three course pathways over the autumn term. The course then displayed the best of their work in a large room at Townley.

The part time Fine Art students had worked in groups to exhibit their work in spaces identified by them. They had therefore thought in detail about how to select a space; what to make to exhibit; how their work fitted with other members of the group; the relationship between the space and the work; and the impact of the space and the work on the audience. A group of the part time students had previously had an exhibition of their work in 2007-08. These students had also displayed their work on a website they had developed, for young artists.

Commissions

There was evidence that some students were interested in developing commissions in the second year. For example, Jackie’s work in the library in a town in the East of England has been described in Chapter 5. Abelia was considering how to approach people who

11 I.e. in the equivalent of the first half of the second year.
attended her church, to encourage them to commission her to do their portraits. Abelia had received strong encouragement from her family to do this. Abelia said she had been held back by not knowing how to go about this type of negotiation. Jacob was developing a flyer advertising his skills, to try to gain freelance work in Graphic Design. Michele had had a range of commissions from neighbours to paint their dogs.

Further degrees
A small minority of students, including Heather as above, mentioned that they were considering doing MA's after their first degree. The majority of these students had reflected on different aspects of an MA. Jackie, for instance, wants to stay at Townley to do a Master's. This is because doing an MA would entail ‘stepping out of (her) comfort zone creatively’. Jackie would therefore prefer to be in a familiar environment. It is unlikely that Jackie would have issues in financing an MA, as both she and her husband have worked in senior positions. At the time of the interviews, Jackie’s husband still did some consultancy.

Laura has also thought about the financial implications of a Master's. Laura’s financial planning differs from Annette’s, in part because Laura’s subject is Textile Design:

"I'd probably try and get sponsored by a company, because I know that you can. Companies sponsor students to do MA's and then you work for the company for about a year afterwards. (November 2008)"

The tutor with whom Laura has had a close relationship since her National Diploma (Chapter 4) has suggested that Laura should consider an MA in Fashion, building on Laura's earlier interest in Fashion and her experience of Textile Design. Laura does not appear to find the prospect of contacting potential sponsors offputting:

"I think you just need to get in to contact with all the companies, email them and arrange interviews with them, and just try and liaise with them as much as you can, and be quite persistent. (November 2008)"

Laura did, however, highlight a tension between planning for the future and managing current course demands.

Workshops
Laura became very involved in helping with widening participation workshops. In both her first and second year, she helped with the NALN progression course at Townley, both with weekly course sessions and the summer school. As Laura is strong in ICT, she had helped with a workshop to encourage girls of secondary school age to take up careers in ICT, held during the autumn term of the second year. Laura has also assisted with sessions when youth groups have used Townley’s facilities.

And I think it would be important to do that because I wouldn’t want to go through worrying about money, because I know from this experience that you can’t focus so well.

Laura has also thought about the financial implications of a Master’s. Laura’s financial planning differs from Annette’s, in part because Laura’s subject is Textile Design:

"I think you just need to get in to contact with all the companies, email them and arrange interviews with them, and just try and liaise with them as much as you can, and be quite persistent. (November 2008)"

Annette attributes her drive to her perception that, because of her previous educational experience, she has under-achieved, particularly in comparison with her peers on the course. Annette has researched Master's degrees and has decided that she would like to apply for an MA in Sculpture in a prestigious London HEI. Annette in part wants to go to this HEI because the MA has an emphasis on drawing, which Annette is good at.

Annette has struggled financially during the part time BA, juggling work, the BA and also studying for a National Diploma in Graphic Design. In interview, Annette has talked in detail about the difficulties in balancing needing to work in paid employment, with being able to maintain a focus on Art and Design. Annette uses this tension to help her plan ahead. In December 2008, Annette observed that, initially after the BA, she may work as a designer, and that she may then work freelance in the holidays during the MA:
Laura did outstandingly well in the first year, gaining the equivalent of a first for her studio work. Laura considered that her strongest area of Textile Design was print. At the end of the first term of the second year, Textile Design students had to choose a pathway to follow for the rest of the BA. Laura had thought that she would choose print. However, Laura’s work in print during the first term of the second year did not work out as anticipated:

