A Hermeneutical Investigation into the Impact of University Performative Culture on Student-Nominated Teaching Award Winners

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How much better to get wisdom than gold! To choose understanding rather than silver.
(Proverbs 16:16 NIV)

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Abstract

This thesis explores the increasing emphasis on metrics, targets and performance indicators within the higher education sector, focusing on reforms to teaching excellence evidenced through student-nominated teaching award schemes. The research aims to understand what we can learn from the winners of such awards concerning the tensions between a performative university culture and their own, inspirational practices. A novel Hermeneutical methodology utilising narrative story telling techniques along with visual metaphors was applied, in order to gain a deep intrinsic understanding of the complex socio-cultural phenomena under investigation. This methodology encouraged lived emotions, experiences, values and ultimately shared meaning to form between researcher and participants. The site of enquiry was a teaching-oriented university where 26 student nominated teaching award winners participated in the study. The study identified several cross-cutting themes, whilst maintaining individual authenticity. The narrative accounts indicated a severe narrowing down of the awards winners' creative operating environment, and thus individual value tensions and fractures became apparent in their everyday teaching practices. Findings indicated a growing performative auditing culture valued standardised measurement and accountability over individual creativity, autonomy and pedagogical diversity. As a result, this study found a clear paradox between the university's standardised performative mechanisms and individual creative teaching practices. The study extends the work of McNay's (1995) *'Four Types of University Culture'*, contributing a fifth type termed *'Value Orientated'.* The Value Orientated culture was unique to these award winners, encompassing lived emotions, experiences and passions influencing their teaching practices. This fifth cultural type was however, extremely fragile and less stable, existing at the periphery of the standardised institutional culture, which inevitably resulted in the teaching award winners becoming labelled as mavericks. In conclusion, the study recommends it is more beneficial to allow a much broader, rich, creative value orientated culture to form; one where teaching excellence is diverse and distributed, leading to new ways of managing, nurturing and ultimately emancipating other academics to explore new ways of practicing.

List of abbreviations

DLHI - Destination of Leavers from Higher Education

HEA - Higher Education Academy

HEI - Higher Education Institution

HEPI - Higher Education Policy Institute

HESA – Higher Education Statistics Agency

KEF - Knowledge Exchange Framework

NUS - National Union of Students

NSS - National Student Survey

OFS - Office for Students

QAA - Quality Assurance Agency

REF - Research Excellence Framework

TDAP – Taught Degree Awarding Powers

TEF - Teaching Excellence Framework

TQA - Teaching Quality Assessment

UAC – University Award Councils

UCAS - Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Thesis overview

This thesis is a reflexive exploration focused on academic teaching practitioners working in a teaching orientated university that has, over the last 10 years, undergone significant changes following government-led reforms around teaching and research. Inspirational Teaching Awards were formally introduced across the sector in 2012 as a way of recognising teaching excellence (Bradley et al., 2015; Madriaga and Morley, 2016). These awards were student-nominated, where students wrote an account describing how the nominee had made a difference to them and their studies. The student nominated aspect is crucial to this research, as it demonstrates a wider qualitative perspective on teaching excellence, student voice and experience outside of the more tangible measures within universities.

The site of enquiry was a teaching-oriented university where 26 student nominated teaching award winners participated in the study. Techniques such as visual metaphors and narrative story-telling were video recorded in order to capture the imagery of participants understanding of themselves as academic teaching practitioners, alongside aspects of university culture. The thesis aims to uncover and problematize the cultural divides and tensions which exist, observing these from a practitioner viewpoint. More specifically, this thesis will examine the deep personal experiences associated with these individuals continuing to strive to practice in the way deemed as inspirational by the students whom nominated them.

With the increasing emphasis on external policy drivers for institutions to evidence teaching excellence, the result had been for universities to create performative measures in an attempt to steer the institution to success. What this commodified cultural state has now created within the institution is a clear paradox of two existing, yet competing agendas occurring side by side: on the one hand the university's own performative agenda around metrics to enhance teaching practice and thus evidence teaching excellence, versus the participants' own individual teaching practice, enacted through unique and diverse values and lived emotions.

The thesis, through the application of Hermeneutical methods (narrative storytelling, thematic analysis and metaphors) aims to gain a glimpse outside of this commodified culture (metrics, measures etc.) to which teaching practitioners are increasingly subjected, and gain new insights into how creative practices can be encouraged, promoted and embedded within the university. Gummesson (2000: 36) highlights that traditional researchers are *"comfortable with looking at the 10% of practice gained by the 'helicopter view' above through questionnaires or surveys, leaving the rest as not amenable for research."* In this sense, the thesis undertakes a much deeper analysis of lived experiences for these participants which other methodologies tend not to (be able to) observe. The study allowed me, as researcher to gain insight into how inspirational practice might be conceived outside of the institution's commodified culture and more visible metrics. It sought to examine the constraints and tensions this causes teaching practitioners aspiring to excellence, defined not in term of metrics but based on their own values. (Jackson, 2008).

Whilst some support and endorse the principle of and the process by which a few teaching practitioners are recognised for their achievements in the classroom and be rewarded for this, from a wider institutional perspective there is much more value to be added by allowing a diverse, collective culture to flourish where everyone feels able and supported to be creative in their own practices (Kay, 1993). In this vein, this thesis aims to highlight a clear case for universities to focus efforts on the creation of a rich, vibrant, all-encompassing and diverse institutional culture of excellence, instead of allowing a few teaching practitioners to teach in an inspirational way to their students.

1.2. Policy context

It is true to say that universities across the UK have been changing over time, due to political reform mechanisms, albeit in a relatively slow manner. However, looking back chronologically there have been some significant pinch points arising from political reforms for the sector, which have both accelerated the higher education (HE) sectors market growth (expansion of student numbers, scale, transformation and distribution of institutions), resulting in increased internal monitoring mechanisms and greater state accountability. It feels appropriate to revisit some of the earlier higher education policy changes with a view to setting the context from which this study begins.

1.2.1. Expansion of the UK university sector

Table 1.1 below presents chronologically the changes and political reforms the UK HE sector has faced from 1167 to 2021. It provides an amalgamation of data showing: key political reforms and dates, number of UK HEIs, alongside student numbers. From this it is clear to see that during the 18th century there was very little change within the sector, along with no political or state intervention. Only eleven, higher education institutions were founded across the UK right up until 1495. It's not then until the latter part of the 19th century (1832 to 1893) that six new universities were created, taking the total number of institutions to seventeen. From 1900 to 1909, the UK sees the birth of its first wave of seven civic universities, also known as 'red brick'. These institutions were born out of Royal Charter and were associated with providing real world engineering skills at their core. The proceeding second wave of six civic universities up until 1957, all stemmed from university colleges.

It wasn't then until the 1960s that the university sector itself saw anything in the way of political state reform and early notions of market competitiveness. The sixties bore witness to a rapid increase in the number of UK HEIs. This was alongside the development of University Award Councils (UAC) and the introduction of student maintenance grants in England. Prior to this, universities were relatively small in size and numbers, catering only to the very elite of society with minimal market competition. The Robins Report of 1963 is seen as one of the key government interventions aimed at increasing student numbers entering

HE. This ultimately paved the way for a change in how universities functioned, were financed and aligned their own strategic priorities, kick starting the 'massification' agenda of universities and state-funded reliance (Schuller, 1995: 20-27; Robins, 1963; Willetts, 2013). Following on from the rapid expansion during the sixties, growth slowed again. There were no new universities created after the 1960s until 1983, when we saw the first private university established, the University of Buckingham. (List of universities in the United Kingdom by date of foundation, 2022)

Sector growth again accelerated in 1992 when the Conservative's Higher Education Act was introduced and subsequent push for polytechnic colleges to form new universities (Warner and Palfreyman, 2000). This then began to allow much greater autonomy in the awarding of taught degree powers (TDAP) for new institutions. Stemming from this, thirty-four new universities were formed, taking the UK total to eighty-four HEIs. This was creating a much more complex and competitive and dynamic market place.

Following this, the next major influential change to the UK HE system was the Dearing Report, also termed White Paper of 1997. The report committee at the time sought to further expand the sector's provision and widen access for all. Alongside this report, was the expansion of student numbers gaining access to higher education through the grants system. This was now the opening up of the sector from previously small, elitist groups to much wider participation across the country for all students. Controversially, the Dearing report (1997) put forward the new notion of tuition fees in English universities, which the Labour government introduced along with the removal of student grants. (List of universities in the United Kingdom by date of foundation, 2022)

Table 1.1 Changes, political reforms, student numbers and new UK higher education institutions

(Adapted from Jobbins, 2013 and other data sources where available)

YEAR	POLITICAL REFORM/S (Data adapted from Jobbins, 2013)	UK HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (List of universities in the United Kingdom by date of foundation, 2022) & (Data adapted from: Jobbins, 2013)	NUMBER OF HEIS (List of universities in the United Kingdom by date of foundation, 2022 and HESA, 2021).	STUDENT NUMBERS (HESA.ac.uk Student record data where available)
'Ancient' universities				
1167		Oxford	1	
1209		Cambridge	2	
1261-1495		Northampton, St Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire, Marischal College, Aberdeen	11	
19th century universities				
1832 -1893		Durham University, University of London, Queen's University of Ireland, Royal University of Ireland, Victoria University, University of Wales (List of universities in the United Kingdom by date of foundation, 2022)	17	
First wave of civic "Red Brick" universities established prior to WW1				
1900-1909		University of Birmingham, Victoria University of Manchester, University of Liverpool, University of Leeds, University of Sheffield, Queen's University Belfast, University of Bristol (Jobbins, 2013)	24	
Second wave of civic universities (evolving from local colleges before WW2)				
1926-1957		University of Reading, University of Nottingham, University of Southampton, University of Hull, University of Exeter, University of Leicester (Jobbins, 2013)	30	
1962	The 1962 Education Act paid university student tuition fees from the state, alongside generous maintenance grants.			8,000 (1962-1963) – 1 in 10 individuals
1963	Conservative Government accepts the Robbins report of 1963 for the expansion of the UK university sector.			
1960s new 'plate-glass' universities				
1961-1969		Sussex (1961), Keele (1962), East Anglia (1963), York (1963), Lancaster (1964), Essex (1964-65), Strathclyde (1964), Kent (1965), Warwick (1965), Heriot-Watt (1966), Salford (1967), Stirling (1967) Ulster (1968), The Open University (1969) (Jobbins, 2013)	44	
1965-1966	Creation of 10 universities from the polytechnics, following on from the Robbins reviews recommendations.	Aston, Loughborough, City University London, Chelsea College of Science and Technology (originally part of the University of London then later subsumed into King's College), Surrey, Brunel, Bath, Cardiff (initially part of the University of Wales), Salford and		

Year	Policy/Event	Universities	Number	Student Numbers
		Bradford. (Jobbins, 2013)		
1973				217,000
		1980s universities		
1983		University of Buckingham (1983) – First Private University, University of Ulster (1984)		
1990	Caps were introduced for student maintenance grants alongside the newly introduced Student Loans Company by the Conservative government to facilitate transfer of liability from state to individual (Jobbins, 2013)			370,000
		Post-1992 'new' universities – Two Waves		
1992	Conservative Governments HE Act 1999 introduced. Polytechnic colleges now able to adopt taught degree awarding powers (TDAP).	Anglia Ruskin, Birmingham City, Brighton, Bournemouth, Central Lancashire, Coventry, De Montfort, East London, Edinburgh Napier, Glamorgan, Glasgow Caledonian, Greenwich, Hertfordshire, Huddersfield, Kingston, Leeds Metropolitan, Lincoln, Liverpool John Moores, London Metropolitan, London South Bank, Manchester Metropolitan, Middlesex, Northumbria, Nottingham Trent, Oxford Brookes, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Sheffield Hallam, Staffordshire, Sunderland, Teesside, West of England, Westminster and Wolverhampton. Second wave of Post-92 universities formed from other institutions Abertay Dundee, University of the Arts London, The Arts University Bournemouth, Bath Spa, Bedfordshire, Bishop Grosseteste, Bolton, BPP, Buckinghamshire New, Canterbury Christ Church, Chester, Chichester, Cranfield, Edge Hill, Falmouth, Gloucestershire, Glyndwr, Harper Adams, Highlands and Islands, Leeds Trinity, Liverpool Hope, Newman, Newport, Northampton, Norwich University of the Arts, Queen Margaret, Robert Gordon, Roehampton, Royal Agricultural, Southampton Solent, Swansea Metropolitan, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, West of Scotland, West London, Winchester, Worcester and York St John. (data obtained from Jobbins, 2013)	84	
1997	The Dearing Review recommends the introduction of tuition fees. Maintenance grants replaced by loans.			
1998	A new Labour Government introduces tuition fees of £1000 per student and removes remaining grants in English universities.			
2000			90	UG Student Numbers reach 1.15million
2006	Fees raised to £3000 per year upon graduating in English universities.		103	1.8 million
		2000s universities		

		University of Cumbria, Buckinhamshire New University, Aberystwyth University, Bangor University, Swansea University, Wrexham University, University for the Creative Arts, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Cardiff Metropolitan University, University of the Highlands and Islands, University of Law, University College Birmingham, Bishop Grosseteste University, Arts University Bournmouth, Falmouth, Harper Adams University, University of St Mark and St john, Leeds Trinity University, Royal Agricultural University, Norwich University of the Arts, Newman University Birmingham, Regent's University London (data obtained from Jobbins, 2013)		
2007-2012				
2011			116	1.9 million
2012	Tuition fees increased to £9,000 per year by the Conservatives in English universities.		127	Decrease of 12%
2014	Research Excellence Framework (REF)			Increase to 3.5%
2015	Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)		130	
2015-2018	Total removal of student number caps in England.	Arden University, University of Suffolk, Leeds Arts University, Ravensbourne University London, Hartpury University	133	
2017/18	Fees rise to a maximum of £9,250 in line with inflation in English universities.			
2018	New universities regulator, the Office for Students (OfS) introduced in England.			
2020	June 2020 UK government Department for Education issues higher education COVID-19 guidance			
2020-2022	Introduction following a pilot of Research England's Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF)		165 (HESA)	1,98 million

1.2.2. Increase in student numbers accessing higher education in England

Just 12% of population in England were able to access higher education in the sixties. In this period student loans and grants for entry to HE, were nonexistent and instead students received means tested grants where fees were paid for by the government. During the 1970s admissions to universities had increased slightly with *"one in seven 18 year olds able to attend a university"*, however this decreased as university funding was reduced. (The Guardian, 2003). Funding for each university place at this time was in the form of tuition fees paid for by local authorities, combined with a Treasury grant.

It was however during the 1980s that the English university sector saw a major rise in student numbers entering higher education, under the Secretary of State at the time, Sir Kenneth

Baker (The Guardian, 2003). This meant that one in five under 18 year olds could now gain a university place by the early nineties. However, funding for university places changed again in 1990 under Margaret Thatcher's Conservative leadership. A student loan scheme was introduced and maintenance grants were capped. This was a major influential move in student funding to facilitate transfer of liability from state to individual. Expansion of the sector continued well into the 1990s, where the new Labour government abolished the maintenance grant and introduced means tested tuition fees. Despite this, university applications still continued to rise, with admissions reaching 1.15 million by 2000 with 40% of all under 30s now entering higher education. 2002 saw a large increase in fees, with students having to now pay £3000 per year upon graduating. Fees were later raised to a maximum £9000 per year in 2012 by David Cameron's coalition government. Student applications that same year also fell by 12% (56,000), due to the newly introduced tuition fees. The following year did however see student applications back up by 3.5%, with each following year seeing a steady increase of around 5.5% with an average of 50% of under thirties now in higher education. 2015 saw the removal of student number caps for English universities, which resulted in a fall of around 5% in intake for low ranked UCAS institutions (The Guardian, 2003). The lifting of the cap also saw a rise in unconditional offers to perspective students of around 40% in 2016. (Higher Education Policy Institute, 2018). 2021 had record number of admissions to universities, totaling 2,955,90 student applications (6% increase), resulting in a dramatic rise in university offers that year of 1,998,690 places (Hazell, 2021) in conjunction with the newly introduced Industry Degree Apprenticeships.

In summary, the English university sector has witnessed a dramatic increase in market competitiveness over the last forty years. There have been several waves of new institutions being created since the sixties, on the back of political reforms aimed at creating a more competitive and open sector. These changes in policy, have not only increased competitiveness amongst institutions but have also changed on several occasions, funding streams for both universities and students. This has further broadened the gap between state reliance and individual funded education. The sector is now seeing prolonged periods of increased insecurity and unrest after some of these major changes. University management are seeking ways to both manage and teach en masse, whilst also differentiating themselves sufficiently enough within what has become an increasingly complex and growing

marketplace. Universities in England are now subject and accountable not only to the 2015 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), but also have to demonstrate high performance outputs and state accountability in their research though the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF). These are also alongside external third-stream engagement through Research England's recently introduced Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF). Balancing the conflicting demands of research, teaching and industry engagement will be one of the most difficult tasks the sector will face over the next decade.

1.2.3. Strengthening administrative core

Crucially, what all of these earlier sector wide reforms needed was a more complex institutional administrative core to efficiently manage the greater student numbers entering the higher education system. This new, more competitive marketplace also required a way of measuring success across a number of different, and many times competing factors. Performance indicators across institutions were only first conceived in the early 90s by the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA), being termed the UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs). These were seen as a way of both comparing and benchmarking across multiple institutions, whilst ensuring external accountability on the back of policy reforms (HESA, 2021). Additionally, university league tables developed by media organisations such as the Times and The Guardian were in their infancy. These utilised a combination of data retrieved from the HESA to measure perceived success in research, learning and teaching.

In 1996 Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) data was used in order to rank separate university departments (Shattock, 2003). This provided a concluding score with three outcomes *"unsatisfactory, satisfactory and excellent"* (Greatbatch and Holland, 2016: 14). As with the other measures, TQA sought to provide *"external review and grade judgements of teaching quality"* in order to allow for comparison and improved transparency of measurement across the rapidly increasing university sector (Greatbatch and Holland, 2016: 14). In the early 2000's the TQA was replaced by the Subject Review and then later by an Institutional Audit (Greatbatch and Holland, 2016). All of these reviews struggling to grasp the complexity and measurement of diverse teaching quality.

The Higher Education sector in England is now experiencing unprecedented levels of turbulent change (Tight, 2013). In more recent times, there has been a chain reaction of policy reforms being introduced. A key one of these was the 2015 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), introduced within the Conservative government's green paper entitled, *'Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice'*. TEF is currently under review during 2021-22, where a new framework is being developed. The current framework itself was refined in the government's 2016 *Success as a Knowledge Economy* White Paper. The choice of measures indicated a priority for English HEIs to realign graduate skills with the changing requirements of industry. This was in conjunction with gathering and publishing further statistical data to measure teaching practices within both departments and courses. The report highlighted concerns over the shortage of high quality, industry-experienced graduates leaving universities resulting in employers struggling to recruit adequate talent. The principle behind the TEF, was for universities were to be measured and therefore ranked on teaching quality by the evidencing of metric measures. This would then lead on to an Olympic-style gold, silver or bronze classification for that particular institution. The TEF itself aimed to amalgamate multiple metrics from surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS), Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE), and student retention and continuation data (Hayes, 2017). As Frankham (2017:635) indicates, such measures gave rise to additional neoliberal management practices being used by university managers, whereby *"'problematic' scores come back onto the table again and again and again, funneling the impact of those scores on the people [academics] concerned"*.

Whilst the intensity and rivalry between institutions increased, university management teams grappled to squeeze out marginal gains around assessment, feedback and teaching delivery metrics. Gibbs (2012:22) likens this data collection and analysis exercise to *"some kind of institutional post-mortem after NSS results"*. This additional drive for excellence across the sector resulted in the introduction of further internal quality and performance metrics to aid the process, but arguably further reduced diversity within teaching practices. The TEF and other prior teaching assessments have placed ever increasing administrative bureaucracy upon institutions as metrics become a driver and indicator of performance and teaching practices. There is now ever increasing institutional priority being placed upon the National

Student Survey (NSS) and Teaching Excellence frameworks, as driving mechanisms for defining 'teaching excellence' and improving student experience within universities.

These political reforms on universities are also seen by some (Brown and Carasso, 2013) as an attack from successive governments toward higher education reform, moving towards a much more marketised sector: *"the view that is offered is that they are the latest, but also the most significant and far-reaching, stage in a long process of marketization under which, through the policies of successive governments of all political parties since 1979"* (Brown and Carasso, 2013: 2). With this in mind, there is minimal empirical research to link the process of quality management adding to end student value: *"input and output indicators do not and cannot comment on the quality of the student experience in higher education. If higher education is seen as a developmental process of increasing the intellectual maturity and personal growth of students, it is difficult to see how performance indicators and input± output analysis can be of any help."* (Tam, 2001: 51).

The increasing emphasis on metrics and performance management systems has resulted in a culture of institutional auditing (Hayes and Wynyard, 2002), where policies have sought to standardise teaching practices down to a set of objective metric measures. This has subsequently led to the removal of crucial enterprising traits and graduate attributes, such as *"risk taking, flexibility, self-reliance, innovativeness"* (Morley, 2003: 47). This has predominately been due to many of these creative attributes being difficult to measure in respect to student achievement and progression (Hill et al., 2016: 3). Therefore, less focus is paid upon them for overall student satisfaction despite their tremendous added value in gaining graduate employment (Jackson, 2008).

Institutions are now seeing that this type of commodified culture can be extremely divisive (Hardre and Kollmann, 2012) resulting in a loss of identity and innovative teaching practices (Clark, 1998). Whilst institutions are struggling to define what it truly means to be excellent or inspirational (Shephard, Harland, Stein and Tidswell 2010; Chism 2006; Skelton, 2004; Gibbs, 2012), there has been a naïve attempt to do this through the steadily increasing presence and visibility of institutional teaching awards (Mitten and Ross, 2018; Gibbs, 2012;). Some have argued (Jones et al., 2020; Muniesa, 2018; Winters, 2009; Skelton, 2017; Alvesson

and Spicer, 2016) these award schemes have been shown to limit excellence to just a few, creating conflicting competitive tensions, serving no other purpose than for outward-facing university reputation and accreditation (Mitten and Ross, 2018; Gibbs, 2012; Skelton, 2004). Excellence instead needs to be embraced as a 'a multidimensional concept' *(*Madriaga and Morley, 2016; Saunders and Ramirez, 2017), where teaching diversity flourishes and enriches the learning experience for all involved.

1.3. Introduction of student-nominated teaching awards

While teaching awards have existed for some time, *student-nominated* teaching awards are a newer phenomenon in the sector. One of the first student-led teaching award schemes was piloted in Scotland in 2009, created jointly by the NUS and HEA, such awards then rapidly spread to other UK institutions from 2011 onwards (Madriaga and Morley, 2016). The first formal award scheme was implemented by Edinburgh Napier University Students' Association (ENSA) as a chance to let students have their say outside of the national ratings scheme (Bradley et al., 2015; Madriaga and Morley, 2016; Lubicz-Nawrocka and Bunting, 2019). Such award schemes were intended primarily to promote and disseminate best practice in teaching across the sector (Davies et al., 2012), as well as forming closer relationships/links between institutions, students and lecturers (Madriaga and Morley, 2016).

Since then university teaching awards have dramatically grown in popularity over the last decade with the majority of UK HEIs now running some form of award scheme (Nawrocka and Bunting, 2019). The awards themselves tend to be institutionally run, most in conjunction with the respective student union. They offer students an opportunity to anonymously nominate academic members of staff who have been deemed to be inspirational or made a positive impact in some form to them during their studies. Awards also having the added benefit of providing valuable feedback in to examples of best practice in learning and teaching to inform course developments. This is further backed up by the QAA (2016), who see students as being key partners in course feedback and delivery. As these schemes have grown in popularity, so have the categories and span of them to now include most faculties and subject areas (Lowe and Shaw, 2019). It is worth noting there are various different types of

teaching award schemes: those which are staff-nominated and as such fall within the reward, recognition and promotion process, alongside the ones this thesis considers that are student-nominated; an attempt to reward excellence outside of the more formalised institutional measures and external surveys such as the NSS (Nawrocka and Bunting, 2019; 65).

Until recently there had been little in the way of qualitative empirical research undertaken on evaluating such teaching award schemes, particularly from an individual academic practitioner perspective, most choosing instead to focus upon the survey aspects of metrics, quality and measurements within higher education (Jones et al., 2020; Muniesa, 2018; Winters, 2009; Skelton, 2017; Alvesson and Spicer, 2016; Davis, 2016; Trowler, 2010; Chaharbagi, 2007; Tight, 2014). Earlier schemes focused on teaching portfolios or student perception of the teaching awards themselves (Bradley et al., 2015; Madriaga and Morley 2016; Lowe and Cassie, 2019).

With the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework in England, university management have also seen teaching award schemes as tangible mechanisms to allow them to evidence excellence (Mitten and Ross, 2018; Gibbs, 2012; Skelton, 2004). Thus, such schemes have accelerated in popularity, but with little concern for their wider cultural impact on individual teaching practices. In this sense, there has been much criticism towards teaching award schemes, especially in terms of them creating a divisive institutional culture or simply seen as a quality management tool (Skelton, 2009; Madriaga and Morley, 2016). Research has also pointed to their being a disruptive mechanism within a university's culture, where a limited few individuals feel they can achieve excellence, as defined by the institution within their own practice (Strike, 1985). As a result, award schemes have been shown to inhibit contributing pedagogical factors to teaching excellence, such as creativity and innovation (Saunders and Ramirez, 2017). Most academics simply choosing instead to focus on the more tangible institutional outputs, such as research which has historically been valorized and valued above teaching practice and seen to link more directly to academic promotion criteria (Thornton, 2014).

1.4. Coronavirus (COVID-19): Refocusing universities on what matters?

"This crisis has exposed the many inadequacies and inequities in our education systems – from access to the broadband and computers needed for online education, and the supportive environments needed to focus on learning, up to the misalignment between resources and needs." (Schleicher, 2020: 4)

The 2019 Coronavirus pandemic has again pushed universities into unchartered territory, faced with truly unprecedented levels of uncertainty across the sector. The guidance for HEIs dealing with the pandemic was first published in June 2020 by the Conservative government. March-April 2020 saw most universities rapidly shut down all face-to-face contact and move swiftly to homeworking and online teaching. This was no small move for most and meant rapid and responsive emergent strategies being deployed to develop new innovative modes of online teaching.

In doing so, the pandemic has again placed the issue of teaching quality at the forefront of the educational system. It has highlighted to HEIs the need for innovative pedagogical modes of teaching with a reliance placed upon academics to develop and adopt new creative pedagogical practices. Universities have also had to demonstrate their own resilience in adopting new ways of working and in particular delivering teaching to students through unique and varied means within exceptionally short timescales. Internally, university management have had to refocus efforts on developing alternative strategies and institutional agendas for coping with this uncertainty, and the majority have done so with good effect. Whilst the traditional university modus operandi provided security and longevity to some extent, Coronavirus has forced universities to move from a safe external 'outside-in' (Day and Moorman, 2011) model of strategic planning, toward a greater emphasis on institution's own internal ability to be resilient, adaptable and agile (Weber and Tarba, 2014).

The enhancement and development of educational practice, combined with the cultural support of academic staff to undertake new and innovative modes of teaching, straying from what some would see as neoliberal performative measures, is at the heart of this thesis. It is only now, during times of sustained uncertainty that institutions are seeing pockets of

academic innovators that need supporting through more non-traditional means and measures in order to nurture and develop new opportunities. This has also had the added benefit for some, if only for a short period, of realigning and refocusing emphasis on high quality individual teaching practices across the board. It has potentially allowed space and time for a rethink of quality measures and processes, that instead of promoting a narrow culture of efficiency and effectiveness, can now instead open up a creative space of opportunity for reform within the sector, resetting historical performance practices.

However, the pandemic has also highlighted the issues associated with good quality teaching practices and the need to push for reform around new ways of managing and developing innovative pedagogical cultures which are fit for excellence (Schleicher, 2020). Despite this, during the pandemic HEIs have had no other choice but to place much more trust and autonomy on staff working from home delivering innovative online and blended content in their own unique ways. Currently, there are mixed feelings and on-going debate ensuing around which mode of delivery will now be best suited for students' learning and again, we see the potential for a new era of change to sweep across the sector once the dust settles. There is now more than ever the rising problem of a new drive for institutions to reinvent themselves in an attempt to still remain competitive and attract students. Moving into unknown territory, universities will inevitably struggle to cling on to a sense of their own identity once they emerge from this state of flux; most simply choosing to revert back to the status quo of face-to-face teaching and examinations.

Ultimately, over the next few years some institutions will simply fall into the trap of refocusing efforts on the wrong performance drivers in a futile attempt to increase student satisfaction through the interrogation of survey data and metrics. Others on the other hand, some will embrace this recent period of churn as a unique opportunity to re-orientate their own internal strategic drivers toward a constructivist cultural mode of individual enhancement of teaching. Only time will tell.

1.5. Summary of contributions

This thesis provides several significant contributions to knowledge, around aspects of both management and educational empirical research. With regards to the empirical contributions, the thesis contributes to the growing bank of empirical research papers around qualitative data being collected on real world phenomena in higher education occurring outside of the more visible performative culture, yet significantly enhancing the overall student experience. In this respect, the thesis contributes in several distinct ways.

This study has built upon the extensive literature around the impact managerialism and aspects of performativity has had on teaching excellence within universities. There has been a growing bank of empirical research looking at the impact of performativity, and what this means for teaching practice within universities (Jones et al., 2020; Muniesa,2018; Deem, 2005; Winters, 2009; Skelton, 2017). This study has sought to build upon these findings, filling an empirical research gap by looking more closely at the cultural fractures which have occurred and the subsequent effects this was having on individual award winners teaching practices.

This study has demonstrated unique and original contribution to the growing bank of empirical research surrounding defining teaching excellence (Gibbs, 2016; Elton, 1990; Skelton, 2009; Chism, 2006; Morley 2016), specifically around university teaching award schemes. No other research studies had currently examined directly the cultural and value tensions experienced by individual teaching award winners trying to continue to practice in a way that significantly enhanced the overall student experience.

The study also contributes methodologically, in the application of the Hermeneutical framework, applied to observe real world cultural phenomena through narrative and metaphorical methods (Morgan, 2006; Musson, 2014; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Guillemin, 2004; Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). Alongside this, the variation on Gadamer's (2013) Hermeneutical Spiral and the way it has been applied in order to extract new knowledge, meaning and understanding of such a varied, complex phenomenon is also a

unique contribution in the sense of highlighting the critical role this form of qualitative empirical research has in an educational setting.

In terms of practice-based contributions, the thesis enhances our understanding of university culture and change, adding to the work of McNay's (1995) theory of the *'Four Types of University Culture'*. Drawing on Hermeneutical philosophy, this thesis has contributed a fifth type of institutional culture which has been termed, *Value Orientated.* This type of culture encompasses emotions, lived experiences and passion drivers for learning and teaching which was seen throughout the study's participants.

There has been limited empirical research to date within UK universities around the effects performative measures have on academic's wellbeing (Winefield, 2008; Trakakis, 2020 Urbina-Garcia, 2020; Fetherston, 2020). This study brought forward new empirical research findings in areas such as mental health and wellbeing struggles teaching practitioners were experiencing in the sectors drive towards evidencing teaching excellence.

1.6. Thesis structure

This thesis includes six chapters in total and has the following structural outline:

Chapter Two: Sensitizing of *literature themes* – In line with the Hermeneutic methodological approach, *'Sensitizing [of] themes'* (Gilgun, 2002; Charmaz, 2003; Blumer, 1954; Bowen, 2006) has been adopted for this second chapter. This approach allowed for a much deeper understanding of the aspects which were arising from the participants throughout the entire process. This approach is much more suited to this particular area of social science investigation due to its interpretative nature. To this extent the research design adopted to observe this phenomenon meant that any formal structured systematic review to the review of literature would inevitably lead to structured pre-determined outcomes and limit the field of enquiry.

The chapter provides the reader with a synopsis of the associated literature in order to sufficiently provide some background in to the investigation. This chapter has been structured around four linked areas, associated with the research topic of investigation, to gain a platform from which to commence the research study, thus forming a basis of inquiry i.e. sensitizing themes. The chapter firstly looks at higher education policy and change, and specifically the changes in state funding and policy reforms universities have borne witness to over the last two decades leading up to the study. The literature then moves to performativity and the resulting drive for evidencing teaching excellence through objective metric measures. The chapter then explores elements of culture and the impact this has on individuals' teaching practices, ultimately leading to the rise of managerialism within the sector. The final section of the literature overview, examines teaching award schemes and the pursuit of institutional excellence derived from this performative movement.

Chapter Three: *Methodology, research methods and sensemaking* - This chapter provides an overview of the methodology adopted for this thesis, as well as describing the analysis of data. The chapter outlines the rationale for the Hermeneutical approach, alongside outlining the chosen research methods of narrative enquiry, poetic hermeneutics and visual metaphors. It begins by presenting the research question and context. The second part of this chapter looks in detail at the mode of data analysis (sensemaking) being applied, providing a

comprehensive overview of the thematic analysis process utilised and an outline of the six stages involved (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The aim in this final section of the chapter is to describe how a series of overarching themes that characterise key elements of the thesis from which the discussion topics were generated.

Chapter Four*: Participants Stories* **(findings) -** This chapter presents the research findings in the form of six carefully selected narrative stories from the participants involved in this study. These were chosen because of the strength of their narrative and illustration of cross cutting themes from across the full sample and thus to emphasise the topics explored in the discussion chapter. Altogether there are 26 narrative stories, which, if all were presented in this chapter would go beyond the scope of the thesis word count. In selecting these stories, I was aiming to balance case-compatibility within-case depth.

Chapter Five: *Discussion and thematic findings* **–** This chapter of the thesis revisits the central Research Question: *'How do teaching award winners experience the drive towards institutional excellence?'*, in an attempt to draw out the evolving cross-cutting themes arising from the analysis and participant narrative accounts. These commonalities found within the practitioners' experiences indicate noteworthy issues that have social and structural underpinnings. As such they should no longer to be viewed as singular, with the risk of being discounted as 'idiosyncratic'. Furthermore, the study now moves on from the individual narratives found in the previous chapter in order to now construct collective experiences that still remain contextualized. In this sense, this chapter provides an analytical pathway from which we can understand the collective from the individual. Finally, by connecting the emerging issues (discussion topics) to the broader research literature; contextual and collective experiences are in turn recognised as part of broader phenomena that scholarship has problematized. This provides a way through in order to foreground the transferability of the findings.

Chapter Six: *Conclusion, contributions, limitations, reflections and recommendations* - This chapter synthesises the issues raised within discussion sub-chapters, alongside reflecting back on the overarching research question. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the study alongside some key findings which evolved out of the previous Discussions chapter

summaries. The second part provides the thesis contributions in the areas of empirical, methodological and practice-based. This chapter will conclude by looking at the limitations of the study, opportunities for future developments, along with the corresponding implications for both policy making and universities.

Chapter Two: Sensitizing of literature themes

This chapter provides an examination of the associated literature, in order to sufficiently set the context of the research and provide background in to the investigation. It is important to note that this initial review of the literature is shorter than it would be in a more traditional thesis format due to the Hermeneutical nature of the inquiry, instead revisiting the literature later in discussion Chapter Five, to draw meaning out of the emergent themes. To this extent the research design and the selected Hermeneutical methodology mean that any deductive approach to the review of literature prior to collecting data would inevitably lead to pre-determined outcomes and limit the field of enquiry (Blakie, 2000). This notion of unstructured literature reviews is supported by Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2010: 130) who state that, *"a review of relevant literature cannot be achieved following a structured approach"*. Given the adopted methodology does not start with set predefined objectives from which a literature search could stem any such attempt would inevitably end in vain. Instead, a form of sensitizing themes (Gilgun, 2002; Charmaz 2003; Blumer, 1954; Bowen, 2006) has been adopted and allowed for a much deeper understanding of the aspects arising from the participants throughout the entire process. This approach is much better suited to this particular area of social science investigation due to its more fluid approach. This has meant a less conventional literature review, where a much larger proportion of the associated literature can be found within the discussions chapter. This allowed the researcher to remain in a more open state of ambiguity for much longer than a pre-determined deductive approach would allow.

The use of sensitizing themes allows the study to avoid any specific attributes or starting parts and therefore, *"gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances... [In contrast] definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look."* (Blumer, 1954: 7). This form of literature overview allowed a much more inductive and interpretative starting point to build and develop throughout the study and to guide themes, discussions and participant interviews. Blakie (2000) supports such an approach and sees sensitizing themes as allowing studies such as this to have no requirement for any formal *"hypothesis or pre-conceived notions"*, instead allowing the researcher to *"discover, understand and interpret"* the

phenomena under investigation (cited in Bowen, 2006: 3). Indeed, it is the case with this study that when utilising the Hermeneutical philosophy for this type of research, combined with the theoretical application of Gadamer's (2013) Hermeneutical spiral, (see Chapter Three: Methodology) it has allowed for a deeper interpretation of the arising themes. The Hermeneutical spiral is *"an iterative process whereby each stage of our research provides us with knowledge"* (Gummesson, 2000: 70), therefore building on both literature and understanding within each stage. The literature itself forms an integral aspect of the interpretative process from beginning to end: *"seeing a literature review as a hermeneutic process makes it evident that there is no final understanding of the relevant literature, but a constant re-interpretation leading (ideally) to deeper and more comprehensive interpretative understanding of relevant publications"* (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010: 130).

Therefore, as I progressed up the Hermeneutical Spiral, new understandings formed moving from part to whole, those understandings being subsequently informed by the literature in an open reflexive process of dialogue and meaning. This inevitably led to wider discussion topics and new and unique, sometimes unexpected findings. It was only through this process that interpretation and re-interpretation of meaning could take place, and therefore a much better overview of the phenomenon and subsequent outlying themes could evolve with the interplay between part understanding and full(er), and so on as I iteratively progressed.

The chapter is structured around four linked areas to gain a platform from which to commence the research study, forming a basis of inquiry. The chapter firstly looks at higher education policy and change and specifically the changes in state funding and policy reforms universities have borne witness to over the last two decades preceding the study. The literature then moves onto performativity and the resulting drive for measurement of teaching excellence through the implementation of performative measures. The chapter then explores elements of culture, and specifically the perspective or lens this study adopts, using McNay's (1995) four type of university culture model as its basis. Finally, moving in to the rise of higher education neoliberal managerialism, examining the extent to which this might result in a loss of academic identity. The final section of the literature review examines the institutional pursuit to evidence teaching excellence through student-nominated award schemes.

2.1. Higher education policy and change

"All students deserve excellent teaching. We will ensure that TEF supports our widening participation aims; the TEF core metrics will be broken down to include those from disadvantaged backgrounds."
(Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2015: 14).

Whereas once universities in England could be deemed to be outside of governmental control, enjoying somewhat of an autonomous existence (Teelken, 2012), there has been ever growing government pressure to *"flatten the learning landscape",* due to increasing competition within the sector over the last 30 years (Hayes and Wynyard, 2002). This began with the expansion of student numbers and the expectation that universities would become more efficient and enterprising in their practices, accounting for their place in society. Furedi (2009) pointed to the evolving nature of HE marketisation, where fee paying students where engaging in a financial transaction. Whilst Hayes and Wynyard (2002) looked at the demands which exist externally, resulting in audits of teaching and research and thus *"practices that lead to formulaic teaching"* (Hayes and Wynyard, 2002: 34). Now more than ever we are seeing an increasing focus on customer value measures (service, price and quality) attributed to the higher education sector and teaching practice (Woodall et.al., 2014). This increasing marketisation within the sector can be seen to have had a severe detrimental impact on the learning process for students and their academic performance, alongside the institutional culture (Bunce et.al., 2017).

As the Introductory chapter of this thesis highlighted, it wasn't until the 1990s that sector growth rapidly accelerated and the early notions of market competition started to arise. Foskett (1996) noted that the rise of student numbers was further fueled during the 1990s by an increase of HEIs from local authority funded Polytechnic Colleges to Institutions in their own right. In the wake of the 1997 Dearing Report, the notion of students now being seen as consumers began to emerge within the sector, causing institutions to change their own perspectives on elements such as efficiency, effectiveness, performance and especially value for money (Bunce et.al., 2017).

The 2003 White Paper, *'The Future of Higher Education'* then sought to place teaching and skills development with equal standing to research: "*Teaching has for too long been the poor relation in higher education. Promotion for academics is based largely on research excellence, rather than teaching ability*" (DfES, 2003: 15).   This is extremely closely worded to the Teaching Excellence Framework White Paper (2015) more than a decade on, "*For too long, teaching has been the poor cousin of research* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2015: 14). This began to give rise to the notion of students choosing universities, rather than universities selecting students (Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon, 2011). Parallel to this something interesting was occurring with respect to Russell Group universities which were now being drawn in by regular market forces and being increasingly incentivised by student income generation, adding fuel to the sector expansion. Molesworth, Scullion, and Nixon (2011: 25) liken this sudden market growth of the HE Sector to a giant awakening "*in response to the direct intentions of government. Governments have cajoled, incentivized and directed expansion of the sector*".

A wave of government initiatives followed, aiming to bridge the gap between society, industry and universities, placing accountability at the forefront of what universities' core business was perceived to be. The changes in student funding in 2012, raising of fees and abolition of funding grants from HEFCE, saw HEIs across England now increasing student fees up to £9000 (max) per year, inevitably paving the way to an era of what some term the *"true commodification of higher education"* (Shattock 2003; Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon, 2011). The sector now finds itself in a tightly managed and administered state, much like other commercial enterprises and one where, *"differentiation between public and private goals are swept away and the enterprising qualities of employees, for example risk taking, flexibility, self-reliance, innovativeness are mobilized in the pursuit of improved economic performance"* (Morley 2003: 47).

Increasing bureaucracy now evident within the sector brought about with it the risk of losing institutional autonomy and identity. This was magnified with the rapid expansion of centralised administration systems required in order to manage performance more effectively and efficiently for such growing institutions: *"Underpinning successful universities is a belief in institutional autonomy. Clark refers to a 'stand up' university or 'self-reliant'*

universities as institutions which have created for themselves a corporate culture and a defined way of managing themselves which marks them out as having identity" (Shattock 2003: 181).

As a consequence of centralised government control, universities have sought to introduce quality control levers (Simons 1994) in order to more effectively align learning and teaching with expected performance outputs sought by government policy. This shift in focus began to create tensions between universities' remits in society, seeing the rise of a much more 'entrepreneurial generation of universities' being established (Clark, 1998). A further critique concerns how teaching quality is measured, including whether to focus on input, process or output measures. Gibbs (2016) for example points out that there is difficulty in using process measures in order to indicate a student's progress within the system, highlighting that areas such as engagement and experiences are underdeveloped in terms of adequate indicators: *"Reviews of teaching quality measures generally conclude that the only safe thing to do is to use process measures – indicators of what you do with whoever your students are, and measures of how they experience and respond to what you do – rather than input or outcome measures."* (Gibbs 2016: 17).

All of the above equated to the more traditionalist strategic mechanisms driving a new type of institutional culture, one which favored efficiency, effectiveness and close oversight of teaching operations in order to achieve desired measurable outputs. Morley (2003) saw the increasing quality movement within the sector as a key response to policy changes and problems, but one which also could be seen to be generating these problems due to the *"moral panic over standards, massification, wealth creation and globalisation"* (Morley, 2003: 6). This increasing quality movement it was argued, set the tone for classification chaos, in terms of learning and teaching through a *"fiction of coherence and unity"* (Morley, 2003: 6). There was now a clear remit by which institutions needed to evidence teaching enhancement through objective metrics: *"There is an assumption that a university is first and foremost an organisation whose performance can be observed"* (Strathern 2000b, cited in Morely, 2003: 126). Whilst this may be well and good on the surface, tensions exist around the more constructivist elements of learning and teaching, such as creativity and innovation. These more 'messy' elements (Proctor, 2010) ultimately allow students to apply their *"own*

ingenuity in overcoming various difficulties" (Hayes 1985: 114), and thus are much more beneficial to academic development (Bradshaw and Lowenstein, 2011)

2.2. Performance culture and metrics

This next section focuses in on the increasing rise of the university performative culture due to the pursuit of excellence, through the implemented standardised metrics and quality measures. This section explores the literature around *Research Theme 2: Explore the impact management and quality procedures have on inspirational teaching practice* (Chapter Three: Methodology).

2.2.1. Defining culture and its significance

Despite being the subject of substantial research endeavor, culture remains ambiguous and difficult to describe, notwithstanding its importance in academic and organisational life (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Handy, 1990; Hofstede, 1991; Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952; Schein, 2004). Much of these former efforts have been focused on classifying culture in terms of independent measurable variables. Kroeber and Kluckhohn's (1952) extensive study of cultural definitions led to the conclusion that a unified definition is not at all possible due to its lived complexities, *"However, total culture is a generalization like "living matter" or total life on earth; and it is of the nature of generalizations that as such they cannot show the sharp patterning characteristic of particular phenomena, such as particular cultures constitute."* (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952: 185). Other various definitions link culture to a set of shared values or beliefs within the organisation (Cummings and Worley, 2005). Smirich (1983) adopts a more interpretivist perspective, where culture is not an independent variable but is instead fluid in nature and thus can be interpreted in many different forms, serving more as an epistemological approach for understanding individuals and their practices within a context.

Morgan (2006) offers up a wider, more sociological perspective on culture within the world we live and places we work, more in keeping with the focus of this study. He views culture as a *"process of reality construction that allows people to see and understand particular events, actions, objects, utterances, or situations in distinctive ways"* (Morgan, 2006: 134). We are all

involved in the organisational construction of daily life and through our own experiences, judgements and values we shape the patterns of how we work, whereby if we *"disrupt these norms the ordered reality of life inevitably breaks down* (Morgan, 2006: 135). We therefore create a shared reality within organizations to enable a *"frame of references that makes organization itself possible"*. Through the use of metaphors, Morgan (2006) provides a way of gaining some insight into these varying cultural interpretations and how we make sense of these in everyday life.

Several studies move on to explore the effects of culture on problem solving, decision-making and performance within organisations. Peters and Waterman (1982) examined links between organisational performance and particular cultural traits such as autonomy, creating winners, positive reinforcement etc., attempting to make the connection between effective cultures leading to increased productivity and ultimately higher levels of performance. Isaksen and Ekvall (2013) sought to examine the impact both culture and climate had on innovation potential, doing so by a quantitative approach examining factors such as openness, trust and freedom. McLean (2005) looked at cultures' links to organisational creativity and how this led to enhanced creativity and innovation. On the flip side, Bate (1984) recognised culture had a considerable impact on organisational behaviour that led to constrained problem solving through resulting factors such as un-emotionality, depersonalisation, subordination, conservatism, isolationism and antipathy.

2.2.2. Culture in higher education

In relation to culture within universities, McNay (1995) articulates four types of university culture: 'Collegium' – encompassing aspects of freedom, organic innovation and people; 'Bureaucracy' – valuing equity, regulatory control/rules and job roles; 'Corporation' – being power, management and policy; and 'Enterprise' – focusing on competence, support, devolved leadership and tactical flexibility. McNay adopts the view that *"All four co-exist in most universities, but with different balances among them."* (McNay, 1995: 106). For this thesis, it was useful to take these four cultural elements as a starting point, from which to gain a sense of what the operating cultures are and varying perspectives from participants,

so as to both inform discussions but also understand the varying types of phenomena occurring.

A culture of institutional auditing arising from the performative aspects of monitoring and accountability (Hayes and Wynyard, 2002) has resulted in the severe standardisation of practices in relationships between student and teacher. This then moves the relationship from one of collaboration to that of sterile administrative transaction: *"Managerial pressure toward the standardization of lecturing has undermined the idea that the student-teacher relationship is a collaborative one. University administrators now force lecturers to treat their relationship with students as if it was an administrative one"* (Hayes and Wynyard, 2002: 38-39). Perhaps training and development may have helped alleviate some of this, however the deterioration of the relationship itself has come about because of imposed reform and institutional reaction to this. This can be seen to impact on both teaching quality and student experience (Papadopoulos, 2017).

The recent neoliberal managerial reforms within higher education, have refocused attention on practices akin to accountability, transparency and performance management within universities. The resulting debasement of teaching practices, along with subsequent decreased staff morale have followed (Kenny, 2018). Subsequently, the sector has seen teaching workloads increase, academic autonomy be reduced, and external accountability become central to practice and transparency (Kenny and Fluck, 2014). This increasing manageralist culture (Hayes and Wynyard, 2002) and associated quality measures has slowly begun to erode core academic values and individual identity (Rabah, 2015; Morley, 2003; Tight, 2013). Morley (2003) goes on to highlight these divisions in relation to academic identity result in a growing culture of mistrust, increased accountability and loss of autonomy, where *"quality assurance can represent an area of danger in the academy. Danger in so far as the purity of disciplinary divisions is being contaminated with bureaucracy"* (Morley, 2003: 68).

The neoliberal managerialist ideology, is one which focuses much more attention on creating a culture of efficiency and effectiveness much more akin to data, comparisons and external benchmarking between institutions (Stolz, 2017). This has been seen to further increase state

accountability, limiting institutional autonomy through the management of quality assurance process and performance data for external market selection, *"The governing bodies of universities need to know how their own university is performing compared to other institutions. Potential students want to know which institutions are performing well in the provision of teaching and in the success of the graduate labour market"* (Johnes and Taylor, 1990: 6). This now has created the notion of the accountable manger within universities, something which Pritchard (2000) explored in relation to a new breed of academic management conceived in the post '92 quality movement, but resulting the beginnings of the loss of identity and increased focus on the policing of performance standards within institutions.

2.2.3. The rise of higher education managerialism

Growing tensions have resulted in an increasingly managerialist culture forming within the HE sector. Tierney (1988) looked at higher educational culture in relation to management practice and why a deeper understanding of it might be more useful and effective for leadership decision-making, especially during complex and turbulent periods of change: *"As decision-making contexts grow more obscure, costs increase, and resources become more difficult to allocate, leaders in higher education can benefit from understanding their institutions as cultural entities.* (Tierney, 1988: 5). This managerialist culture can be seen to embrace accountability over institutional collegiality (Tight, 2014), and, *"while British academics in the 1980s and 1990s may have lacked the veto power, or perhaps it was the will, to resist the managerial changes being imposed on them by government and its agencies, later generations appear to have come to terms with these changes (of course, many of them will have known nothing else)."* (Tight, 2014: 301). Tight (2014) found the dichotomy between collegiality and managerialism, combined with the expansion of the sector, has created a *"demand to ensure quality and value for money"* (Tight, 2014: 302) but one which has inevitably led to a deterioration of the once collegiate culture.

When examining the effect university management have on the institutional culture, Warner and Palfreyman (1996) found that those academics who find themselves in university management roles resisted any form of training for those positions, which in turn had a

detrimental effect on the overall institutional culture, in terms of reduced effective decision making and poor coordination of strategic efforts: "*This is understandable: they were not born managers, they have had it thrust upon them without training*" (Warner and Palfreyman, 1996: 28). This "*new managerial ideology of quality, efficiency and enterprise*" (Hayes and Wynyard, 2002: 33) is one which has been born out of external metrics and internal pressures, and thus has created its own ideology focused around performative strategic priorities such as quality, power, transparency and external accountability: "*New managerialism' has changed and will continue to change what universities do and how they do it; this is very clearly an ideological rather than simply a technical reform of higher education and one that is firmly based on interests concerning relations of power and dominance*" (Deem and Brehony, 2005: 231). This premise embraces the notion that management, as a function, has become detached somewhat from the core business of teaching activities of the university: "*They [university managers] are largely divorced from day-to-day academic work, leading to an increased separation of management and frontline academic activity. "(*Shepherd, 2017: 9).

With the expansion of this managerialist culture forming in academia, we have seen an increase of what Grummel et al., (2009) term the management 'care ceiling'. This ceiling has subsequently given rise to the 'care-less manager', where "*the rules of participation for senior management posts are written largely by and for 'care-less' people*" (p.204). Ultimately this has become somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy, where a chain of command is formed within the institution, and orders are carried out without consultation or question, resulting in poor institutional decisions, nonconductive to enhancing teaching practices. Pursuing efficiencies and accountability over a culture of freedom, flexibility and autonomy, has led to divided academic communities, where subject lines are blurred through managerial hierarchies (Becher, 1989: 13). Yorke (2000) highlights that this type of quality-driven culture is not intended to enhance the student experience, instead being potentially "*dysfunctional' in its practices*". York goes on to outline that this type of culture is divorce from student's wellbeing needs and more aligned with performance targets and quality measures. (Yorke, 2000: 25). Teelken (2012) found the managerialist culture was also generally counterproductive in its application, "*without a direct relationship to the primary process, or acknowledging the specific nature of universities as professional, autonomous institutions*"

(Teelken, 2012: 288), thus leading to high levels of stress and frustration for academics working within its constraints. Teeklen (2012) went on to argue that institutions needed to reclaim their own identities and that "*academics need to build a counter-hegemonic discourse to managerialism and neoliberalism in higher education*" (Lynch, 2015: 202). Hardre and Kollmann (2012) argued that this manageralist culture creates a divisive climate, benefitting those individuals who, ironically, might not be the ones adding to the overall strategic performance indicators. In this respect, there is a need for institutions to now focus efforts on valuing a collegium culture over that of an authoritarian, seeking new ways to make traditional approaches more enterprising in nature. In other words, *"what the university needs to do is to seek various ways to make the seemingly unspectacular spectacular"* (Hayes and Wynyard, 2002: 22).

The concept of performativity born out of neoliberal managerlism (Muniesa, 2018) as an institutional condition, has been seen to generate a standardised approach to learning and teaching, detrimental to self-values, behaviours and individual norms (Sutton, 2017); "*Performativity is a form of rationality and regulation that deploys technical judgements and comparisons to measure, incentivize and punish academics*" (Sutton, 2017: 627). This is something that this thesis sought to explore in more detail, in terms of looking at the effects of a standardised performative culture versus unique individual teaching practices. It is just this discourse between a culture of accountability versus the academic freedom institutions were founded on that will cause the most tensions in light of new government pressures, changing expectations and fee increases. Deem (1998) explored this aspect of freedom at a teaching level, where individual autonomy in teaching could potentially be seen as in opposition to management control and their ability to make decisions in terms of accountability, *"Did organisational freedom at the level of teaching and research inevitably have to mean similar (and hence not very accountable) freedom at the management level?"* (Deem, 1998: 65).

In some respects, we do need to recognise that some level of managerialism may be helpful in creating boundaries and quality assurance mechanisms around the governance of teaching practices, especially given the recent rise in student numbers. Albeit, only a few individuals in Teelken's (2012) study of how academics deal with managerialism reporting this. Crucially, it

is the manner in which the measures and processes are implemented, in terms of understanding their impact and implications on pedagogical practices, hence making informed decisions about teaching development (Teelken 2012). The challenge for institutions is find a balance between effective quality assurance measures and flexible teaching practices that encourage creativity and innovation. Jarvis (2014) argues this can be found only if institutions are prepared to take a broader perspective on a *"series of agendas associated with neoliberal policy prescriptions that valorize market rationality"* (Jarvis, 2014: 164).

2.2.4. The resulting loss of academic identity

The rapidly changing landscape, shifting policy priorities and reforms under successive governments, *"feeds into the continual 'institutional churn' through which, at the institutional level, higher education institutions regularly re-invent themselves in different ways so as to better survive, and attempt to thrive, in their changing environments"* (Tight, 2013: 19). Most recently, the period 2015-21 has been no different on this front, accelerating the performative institutional culture, fuelled by the pursuit of defining excellence within learning and teaching evidenced through external metrics and league tables, such as the Teaching Excellence Framework and National Student Survey. Ultimately, this has resulted in a state of constant institutional flux in order to remain competitive, whilst struggling to maintain institutional (and individual) identity in an ever-changing market place (Tight, 2013). This deepening division is apparent when individual values, central to academic identity are eroded because of loss of academic autonomy (Henkel, 2000).

Boulos (2013) explores the discourses above in universities trying to embrace a diverse culture of creativity and the tensions this causes in terms of individual autonomy, finding many fractions resulted from higher management not understanding teaching practices and creating systems that failed to allow it to flourish effectively, *"top-down political discourse of creativity is often disconnected from teaching practices. In this context, academics feel constrained in their creative teaching"* (Boulos, 2013: 3). Stacey (1992) points out that an anxiety from management, arising from a defense mechanism against unpredictable external climates resulting from policy changes, could potentially be constraining individual creative

practices within universities: "*In reality, success for an organization does not depend on choosing stable equilibrium over explosive instability; it emerges from a third condition that can be called bounded instability*" (Stacey, 1992: 12). This state of instability stems from the university being in flux with the external environment, alongside a constant state of transformative change.

There is an arising need for institutions to shape a clear identity, distinct from competitors within the university sector market place and shape something that provides an attractive offering for students. Due to increased competition between universities, fueled by the rapid rise of marketisation, the sector has seen a rise in complexity and uncertainty (Weick et.al, 2005). Institutions have therefore sought new ways to find sanctuary within this chaotic state, yet still remaining distinct in their teaching offering. A clear institutional identity therefore needs to evolve out of a chaotic market place which is supported by "*Clark who refers to a 'stand up' university or 'self-reliant' universities as institutions which have created for themselves a corporate culture and a defined way of managing themselves which marks them out as having identity*" (cited in Shattock, 2003: 181).

Clark (1998) goes on to point out the need for institutional identity to evolve out of the state funded chaos, considering higher educations' remit in a much broader sense, through the notion of the entrepreneurial university model, in turn leading to a collegial, enterprising culture, where "*collective entrepreneurship overcomes their scattered character, leading toward a more integrated self. Academic groups, small and large, then see themselves in common situations with common problems, common allies and common enemies, and in need of common action. A common culture grows, an identity is shared.*" (Clark, 1998: 15). This need to create a clear identity is not limited to the institutional level but must instead be cascaded down so that a distinct culture forms more widely within the institution: "*It is not enough for one or two individuals to develop these skills. They must be distributed widely throughout the organisation*" (Senge, 1990: 13). Kay's (1993) points out a limited few do not bring uniqueness to an organisation, but focusing efforts on the collective cultural architecture within the organisation does*, "Architecture does not create extraordinary organizations by collecting extraordinary people. It does so by enabling very ordinary people to perform in extraordinary ways*" (Kay, 1993: 69).

Skelton (2012) examined the effects performance measures had on academic teacher identities within a research-led university. He found tensions existing between the teaching aspects of academic identity and the implications for this on a strong research-led culture, which has further connotations around what we see the academic role to be in this climate, *"the teacher as an emergent identity within the institution was insecure given its low-status positioning within the research-led culture" (*Skelton, 2012: 809). He found that *"it is possible to develop a teaching identity within a research-led university but there are obstacles to overcome; for example, the low status of such an identity and the limited support for it in terms of incentives, reward and recognition" (*Skelton, 2012: 810). Skelton interviewed several members of staff pursuing an academic teaching career but who became entangled in identity struggles through lack of status within the institutional culture. Skelton's study *"revealed a complex picture. Some people are pursuing a teaching identity with clear intent, drawing on personal values to inform their teaching and feeling relatively untroubled by external constraints. There are examples of significant 'identity struggles' as people attempt to juggle personal commitments to teaching with the realities of the research culture"* (Skelton, 2012: 23). Two respondents in Skelton's (2012) study particularly highlighted the tensions between the core business of teaching students versus a research led institutional culture, stating: *"The message I've come away with is all that matters is research and that if you want to teach in a university you're in the wrong place..the message keeps on coming back … you can be as good a teacher as you want but it's research that matters. (*Skelton, 2012: 37).

What we now see within universities is the centralised control measures being put in place to govern, are resulting in the subsequent loss of individual and collective identity once held together by the cultural glue (Becher, 1989). As a consequence, this is having the effect of pushing individuals out to the peripheral institutional operating boundaries: *"They have autonomy still, just its limits are ever more clearly defined and policed by the center"* (Becher, 1989: 18). Argos (1956) recognised the individual social nature of education outside of systems and processes, seeing it more as an, *"interpersonal activity, the personalities of those involved cannot be overlooked"* (Argos, 1956: 140). Individuals who should be seen as adding tremendous value to the institutional performance indicators are now *"best characterized as mavericks"* (Memahan, 1993: 48). Whilst these individuals who work on the peripheral borders of the institutional norms appear almost maverick in nature, it is recognised that

there is an increasing need to capture this type of behaviour and embed it more within the central organisational culture for much greater innovative potential (Labarre (2007). In this sense, mavericks tended not to be of their own making or choosing, rather a product of the divisive culture forming around them: *"It appears that skillful mavericks do not want to be identified as separate from the group and that the organization."* (Ray et al., 1997: 20.).

2.3. Teaching awards: The pursuit of institutional excellence

2.3.1. Excellence and metrics

This section explores the literature around *Research Theme 4: Reflect on what a culture of excellence means for the sector* (Chapter Three: Methodology).

The increased emphasis on metrics and performance indicators within the sector has resulted in a drive to evidence teaching excellence through institutional award schemes. However, as discussed earlier, there is a need for the focus to be on a wider cultural shift rather than on individual award winners in order to generate an institutional culture of excellence (Taylor, 2007, Suciu, 2017). Excellence in terms of teaching practice is a widely contested subject within the sector and has been an issue of debate over a number of years (Gibbs, 2016; Madriaga and Morley, 2016; Gourlay and Stevenson, 2017). Teaching excellence can also be an institutional tool for evidencing outward facing reputation, so is more often found within institutional strategic documentation in reaction to policy change. Gibbs (2016) in his critique of the TEF also highlights the difficulties of providing a measurement system around specific 'excellence' criteria, stating instead that, *"only a small proportion of what are proposed as defining characteristics of excellence in teaching can be measured or quantified, placing a heavy burden on qualitative judgements by expert (or perhaps inexpert) panels*." (Gibbs, 2016: 20). Coffield and Edward, (2009) highlight the political drivers within the sector and the cascading pressures upon teaching practitioners to constantly strive to better evidence their own practice, "*How are we, however, to explain the frenetic activity of politicians and policy makers in this sector, as they constantly increase the pressure on practitioners to move from 'good' to 'best' practice and now on to 'excellence for all'?* (Coffield and Edward, 2009: 385).

The policy shift from the time of the 1997 Dearing Review, where the term 'excellence' appeared just 36 times within the report, contrasts with the more recent 2015 Teaching Excellence (TEF) White Paper *'Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice'* where the term 'excellence' appears 97 times. This is indicative of societies changing attitude to universities and the expectation they place on their ability to disseminate their specialist research knowledge and teaching experience for wider benefit. The increased focus on high quality teaching and increased accountability has created institutional tensions that have permeated in a more transparent approach to the measurement and accountability of teaching practice itself, resulting in pressures to change and transform themselves through measures of excellence (Blass, 1999). These institutional measures of excellence in practice, brought with them mechanisms to evidence excellence through objective measures which can be neatly placed on a spreadsheet or database for tangible performance gains. Gibbs (2012) likens this data collection, analysis and dissemination to *"some kind of institutional post-mortem after NSS results are published each year. The centre will collate NSS data and add other institutional data such as about entrants' A-level scores, applicants per place, retention rates and marks in examinations, and send a report to each department for consideration. In some cases, this can be quite an elaborate procedure"* (Gibbs, 2012: 22).

Issues arise when attempting to reduce the complexities of teaching excellence, and all the nuances that go with it down to a sterile set of objective measures. Gourlay and Stevenson (2017) found this when researching the emerging discourses in higher education and its increasingly commodified status, highlighting *"severe difficulties which arise when an attempt is made to reduce a complex, unstable, context-dependent and multifaceted construct such as 'excellence' to a set of metrics"* (Gourlay and Stevenson, 2017: 394). They move on to seeing excellence as a term which *"wears the clothes' of student entitlement, but ultimately erodes the core academic values and intellectual development flowing from challenge, criticality, risk and freedom"* (Gourlay and Stevenson, 2017: 394). Ball and Wilkinson (1994) highlighted that standardised performance indicators around excellence in teaching practice at an institutional level would inevitably lead to 'nationalised policy making' (Ball and Wilkinson, 1994: 426). Madriaga and Morley (2016: 166) also see *"the steady effort to make the intangible, ambiguous aspects"* of excellence in teaching, more tangible and explicit in student-led award forms, despite clear criticism of such reforms. Seeing teaching excellence

as a concept can be viewed as not being helpful in opening up meaningful debate around enhancement of practice, instead being seen more as a quality tool that universities can band around as objective terminology (Skelton, 2009). The increasingly complex ties and uncertainties in higher education causes difficulties when trying to limit our understanding of excellence in practice, as Skelton (2004) highlights: *"In other words, there are different definitions of what it means to be an `excellent' teacher and these are located within a shifting social, economic and political context"* (Skelton, 2004: 452).

What is apparent within the above narrow definitions of excellence as captured in quality metrics, is the conflict occurring between the pursuit of excellence and the interests of equity (Strike, 1985). Can all achieve excellence or is the notion of the terminology at odds with the ideology of educational excellence? *"The point is not to do something well. It is to do it better than someone else"* (Strike, 1985: 411). However, seeing excellence in this way creates internal individual competition and thus fuels a divisive culture. Indeed, what most authors (Gibbs, 2016; Madriaga and Morley, 2016; Gourlay and Stevenson, 2017) observe is that terminology around notions of excellence within education cannot simply reduced down to simplistic concepts. The nature of the terminology itself is often highly ambiguous and misunderstood, where Elton (1998) draws conclusions around institutions' ill -informed and futile attempts to reduce the concept to individual constructs: *"The concept of teaching excellence is applied to individual teachers"* but instead views teaching excellence as, *"a multidimensional concept and its different dimensions call for different forms of recognition and reward" (*Elton, 1998: 9). It is often more the case that metric measures are focused less around student enhancement and improving teaching, instead targeted more at external indicators of performance in the public domain (Gibbs, 2012). Gibbs (2012) goes on to point out the divisive nature of award schemes focused upon specific individuals. He argues that reward and acknowledgement of excellence should be focused on programmes and environments not specific individuals: *"Awards and public acknowledgement of special achievement should be reoriented towards recognition of outstanding programmes and 'learning environments' that require the collaboration of many teachers, and away from public competition between individual teachers"* (Gibbs, 2012: 21).

In reducing excellence to a set of institutional metrics focused on particular individual traits, Saunders and Ramirez (2017) found that creative individual practices were inevitably lost. Thus: *"the measurement of teaching becomes the goal of the educative experience, and the dynamic and creative processes undergirding pedagogical performances are condensed to numerical expressions on a teaching evaluation"* (Saunders and Ramirez, 2017: 400). Dunkin and Precians (1994), concluded the outcomes of teaching compared to research were more difficult to measure, and therefore publications were often seen as more beneficial tangible outputs for individuals to focus efforts on.

In summary, the empirical research shows the need for a much broader focus on viewing teaching excellence, and one which is potentially distinct from the metric based indicators (Gibbs, 2016; Gourlay and Stevenson, 2017). Policy shifts and increase external accountability for institutions has resulted in a drive towards the creation of quality indicators designed only to evidence excellence through tangible, objectives outcomes. These can be seen to only result in further reducing the complex nature of teaching excellence into unhelpful terminology, creating a divisive institutional culture (Skelton, 2009; Madriaga and Morley, 2016).

2.3.2. Excellence as promotion criteria

Similar issues arising from attempts to define excellence also feed in to efforts to use it as an institutional promotion tool. For example, Gibbs argues that *"very few examples in the UK of definitions of teaching excellence and even fewer which go beyond vague common sense in a way which could possibly guide promotion decisions"* (Gibbs, 1995: 75). Studies in Australia have shown it is better practice to instead link excellence to student learning, but this is futile if the concept of excellence itself is not understood: *"It is not possible to compare lecturers' excellence in teaching if there is no definition of what excellence means."* (Gibbs, 1995: 75).

Despite winning or being nominated for a teaching award, it is often the case that the award achieves little in the way of providing individual motivation for promotion on the practitioners' part. More so, it is often the case that intrinsic motivations and deeply held values around teaching practices that are the award winners driving forces in continuing to

practice in the way they do (Visser-Wijnveen, Stes and Van Petegem, 2014): *"teachers were highly motivated because their perceived levels of personal effectiveness, interest and effort were all high"* (Visser-Wijnveen, Stes and Van Petegem, 2014: 652). Respondents in Visser-Wijnveen, Stes and Van Petegem (2014) study stated they were torn between conflicting priorities around teaching and research promotion pathways, given the institutional drive for promotion opportunities linked only to research based outcomes.

In terms of policy research around academic promotion, the UK's Higher Education Academy carried out a study looking at the 'Reward and Recognition of Teaching in Higher Education' in 2009 (HEA, 2009). This looked at academics' perceptions of policy and processes in teaching and methods for assessing and rewarding good teaching practice. The study found that the overall status of teaching compared to research within the sector was much lower. Because of this there was a disparity between individual focus on promotion criteria for both research compared to teaching, concluding the majority of *"senior academic positions"* were instead: *"weighted in favour of academics who focus on research"* (p. 54). Following on from this, the HEA Professional Standards Framework has attempted to provide a set of benchmark criteria based on teaching competencies, through their fellowship scheme. Thornton (2014) looked at the University of Huddersfield, where their Learning and Teaching Strategy in 2008 required 100% participation in the scheme. He concluded that there were some academics who saw such schemes as adding limited value, and others who were *"hostile and skeptical towards such exercises"* (Thornton, 2014: 237). Overall, just 27% of respondents reported changing their practice, and a quarter did not value the scheme at all. The research showed that such schemes worked best, *"when they are part of embedding a culture of professional development."* (p. 237) but in this particular case *"Sadly, the factory-farm approach adopted by the university to get everyone through the arbitrary hoop set by the VC on this issue devalued the whole process"* (Thornton, 2014: 234-237). However, it is worth noting that this particular scheme avoids the earlier criticism that excellence is relative rather than absolute – here individuals can define this in relation to their own teaching practice.

More recently, Fung and Gordon (2016) have looked at research intensive universities reward and recognition processes. Along the same lines as other findings, the conclusions reached argue for, *"focusing on 'education' as a holistic, collective practice rather than adopting*

exclusively individualised models of 'teaching excellence'" (p.53). They recognise the need to see promotion in a much wider integrated sense and one which focusses more on individual strengths within teaching practices, embracing the diverse aspects of research and teaching. In a further study, Feng et.al., (2017) goes on to highlight the importance of nurturing a quality culture within institutions, that embraces the complex and sometimes contradictory relationship between teaching and research. The paper urges institutional leaders to reward and promote academics on both their teaching, academic scholarship and research, viewing all with equal status within the university environment. A growing division can be seen to be arising between promotion criteria pathways based purely upon research priorities, highlighted by a distinct *"difference between old and new universities where new universities are clearly more supportive of teaching than 'old' universities. This gap clearly reveals the lack of progress among 'old' universities"* (Parker, 2008: 250).

2.3.3. Excellence leading to teaching award schemes

This section explores the literature around *Research Theme 1: Develop an understanding of the perception of cultural fit from a practitioner viewpoint* and *Research Theme 3: Gain an insight into individual values and how these drive inspirational teaching practice* (Chapter Three: Methodology)

The Dearing report of 1997 (Dearing, 1997) brought excellence and institutional benchmarks clearly into the frame with the introduction of student fees and perceived state value for money for students attending English universities. The notion of outward facing state accountability for institutions was to be embraced by universities through attempts to objectivity evidence excellence through tangible teaching award schemes. Universities reacted by being much more explicit in terms of their *"commitment to rewarding teaching excellence in learning and teaching strategies"* (Parker, 2008: 238). Warren and Plumb (1999) began to examine the rise in a new phenomenon of teaching award schemes within the sector, as a more explicit means of recognising excellence. They concluded that such schemes *"tend to be rather cumbersome and bureaucratic"* (Warren and Plumb, 1999: 254), stating that schemes tend to work best in institutions where teaching is a key priority, rather than being perceived as a bolt on to existing research initiatives. Ultimately, the awards themselves

are recognised as a limiting factor in evidencing excellence or notions of student quality and enhancement (Lubicz-Nawrocka and Bunting, 2019).

It is inevitable, when taking on board all of the factors leading to the measurement of teaching excellence, tensions and pressures will inevitably arise. Shephard et.al (2010) examined national teaching award winners from a variety of international countries and looked at how the award processes affected winners, concluding that a narrow terminology of excellence may be a straitjacket from which institutions cannot break free once they eventually begin to define it: *"How ironic if the current enthusiasm in higher education to recognise excellence, institutionally and nationally, were to constrain our ability to nurture excellence"* (Shephard et.al., 2010: 55). Like most other studies, detrimental aspects of such awards came to the fore, and in particular concern, *"that the changes undertaken by awardees during the award process may overly reflect a narrow notion of excellence as then the award processes may potentially limit higher education's exploration of teaching excellence rather than expand it.* (Shephard et.al., 2010: 55).

Much more specific clarity around teaching award criteria and how the awards are conceived is needed (Chism, 2006). Chism (2006) found that the reasons behind this lack of clarity may be linked to *"several possible reasons: the primacy of the symbolic—rather than individual reward function; the belief that excellent teaching is impossible to define because it is ineffable, situation-specific, or individual; the belief that everyone knows good teaching when he or she sees it; or the lack of knowledge of the research literature on teaching (or lack of trust of these findings) on the part of those who frame the awards."* (Chism, 2006: 601). Oravec (2017) explored the darker side of award schemes and looked at how gaming and manipulation of awards data could lead to potential unfair practices going on, like we see in any athletic sporting event. Highlighting that in reality, *"there are few real 'winners' in these configurations"* (Oravec, 2017: 432). Thus, there were more losers within the awards system than winners, and the awards themselves had minimal value in terms of the 'star players'.

We would naturally assume that teaching practitioners who receive the awards are grateful of the prestigious attention and recognition bestowed upon them by the institution. This however is often not the case. Taylor (2007) shines a critical light on award schemes from the

individual award winner's perspective, pointing out her *"apprehension about the 'poison chalice'"* (Taylor, 2007: 507). She also highlights the divisive nature of such schemes, where they *"further polarise teaching and research, accelerating 'teaching only' contract staff and differentiating research and teaching"* (Taylor, 2007: 517). Taylor's own apprehension in the study comes across, when she talks about feeling in a somewhat vulnerable and risky position, and thus declining the award nomination the first time around. The paper goes on to see the award ceremony itself as purely a public relations performance used only for the sake of the university: *"I became public property and joined the performance of the university."* (Taylor, 2007: 507).

A more recent study by Mitten and Ross (2016) examined undergraduate faculty award winners and the specific institutional challenges they faced in having to choose between research and teaching. They found that there were high levels of *"motivation, commitment, passion for student learning, and willingness to go 'above and beyond' to meet the needs of students"* (Mitten and Ross, 2016: 12). The respondents all pointed to the fact that their motivation came from internal drivers, combined with the interactions with their students, and not the institutional recognition through the award. Award winners noted considerable challenges arising from the standardised learning and teaching landscape arising from the university. These challenges were around quality systems and processes designed to deal with the increasingly large student numbers, where winners were striving to deliver their own values maintaining a high level of student experience: *"The most prevalent challenges arose from the faculty evaluation system and efforts to produce standardized student experiences"* (Mitten and Ross, 2016: 5).

These value conflicts of teaching practitioners and the institutional culture were also researched in the study by Skelton (2012), who examined the cultural constraints creating a divide in academia between individual values and how these manifested themselves in approaches to learning and teaching practice within the structures found around them. He highlighted that there was much to learn from the 'value-related conflicts' that arise amongst both teaching and research practitioners, and in particular why certain values may be denied, which is what this thesis aimed to examine more deeply. In an earlier piece, Skelton likens the tensions between individual's values and institutional notions of excellence to *"the enduring*

human struggle to 'live out' educational values in practice. Excellence is about the degree of engagement with this struggle as our values inevitably get denied in concrete material circumstances (Skelton, 2009: 109). Institutions must strive to find their own way to define excellence in much more universal terminology that embraces enterprising practices across a multitude of disciplines, individuals and university structures outside that of metrics: *"inherent in a discourse of 'teaching excellence' which is open to myriad interpretations and understandings...with many layers of meaning and not easily captured by metrics."* (Wood and Su, 2017: 463).

We are therefore seeing awards themselves being intertwined with terminology around excellence in an attempt by institutions to evidence some form of ontological truth from which teaching practice can be enhanced. Burke et al., (2015) examined this neoliberalism movement, finding that it *"constrains the ways that 'teaching' is understood"* (p.40). They further highlight issues around 'excellence' becoming a form of ontological truth in itself within higher education and thus severely limiting pedagogical freedom, from individual expression, innovation and practices to one's own values and beliefs. Linking excellence in this sense to institutional performance frameworks can be seen to generate a divisive culture where *"individualism together with excellence as a regime of truth operates as a powerful mechanism to regulate practices and block pedagogic imagination"* (p.41)*.*

To conclude, what does all this tell us about who is an excellent teacher? How do we measure excellence in teaching? The answer is that until now there has been growing pressure for higher educational research on teaching excellence and pedagogical developments outside of the more quantitative empirical studies. With the increasing political pressures, rapid expansion of market forces and a push for demonstrable, tangible metrics there has never been a greater need to explore these phenomena in more detail. From the literature, it is clear to see that gaps exist around individual experiences of teaching awards and their views on the awards ceremony. Alongside this, it is important to also address the empirical gap, in terms of looking more closely using a qualitative approach specifically aimed at addressing what an institutional culture of excellence really means in practice and the implications this has for individual academics.

Chapter Three: Methodology, research methods & sensemaking

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology and methods of analysis adopted for this thesis, outlining the rationale for the Hermeneutical approach, alongside the chosen methods of narrative enquiry, poetic hermeneutics and metaphors. It begins by presenting the research question and context. It then describes how Hermeneutics was applied with the context of the study, before providing the theoretical Hermeneutical spiral model for the research process. Discussions then move to my role as researcher and specifically, how reflexivity played a central part within the research process. The second part of this chapter looks at in detail the mode of analysis applied, providing the reader with a comprehensive overview of the thematic analysis process utilised and an outline of the six stages involved, adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006).

3.1. Research question and themes

The overarching research question which this thesis seeks to explore focuses upon:

'How do teaching award winners experience the drive towards institutional excellence?'

Key Research Themes (developed from my own pre-understanding) stemming from the research question and supporting literature aim to:

> **Research Theme 1:** *Develop an understanding of the perception of cultural fit from a practitioner viewpoint*
>
> **Research Theme 2:** *Explore the impact management and quality procedures have on inspirational teaching practice*
>
> **Research Theme 3:** *Gain an insight into individual values and how these drive inspirational teaching practice*
>
> **Research Theme 4:** *Reflect on what a culture of excellence means for the sector*

3.2. Research study and context

The research is a reflexive exploration focused on 26 academic teaching practitioners working in a teaching-orientated university, which has undergone quite significant changes over the last 10 years in relation to similar institutions in the sector to government led reforms around teaching and research. The institution has a strong teaching award focus. These awards were student-nominated, where students wrote an account of why the nominee made a difference to their study. The student nominated aspect is crucial to this research, as it demonstrates a wider qualitative, yet performative perspective on teaching excellence outside of the more visible institutional measures in place.

It is important at this stage to clarify the narrow focus on only specific academics who have won this inspirational teaching prize. In doing so, I am not arguing that a distinct few academics 'are inspirational', demonstrating traits that are different from the others, but instead trying to tell the story of their struggle (Spinoza, 1677 cited in Malpas and Gander, 2015) in continuing to practice in such a way. The research intended, through Hermeneutical methods (narrative storytelling and visual metaphors), to gain a glimpse of participants inspirational practice occurring outside of the commodified culture (metrics, measures etc.) in academia. Gummesson (2000: 36) highlights that traditional researchers are *"comfortable with looking at the 10% of practice gained by the 'helicopter view' through questionnaires or surveys, leaving the rest as not amenable for research"*. In applying visual methods and techniques I was able to delve to some extent into the 90% of practice, which occurs 'off the radar' or outside of the normal cultural parameters. The study allowed me as the researcher to gain insight into how inspirational practice might be conceived outside of the institution's commodified definition. It sought to examine the constraints and creative tensions participants were experiencing due to continuing to practice in line with their own values and beliefs (Jackson, 2008). This was achieved through the participants own understanding and experiences, telling this through their lived narratives.

Sitting directly alongside the narrative aspect, participants were asked to begin by drawing a metaphor or theme of their journey in the university, based around Morgan's (2006) work on

visual imagery. Specifically, participants were asked to draw themselves on a large piece of flipchart paper and, as the discussions progressed, they then were asked to add their perception of such elements as management, students, teaching and culture. I chose to video the discussions in order to capture the *"naturalistic interaction in conversation and discourse analysis"* (Heath, 1997 cited in King, 2004: 47). Murray (2008) argues that *"Interviewees quickly become accustomed to filming, so long as they have an interesting topic to talk about"* (cited in King, 2004: 47) which was true of this study. When considering recording of these interviews, Warren (2002) states, *"Recording equipment inevitably has meaning for the interviewee; furthermore, it is likely to have different meaning for different people"* (cited in King, 2004: 45). The video recordings had the additional benefit of capturing the main aspects of the visualisation techniques within the discussions and thus aiding the transcription aspects where prompts could be noted, particularly where participants made reference to their metaphorical drawings.

3.2.1. A conceptual overview of the study and its research context

The conceptual framework below (Figure 3.1) is intended to provide the reader with an insight into the phenomena under investigation and how these are situated within the cultural aspect of academia. The model shows in more detail the relationship between both students and academics who are somewhat culture-bound (Moss-Kanter, 2010). This bounded relationship occurs in terms of both student and academics working towards the performance measures which relate directly to enhancing the centralised institutional culture (performative management tools) such as the NSS, module evaluations and quality measures etc. As aforementioned in the literature overview Chapter Two, it is these such measures and tools which have created the institutional perceived 'commodified culture', which you can see as the large grey circle that all parties operate within. However, students are still recognising the inspirational teaching practices of other academics outside of this culture, hence the nomination for a teaching award. It is these academic individuals who appear to be operating on the fringes (or outside in some cases) of the institutional culture that this study observed. The dotted arrows pointing back in to the circle represent the value being added back in to the enhancing the central performance measurement tools. However, this study sought to

observe in more detail the potential creative tensions and often fractures individuals were facing in continuing to practice in such a way.
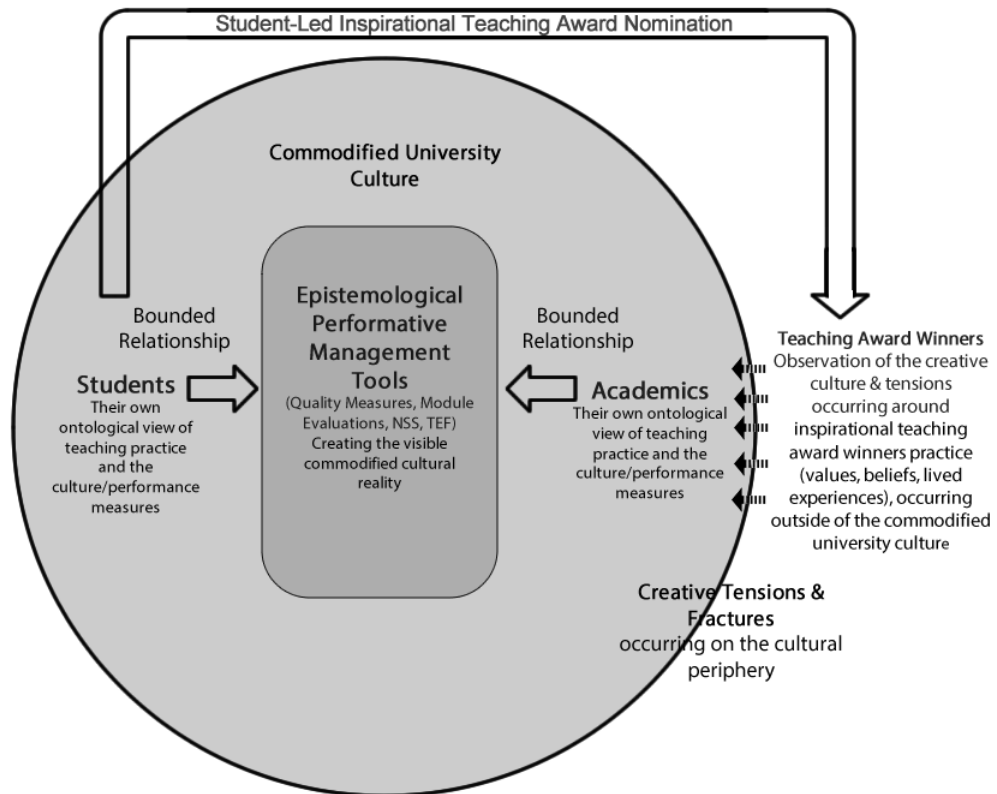
Figure 3.1 Conceptual Framework of the phenomenon under investigation: Presents an overview of the research context in relation to the visible university culture and applied methodology

3.3. Research philosophy – Hermeneutics

I have chosen to apply a Hermeneutical methodology in order to interpret meaning and seek a form of understanding (Gadamer, 2013) on a complex phenomenon such as the interpretation of individual practices. Gadamer (2013) outlines that the scientific world has become somewhat removed from such areas and that in order for us to become awakened to the 'habits, thoughts and behaviors' which are taking place, *"A new critical consciousness must now accompany all responsible philosophizing which takes the habits of thought and language built up in the individuals in his communication with the environment and places them before the forum of historical tradition to which we all belong"* (Gadamer, 2013: xxiv). The rationale for this choice stems from the hermeneutical ability to seek understanding about the world around us through the sharing of language and meaning: *"we must recognize that all understanding is interwoven with concepts and reject any theory that does not accept the intimate unity of word and subject matter"* (Gadamer, 2013: 404).

Hermeneutics is classified as the 'Science of Interpretation' by Spinoza (1677) (Malpas and Gander, 2015) moving from a limited linguistic form of knowledge, where communication and information is "handed down" being written, spoken or heard and then interpreted by the receiver. This enables a limited form of ontological truth to be shared between parties, thus creating a frame of reference (Regan, 2012: 299). Hermeneutics moves communication toward a more open form of looking at language and forming meaning from it, where the interpreters own background, history and cultural context effects how meaning and understanding is placed at the forefront and rooted in a set period of time (Regan, 2012). As this study uses language and historical experiences as a process of shared conversation (inquiry), it is necessary to use an appropriate methodology, such as Hermeneutics to do this: *"But no text and no book speaks if it does not speak a language that reaches the other person. Thus, interpretation must find the right language if it really wants to make the text speak"* (Gadamer, 2013: 398).

Hermeneutics also allows a study such as this to live with the sense of ambiguity for a far longer period, whilst themes are explored and pre-understanding of the subject forms, with

the final aim towards an understanding of the whole. Other more rational research methods require a strict understanding of outcomes from the outset (Gadamer, 2013). Hermeneutics adopts a purely constructivist standpoint (Glasersfeld, 2002), which in turns assumes no objective reality and is useful when looking at the cultural aspect of the study from the individual's viewpoint. The relationship between the interpreter [researcher] and their translation or understanding of events, culture and context through the shared language of conversation, in the end create some form of meaning (Gadamer, 2013).

Through adopting a Hermeneutical approach to this research, I am not intending to create a scientific linear process to gain understanding of the phenomena taking place, instead using it as a key to help unlock (interpret) meaning by way of the narrative and visual methods (Gadamer, 2013). As Heidegger (1927) noted, we have struggled with the pursuit of being and meaning since the time of Plato and Aristotle. In itself Hermeneutical thinking is not intended to be standalone of disconnected, but aims to shine a light on horizons and viewpoints outside of more logical methodological pursuits, *"When understanding becomes the central phenomenon for philosophy, hermeneutics is no longer conceived of as simply one minor branch of philosophy."* (Hoy, 1993: 170). Dilthey (1923) aimed through Hermeneutical enquiry to create a link between the division of natural sciences (outer experiences) and human sciences (inner experiences), in-keeping with the study observing individuals lived experiences within a defined context or culture, *"The history of human sciences shows a constant struggle with the difficulties encountered here"* (Dilthey, 1833-1911: 3). As Geertz (1973) pointed out, looking at culture is not something we can simply do with traditional scientific methods; one must tackle this complex subject with interpretative tools in order to communicate meaning. This study's ontology is based on a language of shared meaning in order to perceive the world around us, where the past and present come together to form a shared language of meaning and understanding (Jules, 2015: 117).

3.4. Research process: forming my pre-understanding

Underpinning this study's methodology is the notion of the Hermeneutic Spiral (Gadamer, 2013). The spiral is *"an iterative process whereby each stage of our research provides us with knowledge"* (Gummesson, 2000: 70). The spiral model (Figure 3.2) outlines my development of pre-understanding within this research to the emergence and development of understanding (i.e. from PART understanding moving to WHOLE) around four central themes: Culture, Management Practice, Award Winners and Excellence and Teaching Values (Left of Spiral).

This interplay between my own pre-understanding and forming new understanding (or meaning) of the phenomena taking place involves 5 distinct types of knowledge, as proposed by Gadamer (2013):

1. *My own general knowledge* – (case models, theories and concepts around the four research themes)
2. *General Knowledge of Techniques* – (narrative methods being used to gain access to the awards winners' lived experiences)
3. *My specific knowledge of institutional condition* – (past experiences)
4. *My specific knowledge of social patterns* – (my own understanding of university culture)
5. *My specific personal attributes* – (my personality, views and values on the topic)

It is an iterative process, whereby as I move up the spiral, my own understanding of each of the four themes evolved. The spiral takes me through the entirety of this research study. Prior knowledge of the research phenomena is utilised in forming what to ask in order to begin dialogue (Pre-Understanding) – at the start. This interplay between my own pre-understanding, dialogue, and then ultimately understanding helps to take me, as the researcher further up the spiral until the areas have been covered and meaning can be sought (Understanding) (Gadamer, 2013).

Structuring the research in such a way allows the development of my own existing pre-understanding (knowledge of the topic) plus my experience (to create the PART), combined with the participants' experiences as inspirational award-winning academics. This helps support the interplay of knowledge and the forming of new understandings (moving toward THE WHOLE) until reaching the top of the spiral where no new understanding is then formed. New areas of the themes will likely emerge/evolve as a result of gaining new knowledge of the subject area, conversations I have with participants, and as my own feelings change (outlined in the reflexive diary I kept).

Figure 3.2 Representation of researcher and participants' journey up the Hermeneutical Research Spiral

Researcher Journey up the Hermeneutical Spiral

WHOLE

Time

Understanding
of the phenomena under
investigation

Evolving Themes

Values

Award winners and
excellence

Management practice

University culture

PRE-UNDERSTANDING
(of the phenomena
under investigation)

Methods to access reality:
interviews, storytelling & metaphors.

Experience of participants

UNDERSTANDING
(of the phenomena
under investigation)

Academic literature

Personal Involvement

Personal Experience/Pre-understanding
of phenomena
as an academic practitioner

PART

Adapted from Gummesson (2000): 71

58

3.5. Role of the researcher

I am situated within this same research context with the participants themselves and through the methodology, working to generate a shared framework for the meaning and understanding of the subject being explored. It therefore can be seen as *an 'interpretation of the self-interpretation of others within a context'* (adapted from Bleicher, 1982). This allows for one's own pre-understanding (experience combined with theory) to open up a dialogue of enquiry with participants. Gadamer outlines that doing this is an attempt to understand the experiences of others in a defined context: *"The hermeneutics developed here is not, therefore, a methodology of the human sciences, but an attempt to understand what the human sciences truly are, beyond their methodological self-consciousness, and what connects them with the totality of our experience of world"* (Gadamer, 2013: xxii). The researcher must be aware of preconceptions and assumptions in using this method of research. However, the aim is not to remove these or search for some 'scientific truth', but instead to acknowledge the subjective nature and interpret it through meaning as Johnson et al., (2006) confirm: *"…a subjective view of epistemology repudiates the possibility of a neutral observational language: language does not allow access to, or representation of, reality"* (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000: 112).

Figure 3.3 below provides an oversight of how the various elements fit together, taking me from pre-understanding to understanding of the phenomena from my own personal experiences as a practitioner, allowing a means of access to this area (outlined above), which have shaped the nature of enquiry for this type of study. This has helped shape a certain attitude toward this area (Ricoeur, 2008) through my own preconceptions, knowledge and values towards the topic. *Intermediaries* then enable learning to take place in terms of supervisors, past literature and studies on the topic itself. As Ricoeur (2008) notes, one risks *'entering the vicious circle of academic research'* when researchers begin quoting each other.

The 'Development of Understanding' comes from the choice of methods allowing access to and analysis of the experience of the participants. This in turn, through my own personal involvement, allows the process of moving up the hermeneutic spiral from PART to WHOLE

understanding – summarized by Ricour (2008) as: *"no understanding without preunderstanding"* leading to *"… an understanding of the parts assumes an understanding of the whole"* (Ricoeur, 2008: 70). My own role as a senior academic within the university sector, has both allowed a development and appreciation of the issues and tensions being faced by participants involved within this study. In some respects' this has provided me with an insider viewpoint, which has informed the study and allowed a much closer relationship to form between myself and participants. A deep intrinsic shared empathy towards the issues being faced, has provided participants with the confidence to discuss these in great detail. These have been shared sharing them through the lens of narrative storytelling, and opening up of dialogue between both parties.

Figure 3.3 Framework for the Development of Pre-Understanding of the Phenomena during the Research Process

Framework for gaining understanding of the phenomena taking place in higher education using Hermeneutics
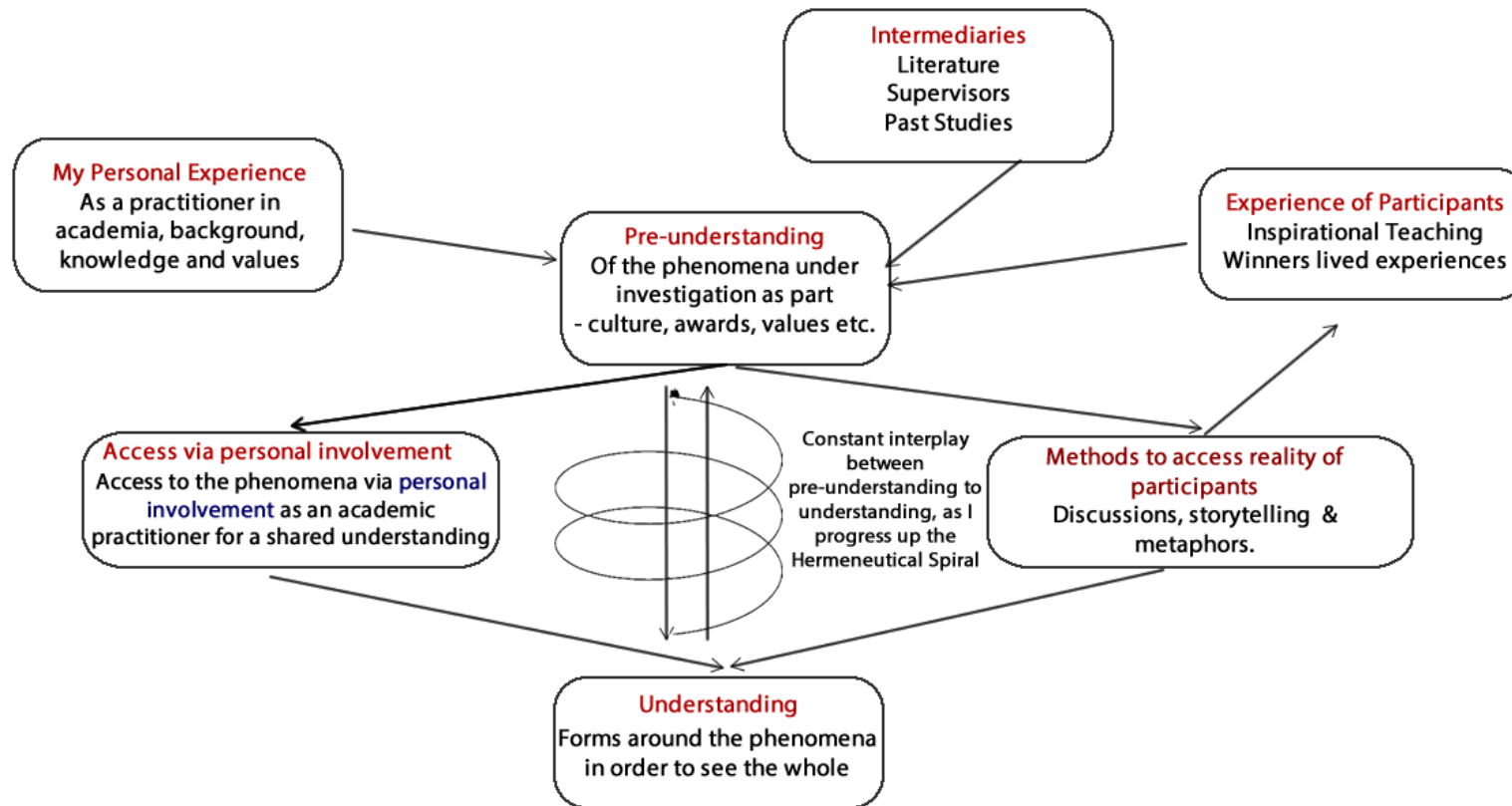
Adapted from Gummesson (2000)

3.6. Demonstrating reflexivity

Reflexivity has many varying definitions and meaning. One definition by Holland (1999: 464) is the process *"which turns back upon, or takes account of, itself or a person's self, especially methods that take in to consideration the effect of the personality of the researcher in the investigation."* Johnson and Duberley (2000: 1286) look at reflexivity specifically in terms of management research and ontological and epistemological stances, which is useful to this area of research in the sense that *"language rhetorically produces many realities as there are modes of describing and explaining"*. The very nature of Hermeneutical research, requires a central role of reflexivity and understanding. By utlising this approach it both encouraged wider meaning and understanding through dialogue and communication to form between myself and participants within the study (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). This had a duality of allowing me to understand in more detail what the participants were discussing but also enhanced my understanding of self, (Thompson et. Al., 1994) through practice and knowledge thus changing my own world view (Gummesson, 2000).

The preceding has implications for my own ontological stance, where *"a realist ontology is utilized - that is, there is a real world with real phenomena to explore - and a subjectivist or constructivist epistemology, in that our understanding of that reality is socially constructed"* (Symon and Cassell, 2012: 21). In adopting an interpretivist stance, in some respects I am trying to *'achieve an access to management reality'* (Gummesson, 2000) within higher education. In doing so I am trying seek understanding and meaning through 'their', (participants) world view: *"the meaning and interpretations actors [academics] subjectively ascribe to phenomena [in HE] in order to describe and explain their behaviour"* (Symon and Cassell, 2012: 21).

The research has therefore evolved through meaning and understanding in its entirety, on the basis of an interpretation of the socially constructed world of academia, which came out from the participant discussions. I am aiming for clarification of the subjective experience (their practice) and insight in to the original intentions of the actors - through authentication, rigor and my own understanding (Eco, 1999). Throughout these sets of interviews, I

demonstrated ongoing reflexivity within my reflexive diary to demonstrate how I had taken into account my own views of reality and the context (Gadamer, 2013) as they unfolded and were potentially changed as a result of the participants I was speaking and interacting with. This allowed a constant process of review, reflection and evaluation as I progressed up the Hermeneutical Spiral (Gill and Johnson, 2010). After each interview had taken place, I also reflected on the aspects drawn and discussed in my reflexive diary which allowed new insights to form. This allowed me to collect data about people's understandings of culture, climate, management and the effect it had on their own practice/values. The metaphors didn't represent an objective reality on their own but instead allowed a much deeper understanding of both the participants *"social and organisational worlds"* (Musson, 2014: 4).

The research methods tested me on many levels, not simply requiring good interviewing abilities, but additionally demanded a high level of emotional commitment and involvement with the participants. Utilising my own subjectivity as a mode of emotional knowing was key in nurturing responses out of participants within discussions (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). Discussions were semi-structured and discussion topics tended to go in various directions emotionally, often leading to tears from some of the participants. This therefore required a high level of empathy and understanding from me as researcher. Being a compassionate and empathetic listener was therefore vital, as was having the ability not to push too far when it was not required but instead allowing freedom in expression with the participants during these discussions.

3.7. Ethical considerations

King and Horrocks (2014: 110) observe that *"when using qualitative interviews, researchers are better positioned than those carrying out other kinds of research to recognise ethical issues, to obtain information that could help in making ethical decisions and to engage in a genuine process of negotiation around ethical concerns"*. This is ultimately true of this research study in terms of the responsibility I held as researcher/practitioner, sharing my own academic experiences working within universities with the participants around the sensitive issues being discussed. Participants were contacted directly, obtaining information from the

university website or through contacts. The voluntary nature of the study and ability to withdraw at any time clearly communicated to all participants involved. Discussions were conducted in a way to not cause harm or stress to participants during the conversations. Ethical clearance was obtained by the University of Sheffield for this study. Formal consent to participate in this study was obtained informed from participants involved in the study via a consent form, whilst also asking applying due diligence and asking for verbal consent at the start of each recording.

Confidentiality and anonymity was taken extremely seriously for this research study, given the sensitive and personal issues being discussed. Personal information was kept confidential at all times, and names of those involved were pseudo-anonymised as a result. Data was held under the UK Data Protection Act (2018) and underpinned by the General Data and Protection Regulation (GDPR), not being shared for any other purposes than the research. Data were only to be kept for the length of this study, until the thesis was submitted and then destroyed. Data were stored on a secure, password protected laptop at all times. Participants themselves were provided with alternative names, and other measures including avoiding naming specific department names in order to disguise their identity. Additionally, great care and attention to details was taken to remove any identifiable elements from metaphors and the course of transcription that could identity participants or their institution was removed in order not to compromise any participants backgrounds or positions.

3.8. Research methods

This section looks at the specific research methods used. As part of my journey moving up the Hermeneutical Spiral with the participants, methods such as narrative inquiry and visual metaphors were utilised as a way of constructing meaning to understand the specific cultural phenomena taking place (essentially as a means of gaining access to the participants' own realities). The following sections provide an account of the research design and the methods executed.

3.8.1. Participant selection

The 26 participants involved within this study were all student-nominated inspirational teaching award winners. The university makes extensive use of the award winners within their marketing collateral and in this sense, it forms major form of promotion for the university each year. The study participants were selected from the list of award winners presented on the university website, then directly emailed to ask them if they would be interested in taking part in the study. All accepted the opportunity to meet and discuss their experiences of receiving the teaching award with me. In choosing the physical environment for the interviews and location, my main requirements were that the people I spoke to should be as comfortable as possible, both physically and perhaps more significantly, secure psychologically when telling me their stories (King, 2004: 42). Therefore, a booked, quiet venue with an informal layout was essential and this was communicated prior to meeting.

3.8.2. Narrative enquiry

The interviews built on the ideas around narrative storytelling to enable, '*people to express their understandings of events and experiences'* through narrative enquiry (Mishler, 1986). Snowdon (1999) and Denning (2001) suggest that stories can provide simple, non-threatening ways of explaining complex ideas, so provided the perfect platform from which to begin discussions around the themes being extracted. Participants' narrative accounts (or stories) about their journey in academia provided an insight into areas such as awards, values, management and cultural tensions within higher education.

Narrative accounts themselves can be seen to push forward through time (Heidegger, 1996), it is therefore relevant to use methods that allow this passage of time to be recorded to some extent through the research study in terms of the participant's own academic journey and lived experiences as a snap shot in time (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009). Ricoeur (2008) focusses upon the notion of time as a concept in relation to experiences driving current understanding and meaning. Time plays a crucial role in capturing a glimpse of experience from those participants being observed and their journey up until the point of the discussions with them taking place (Heidegger, 1996). In this sense, it is useful to see life as a lived narrative, or 'lived time' (Bruner, 2004) and as a means of transmitting culture, thus gaining access to a reality through stories through a process of 'reality construction' (Bruner, 1991). Roberts (2006: 127) highlights the difference between the perception of 'information' and perception of a 'story', stories having context, being cloaked in credibility and being a fast way to access an individual's perception of reality. (Roberts, 2006: 128). Bruner (1986, 1990) describes the sense of 'narrative knowing' as opposed to 'pragmatic knowing', a term whose roots lie in the more scientific schools, focusing on classification and measurement. Narrative knowing on the other hand, centers on people understanding themselves, organising interpretations of the world in storied form (Murray 2003). Critics of narrative knowing have viewed it as being 'subjective, vague, immaterial and lacking in legitimacy' (King and Horrocks 2010). However, in its defense authors such as, Sarbin (1986) (cited in King and Horrocks 2010: 214) have shown that humans *"perceive, imagine and make moral choices according to narrative structures"* (cited in King and Horrocks 2010: 214), which is central to this area of research in terms of how I extracted views of the participants and how then they expressed the impact of structures on their daily working lives.

3.8.3. Poetic hermeneutics and metaphors

Participants were asked to draw themselves on a large piece of flipchart paper and, as the discussions progressed, they then were asked to add in such elements as management, students, teaching, and culture. These elements were all based around the 4 research themes (section 3.1), identified from my own pre-reading, experience and understanding. This allowed a much deeper interpretation and expression to form during the discussions. The metaphorical drawings the participants produced were then photographed to be

analysed/interpreted in the data analysis stage alongside their recorded narrative, providing a rich and detailed dataset.