And the first five weeks I was in the print room, and it did go well [pause], ’cos originally I wanted to do print. That’s what I wanted to specialise in for this whole course. That’s the whole reason I came here. And in the first year print went really well, so I was really, sort of, really enthusiastic about doing print, but I think this year in the first term, print didn’t really go so well. [pause] I think it was just [pause] the images that I had were fine, but I think maybe I chose slightly, slightly the wrong fabrics and [pause] slightly too many colours and got the compositions slightly wrong, but they still came out quite good. (November 2008)

Laura has strategies to address the issues she reports in her work. The above shows that Laura can reflect critically on her work to analyse any mistakes she has made. Laura acted promptly on tutor feedback, and used her strengths in Photoshop and digital printing to do digital as well as screen printing. In contrast to print, the weave that Laura did in the first term of the second year went better than expected. This left Laura feeling confused about which pathway to select for the rest of the course:

I don’t know. I’m a bit confused at the moment. Because now I’m doing weave, and I had my mind set on print, so I wasn’t really too worried about weave, and I worked really, really hard for print, even though it didn’t really pay off in the end, but now weaving’s going really well. So now I’m really confused. (November 2008)

By Christmas, Laura had made a decision which she appeared to be settled about:

I have chosen weave. I got 82% for it, which was the better of the two, so I am happy and excited to be starting the next term in which we will be doing a menswear project for Timothy Everett. (Email, December 2008)

Laura is sufficiently flexible not to be put off by not doing as well in print as she had anticipated, and to feel positive about her altered focus on weave.

Chango

Chapter 7 related how Chango had considered leaving HE during the first year of the Graphic Design BA. Towards the end of the first year, Chango highlighted a resolve to complete HE. However, in his second year interview, Chango said that he wanted to defer his university place. Chango felt that he had received little tutor feedback on the illustration pathway in the first term of the second year, though he also acknowledged that he had not attended the majority of sessions. Chango stated that he would have liked to work in a studio environment at HE. Unlike Marcus and Martinho, Chango did not feel he was getting value for money from the second year. Chango underlined that he felt passionate about Art, but that the work at university did not enable him to express his creativity. Chango commented that he had experienced a range of negative emotions about HE, and that he had found reflecting about whether to defer his HE place very stressful. In November 2008, Chango stated that he felt:

Not so much depressed anymore, just more annoyed, because I just felt like I’d been here before and tried to make it work, and now it’s gone back to square one. It was just annoying being back here again, and like battling with my own thoughts, trying to kind of motivate myself and thinking, ‘Okay if I look at it this way, it’s interesting,’ but it wasn’t, you know. The same problems from the first year were still there. They were just kind of covered up.
The long term advantages of a degree from Townley were not enough to motivate Chango to continue HE:

> I know it’s an amazing uni, and I know that, like once I come out of Townley, I’m going to get a high paying job, or at least get the advantage over someone that went to somewhere else like (name of large new university) or something, but it’s a long three years if your heart’s not in it. (November 2008)

Chango planned to spend his time developing a magazine with friends, making his own work and trying to get a job in the creative industries.

**Downs through personal circumstances**

Chapter 4 discussed how personal circumstances outside HE created issues for Michele and Sara within HE. They apparently experienced problems over the summer and in the first part of the first term in the second year. By the November 2008 interviews, both said that they were managing the demands of HE again.

Pearl had had to defer the third year of the part time BA for a year, because she was nursing her dying mother at home.

**Short term downs**

Unsurprisingly, within generally positive development in the second year, some students experienced short term downs. For example, Chapter 2 discussed how Claire had been initially distressed by feedback at the end of one week from a stand-in tutor about her term’s project. She dealt with this by discussing the feedback at length with her family over the weekend and with her course tutor the next Monday. By the end of Monday morning, when Claire had her research interview, Claire had resolved to put the stand-in tutor’s comments to one side, and to continue as before with her project.

8.12 STUDENTS’ VIEWS ON THE SUCCESSFUL ART AND DESIGN STUDENT

Across the first and second year interviews, many students’ comments highlighted their perceptions of important qualities in a successful HE Art and Design student. Students tended to cite a wider range of personal qualities than some tutors did, who tended to focus on points such as making connections between, for example, theory and practice. Students did not tend to comment in detail on intellectual skills. Below is a composite student account of characteristics of the successful HE Art and Design student:

> having commitment. Living for Art and Design to the extent of sacrificing other aspects of life (e.g. standard of living) for Art. In the case of one student, living for Art and Design to the extent of working all the time
> being passionate about Art
> challenging self, pushing boundaries, experimenting, working out of their comfort zone
> being reflective, critical and questioning
> making connections e.g. between other artists and their work
> being able to tolerate uncertainty
> being prepared to struggle, to develop their artistic practice
> being self-directing
> being self-motivating
> using initiative and being proactive, not reactive
> being organised in their approach to work, over the course of a project
> being able to use mistakes to re-develop their work
> being both confident and humble (the latter in accepting feedback)
> welcoming feedback from tutors and peers
> having sufficient confidence not to make negative comparisons between their own work and that of peers
> being able to generate commissions
> tailoring commissions and, to some extent, exhibition pieces to audience
> being able to articulate their practice orally and in writing
> being able to manage the written demands of the HE course, in terms of passing the essay strands of the course.

8.13 SUMMARY

**Overall perceptions**

> Students thought that the demands of the second year were more intense than those of the first. The large majority of students preferred this.
> Several students commented that they were getting much better value for money in the second than in the first year.
> Most students highlighted that they had a much clearer understanding of HE expectations in the second than in the first year.
> Students tended to feel more settled about themselves within HE Art and Design.
Dealing with downs
> Some students reported experiencing downs in the second year, such as:
  » not performing as anticipated in strands of the course
  » in the case of one student, deciding to defer his HE place
  » personal circumstances impacting upon students’ engagement in HE.

A successful Art and Design student
> Across interviews, many students highlighted characteristics of a successful Art and Design student, from, for instance, commitment and passion for Art, to the capacity to be critical and reflective about Art. Students tended to focus on personal attributes, rather than detailed analysis of intellectual skills.

8.14 KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE HE ARTS SECTOR
> How may it be ensured that students manage transitions in the second year effectively?
> How may institutions support students in developing their thinking about future employment or post-graduate study, and their involvement in Arts related activities outside the HE course?
> How may the composite student account of qualities of the successful Art and Design student be disseminated to a wider group of students, to promote critical reflection on identity within Art and Design?

Looking beyond the HEI
> There was considerable evidence of some students looking outwards, beyond the HEI, in relation to their artistic practice, in terms of:
  » undertaking work-based learning and work experience
  » developing their thinking about employment, through, for instance, the Norton business enterprise course
  » developing plans to start businesses
  » exhibiting their work
  » winning and looking for commissions
  » considering post-graduate study.

The part time BA
> The often sophisticated range of skills demonstrated by part time students may be related to being at a later stage of the course than the full time students, and to the fact that, over the course, they have a longer period of time in which to develop their work than full time students.

The FdA
> FdA students perceived that the second year was more independent than the first, and that the structure of the first year had prepared them well for managing the second year.

Second year transitions
> Students on some courses have transitions to manage in the second year:
  » FdA students have to decide whether to apply for Townley’s bridging course to join the Fine Art BA in the third year, apply for a BA at another HEI, or complete their studies.
  » At the end of 2008-09, part time Fine Art students become full time and join the third year of the full time Fine Art BA.
> Both FdA and part time students voiced doubts about these transitions.

There was evidence of second year students changing their approach to work, and of putting subject learning into practice, based on the lessons of the first year.

There was evidence of second year students changing their approach to work, and of putting subject learning into practice, based on the lessons of the first year.
9.1 OVERVIEW
This chapter presents case studies of three students who were on the 2006-07 progression course at Townley, but who did not progress to Townley.

9.2 SABRENA
Sabrena is a mature, minority ethnic student with physical and learning disabilities, including dyslexia. Sabrena has had cancer in recent years. Sabrena was explicit about how her experience of abuse has influenced her Art:

I have a whole history of very severe abuse, and until just recently, in the last couple of years, it wasn’t uncovered to anybody, and I think always my Art work, like the only real me was my personal Art work diaries, which I think even now I wouldn’t show to anyone… I’m starting to understand how you can express yourself into your work. (February 2007)

Sabrena left grammar school at 15. Sabrena described how the school did not present Art as a viable career option for working class students. Sabrena passed O levels in Art, English Literature and Maths, and Art A level, after leaving school. Sabrena worked primarily in nursing, though she has also done jobs such as washing dishes. More recently, Sabrena worked as an Art therapist.