Metaphor and narrative when combined constitute two aspects of poetry and expression. Metaphor can be seen against the backdrop of narrative text, opening up new insights (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). Guillemin (2004: 274-5) recognises that *"Drawings are visual products and at the same time produce meanings."* As early as 1260, scholars such as Eckhart made use of metaphor and hence analogy to seek meaning from scripture and God (Malpas and Gander, 2015). At the deepest roots of traditional Hermeneutics exists what Gadamer (1989) terms *"the metaphorical-poetic not logic-formal".* To this extent, using metaphors in this research was not about an elaborate attempt to try something new, but instead to create a 'fluid poetic sphere' from which discussions could flow and new insights could be gained (Ricoeur, 1978 cited in Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009: 124). By integrating metaphors within the interviews, I sought to support the narrative plot and help to join together elements of what is a complicated mix of emotions, lived experiences and deeply rooted intrinsic values. In seeing the research question through a metaphorical lens, I was aiming to *"generate a new unity of the whole within the realm of language"* (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009: 124). In this sense, the metaphoric interpretation is 'grafted' onto the narrative story being told by the academic teaching practitioners themselves (Philips and Brown, 1993; Ricoeur, 1991 in Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009).

In further support of this type of method, Ricoeur (2008) observes that the understandings of a phenomenon goes far beyond that of the natural sciences, instead being based around our own human subjective inquiry (Ricoeur, 2008). It was hoped that by adopting such visual methods I would learn more about the values and experiences of the participants and gain a small glimpse into participants' realities in order to *"grab hold of feelings that would be otherwise inexpressible and unmemorable"* (Sandelands and Boudens, 2000: 58). Guillemin (2004) also recognises that *"drawings are visual products and at the same time produce meanings"* (Guillemin, 2004: 274-5), therefore providing a much wider viewpoint on the topics of discussion.

3.9. Sensemaking and crafting of stories (analysis)

3.9.1. Introduction to the analysis process

This section describes the systemic and rigorous approach adopted with the collected data set, including video recordings of the interviews, metaphorical drawings on flipcharts, alongside my own reflexive diary. In order to try and make sense of this vast amount of data, a process of thematic analysis was utilised for each of the 26 participants' transcripts. Riessman (2005: 3) indicates that *"The thematic approach is useful for theorising across a number of cases – finding common thematic elements across research participants and the events they report."* In this instance, the themes generated from the transcription stage helped support finding common elements across each of the narrative stories. I was at this stage, aiming to try and gain some form of agency from the transcripts in order to have key narrative ingredients to work with and from which I could then construct plausible stories, crucially staying true to the participants original accounts.

In terms of authenticity and how the story teller (researcher) tells these accounts, it does not need to be true to the past, as this is this the participants own world account of their lived experiences. Instead the accounts need to focus upon the impact they would have in this study on future connections and implications for teaching excellence. As Riessman (2005: 6) asserts: *"narratives are useful in research precisely because storytellers interpret the past rather than reproduce it as it was. The 'truths' of narrative accounts are not in their faithful representations of a past world, but in the shifting connections they forge among past, present, and future."* In this sense, I am extracting meaning out of each story and also the combined stories, reflecting upon conceptual frameworks in terms of the implications being put forward in relation to higher education policy, practice and culture. Underpinning this is the development of themes utilising the literature in the discussions (Chapter Five) which inform each narrative.

3.9.2. Working with narratives and metaphors: the researcher as a story teller

As story teller, at this stage I was left with 26 extremely lengthy transcripts. These needed to be condensed down in to narrative stories which still conveyed the emotions, passions and

values of these inspirational teaching award winners. Additionally, I also had the metaphorical drawings and my own reflexive diary to incorporate within the stories. Having collected the data myself, I approached the sensemaking stage with some prior knowledge, interest, academic experience and form of understanding of the transcription data. The immersion in these aspects of the data was key to really understanding it in any sense of the word (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 87). On this aspect, considerable time was taken to read over the transcripts multiple times over to see if any patterns or ideas emerged at this first step. As I re-read the transcripts, I began to use post-it notes to record my initial ideas and considerations for the overall analysis. Most research guides point to a small sample being more useful in this respect. However, I was dealing with a large amount of transcription data from the interviews, and this part of the process therefore took a considerably long time, but was useful in enabling a detailed understanding of some of the core issues revealed across transcripts to form – helping more concise themes to emerge later in the process.

My own subjectivity has been at the forefront of all these stories, combined with my practice and experience as an academic working in higher education for a number of years. I have embraced the aspect of my own lived experience and understanding during the construction of each individual narrative to form a complete understanding of the situation these participants were facing. That is to say, I am not assuming some form of objective stance, rather trying to position myself within participants' lived experiences and context, which is full of *"privileges positionality and subjectivity"* (Riessman, 2013: 4). In this sense, these accounts represent a form of individual truths (not a single truth) to the events at the time, and therefore the historical element is central to creating meaning from them and how participants experienced the changing and complex cultural and temporal elements occurring around them within a set context. My constructivist approach to creating the narrative accounts involved *"characterizing a culture"* of lived experiences and complexities, in the sense of the participants passing of time (Bruner,2004: 694) working within the university and receiving the inspirational teaching award. I am attempting to analyse university culture using the course taken by participants in their own lived journeys and represent these within their narrative stories. Indeed, in this sense I am the storyteller of the participants' stories, but cannot discount the fact that the account and researcher were intrinsically intertwined, and therefore any attempt to detach would be futile and reductionist. We are all therefore

interacting and attempting to make some sort of sense of these interactions through reflection in stories and how these have helped to shape our current experiences and construct some form of reality that can then be interpreted (Bell, 2002).

As researcher developing these stories, I chose to adopt a sociocultural philosophy for the narrative construction, where there is no set right or wrong process for the development of stories (Grbich, 2013: 221) but one which emphasises the identification of narrative structure (boundaries) arising from the transcripts. This is where the preceding elements of the thematic analysis assisted, in terms of opening up what the actual boundaries were, how they were to be grouped, and how the stories could be coupled or linked to specific events taking place within each participants account. The stories created from the participant accounts are therefore lived narratives, which tell a story or lived journey of each participant. In this sense, it is important to keep accounts separate up to a point, and take each one in the premise that, *""stories" do not "happen" in the real world but, rather, are constructed in people's heads"* (Bruner, 2004: 691). These stories are therefore a representation of the lived world around these participants, with an interpretation from my own perspective, as storyteller. The re-interpretation from my own understanding, intertwined in the intricate elements of the participants accounts construct a form reality of their own (Bruner, 1998). Within these stories the notion of 'self' has been put at the forefront of each, growing out of the interactions participants had with the cultural elements in the lived world around them. This is then self-constructed in their own individual ways and viewpoints and put forward within each of the narrative stories.

3.9.3. Seeking meaning through thematic analysis

The process of analysis adopted (Figure 3.4 below) is adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006: 87). This has provided a guide for the process I followed in this research in order to create a cohesive structure to the narrative accounts extracted from the transcriptions, whilst still seeking to maintain individual authenticity. It is important to note that this is not strictly a linear process (as represented in Figure 3.4) and as the dotted arrows on the model indicate. The process of analysis began as soon as the data was collected very early on in the study, and both can be seen as being interrelated (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Combined with the Hermeneutical philosophy, it is much more iterative and progressive in nature.

Figure 3.4 below highlights the overlap between the three elements of the thesis: *(a) the thematic analysis process; (b) production of the narrative stories (Chapter Four); and finally (c) creation of the overarching final discussion sections topics.* The elements of supporting data (reflexive diary, interview transcripts, literature, metaphors and methodology) which guided and informed the analysis process will be presented.

Figure 3.4 Six Step Thematic Analysis Process highlighting the stages being undertaken

Thematic Analysis Process

STEP 1:
Familiarising myself with the transcriptions

- - -→

STEP 2:
Searching for Themes (Broad Scope, Local Detail)

- - -→

STEP 3:
Reviewing and Refining Themes (Reducing Overlap and creating headings)

Reflexive Diary

Interviews

STEP 6:
Creation of Taxonomy of Discussion Topics mapped to Research Themes

←- - -

STEP 5:
Creation of narrative stories (Bringing all elements together)

←- - -

STEP 4:
Defining what each core theme is about (Clustering Mapping of Themes)

Methodology

Literature

Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006: 87)

3.9.4. Step 1: Familiarising myself with the transcriptions

Figure 3.5 Step 1 of the thematic analysis stages

STEP 1:
Familiarising myself with the transcriptions

STEP 2:
Searching for Themes (Broad Scope, Local Detail)

STEP 3:
Reviewing and Refining Themes (Reducing Overlap and creating headings)

Reflexive Diary

Interviews

STEP 6:
Creation of Taxonomy of Discussion Topics mapped to Research Themes

STEP 5:
Creation of narrative stories (Bringing all elements together)

STEP 4:
Defining what each core theme is about (Clustering Mapping of Themes)

Methodology

Literature

Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006: 87)

Making sense of the transcriptions

I was left with a series of 26 video recordings lasting from 30 minutes in length to some which extend to over two hours. These were manually transcribed and, because of the length of the video recordings, the transcripts are themselves extremely lengthy which meant that the analysis and representation of these in stories was much more complex. Due to the vast amount of data, I took the decision to use someone else to transcribe the recordings, which is not uncommon where large amounts of data are associated with research studies such as this, combined with the mode of part time study (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 232). Tilley (2003: 837) describes in detail how approaches to transcribing can differ, and that it is more common place to utilise external help for transcription, providing a useful overview of her own experiences as a transcriber. My concern was that by not undertaking the transcription process myself, I may have become somewhat detached to the data and the interviews themselves, and would not have the closeness to the data, complicating things later on in the

process. Tilley (2003:842) emphasises this concern in her own study but, as I did, overcomes this issue by going back over the videos many times; reading the transcripts and making notes around them compensated for not undertaking the transcription process personally. Moreover, as Lapadat and Lindsay (1999: 69) state, *"the audio or video tapes—not the transcripts—are the data"*; in this sense, the video recordings with the participants were the actual data in this case, and the transcripts stemming from them formed only an aid to the interpretative element within the analysis stages.

Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that at this particular stage, there is no one set method to undertaken thematic analysis, and it is more about following principles, which I have adopted throughout the six steps of the thematic analysis process. In essence trying to represent the voices and values of those participants' stories, Bird (2005: 228) states it is important to distance oneself at times in order to be able to effectively represent those voices in written format: *"Those researchers who desire to present the voice of the participant must wrestle with this issue while they knowingly write the research as their own product. When representing an oral voice in written form, the transcriber becomes the channel for that voice"*. Therefore, even this early stage in the transcription process was in itself an act of interpretative enquiry and understanding of meaning for the researcher, whereby I was placing myself directly in the centre of the narrative accounts and how these played out.

Working with the transcriber

I held in-depth conversations with the transcriber at scheduled points during the transcription process. This served multiple purposes. Firstly, to clarify aspects of the videos and how they could be transcribed. Secondly, to question the transcriber about their understanding of the themes and structure of discussions, which also helped my own understanding and made sure transcription was providing sufficient detail from which the next stages of the analysis could then take place. It was also important to me that the transcriber understood the context of the research it took place under. In this respect, it allowed them to provide some early reflections and feedback on what they, as an external observer, were witnessing from the videos and the initial emergent themes stemming therefrom, therefore helping to confirm/corroborate and test my own observations. Again, this was useful at this early stage to get me thinking about how I would organise and make sense of the themes emerging.

Completed transcripts were returned to me in three stages, allowing initial scanning and reading of outcomes as the transcription progressed, so as not to be totally distanced from either it or the transcriber.

Coates and Thornborrow (1999) point out that data can be transcribed in many different formats; any researcher therefore needs to think carefully about how they are to transcribe. The 'denaturalized' method of transcription has risen because of a focus upon *informational content* (Maclean et al., 2004). I was interested in this method, as rather than focusing upon accents, patterns of speech etc., the approach instead centres on the wider themes and issues arising from the conversations. Related to this research question, is the pursuit of the effect of cultural elements on a person's academic practice. These cultural constraints are often captured in the video interview itself and not in the 'mechanics' of the dialogue which would be transcribed word by word. Indeed, if the research objectives were concerned with the mechanics of language, my mode of transcription would reflect this, examining how *ideas* around practice arise from the interviews rather than the actual *ideas* themselves. Underpinning this whole process of transcription is reflexivity in the study, helping both to honour the process and also the 'voice' of the people I spoke with throughout.

In terms of the mechanics of the transcription process, meetings were arranged with the transcriber where clear guidelines were given. Colours were added by the transcriber to highlight both the researcher and participant responses. Additionally, because of the visual metaphor elements to the research process, a separate colour (purple) was recorded on the transcripts for when the participants would draw or point to their metaphor to illustrate their narrative accounts.

3.9.5. Step 2: Searching for themes (broad scope, local detail)

Figure 3.6 Step 2 of the thematic analysis stages
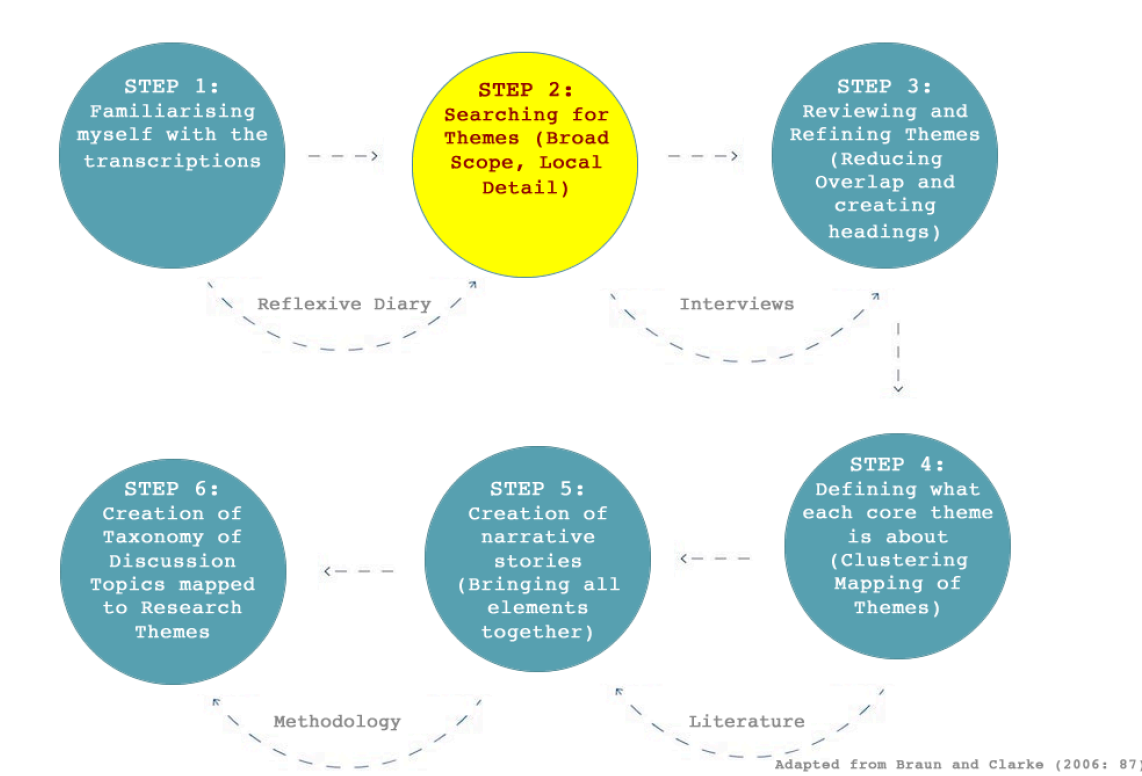
With transcription complete, it was time to begin what I termed a broad scope sweep of each transcript to start the process of formally identifying common themes. The qualitative data collection process involved in this research study has been highly complex, ambiguous and diverse, in order to do it justice, thematic analysis was employed due to its inherent flexibility. This particular method has been described by Aronson (1994) and Roulston (2001) as being independent of theory and epistemology, *"which can provide rich, detailed and complex accounts of data"* (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 78). Rubin and Rubin (1995: 226) state that within the process of analysis, *"you discover themes and concepts embedded throughout your interviews"*, something I witnessed become more and more apparent at each stage of this process. Themes in relation to the present study, were defined as the most distinctive features which sprang out of the transcribed accounts, metaphoric drawings and also from the reflexive diary accounts.

At this second stage of the thematic analysis process I was trying to go beyond my interpretation of the descriptive elements of the transcripts and focus more on the meaning of what the participants said in terms of how I perceived their language around the topics being discussed, alongside their metaphoric accounts. Weick (2005: 409-413) describes this stage of sensemaking as a *'process of ordering'* and *'organising through communication'*, within a set context, where a certain set of circumstances are unfolding i.e. the cultural tensions being experienced by the award winners. I now needed to take a step back and make sense of the complexities that have arisen out of the transcripts, in order to form a conclusive oversight of the phenomena taking place. I understood this second step of the analysis process as seeing the participants' (work) lives through a narrative lens (Bruner, 1996), where I tried to organise and unfold events which took place for these individuals within a complex cultural context over a period of time. This interplay was one of noticing interesting and common features, reflecting on what was said back in the discussions, looking back retrospectively over the drawings the participants made and where they pointed to when they were discussing particular elements. To assist this step after each interview, as noted previously, I had also created a reflexive diary to note down my thoughts, feeling and assumptions after each discussion with the participants.

The process itself was one of determining human behaviours and the *'interplay of action and interpretation'* of language (Gadamer, 2013) by way of generating themes. With the complicated nature of culture within this investigation, this second step of the process was challenging. Indeed, it took considerable time to process and make sense of the diverse lived experiences, language, metaphorical drawings and analogies being put forward. I was in essence trying to tap in to participants' world views (Gadamer, 2013) of lived experiences (values, emotions and tensions) within academia, and draw out key characteristics across transcripts in order to then process these and begin to formulate the narrative overarching themes in order to move to the next step of the process (3: Reviewing and Refining Themes). In the same vein, Weick (2005: 410) points, out: *"Plausible stories animate and gain their validity from subsequent activity. The language of sensemaking captures the realities of agency, flow, equivocality, transience, reaccomplishment, unfolding, and emergence, realities that are often obscured by the language of variables, nouns, quantities, and structures."*

The thematic map below (Figure 3.7), outlines the emerging themes arising both form the transcriptions but also during the period of undertaking the discussions with the participants. With this study being part time, and given the slightly unorthodox Hermeneutical methodology, data were collected early on in the study, there was a delay in undertaking the analysis. Referring back to my earlier point about this analysis stage not being a predefined linear process, it was much more a journey of learning, development and understanding at each stage to extract meaning from the themes in further depth as I progressed through. Throughout this process of theme development, I have modified the titles of the headings in the map (Figure 3.7) to reflect my increased understanding of the theme emerging, to correspond with my wider understanding and how these correlated with the overarching research question.

Figure 3.7 Thematic map, highlighting main themes arising from transcripts

Thematic Map

Forced to operate on the cultural perimeter

Strong value conflicts

Only management roles

Academic Teaching practitioners

Lack of any career prospects

Cultural Elements

Roles

Conflicting demands

Feeling like mavericks

Teaching awards and ceremony

Strains of operating on the outskirts of the culture

Negative Talk

Loss of individual identity

Interesting Elements

Mental health and wellbeing

Tensions Arising

Negative perception of university management

Passion for teaching shone through

Teaching as an act of performance

Entrepreneurial aspects and creative thinking

Performance and control mechanisms

Positive Aspects

Constraints

Quality measures and metric drivers

Deep understanding of pedagogy

Students and their relationships

Trying to continue to teach in a way they deemed made a positive impact

3.9.6. Step 3: Reviewing and refining themes (reducing overlap)

Figure 3.8 Step 3 of the thematic analysis stages

Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006: 87)
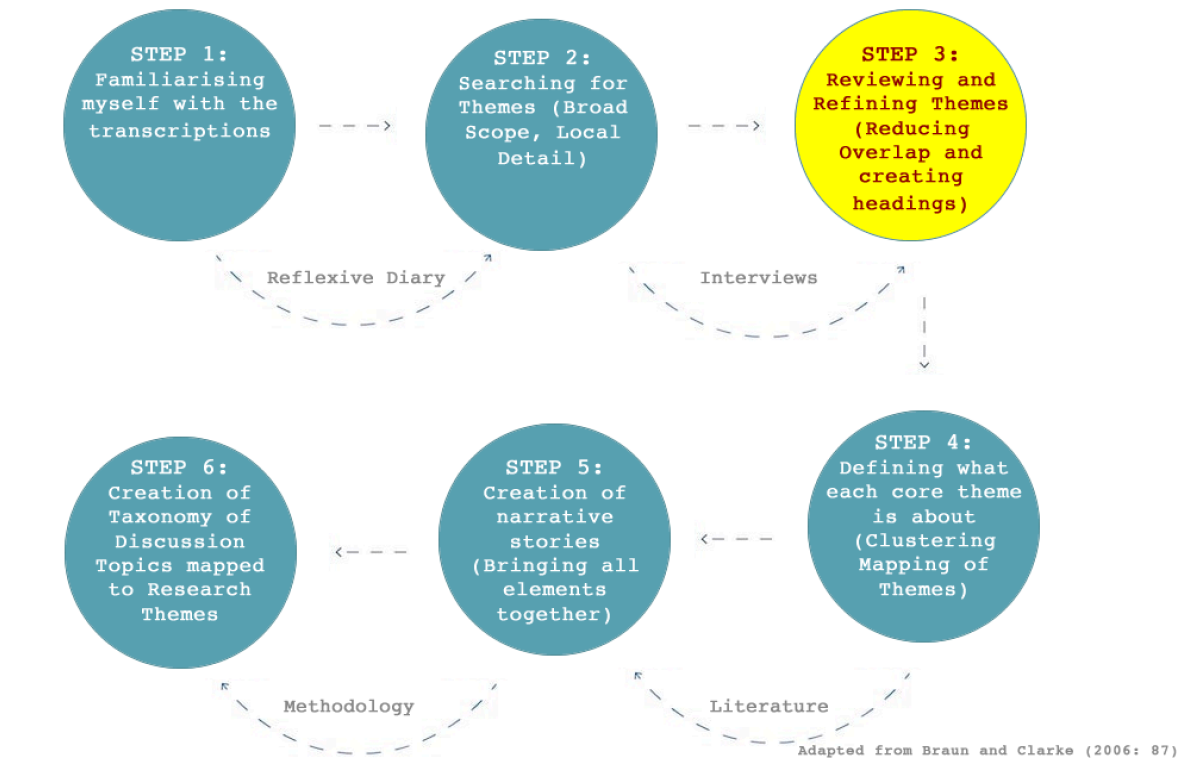
The headings from the previous step, were then used to create an overarching table below (3.1), in which common themes could be identified for discussion. In terms of both the claims and accuracy of the table headings being provided, they do not need to justify the claims, as they themselves are each an individual object in a moment in time without argument (Dahlstrom, 2013: 13616) *"narratives have no need to justify the accuracy of their claims; the story itself demonstrates the claim... narratives are able to provide values to real-world objects without argument, it is difficult to counter their claims"*. Therefore, the intention was to put forward a persuasive argument for each theme that is being presented at face value using my own interpretation of what emergent outcomes were arising across participant discussions. Table 3.1 was a first attempt at cohering and making sense of the themes identified in the previous mapping step (2) of the process. Within the table, each participants' account was mapped on to an overarching theme (descriptor), which reflected and conveyed their story succinctly. The rest of the table provides an overview of the common identified sub-themes arising from the participant accounts and the frequency in which they occurred.

It is worth noting, that the table appears quite quantifiable but was used to inform an impression of commonality and frequency from which the stories could then be constructed more coherently, adding value to the areas that mattered the most to each individual participant.

Stories	Key overarching theme	Maverick perception	Views teaching as a performance	Creative thinker	Deep rooted teaching philosophy	Passion for teaching and students	Value conflicts	Career prospects	Strong sense of identity	Low need for recognition.	Individual perception of culture	Quality and performance measures	Perception of Institutional Management	Entrepreneurial traits: Boredom Risk Taking Innovative Confidence	Impact on personal wellbeing	Views teaching less about the process and more about the end result
Participant 1	Administration				✓	✓	✓					✓	✓			
Participant 2	Teaching focused				✓	✓	✓							✓		
Participant 3	Performance		✓			✓							✓			
Participant 4	Creativity			✓	✓	✓	✓				✓			✓		✓
Participant 5	Industry Background	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓			✓	✓	
Participant 6	Maverick	✓				✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Participant 7	Process and Quality Controls					✓		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	
Participant 8	Boundary Spanner			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				
Participant 9	Researcher					✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	
Participant 10	Creative Tensions	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Participant 11	Wellbeing				✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Participant 12	Cultural Tensions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Particpant13	Conflicts				✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	
Participant 14	Maverick	✓				✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		
Participant 15	Maverick	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓		
Participant 16	Cultural Tensions	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Participant 17	Cultural Tensions	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	
Participant 18	Cultural Tensions	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	
Participant 19	Innovator			✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Participant 20	Relationships	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	
Participant 21	Student Focused					✓					✓	✓				
Participant 22	Boundaries					✓	✓				✓	✓			✓	
Participant 23	Identity			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓		
Participant 24	Conformity					✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	
Participant 25	Trapped/Culture				✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	
Participant 26	Performance		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Totals		10	4	8	12	26	20	12	8	6	20	20	17	12	13	3

Table 3.1 An overview of overarching themes identified from the transcripts

3.9.7. Step 4: Defining what each key theme is about (cluster mapping)

Figure 3.9 Step 3 of the thematic analysis stages

Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006: 87)
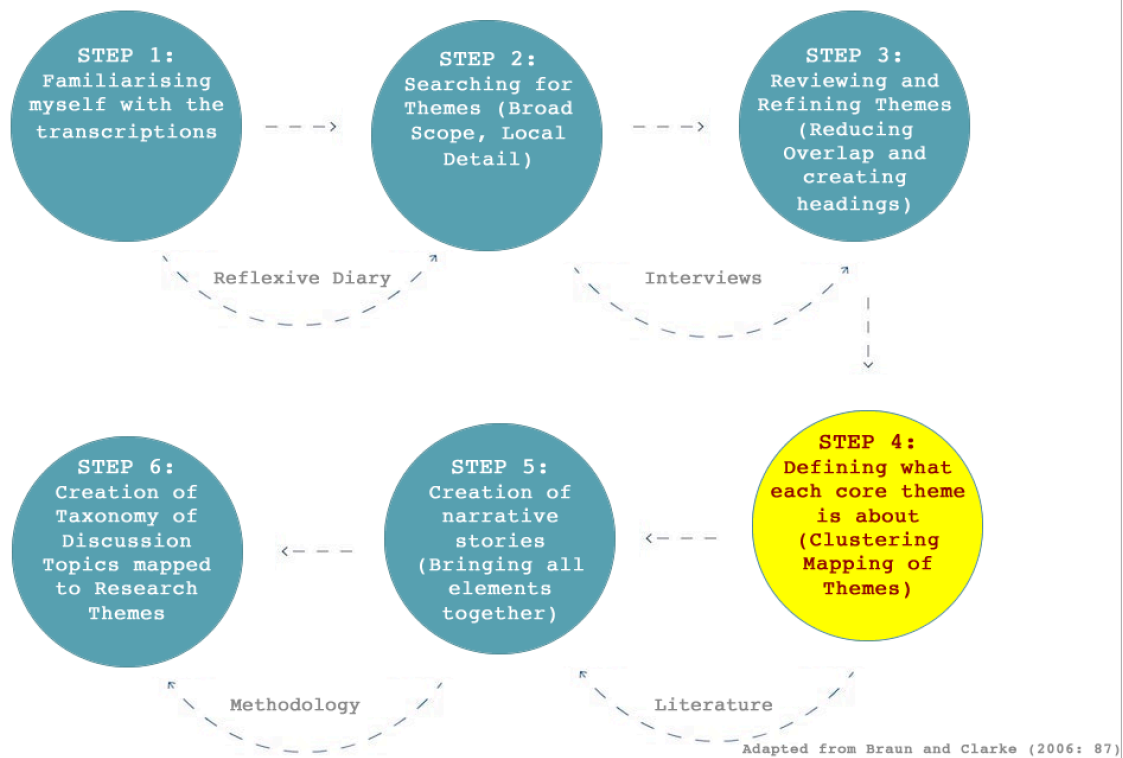
Step four is concerned with the refinement of the themes outlined, aided by the development of a thematic cluster map (Figure 3.10). This step involved going back over both the transcripts and also reviewing the literature around each theme to gain a more detailed understanding of which were 'stand-alone themes' and which might also be overlapping. It was also the case that the sub-themes identified from the table needed to be combined in places in order to avoid duplication across participants. This allowed for a holistic view of the overarching themes and highlighted areas of particular interest, which could then be drawn out when writing the narrative stories.

The themes identified from the previous steps 2 and 3, were then clustered together to form key areas each narrative story needed to focus upon, such as culture, management, values and quality measures. I extracted quotes from each of the participants' transcripts to assist in highlighting these common overarching themes, and from which the stories could then be

produced. There was at this stage some overlap during the participants' interviews, which this step helped to reduce.

Applying Corbin and Strauss (1990) method of data analysis to this stage, themes from table 3.1 above were developed and grouped to form six clear categories outlined below. Corbin and Strauss (1990) note, that at this stage these categories are higher in level than the themes from the table they represent. In this sense, it allowed for groupings and theoretical reading around these headings, to understand the occurrences that were taking place and to make comparisons across participant accounts:

1. *Perspectives on University Culture.*
2. *Perspectives on Management, Systems and Processes.*
3. *Cultural Fit and Values.*
4. *Career Development and Progression.*
5. *Creativity and Practice.*
6. *Views on the Inspirational Teaching Award.*

These common headings are not presented in a particular order or ranking; instead it was useful when looking over the transcripts to group common elements together which arose during the conversations (colour coded). The metaphorical drawings which supplemented each transcript also provided a springboard from which these headings were determined. The 'clustered' headings in Figure 3.10 were later used to create common themes that could be identified as a discussion thread throughout each of the narrative stories. They were also useful for ordering my own thinking on the topics and being able to succinctly convey a sense of journey and purpose arising out of each narrative.

Figure 3.10 Thematic Cluster Map of key story themes and sub-themes.

PERSPECTIVES ON UNIVERSITY CULTURE

Forced to operate on the cultural perimeter

Mental health and Wellbeing

Strong value conflicts

Feeling like mavericks

Tensions arising

Only progression into management Roles

Conflicting demands

Strains of operating on the outskirts of the culture

INSPIRATIONAL TEACHING AWARD

Teaching awards and ceremony

Trying to continue to teach in a way they deemed made a positive impact

Poisoned challice

Management tool for evidencing excellence

Student nominated

Creates a divisive culture

PERSPECTIVES ON MANAGEMENT & QUALITY MECHNANISMS

Negative perception of university management

Quality measures and metric drivers

Lack of any career prospects

Performance and control mechanisms

Loss of Individual Identity

INDIVIDUAL VALUES

Low need for recognition

Value Conflicts

Passions and emotional drivers

Relationships

Personal conflicts

Strong sense of academic identity

Pedagogical understanding in practice

CULTURAL FIT AND VALUES

Mavericks operating on the fringes of the culture

Individual value tensions

Loss of academic identity

Stress, mental health and wellbeing

Conflicts between control measures and teaching practices

Conflicts with team and maanagement

CREATIVTY AND PRACTICE

Teaching as an act of performance

Passion for teaching shone through

Well–roundacadacademic understanding

Deep understanding of pedagogy

Students and their relationships

Entrepreneurial aspects and creative thinking

Fluidity

3.9.8. Step 5: Creation of narrative stories (bringing all elements together in a cohesive format)

Figure 3.11 Step 3 of the thematic analysis stages

STEP 1: Familiarising myself with the transcriptions
— — —> Reflexive Diary
STEP 2: Searching for Themes (Broad Scope, Local Detail)
— — —> Interviews
STEP 3: Reviewing and Refining Themes (Reducing Overlap and creating headings)

STEP 6: Creation of Taxonomy of Discussion Topics mapped to Research Themes
Methodology
STEP 5: Creation of narrative stories (Bringing all elements together)
Literature
STEP 4: Defining what each core theme is about (Clustering Mapping of Themes)

Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006: 87)

This fifth step emphasises the use of 'interactional analysis' (Reissman, 2005: 4), where I experienced the emotions, struggles and tensions along with the participants during the interviews. I now reach this step equipped with the tools and wisdom needed to carefully craft the narrative stories using the evolved themes from the previous stage of the thematic process. Reissman (2005) describes this as a dialogic process, one which was observed when I moved from purely analysing the data to perceiving it more as a lived set of stories conveying emotional struggles and tensions experienced by participants. In this sense, the experiences of the participants were mixed with the emotions and experiences of me as researcher, and thus allowed process of narrative construction to take place under each evolving theme, creating meaning from out of the transcripts in order to allowing the crafting of each story.

Developing all 26 narrative stories took a considerable amount of time from a researcher perspective because of all of the various elements (metaphors, transcripts, themes and

headings) which were needed to be brought together. It was an extremely useful exercise in becoming more familiar with my participants' accounts and therefore assisting in the discussions Chapter Five of the thesis to really dig down into specific details. The stories presented in Chapter Four of this thesis attempt to show insight through my own understanding of these elements as a snapshot of time of lived experience of each of the participants involved in the study. I am therefore using the stories to provide a narrative construct of reality (Bruner, 1991) whilst adopting the position we cannot detach the human participant (ever) from their own cultural setting, so we must take both together as one as reality construction as has been the case with the formulation of these stories.

The stories themselves are an intricate cocktail of emotions, feelings and attitudes towards the cultural elements of higher education. With this in mind, as both story teller and researcher, the stories I formulated attempted to piece these elements together, in order to convey or illustrate a cultural picture whilst also being true to each participant. Gudmundsdottir (1996: 297) eloquently describes this process of narrative construction, as putting together a, *"grey undefined mass of feelings, attitudes, and "bags of tricks" all drenched in values"*. Bruner (1997) touches upon how we make sense of the participant stories, alongside what guides us in our pursuits of meaning. He points to the story tellers own interpretation, using theories, experience and dialogue to draw out commonalities in this self-construction of life through natural language. This does however pose difficulties for this type of analysis, as one struggles to deal with the subjectivity and therefore deep complexities of each story and narrative account, in order to sufficiently give each participants account justice. As researcher (and storyteller) I needed to see each of the participants accounts as a snapshot within a certain period of time from their own unique perspective.

The participants' metaphors also helped with this deepened understanding, and as a tool they allowed participants to highlight elements of their journey through higher education in a visual way, pulling together some of the disjointed strands of memories, values and emotions in the one visual form. These drawings/metaphors also helped with the expression of strong feelings, emotions and values related to the complexities encountered when trying to describe a cultural context. I began by asking participants to draw how they perceived the university culture, and themselves within it. During the discussions with participants further questions and prompts were asked around the metaphorical drawings, in order to extract or

highlight certain key points during their narrative stories. This allowed a free flow to the discussions, which could then be presented within the stories in an attempt to show the passing of time. The completed stories can be found in Chapter Four.

The metaphorical examples below (Figures 3.12 – 3.14) represent an overview of the interpretation process outlined by (Grbich, 2013:203) followed for each drawing. I had asked the transcriber to indicate on the transcripts in a different colour (purple) when a participant drew on the flipchart paper and what and where they were drawing or indicating to. This was useful when coming back to crafting the stories, as I had an accurate record to correlate with the issues they were discussing within the videos and how these aligned to their drawings. I was also then able to go back and watch the video recording again to make sure what was being drawn linked to the description being provided by the participant, and then form my own understanding of this aspect. This was not a quick process, but one which assisted in helping my own detailed understanding form, and also assisting in providing rich and detailed extracts for the formation of the stories themselves. It was then a case of linking these drawings and the specific extracts identified to the overarching themes around elements of management, culture, performativity, quality etc. that were to be discussed within each of the stories, which can be seen on the model (Figure 3.14) outlining the higher-level themes arising from the metaphor drawings.

Figure 3.12 Margaret's (story 3) visual metaphor analysis

VIEW OF THE LEARNING AND TEACHING LANDSCAPE

"(Participant starts drawing), I have got quite a cool one that I use with my students, there we go, there's (begins drawing at the top Level 6 in green), here are my level six students, bless them (continues to draw)"

VIEWS ON STUDENT LEARNING

"So, the uni tries to tell me what to do, but I know what my job is, my job is to get these guys out of their sheepy pen (indicates and adds to drawing some sheep for L4 and L5 students) where they are just in a safe zone. They are expecting this is the environment they have been brought up with, they

PERSPECTIVES ON MANAGEMENT

"(Participant start drawing a large house at the top of the part to represent management) controls the farmer or they interact and then basically university protocols deal with me and that is where I get fed"

STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

supposed to have a protean view of career development, they are supposed to see the opportunities, they are supposed to see how to get to the opportunities, they are supposed to assess themselves (continues to draw at the bottom of the paper a start and finish line, along with tick boxes that they complete and have very little choice)"

HOW SHE VIEWS HER OWN ROLE

hence the, there is the hook or crook (adds herself to the drawing as a grey 'knackered old' sheep dog), get them over the wall because that is a big barrier for them, it is not a gate, it is not just 'I can go open

BARRIERS AND TENSIONS BEING FACED

"That is the barrier (indicates to the sheep pen walls on the drawing), that is always going to be the barrier, whenever you try and do this you will have some that do not want to jump the barrier, some that cannot jump the barrier and just get hung up and legs over one side and some that hop over and are quite happy and you will always get a mix of students and maybe your job as a lecturer (Draws crook and whistles) is to try and give a nose up to those people who can't get over to the green fields (draws green fields of autonomous learning). You have got to think a little bit outside the pen"

Figure 3.13 Suzanne's (story 5) visual metaphor analysis

PERSPECTIVES ON MANAGEMENT

"I think I see the executive group as here (indicates elephants head). So, if we said you know the big 'M' is there *(starts to write in elephant's head)* the big management is there, but then within each department you know, if you have got all these different departments, if we have got all these different *(draws squares all within the elephant so it looks like a patchwork 'elma' elephant)* – so you have got all these different management structures *(puts dots within each square/patch drawn)* within. I think the university is very top heavy on managers"

PERSPECTIVES ON UNIVERSITY CULTURE

"I am going to get serious with this (laughter) – I think in my mind's eye I think I see the university as a giant rumbling elephant and we are all experiencing different parts of it, I could draw it in that way or you could draw it in different silos of different areas of endeavour which don't necessarily tie up but I think I will go for an elephant, go for an elephant, a green elephant *(starts drawing large elephant right across the flip chart paper)*"

SIZE AND DEPARTMENTS

"(Has continued to draw an elephant covering the entire page) – so they would have enormous ears, little eyes, okay and then he would have a smile on his face – okay a bit short in body but I think it's a massive organisation, it is a very large university and in fact I feel as if I've, maybe it is Elma the elephant, I have worked in lots of different departments *(draws red squares within the main body of the elephant)*"

STANDARDISATION OF PRACTICE

"It is almost symbolic of a trough *(draws trough underneath the trunk of elephant)* you are going to have to the trough to eat out of because you can't even look at the plate of food, so the aesthetic, we are losing the aesthetic from the university"

RELATIONSHIPS

"The university thinks it is so mighty that it goes around sometimes crushing our external relationships *(draws people underneath one of the elephant's feet,)* and being rather heavy handed"

VIEWS ON STUDENT SUPPORT

"I think they feel a bit beleaguered, we work incredibly hard, there are some very dedicated staff, there is a struggle with lots of the personalities. in terms of other places I have worked I have worked within student support *(starts drawing a large rectangle within the elephant at the base of the body)*, that is almost like the underbelly of the university, it is the service, the support of the students, they hold things together, they try and influence and innovate, try and make changes through the university"
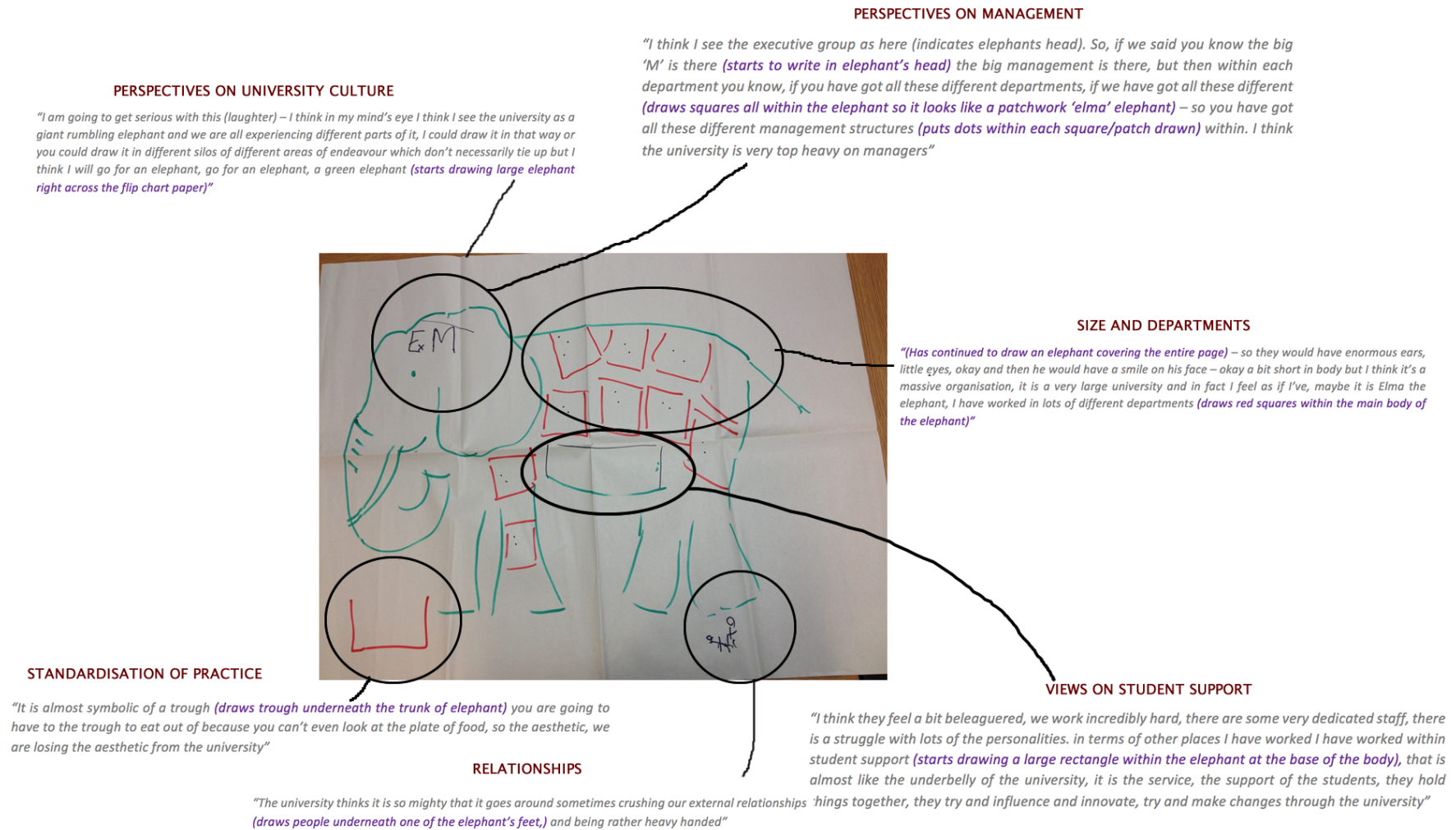
Figure 3.14 Higher level visual metaphors mapping and analysis

Visual Metaphor Mapping & Analysis

On the outskirts of the culture looking in

Relationship to students – sees them being central to everything..

Perceives the university as a group of separate islands, where they are lost at sea

Creativity and Freedom represented by a playground environment. Says the university owns the playground so freedom is dimishing..

Play and Performance aspects of practice

Filling in gaps in students learning

Creativity is a big element of their practice

Draws upon personal experiences as a student

Feels inspirational practice happens outside of the culture

Closing down of the creative space (represented by tail wagging the dog)

Award feedback taken out of context..

Represents the university culture as a large elephant called Elma. Tells me everything is too big!

Views on Management – The big M, being the large head of the elephant.. Unable to see any of the sub cultures as can't look back. Too top heavy now.

Standardisation of practice represented by the feeding trough

Red squares & dots represent all the different departments

Sees student support as holding everything together (the elephant underbelly)

People being crushed by the giant elephant (university)

Understanding of education and moving students out of pen

Students have different abilities

Perspectives on Management = control the farmer and what they do..

Sees their role as shepherd directing students out of the sheep pen (Safe Environment)

91

3.9.9. Step 6: Development of a taxonomy of discussion topics

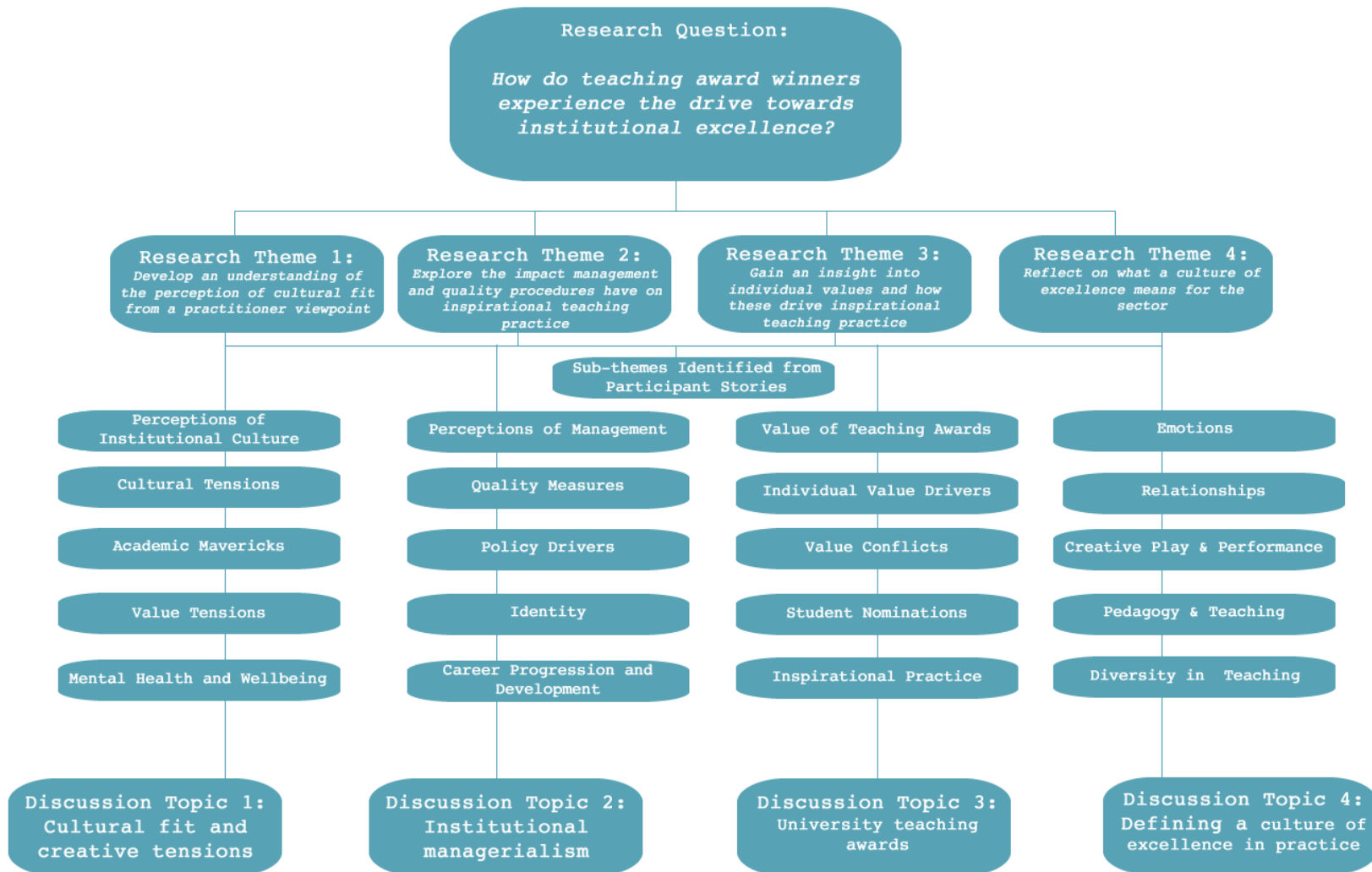**Figure 3.15** Step 6 of the thematic analysis stages
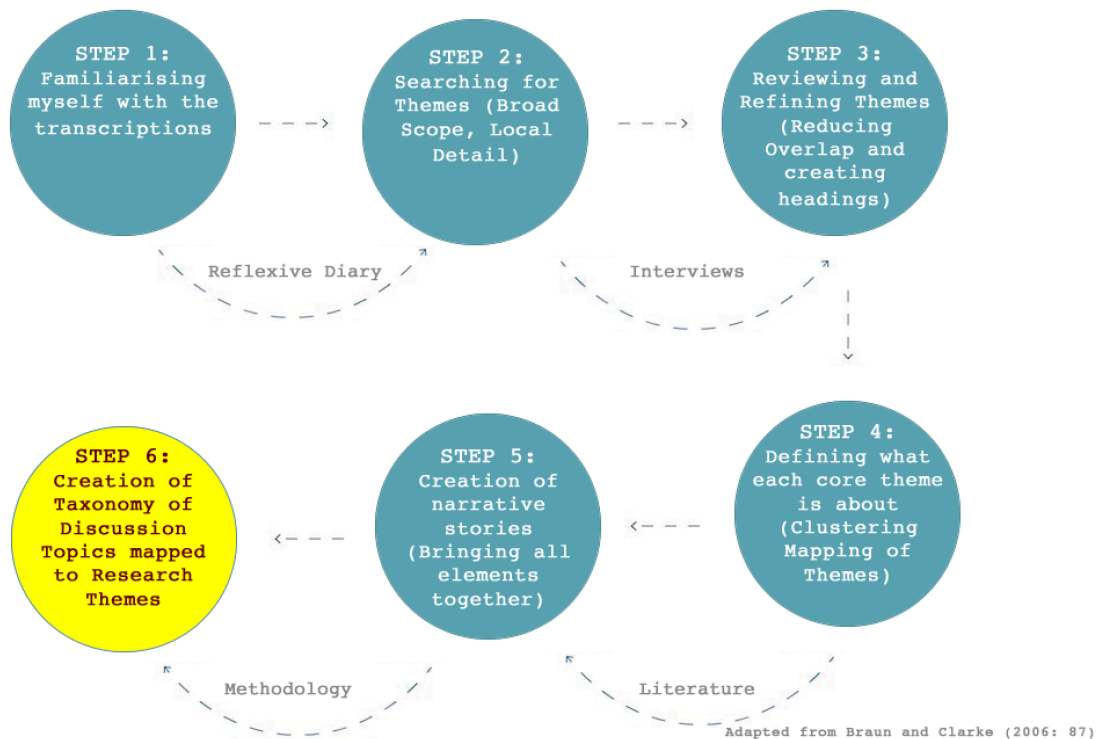
Now that all the stories had been crafted, this final stage of analysis was vital in making sense of the completed stories and linking these to the specific topics which could be used within the Discussions Chapter Five of this thesis. In this respect, the whole process of analysis is interrelated and constant given the Hermeneutical nature of enquiry, in the sense that each respective step helps to understand the previous one (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). The stories that have been created as part of step 5, are able to inform the discussions chapter in terms of making sense of the four research themes presented within this chapter.

The ultimate aim of this final step was to create a series of key overarching elements arising from each of the stories, which could then be mapped to the four research themes. These could then be then used to create the subsequent overarching discussion topic headings in Chapter Five. The literature and reading around each area was taking place throughout the analysis steps, but at this final step could now be much more refined and focused in on the creation of specific topic headings. The taxonomy model (Figure 3.16) below represents how the stories and their headings, were mapped onto the research themes and in support of the

central research question of the thesis. It was only then that the four distinct discussion topics to be used in the discussions chapter of the thesis could be generated.

Figure 3.16 Taxonomy of discussion topics generated from the stories mapped onto the research themes

Research Question:

How do teaching award winners experience the drive towards institutional excellence?

Research Theme 1:
Develop an understanding of the perception of cultural fit from a practitioner viewpoint

Research Theme 2:
Explore the impact management and quality procedures have on inspirational teaching practice

Research Theme 3:
Gain an insight into individual values and how these drive inspirational teaching practice

Research Theme 4:
Reflect on what a culture of excellence means for the sector

Sub-themes Identified from Participant Stories

Perceptions of Institutional Culture

Perceptions of Management

Value of Teaching Awards

Emotions

Cultural Tensions

Quality Measures

Individual Value Drivers

Relationships

Academic Mavericks

Policy Drivers

Value Conflicts

Creative Play & Performance

Value Tensions

Identity

Student Nominations

Pedagogy & Teaching

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Career Progression and Development

Inspirational Practice

Diversity in Teaching

Discussion Topic 1:
Cultural fit and creative tensions

Discussion Topic 2:
Institutional managerialism

Discussion Topic 3:
University teaching awards

Discussion Topic 4:
Defining a culture of excellence in practice

Chapter Four: Participant stories (findings)

This chapter presents the research findings in the form of six carefully crafted narrative stories from the participants involved in this study. The stories combined several common headings throughout, looking at: Perspectives on university culture, Perspectives on management, Systems and processes, Cultural fit and value tensions, Career development and progression, Creativity and practice, and views on winning the inspirational teaching award.