Sabrena described how she has loved Art throughout her life and how she wishes she could have gone to Art college after leaving school. When this research started, Sabrena was on a Foundation Diploma at an FE college. All Sabrena’s comments, over the three years of this research, demonstrate her love of Art. Sabrena’s output was prolific and, during the progression course, she spent a lot of time visiting galleries and making very detailed notes on what she saw. However, at the portfolio review, the two tutors interviewing indicated that Sabrena should not apply for the Fine Art BA. Sabrena’s sense of rejection from the portfolio review interview is apparent in the following:

Because if I’d listened to him (the BA tutor conducting the portfolio review), I would never have pursued it, because he more or less said to me, 'Don’t bother.’ He more or less told me, ‘Just go home and do it at home, and that’s it. Don’t bother, because you’ve got nothing to offer at all.’ (June 2008)
Sabrena and her peers interpreted her rejection from the Fine Art BA at Townley primarily in terms of her work being too figurative for Townley’s BA. Through the portfolio review, Sabrena lost a great deal of confidence:

I was so low because of them telling me that... I sort of lost complete confidence in everything... This kind of snobbish Townley, they really made us feel that, ‘Who are you that you dare and come for this interview (portfolio review)?’ (June 2008)

Sabrena’s research interviews, including the most recent in December 2008, indicate that the portfolio review has had a long term, negative impact on Sabrena.

Sabrena applied for the FdA at Townley, but did not gain a place. Sabrena described how she did not talk about the personal influences on her practice in the FdA interview:

I know that I went wrong on my interview, when she asked me, ‘How come you are so interested with Africa, and this and this and this?’ I don’t know, something made me go very introvert, and I didn’t tell her about my own ethnic identity, and didn’t speak about anything to her, so it looked like I was witholding. All your work is all about this, but you yourself can’t identify with it, so therefore what’s the point? But I could very well identify with it, but I didn’t tell her that on the interview. (June 2008)

Whilst on the Foundation Diploma and applying for university, Sabrena said that she lost her sense of identity as an artist, because her Foundation tutor and Townley had apparently urged her to move away from figurative work:

It was sort of like, ‘Stop being figurative. Stop doing this. Stop doing that,’ and I was becoming lost. I wasn’t expressing myself. (June 2008)

Sabrena struggles with the literacy demands of the course. For instance, Sabrena apparently finds any book, except for the Bible, difficult to read.

Mariana persuaded Sabrena to go with her to an Open Day at Waterpoint, a large new university. Though Sabrena had largely dismissed university after feeling crushed by the portfolio review, Sabrena found that she was very attracted by the facilities and by the friendly atmosphere at Waterpoint. Sabrena therefore applied to and gained a place at Waterpoint. During her first and second year at university, Sabrena has started making very large metalwork pieces, which are visually extremely striking, and has relished experimenting with metalwork.

Whilst Sabrena thought that her practice has developed greatly during her first and second year at university, she considered that there was relatively little tutorial support at Waterpoint. Sabrena felt she gained more help from support staff than from lecturers:

The technicians are all there to help you, and they’re much more informative than the teachers really... Technicians somehow reflect, well they reflect what you get in your degree. (November 2008)

By the second year interview, like some of the Townley and Norton students, Sabrena was beginning to think about seeking commissions. As well as her university work and visiting as many galleries as possible, Sabrena works on a voluntary basis at two galleries. Whilst at university, Sabrena has developed a long term ambition of having her own studio.

9.3 MARIANA

Mariana is one of the two students who perceives herself as being from the underclass (Chapter 2). Mariana is a mixed race, mature student who has mental health issues and who is dyslexic and dysphraxic. Mariana has also had significant health issues, including cancer and psoriasis.