4.1. Introduction to the stories and how they were formulated

Altogether there are twenty-six narrative stories, which, if all were presented here in this findings chapter would go beyond the scope of the thesis word count. In selecting these stories, I was aiming to balance case-compatibility within-case depth. In this chapter, I present a selection of six carefully selected narrative stories from the 26 participants involved in this study (see table 4.1 below).

The six stories to be included within this chapter were selected because of the combined strength of the personal narrative and their illustration of cross-cutting themes, aligning to the four overarching research themes from Methodology Chapter Three. The selected narratives (stories) presented aim to maintain individual veracity (Robinson et al., 2012) of the individual participants accounts, in essence conveying participants' voice and being authentic to their journey and lived experiences within academia. The stories additionally had to highlight issues and tensions occurring across the university for the award winners and avoid elements of overlap and duplication. Extracts and metaphors from the additional twenty stories have been used throughout Discussions Chapter Five to highlight and inform key areas of debate and insight.

Participants Stories	Story Title	Included
Story 1: Cath's Story	The Rule Breaker	Chapter Four: Findings
Story 2: Nicola's Story	Leaving the University Playground	Chapter Four: Findings
Story 3: Margaret's Story	The 'Knackered Old Sheepdog'	Chapter Four: Findings
Story 4: John's Story	Rage Against the Machine	Chapter Four: Findings
Story 5: Suzanne's Story	Getting Crushed by Elma the Elephant	Chapter Four: Findings
Story 6: Peter's Story	Rejecting the Award	Chapter Four: Findings
Story 7: Sandra's Story	The Creative Academic	
Story 8: Sam's Story	A Tamed Wild Academic Trapped in a Zoo	
Story 9: Holly's Story	The Committed Teacher	
Story 10: Amy's Story	Working in the Tower Block	
Story 11: Ben's Story	The Rising Administrative Core	
Story 12: Geoff's Story	The Research Academic	
Story 13: Alan's Story	The Performer	
Story 14: Craig's Story	Encouraging his Students to Fail…	
Story 15: Pamela's Story	The Musician who simply love teaching	
Story 16: Henry's Story	The Practice Based Teacher	
Story 17: Hannah's Story	Feeling Lost	
Story 18: Melanie's Story	The Boundary Spanner	
Story 19: Fiona's Story	A Foot in both Camps	
Story 20: Bill's Story	Fighting the Monolith	
Story 21: Simon's Story	A Shining Star going Unnoticed	
Story 22: Joanne's Story	Small Fish in a Big Pond	
Story 23: Karen's Story	A Busy Worker Ant	
Story 24: Rebecca's Story	Sticking to her own Safe Space	
Story 25: Victoria's Story	Conformity for Conformities Sake	
Story 26: Tony's Story	All the world is a stage (even the university)	

Table 4.1 An overview of participant stories and their titles

As researcher in this study I lived these stories, alongside participants whilst collecting the interview data and therefore had formed a deep intrinsic understanding of the topics and issues being discussed. Indeed, it is true to say that stories have formed part of our culture since the beginning of time. They have been used as a vehicle to express feelings, emotions and deeply held cultural values across all areas of society. We see stories as a glimpse into the past, which helps shape our current lives and being. In this sense, each story presented should be taken on its own merit as a snapshot in time occurring within the university from participants own perspective, but used to shape current practices and understandings within higher education. On the element of time and context, Bruner (2002) goes on to point out that it is just this lived experience that narratives provide in order to provide structure on what we experience. Underpinning this narrative process was Gadamer's Hermeneutical spiral combined with my own understanding, experience and knowledge to help in crafting these stories. These elements also helped me see when I had reached the top of the spiral and no new themes were evolving out from the stories, thus reaching saturation point. It was extremely important for me as researcher that the stories maintained their individual authenticity right up until the very end of the study, underpinning the relational aspect of each participants narrative journey. As such, humans and stories are intertwined thus becoming difficult to understand by removing them from both context and time, within which they will always belong (Plummer, 2001).

It is useful, prior to going in to the stories to recap briefly upon their formulation, in the sense of the specific elements from the analysis stage (Chapter Three) which were used. The stories utilised a combination of data including video recordings of the interviews, transcriptions, metaphorical drawings on flipcharts, alongside my own reflexive diary which is used throughout to draw my own conclusions about each discussion. Each story was given a creative title which was used to represent the main theme arising out of it. Below the main story title, a summarising quote from the participants narrative is provided in order to put forward a flavour of the content to follow. Each story then begins with a brief overview of my own thoughts and feelings, both before and after the meeting, adapted from my reflexive diary extract at the time. This also introduces some of the key topics outlined within each conversation. Stories then move in to showing the metaphorical drawing of the university culture produced by the participant, which evolves as the story unfolds. Snippets are taken

throughout the story to highlight when the participant drew to illustrate their points. An overview and illustration of the topics being discussed have been used as headings throughout each story, and these also provide the reader with overlap and context across the narratives. Within participant quotes, the purple text contained in square brackets [] represents when participants were drawing or pointing to an aspect on their metaphor, during the discussion.

4.2. Outline summary of the participant stories

An outline summary of each the six stories included in this chapter is presented below:

Story 1: Cath's Story – The Rule Breaker: reveals how Cath does not feel a part of the main university culture, and how this has a subsequent effect on her ability to make decisions. She sees the university having three distinct competing sub-cultures, thus causing frictions in her everyday work and having an inevitable impact on her wellbeing.

Story 2: Nicola's Story – Leaving the University Playground: highlights the struggles of a creative and performance-based academic who is passionate about teaching. Nicola is experiencing tensions, mainly because of the increasing managerialist culture and the institutional attitudes towards quality forming around her. She felt she could no longer carry on practicing (teaching) in the way she did because of the performative measures coming in to effect.

Story 3: Margaret's Story – The 'Knackered old Sheepdog': tells the story of another passionate academic who unfortunately was being treated for depression at the time of the study. Margaret talks about the closing down of her own teaching space/boundaries and subsequent loss of individual autonomy. She discusses her own career development opportunities within the university and how she feels there is no academic teaching progression ladder only progression into management roles.

Story 4: John's Story – Rage Against the Machine: highlights how John feels he has distanced himself from the university culture because of the imposed metrics in place. Whereas John

once had groups of peers working with him, he now feels alone, continuing to practice in the way he deems adds value to the student body.

Story 5: Suzanne's Story – Getting Crushed by Elma the Elephant: tells the story of a longstanding member of staff in the university, undertaking lots of varied roles. Suzanne expresses a deep commitment to do the right thing in the university, but like other award winners, went on to talk about how it is becoming more and more difficult to practice in this way, and to her own detriment. She has been worn down by this cultural tension now and expressed her deep sorrow for what is happening around her.

Story 6: Peter's Story – Rejecting the Award: looks at someone who is very much against the notion of teaching awards being given to individuals, because he feels strongly that they only put other colleagues off trying to be inspirational to students in their own diverse ways. Peter actually went so far as to remove himself from the teaching awards shortlist in the first year he was nominated. Peter, like others very much feels he is operating on the outskirts of the university culture. He does so, with the students learning needs at the forefront of what he does.

4.3. Story 1: Cath's Story - The Rule Breaker

"I do a lot of breaking the rules because I try and do something that I feel is better for the student."

My lasting impression of Cath was someone who is extremely student focused and down to earth. Like other participants, Cath told me that she feels safe in her own area of work but feels she is operating outside of the main university culture. Her perception of the institutional culture was one of competing agendas: around herself, students and the university. This aspect was having a negative impact on her ability to make effective teaching decisions within her own practice. She talked about the increasing number of quality measures being introduced within the university to standardise teaching, which also were putting pressure upon her. What was apparent, was the way Cath puts her own values central to what she does, especially in term of enhancing the student experience. This aspect meant that Cath's values sometimes clashed with the institutional norms. In this sense, she often had to break the rules in order to do what she felt was best for her students. I actually bumped in to Cath a year after our discussion, where she told me she still reflects back on what we talked about and it really made her reflect on her own academic role.

(Extract summarised from Researcher's Reflexive Diary)
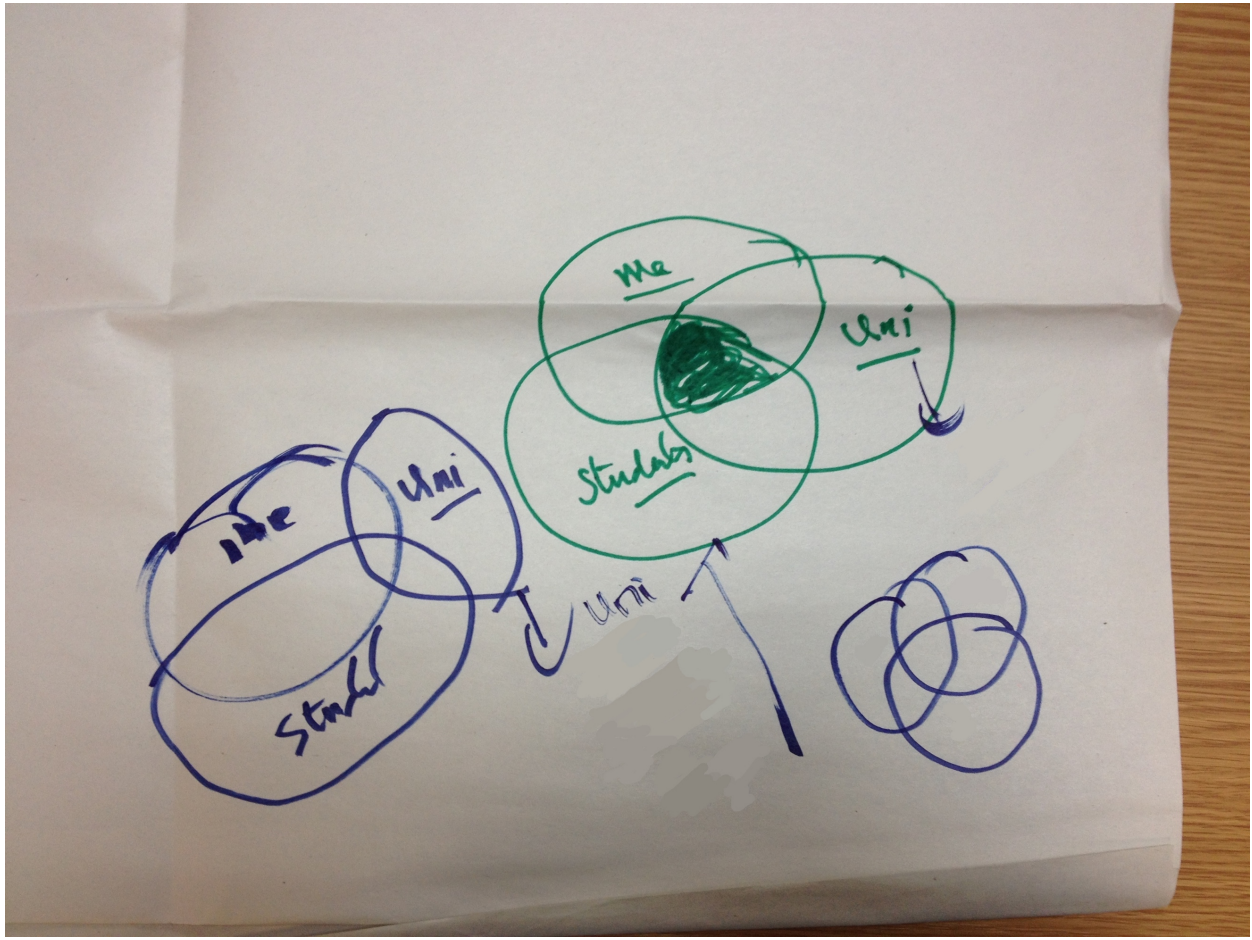
(**Picture 4.1** Cath's metaphor of the competing university cultures)

4.3.1. Disconnected and competing cultures

Cath begins her metaphor of the university culture by drawing a series of three circles to represent herself, students, and the university (as she perceives it). She tells me the circles should all be imbricated but in reality, are actually kept quite separate from one another:

> "*[Draws a circle] Well, in theory we should be having [draws a series of overlapping green circles as she speaks], or we should have [colours in where circles overlap], we should all be singing from the same hymn sheet [continues to colour in where the circles overlap] when actually we aren't and we are quite separate, and those are the students [draws separate circle]."*
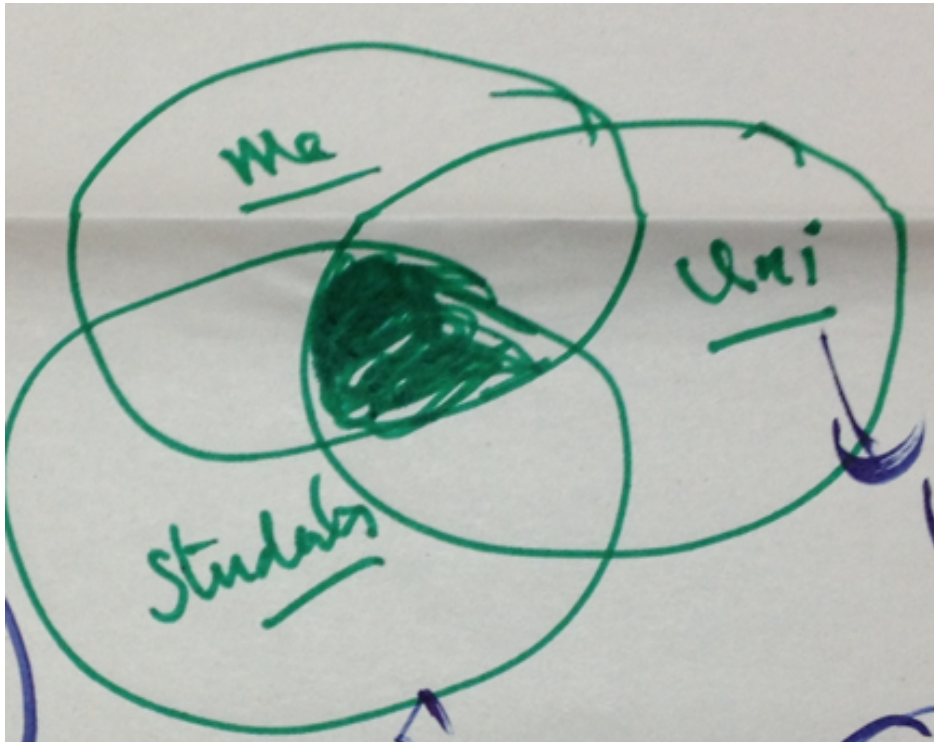
(**Picture 4.2** Cath's metaphor drawing of the ideal university cultural overlap)

In reality, Cath's perception of the university culture is of three detached, sometimes competing elements (students, the university and herself). Interestingly, she sees these elements as being quite separate from each other, but does identify the need for overlap moving to a more integrated culture where one informs the other and has equal contribution (central overlap). She tells me that the sheer size of the institution is part of the issue in restricting overlap. In this sense, I got the impression that Cath had a very holistic understanding of the university and its varying strategic agendas:

"That is the ideal. Well in my mind that should be the ideal. But I suppose [Cath starts drawing a new blue circle and arrows] we are all very separate and operate independently. It is also about the size of this, isn't it? Because in theory this should be of equal size (indicates coloured in centre of where the circles have overlapped), in terms of there should be equal contributions but in reality, probably there is a bigger overlap between myself and [draws another circle overlapping the one she drew to represent students] the students here and I would see the university [draws another overlapping circle] as a lesser part of that. The middle bit is where we should all be,

because we should all be singing and dancing from the same hymn sheet and that is really I suppose what we are seeking."
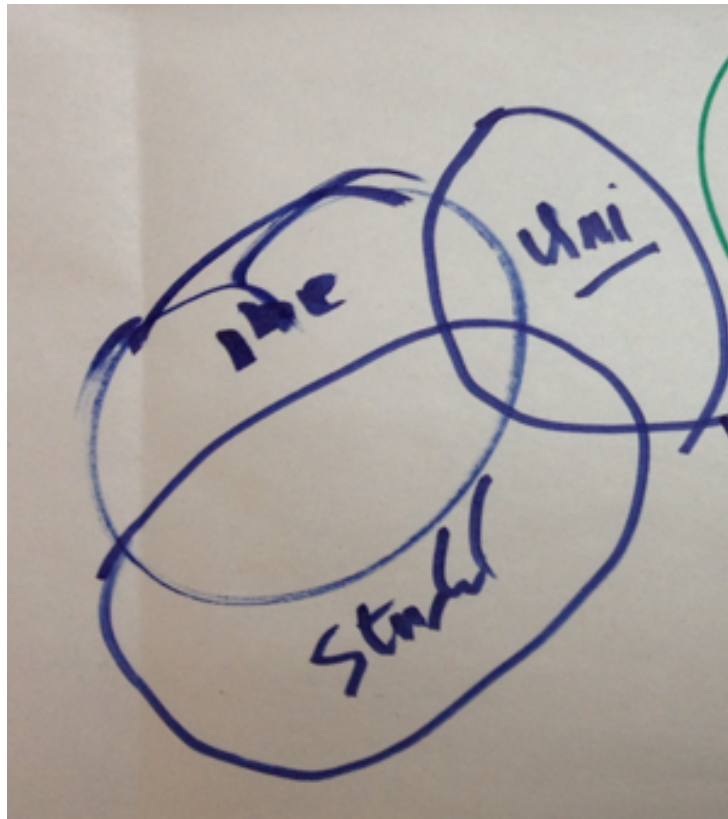
(**Picture 4.3** Cath's metaphor drawing of the cultural reality)

In this respect, Cath talks about seeing herself as an outsider to the university culture. To represent this aspect, she draws a separate sub-culture for her divisional group within which she practices. Due to her strongly held pedagogical values Cath has always taught in the way she has done despite winning the teaching award. She is however finding that the further away from the more centralised university culture she was moving, the more isolated she is:

"If we were looking at it in terms of my own divisional group then I would say we get more towards this [indicates initial series of overlapping blue circles drawn outside the green]. If you are interpreting where the division is, I think as you go further up it becomes more detached and then this level of equality [indicates initial series of overlapping circles drawn] would change. But I certainly feel in terms of my relationship with the university I am on the outside of the culture [draws a separate 3

circles outside of the green ones]. I have always done what I have always done, so all of the sudden you get nominated; to me I haven't changed what I have done."

So, all in all, Cath tells me there are three separate representations of the culture existing within the university: The Ideal cultural fit, the cultural reality, and finally where Cath sees herself operating within the culture. Cath reported striving for harmony and correlation of activities within her own divisional team, placing the emphasis on experience and learning. She does however point out that there are other colleagues who operate outside of the cultural ideal she is trying to create for her students. This could also be interpreted as them keeping within the perceived centralised institutional norms:

"I actually think that is what I seek to achieve, is that complete sort of harmony between the three of us and that is what I sort of fight for: for staff and students in terms of that experience. There are a lot of people that work on the outside of that, and that is a huge frustration for me."

4.3.2. Culture and management

Cath sees a difference from when she first started at the university, where historically there was a strong sense of commitment from academics towards the university and its aims. However, she feels now new people are joining the university simply for their own career goals (management) and unfortunately fail to see the impact their decisions have on both individuals and teaching practice:

"Increasingly when you've had different people in terms of management at quite high levels coming in, they have obviously got a different rationale for being at the university. When I first started here there were a lot of people who had been here a long time, who had a lot of commitment to the university per se. Whereas now you have a lot of people coming in who are here as a stepping stone for their career, and they make decisions that impact on us as lecturers and students but then they can walk away from those decisions."

She goes on to tell me that management is too far removed from the decisions they are making and this is becoming more frustrating because communication is being shut down. This is making Cath's working practices more and more difficult as time moves on:

"They are too far removed from it, but for them it is about career progression. So, for me that has increasingly been frustrating, because increasingly I feel we haven't been able to talk about what we are required to do, to look at the rationale behind what we are required to do, so I have found that more difficult"

Cath sees the need to keep in touch with teaching practice and sees this as what the university is all about. She feels much more grounded through her teaching practices, which helps with understanding the implications of decisions being made:

"I couldn't do my job if I didn't teach and if I wasn't in day to day contact. Because that allows me a touch point – what is this about, why are we here and I think this [indicates to Uni on drawing] tends to forget why we are here and that is the sadness really you know."

Exploring more closely at how Cath feels about her role and specifically how this fits within the university, she tells me there is less trust in her as a professional. She sees there is an increasingly dominant performance structure being imposed from the university in order to tightly control teaching. These quality measures are ultimately causing tensions and making working practices more stressful for her:

"As an academic I feel that there is less understanding of our ability to be a professional and to do a job and there is an expectation that we need more structure in order to do that job. I don't necessarily agree that we do but they are putting those structures in place which create pressure and tension at different times of the year. It can be quite stressful."

When thinking about if the circles/aspects can be combined, Cath has strong views that everyone should do some teaching no matter how small that is. She perceives an increasing

drift occurring between management roles and academics, and that this is impacting on effective decision making around aspects of teaching practice. If management did more teaching then they would understand the impact of the decisions around practice:

"I think they can be combined, if whether you call it management and academia, if people still teach – but it is increasingly less if you go up. I think it is a simple solution: everybody if they are in the university should still teach. So, you are not making decisions that actually you can't see the impact of those decisions because you are actually doing the job; I think it is very simple."

Cath essentially doesn't see a need for management per se as a function within the university. This is due to, in her opinion colleagues self-managing and having shared values to achieve the same set of goals as a collective. However, she does perceive the need for some overall strategic purpose and a shared sense of direction at an institutional level to be in place:

"I think people self-manage and as a leader I don't necessarily see myself managing people as such. I see that we have goals and objectives to achieve as a division which we need to achieve together. I do think you know that everyone needs a direction, a sense of purpose and a sense of the way forward."

4.3.3. Metrics and performance measures

Cath has seen an increasing number of metrics and quality measures being introduced within the university. These are now causing more pressure for her within the role to ensure student's complete them:

"They were always there but increasingly using the, you know, the NSS. All those pressures, and there is a pressure to ensure the students fill in the form."

Cath doesn't feel these quality aspects (NSS) are measuring the right things in the university. Instead, she sees that these measures are limiting her own individual creativity and thus has have changed the way in which students engage with academics in the current culture:

"I think it's curtailed what we can do. I think it's curtailed our creativity. It has curtailed how students perceive they should engage with us."

She very much over achieves in her role because of her own values set. Cath uses the example of marking turnaround times and trying to get feedback to her students in just two weeks. She emphasises the lack of trust around the quality measures being put in place to act as control systems. She thinks these are to deal with the lowest common denominators within the university:

"For my final years I prioritise getting it back in two weeks because it was important for what they were doing. Nothing to do with what the university sort of felt was right but for me in the context of student experience. So, I think there is this sort of perception that actually we would go to the lowest common denominator."

Cath tells me management are not giving academics within the university the freedom to make informed decisions and choice around their teaching practices. This is now eroding any flexibility she had within her own role. She sees the need to encourage diversity within teaching practice to enrich the overall student experience. However, the policies and procedures are having the opposing effect and creating a standardised teaching environment:

"They are not giving us the freedom to make those decisions, whereas in days gone by you would have maybe had a bit of flexibility. Each cohort is different but the policies and procedures assume that everybody is the same."

4.3.4. Wellbeing and workload pressure

In terms of Cath's own wellbeing she tells me that her academic role is becoming much more stressful, given the increasing pressures and multiple demands being placed on her by the university:

"It is a very stressful job, mainly because the nature of the job means that you can actually be involved in absolutely everything. If people say 'Is that your job', well I say, 'Maybe no, not if you were to look at my job description.'"

The tensions being experienced by Cath appear to be caused by the long hours being required to be put in by both her and the team. She tells me that these are needed in order to deliver the expectations placed on her by the university which has unfortunately become the expected norm within the culture:

"It is just the way we have always worked and so there is never a 9 to 5 mentality. You know it is very long hours, very unsocial hours. So, I suppose you can say we are quite lucky because most people come in with a mind-set."

In terms of the quality measures being put in place to govern, she notes that these are now limiting teaching practices and individuals are faced with an increasing challenge to maintain pedagogical diversity within the culture. The quality measures seem to be restricting flexibility and autonomy rather than enhancing and enabling:

"They probably are, and at the moment we have a particular challenge with this. Then a lot of the really good practice isn't there anymore."

When looking at the aspect of career development and enhancement for her staff, Cath talks about the performance measures around staff appraisals being simply seen as a process. She is frustrated about this and wants to have more meaningful conversations with her colleagues about their own career aspirations, rather than simply metric indicators. She sees her own role being much more about developing staff rather outside of the tick box appraisal form:

"I certainly didn't have that space in my diary which in effect you need a week to see everybody properly, to be able to have those conversations and that is very frustrating…it is almost like it becomes a process, it doesn't become a meaningful experience. It just becomes a process driven. I mean I still enjoy them but I still feel that in my role I should be having more time to do more than just that process."

She goes on to talk about the need for a readdressing of management as a function and not recruiting people to these roles without prior experience of managing in a university context:

"I think the problem is increasingly we are getting these specialists in, and functionally getting them to manage those areas. The trouble is they are managing in different contexts aren't they, they are managing in a university context."

4.3.5. Teaching practice and rule breaking

Cath had strongly held values around teaching practice and students. In terms of her own and others teaching, Cath sees the need to put the student back at the heart of the university culture and have everyone teaching in order to change their perceptions around practice. Essentially, re-orientating the universities attitude and focus towards teaching practice:

"I think we need to put the student at the heart of the experience, that not being rhetoric and everybody actually working towards that. Part of that is these people [indicates management on the drawing] understanding what it is like to teach you know and then that would I think change their perception."

Cath tells me that the university is moving to a 'one size fits all' culture, instead of trying to understand and play to individual strengths to get the best outcome. This type of standardised culture does not play to her team's particular strengths. This is unfortunately resulting in a culture of increased accountability:

"One size fits all and we were never about one size fits all; we were always about understanding that our strength was that we had different types of programmes and that we were able to create whatever was the best fit for those programmes to get the best outcome, but they are putting us in a scenario where they are still making us responsible for the outcome but taking away increasingly our ability to influence that."

When discussing rules in place to govern teaching practice within the university, Cath is quite open about breaking them. She doesn't do this boastfully, telling others about it, but instead does it because she is trying to continue to enhance practice in her own way and do the very best for her students. In this sense, the students are seeing this rule breaking as enhancing their own experience within the institution, and thus nominated Cath for the teaching award. This could be seen to be adding productive value to the institution's centralised teaching measures, but ultimately means Cath is working outside of those cultural norms due to her nonconformist behaviours:

> *"I do break the rules. I don't necessarily tell the people; I just break the rules and I say to the students 'You can't tell anybody what we are doing because if you do that then you are just spoiling it for you and you are spoiling it for us and we are doing this in order to make a better experience' – but yeah I break the rules."*

Cath's rule breaking within the university tends to fall within the area of bypassing policies in place used to govern things like student assessment submissions. Instead of students submitting through the more-lengthy formalised procedures within the university, she instead tells her students to send them directly to her and can provide feedback much quicker. This is also much easier to manage. On another occasion, Cath changed assessment submission deadlines as students were not able to meet them because of personal issues they were experiencing. Cath increased the deadline by two weeks for them. She knows that if she had asked anyone to do it, the answer would have probably been, no. In this sense, her rule breaking is productive and good intentioned in nature:

> *"Oh, I always have the student submissions sent to me. It is much easier to manage…. I just created an environment in which we had to find those two weeks from somewhere and that involved me changing, but I just got on with it and managed it in the best way that I could because I just knew those students were incapable of meeting those deadlines. It was impossible, they weren't in the mind-set to do anything – but had I asked the question…"*

Cath and her colleagues try to resolve situations between themselves for the good of the student, instead of getting stuck by the institutional norms (policies and procedures), ultimately placing the student experience at the heart of what Cath does and staying true to her own value set. In conclusion, there is a recognition from Cath that this rule breaking is becoming more difficult for her now, given the more restrictive quality measures being put in place to govern:

> *"We try and find solutions together, work together as a team to offer the student's those solutions and we do try and have a sense of you know who the students are that we need to be keeping an eye on. But yeah, I do a lot of breaking the rules because I try and do something that I feel is better for the student, but it is difficult…."*

4.4. Story 2: Nicola's Story - Leaving the University Playground

"You have made this happen for me and it is a really valuable conversation. You probably think I am doing you a favour; I am not, you are doing me one."

Like other award winners I had spoken to, Nicola saw her own teaching as a performance and felt it was a creative art form and expression of herself. She had very deep-rooted values in terms of understanding of pedagogy and approaches to her teaching practice. Nicola very much embraced the elements of diversity and individuality within her teaching, opposing the push for standardisation occurring across the university. Prior to our discussion when we talked, Nicola was very supportive of this research study and quite forthcoming telling me, *"There is no way we can progress these things if people aren't willing to speak"*. Subsequently, this was the longest discussion I had done with a participant. Nicola very much saw herself as being lost within the university culture and used several analogies within her metaphor drawing to describe her feelings towards this aspect. As part of our discussion, we talked a lot about the value of the lecture within a university environment. Nicola told me she felt strongly about the lecture and saw it being one of the key reasons why she was nominated for her teaching award. What came across to me was Nicola's passion towards teaching, telling me it was the main reason she did the job. She found it difficult to carry on teaching in the way she had done because of the university performance measures coming into effect around her. This had been causing value tensions for her over a long period of time in terms of trying to carry on delivering in the way she always had done. We went on to talk about the award and the ceremony itself, with Nicola telling me that despite winning the student nominated award for her excellence in teaching, no one within her division congratulated her and she has been treated with very little respect from colleagues and managers, some of whom have actually been quite hostile towards her. Nicola told me that she really valued our discussion and opportunity to sit down and talk in detail about her feelings and practice.

(Extract summarised from Researcher's Reflexive Diary)

4.4.1. Perspectives on university culture
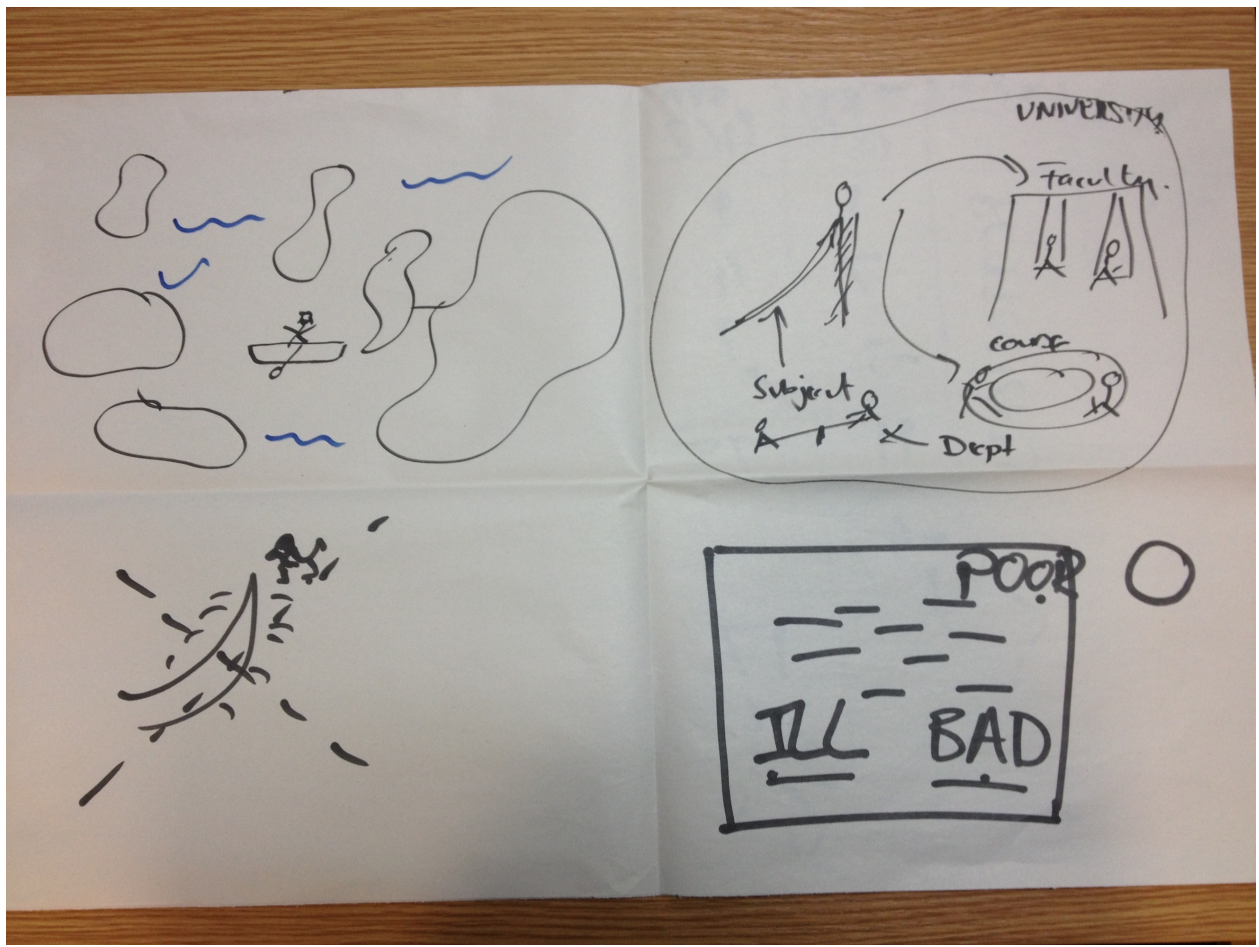
(**Picture 4.4** Nicola's metaphor drawing of the university culture)

Nicola went in to some considerable detail in drawing her perception of the university culture. The first of her four drawings (top left corner) on the flipchart paper, depicted the university as a series of islands, where she is aboard a sailing boat (with a smile on her face). She goes on to describe herself being lost at sea, which I took to mean not quite knowing where she fit within the university islands (culture). Throughout our discussion, Nicola adds various metaphors on the flipchart paper to highlight various aspects:

> "I can't believe I am doing this. It is a boat with me in it and these are all islands. So, I would say that is a metaphor about how I exist within the university but I think it is a lot about my personality and as I have explained to you, I have different roles and I

love those different roles. It is more than an island and boats. There is a smile on my

face there'."
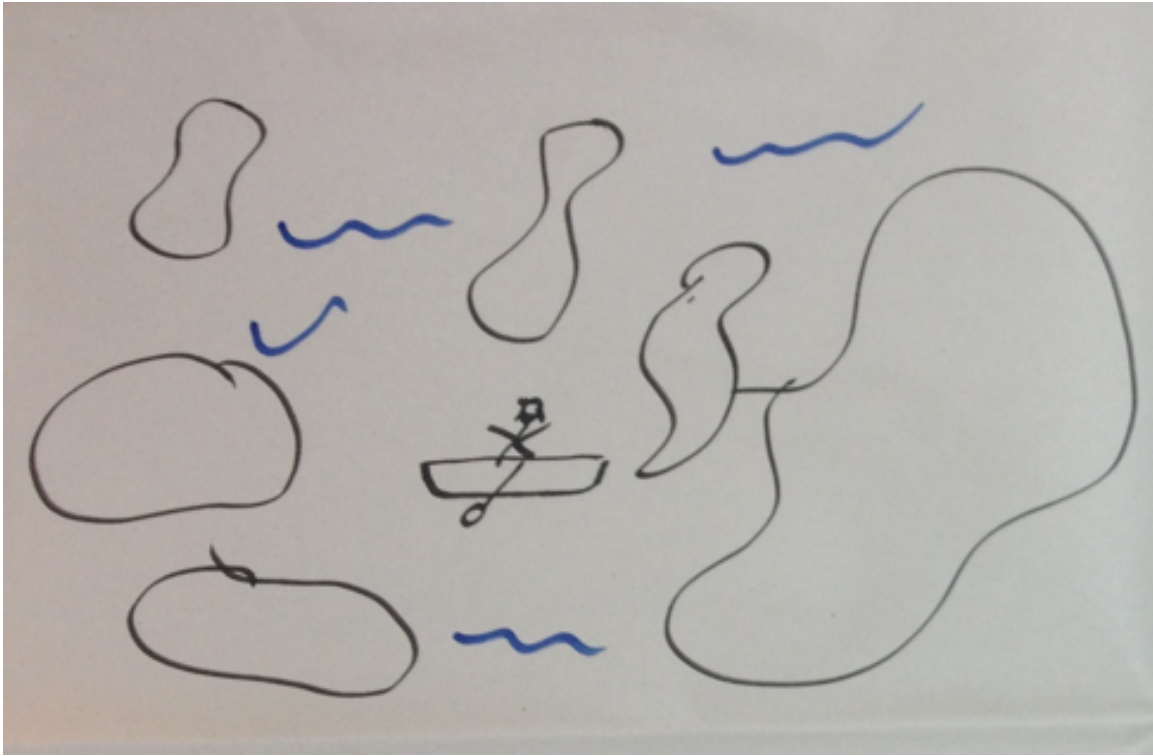
(**Picture 4.5** Nicola's metaphor drawing of a series of islands with her in a boat representing the university culture)

4.4.2. Performance and play in teaching

Nicola's second metaphor drawing represents the university as a playground. She is situated inside this playing on the rides alongside colleagues from right across the university, enjoying herself. When drawing this it was apparent how much she loved teaching and working with other colleagues within her practice. She does however go on to describe how she is, *'running out of the playground'*. I took this to mean the creative space and freedom to play within her role is rapidly diminishing because of the university (who ultimately own the playground) introducing more restrictive ways of working (playground rules):

> *"I would suggest actually it is more like this [starts drawing a new picture in the top right corner of the paper] – that is a slide, they are the swings, that is the roundabout and it is about where I play. And I actually describe it as playing, so that could be*

playing with the faculty [continues to draw, drawing arrow connections between the playground equipment] and I work with colleagues on a faculty level, that could be me playing with the team in terms of my programme, this could be the divisional and what would I have for – I would have a seesaw [is continuing to draw a seesaw]. I am running out of playground. I don't want you to take it that way that I would just jump ship to another division – so that could be the division and of course that is the playground [draws a large circle around all the playground activities she has just drawn], is the university."
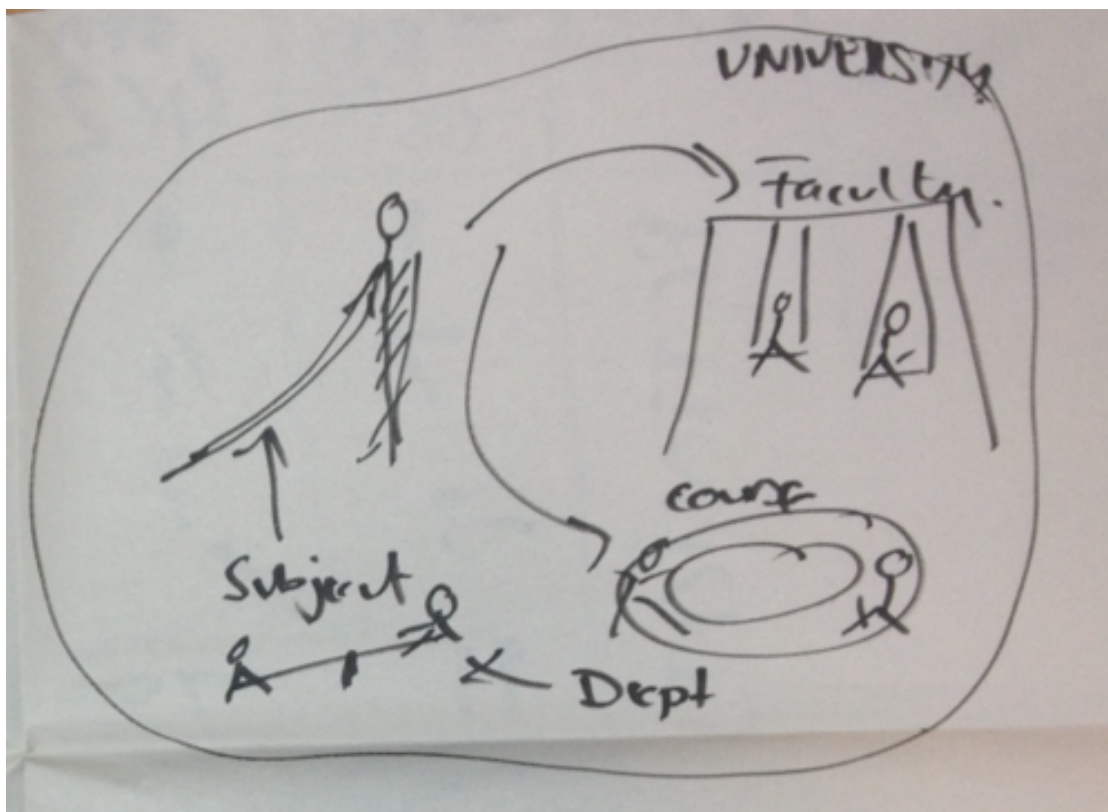
(**Picture 4.6** Nicola's metaphor drawing of the university playground)

Play and performance (represented by the various playground rides) are a major part of Nicola's own practice. She compares teaching to a stand-up comedy performance, combining elements such as play, humor and smiling. She very much tries to incorporate these elements in to her own teaching practice in order to enhance the classroom experience:

"I see pedagogy of teaching creativity relating to stand-up comedy and narrative. Play, smiling in the mind and humor are massive parts of it."

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In terms of Nicola's pedagogical teaching methods, she focusses on the end outcome in her own practice, akin to having a broader perspective on the student learning journey. She again emphasises to me that play is a really important part of the learning and cognitive development aspects for her students. She feels education has lost of the ability adopt creative practices, such as play and thinks there is a real need to bring it back in to the classroom. There is however now a lack of space for Nicola to do some of this creative work in her own teaching practice:

> *"I am trained to look at the end. I have spent more of my teaching time looking at the process and ideas and the different stages of these result in that outcome as well. So, play is really important anyway in my life, full stop. We lose the ability to be creative at school and we need to bring it back. Those creative spaces are really important and they don't exist."*

4.4.3. Valuing diversity in pedagogical practice

Nicola values embedding new and unique pedagogical approaches within her own teaching practice. She does however feel she has become culture-bound very quickly since joining the university and this is seen as a weakness for her, telling me she needs to break away from:

> *"I do really value individual and new, unique pedagogy's and I think that is really important. I have become very quickly personality wise institutionalised, very quickly, and it is a weakness and I have to be wary of that."*

She feels strongly that there should be as much diversity as possible within teaching practices spread across the institution, and this is a key factor which students value the most. The diversity in teaching also suits different student learning styles and hence better supports students. Nicola goes on to tell me that more individuals need to be inspirational in their own way, not just the teaching award winners doing things differently:

> *"Students learn differently, so if every tutor on the programme was like me or I… we were all like other people on the programme, then we are satisfying one particular*

group of students and we are relating to them and I just think there is that difference of relation."

Moving in to talking about the traditional university lecture, Nicola tells me that she very much values the lecture and for her it is a crucial element of teaching practice. She feels that this is why she received her teaching award nomination:

"I believe so strongly in lectures still and I know there is still a place for them. I really do think that is why I got that award."

Nicola is passionate about teaching and it is the best part of the job for her, which is rooted deeply in her own value set:

"I bloody love it! It is the best part of the job for me. The dark place is the fact that I would only lecture in the early days because that is what I was employed to do."

4.4.4. Views on quality measurement

Nicola is experiencing the creative tensions of still trying to work within a university created, quality framework. She sees that the institutional standardisation movement is clashing with her own teaching practices. She gets extremely frustrated when colleagues tell her that it simply needs to be like this for consistency:

The person I am, the management I am walking away from, also believe the same as me and I am still trying to do it within a university framework. I am going to quote somebody in the division now who told me, 'We are not trying to create an everything has to be the same in the university but we do need a consistency.' We are a peculiar organisation!"

She sees the need for difference across university divisions, where teaching and assessment practice can and should vary for the right reasons. Nicola tells me that the blanket approach to standardisation of teaching is now killing any form of individual creativity. There is a clear

need for greater trusting of academics to do the right thing. They are experienced professionals and know what is best for their students:

> *"We have a particular type of pedagogical approach to higher education because we deal with creativity. The rest of the sector need to understand that we have a collective way of assessing, it is about trust. We know what we are doing."*

With this in mind, Nicola feels that, like others she is situated on the outskirts of the main standardised university culture. She takes some comfort in knowing that she is not alone here and there are other colleagues who also don't want to conform, but ultimately end up doing:

> *"I don't want you to think I am the only person that sits outside of it, loads of people are outside of it in the division; we never want to conform, although we often do!"*

She sees that the performance measures in place are killing the creative overlap within the university environment. Nicola recognises the need for other colleagues to come together to share knowledge and experiences (innovation) and talks about the need to nurture and facilitate a blurring of the boundaries between disciplines. In this respect, I could clearly see a deep intrinsic need to view teaching and knowledge creation in a much more dynamic fluid sense. Instead the university appears to be closing down the parameters around Nicola, suffocating her creative teaching. It is all about collegiality to her and everyone working to a common goal, but achieving this in diverse ways:

> *"The university is course-centric. We are 'welcome to the party' and now it is like you are going to give us systems to help us be course-centric. Overlap happens in life and I love those spaces; it is the blurring of the boundaries that are key to me in terms of the disciplines I teach, how I teach, and how I work with colleagues. Working with others and working with different types of others to create those knowledges and experiences and never doing anything on your own, always working with others. It is about that collegiateness, collegiateness (sic) at all times!"*

Talking more with Nicola about specific quality measure aspects, she feels the measures in place to ensure consistency are bogging the institution down. Instead of setting deadlines for academics, she argues it should be a case of trusting the staff know the end point and can create the processes to get there for themselves:

> "We are getting bogged down in process, and that's from a quality director, but that is what I am hearing. Don't give the deadline; let them set a process up that suits their staff. I think staff really need ownership and that is what I mean about collegiateness (sic) as well. I was in that intermediate management where you are a conduit between that dumping on you and dealing with it with staff below."

Quality measures, such as The National Student Survey (NSS) Nicola sees as being part of this blanket approach. She outlines that the questions being asked by them do not suit everyone. There is a need to take student feedback in to account in terms of the context:

> "We have to do a lot of work on the NSS in our discipline because we are slated by it and it is very easy to demonstrate that the questions don't suit our disciplines, they really don't. We need to understand the feedback in the context of the questions they are being asked."

In particular, Nicola views the NSS as a blunt management tool being used to govern. There appears to be a disconnect between student and management perception of good practice which is generating the wrong measures being put in place:

> "It is absolutely amazing because it is a blunt tool for everybody! On just one very basic level your students are telling you 'Do you know that this has been fucking great and thank you!' I hate it when I hear it from managers; it is like good honours rates, I have got a real problem with good honours rates."

4.4.5. Closing down of Nicola's creative culture

Nicola begins drawing another metaphor to represent her perception of the university. She now draws an analogy of the tail wagging the dog. This was used to represent the university's reactive 'knee jerk' approach to teaching quality developments. This is where problems higher up in the university seem to be getting hidden and certain things are not being discussed openly within the current culture:

> "[Nicola has started drawing again in the bottom left corner of the flipchart paper] *This was the thing that I was worried about drawing. So that is a tail and there is the dog. I think that is something you know [indicates to the drawing of the dog], using those terms like knee jerk reaction and panic don't go down well in the areas I work, we don't use those terms on purpose you know.*"
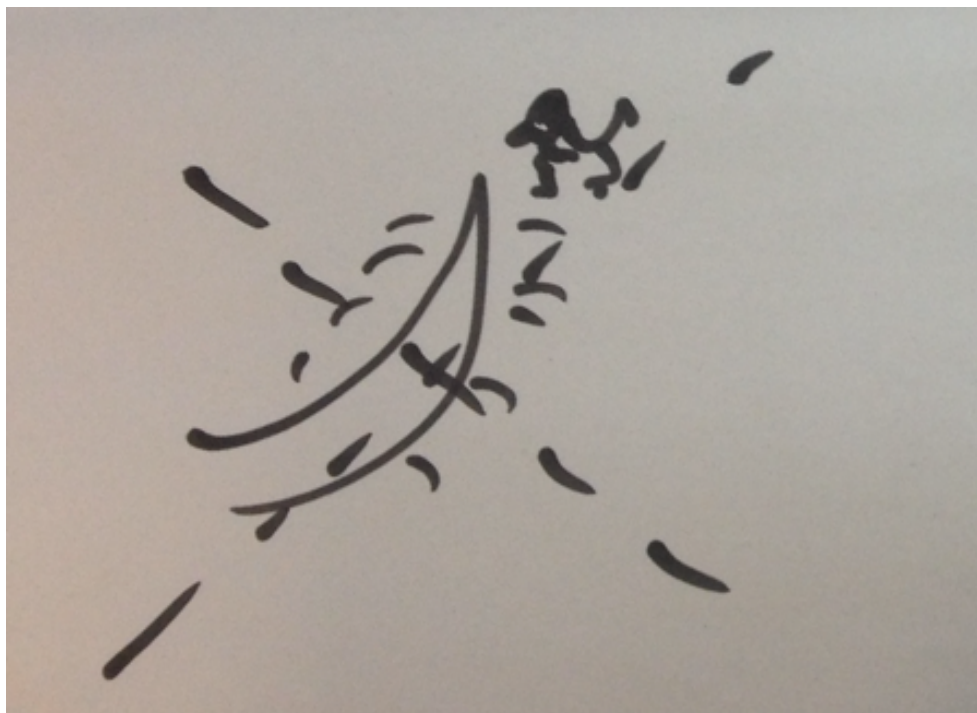
(**Picture 4.7** Nicola's metaphor drawing of the tail wagging the dog)

Nicola has now moved on from this culture and sees her way out of it. She tells me it is her job to try and do something about it, specifically in terms of trying to change the culture

around her and make a real difference for her colleagues. The hope is to create more of a trusting facilitative culture:

> *"I have moved on [starts drawing herself outside of the tail] from that, I am not going to cross it out [makes a dash cross through the dog] completely but just because I understand that that is about facilitation. It's my job to do something about that [indicate drawing of the dog] and I really think that it is something that I have wanted to deal with."*

4.4.6. Views on the inspirational teaching award

Our discussion moves into looking more closely at Nicola's view on the inspirational teaching award she won. Her view and experience on the teaching award is an interesting one. Nicola views the award as a marketing tool for the university and thus is skeptical of it. Even though Nicola received the award no one congratulated her on getting it within her division. She did not really know the rationale behind the nomination and perceived it more as popularity contest within the university:

> *"We are going to honest on camera now aren't we. So, one of my problems with the inspirational teacher's award in that, when I first got it I was 'Oh what is this about, is it a popularity contest?' I didn't even get congratulated by the Divisional Head."*

Despite the award, Nicola has been given very little recognition from colleagues. She goes on to tell me the story of when she informed her manager she was leaving for a new job shortly after winning the award and the response was extremely hostile:

> *"Okay we are being really honest now aren't we, so you know (participant tells a story about when she informed her manager she would be leaving the division for a new job). Her response was 'fuck off' and I was left thinking, 'hang on a minute you have got an inspirational award winner, and you are saying this. And colleagues around me are just like this [open hand gesture]'."*

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Despite winning a student nominated teaching award and having vast experience, no one in the institution asked Nicola how she did it, what they could learn from it or how better they could use her experience. It was as though her practice went against many of the approaches in the university, and this therefore made her somewhat of a cultural outsider (hidden). She even thanked me as researcher for sitting down and talking through it with her:

"It has been really fantastic but it has only been fantastic because of people like you, so you know when you say 'who comes to ask you what is it that makes your sessions inspirational?', nobody in terms of the university management structure or the things that are about improving, not the NSS student experience committee, not the people on our programme who have got a really poor overall NSS satisfaction rate. So, nobody is asking me..."

In terms of looking into the darker side of teaching award ceremonies, Nicola tells me that when she was told she had received the award, winners also received some words that student had written down (software image of multiple words) on the certificate. However, this was manipulated and taken out of context. The largest words read, "Poor, Bad, Ill". They handed her the certificate with this in the ceremony and it was projected on to a large screen:

"I am going to draw you something else now [has started to draw], You will like this... So as an inspirational award winner last year you were given a certificate and it had some words on it [has started to draw words on the paper]. Do you want to know the biggest words on mine [starts writing] – they are the two strongest words that came out, all over it said "Bad, poor...", negative words, because all they did was take a paragraph shoved it into a machine. So, what they did was take a paragraph from a student who had written about me and what the student had written was when I was really poorly and things were going very badly and I was very ill – Nicola did this and that for me etc."
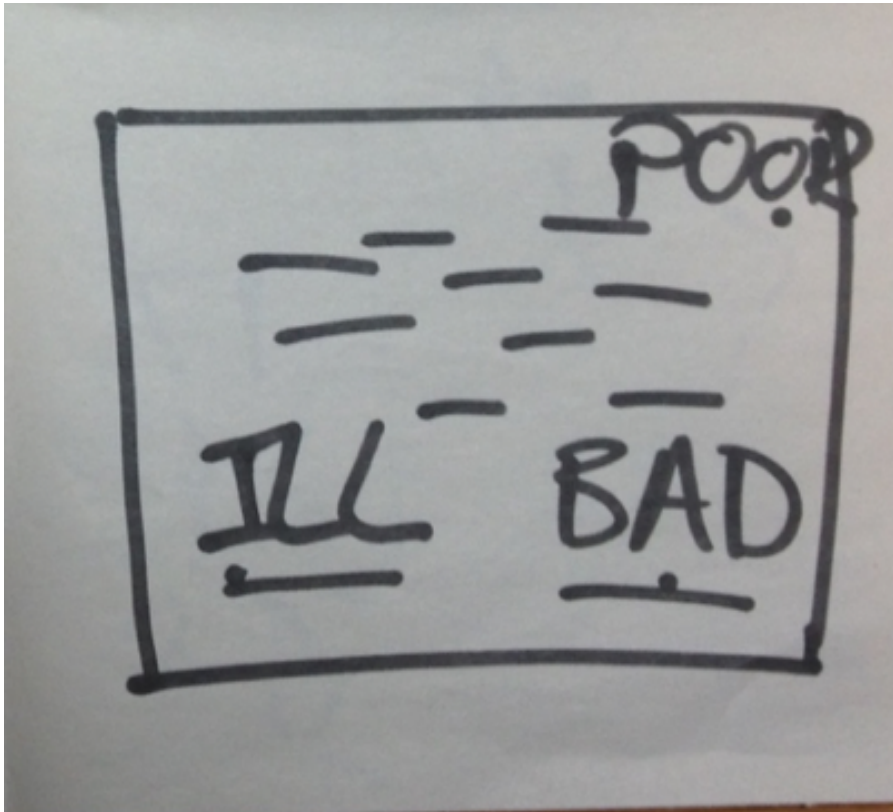
(**Picture 4.8** Nicola's metaphor showing student word nomination text on her certificate)

4.4.7. Pushed out of the institutional culture and alone

Despite winning the award and achieving so much in terms of her teaching practice, Nicola feels extremely isolated, even pushed out to the operating boundaries of the central university culture:

> *"I have been put by other people on a hamster wheel and they are happily watching me get really, really, really bloody brilliant at that wheel but they are not letting me play on anything other. When I was in isolation in the division recently I found it really difficult. It was a bit like being a spy and being left in the cold."*

Nicola goes on to tell me that she unfortunately does not feel she has a career anymore within the university and has simply ended up where she was purely by accident. Because of this she has decided to leave her division, not because of teaching but because of the increasing performative culture forming around her:

"I have ended up here by accident, none of this was designed. You are talking to me at a very particular time actually in that I have decided to leave my division for good reasons and I have actually not decided to leave the division in terms of teaching, I have decided to leave the division because of the attitude towards quality within the new management structure."

4.4.8. Value conflicts and personal tensions

Nicola has felt pushed to make this decision and leave the division she loved because the institution has changed so much and she doesn't fit in anymore with the emergent culture. Her strong values and beliefs conflict with the new institutional values around quality management. She would rather leave than lose her own identity within this:

"I do feel what I am doing in terms of stopping a role that I really, absolutely love in a division, saying to the division 'I am not quite the person for you anymore. I don't genuinely think I can work with you. I don't like this. That is not the reason I am going although it could be perceived that way; the reason I am going is that actually I am not the right person for you anymore, if this is how you want it to be. I don't think I have lost my personality; I have a reputation."

Nicola came to quite a stark realisation when drawing her analogy of the boats and playground. She told me that she was going to move to different 'playground' (division) and had been using the very same analogy in her own mind for some time prior to represent her decision:

"You know now that you have just said that it is a really scary analogy for me because this is what I have definitely used for years [indicates island and boat drawing and playground] and now you are saying you are going to a different playground and yeah I was like 'Whoa!' - the analogy I have used."

Towards the end of the discussion, Nicola told me that she really valued the opportunity to talk openly about her award and practice as part of the research study. From my position as

both listener and researcher, I was extremely privileged for Nicola to have opened up and been so honest in all aspects of our discussion. This study was all about giving a voice to these teaching award winners and displaying empathy and understanding towards their tensions and struggles through their narrative stories:

> *"You have made this happen for me and it is a really valuable conversation. You probably think I am doing you a favour; I am not, you are doing me one."*

4.5. Story 3: Margaret's Story - The 'Knackered Old Sheepdog'

"We don't do this for the money you know. We do this because it is a vocational career we love."

I found my discussion with Margaret really insightful and reflected on it for a good few days afterwards. Margaret was very open, both when talking to me about herself and also the way she feels about the institutional culture. She talked about her strong passion for the students and their experiences. We had a lengthy discussion about the impact institutional performance metrics has had on the student experience. I started to get the sense there was something else in the background and asked a question about her wellbeing. She told me she was currently being treated for clinical depression and some of it was to do with the performative culture forming around her. She was anxious and felt pressured to keep up with processes and not let anyone down. Margaret had lost autonomy in her role, telling me she did not feel valued by the current system that the university was imposing upon her. She, like others I had spoken to, made the clear distinction between teaching and being a manager in the university and saw the two elements as being polar opposites. Margaret also said, like other winners, we do not need managers in higher education. Her passion and enthusiasm for the students shone through and was why she won the inspirational teaching award. She talked about her own experience as a student and how it felt, trying to bring this back in to her teaching practices. Margaret, like others, saw the relationship to students as being of equals not subordinates. She talked about her own career development opportunities and there not being any teaching progression routes only ones into management roles. Margaret sent me an email after our discussion to thank me for talking with her and how much our conversation has made her reflect on her own role.

(Extract summarised from Researcher's Reflexive Diary)

4.5.1. The university farmyard

Margaret begins our discussion by turning the flipchart paper round to portrait perspective and then begins to draw her representation of the university culture as a farmyard. She starts by drawing her level 6 undergraduate students and green fields to represent their autonomous learning journey in the university:

> *"[Participant starts drawing] I have got quite a cool one that I use with my students… There we go, there's [begins drawing at the top, Level 6 in green]…here are my level six students, bless them [continues to draw]."*
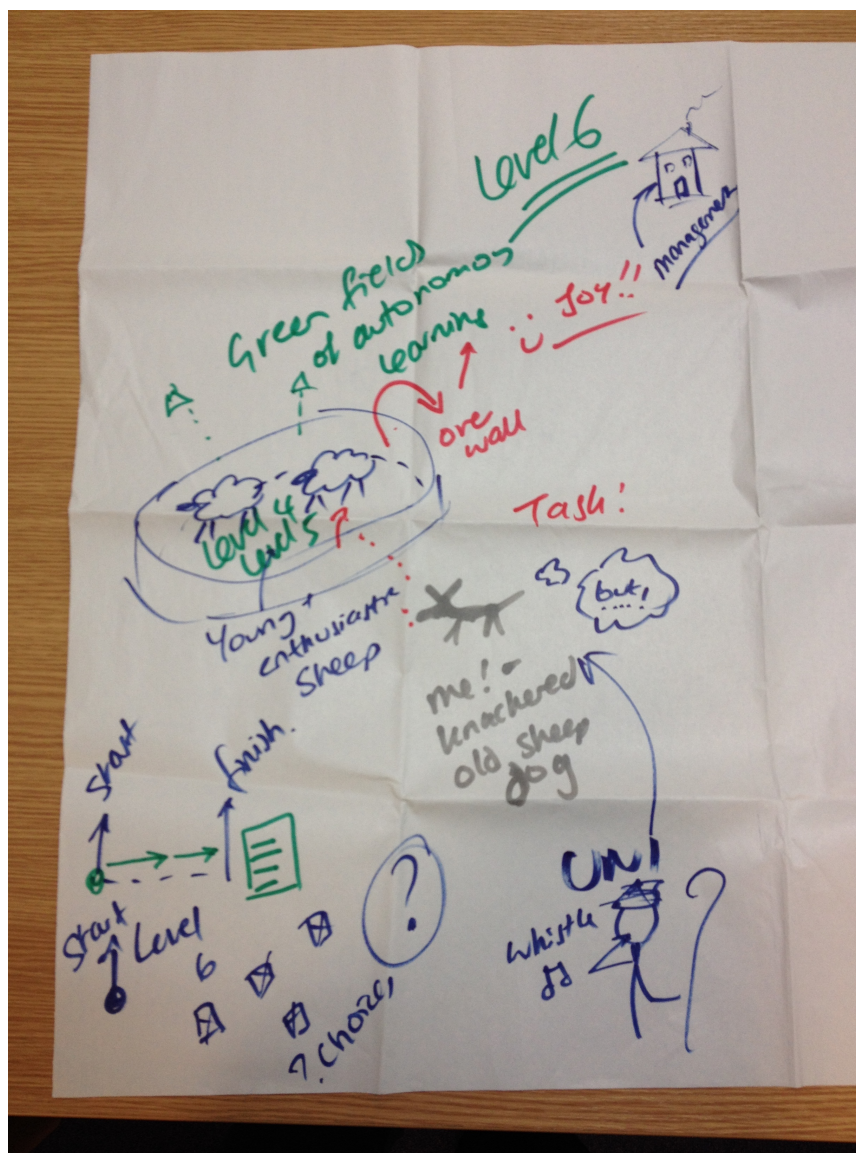
(**Picture 4.9** Margaret's metaphor drawing of the university culture as a farm)

In the next part of Margaret's metaphor drawing, she moves a little further down from the top of the paper and draws a sheep pen containing her level 4 and 5 students who she describes as being in a safe, protective learning environment. She goes on to say that her role as the 'knackered old sheep dog' is to get them out of the pen (that safe environment) to find out how they learn. Crucially they have to want to do this by themselves:

> *"So, the uni tries to tell me what to do, but I know what my job is, my job is to get these guys out of their sheepy pen* [indicates and adds to drawing some sheep for L4 and L5 students] *where they are just in a safe zone. They are expecting this is the environment they have been brought up with: they know the walls, they are comfortable, they know where the boundaries are, but obviously as graduates they can't stay in there forever. They have got to get out and my job is to basically by hook or by crook* [adds herself to the drawing as a grey 'knackered old' sheep dog]*, get them over the wall because that is a big barrier for them, it is not a gate, it is not just: 'I can go open the gate and walk out.' They have to want this and they have to get over that wall and get out into the scary area of learning how to learn and doing what they need to do and developing themselves. And this is the scary bit because out here are wolves and the unknown and you know, being a big grown up sheep rather than a little lamb."*
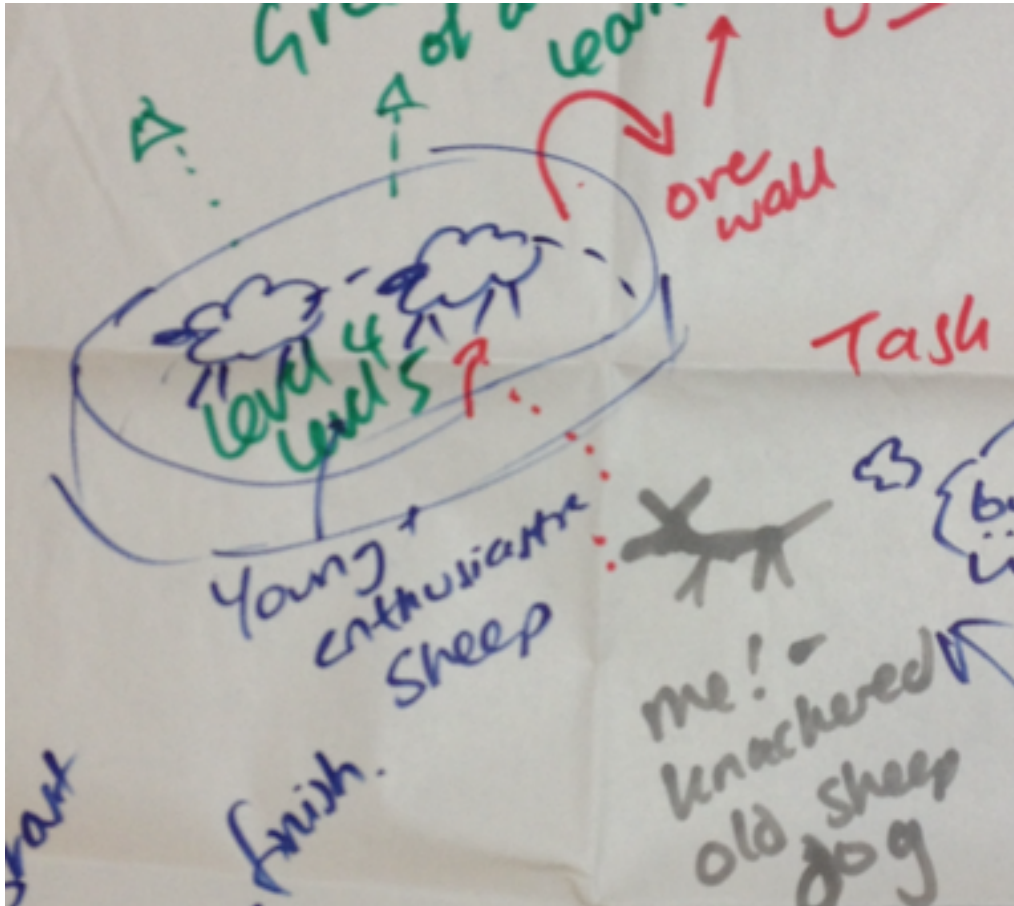
(**Picture 4.10** Margaret's metaphor drawing of the sheep pen with her students contained within and herself represented as a 'knackered old sheep dog')

Margaret demonstrates a very good understanding of the educational environment and sees this as creating the barriers (walls) that are containing her students. She sees that their educational journey has been created with a predefined set of linear performance criteria (assessments, start points, end points) and that higher education is now no different to this. She tells me that graduates should not have defined objectives, because they should instead set their own; they should devise their own assessments which are more suited to their career development opportunities. She very much sees a different way of teaching with much more flexibility and empowerment towards her students, instead of the 'tick box' system we currently have created which provides little in the way of choice:

> *"The educational environment from my beliefs. That is what they have grown up with, GCSEs, AS Levels, A-Levels, whatever – a defined start point, a defined finish point and a designed assessment criteria that you then tick against. Graduates do not have finish*

points because they set their own objectives, they are supposed to have a protean view of career development, they are supposed to see the opportunities, they are supposed to see how to get to the opportunities, they are supposed to assess themselves [continues to draw at the bottom of the paper a start and finish line, along with tick boxes that they complete and have very little choice]."
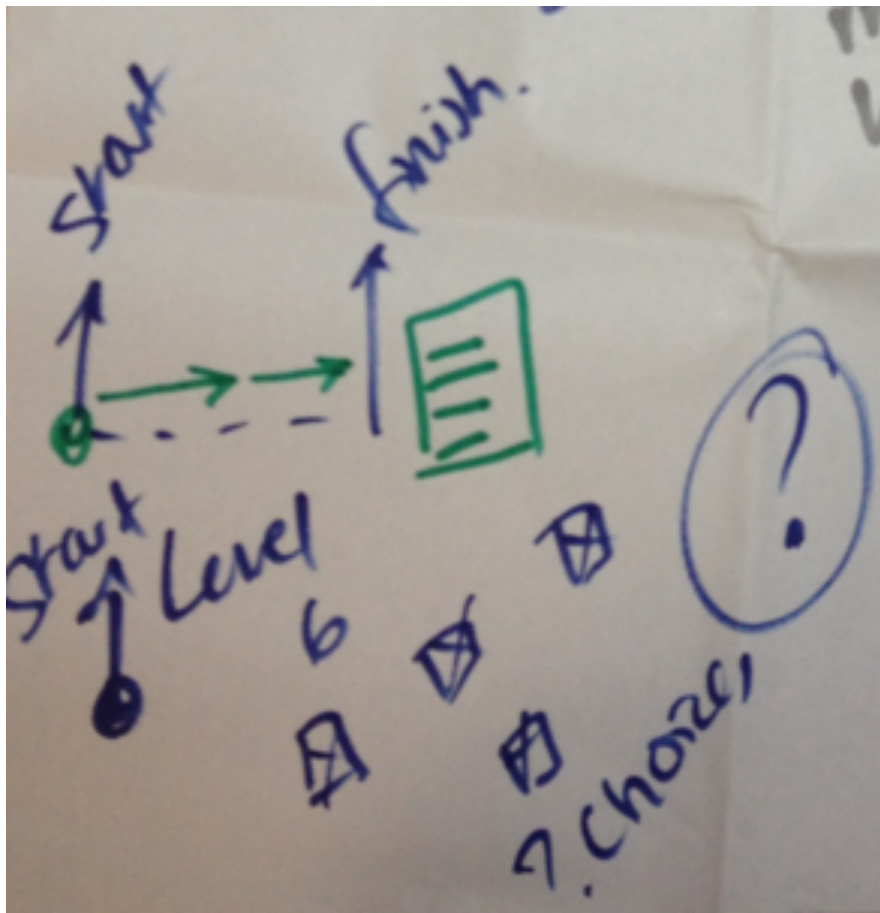
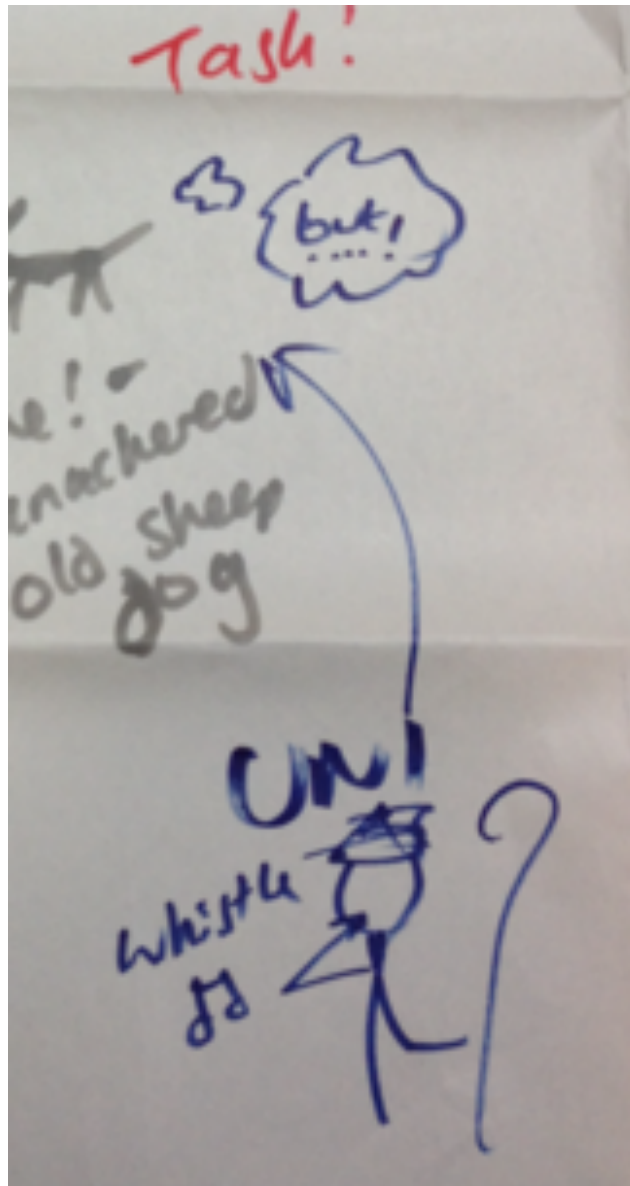(**Picture 4.11** Margaret's metaphor drawing of students predefined learning journey)

Margaret sees that the current learning and teaching climate is too comfortable for her students to be within, therefore they do not feel the need to stretch their learning and academic development. At the same time, her students realise that this is not what they should be doing in terms of effective learning:

"They're comfortable, they know where they are and it is comfortable but at the same time they really know maybe it is not really what they should be doing."

She sees the barrier (pen walls) as the culture trapping her students learning. Margaret notes that all students learn differently and have different abilities, and some may not be able to easily 'jump out of the pen' but sees her job as being able to help and support those to get them 'over the wall' and in to the green fields of autonomous learning:

> *"That is the barrier [indicates to the sheep pen walls on the drawing], that is always going to be the barrier. Whenever you try and do this you will have some that do not want to jump the barrier, some that cannot jump the barrier and just get hung up and legs over one side and some that hop over and are quite happy. And you will always get a mix of students and maybe your job as a lecturer [draws crook and whistles] is to try and give a nose up to those people who can't get over to the green fields [draws green fields of autonomous learning]. You have got to think a little bit outside the pen."*

(**Picture 4.12** Margaret's metaphor drawing of her role as lecturer in getting her students to jump out of the sheep pen in to the field of autonomous learning)

4.5.2. Margaret's flock of students

Margaret clearly recognises and articulates the differing levels of abilities and progression needs of her students. She describes her level 4 students coming in and not being quite sure about things (how to eat grass), progressing onto be more competent students at level 5, who are 'nosing over the fence to see what is out there', right through to her level 6 students who should know how to get out of the sheep pen. There is a need for them to know what is out there in the real world:

"I think that at level four they come in, they are not quite sure, you need to basically teach them what's what and how to eat grass. Level five they are skipping about, they are nosing over the fence a little bit and yes if they can make it at that point that's fine but you might need to keep an eye on them. Level six they should be out there, by the end of level six that is where they should be in my view. The barrier is needing to understand what is out there and what the world is like."

She wants all her students to have the right skills and capabilities to succeed in the outside world. In this sense, Margaret is very much focused upon developing graduate employability skills within her students and supporting any who need it (the stragglers as she calls them):

"What I really want is when I jump into the pen and say 'Right, okay, everybody out', they are all ready, they are ready, they are skilled up, they know how to deal with it and they all want to jump out and yes my job then is to round up the stragglers."

Margaret sees the need to focus on developing employability capabilities such as adaptability in order to prepare students for the world outside university, and sees this as being her job as sheep dog:

"You can prepare people to adapt and that's what my job is, to prepare people to be adaptive employee's, not to be trained drones that can go out and execute a series of preordained moves. That is not what this is about."

Margaret tells me there are no linkages between modules or years in terms of development; it is simply a tick box exercise for students. She uses her own experiences as a student to support her current teaching practices. She notes a change in students and their expectations, particularly around lectures and how they perceive their learning:

"I am a continuous student myself so I tend to judge them by my own low expectations of myself. There are no linkages, it is like a module it is a compartment, tick the box. The students aren't coming to us with the skills that are needed to sit in formal lectures,

they don't get it like students did ten years ago. If you don't tell your students 'Now, get your pens out and make notes because a lot of things I am going to talk about are not on the slides and there are some important things and you will want to annotate your notes' and it is like 'Oh right, that is what you have given us notes for, I just thought that (hand gesture) you know'."

In this respect, she shows empathy with her students and recognises different abilities require different levels of support (i.e. not everyone is the same). Margaret has a fluid style of teaching that recognises the ability to facilitate the process but crucially not control it and only stepping in when needed (to protect the flock of sheep from the wolf):

"I empathise with you but just get on with it and get it learnt and if you are struggling with it come and see me and we will go through it and it is no problem. If you see a wolf coming in to view you are out to deal with it. If you don't see the wolf that is fine, you just sit on the wall watch them all, but if there is a problem they know where I am, I am on the wall, I am visible."

4.5.3. One size doesn't necessarily fit all!

Working within the university culture Margaret has felt devalued because on the one hand she can demonstrate she is doing what she knows to be right by the students and preparing them for the world outside. However, this is causing value tensions to clash with the 'one size fits all' university approach to standardisation. She sees that as the university gets bigger more rules are coming in to enforce accountability due to increased problems arising and the resulting need to try and control this through imposed quality measures:

"A lot of the time it did make me feel devalued, because at these levels I have got a reasonably firm idea of what I want to do with the students to prepare them for this. And unfortunately, when people start saying 'This is how we wish you to practice this' – well I have been doing this a long time, and you know, and I think I am reasonably good at it. It is not one size fits all and I think sometimes we try, by trying to make things homogenous across the university and because it is such a big university it is

much easier to have a set of rules for everybody because it is then easier to demonstrate the due diligence when you have problems."

She perceives an inequality about how different disciplines within the university are subject to different performance measures. In this, Margaret recognises that learning must be treated as a diverse commodity in order to allow creativity to happen in the first place:

"It doesn't feel fair that at the same time some disciplines need a different understanding of something and that is not devaluing them, that is just saying, accepting that some practice is different, there are different styles of teaching, different styles of learning and different skills that are needed to survive. Think about it, you get a creative spark and pow and it is just different aspiration"

Margaret also sees that most quality measures being brought in to the university do not add value to the final metrics, such as the NSS. Instead they actually have the opposite effect of reducing the scores:

"And unfortunately, a lot of the things that we do scupper our chances in the NSS rather than actually assisting the NSS."

She sees that in this new system, academics and students will always look for the easiest path to navigate through which is not necessary the best way. She feels that there is no ability to change that type of culture now:

"It is human nature, that is how we are; we always look for the easy path of least resistance. Thou shalt not change it."

4.5.4. The burdens of academic administration

Margaret recognises the need to remove the 'student as consumer' mind-set which has developed across the sector:

> *"In the magic wand field, they need to get rid of or drop student fees because they need to remove the consumer culture, that is the magic wand. If you have students coming here and paying effectively 30 grand then they expect a level of service, and they do not see why they should have to work when they have paid for their degree."*

This aspect has changed the relationship with the students, she tells me. They now see academics as service providers and they are customers. In that mind-set, they want everything as easy as possible for minimal effort, but learning is not like that:

> *"So, then we are service providers rather than academics and they are customers rather than students, and they perceive that we should just make things as easy as possible for the money that they are paying and trying to explain to them you know that it is not. It is a gym membership and they have got to do the work, nobody wants to hear that. Humans are fundamentally lazy. That is why we have evolved to do what we do; we have spent our entire evolutionary history looking for easier ways to do stuff; our entire brains are geared towards making life easier or making the perception of life easier."*

In her ideal scenario if she had a magic wand the right balance (relationship) would be redressed to be much more of a working partnership, instead of her being seen as the 'enemy', taking students money and not giving them the easy ride they expect in their learning. This has been lost in the current climate:

> *"So that would be my magic wand because then you readdress the balance, because I think the balance has been lost between academics and students. I think it used to be much more of a partnership. I think students respected you because they could see*

that you were trying to help them, whereas now you are both, you are the enemy, you are taking their money and not giving them what they want."

She goes on to talk about the systems being introduced to avoid failure for students and stop them complaining when they do not achieve, despite academics doing all that is humanly possible:

"We give as much as we can humanly give. We spend a lot of time firefighting, we spend a lot of time box ticking so that we can back up systems, so when the students inevitably complain that they don't get the degree that they thought they should have got, we can prove that we have."

Margaret tells me that these performance measures introduced have taken away from the academic role, instead turning academics into secretaries. She sees her job pushing the students to do the best they can. She spends most of her time undertaking the burdens of administration duties now such as writing reports and ticking boxes on forms:

"Acted with due diligence and done everything that we should have done, that detracts from the experience of academics because we are not secretaries. With all due respect our main job should not be typing up emails, typing up grades; it should be seeing students, setting work, pushing the students to do well, but we spend far more time now writing reports and emails and ticking boxes."

Margaret sees the academic administrative burden increasing and this needing to change. She describes the need to take some of this administration work away from academics and instead employ more office scutters (robots) to instead undertake it:

"When you start spending twenty hours a week doing admin, and ten hours a week seeing students, then really what the university is paying for is a bunch of glorified, over-titled admin' staff and not academics. If you want your academics to be academics you have got to take off some of the non-academic work and you have got to employ maybe some office scutters."

4.5.5. Farmhouse management

When moving in to discussing university management, Margaret tells me that she sees management as controlling her, referring back to her metaphor of the farm where management is represented by the drawing of a farm house. Management introduce systems to deal with her but she also recognises they are the ones who ultimately pay (feed) her:

> "*[Participant start drawing a large blue house at the top of the paper to represent management] Management controls the farmer or they interact and then basically university protocols deal with me and that is where I get fed.*"
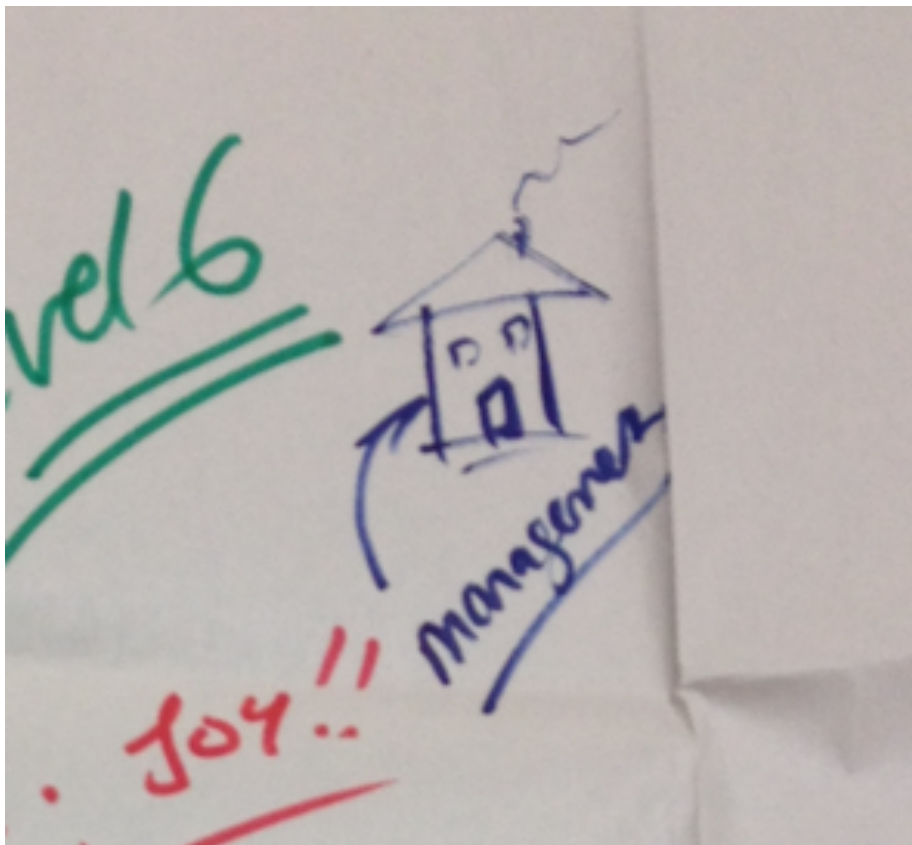
(**Picture 4.13** Margaret's metaphor drawing of university management situated in the farm house)

Potentially viewing her academic role now likened more to just doing a job, Margaret recognises the need to be paid and rewarded but also needs a safe place to operate in, calling it her safe space. She sees there is over management of academics currently occurring, and tells me that academics don't necessarily make good managers in HE:

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"I need to be fed, so I need my pay. I need my wage and I need somewhere to go, you know, when I get into trouble. I need a safe place to go, I need a space. But at the moment, management – I think there is an over management – I mean I think that we are academics, in general we are not necessarily great managers and or leaders."

She acknowledges that she could do the management part of her role but simply does not want to. Margaret sees her role as working with the students. She again refers back to the metaphor of the farmer and her sheep dog to highlight that she sees herself working on the ground (outside in the field) with her students, and not located up in the warm, cozy farmhouse (management). This assumes a separation of role, and is important in the sense of her own professional identity:

"I could do the management but I don't enjoy the management, why should I? This is my job [indicates to the farmer and sheep dog on her drawing] I know what my job is, that's fine, I am happy with that. You know I get the whistle out and I occasionally go back and that is fine. I am happy but this is my focus, this is what I live for [indicates top of drawing to where she has drawn the students in the pen] So why on earth would I try and turn into a house!"

Getting her magic wand out again, Margaret thinks that in an ideal scenario all academics, whatever level should be teaching (core business) and not undertaking management roles. She sees a need for more practice managers not necessarily business managers within the university environment:

"Magic wand time, what I would like to see is senior academics doing senior academic roles and basically something which might be controversial: in my view, all profs, all SLs, should be student facing, they should be facing the core business and we should have for each division one business manager who's not an academic, whose sole purpose is, well basically like a practice manager. Realistically we need practice managers."

4.5.6. Career progression for teaching-focused academics

Speaking more to Margaret about her own career aspiration, she tells me that she views management being like a poisoned chalice. She doesn't see any career progression outside of a management; just the de-valuing of the academic role now:

> "Management is a poisoned chalice anyway, it is a poisoned chalice job really. There is no progression. If you are a good academic that is your career for the rest of your life and you will be taking a year on year pay cut, suck it up basically, until you are put out to pasture yourself. You are basically going to devalue in the market."

The lack of opportunity for Margaret was apparent and she tells me that there is no career progression for those academics who focus upon their teaching, only the ones who are researched focused in the university. Teaching is not valued within the university, which she cannot understand as it is core business:

> "There is no progression here for people who can teach. If you can research and you can produce thousands of papers fantastic, you can go somewhere else, but taking your teaching skills it is not valued, teaching in universities. Why are we not valuing our core? It is like, we are in a great sausage factory of HE; we are the ones that can pack the sausages the most and the best but the people who are moving are the people who are labelling the boxes."

For Margaret, there is little in the way of reward, progression or incentivising of good teaching practice now. The thing that incentivises Margaret, like other award winners is her own professional pride in doing the teaching job she loves:

> "We have no rewards now. The incentive to do well is your own professional pride and if you undermine that professional pride then what you end up with is a load of staff just marking time because they are not going to be paid more, there is no progression, there is no incentive."

4.5.7. Impact on individual wellbeing

Asked about how she feels about the current university culture, Margaret tells me it is difficult for her to answer. The culture is having a severe detrimental effect on Margaret's own wellbeing and is causing depression which has gradually been getting worse whilst she has been working at the university:

> *"It is difficult for me to answer that because I am already under treatment for clinical depression and I have suffered with depression periodically throughout working here."*

Margaret is passionate about the job she does because she loves it and is in it for the right reasons. She just doesn't need all of the constraints to ensure she is actually doing the right thing:

> *"It is difficult to work out which things are causing it sometimes but yeah I do feel that sometimes, I think everybody does – we don't do this for the money, you know we do this because it is a vocational career we love."*

Finally, Margaret talks about the need for the university to invest in its teaching staff, not through financial reward but instead by showing value, trust and support for what they do. That way it will have the best possible impact on the overall student experience. Margaret comes across as someone very emotionally invested in both her role and highly committed to the university and raising a healthy flock of sheep (students)! She is extremely diligent, taking pride in what she does and cries out for the recognition and respect in ways that she thinks are appropriate to a role that entails that level of responsibility:

> *"It would be nice to get paid a lot don't get me wrong. I would like to be rewarded, but that is not how they demonstrate, how the university demonstrates its belief in me, and that's not how it demonstrates its value in me – how it demonstrates its value by trusting me, supporting me and believing in me and believing that I want to do the best I possibly can for my students".*

4.6. Story 4: John's Story - Rage Against the Machine

"It used to be collectively we could rage against the machine but (…) now it just seems to be the individual [who] becomes separate to everything."

John and I had booked a room at the venue but first went for coffee, where we discussed the nature of the interview and what I was looking at, which was a good opportunity to get to know him a little more. What comes across from our early discussions is his strong sense of understanding pedagogy and focus on the students. He said it was the students who motivated him to keep going and remain working in higher education. His story tells of his struggles trying to individually battle against the large university machine and all the corresponding performance measures being put in place. He talks about the good old days, when he and his colleagues would collectively battle against the machine, but now unfortunately feels all alone, operating like a maverick outside of the culture. Sadly, he told me after the interview that he simply sees it as a job now and nothing more, despite winning the teaching award.

(Extract summarised from Researcher's Reflexive Diary)

4.6.1. The maverick and the machine

John begins our discussion by drawing himself and the university culture on the flipchart paper, which is described as *'rage against the machine'*. He then draws a large square box to represent the university culture, which contains all of the visible control mechanisms (timetabling, assessments) – these represent the university machine to him:

> "Me and the university, our relationship – dead easy, dead easy here we go [starts drawing on the flipchart paper], that's it, simple as, rage against the machine."
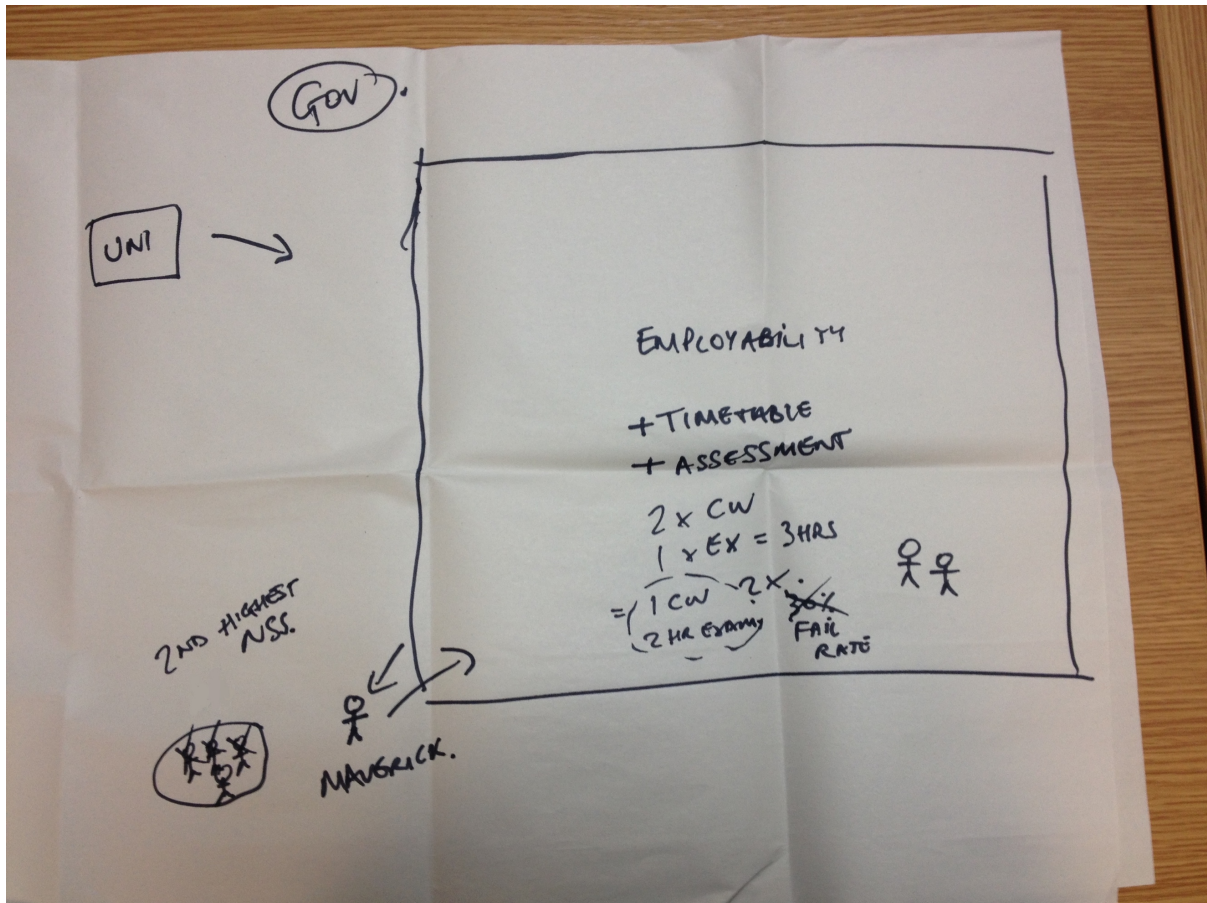
(**Picture 4.14** John's metaphor drawing of the university culture as a big machine)

Interestingly, very early on in the interview, John calls himself a maverick and places himself outside of the university (machine) large square box. He has drawn his colleagues back inside the box – crossing them out one by one. These are those colleagues who once bravely battled alongside him against the performance measures but are now sadly gone and he is alone. When asked if he does feel on the outside of the institutional culture, he told me he does.
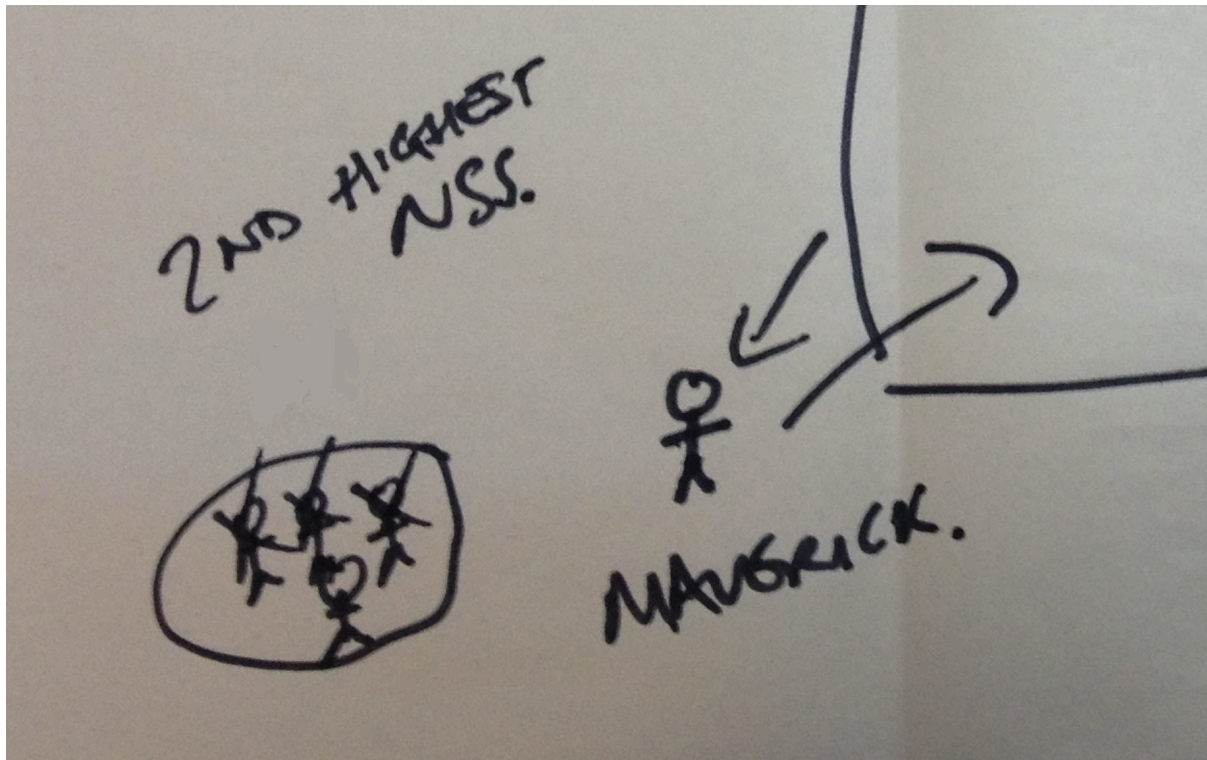
(**Picture 4.15** John representing himself as a maverick outside of the university culture on his drawing)

Exploring if this has always been the case for John, he tells me that when he started he did not see the institution in the same way as he does now; he saw all of his colleagues in his division working collectively, against the bureaucratic mechanisms (which he describes as the machine). He tells me that now, it is one or two people doing this and the rest are inside the institutional framework, working with the measures. In this sense, John has clearly drawn the representation of the bounded relationship his colleagues now operate within. They do not see anything different, only the centralised measures in place used to reward visible teaching performance:

> "When I first started possibly not, I think there was more of a collective pride. It would be more *[starts drawing colleagues inside the black box against the control mechanisms]* all the teachers raging against the machine. But I think over the years what's happened is that through machinations of this *[indicates centrally on the drawing]* then they have destroyed that *[points to colleagues working together]* and it now feels like that is basically the machine; it used to be collectively we could rage against the machine but things are getting done now it just seems to be the individual now becomes separate to everything."

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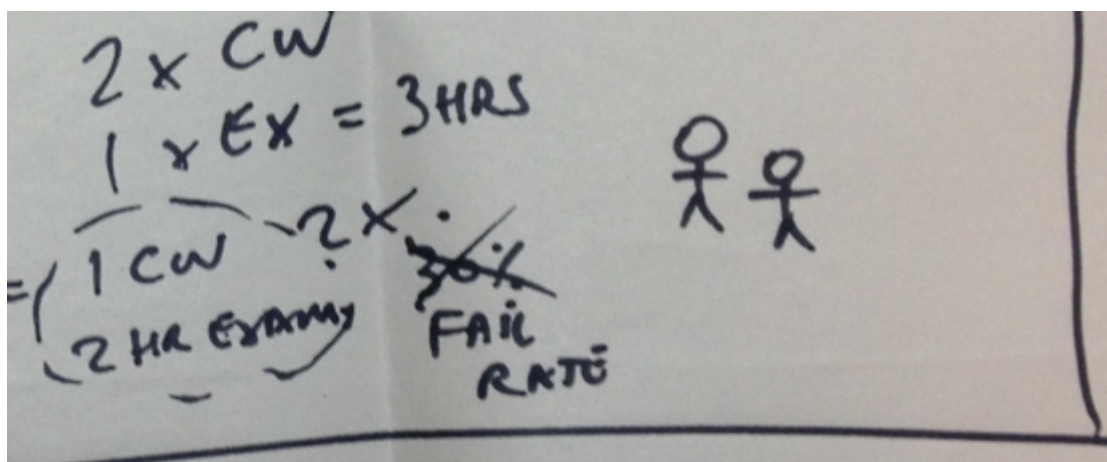
(**Picture 4.16** John's drawing of his colleagues working inside the university culture/machine)

4.6.2. Mechanics driving the performance agenda

Unpacking John's metaphor further, I asked why he drew the machine so big as a central box dominating the flipchart paper. He starts talking about the university not knowing how to differentiate itself from competitors anymore and instead they are trying to do too many things. He talks about his blocks/barriers being things like timetables and assessments where he feels he has no control over them because they are all controlled from the centre:

> *"I think this is where we suffer from is that we have, we don't know how to differentiate, we do and we don't. We are trying to do too much because surely the focus is employable graduates, I agree with that, that's the differentiation but then in terms of being able to pass on my knowledge to other student's my blocks are things that you have no control over like the timetable, assessments. That is absolutely cuckoo by the way, I can't believe that."*

John used to be very proud that his subject had achieved the highest National Student Survey scores in the division. He goes on to state that colleagues have now given up, and have simply got ground down with it all. This is a compelling aspect of John's discussion, and highlights that both he and his colleagues have resigned themselves from the collective culture and are now operating purely on an individual basis:

"We used to have the second highest score [writes NSS on paper and crosses out colleagues]. Satisfaction was right up there at the top, employability was at 95%, then through the machinations that just gradually ground us down and then one after another has just given up, given up, given up, given up."
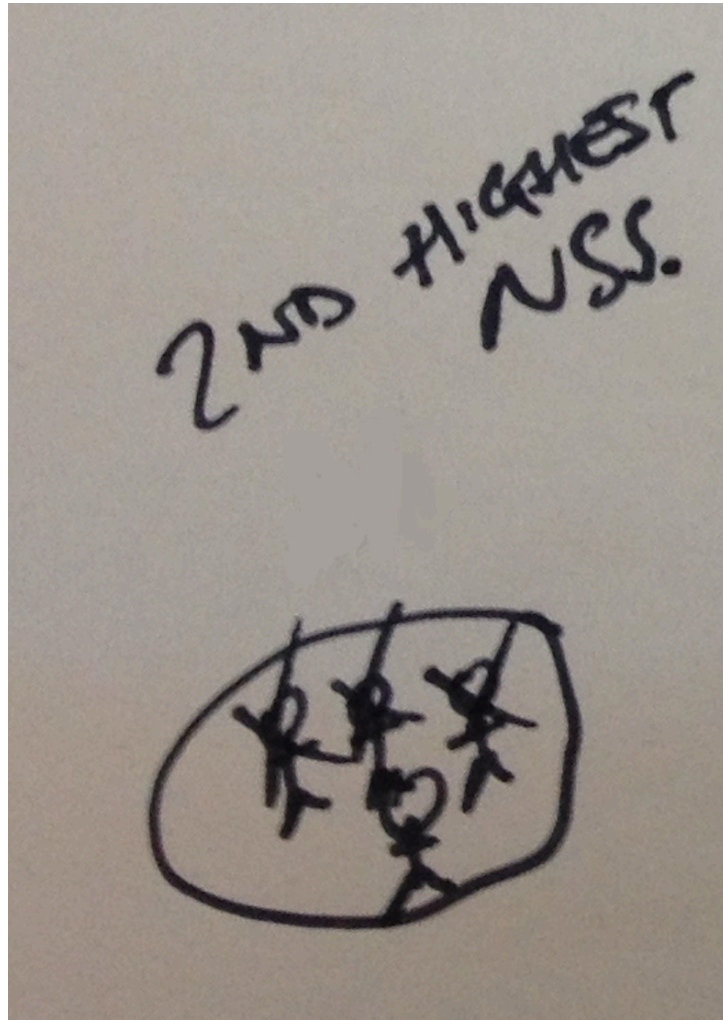
(**Picture 4.17** John's metaphor showing the second highest NSS score achieved, but then his colleagues gradually being ground down and eventually giving up (crossed out one by one))

John feels there has been a blanket approach to all of the performance measures introduced around teaching and this in turn restricts his unique pedagogical approach. This is causing him considerable value tensions as he carries on doing what he has always done, but means that he feels very much like a maverick operating alone on the periphery of the institutional culture:

"Yeah and that is why I feel like I am outside of it because I feel like I am a maverick [drawing himself on the outside of the box]."

Like other award winners, John mentions breaking the rules (or bending them), but only for the right reasons (productive performance) in his battle against the machine. He uses the example of an assessment task where he fought the system and won against the standardised mechanism. He holds close the value of individual specialist knowledge and subject specialism to create a diverse teaching culture for all his students:

"I try to break the rules as much as I can… I don't break them, I bend them and I bend them for the right reasons. Although I rage against the machine, it has only been through my raging back at the machine that we have got that back to two pieces. It is just one size fits all…. everything has got to fit on a spreadsheet. No, it hasn't, teaching sport is not the same as teaching science, teaching business is not the same as teaching economics and that is the differentiation, that specialism, that knowledge about teaching is overruled by [indicates to the drawing]."

4.6.3. Machine management

When exploring the university management function more with John, he perceives that management are simply using these metric measures to impose a level of control in order to effectively manage the complexities of teaching on a large scale. He mentions it is a fine balancing act of control, and feels the metrics may have gone a little too far. He sees that everyone ultimately is fighting towards the same common cause:

"In terms of management, I don't think they are doing it out of badness, does that make sense? I think that they need a control, they need a social way of managing things, and things do get out of hand whereby things aren't perfect in here (indicates inside the box) and need to be reined in but they have reined it in too much. A lot of people are 'oh management this, management that'. We are all going for the same cause [indicates to employability]"

John indicates he does feel on the outside of the culture, almost pushed out, even though he was given the teaching award by the university. He now does not mind being in this position because it does not cause him any stress. Instead he simply gets on with the job and tries to keep out of the bureaucracy, choosing to focus efforts on the students he teaches. He is more accustomed to seeing his academic role 'just a job' now unfortunately:

> *"Oh yeah definitely. You just sort of come in, do your job, keep your head down. Hope that people don't notice you in the right way so you don't get sucked into endless meetings over ridiculous nonsense. You know nothing really seems to have changed. Yeah it is more that, you just get on with it. When the shit does hit the fan (pardon my French) and numbers start to drop there is at least, look I told you, you just decided to ignore it and that is all we are doing and then we just get on with it, we just say 'Right we will do our best for the people we see in front of us' and if you obtain that mentality and just get on with it I think that avoids the stress."*

He sees the battle raging against the machine futile to some degree, as decisions being made are without question and any form of consultation:

> *"If you decide to suddenly I am going to rage against the machine and rage here [indicates central part of the drawing] – forget it, you can raise your concerns but ultimately it will be 'Sorry guys, we have decided that.'"*

Like others, John draws historical comparisons with what it used to be like where he enjoyed more autonomy as an academic. John now appears to have adopted much more of a laissez-faire approach to his practice, assuming that others will make the noises and he instead tends to try and keep out of the way:

> *"I think the good news was that I joined years ago, it was as long as you did the unwritten rule. The spoken rule was if you do your teaching it doesn't matter what else happened. The good news is that there are other people here [indicates drawing] that are making a bigger noise than me, so let them worry about those, it is great."*

4.6.4. Teaching practice and students

As with all the other award winners, John has deeply held values about teaching practice and student experience. It is this passion that is his driving force in the job he does:

> "What motivates me - teaching is a passion, my experience – it is not about me anymore, it is about, it is these guys *[indicates to drawing of students]."*

Again, he refers back to the good old days, when he saw more of a collective unity with colleagues, but now feels we are lowering standards due to government measures being imposed:

> "In the old school, in the old, when we were collectively together in what we said were the good old times. Now, I agree we are debasing our own degrees which is a bit of a shame. Independent thought is what was required *[hand gestures – 'oh!']."*

Through the increasing quality movement, he feels we have lost something in the essence of student learning. Whereas once failure was embraced in higher education and simply seen as the learning process, now it is a bad thing:

> "Do you know what the funniest thing is that one of the best ways to learn is through failing and do you know what, I think again talking in a timeline, students in the past would accept failure and would accept criticism and learn from it."