From her account, Mariana had an exceptionally challenging childhood. Her mother was schizophrenic and her father had been a drug dealer, who had died when Mariana was in her teens. Mariana described how, as a child, she had lived in chaos and had often been hungry. Apparently, the school had failed to realise that she needed support:

There were points when I was really young that we were so hungry we were picking up food from the floor in the street ... I would go to school with my toes sticking out of my shoes, like rips in my coat at the shoulders, patches on my things, my hair matted, because we would quite often not have electricity or hot water, and you couldn’t have a bath. ... So I would go to school in a terrible state, and I’d hand in homework if I’d done it, and their focus would be on, ‘Actually, your handwriting is coming off the lines.’ I’d be sitting there in that state, my face all covered in dirt, clearly malnourished, but no, not...
Mariana talked, across her interviews, about the insidiously negative effects of social class, making comments such as:

I think people can tell when you're poor there's that, even if you do your best to scrub up well and everything, you know, there are certain things in your language that give you away, or in your demeanour, or whatever, so straightaway they're like (makes a splat sound). (July 2008)

Mariana perceived that her social class had, over her lifetime, suppressed her ambitions and opportunities. When asked what she counts as success, Mariana responded:

Really, really, really basic, just being alive... because I did not expect to get off the estate (where Mariana grew up) alive. I didn't expect that at all... I left when I was 29, because I was waiting all that time to peg it really... So for me, yeah, success is just being alive for a long time, now. Yeah, in the last few years, it's started to be less about just surviving, because before that it was, 'Just stay alive, no matter what. Just stay alive.' Now I feel frustrated because I feel... that a lot of my youth has slipped away, has been wasted... I start trying to do something that's not about surviving. It's about living, about having a future, getting an education, get some kind of control over your health, get rid of the psoriasis, get rid of the cancer, eat better, find somewhere nice for me and the kitties to live, but still I feel like I am stuck always at the beginning. (July 2008)

The above illustrates that, although Mariana perceives that her horizons have expanded, significant progress is difficult. Mariana highlighted that her parents, through their life circumstances, had provided a negative role model:

All you can see is your parents failing all the time, and to a certain degree, yeah, it teaches you how to fail. That's the main lesson it teaches you. If you're going to learn one thing, you're going to learn how not to live, and then I suppose it teaches you not to try, which is the next big lesson. (July 2008)

The two comments above underline the deeply rooted psychological legacy of Mariana's negative experiences in childhood, in terms of how she views her future.

However, though Mariana's childhood had been very difficult, Mariana's father had encouraged her to read widely. They apparently discussed books, films and music at length together. When Mariana became a school refuser, she used to go to the public library to read. As a result, Mariana was very articulate and drew on a range of literary, film and musical references in her research interviews. Though Mariana did not have a bed in the flat she moved into in 2008, she had a bookcase piled with books (as observed in July 2008).

Mariana attended the progression course at T ownley, through the Foundation Diploma she was on at a local FE college, with Sabrena and Nick. Mariana, like Sabrena, had a very negative experience of the progression course portfolio review interview (Chapter 6) referring to it as:

The Townley interview debacle, if I start swearing about that, I'll never stop. (July 2008)

After the portfolio review interview, Mariana decided not to apply to T ownley and stopped attending the progression course. Mariana attended an Open Day at Waterpoint University, apparently not intending to go there. However, at the Open Day, Mariana was attracted to the HEI by the environment and the interest tutors demonstrated in her.

They (the lecturers) were interested in me when I was at the Open Day. They seemed very keen on the questions I was asking them, and there was lots of eye contact from the tutors. So I felt included and that they were saying, 'Come here, yeah, you'll have a good time;' kind of thing. And then when I had the interview with them, and the tutor who did the interview understood what I was talking about so much better than anybody at (name of FE college) had. She understood my work. (July 2008)

Mariana's sense of being 'included' and 'understood' contrasted with her perception of Townley and her FE college.
Mariana was explicit, in all her research interviews, that her motivations about whether to go to university were mixed. Mariana argued, in all her interviews, that her main motivation was to have access to resources, such as equipment and materials. For instance, whilst Mariana was on Townley's progression course, she commented:

I suppose if I'm being straight out honest, it's (wanting to study HE Art and Design) because I don't have access to materials in any other way, as well as access to thousands, hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of equipment, and I'm never going to have that kind of money. So it's really for a very practical reason, that they have got the equipment I need... (January 2007)

In part, Mariana also decided to go to university, because she did not want to fall behind her peers.