John sees his practice of teaching as being socially constructed and a two-way relationship, which is not about the tools of the trade (PowerPoint etc.) but is much more about the individual and the diverse modes of delivery in order to better engage students:

> "It needs to be engaging and it is a two-way process and that's again really were people have just forgotten that it is not just about the tools that you are using it is about the individual and the way in which they deliver."

However, because of the maverick way John is operating he now faces issues with isolation and loneliness. The colleagues who once rallied round him have now but disappeared leaving him to rage a war against the machine on his own:

> "I was a maverick that thought 'we could do this differently', but now it's getting lonely…"

4.7. Story 5: Suzanne's Story - Getting Crushed by Elma the Elephant

"You are punished for innovation, I honestly think that is the case...I think the most innovative people are actually sometimes punished because they wanted to bring in good teaching, different forms of assessment, different activities.."

Suzanne had vast experience across a variety of different and quite varied divisions within the university. Suzanne talked about the wider remit of the university and how this is now changing due to external pressures. She saw the role of management in the university as being quite dominant and somewhat top heavy, displaying a broad understanding of its function/s. Suzanne expressed a deep understanding of doing the right thing in the university, but told me, like other award winners had done, that it is getting more and more difficult to practice in this way, much to her own detriment. She has been worn down by this cultural tension and expressed her deep sorrow for what is happening around her.
(Extract summarised from Researcher's Reflexive Diary)

4.7.1. Elma, the giant university elephant

Suzanne really enjoyed drawing her metaphor of the university during our discussion. She represents the university by drawing a large rumbling green elephant right across the entire width of the paper. She tells me that everyone is experiencing different parts of it, which I take to mean sub-cultural elements within the university:

> *"I am going to get serious with this [laughter] – I think in my mind's eye I think I see the university as a giant rumbling elephant and we are all experiencing different parts of it. I could draw it in that way or you could draw it in different silos of different areas of endeavor which don't necessarily tie up but I think I will go for an elephant, go for an elephant, a green elephant [starts drawing large elephant right across the flip chart paper]."*
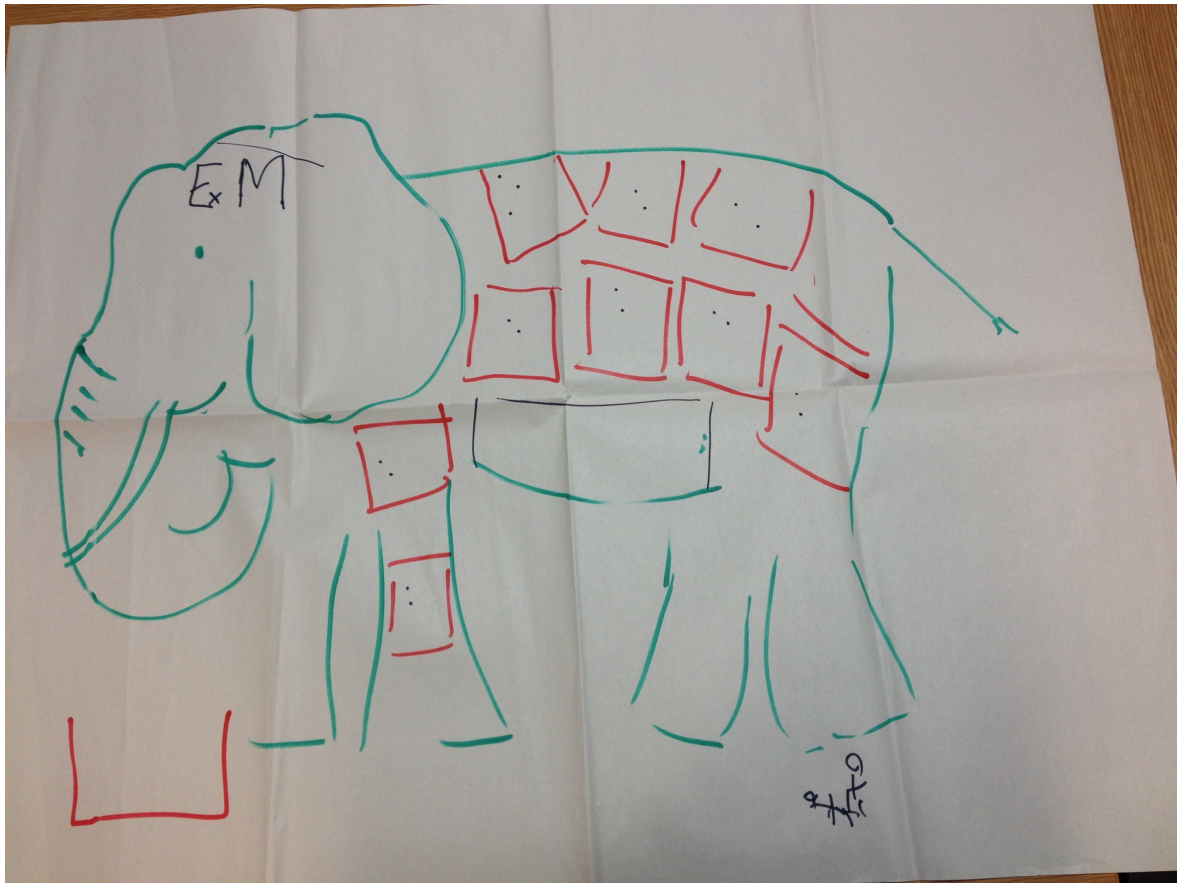
(**Picture 4.18** Suzanne's metaphor drawing of the university culture as an elephant)

Everything on the elephant is large, to represent her perception of the sheer size of the institution. Suzanne draws a big smile on the elephant's face and names her, Elma. She then proceeds to represent each university division by drawing several red square boxes over the elephant:

> "[Has continued to draw an elephant covering the entire page] …so they would have enormous ears, little eyes, okay, and then he would have a smile on his face – okay a bit short in body but I think it's a massive organisation. It is a very large university and in fact I feel as if I've… maybe it is Elma the elephant, I have worked in lots of different divisions [draws red squares within the main body of the elephant]."
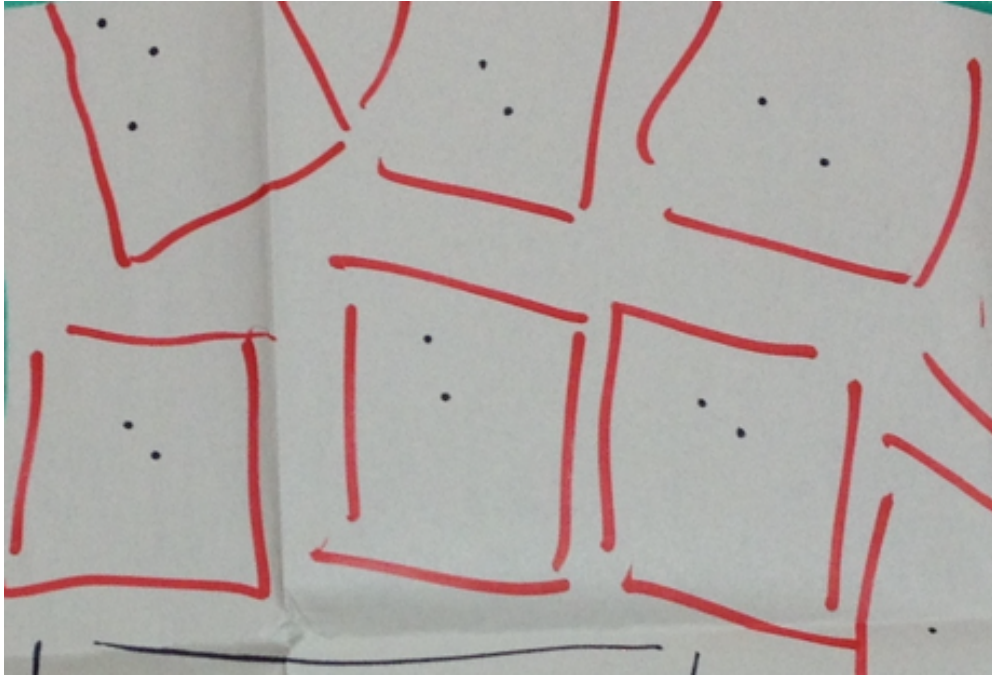
(**Picture 4.19** Suzanne's metaphor representing the university departments within the elephant)

Suzanne tells me that academics feel beleaguered. She draws the student support area as the underbelly of the elephant, holding everything together. They are trying to innovate and make changes within the large university environment. She tells me that she has worked across many of these divisions within the university:

"I think they feel a bit beleaguered. We work incredibly hard; there are some very dedicated staff, there is a struggle with lots of the personalities. [starts drawing a large rectangle within the elephant at the base of the body]. Student support is almost like the underbelly of the university, it is the service, the support of the students; they hold things together, they try and influence and innovate, try and make changes through the university."
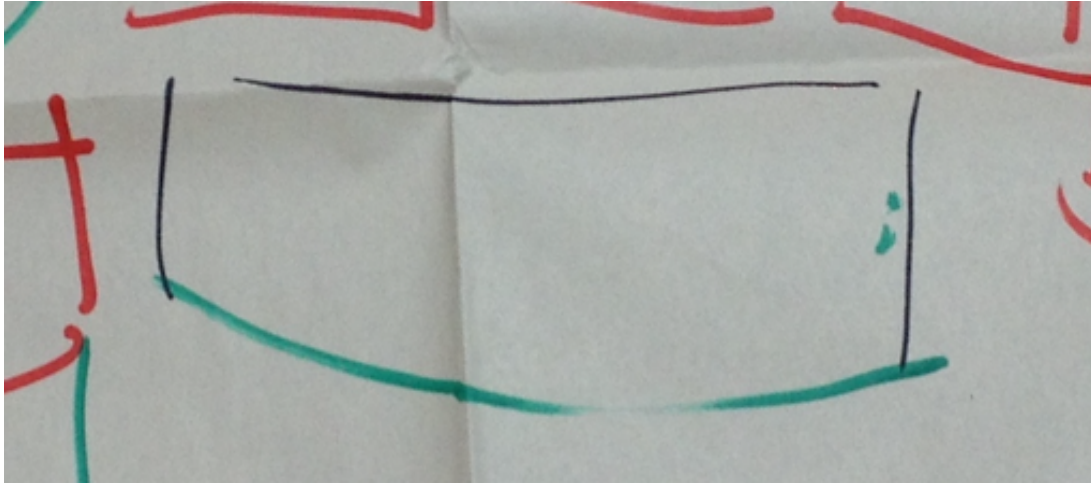
(**Picture 4.20** Suzanne's metaphor drawing of Student Support as the elephant's underbelly)

In terms of seeing the bigger picture within the university, Suzanne tells me that she sees the role of the university as diminishing. Much of this can be seen to link to external policy drivers and how universities have reacted to changes in student funding for example:

> *"I think we are coming away from a much wider understanding of university, I think we are going to be go back to a much more compressed, because of the economic and government pressures."*

4.7.2. 'The Big M'

Suzanne represents the management of the university as the large head of the elephant – 'The Big M'. She goes on to say that within each of the sub-cultures (red boxes inside the elephant) these also have their own management structure. She feels that the university is very top heavy on management:

> *"I think I see the management group as here [indicates elephants head]. So, if we said you know the big 'M' is there [starts to write in elephant's head] the big management is there, but then within each division you know, if you have got all these different divisions, if we have got all these different [draws squares all within the elephant so it looks like a patchwork 'elma' elephant] – so you have got all these different management structures [puts dots within each square/patch drawn] within. I think the university is very top heavy on managers."*

(**Picture 4.21** Suzanne's representation of university management as the elephant's head)

She sees that new managers are now coming in, costing the university a lot of money, when in her view what is needed is more resourcing into people on the ground teaching:

> *"We have just had a new manager come in, and it is a whole new tranche of a person, an expensive person coming in when we feel that actually we need more foot soldiers and deliverers because we are so pressurised on teaching and time."*

Suzanne goes on to tell me that she sees management as being a top down function in the university, but fails to see the connections. Going on to discuss the connections that filter down through the university channels, Suzanne emphasizes the disconnect between decisions being made within the university and their impact lower down in terms of teaching practice:

"So, in terms of the management I don't know, maybe I don't understand the connection that feeds through there, it all seems to be top down [hand gestures from elephant's head towards main body of elephant]."

Suzanne notes the panic emails that come out from management, and sees there is a clear lack of communication within the current culture. Like others, she feels it is the relationship part that is lacking in terms of making connections with staff and associated teaching:

"Well, the emails are quite anxiety provoking really, because you think 'Bloody hell where are we going with this?' I feel that what matters to me as an individual is that I know a lot of people in different divisions. You know relationship building, relationship management, not email; talking to people is absolutely vital and I think not enough of that is done."

Suzanne stresses the importance of other more creative interpersonal means of communication, as opposed to online methods which are depersonalised. She feels that management has lost touch with what people are doing, particularly in terms of teaching students:

"I think there has got to be more creative commons and not online, I think. I am sick to death of everything online. I think management needs to get out and talk to people. I think they need to see more of what people are actually doing, you know get their feelers out with what is going on and with people who haven't lost touch with what it is like to teach students."

When moving in to discussing career development, Suzanne tells me, as other participants did that progression is limited to management roles. This is not helping people to be creative as they are boxing themselves into specific roles which isn't helpful to the wider practice of teaching:

"Progression seems to be into management, and I think that isn't actually helping people who have got specific skills to find the right jobs, so people are shoehorning

themselves into things that they aren't neither competent or comfortable doing. It's painful for everybody else to witness and it puts pressure on people."

4.7.3. Crushing that creative energy

Suzanne goes on to note a need for a more informal dialogue to evolve in order to stimulate creative practices where different people will come together to discuss ideas outside of the more formalised institutional mechanisms:

> *"It is the casualness and the creativity 'Oh my god, that is really interesting' in a natural and unforced way that people could bring things forward."*

Speaking more about creativity, she sees a need for a new more flexible structure to evolve in order to harness the creative energy from staff. She feels that the increasing administration core is stifling this aspect:

> *"There is a need for an appropriate structure to represent what a university needs in terms of that creative energy and I think also the underpinning this whole experience is the administration of the university is becoming more and more rigid and more and more frustrating."*

In terms of collaboration and networking, she feels the university is crushing those external relationships:

> *"The university thinks it is so mighty that it goes around sometimes crushing our external relationships (draws people underneath one of the elephant's feet) and being rather heavy handed."*
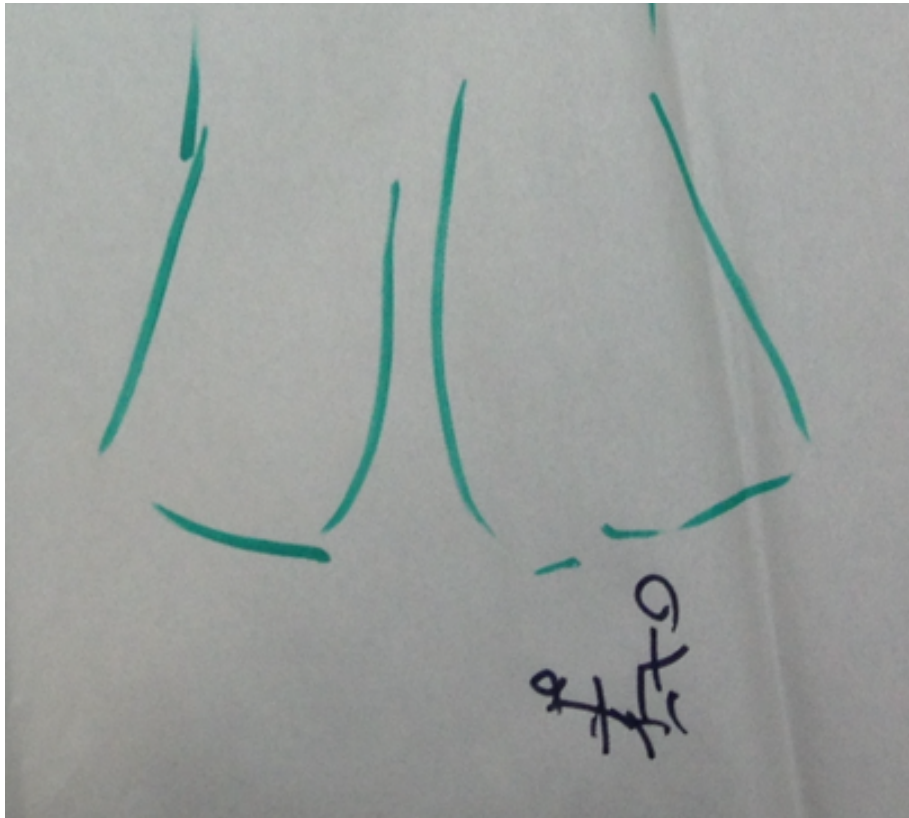
(**Picture 4.22** Suzanne's drawing of the elephant (university) crushing relationships)

4.7.4. Value conflicts in teaching practice

When looking more closely at some of the value conflicts occurring within Suzanne's practice. She tells me that her creative energy is slowly draining because of the heavy administration function. This is resulting in rising anxiety because of the extra burden this is placing on her role, therefore meaning work practices (teaching) is becoming quite difficult and tiring for her:

> *"It is very anxiety provoking and it actually rinses you out of energy. It just gets so tiring and there is an awful lot of jobsworth-ness going on about the administration and that is quite difficult."*

Having expressed deep values for what is right and winning the award, Suzanne is now finding it more and more difficult to continue to practice in the inspirational way with her students. The university performance measures are conflicting with her own value set and this seems to be getting worse:

"I think it is very frustrating and part of you has to think 'I can't control all of this, I have to let it go' – but actually that cuts against your own conscientious code of delivery. I think it is getting worse."

It is interesting that Suzanne uses the term 'rub' to describe the cultural tensions that are exhausting her. She tells me that the university has forgotten the people dimension and is becoming more depersonalized:

"That rub can be quite exhausting. People don't know the human dimension and we are getting depersonalised in the university."

Feelings and emotions play a big part of Suzanne teaching and she sees the need to respect and trust individuals for what they can bring and the commitment which comes with that:

"I think it is about respecting people, I don't think there is enough respect for people and what they can bring to the university and their love and commitment."

4.7.5. Loss of innovation and a menu of 'bland food'

Suzanne was acutely aware of the university's performance measures reducing teaching down to a set of metrics. She describes this in terms of the depersonalisation and standardisation of her practice. To represent this, Suzanne draws the elephant eating from a bland trough rather than an interesting and colourful plate of food. She sees this is inevitably resulting in a loss of identity for the university within the wider market place:

"It is almost symbolic of a trough [draws trough underneath the trunk of elephant]. You are going to have to eat out of the trough because you can't even look at the plate of food. So, the aesthetic, we are losing the aesthetic from the university."
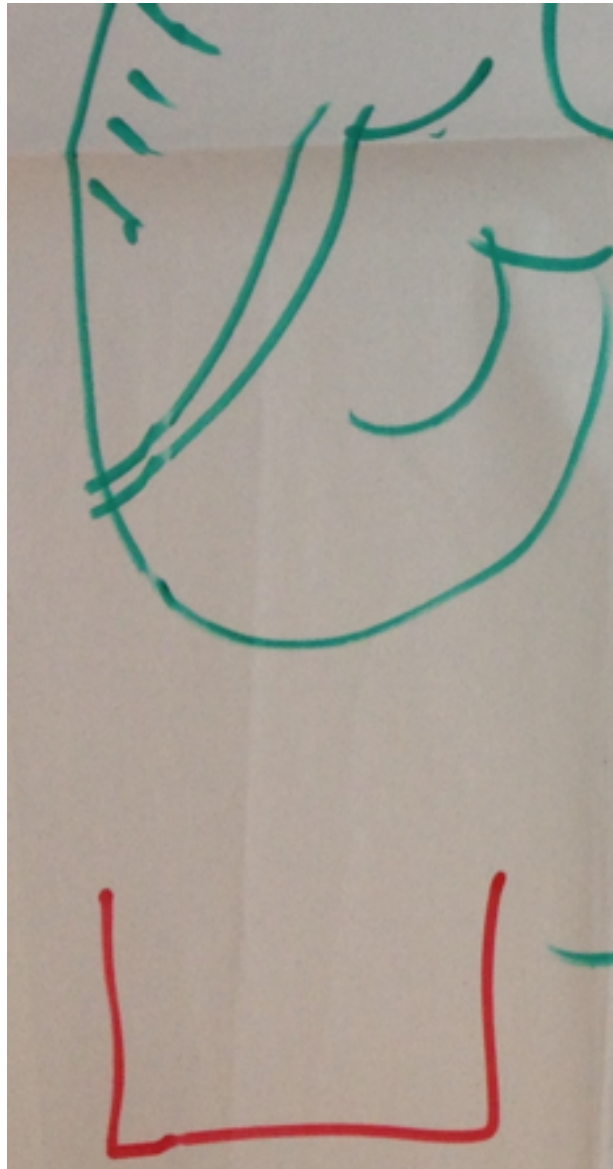
(**Picture 4.23** Suzanne's metaphor drawing of the elephant eating out of the trough representing the increasingly standardised movement)

Like other award winners, Suzanne values collegiality over the standardised approach to working practices and sees the need for better communication between colleagues in order to enhance the overall student experience:

> *"Collegiality is so important to me. It makes me want to come to work to feel that I know people, that I can speak to people."*

She feels the university needs to be much more modern and flexible within the approach instead of keep changing what it does, hence lacking in identity. It was interesting that Suzanne sees the need for the university to learn from what it has done rather than keep changing:

"I feel that the university has got to be modern and responsive and flexible to the market. I don't feel that the university is totally confident, it keeps on changing. 'Change' is the absolute watch word of this place. It denigrates and disregards the dedicated work of people who have gone before."

On the flip side of this and seeing how the uncertainty around identity filters down from an institutional level, she sees that students are now just 'ticking the box' around their own progression and development. This in turn is limiting their own learning:

"I think they are tedious boring and students think, you know they are learning by tradition through the key stages at school to tick the box and get the accomplishment therefore they won't do anything else beyond and that is strategic."

Suzanne sees that the most innovative teaching staff are being punished because the way they are working does not fit with this standardised approach, hence causing value tensions for them. She notes there is a divide within the culture from those colleagues that did new things and those who simply 'trundled along':

"You are punished for innovation, I honestly think that is the case...I think the most innovative people are actually sometimes punished because they wanted to bring in good teaching, different forms of assessment, different activities and then they went 'No'... So suddenly, the people who couldn't even be bothered to get off their arses to do anything are fine because they have just trundled along. So, the people who went 'Oh I will do that, I am an innovative person, I am going to try and bring something zowy and interesting for the students' have had pies in their face and been told 'No, get back into the corner.'"

In terms of how she views her own inspirational teaching practice, Suzanne stresses the importance of support for the students and having an open dialogue, which she is able to do within the current structure she works within. She tells me that if that changes she would most likely leave:

> *"If I am being commended for being inspirational, a couple of comments have come back saying I support students. So, having that kind of dialogue with them I am able, within the structure I have got at the moment, to do that. If they took that away from me and said 'No you can't have that' it would destroy it. I would hang up my boots because the module would fail and I wouldn't be hanging around to watch the death of my work you know, I would be like 'Okay I am off.'*

4.8. Story 6: Peter's Story - Rejecting the Award

"I was shortlisted and I took my name of the shortlist… the reason that I rejected it in the first place was because I tend to see this as a team game, if you like, and we are all working together and it doesn't seem right that some people get to be picked out to be better than others. I just think that this could be so divisive."

Peter very early on in our discussion called himself a cavalier. In all honesty, he did not strike me as being too cavalier within his practice, but he told me that he definitely broke the rules when they needed to be broken. Like others I had spoken with, Peter had a strong focus on the end result or outcome, and to that extent, he, like other participants saw the process of getting there as much more fluid, outside of the restrictions within the university. He told me he had never booked leave officially through the system, and never felt he needed too up until recently. He did not agree there should be individual teaching awards, as this puts others off trying to be inspirational in their own diverse practices, he even removed himself off the short list for an award for this reason. Peter, like others very much feels he is operating on the outskirts of the university culture. He does so, with the students' learning needs at the forefront of his practice. He demonstrated high levels of emotional intelligence and this enabled him to work across multiple levels and abilities. Peter saw the university management function as an oppressive force introducing performance drivers and control mechanisms which ultimately measured the wrong things. After the interview, Peter sent me an email, thanking me for my time in talking to him; he had really appreciated it. At the end of the email he wrote three words, *"communication, care, consideration. That's the secret!"* Very true.

(Extract summarised from Researcher's Reflexive Diary)

4.8.1. University operating like a business

When asked how Peter sees himself in the university, he writes down on the flipchart paper the word, 'Self' and then next to it: 'Enabler'. He then writes the words 'University' next to 'Business'. He told me in recent times he certainly sees more of a growing business-like culture occurring within the university.

[Peter starts writing on paper, he writes 'self' on the left-hand side. Has written four words in four quadrants of the paper].
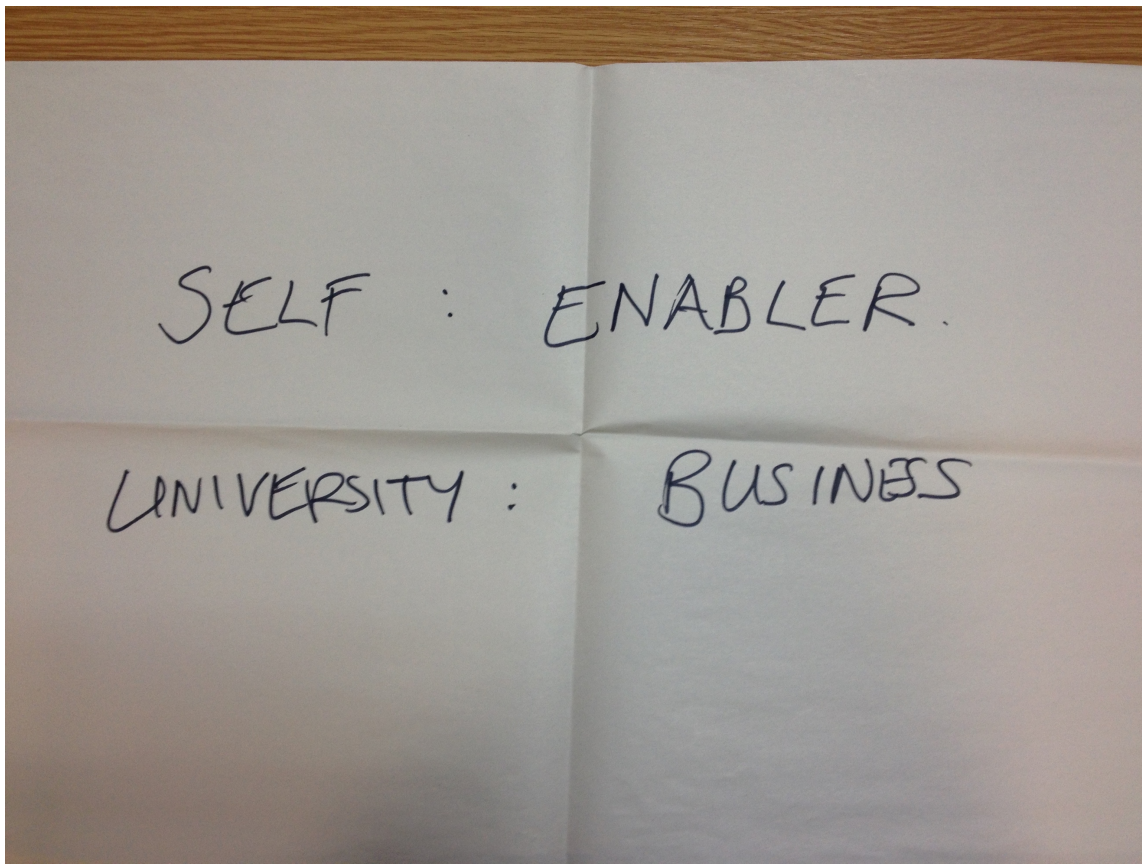
(**Picture 4.24** Peter's metaphor drawing of the university culture)

When asked if both areas of self and university work together, Peter tells me that right now he does not think they do. He sees the university putting very little investment into teaching. He perceived the university acting more in the way of business interests with a strong focus on making money rather than enhancing teaching practice. As with other participants, Peter is quite emotional in terms of passion and values on this particular aspect of his drawing:

"It is a bit difficult, it is emotional. I don't know if emotional is the right word but we are in this business of pay disputes and when you get into situations like this it kind of brings things into a sharper focus – so the university is acting as a business and acting as an organisation that is there to make money, in my view by putting in as little investment as possible in the teaching, that is probably coloured by opinion right now."

When asked if Peter feels part of the university culture, he tells me both yes and no. He does not like the direction the university is heading in terms of marketisation. It saddens him to see what is going on around him, and as a result he is feeling more personally detached and this is where the emotional drivers are stemming from:

"I feel, well it is difficult isn't it because yes and no – I don't like the way the university is heading. Personally, what is going on but it saddens me to see it as a whole – in terms of my development, in terms of my aims and how it is going to affect me in the future, it is not really valid, not to me personally."

4.8.2. Turning down the teaching award

Peter turned down the Inspirational Teaching Award when he was nominated, but decided to accept it the following year. The rationale he saw for winning the award was because he cares and offers his students support when needed. Something he didn't see across all colleagues:

"I don't think I am a brilliant teacher at all, I am a little bit conservative in the way I go about things, I don't come up with anything sort of wildly experimental. I rejected it the first year, I had nothing to do with it but when I won it the second year I decided to go with it. But I know the reason that they voted for me, it is because, it sounds a bit soft this, but I care about them, I put a lot of effort into the pastoral side of it and as much as possible I will support them, which I don't always see with colleagues."

The reason he gave for turning down the award was that he sees inspirational practice being a team game, and potentially awards such as this can be very divisive in his opinion:

"I was shortlisted and I took my name of the shortlist and last year I just let it go forward and then I got the win, which I felt very uncomfortable about, the reason that I rejected it in the first place was because, I tend to see this as a team game if you like and we are all working together and it doesn't seem right that some people get to be picked out to be better than others. I just think that this could be so divisive."

Peter told me that the only let the second award nominations go through was because the students had voted for him and he didn't want to let them down:

"A lot of people when I rejected it came to me and said 'you should have let your name go forward, don't forget students have voted for you and they will be pleased to see you get it' – so that sort of influenced me as well, so the award thing I am a little, little bit ambivalent about it."

He recognises that students who are now coming to university have changed, now requiring varying levels of support. He sees the changing market and feels the university needs to change to meet those new demands being placed upon it:

"So, I am really pleased that people are able to experience it but what we have to recognise is that the student's that we teach are not going to be the same. It is inevitable that things are going to change because the university has got to change to meet the demands."

Peter likens working in the university, to working in any competitive business environment. He most likely felt the individual awards were a way of increasing competition internally and thus damaging collegiality amongst colleagues. He goes on to tell me that he is now operating on the outside of the university culture, but still enjoys his job:

"I feel kind of outside of it now, I enjoy coming here and I enjoy my job."

He is skeptical about awards such as this and sees them as dividing the culture and creating a culture of 'super teacher' with abilities distinct from other colleagues:

> "I have heard performance related pay being talked about in the past and probably, you get super teachers and all this sort of stuff which I don't like at all, I don't like at all."

On this aspect, Peter sees any form of inspirational teaching (or excellence) as hard to measure through metrics. He doesn't class himself as an academic and is very much vocationally focused in his teaching. He sees he got the award because the subjects he teaches are easy, and it wasn't hard to be seen as inspirational teaching them:

> "Inspirational Teaching is hard to measure. I am not an academic. Because my stuff is quite simple and it is quite easy to do then I probably get more votes, so getting, being an inspirational teacher because you do something which is a bit easier that doesn't necessarily tick boxes for me."

4.8.3. Cavalier values

Peter feels teaching should be much more valued and recognised within the university culture. He embraces the notion that everyone can practice inspirationally in their own way, given the right supportive climate. He sees the teachers mattering more than anything else (NSS etc.). By supporting and resourcing teaching there are going to be much better outcomes:

> "I think teaching should be more valued for a start and I think that should be recognised. The NSS is all for the students but you know it is the teachers that matter. If you give teachers the right tools and the right allowances and the right pay and so on and so forth then you are going to get better jobs done and better students."

He describes himself as a cavalier in his own practice. He tends to find ways around the rules where it is permissible:

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"In terms of practice, I am pretty cavalier about the whole lot whether it is booking leave or not booking leave. The sort of things here like ethics checklists which I have to do for students, almost like risk assessments every step of the way, I tend to write a rush of them."

In this sense, he is quite non-conformist and goes against some of the procedures in place that do not sit well with his own value set. One example of this is him not handing out module evaluation forms to students, as he sees them as being pointless measurement of teaching excellence:

"The evaluation questionnaires that we are supposed to give every student for every module. They are still on my desk you see, because I am not going to do them. They don't even understand them so they are pointless, they are pointless."

Like other participants, Peter tends not to work within the rules, because he has been there long enough to know his way round them, so he ignores the business side of the university. Like others he is doing what he feels is right and best for his students, which often causes tensions against the measures in place:

"I tend not to work within the rules. Probably because I am old enough and probably because I am unambitious enough I tend to do what I want to do, which is kind of egotistical I suppose but it is what I think is right, I am able to ignore this side of things [indicates side of paper where 'business' is written], I get away with it if you like."

To conclude, Peter the once brazen cavalier now sees himself becoming lazy, drifting away from the rising corporate business culture within the university:

"I suppose I am being lazy, I am just sort of drifting away."

Chapter Five: Discussion and thematic findings

This chapter of the thesis revisits the central Research Question: *'How do teaching award winners experience the drive towards institutional excellence?'* in an attempt to draw out the evolving cross-cutting themes arising from the analysis and participant narrative accounts. These commonalities found within the practitioners' experiences indicate noteworthy issues that have social and structural underpinnings. As such they should no longer to be viewed as singular, with the risk of being discounted as 'idiosyncratic'. Furthermore, the study now moves on from the individual narratives found in the previous participant stories in Chapter Four in order to now construct collective experiences that still remain contextualized. In this sense, this Discussions chapter provides an analytical pathway from which we can understand the collective from the individual. Finally, by connecting the emerging issues (discussion topics) to the broader research literature; contextual and collective experiences are in turn recognised as part of broader phenomena that scholarship has problematized. This provides a way through in order to foreground the transferability of the findings.

Through the longer-term process of researcher self-reflection, supporting literature and reflexivity that ensued from the fieldwork and the exploration of the findings, new understanding, meaning and insights have emerged at this point of the thesis (Gadamer, 2013). These discussions transcend the specific context and experiences of individuals and therefore have broader relevance beyond the boundaries of the case study institution and the individual participants involved within the study. That is to say, each participants narrative should not be taken out of context as a snap shot or glimpse of their own lived experiences in a moment in time.

The discussion chapter identifies those tensions and fractures being experienced by participants by going into greater depth of the interpretation of the findings which arose out of each the 26 narrative accounts and connects these with existing empirical research in the field in order to draw out meaning and understanding (Regan, 2012). It is only at this discussion stage, that the individual element has been combined to form a picture of what is occurring at the whole (university level). This is especially significant when thinking about the

advancement of theory, practice and policy with higher education, to which this thesis contributes.

The chapter revisits the four Research Themes (RT) identified in the Methodology Chapter Three, which have been used to create four discussion topic headings. This connection can be seen in the model below (Figure 5.1) which highlights the evolving nature and associated connections made from the narrative account emergent themes and how these formed the subsequent topics.

- ***Research Theme 1 (RT1):*** *Developing an understanding of the perception of cultural fit from a practitioner viewpoint.*
- ***Research Theme 2 (RT2):*** *Explore the impact management and quality procedures have on inspirational teaching practice*
- ***Research Theme 3 (RT3):*** *Gain an insight into individual values and how these drive inspirational teaching practice*
- ***Research Theme 4 (RT4):*** *Reflect on what a culture of excellence means for the sector.*

The rich amalgamated data collected, consisting of the six carefully selected participant narrative accounts found in Chapter Four, along with the additional twenty participant narrative stories, have all informed and developed the overarching topic themes.

The four Discussion Topics developed (exploring, interpreting and discussing the four Research Themes above) for use within this chapter are therefore as follows:

- ***Discussion Topic 1:*** *Cultural fit and creative tensions*
- ***Discussion Topic 2:*** *Institutional managerialism*
- ***Discussion Topic 3:*** *University teaching awards*
- ***Discussion Topic 4:*** *Defining a culture of excellence in practice*

Mapping these four discussion topics and their relationship to the four research themes can be seen on the taxonomy model below (Figure 5.1). This has enabled key areas and

connections (in red) to be highlighted and the formation of clear overarching discussion topics developed.
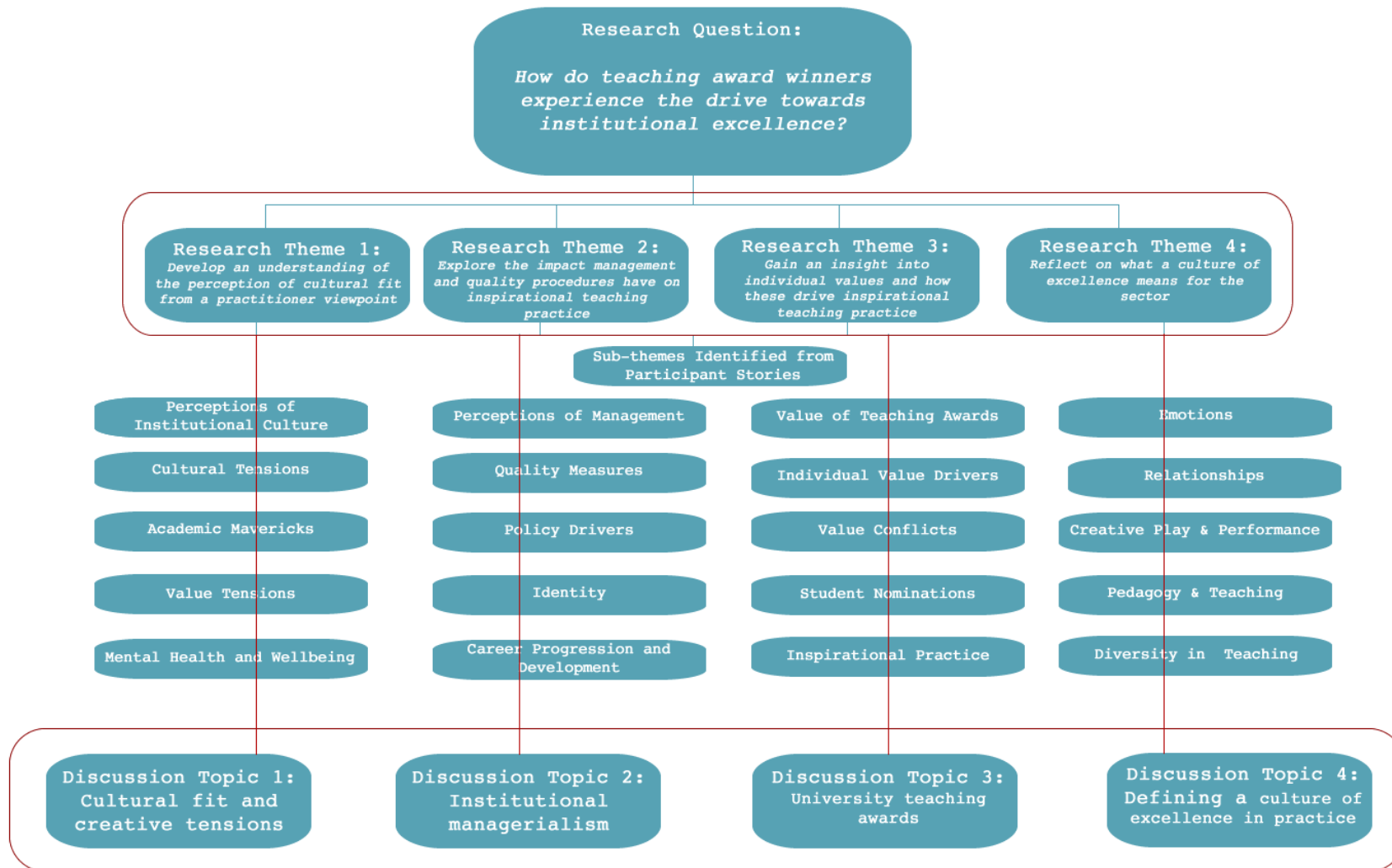
Figure 5.1 Taxonomy Representing the 4 Research Themes explored using 4 Discussion Topics

Sub-topics mapped onto the institutional macro, meso and micro-levels

Each discussion topic identified has also presented sub-topics, in order to effectively capture the complex nature of this study and its findings.

The sub-topics used to explore each discussion topic within this chapter are as follows:

- *Discussion Topic 1: Cultural fit and creative tensions (RT1)*
  - **Sub-topic 1.1:** Perceptions of the institutional culture
  - **Sub-topic 1.2:** Exploring the cultural tensions
  - **Sub-topic 1.3:** The creation of academic mavericks
  - **Sub-topic 1.4:** Change makers or rule breakers?
  - **Sub-topic 1.5:** Mental health and wellbeing

- *Discussion Topic 2: Institutional managerialism (RT2)*
  - **Sub-topic 2.1:** Managerialism in universities
  - **Sub-topic 2.2:** Performance metrics and control measures
  - **Sub-topic 2.3:** Specialist knowledge and the erosion of identity
  - **Sub-topic 2.4:** Career progression and development

- *Discussion Topic 3: University teaching awards (RT3)*
  - **Sub-topic 3.1:** The value of teaching awards
  - **Sub-topic 3.2:** Students perception of inspirational practitioners
  - **Sub-topic 3.3:** Criticisms of university teaching awards: 'The poisoned chalice'

- *Discussion Topic 4: Defining a culture of excellence in practice (RT4)*
  - **Sub-topic 4.1:** Teaching and emotions
  - **Sub-topic 4.2:** Teaching as relationships
  - **Sub-topic 4.3:** Embracing diverse learner styles
  - **Sub-topic 4.4:** Teaching as performance
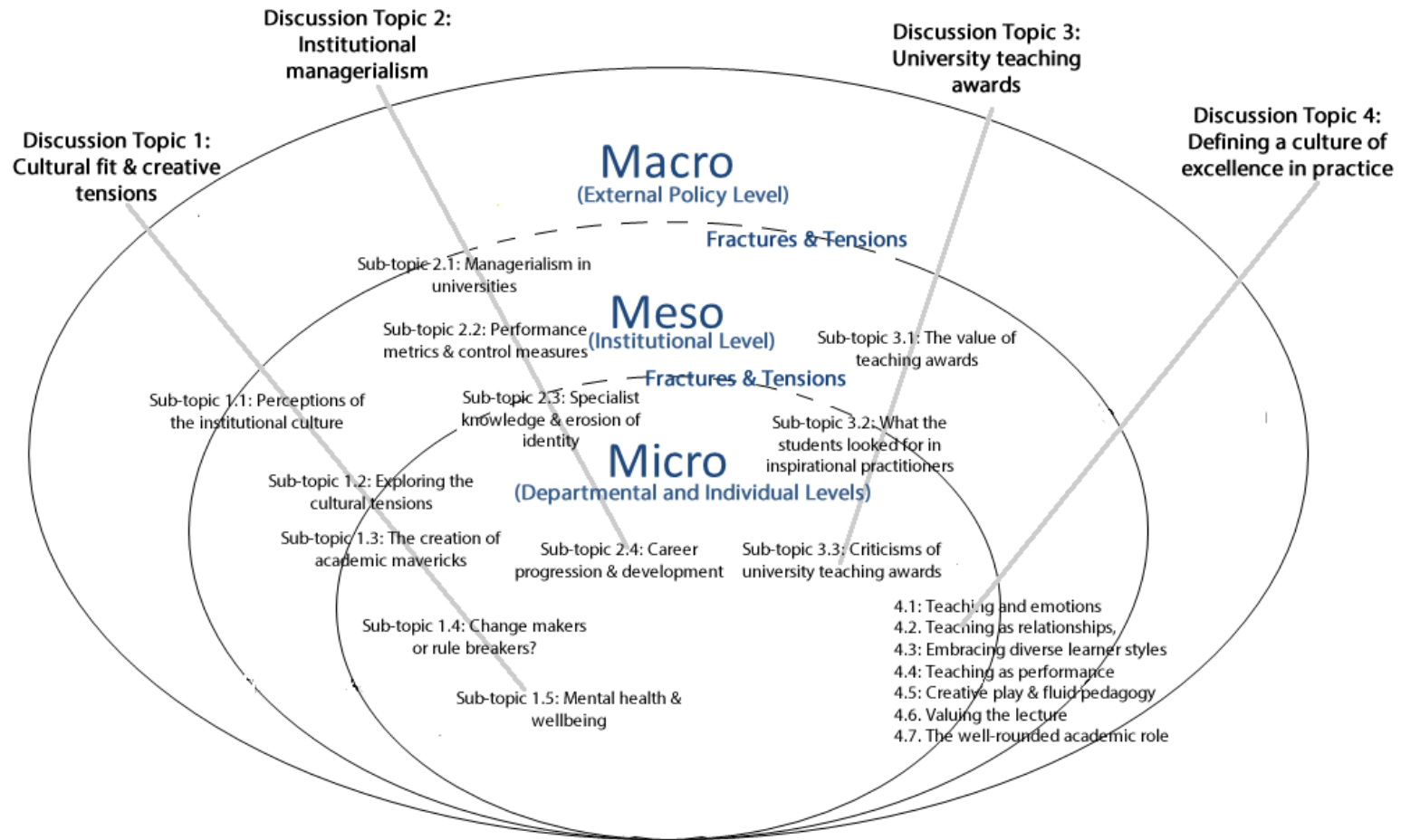 - **Sub-topic 4.5:** Notions of creative play and fluid pedagogy

- Sub-topic 4.6: Valuing the lecture

- Sub-topic 4.7: The well-rounded academic role

In order to provide insight, meaning and a deeper understanding at this stage of the process, I have mapped each of the four discussion topics and corresponding sub-topics found above within a holistic tiered representation of the university's operating environment, outlined in Figure 5.2. below.

This tiered model has three distinct levels: macro-level (external policy environment), meso-level (institutional), and micro-level (departmental and individual). It is important to stress that each participants account formed 'their world view' of the complex phenomena under investigation as part of this study. In that sense, a constructed realty was born out of the analysis and findings stages (Chapters Three and Four) which allowed the overarching discussion sub-topics in the model to develop. These intricate levels of discussion are not isolated, nor separate from each other, but instead have overlapping and cross-cutting topics, as figure 5.2 highlights. At each level, discussions were synthesised to draw out the complex interplay which was occurring (i.e. fractures and tensions occurring for the participants).

The interplay between levels was not of a static nature, nor focused in a single moment in time. Instead, the study observed a time-based shift in fractures and tensions, within how each associated level interacted. This notion of time and interplay was an iterative key Hermeneutical element during the methodological process as researcher progressed up the Hermeneutical Spiral (Gadamer, 2013). This element of the interplay of time which the research made use of was outlined by Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) and Ricoeur (2008), who saw the notion of time in relation to personal experiences driving current understanding and meaning which was the case with this study i.e. participants lived experiences driving their own perceptual understanding of the university culture they operated within. Bruner (2004) used the concept of *'lived time'*, in so much as this study captured a glimpse of those experiences that participants had observed within the institution. In this sense, the study was able to observe *'lived experience as a narrative'* (Dilthey, 1833-1911: 3) transmitting meaning within the university context as observed through the participants own lenses. Through this

iterative process, the topics discussed within this chapter evolved meaning and interpretation from the researchers own perspective.

Discussion Topic 2:
Institutional
managerialism

Discussion Topic 3:
University teaching
awards

Discussion Topic 1:
Cultural fit & creative
tensions

Discussion Topic 4:
Defining a culture of
excellence in practice

Macro
(External Policy Level)

Fractures & Tensions

Sub-topic 2.1: Managerialism in
universities

Meso
(Institutional Level)

Sub-topic 2.2: Performance
metrics & control measures

Sub-topic 3.1: The value of
teaching awards

Fractures & Tensions

Sub-topic 1.1: Perceptions of
the institutional culture

Sub-topic 2.3: Specialist
knowledge & erosion of
identity

Sub-topic 3.2: What the
students looked for in
inspirational practitioners

Micro
(Departmental and Individual Levels)

Sub-topic 1.2: Exploring the
cultural tensions

Sub-topic 1.3: The creation of
academic mavericks

Sub-topic 2.4: Career
progression & development

Sub-topic 3.3: Criticisms of
university teaching awards

Sub-topic 1.4: Change makers
or rule breakers?

4.1: Teaching and emotions
4.2. Teaching as relationships,
4.3: Embracing diverse learner styles
4.4: Teaching as performance
4.5: Creative play & fluid pedagogy
4.6. Valuing the lecture
4.7. The well-rounded academic role

Sub-topic 1.5: Mental health &
wellbeing

Figure 5.2. Tiered Representation of the observed tensions existing at each institutional level (macro, meso and micro)

5.1. Discussion Topic 1: Cultural fit and creative tensions

Discussion Topic 1 explores *Research Theme 1: Developing an understanding of the perception of cultural fit from a practitioner viewpoint*.

I have explored this research theme using five separate sub-topics derived from the participants narratives contained within the Findings Chapter Four combined with the additional 20 stories:

1. **Sub-topic 1.1:** Perceptions of the institutional culture
2. **Sub-topic 1.2:** Exploring the cultural tensions
3. **Sub-topic 1.3:** The creation of academic mavericks
4. **Sub-topic 1.4:** Change makers or rule breakers?
5. **Sub-topic 1.5:** Mental health and wellbeing

I begin this first discussion topic by looking at participants' perception of the institutional culture at the meso-institutional level (sub-topic 1.1). This sub-topic utilises the empirical literature alongside participants' metaphorical drawings in order to draw out the research contributions this element provides. I then look in more detail at the arising cultural tensions being experienced because of this, exploring this from the micro-departmental level within the university environment (sub-topic 1.2). This section then examines the notion of academic mavericks (sub-topic 1.3), moving from micro to meso level perceptions of the teaching award winners. I then consider whether these exhibited values place the participants in the 'change maker or rule breaker' (sub-topic 1.4) category within the institution, given the growing standardisation of the culture around them. Finally, exploring the aspect of academic wellbeing and associated research (sub–topic 1.5), before moving into the more specific aspects of struggles which participants were facing in their everyday practice.

At the end of each discussion section you will find a summary, indicating the key areas emerging from the sub-topic discussions and how these have enhanced current thinking in the field.