Like a small number of other students (Chapter 6), Mariana perceived that she had been pushed into applying to HE:

You're kind of [pause] shooed on from the Foundation into uni straightaway, when it might not be the best thing for you. (December 2008)

In Mariana's view, she had not been able to withstand this pressure because she had been depressed and:

It seemed to be a fight to extract yourself from the process. (December 2008)

Because of her mental health issues, Mariana did not see herself someone who would pursue a career. This made Mariana think that she did not need a university degree. Mariana also did not feel ready for university, as a comment from her most recent interview illustrates:

On the personal level, I don't think that I was ready. I wasn't sure it was something I wanted to do at all really. (December 2008)

Before going to university, Mariana had had little understanding of university:
that's kind of your problem, because I'm really worried that I'm going to end up sleeping under a bridge. (July 2008)

As Mariana's observations above imply, her accommodation problems probably impacted upon her capacity to cope with Waterpoint's reported shortcomings. Whilst Sabrena managed to deal with, Mariana appeared not to want to tolerate issues at Waterpoint. Mariana did not complete her final assessment for the first year and, in July 2008, deferred her university place. By December 2008, Mariana's view of university appeared unremittingly negative:

Not to put too fine a point on it, university pretty much ruined my life ... It has really taken it out of me. It has been Groundhog Day... It has been really stressful, and I have to admit I have been very depressed and really, really struggled a lot.

As the above suggests, the experience of HE has had a negative effect on Mariana's mental health. Mariana said that, whilst her decision to defer her place at Waterpoint might appear negative to others, she viewed it as positive:

It would look to the outside like I've dropped out again, like I dropped out of school, like I dropped out of college, but actually the motivations are really different this time. I left because they're not good enough for what I want to do. And I'm serious enough about what I want to do that I'm not just going to drift through that, because that would be easier for me to do actually, to just stay in the uni and go with the flow. (July 2008)

Mariana highlighted that she had learnt through her negative experience of university:

It brought into sharp contrast for me that, whatever it is that I do next year, whether I go back to uni or to short term courses or whatever, I need to be really careful and really smart and really honest with myself. (December 2008)

After deciding to defer her place, Mariana initially tries to take pleasure in the small things in life, but realises that these are not enough for her, and that she has a deeply rooted drive to move forwards:

The thing that I've been realising over the past couple of weeks really is there is something in me, some sort of ambition or drive or something, the thing that meant, you know, I didn't end up in the gangs, I didn't end up on heroin, I didn't end up with kids that I can't take care of, that I didn't end up suffering the kind of mental health problems that my parents did... (December 2008)

In contrast to Mariana's statements about her difficulties in taking herself forwards, illustrated earlier in this case study, negative experience of HE may enable Mariana to act upon her more developed awareness of her drive.

9.6 FLORENCE

Florence has already been discussed in terms of inverted social class issues (Chapter 2). As Chapter 2 outlined, Florence is a middle class student who completed a National Diploma in one of the target feeder FE colleges for Townley's progression to HE course. Chapter 4 related how, when one of Florence's FE tutors discovered that Florence had attended a private school, in the spring term of the second year of the National Diploma, he apparently targeted her by, for instance, making negative comments about social class and her father's occupation. Some of the other students noticed this inverted discrimination. When Florence wanted to re-submit work to improve her National Diploma grades, the tutor apparently did not give her feedback on how to develop her work and then did not record the improved grades which Florence subsequently received.

Florence described in detail her emotional response to what appeared to be victimization:

(}Every morning I literally just wouldn't go (to college). I didn't want to go, and I started getting the bus because the bus stopped closer to college, and I was really getting so panicked I literally couldn't walk up the hill, because I really couldn't breathe, because it was really that bad. I felt like I was just being hated. It was really, really bad. (July 2007)

When Florence described her experience in research interviews in July and December 2008, she was explicit about her ongoing anger about this tutor, though distance had to some extent tempered this by December 2008:

I feel like I am over it, because my life has changed so much and so much has happened
Florence's planning extended to her career; in January 2007 she said that she wanted to run her own business in soft furnishings and curtains.

Florence gained a place on the Fine Art BA at Townley. However, Florence subsequently turned down this place, to study Law at a well regarded, new university. In her interviews in July and December 2008, Florence highlighted that the idea of studying Law had occurred to her suddenly, after she had applied to HE to study Art. Florence mentioned the idea one evening to her mother, who apparently has supported all Florence's educational decisions. Florence’s mother subsequently accompanied her on university visits. Florence said that she selected universities to visit randomly. After Florence gained a place for Law, she struggled about whether to choose Art or Law:

*I was really frightened. It was really hard. I really didn't know if I'd made the right decision at all. One day I'd wake up and say, 'Right, I'm going to Townley,' and then next day I'd wake up and say, 'No, no, no, I'm going to (name of new HEI).' It was really hard. I don't know if I can say I made the right decision. (July 2008)*

In her research interviews in July and December 2008, Florence related that, in the end, she chose Law, in part because she did not feel that Art was academic enough:

*It was just basically I felt like I needed a balance between the academic and the creative side, and I felt that in Art there was not enough of the academic for me. (July 2008)*

Florence stated that she wanted to do a subject which was very difficult at university. Florence had had relatively little experience of Art theory. She said that she had found the few essays they had written on the National Diploma very easy. Florence may have been unaware of the demands of essay writing in HE Art and Design.

It is likely that Florence’s family also influenced her choice of FE subject. Florence had two sisters who were apparently both very bright. In contrast, one of Florence’s sisters apparently had told Florence that her father thought that Florence was, in Florence’s words, ‘dim’. Florence’s father said little, but Florence perceived that he was more proud of her studying Law than if she had studied Art and Design. It is likely that Florence wanted to prove herself to her family.
Florence felt comfortable socially in the environment of the HEI:

> With (the HEI), it’s so much more like I can communicate with people and like everyone has been to a private school. I know that’s maybe a wrong way of thinking, but I just feel like I’m on a level and people don’t look at me. No one thinks I’m spoiled here at all. (July 2008)

However, Florence found Law at university very difficult and stressful. Florence failed the first examination. This was because she had not written any essays since GCSE, other than those on the National Diploma, whereas most of her peers had done A levels. Florence’s difficulties with essay writing were not resolved by attending study skills support, which she did not find useful. Whilst Florence stated that she enjoyed the challenge of getting to grips with Law, she also underlined that its level of difficulty had undermined her confidence:

> I always feel in this degree kind of clinging on... Law has pushed me to my limit, absolute limit... Right to my limits and beyond, oh God. (December 2008)

9.5 IMPLICATIONS OF THE CASE STUDIES

> These case studies, and others used throughout the report, reveal the capacity of case studies to illuminate key issues.
> The three students embody the diversity and complexity of educational and life experience across the students in the sample.
> Some of the issues raised by these case studies are, broadly, similar to issues raised through discussion of other students. For example, all three illustrate the potentially long term influences of family upon educational interests, experience and decision making.
> Whilst Chapter 2 highlight the diverse ways in which students respond to social class, Mariana’s case study powerfully illustrates the potentially destructive impact of poverty on educational and other life opportunities. At the same time, Mariana’s emerging awareness of her determination to progress, in spite of her challenging circumstances in the first year of HE, illustrates that responses to class, and therefore potentially to any associated opportunities, are dynamic over an individual’s life.
> Mariana and Florence starkly highlight the importance of careful career guidance about HE, based on listening to individual students about their motivations and life circumstances, and intervention at critical moments in students’ educational careers. For example, by her own admission, Mariana was not well placed to cope with university before HE, and in many respects her problems have intensified through her experience of HE. Mariana could probably have benefited from detailed career and life guidance, after deferring her HE place; if there was any available, Mariana was not aware of it.
> The three case studies epitomise the powerfully negative impact which some staff can have on students, and contrast with the large majority of staff discussed in Chapter 4. The staff these students focus on appear to be destructive, disinterested and/or disorganised, and do not tailor their approach appropriately to individual students. For instance, whilst Florence’s decision not to do Art appears also related to family, her FE tutor undoubtedly had a very significant impact on her decision making. As a result, HE Art and Design lost a strong student and Florence instead chose a subject with which she struggles. As touched on in Chapter 2, this FE tutor’s inverted approach to social class underlines the importance of acknowledging the strengths and potential of all students, rather than privileging specific social groups.
> Mariana and Sabrena are still affected by a sense of rejection by Townley. In spite of this and the reported lack of staff support at Waterpoint, Sabrena’s artistic practice has flourished. Perhaps this is to some extent because of Sabrena’s realisation, in part through the FdA interview, of the importance of using her identity in her work, and of being able to articulate its use. Again, as in Chapter 3, this realisation and Sabrena’s striking artistic practice underline the rich diversity which students from widening participation backgrounds can bring to HE Art and Design.