5.1.1. Perceptions of the institutional culture (sub-topic 1.1)

The participants metaphorical drawings of the institution indicated a divisive culture was forming over the duration of this study (Pictures 5.1-5.3). Participants drew symbolic objects, such as heavy iron weights, being trapped inside zoo cages and large elephants tramping over individuals.
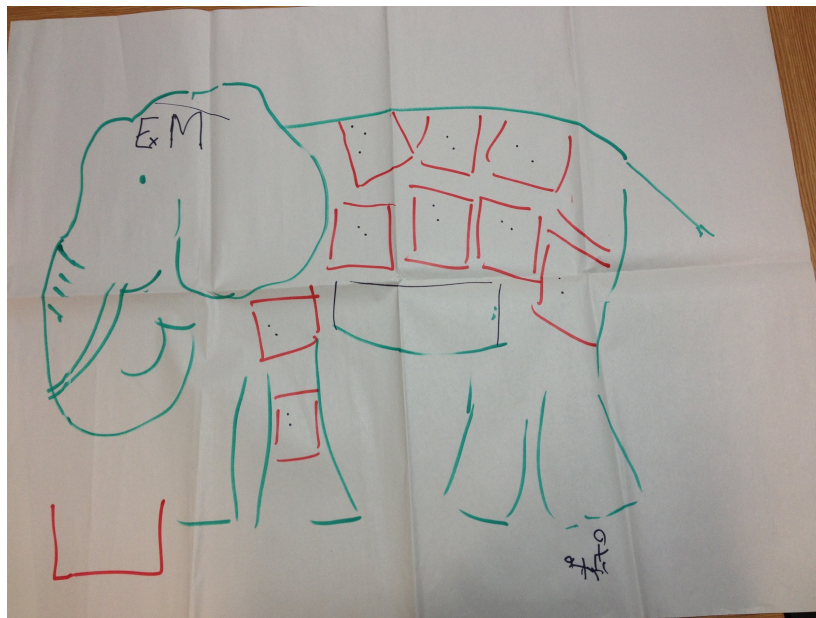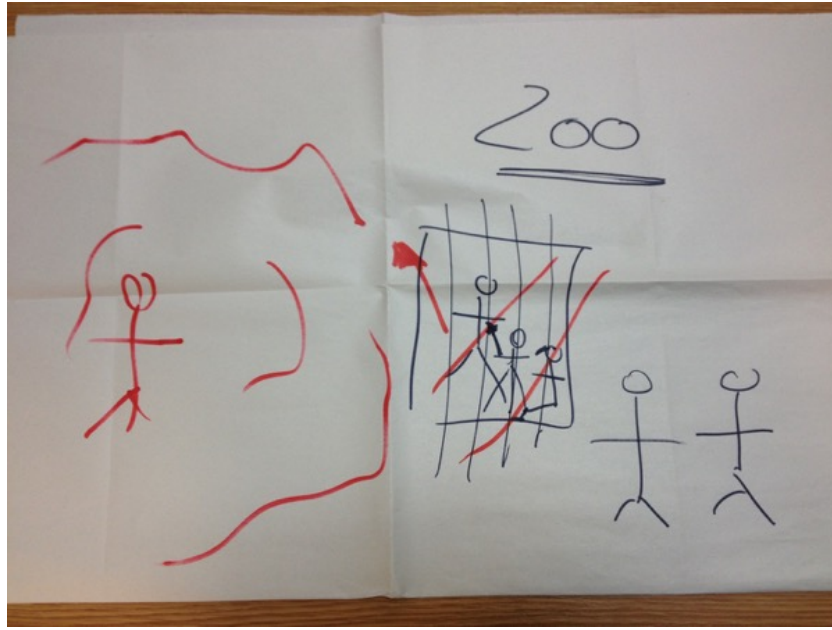
(**Picture 5.1 – 5.3** Participants metaphorical representations of the university culture)

To this extent, these representations were indicative of the pressures being placed upon participants to perform within an increasingly restrictive climate (McNay, 1995). It was clear that the established university auditing culture (Hayes and Wynyard, 2002) had created a deep, underlying sense of mistrust toward management from all of the participants. This was because participants could not see a connection between decisions being made concerning teaching nor the outcomes they were fundamentally meant to achieve in practice. Hayes and Wynyard (2002: 38-39) also saw that this culture of institutional auditing, combined with the move to standardise practice only forced academics to become more distanced from the central administrative core. Participants tended to concur with this view, and felt that the increasingly dominant performance culture was driving them further away from their once close relationships with their students:

> *"I think the balance has been lost between academics and students. I think it used to be much more of a partnership. I think students respected you because they could see that you were trying to help them, whereas now you are both, you are the enemy. You are taking their money and not giving them what they want."*

(Margaret, Story 3)

In terms of specific aspects which came out surrounding this managerialist culture, participants reported an emerging lack of trust and openness occurring within the university climate. Historically, the once high trust culture was now being brought to its knees, crippled by the neoliberal forces (Deem, 1998: 3). Participants felt the lack of trust was a key factor that was causing deep-rooted divisions within their daily working practices, which many termed a 'machine-like' culture. At its core, the once highly trusting academic role was now nothing more than a mere slave to government imperatives and institutional metrics, unable to question managerial authority and having to take the measures being forced down upon them as truth:

> *"It is the systems that are fumbling and that machine isn't, and then it pulls it all back – there is your dream but actually no this is what you are going to have. I don't think we feel trusted. It's all how do you get there, what is the mechanism for doing that?"*
> (Rebecca, Story 24)

Essentially, much of the restrictive culture was causing internal value conflicts across all participants, where they were battling against something that could not now be changed, altered nor questioned. Morley (2003) found that this growing culture of mistrust, increased accountability and loss of autonomy being prevalent where quality assurance mechanisms were dominant, this generated a divisive culture and subsequent loss of teacher identity. This was certainly the case for many of the participants in the present study, who reported not now feeling like trusted professionals able to deliver pedagogically in their own way, simply because it did not fit with the standardised institutional practices.
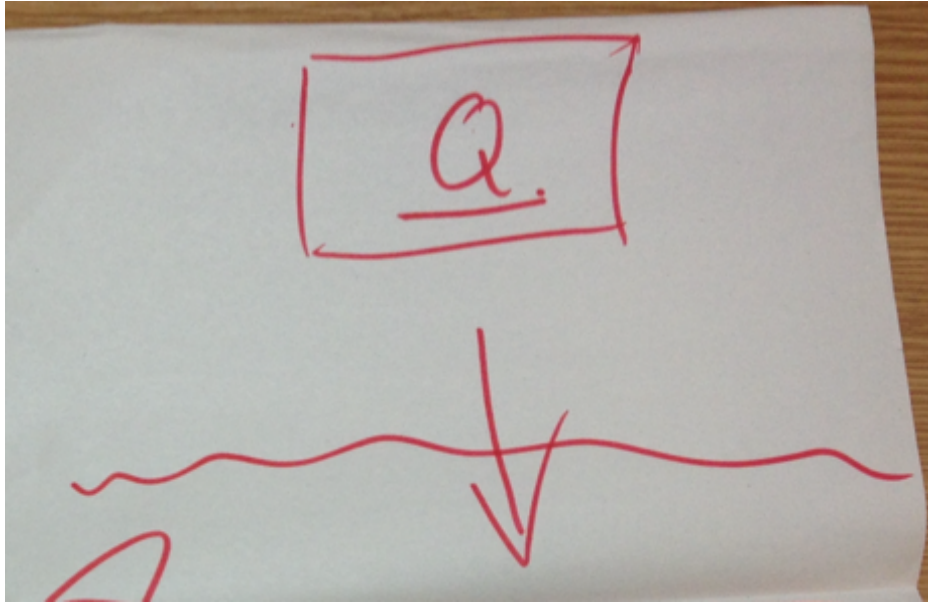
(**Picture 5.4** Bill's (story 20) metaphor drawing of dominant top down quality procedures in place, filtering down and limiting his teaching practice)

5.1.2. Exploring the cultural tensions (sub-topic 1.2)

This study sought to gain a glimpse into the cultural tensions that participants were experiencing, through examining the fractures occurring between the performative culture of accountability and control located at the meso-Institutional level. This was further contrasted against a backdrop of inspirational teaching practice occurring at the individual level. By talking to award-winning practitioners using narrative enquiry, the study aimed to uncover and reconstruct the discourse occurring between the performative measures being introduced institutionally to govern standard practice, against individual's ability to be creative and innovative within their teaching.

Here we are looking at how creativity within individuals add benefit to wider organisational innovation (Litchfield et al., 2014) in order to enhance the universities strategic goals (i.e. metrics). Essentially, what the study found was that the university was caught in a major dilemma. On the one hand realising it had to innovate to remain competitive, whilst also ensuring that it could maintain stability in current practices. Due to the performative culture it was imposing, there was a lack of risk taking evident, limiting innovative potential (Smith, 2013). The university now found itself in a stalemate situation, and one where pockets of

innovation (Reid, 2015) occurring were enhanced through participants, but existing outside of the main strategic culture.
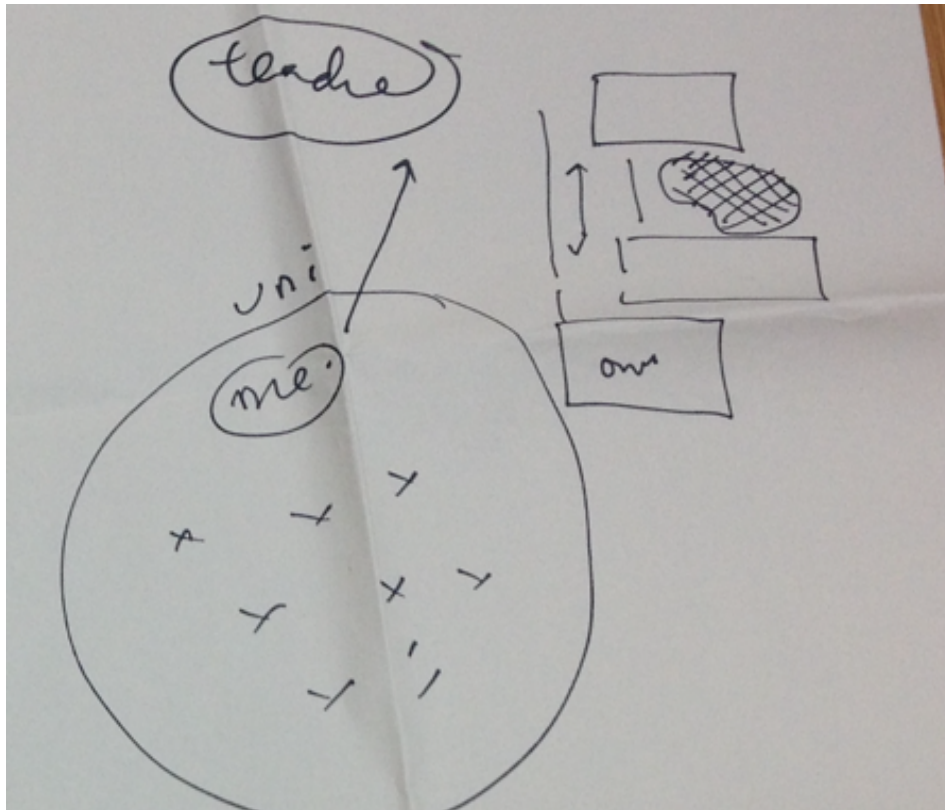
(**Picture 5.5** Craig's (story 14) metaphor of a fishing net and everyone in it trying to find room to be more creative)

Cultural tensions therefore arose for those whose practice was both recognised by the institution following nomination by the student body. These tended to occur due to the cultural friction being experienced because of participants creative teaching practices conflicting with what the institution recognised as being of an innovative nature. Previous research on cultural tensions and organisational creativity (Amabile, 2006; McLean, 2005; Peter and Waterman, 1982; Bates, 1984) has examined the direct link culture had to innovation potential within organisations. All studies concluded that a productive healthy culture and climate are major contributors to engender organisational performance, enhanced through individual creativity. Paradoxically, the performative culture within the university was having the opposing effect at the micro departmental level, instead commodifying working practices, losing the ability for individuals to be creative in teaching practices, and thus limiting innovation potential within the institution:

"In some respects, the voice right at the top of the university is saying, 'We have got space to be creative, we need to kind of liberate, we need to do something different' but it seems to me to become more standard, standard, standard – you have got to have two assessments, they have got to look like this, fit this into your forms..."
(Sam, Story 8)

Participants felt the current institutional culture was deeply risk adverse, and were increasingly becoming frustrated due to the highly competitive climate they now found themselves working within. They reported being unable to understand why the university was not doing more to push boundaries and promote new ideas, given the wealth of talent it possessed:

"I think they are risk averse, completely risk adverse. They are not prepared to take any risks at all so they have to make sure everything is covered. They are not forward thinking and not taking some chances and where people are doing creative and different things it is all being done under the radar. You know we are doing all sorts of stuff but it is not officially recorded all of the time." (Holly, Story 9)

Essentially, the university now found itself at a tipping point, which participants were starkly aware of within the discussions: it had to make a trade-off between enabling innovation to occur through enabling risk taking and individual creativity, whilst not allowing the performative metric drivers to slip. Smith (2013) describes this state as the 'Innovation Seesaw', one where organisations have to rebalance risk if innovation is ever to occur. Polach (2003) also found that innovation cannot exist without risk, which was a real dilemma for the institution in the present study. Participants increasingly found it difficult to work in this risk adverse climate, where they were trying to innovate within their own teaching practice, but finding this was not favoured institutionally due to the increasingly restrictive measures being imposed in an attempt to create a safe, efficient, predictable and measured environment:

"You are punished for innovation; I honestly think that is the case. I think the most innovative people are actually sometimes punished because they wanted to bring in

good teaching, different forms of assessment, different activities and then they went 'No'... So suddenly the people who couldn't even be bothered to get off their arses to do anything are fine because they have just trundled along, so the people who went 'Oh I will do that, I am an innovative person, I am going to try and bring something zowy and interesting for the students' have had pies in their face and been told 'No, get back into the corner'." **(Suzanne, Story 5)**

Ritzer (1983) found that organisations that avoid risk, instead opting for predictable, stable climates ultimately find themselves in a state of paralysis. Such organisations tend to favor elements of efficiency, calculability, predictability and control over more risky factors traditionally associated with innovation i.e. failure, risk, and creativity. In this sense, the universities implementation of performative measures, to ensure standardised practices across subjects have inevitably left them in a fragile position, one where it is often difficult to escape from in times of uncertainty. Langton's (1990) research showed how the most innovative companies, with the most innovative systems tended to gravitate towards the edge of chaos (error, risk, failure, chance, serendipity) in order to enable new developments to grow. A university system is no different in this sense, and arguably needs to readdress this balance of risk and creativity in order to develop and grow. This study has found that this system was reversed within the participants' institution: instead of providing high reward for those few risk takers, it instead had the effect of inhibiting those who would normally want to be creative within their own roles (Amabile et al., 1990)

The study more specifically found that meso-level institutional performativity acted out through managerialist ideologies was creating quite severe tensions cascading down to the departmental and individual levels for all participants involved. This came across both in the participant narratives, but also within the overarching mapping of themes in the thematic analysis stage, where the majority of participants stated they had experienced some form of tension arising from their own teaching practice, which was put down to their deep-rooted pedagogical values clashing with the university's performance measures. Clear value tensions arose for those whose practice was both awarded by the institution and nominated by the student body. These findings are in line with Hayes and Wynard's (2002) view of the institutional auditing culture and the emergent standardisation of practice, thus eroding

academic integrity. Ball (2000: 4) found that because of this there was a *"conflict of values"* and a clear separation of self from everyday working practices. Participants described, through their narratives the personal struggles within higher education arising between their own creative practices and the lack of support and recognition shown from the institutional culture (Munson, 1994), despite it awarding teaching prizes.

Participants went on to report that pockets of innovation were still occurring within the micro-departmental level but these were not always endorsed by the meso-institutional level, if no direct link to the end-outcome performance metrics could be evidenced. Participants felt that other colleagues would and could be able to be more creative on a daily basis, if they were not burdened by excessive workloads and metrics. Concurring with this, Saunders and Ramirez (2017: 400) found that creative practices were inevitably lost due to the *"measurement of teaching practice through numerical expressions to teaching evaluation"'*. Due to this, some of the participants had regrettably taken the decision to leave the institution, a finding reported in an earlier study by Dixon (2017), where staff had either reduced their contracted hours or chosen to leave.

What participants of this study were reporting, was a severe narrowing down of their own creative operating environment and pedagogical parameters. The institution had created performative controls to steer the institution to perceived success (i.e. exceeding the external macro driven policy metrics), but in doing so had created a culture not entirely conductive to enhancing student experience. Burrell's (2020: 101) findings in this respect are of particular significance when looking at the operating environment, showing that organisational cultures have a significant impact on individual employees' day-to-day workings, defining it as *"the inability to create an organizational culture that allows for the maximization of organizational talent can manifest itself in underperformance, employee disengagement, high turnover, toxic cultures, and employee turnover"*. As Layton (2011: 168) highlights, universities have tended to adopt a *"narrow view of teaching and learning"* when pursuing such standardisation strategies. To this extent, many participants in the present study talked about the conflicts arising from trying to improve the student experience through inspiring and creative ways of teaching, but paradoxically this now being extremely difficult to do because of the emergent performative culture.
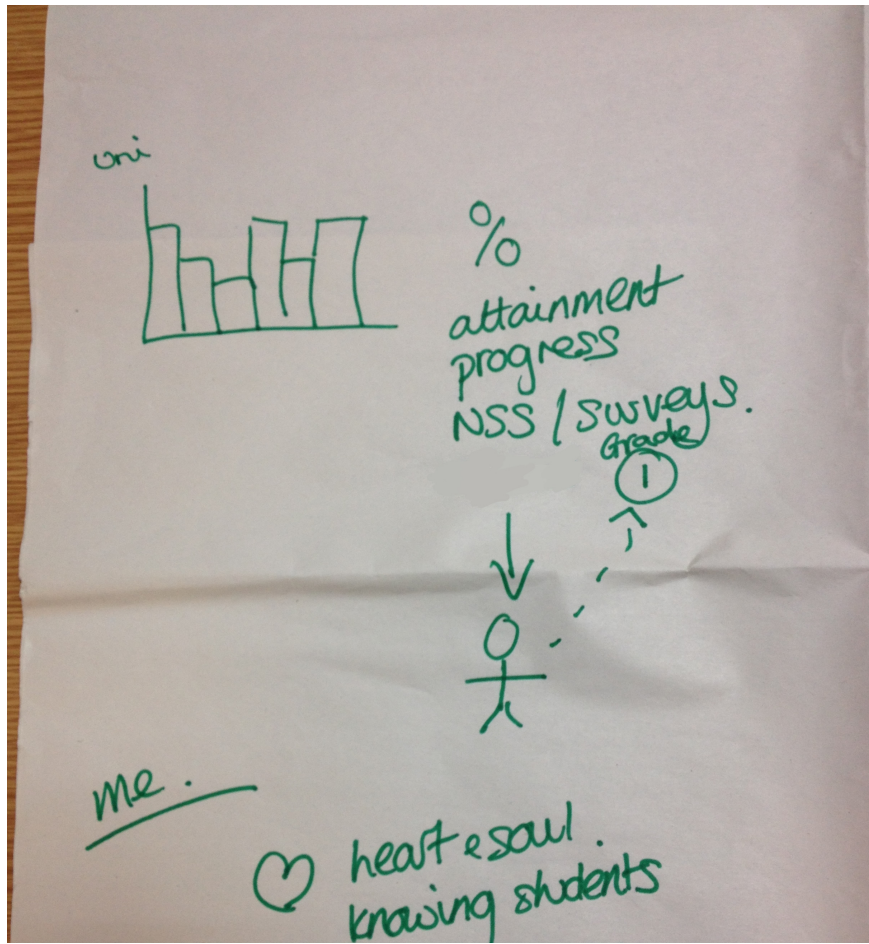
(**Picture 5.6** Victoria's (story 25) metaphor drawing of the performative control mechanisms cascading down from above and restricting her creative teaching practices and relationship with her students)

The tensions arising out of participants' creative behaviors, was causing significant friction (rub) against the institutional performative measures. Baumol (1990: 3) helps to explain this particular aspect emerging from the study in his paper looking at productive, unproductive and destructive entrepreneurial factors. He viewed factors that influence and enhance organisational activities as productive were heavily influenced by the 'pay-offs' attributed to them by the organisation. The pay-offs in this thesis' context were elements perceived by the university authorities as adding end user value, i.e. enhancing student value through measurable metrics. In this culture, in order for participants' roles, activities and teaching to be deemed as 'institutionally productive' they would need to be heavily dependent upon fulfilling the 'rules of the game' and the reward structure established by the university. Instead, the majority of award winners now appeared to view their behaviors as being deemed unproductive and in some cases even destructive. This ultimately had the effect of pushing participants further to the outskirts of the formalised operating culture:

"Probably the thing that would make me leave would be if I wasn't able to do the things I believed in doing; I suppose that is more important then surely internal recognition. It is just a bit sad that you often have to feel like an outsider." (Sandra, Story 7)

Morley (2003: 71) observes that those individuals who do resist these restrictive cultures, inevitably suffer an impact on their own value set and emotional wellbeing, seeing that institutions often *"hold out on the possibility of emancipation but instead create mechanisms of oppression and control over academics"*. This was the case for all participants involved in this current study, who encountered value conflicts in varying severities, arising out of the resulting tensions being faced by continuing to practice in the way they deemed productive for their students, yet fearful of institutional repercussions.

In terms of the cultural construction of daily life for participants, Morgan (2006:135) observes that we are all involved in the construction through our own experiences, judgements and values we shape the patterns of how we work, whereby if we *"disrupt these norms the ordered reality of life inevitably breaks down.* At the heart of this research was an attempt to gain access to the participants observed reality and their own perspectives on the meso-institutional level culture and where participants placed themselves within it. Argos (1956: 40) recognised the importance of this study's focus on the individual personal nature of education outside of more formalised institutional processes which were being introduced, seeing it more as an, *"interpersonal activity, the personalities of those involved cannot be overlooked".* Crucially, due to the cultural constraints in place around them, participants fundamentally questioned if their own practice, which historically had been rewarded, valued and inspiring was even productive in the institution's eyes. The link between participants daily teaching outputs and how this now added value to the end metric measures the institution now being used for evidencing *'teaching excellence'* was rapidly disappearing:

"I think when I came here I questioned a bit of it because I think people said to me 'Oh, why are you doing it that way?' And I was kind of going, 'Isn't this what everybody does'. But at times you feel so much, I felt so much out on a limb with it – I nearly left

a few times because of it. It has been incredibly hard, at times, and I have questioned myself, because it would be easier to keep… to go with the flow." (Sandra, Story 7)

Participants really valued the opportunity to have a discussion with me about the tensions they were now facing and how they saw themselves within these struggles as part of this research study. It was clear that for some time they had to hide these emotional elements behind a screen when operating inside the meso-departmental level:

"You have made this happen for me and it is a really valuable conversation. You probably think I am doing you a favour; I am not, you are doing me one…. It has been really fantastic but it has only been fantastic because of people like you, so you know when you say 'Who comes to ask you what is it that makes your sessions inspirational?', nobody in terms of the university management structure or the things that are about improving, not the NSS student experience committee, not the people on our programme who have got a really poor overall NSS satisfaction rate. So, nobody is asking me.." (Nicola, Story 2)

"If I wrote in my review you know, 'some students said that they were feeling lost or lonely or struggling or whatever' I wouldn't think it would be given much lip service without the evidence, but how can you evidence somebody's feelings." (Victoria, Story 25)

5.1.3. The creation of academic mavericks (sub-topic 1.3)

It was clear that as I ascended Gadamer's (2013) Hermeneutical Spiral, unexpected emergent themes were evolving out of this study. An interesting aspect to the findings arising early on during the interviews was around the notion of academic mavericks. A review of the empirical literature around mavericks as this emergent theme materialised highlighted there were limited studies to draw upon within this field, particularly around the aspect of mavericks operating within higher education. The majority of empirical studies focused upon large US corporations, alongside workplace maverick leadership's abilities which enhance innovation potential (Taylor and Labarre, 2006; Ray et al., 1997; Semler, 1993; McMurry, 1974; Peters, 1982). However, much of this literature seemed to be trait orientated and examine 'maverickism' in terms of individuals promoting organisational creativity within corporate organisations (Gardiner and Jackson, 2012).

Around a third of the participants reported labelling either themselves, or being labelled by the institution as mavericks. This theme emerged among participants in all three phases of the study. Terms such as *'Maverick'* and *'Cavalier'* were frequently used by several participants when they were drawing the metaphors of how they saw themselves, operating on parameter (or some outside) of the meso-institutional level culture. These were unprompted and not planned for, due to the iterative narrative story telling nature of the study, but came about frequently and often linked in to participants own state of mental wellbeing within the institution, which is discussed later in this chapter. Some participants openly labelled themselves as mavericks, whilst others used the term because colleagues or management had labelled them as acting in a maverick like way. This aspect was also indicative of the metaphors they drew in our discussions. Participants placed themselves outside that of the main administrative core, operating outside in complete isolation (Pictures 5.6 and 5.6).
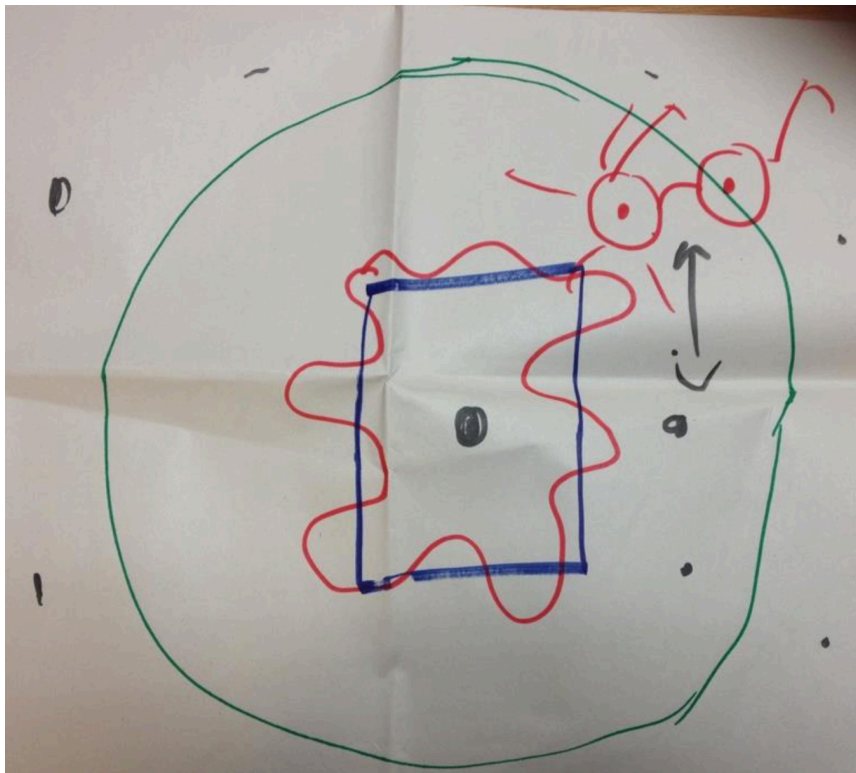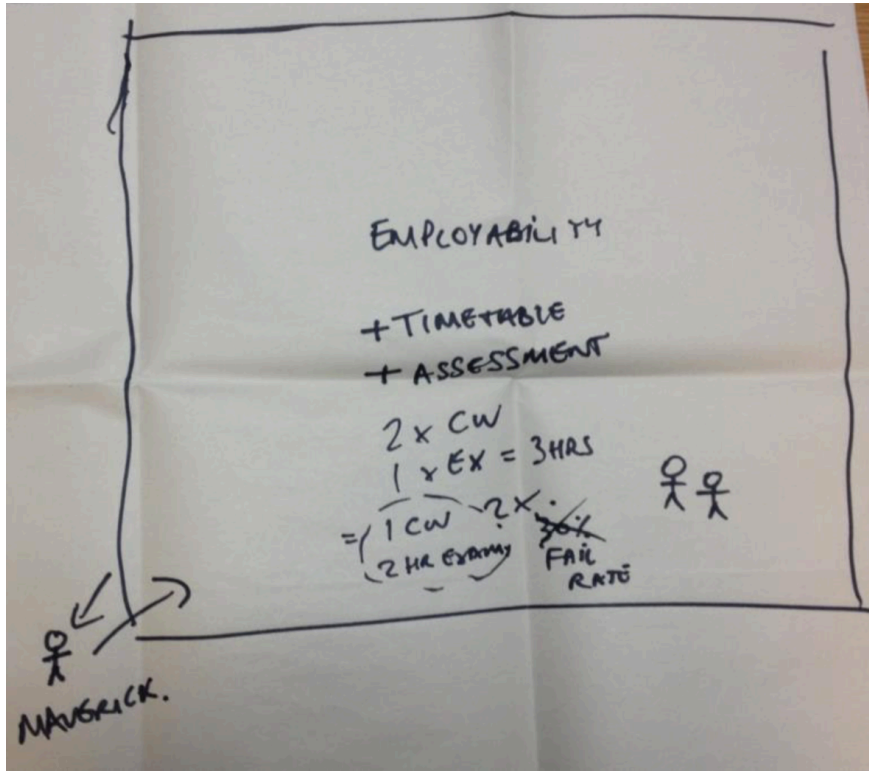
(**Picture's 5.7 and 5.8**. John's (story 4) and Sandra's (story 7) metaphors placing themselves on the outskirts of the university culture)

To be clear by using the term *'maverick'*, this study is not adopting McMurry's (1974) definition of mavericks in organisations: defining individuals as *"nonconformists who are eccentric, recalcitrant, and usually rebels without a cause"* (Ray et al., 1997: 21). On the contrary, this study has found that these teaching award winners, were conformists, collegiate, and highly creative thinkers who significantly enhanced the overall student experience and were thus commended by the meso-institutional level as exemplars of 'teaching excellence'. However, participants reported a different and stark unfolding reality, one in which they were being pushed out to the operating boundaries of the institutional culture, isolated and marginalized.

Essentially, the paradox which was now unfolding between the institution wanting to recognise individual examples of teaching excellence, against a backdrop of a rising meso-level managerialist culture, which had now pushed these individuals right to the outskirts. In this respect, participants who had badged themselves as mavericks during their own narratives had not intended this to be in a positive light, but instead felt excluded from the centralised university culture. This was therefore forcing them to be seen to be operating independently from their peers, instead staying true to their own deep-rooted values around teaching. Choosing to fight against the status quo, had cost these individuals dearly in terms of their own individual wellbeing and promotion opportunities:

> "Yeah and that is why I feel like I am outside of it because I feel like I am a maverick."
> (John, Story 4)

> *"I am not a particularly maverick person I am not somebody who is comfortable saying 'oh you know this is all – I will do it my own way' but it has given me the confidence to go actually that is alright."* (Bill, Story 20)

The dichotomy occurring, was one in which the *'awarding giving'* managerialist culture had now also forced the *'award winners'* to operate outside of its tightly defined parameters in order for them to continue teaching in the way they deemed most beneficial for their students and be nominated for future awards. In essence, as outlined by Ray (1997: 22), the *'institutional culture set the acceptable operating parameters of the members who are a part of it'*. It was the distinct teaching practices participants displayed, which students deemed to

be none-consistent with others academics, thus making them stand out from peers and be individually nominated:

"There are more systems and rules and regulations and forms and less opportunity for cavalier stuff, there is more control." (Henry, Story 16)

Crucially, these institutionally (meso-level) created academic mavericks, tended not to be of their own making, rather a bi-product of the divisive institutional culture forming around them. Ray (1997: 20) found similar to participants views that they tended not to enjoy this label and didn't want to be "*identified as separate from the group and that the organization which is "loosely coupled" facilitates maverick behavior."* The question was put to participants within the interviews of why their peers did not act in this way, or see themselves as being mavericks. Participants often drew their colleagues being separate from them within the metaphors. The majority of colleagues being rooted firmly inside the meso-institutional culture.

Participants usually referred back to the managerialist culture making them feel this way because of clashes with their own values around teaching practice and the imposed performance measures. Gardiner and Jackson (2012: 8) explain this by linking it to the cultural conditions of an organisation, stating that *"in punishing conditions, individuals high in maverickism are more likely than their low maverickism counterparts to continue to take risks".* Some of this could also be put down to the university award scheme itself, creating a sense that these individuals are in some way different to the normal academic mould and thus making them stand out or appear different to peers. Taylor (2007: 507) also observed this view on awards, seeing the award scheme as a poisoned chalice due to its divisive nature, driving a wedge between academic staff and differentiating between teaching and research. Participant's colleagues operating within the micro-departmental level appeared to have become 'culture bound' (Moss-Kanter, 2010), trapped in a system where they only see the visible objective control measures put in place to govern over them and standardise practice. This state is often referred to as, 'learned helplessness' (Maier, 2016), spreading like a virus through the levels of the university. In this institutional state there is no creativity, or questioning of decisions, simply acceptance to what colleagues see around them, with an inherent inability to control anything. It is undoubtedly this fact alone which portrayed the

award winners in such a stark 'maverick light'. Inspirational to their students, practicing differently and breaking cultural norms compared to those who dare not emancipate themselves from the engrained managerialist culture forming around them:

> *"People forget how to work autonomously. If they have been controlled by the beast that is the timetable you forget. There needs to be systems that work and the bravery to tackle the systems that don't. I think they do keep to their own. The cost of going out there would be too much to me so I am not doing it. I think there are pockets of it, but it isn't always celebrated and it is not always facilitated and so sometimes it happens despite the organisation. My impression is people are feeling more and more burdened by just delivering the day to day, to have the time to kind of put their head above the parapet and think you know about what other opportunities might be out there."* (Melanie, Story 18)

> *"If we portray ourselves as this maverick who is off doing all these things, achieving this and achieving that, then people do just look at you and think (rolls eyes / open hand gesture…The persona of that, does have a negative effect on people in terms of their ambition because they think 'I can never do that'. That if anything that probably makes me even more individualistic, so I wish I could be more collegiate"* (Henry, Story 16)

Participants stated that colleagues tended to stick within their own sub cultures, unable to cross boundaries fluidly between levels (Teece et al., 1997). Gaudet and Clement (2008: 213) observed this aspect in their studies, by looking at social in and out groups, where often in the cultural group interactions results in, *"acculturation, a process by which the culture of a group is changed, either by the adoption or by the loss of cultural markers"*. They found that members of the cultural in-groups found it difficult to maintain distinctive identity under the pressures of the centralised commodified culture.
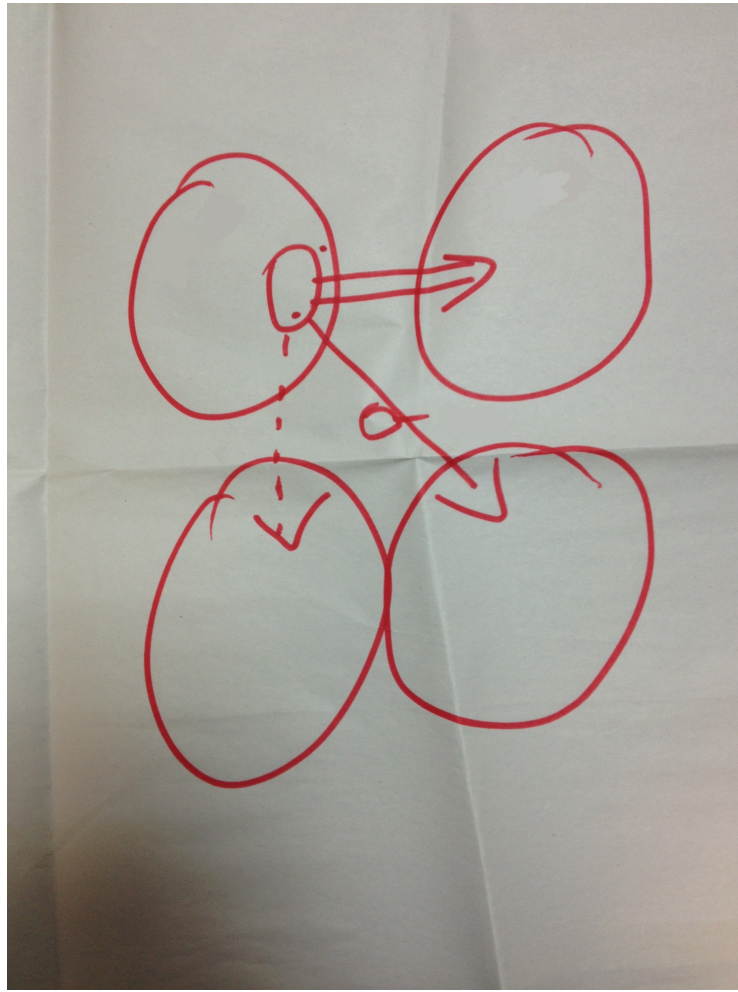
(**Picture 5.9** Melanie's (story 18) metaphor drawing of her own fluid practices working across the university culture outside of its defined parameters)

An important conclusion to this comparison of those academic award winners and their peers is to not underestimate the role culture plays in enabling creative practices to form. Amabile (1990) saw culture as the central eliminate to extinguish anything creative for organisations.

5.1.4. Change makers or rule breakers? (sub-topic 1.4)

Enabling participants to carry on and practice in the way they deemed fit, despite the mechanisms that may not allow them, was intrinsically crucial for these award winners. However, ironically it was also this element which appeared to be pushing them further away from the centralised accepted cultural norms. Amabile (1996) and Woodman et al., (1993) observed that bureaucratic, rigid management cultures will inevitably lead to constrained

creativity, pushing those individuals to the outer operating parameters of the organisation. Many of the participants pedagogical teaching practices clashed with the objective standardised modes for teaching practice found within the meso-level. More often, these individuals were then labelled at the micro-departmental level as rule breakers, rather than the ones who were adding value and pushing forward new ideas and innovative developments. Ray et al., (1996) found that the attributes of a maverick were crucial in the change process, generating ideas and new ways of working in an organisational system. To this extent these individuals cannot be overlooked at the meso-level in terms of value adding, but were instead battling against the cultural status quo and being labelled non-conformist, rule breakers due to their outward facing unorthodox teaching practices:

"I tend not to work within the rules. Probably because I am old enough and probably because I am unambitious enough I tend to do what I want to do, which is kind of egotistical I suppose but it is what I think is right, I am able to ignore this side of things. I get away with it if you like." (Simon, Story 21)

"I do get around the rules. If it does happen I just have to do it myself and that takes time away from the real job, everyone complains about the job getting more administrative, we are always talking – there is far more admin than there used to be." (Ben, Story 11)

McMahan (1993: 48) observed that organisational structures and systems need to complement and promote spirit of innovation, rather than in this study's case hindering it. One participant felt that the blanket approach to the standardisation of teaching being adopted by the institution, severely restricted their own teaching practices. They felt it pushed them further to the cultural perimeter, making them feel like they were a rule breaker for not adhering to things they felt would not enhance the student experience. The current institutional culture appeared to be stifling these individuals, and fundamentally not allowing others to be more creative in their own practices. This was in turn making life more difficult for those who constantly strived to deliver excellence in their daily teaching.
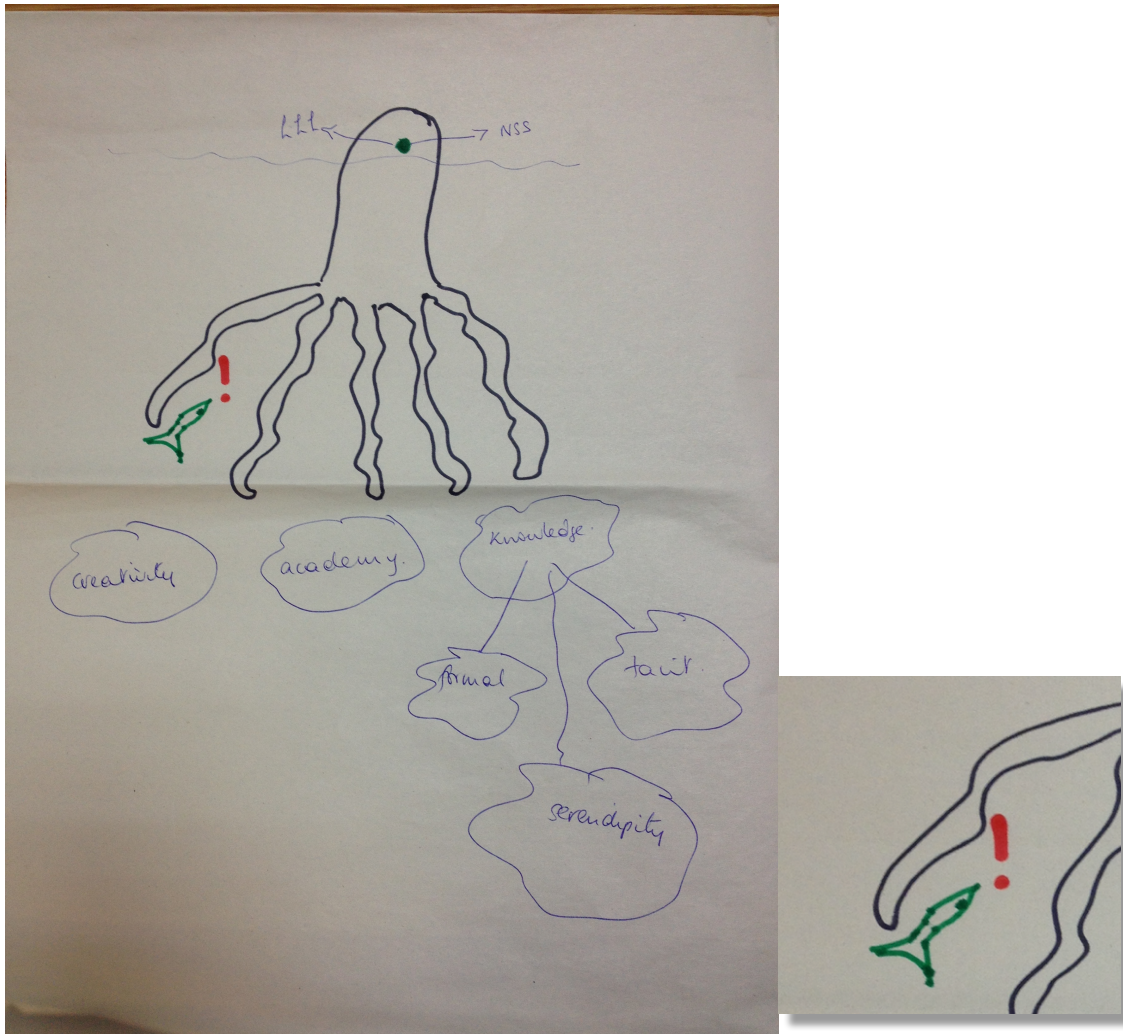
(**Picture 5.10** Joanne's (story 22) metaphor showing how the university octopus's tentacles are strangling creativity, represented by her being the small fish)

This automatic institutional 'immune' response (Booz et al., 2005) targeted toward creative practices seems to be triggered by perceived threats from new ideas and new ways of working, that do not necessarily fit with the set institutional norms. These were often derived from changes within the external macro-level policy environment and then re-interpreted within the institution, resulting in new performances measures being introduced. Booz et al., (2005) saw that the DNA makeup of any organisation was critically important in enhancing creativity: healthy organisational cultures promote and encourage, whilst unhealthy organisations, which is what participants in the present study seem to be reporting. In this sense, the institution seemed to be releasing 'ideas antibodies' (Amabile, 1998) which were

quashing individuals creative spirit:

> *"What is the consequence between me busting a gut trying to be innovative. Trying to create things, putting in all the time and effort you know, what it takes to organise things and to change my modules every year to make them innovative and fresh. Sod that for a game of soldiers I will just draw a salary."* (Henry, Story 16)

Given the changing times in higher education and increasingly prolonged periods of *"institutional churn"* (Tight, 2013: 11) academia now finds itself subject to again, a coordinated, collective push is needed. This echoes Strike (1985) whose study found that excellence should be more widely embraced in all its diversity as a universal concept, so that all can strive to excel within their own practice, rather than allowing individuals to compete for a form of excellence which may be unattainable. In this sense, these award-winning academics are the problem solvers, the change makers, the innovators that lead by example and create a unique environment from which students benefit. They are not afraid to push the boundaries and try out new practices and test out potentially risky pedagogical innovations:

> *"If I want to do something I will bloody well do it and even if they say I can't I will find a way of doing it. I have always been like that and I will always be like that!"* (Joanne, Story 22)

> *"I think I am quite fearless about trying new things. They have seen me make mistakes."* (Craig, Story 14)

This however also places them as individuals in a fragile, unstable position within the institutional. Fundamentally, participants creative practices crucially require the support of the institutional culture to encourage, support and reward. When this is the case other colleagues feel able to demonstrate excellence within their own practice in unique and differing forms.

This study found that the participants are crucially not mavericks in the traditional rule-breaking sense, but instead creative individuals. Fundamentally, whilst it is fine for a few individuals each year to be recognised for their achievements in the classroom and be

rewarded for this, from a wider organisational perspective there is more value to be added by allowing a collective creative culture to flourish; one in which everyone of all abilities, experience and backgrounds feels able to practice pedagogically, free from the shackles of institutional performance measures. Kay (1993: 69) argues that a limited few individuals do not bring excellence an organisation, but focusing efforts on the collective culture does, stating that *"organisational structure does not create extraordinary organizations by collecting extraordinary people. It does so by enabling very ordinary people to perform in extraordinary ways"*. In this sense, this study has highlighted a clear case for the university to focus efforts on the creation of a rich and vibrant, all-encompassing and diverse institutional culture of excellence:

> *"For me it is about having new ideas isn't it. New ideas and new thoughts, and those being allowed to flourish, whether it is education or research but sometimes it feels quite hard to do that."* (Melanie, Story 18)

> *"We try and find solutions together, work together as a team to offer the student's those solutions. But yeah, I do a lot of breaking the rules because I try and do something that I feel is better for the student, but it is difficult." (Cath, Story 1)*

5.1.5. Mental health and wellbeing (sub-topic 1.5)

The aspect of mental health and wellbeing came up on a number of occasions across multiple participants during this study. Around half of the award winners reported they had experienced some form of negative impact on their own mental wellbeing since winning the inspirational teaching award. As I moved further up the Hermeneutical Spiral over the duration of the data collection, more evidence was emerging from participants about the detrimental impacts the institutional cultural tensions were placing on their own individual mental health and wellbeing. For the researcher this was quite striking, as the study had not intentionally set out to investigate or focus upon these aspects, but highlights the value of applying the adopted Hermeneutical methodology in this context.

There has been limited empirical research carried out within UK universities on the effects culture has on academics' wellbeing to date, with most studies focusing efforts on student wellbeing outside of the UK. While some studies had looked at the university research environment and academic mental health, unlike this study, none has looked specifically at the impact performative measures had on academics' wellbeing within UK universities. The majority of previous studies have instead focused upon Australian universities, researching job stresses and anxiety in research-focused academics. Winefield (2008) found that a variety of changes to working conditions, mainly in respect of culture and performativity had severe negative consequences in terms of increased stress and mental wellbeing on academic members of research staff. A more recent study by Trakakis (2020: 2) examined how *"universities are crushing academics"*. Trakkis's (2020) examined Australian universities, where academics are *"saddled with increasingly heavier teaching loads each year"*. The study goes on to highlight the tragic case of an academic member of staff committing suicide because of the pressures they were placed under at the university. There was also a similar UK case in 2018, where a lecturer from Cardiff University sadly committed suicide because of increased workload pressure he was under (Pells, 2018)

Participants reported severe wellbeing struggles during the course of this study, with the majority talking about high levels of stress and personal tensions arising both pre-and post-teaching award nomination. The awards were not a contributing factor to this and this study did not set out to find a causal link in this respect. The teaching award in some cases helped candidates who were suffering stress to validate that their behavior was enhancing the student experience, providing them with the confidence to know they were in fact doing the right thing. While this study examined a snap shot of teaching award scheme winners, it was however clear that participants had been facing these difficulties for a long period prior to the discussions, and much of this could be put down to the increasingly performative management culture being imposed upon them:

> *"I sit outside. When I first came here, my first six months here I used to go home at night and literally sometimes on a Friday night weep into a glass of wine: 'What the fuck have I done to myself coming here'."* (Pamela, Story 15)

Many participants welcomed the opportunity to have an open discussion about their wellbeing during the study, opening up about their own lived experiences and value tensions. Some participants shared that they were thinking of leaving the university since the study began, due to the impact this single aspect was having upon them. A few participants carried through with this intention and have now unfortunately left the institution because of their health. Participants told me they felt quite isolated in carrying on in the way they deemed best to practice and in their view enhanced the student experience, and in doing so it was having an extremely negative impact on their personal lives outside of the role:

> *"I feel quite isolated and that makes me think I don't see any career progression for me because there doesn't seem to be. Nobody has ever said to me 'You are doing a great job' – so it is really for me, the value of my work comes from the students and nobody else."* (Holly, Story 9)

Abouserie (2006) saw that the majority of academic lecturing staff fell in to the moderate to serious stress categories, due to significant conflicting demands being placed upon them by universities. The wellbeing issues participants discussed broadly fell in to three (related) categories: stress, depression and physical burnout. Urbina-Garcia (2020: 1) has identified the same categories, undertaking a literature review of what was currently known about academics' mental health. He concluded that *"there is compelling evidence that the university environment is triggering high levels of stress and burnout and low levels of wellbeing for academics. There is extremely limited research on the perceptions and lived experiences of academic staff. It is virtually unknown."* He went on to report that *"there were no reviews of the literature analysing what the most commonly used instruments/measures are and what the main stressors and coping strategies used by academics are. Our initial review of the literature found only four studies in this regard"*. This makes the findings of this thesis unique in the evolving aspects participants were reporting:

> *"I find it quite emotionally exhausting actually, quite distressing. And you really have two choices, and I have found myself in these two choices all the time – I either involve myself in as many professional activities to try and change things and get knocked back, or I withdraw. And that is depressing and that means it is very, very difficult but I can see increasingly that is what will happen."* (Amy, Story 10)

A couple of participants informed me they were being treated for clinical depression due to the climate and difficulties encountered trying to balance conflicting priorities in their own teaching practices, with the impact spilling over to their personal lives. One participant broke down in tears when opening up about their continuing struggles, telling me they welcomed this opportunity to discuss the challenges they had been facing. This echoes Padilla (2015) and Barkhuizen's (2014) study's findings, and is clearly a common phenomenon internationally: Fatherston's (2020: 13) findings looking at Australian academic wellbeing found that *"excessive work hours, high levels of intrusive work-related thoughts, inactivity and the perception work-life merge adversely affected both psychological and self-perceived physical wellbeing".* Bell (2012:32) also concluded that there was *"a harmful influence of anxiety-related job stress on wellbeing amongst academics".* Such job stressors had a major influence on the present study's participants' work-life balance and their overall state of

wellbeing.

Participants reported higher levels of stress in their daily teaching roles, which was increasing year by year, compared to research activity. This subsequently seemed to be associated with lower levels of overall satisfaction and motivation within their work. Participants also went on to talk about their own lowering levels of commitment towards the institution, as a result of feeling burnout and suffering from high levels of anxiety. In this, the present study reflects the earlier work of Bezuidenhour and Cilliers (2010: 3), who found there was a direct correlation between burnout in academic roles and the level of commitment to the work they were doing. These causal factors often resulting in academic burnout and exhaustion, arose from the participants continuing to try to practice to enhance the student experience, despite the institutional culture inhibiting their ability to do so. Given this study took place in a predominantly teaching-focused institution, the factors leading to burnout and exhaustion for academic staff were significantly magnified:

> *"It is very anxiety provoking and it actually rinses you out of energy. It just gets so tiring and there is an awful lot of jobs worth-ness going on about the administration and that is quite difficult. That rub can be quite exhausting. People don't know the human dimension and we are getting depersonalised in the university."* *(Suzanne, Story 5)*

The factors reported by participants as affecting their wellbeing fell into four main categories: (i) increasing administrative burdens, (ii) quality measures and metrics, (iii) heavy workloads and (iv) the loss of individual autonomy and control within their roles. Bezuidenhour and Cilliers (2010: 3) found that professionals with *"a manageable workload are far less likely to experience emotional exhaustion".* Quality measures and surveys were repeatedly reported as creating additional workload pressures on participants. They felt the need to constantly improve their own practice in order to add visible metric value. Many participants simply did not see the need for constant surveys and dissection of their teaching practice under the guise of trying to enhance practice. This area significantly increased participants' stress levels in their daily work and personal lives, not allowing them to switch off after teaching.

Urbina-Garcia (2020: 2) found that increased competition between universities had inevitably led to extreme pressures being placed on staff to perform to the imposed quality measures

by institutions. This was a severely detrimental factor in the present study's participants wellbeing and personal lives outside of the university, and they reported that an ever-increasing loss of control and the ability to make their own decisions about how they should perform, combined with an increased culture of accountability had resulted in them feeling devalued and demotivated. Smith and Erdoğan (2008) concluded similarly when looking at how teachers make decisions on how to teach and the conflicting factors that occur and generate higher levels of stress when this control is taken away from them – they found a clear link between teacher autonomy and individual wellbeing. This is also evident in Demerouti's, (2001) 'Job Demands-Resources' model of burnout, highlighting that where is a lack of support and resources this inevitably leads to individual burnout and stress.

Conversely, Ekvall (1991) found that organisations with higher levels of individual autonomy experience higher levels of creative energy, which was also the case across participants here. The findings follow Amabile's (1997) work in high trust cultures, enabling and trusting employees to be able to do the right thing of their own accord, whilst supporting it from the meso-managerial level. There was growing resentment and some hostility being demonstrated towards participants from colleagues who had not won the teaching award. All of the above factors combined, were having severe detrimental effects on mental health and wellbeing on those participants who the institution had deemed inspirational award winners. This was something which appeared to be hidden and not discussed (or understood) at either meso (institutional) or micro (departmental) university levels.

5.1.6. Discussion topic 1 summary

Discussion topic one explored in detail Research Theme 1, and in doing so gained an understanding of the cultural fit for the participants and the creative tensions which they were encountering. This study can conclude that the cultural fit was not a healthy one for those teaching award winners in the sense that individual pedagogical and creative teaching practices clashed against the objective standardised measurements of teaching quality, created within the meso-institutional level.