9.6 KEY QUESTION FOR THE HE ARTS SECTOR

> How might these case studies be used to develop awareness of widening participation?
References


Carter, R. (2008) ‘Right, well, OK, so, it’s like, you know, isn’t it, I suppose: spoken words, written words and why speaking is different’ in Hudson, C. (ed) The sound and the silence: key perspectives on speaking and listening and Skills for Life (Coventry, QIA).


Arts from the Heart

References and Appendices


Smith, K. (2002) ‘School to University. Sunlit steps or stumbling in the dark?’ in Arts and Humanities in Higher Education.


APPENDIX I

Topic areas for interview: students

1st interview 2007-08

1. Contact details
2. Why you wanted to study Art and Design at uni
3. Things which helped you in getting into uni to do Art and Design
4. Any difficulties you experienced in getting to uni
5. Your expectations of uni in the summer 2007
6. Your experience of Art and Design at uni now
7. How you find the reading, writing and speaking and listening in Art and Design at uni
8. Visits to galleries
9. How you get your ideas for your work in Art and Design
10. How your work in Art and Design has developed since September 2007
11. Responses of your family and friends to you doing Art and Design
12. Your thoughts on what you might do, after your BA/ FdA finishes.
APPENDIX 2
National Arts Learning Network research: student briefing paper

Your views count: students’ experience of HE Art and Design

What is the research project about?
The National Arts Learning Network (NALN) is conducting a research project which follows students through Higher Education (HE) Art and Design. Townley is one of two HE institutions taking part in the research. The other institution is Norton.

The research is about what helps and what hinders students to progress into and through HE Art and Design. It is about your experience of HE Art and Design. The research consists of:

> interviews and informal conversations with students
> interviews and informal conversations with staff
> observations of some HE Art and Design sessions
> relevant documents about Art and Design (e.g. your course prospectus).

We would like to invite you to be interviewed by Caroline Hudson, the researcher, as part of this research.

How would my privacy be respected?

> If you choose to be interviewed, what you say to Caroline would be treated confidentially.
> What you say would not be repeated to staff.
> You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to.
> Your name would not be used in written reports and in presentations about the research.

How would participating in the research benefit me?

> You can keep your transcripts to use in your undergraduate Art and Design course.
> You would be contributing to a major national project. You could include this on your CV.
> Your experiences would help to collect much needed evidence on students’ views. Students’ views will help to improve the experience of students nationally in HE Art and Design.
> You would receive a £10 voucher for being interviewed.

What would participating in the research involve?

> 1 x 45 minute (approximately) interview in February or March 2008.
> 1 x 45 minute (approximately) in May/June 2008.
> 2 x 45 minute (approximately) interviews in 2008-09, if the research is extended.
> After the first interview (March 2008), interviews would preferably be face to face but could be conducted by phone if you were especially pressurised.
> Some conversations with Caroline when she attends your Art and Design sessions.

Contact details
(Researcher contact details were included.)

Your contribution would be of great value to the research.
APPENDIX 3
National Arts Learning Network research project tracking students into and through HE
Art and Design

Participant consent form

Name of research participant……………………………

> I have had the chance to talk and ask questions about this research.
> I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
> I know that I do not have to answer questions I do not wish to in interview.
> I know that I can stop my interview at any point if I wish to.
> I know that I can withdraw from the research at any time.
> I understand that my interviews are transcribed and stored electronically in a
  safe and secure location and will be used purely for the purposes of this research
  project.
> I understand that no one except Real Educational Research will have access to any
  of the data collected.
> I know that, as a research participant, I receive transcripts of my interviews and
  that I am invited to make any amendments or additions to the transcripts, when I
  receive them.
> I understand that any extracts from my interviews used in publications will be
  anonymised.
> I understand that images of my work which I have provided for Real Educational
  Research may be used in research reports and presentations.
> I know that if I have any questions or problems about the research, I can telephone,
  text or email Caroline Hudson.

Signature .................................

Interviewer's statement
I confirm that I have explained to the research participant above the nature and purpose of
the research.

Interviewer's name: Caroline Hudson   Date:
Art from the heart