Building on the associated empirical literature around aspects of value tensions, culture and performativity by Deem (1993), Hayes and Wynard (2002), Skelton (2004) and Morley (2003) this study advances these through adopting a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individual teacher focused award winners. It does so by exploring how the performative tensions being encountered by these award winners played out on a day to day basis within each of the corresponding organisational levels. In doing so, this study has highlighted a discourse occurring between participants own creative teaching practices existing within the micro-level, set against a backdrop of a lack of support, recognition and reward for these kinds of behaviors within the meso-institutional level. Enhancing an understanding of what specific aspects of the performative culture was causing these value conflicts for participants was crucial. These tensions arose in many different forms across all participant narratives. Many felt they were battling against something which could not now be changed nor questioned at the higher up (institutional) levels.

Discussion topic one has highlighted some key areas which have evolved out of the iterative nature of the adopted Hermeneutical methodology. The first of these being the creation of academic mavericks. This further enhances the limited body of corporate empirical research by Labarre and Taylor, (2006) and Ray (1997), but grounds this in a public sector educational context. In this sense, this study uncovered the novel creation of maverick academics occurring within the micro-level. This labelling of mavericks for these award winners was not of their own choosing, instead they were being portrayed in a maverick light because of their unorthodox teaching practices. Building on Baumol's (1990) work around conductive practices, participants in this study's teaching was not being recognised as productive

enhancing behaviors because there wasn't a causal link to end outcome metric indicators. In this sense, the award winners were could be seen as innovators, whom were choosing to work against the grain at times and break rules simply because they were not in keeping with their own value sets around high-quality student experience. This ultimately set participants at odds with the more rigid and formalised processes for teaching quality management within the university (Tight, 2014; Kay, 1993). This often resulted in placing participants in a fragile and vulnerable position on the outskirts of the culture.

There has been limited empirical research to date carried out within UK universities on the effects culture has on the effects of performative measures on academic's wellbeing, with studies being undertaken mainly in American and Australian research orientated universities (Winefield, 2008; Trakakis, 2020 Urbina-Garcia, 2020; Fetherston, 2020). This study brought forward new empirical research findings in areas such as mental health and wellbeing struggles teaching practitioners were experiencing in the sectors drive towards evidencing teaching excellence. Building upon both Winefield (2008) and Trakakis (2020) international studies examining research-orientated academic staff's wellbeing. In contrast, this study stands out by focusing more specifically on teaching-orientated staff's wellbeing in a university context. In this aspect, the study concluded that the tensions being reported by participants were severely affecting their own wellbeing and mental health within their roles. This study offers a detailed rationale around the impact university performative elements have teaching focused academics, along with potential ways to alleviate some of this building upon Urbina-Garica's (2020) findings. Fatherston's (2020) and Bezuidenhour and Cilliers (2010) research around excessive working conditions for academic staff is enhanced by this research studies findings, indicating the reasons for academic stress and burnout fell broadly in to 3 categories: increasing administration burdens, quality measures and metrics, and the loss of individual autonomy within roles.

Using Abouserie (2006) research around conflicting demands causing stress to academics, this study further highlighted an ever-increasing loss of control for participants. This manifested itself in the in-ability for participants to make their own informed decisions/choices about how they should teach. This was further exacerbated by an increasing culture of accountability resulting in participants feeling stressed, demotivated and untrusted. Contrary

to Amabile's (1997) and Ekvall (1991) work on high trust cultures feeding innovation potential, participants in this study reported working in a restrictive institutional environment, where low levels of empathy, encouragement, recognition and support were shown for the work they do and value they add.

5.2. Discussion Topic 2: Institutional managerialism

Discussion Topic 2 explores *Research Theme 2: Explore the impact management and quality procedures have on inspirational teaching practice*

From the research findings, I have explored this Research Theme using four separate sub-topics derived from the participants narratives:

1. **Sub-topic 2.1:** Managerialism in universities
2. **Sub-topic 2.2:** Performance metrics and control measures
3. **Sub-topic 2.3:** Specialist knowledge and the erosion of identity
4. **Sub-topic 2.4:** Career progression and development

I begin discussion topic 2 introducing the notion of institutional managerialism and specifically focus on the increasingly managerialist culture forming around participants. The discussion then moves into sub-topic 2.2, unpacking metrics and control measures and the impact these have on participants teaching practices. I will then turn to looking at the area of specialist knowledge and the resulting erosion of academic identity (sub-topic 2.3). Finally, based upon the previous two areas, draw this to a close by the resulting discussions arising around career progression and development (sub-topic 2.4).

5.2.1. Managerialism in universities (sub-topic 2.1)

The literature around managerialism within higher education predominantly focuses upon the rising wave of managerialist ideologies, a phenomenon which is now well-researched (Deem, 2005; Alvesson and Spicer, 2016; Davis, 2016; Trowler, 2010; Chaharbagi, 2007). The current state in which publicly-funded Higher Education Institutions now find themselves, is one in which they strive to justify their worth and are required to demonstrate 'value for money' in society (Deem, 1998). This has inevitably moved them closer towards a private sector way of organising and managing (Davis, 2016). Santiago (2012: 513) points out that *"little is known about this topic, particularly at the academic staff and 'academic manager' levels"*. Therefore, this study, through discussions with the award-winning participants

provides a glimpse into a unique individual perspective of institutional managerialism occurring within these levels.

Within this study, the majority of participants felt it pertinent to discuss university management and the effect this function had on their own teaching practice. The discussions were often highly conflated with emotions, specifically around the impact the management function had on their daily working lives and wellbeing. These findings build on Winefield's (2008) study who found that a variety of changes to working conditions, particularly due to changes in management culture had quite severe negative consequences, in terms of increased stress and wellbeing on academic members of staff.

Looking more closely at the participants terminology around university management, many of them spoke about management predominantly as a control function, detached from any individual persona. Deem (2007: 13) also saw that due to greater control from government, alongside reductions in resources, universities have crafted their own set of control measures and processes for directing learning and teaching. However, this present thesis study went on to find that most participants felt untrusted in the day to day teaching practice they carried out, which further exacerbated the gap between management and academics. As we saw in the Literature Overview Chapter Two, the wave of government policies increased dramatically from the 2000s, further fueled by student tuition fees, student choice and new national metric measures, such as the NSS. This increased the pressures on institutions to introduce performative controls mechanisms around teaching practice (Shattock 2003; Molesworth, Scullion, and Nixon, 2011). In this sense, participants also felt that the once collegiate culture still being banded around by university management, was merely lip service, clinging on to some form of historical ideology of times gone-by. Shepard (2018) explained this current study's findings by the fact that when more formal control mechanisms were brought in to create greater 'value for money', the less formal ones (such as openness, self-management, and autonomy) are perceived to be inadequate and ultimately eroded:

> *"Individually I think the managers are fantastic, lovely, but somehow it just gets lost in*
> *the system. And yet I don't understand how the messages that come down are you*
> *know these kind of really, I want to say straitjacketed, but you feel a bit like 'gosh*

something else that is being contained. There is a real mismatch between the practice and the understanding of the practice and then what people think is happening centrally." **(Cath, Story 1)**
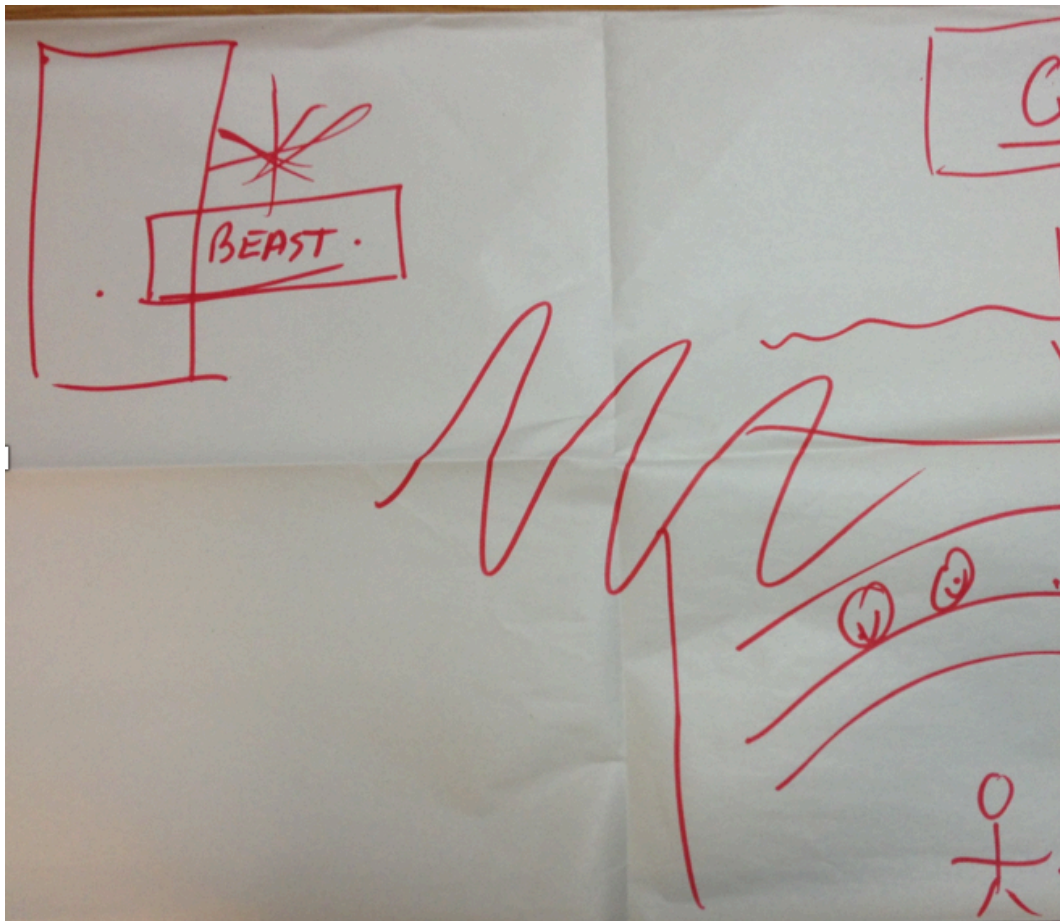
(**Picture 5.11** Bill's (story 20) metaphor drawing of quality measures being transmitted out of the monolith/management impacting within his own safe teaching space)

Participants now made reference to now seeing their own professional working roles at the university likened to mere factory work. This did not come as a complete surprise within this study due to the cultural tensions participants were experiencing. The research by Deem (2007: 2) also noted that the once collegiate university model had now *"transformed universities from 'communities of scholars' into 'workplaces'"*. Building on Deem's (2007) work, this study found that much of this was due to the increasingly complex macro-external policy measures, being interpreted narrowly by meso-institutional level management. This resulted in complex control systems being introduced to ensure practice was rationalised in

such a way that alienated (Braverman, 1974) participants values from their own work. Diefenbach (2008: 27) also saw this shift in workplace dynamics, attributing it to the *"rise of the audit culture"*, and one which exploited individuals for managements *"position, power, self-promotion and preservation"*:

> "It is the managerial culture that is the problem. *People don't often talk and there can sometimes be a barrier, a layer of management, layer of erm process that can sometimes get in the way of people just talking to each other, explaining the situation rather than saying it doesn't fit this rubric therefore you are in the wrong."* (Ben, Story 11)

This study found that university performance measures could also be seen to be exploiting the use of power dynamics which was found right across the institutional levels. This was in turn fueling a sense of both anger and resentment from participants towards the management function. Most participants reported withdrawing to the sidelines and 'keeping out of the way', in order to survive. Participants went on to state they did not actually fully understand what university management did or what their actual roles were. Strategic priorities were not communicated and resulted in the loss of participants freedoms. This particular aspect was previously explored by Morley (2013) who highlighted that the aforementioned aspects of performativity within universities were a tremendously damaging force to academics' autonomy. In this respect university management simply acts in a way they think external auditors expect them to, being nothing more than *"a damaging process of ventriloquism and impersonation" (*Morley, 2013: 70) in order to naively evidence value in learning and teaching.

This thesis witnessed an increasing detachment occurring between on the ground teaching activity and management coordination and control. Grummell (2009) termed this the 'care-less manager' in academia, whose primary purpose is to ensure performance standards are policed. Pursuing these efficiencies and accountability over a culture of freedom, flexibility and autonomy has ultimately resulted in the erosion of the manager-academic-student relationship across the university levels:

"You remove all of the essence of who people are and relationships from that, stripping that away – because if you do you become like a sausage factory. And this is not what I am about." (Sandra, Story 7)

"I think the problem is increasingly we are getting these specialists in, and functionally getting them to manage those areas. The trouble is they are managing in different contexts aren't they, they are managing in a university context. Realistically we need practice managers." (Cath, Story 1)

The reality borne out of this current study was that participants were witnessing increasing forms of internal competition arising from the imposition of external (macro-level) metrics. These were reported as being cascaded downward from management, limiting participants' everyday teaching practices. Deem and Brehony (2005) saw this ideology of new managerialism in higher education as not only being a technical function but firmly based upon power and control of individuals who operate within that environment:

"The levels of panic, I mean it is there, isn't it? We over emphasise it because we need to get that 80% in terms of filling them in so the data is sound. So, we are chasing numbers, just as the NSS is chasing numbers. Who is to say that questionnaire is actually recording what good practice is? At some point, you have got to measure that and then it is a subjective measurement of what somebody's perception of what student experience is." (Bill, Story 20)

In the present study, collegiality appeared to have taken a back seat and a rising culture of accountability was being witnessed, reflecting Tight's (2014: 295) observation that collegiality appeared to have a *"lower profile in higher education research literature than managerialism".* What was clear from the present study is that there was a growing resentment from participants to this rationalised form of managing teaching quality and enhancement within the institution, and one which was having a significant impact on their working lives.

"You are talking to me at a very particular time actually in that I have decided to leave my division for good reasons and I have actually not decided to leave the division in terms of teaching, I have decided to leave the division because of the attitude towards quality within the new management structure. The person I am, the management I am walking away from also believe the same as me and I am still trying to do it within a university framework. I am going to quote somebody in the division now who told me, 'we are not trying to create an everything has to be the same in the university but we do need a consistency' - we are a peculiar organisation! We are getting bogged down in process. I think staff really need ownership and that is what I mean about collegiateness as well" (Nicola, Story 2)

Looking further into the organisational structure being seen by participants, McNay's (1995) work on organisational ideals in higher education, offers up an alternative form of organising on a day to day basis which provides a less opposing or formalised dichotomy of management and control. McNay (1995) proposes the notion of a 'Bureaucratic Leadership Structure', where key roles are designated to designing systems to coordinate and facilitate the work of others rather than tightly controlling and directing that work. This links in to the processes, and inevitably the impact it has on the institutional culture.

Participants discussed this difficult balancing act of control and development within our discussions. They perceived culture coming last in line in terms of priorities for management, who had hidden behind a plethora of formalised strategies, policies and systems without actually seeing what impact they would have on the daily working cultures of higher education. This reflects Drucker (2013), who questions which should actually come first in organisations (structure or culture), asserting that culture should always come first in any organisation. This sadly was not the case reported by participants in this study, who placed corporate strategy at the forefront of practice, shaping a narrowing pathway they had to navigate through:

"I feel that what matters to me as an individual is that I know a lot of people in different divisions. You know relationship building, relationship management, not email. Talking to people is absolutely vital and I think not enough of that is done. I think management

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needs to get out and talk to people. I think they need to see more of what people are actually doing, you know get their feelers out with what is going on and with people who haven't lost touch with what it is like to teach students." (Suzanne, Story 5)

5.2.2. Performance metrics and control measures (sub-topic 2.2)

Performativity as a concept has been explored most recently by Jones et al., (2020). The research saw the performative condition of the university environment as being something which is a state of paralysis caused by centralised mechanisms of control, targets and systems. This is policed by an authoritarian body of management within the university environment, and one which is counter to that of a collegiate culture. Muniesa (2018) saw this performative institutional condition as generating a standardised means for practicing learning and teaching, and one which employs a rationality and regulation to incentivise, measure and punish academics (Skelton, 2017).
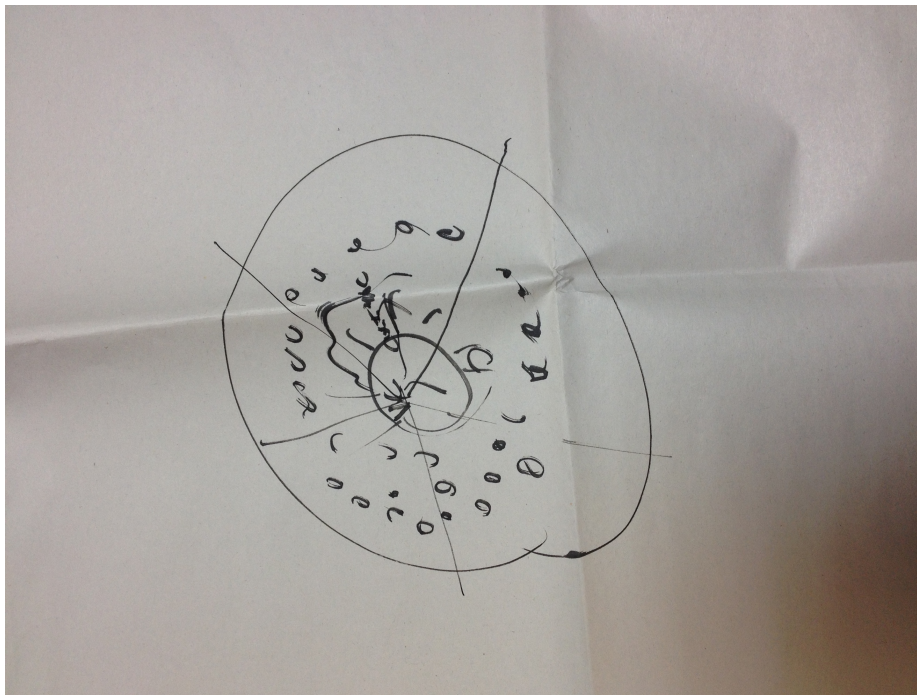
(**Picture 5.12** Fiona's (story 19) metaphor drawing of the centralised performative management culture. The small black dots represent the rules and procedures stemming out from the middle of the structure)

Aspects of performativity were being witnessed arising out of the managerialist culture across the participants accounts, being labelled as a form of organisational condition within the

institution which could not be stopped. Ball (2003: 216) saw performativity as *"a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)"*. In this type of culture, academics are made to adhere to these regimented, strict routines in order to evidence tangible teaching outputs which in turn tick metric boxes, further fueling the management-teaching divide (Muniesa, 2018).

This current study found a profound impact on the inspirational award winners' due to the performative measures being put in place by the university. Participants felt that management had imposed unnecessary indicators around them in order to somehow validate their teaching practices. The struggle therefore arises when these diverse individual practices are being scrutinised to an extent that individuals fear their own value set are under threat. These were subsequently causing tensions and fractures to occur between meso-level management function and micro-level departmental operational aspects of individuals day to day teaching practices. These fractures were translated in to personal struggles for each of the participants, who saw the controlling power related aspects they were being subjected to, drastically limiting their own ability to fulfil their roles in the way their own values and behaviors deemed to be fit. Most talked about the metrics creating a divisive and exclusionary culture, where they had been forced to the operate on the outskirts:

> *"I think it is a very suspicious system where students have to be controlled and a lot of it is administration. They see academics as the weak link, academics have to be controlled. There is a real issue that if we want to do better at REF, we have got to upskill the researchers. If we want to go up the league tables we have got to upskill the teachers so that they can perform at a different level. And I think that that is really good but I think that the bureaucracy bit causes loads of trust issues. I mean I get frustrated with that. Some of it is because people who don't teach and haven't taught for a long long time are sitting in places like management and they are making these core judgements"* (Fiona, Story 19)

Essentially, the university was steering itself towards a course of bounded rationality where the de facto position emphasised performativity. This was in a vain effort to regulate and

monitor standards at the micro-departmental level through imposed measures. Participants felt that they did not understand the management core function, and why they were embedding these measures which were ultimately detrimental to teaching. Deem (2005: 231) saw that new managerialism was predominately based upon an ideology focused upon fulfilling the self-serving interests of power and dominance for those concerned, which goes someway to understanding the motives of management in this study's context. The performative measures being put in place were creating a separation of activity, not only for the participants in terms of teaching but moving management further away from this front-line operation. This was exacerbating the divisions between decisions being made from management, measures resulting from them and then trying to evidence outputs in terms of value added (Shepherd, 2017). York (2000: 25) goes on to warn that this type of quality driven culture through its enforcement, was not intended to enhance the student experience but instead be potentially counter-productive in its practices.

Participants in this study, recognised this paradoxical element of their own creativity and inspirational teaching practice being reduced down by performance metrics designed to evidence excellence. However, instead it was having the opposing effect and destroying it. The freedom and high levels of trust which they discussed and historically thrived upon, was now being eroded away by rigid, limiting control measures. Teelken (2012) highlights that such control measures tended to be extremely counterproductive to organisational performance, instead resulting in higher levels of stress and frustration amongst the workforce. Therefore, this pursuit of a more formalised performative metrics as measures of accountability was placing tensions on the internalised values of those teaching practitioners on the front line of the workforce. Winters (2009: 124) noted alongside this current study's participants, that the *"quality assurance measures were 'merely fruitless and irksome."* Participants now only saw universities being part of a: *"new managerial ideology of quality, efficiency and enterprise",* where a new institutional form was born out of standardised measurement systems (Hayes 2002: 33):

> *"I think what is happening currently seems to be the idea that standardising things is right. That is the problem about trying to make everything the same when everything*

is not the same and most of the people higher up in management don't appreciate that the subjects are very different." (Hannah, Story 17)

Instead of discussing the method behind the metrics, participants instead talked at length about the way this formalised managerialist culture felt within their institution and the negative impact it had on their emotions, values and behaviors. This particular aspect can be explained by Chaharbagi (2007) who saw that more meaning could be conveyed more through emotional experiences than by a theoretical understanding of it. What was striking about the findings from this current study was the way in which participants talked about the severe impact this then had on their own emotional wellbeing. The rational performance aspects were causing undue stress upon them due to trying to conform to management control targets, whilst also still being true to their own pedagogical standards and inherent values. In essence, participants were internalising their struggles because of their professionalism towards the role, duties and commitment they showed for their own students. These values however now struggled to play out in practice. The participants' accounts of emotional struggles, can be explained to an extent by Lynch's (2015: 195) findings, which highlighted the effects of performativity on an institution were to *'re-orient'* focus on measurable outputs and were a *"deflection away from the aspects of social, emotional and moral development"*. This study found quite a severe detrimental void now growing between the emotional characteristics students valued in the award winners, and the lack of value placed on these by enforced measures filtering down from the managerial level:

"They don't care. It feels to me that there is a lot of so called strategic roles that don't really do anything themselves. Why we are paying so much money for so many, who themselves are exhausted with it – why? We are self-managing and I wish we would be trusted a bit more. The levels of stress that we see and I see on my corridor every day are often from all layers of people who are dealing with the same problems. We are meant to be self-managed, also academic managers are not necessarily skilled managers, they are given responsibilities to manage things without any training. I would never do it." (Amy, Story 10)

It was the paradox between the increasing culture of accountability versus academic freedom, which was causing the most severe emotional tensions for participants. This has also been magnified in light of new government pressures, changing expectations and fee increases universities are now dealing with (Molesworth, Scullion, and Nixon, 2011). Grummell (2009: 194-196) saw that neoliberalism movement did not fully acknowledge how emotions played out in practice within universities, going on to state that, *"academic institutions are 'greedy' in terms of the level of commitment, work productivity and emotional engagement that they expect of employees"*. This was the case with all the participants, where they had a single choice, to either hide their own emotional drivers which fueled the award winning inspirational practice, or instead risk the tension arising out of emotional feelings being placed at the forefront of their practice. Panikkis (2004) explains this in a study of higher education teachers and emotional labor, where they put these specific tensions down to the trying to satisfy the customer (student) and also profit for university management. In this sense, Panikkis's study found academic labor being exploited within this tangled relationship and ultimately being sacrificed. Chaharbagi's (2007: 328) found the emotional strength participants displayed to be the reason why they would not simply bow down and submit the wave of managerialism they ultimately found themselves in. Thus, tensions grew for them in their own roles over the period of this study. Participants reported not 'buying in' or putting up some form of resistance to the decisions being made, simply because they clashed with their own strong value set but felt unable to overcome this force. Instead most chose to keep to the side lines and hide any form of emotional dislike for management decisions. Lynch (2015: 199) concurred with this view and found that this form of environment led to an internalisation of emotions resulting in both *'individual and collective levels ',* becoming more and more distant from each another.
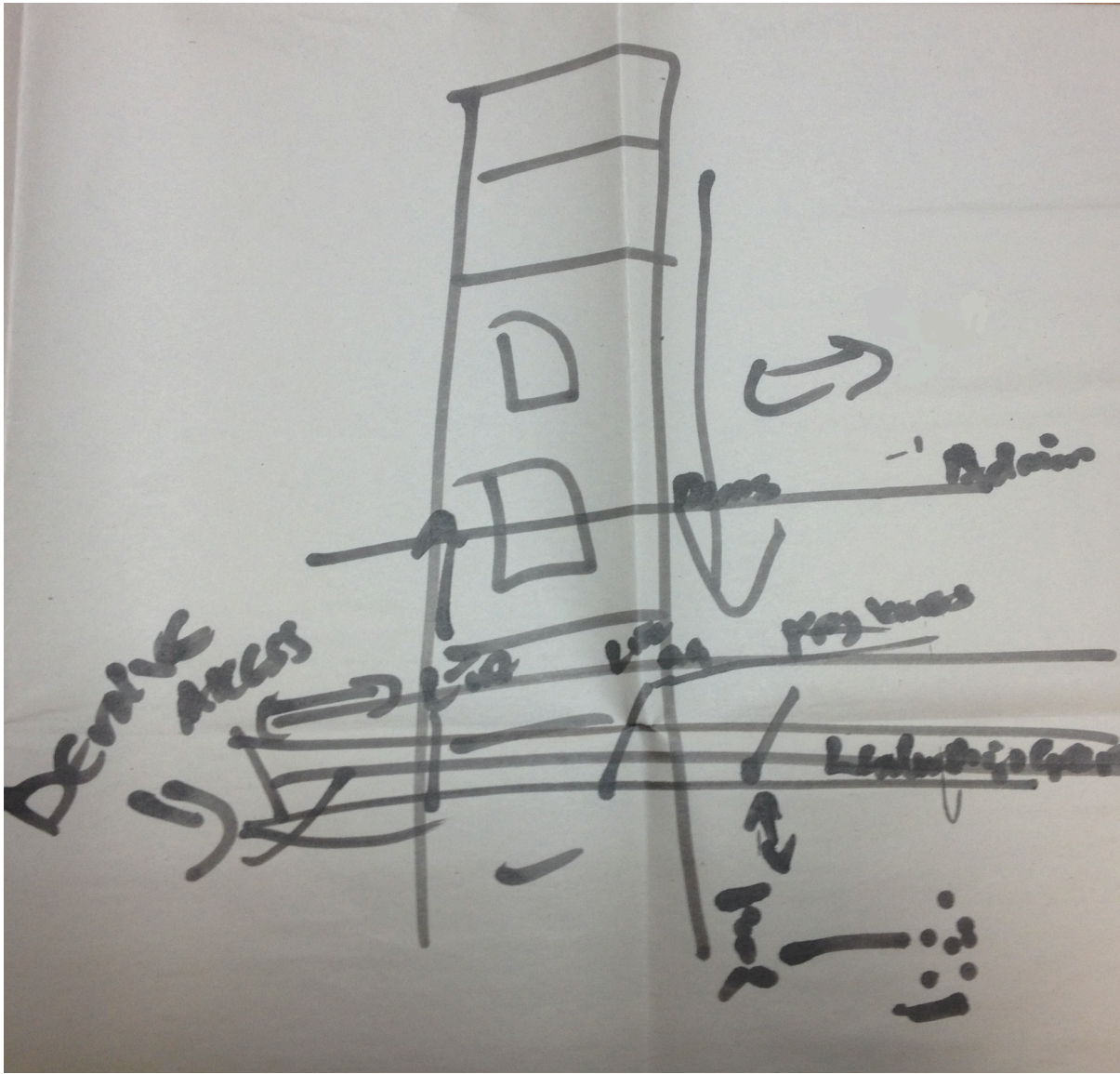
(**Picture 5.13** Amy's (story 10) metaphor of a large tower block where the various levels/floors are distant from each other)

This neoliberal managerialist drive was fueling clear resentment from participants towards the university management function, and along these lines, the majority of participants did not perceive a direct need for management roles or the need to be managed per se. Participants reported such tactics and measures being deployed, affecting their own wellbeing. These often resulted in strong negative emotional triggers towards management, such as resentment, anger, loneliness, loss of confidence in what they do and choosing the try and distance themselves from those decisions. Many reported management didn't understand pedagogical teaching practices. Shepherd (2017: 9) also observed that managers in academia were *"largely divorced from day-to-day academic work'* which in turn led to a

separation from front line core activity. This view was shared across participants in the study, reporting that as work had intensified, so did the control mechanisms being put in place from management to regulate teaching. Participants felt this resulted in a loss of trust for them as qualified self-managing professionals:

> *"I would hope as an academic that I am a self-manager. I am aware of who I am teaching and you know I do that to the very very best of my ability and isn't that enough as a promise you know. Trust me to do a good job because you know I really believe in what I do. I think sometimes I have a perception that there is a natural belief that staff are lazy or you know are not willing to go an extra mile or intentionally not helpful and that is absolutely not my experience. I would say that it is the opposite. I see staff who give 10,000%, who would go the extra mile. I just think that actually that, this needs to be valued and communicated to staff, that they really are valued and that they have got kind of that insight, knowledge and understanding that as an organisation we need to pull together and tap into it. Instead it's all based on management."* (Sandra, Story 7)
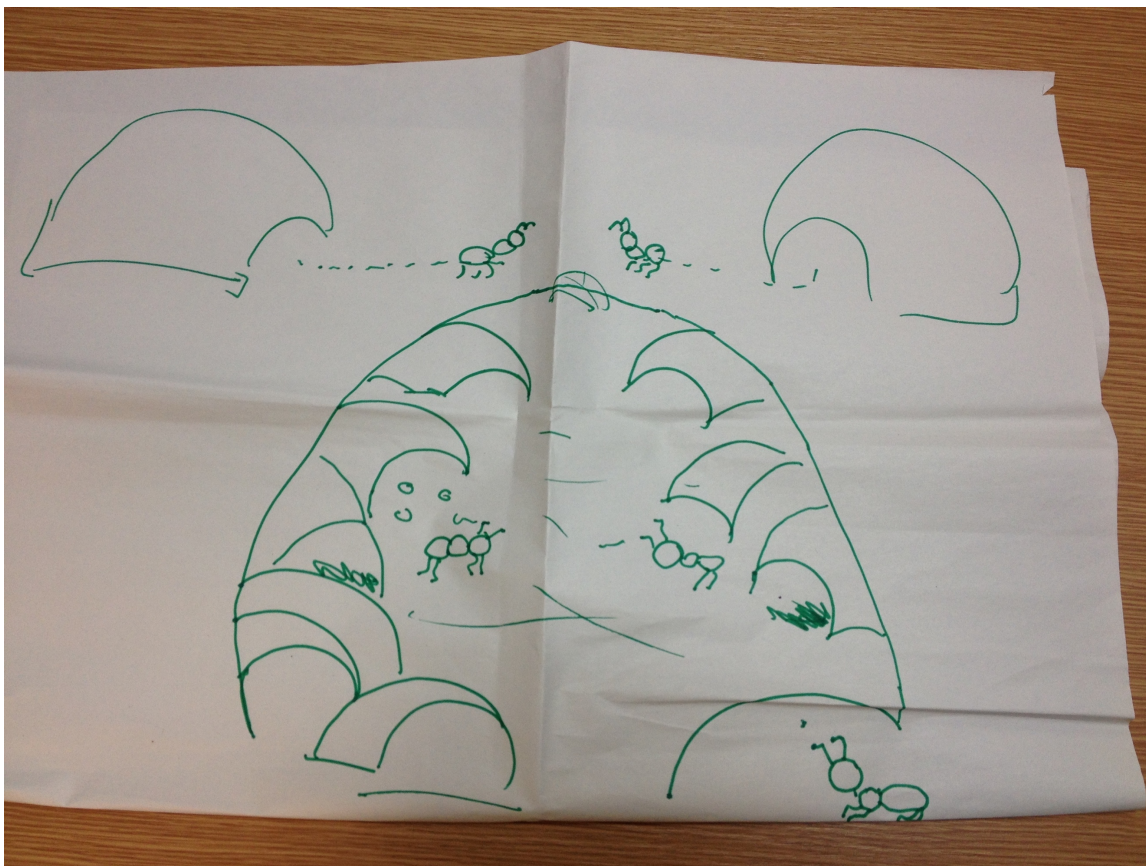
(**Picture 5.14** Karen's (story 23) metaphor highlighting how her and her colleagues are likened to self-managing, organizing and directing ants all working together for a common cause)

Winter (2009: 129) points to a crisis point facing the higher education sector resulting in a, *"demoralised workforce with a lack of trust in, and commitment to, academia as a whole"*. Participants felt that the university managers whom were brought in by the institution to 'manage them', where not actually effective managers. Instead, they were perceived as being shoehorned by the institution to manage in a university context without a thorough understanding of that context. This then caused issues later down the line, and resulted in poor decision making around the student experience and measures in place to control and direct it. Warner and Palfreyman (1996: 28) found in their study that managers brought in from outside the university environment, struggled to effectively manage in a university environment without the right training, "*This is understandable: they were not born managers, they have had it thrust upon them without training."*. However, Teelken (2012) did recognise the fact that some level of management within a university environment was necessary for effective operations, but finding the right balance between measures which were effective aiding productive teaching against not stifling flexible and creative practices within the institution. This current study's participants did feel they had very little power or influence in the decision-making process, hence the growing detachment from the management function within the university:

> *"Some rule by fear, some rule by the schedule. It is to do with trust and it is to do with chaos. It is the element of trust that is going to get us there. We have forgotten what management means, we have forgotten it is actually something that facilitates rather than the thing itself. It has become the thing itself. I think one of the signs, if a manager is threatened by that kind of creative free thinking you know they are in the wrong job, they are in the wrong job."* (Tony, Story 26)

5.2.3. Specialist knowledge and the erosion of identity (sub-topic 2.3)

All organisations have fundamentally struggled with the concept of knowledge and its place within daily life (Clark, 1998). Universities were and still are not alone in this messy concept. However, universities have a much larger onus placed upon them to operating within the knowledge economy (Clark, 1998). Along these lines, Penrose (1995: 77) commented that, *"economist have, for the most part, found the whole subject of knowledge 'too slippery to handle with even a moderate degree of prevision"*. Indeed, the entire western culture is built upon scientific knowledge production, so for any organisation *to "place itself beyond the pale, risks creating a sense of social isolation'"* (Gibbons et al., 199: 2). Higher education should be, but ultimately is no different in this respect due to its pursuit of rationalisation of teaching practice over the last two decades, fueled by external policy, funding changes and competition within society (Molesworth, Scullion, and Nixon, 2011; Furedi, 2009; Shattock, 2003). Instead universities have chosen to lean on and implement much more classic Tayloristic scientific management principles to *"command and control people who are too stupid to see what is scientific and therefore best"* (Drucker, 1992: 271). This has ultimately resulted in a deterioration of applied knowledge within learning and teaching, further fueling the loss of academic identity:

> *"There is a push towards standardisation that is inappropriate because students aren't standard, intellectual learning patterns are not standard and it is impossible for me. What is happening in HE, the landscape is detrimental. It is a worry."* (Amy, Story 10)

In this study, we are now seeing the unfortunate surrender of the last few remaining academics who have clung on to their own specialist knowledge and applied this within the classroom but increasingly saw a depletion of control over their own teaching practices. Participants in the study, reported a resulting loss of their own working identity as an academic, due to restricting culture being introduced around them. This loss of control over the expertise academics had, was evident across this study, and had a direct impact on those participants who had founded their own inspirational practice on their individual specialist knowledge. They now saw the erosion of this through performative measures and rationalisation of practice:

"The way we see teaching, that is what we are, it is our identity. They want uniform modules now. Modules are all so uniform now. I feel like a glorified teacher. Identity links with being an academic, links with expertise." (Rebecca, Story 24)

A '*loss of self*' which was reported by participants, links to the ever-decreasing loss of academic identity (Shattock, 2003), accelerated over the last decade by the increased wave of managerialism entering every day teaching practice. Deem (2007: 22) observed that this managerialist culture had now place an *"ideological, political, and cultural challenge to their occupational identity and status as independent, disinterested, and self-managing experts"*. This therefore demonstrated a direct connection between the meso-institutional measures filtering down and how they ultimately were eroding creative practices at macro-individual level. What this study found, was how university managers legitimised their control and coordination of activities through cascading measures which filtered down through levels, in an ever-increasing attempt to evidence excellence. University metrics were now being seen as the only 'expert knowledge' in the university environment, and shifted emphasis away from individual expertise toward a much more sterile way of practicing. In this sense, the study has shown that we are witnessing a new cultural reality forming, and one in which scientific metric measures have shadowed individual academic expertise.

Instead of university management trusting and more crucially valuing the specialist knowledge in participants heads, being comfortable with the concept that knowledge cannot be transferred in any form (Polanyi 1983). They have instead built up a brick wall made up of systems, process and measures in an attempt to place accountability and control over academics. In the radical constructivist view of knowledge creation (Ernst Von Glaserfeld, 2002), institutions should be comfortable with the fact that all knowledge is individual, and no matter how much we try we can never capture it in any form. Essentially, it is inherently individual to participants and something that is distinct/unique. This unique knowledge is crucially what the students nominated these academics for, and why the institution deemed it 'inspirational' in the first place.

This study has found severe tensions/clashes arising from the specialist individual knowledge and the control systems put in place to counter this messy form of teaching practice. This 'view from nowhere' (Polanyi 1983) the university now finds itself in, is a static, stagnant

state, devoid from individual difference and subjectivity. It instead makes things more difficult for centralised measures to capture, evaluate and evidence. In this context, the once complicated sense making process of teaching, where messages transmitted through various methods where open to debate and integration (Shannon, 1963), are instead now transmitted in a one-way flow of PowerPoint slides, carrying very little in the way of meaning for the intended student audience. On the one hand the university strives to evidence this inspirational diverse practice (teaching excellence) through the metrics, but is simply unaware that with the same hand it is sadly extinguishing participants own forms of creativity. Saunders and Ramirez (2017: 400) highlighted, that when measures and control systems become too strong, creative practices within education tend to get lost or not happen at all, where "*the measurement of teaching becomes the goal of the educative experience, and the dynamic and creative processes undergirding pedagogical performances are condensed to numerical expressions on a teaching evaluation*". This now appears to be the case across many of the participants with limited scope for doing anything dynamic or innovative within their role.

Higher education institutions now find themselves in a state where they struggle to differentiate in a highly competitive market place, simply because they have eroded the one thing which made them unique and different - knowledge. Hayes and Wynard (2002) point to a need to focus efforts on valuing a collegiate diverse culture over that of an authoritarian, seeking new ways to make traditional approaches to learning and teaching more enterprising (McNay, 1995), "*what the university needs to do is to seek various ways to make the seemingly unspectacular spectacular*" (Hayes and Wynyard, 2002: 22). Through this, university management again need to be comfortable with enabling diverse practices to flourish in learning and teaching. Allowing systems and processes that facilitate and nurture knowledge, instead of narrow measures that quash it. Participants recognised the resulting conflicts occurring, where control drivers were shaping a 'sterilised form of pedagogy', culminating in the loss of individual teaching practices. Some felt anger towards the institution because of this. Participants went on to talk about how the university now needed to shape its own identity within the highly competitive market place, and to stand out in terms of their unique individual specialisms. Clark (1998) referred to this in his notion of the *'stand up or self-resilient university'*, with a clear need to shape a distinct institutional identity out of the state

funded chaos emerging:

> *"I think the university is scared, I think the university is scared to be itself I feel. I think we lack confidence, I think we lack clarity and I think we lack that confidence to say this is what we are about, this is what is going to differentiate us as a university from other universities. I don't think we are brave enough to differentiate, we just want to be. I mean look at the questions on the module evaluation questionnaire which reflect the NSS – 'my teacher was enthusiastic' – is that a measure of a good teacher, the only measure."* (Henry, Story 16)

Participants on the whole seemed to struggle with the emerging concept of identify during the study. More specifically, in the sense of not talking about themselves but instead choosing to focus on the meso-institutional level loss of identity within the external macro-level marketplace. Jazvac (2009) attempts to explain this by the fact that trying to define terminology around identity is in itself a difficult task mainly due to its ambiguous nature. Participants did talk about feeling less trusted in their roles, due to the loss of credibility in what they do, with the knock-on effect that this was causing more individual stress. Participants in this current study talked about not being perceived as responsible for what they do as an academic, and instead management having to tightly control it. Martin (2020: 533) concurred with this view and saw that due to rapid changes in the sector; ambiguities, uncertainties and undue stress was being placed on academics own identity, leading to a need to reconstruct it in order to gain validity in an attempt to be a seen as a 'proper academic'. In this sense, participants felt they had to constantly reinvent themselves in some way in order to survive the turbulence occurring around them. Many opted for either taking a back-seat in the university and keeping out of the way, or simply reverting to standardise ways of practice, putting aside their once inspirational teaching values. Clegg (2008: 340) goes on to explain that identity is more fluid within an academic in so much that: *"academic identities were being actively shaped and developed in response to the changes in university structures and external environments".*

A few participants felt they had only clung on to their academic identity predominately through their own specialist research or occupation, as opposed to their teaching element because of its lower status within the institution. This was also echoed with other participants

who had a strong sense of identity but from either their experiences in previous corporate work or through pursuing their own external consultancy interests outside of the institution:

> "I have got a really strong sense of professional identity which helps definitely. I have a research contract and I have a teaching contract so that has really helped. Ironically you see the research contract, everything that I do is what REF is and they go 'yeah do it' – so do all of the performance and esteem indicators. So, actually that makes complete sense 'out there', but it makes less sense when you know everything is about conformity and consistency." **(Sandra, Story 7)**

> *"I just fly under the radar. So, the fact that I do consultancy through my job here and I do, write research papers and go to conferences, all of those things give me the life blood to be who I am. I have got a role where I can make a contribution without having all that bureaucracy to constrain me but no if I am really honest I see nothing, there is nothing."* (Henry, Story 16)

Skelton (2012: 810) examined this in his research, looking at the impact control measures had on teaching identities in a research-orientated university. He concluded that tensions existed between the strong research led culture and prevailing teaching agenda. He found that, *"it is possible to develop a teaching identity within a research-led university but there are obstacles to overcome; for example, the low status of such an identity and the limited support for it in terms of incentives, reward and recognition".* Along these lines, a few participants reported that having a more balanced contractual status within the institution, combining teaching and research did help their own sense of academic identity and also aided autonomy for them operating within the micro-level. They did however allude to the central metric performance drivers restricting even this to an extent, making them feel quite isolated at times. Becher (1989: 18) observed that centralised control measures fragment cultures resulting in the subsequent loss of identity. Those participants whom were once held together tightly by the 'cultural glue', were instead now being pushed outwards to the peripheral cultural boundaries, *"They have autonomy still, just its limits are ever more clearly defined and policed by the center"*.

5.2.4. Career progression and development (sub-topic 2.3)

The study found that the majority of participants did not see their winning of the inspirational teaching award linking to any form of promotion and progression criteria within the institution, which aligns with Gibbs (1995) findings, where few examples of UK universities were able to successfully use teaching excellence as a promotion criteria mechanism, due to its ambiguous nature. This study highlighted that participants saw little or no promotion and/or academic progression within their own roles outside of the recognised modes of management progression:

> *"No academic progression, it is managerial. If you want to get on and earn more money you need to do less teaching and you need to be a manager. I kind of think that it is almost going backwards from a career perspective but earning more money doing it. I am really reticence about pushing for that next role because I am really enjoying this. The only progression is around managerialism if that is what you want to do."*
> (Bill, Story 20)

Participants reported, alongside the findings of Smeenk's (2006) study, that the institutional control measures and managerialism had a dramatic negative knock-on effect on elements of promotion, development, motivation and employee autonomy. Deem (1998) identified three direct routes to university management: career track managers, reluctant manager, and good citizen route. These routes resonate closely with the participants in the present study, who reported progressing to management roles either reluctantly for their career progression or within the good citizen category, predominantly being asked to be a programme director. None reported adopting an early career decision within academia to pursue a management position:

> *"They started appointing people to senior lecturer for management roles and that led to a lot of dissatisfaction with researchers and we lost quite a lot of researchers because they were saying 'The only way I can progress in this place is to take on a management role that ensures that I can't do any research.'"* (Fiona, Story 19)

This research looked at participants' own intrinsic motivations and incentives for progression within the university. Promotion was not sought based on any form of financial reward, but rather the teaching element itself that was valued as the basis of reward. Participants did not see any pathway for academic progression based solely upon the teaching function itself within the university. All participants reported seeing was a management or research promotion pathway set out by the institution. Visser-Wijnveen and Petegem (2014) in their research also found that institutions based careers development pathways focused upon research and additional reward was given for this task over teaching within the university system. For many participants, this in turn caused quite considerable frustration and, on occasions anger. However, this thesis' participants were motivated more by their personal sense of achievement and pride within the teaching role itself. Others saw promotion linked only to administrative duties, which they were adamant they did not want to do:

> *"A lot of what they do is admin and I don't want to do that, it is not worth the hassle. The best bit is standing in front of the students. The bit I look forward to, the actual teaching."* (Alan, Story 13)

> *I don't want to be a professor, I do not want to be a manager; I have no ambition like that genuinely, you couldn't give me that job. I just want to do the teaching (*Tony, *Story 26)*

Dearlove (1998: 72) also found that *"Academics believe they should govern themselves but they rarely want to take on a specific managerial job because it frustrates their research-based career progress and so when they undertake 'administration' they frequently fail to give it the time and energy it requires, offering only an impoverished management to others."* This study's participants believed strongly in self-governance and avoided administrative tasks which distracted from their main role of teaching students. Participants instead saw promotion purely based purely on a university management function. No participants in this study seemed to have exploited this management function for their own career promotion aspirations or self-promotion. This was contrary to Diefenbach and Klarner's (2008: 23) organisational change study that found *"the rise of the audit culture and managerialism have arguably been exploited by some individuals in the sector for purposes of self-promotion and*

preservation as it has created an opportunity for cronyism, rent-seeking and organisational psychopathic behavior. In this sense, the main purpose of managerialism is to increase the authority, privileges and influence of power and career-oriented managers". This, Diefenbach and Klarner (2008) go on to argue, had serious consequences for the sector in term of career aspirations of academic staff. This was certainly the case from the participants' perspectives on career development, with many choosing to steer clear of the institutional mechanism for promotion into management roles:

> *"There is no progression here for people who can teach. If you can research and you can produce thousands of papers fantastic, you can go somewhere else but taking your teaching skills it is not valued. Why are we not valuing our core? It is like, we are in a great sausage factory of HE, we are the ones that can pack the sausages the most and the best but the people who are moving are the people who are labelling the boxes. We have no rewards now. The incentive to do well is your own professional pride and if you undermine that professional pride then what you end up with is a load of staff just marking time because they are not going to be paid more, there is no progression, there is no incentive."* (Margaret, Story 3)

Two participants, Hannah (story 17) and Holly (story 9) unfortunately simply saw their careers as going nowhere within the institution, as they had focused on the teaching side which did not fulfil the criteria for promotion:

> *"I am hoping to retire soon, as my career as I have been telling you has gone absolutely nowhere. So, I have spent years and years trying really hard and being positive and I get shitted on all the time. I am entirely lost in the university sector. I have tried so hard and feel I tried so hard to be part of things and I just got left out of everything."* (Hannah, Story 17)

> *"I don't see any career progression for me because there doesn't seem to be. It is either you go up the dark side or you stay were you are doing what you want to do."* (Holly, Story 9)

5.2.5. Discussion topic 2 summary

Discussion topic two addressed Research Theme 2 to investigate what impact, if any, the institutional quality measures being put in place had on inspirational practice and academic career development. As a result of the observed rising neoliberal management practices within the institution, all participants reported some form of fracture and tension occurring as part of their everyday teaching practice. Building on literature around aspects of performativity (Lynch, 2015; Chaharbagi, 2007; Winters, 2009 and Deem, 2005), this study explored individual fractures and tensions in closer individual detail. Fractures occurring at the individual-level tended to be specifically around the strict management of systems, processes and quality measures within the institution and fundamentally the way these were being implemented and enforced. These measures were perceived by participants to increase accountability in their own teaching practice through the implementation of meso-level control levers. This study found that these controls were primarily around: feedback, assessment and teaching quality. In this sense, performativity within the university environment was seen to be reducing down the complex nature of pedagogic learning and teaching to simply numbers, which could be measured and accounted for through performance metrics and audits.

This study highlighted that the rising culture of auditing and increased academic accountability was now prevalent across the institutional layers, and could be seen to be slowly eroding academic identity and fundamentally what it means for participants own practice. This aspect enhances the work of Hayes and Wynyard (2002) who looked at performance measures impact on practices in HE. Participants spoke of the perceived quality assurance mechanisms being introduced at the micro-departmental level cascading down and limiting their own individual practices and how they went about their daily teaching norms. Participants reported the erosion of their identity due to the implementation of standardised practices being introduced, broadening an understanding of the aspect of identity struggles from previous work undertaken by Martin (2020), Jazvac (2009) and Skelton (2012).

Finally, building on the bank of empirical studies around academic career progression and development (Smeenk, 2006; Gibbs, 1995; Visser-Wijnveen and Petegem, 2014; and Deem et

al., 2007) the study has made new connections in the understanding how academics view career development and teaching practitioners own aspirations and ambitions outside of management roles. The study highlighted the deep divisions which have existed within universities due to differences in contractual positions and promotion opportunities, especially in terms of a growing divide occurring between management and academics. This was at the root of what this study found across the teaching award winners, who fundamentally felt that they did not need to be managed in an administrative way. Instead participants either wanted to be trusted enough by the institution to self-manage and regulate their work as they deemed fit and purposeful, or as in some cases, have equal status with academic colleagues managing them in a more collegiate, facilitative and supportive manner.

5.3. Discussion Topic 3: University teaching awards

Discussion Topic 3 explores *Research Theme 3: Gain an insight in to individual values and how these drive inspirational teaching practice*

I have explored this Research Theme using four separate sub-topics derived from the participants narratives:

1. **Sub-topic 3.1:** The value of teaching awards
2. **Sub-topic 3.2:** Students perception of inspirational practitioners
3. **Sub-topic 3.3:** Criticisms of university teaching awards: 'The poisoned chalice'

I begin this discussion theme by exploring the value of the teaching award itself (sub–topic 3.1), before moving onto a more detailed discussion around what students nominated the inspirational teaching award winners for (sub–topic 3.2). Finally, sub–topic 3.3 will then look at some of the criticisms of such award schemes, and in particular, how these tended to create further divisions within the institutional culture instead of celebrating diversity.

### 5.3.1. The value of teaching awards (sub-topic 3.1)

The teaching award itself provided participants with the inner confidence to discuss pedagogical matters with colleagues, and thus validated to some extent their own diverse teaching practices. It has also provided them the institutional credibility to justify their own teaching approach as beneficial and productive within the meso-institutional level boundaries, whereas it was perceived unproductive against performance measures put in place by institutional management:

> *"I suppose I didn't have the confidence to say what I was doing was right, but I have now got my face on the wall for that award thing. I've got a bit more confidence to wander up to people and say 'Could you tinker that a little bit', 'we need to push it in that direction'."* (Geoff, Story 12)

Mitten and Ross's (2016: 12) study which looked at undergraduate faculty award winners, concluding their own intrinsic motivations came purely from internal drivers: *"motivation, commitment, passion for student learning, and willingness to go 'above and beyond' to meet the needs of students."* Building upon this, the current study's participants believed that the validation of their own practice benefitted from winning the inspirational teaching award. Additionally, with other staff now recognising this fact, this in turn motivated participants to keep on going. Visser-Wijnveen et al., (2014: 652) found that motivation played a key part in enabling good teaching practice, where *"teachers were highly motivated because their perceived levels of personal effectiveness, interest and effort were all high"*:

> *"I think that one of the benefits of the inspirational teaching awards is it is a way of actually going 'Do you know what I can see what I do is actually quite good.'"* (Pamela, Story 15)

There were however value tensions subsequently arising from the award reported. Participants discussed the paradoxical fractures that existed between how they saw themselves within the meso-university culture, versus the 'outside in' perceptions of their own practice coming from micro-departmental levels. In this sense, the boundaries between seemingly productive and non-productive behaviors tended to blur in the institutions eyes.
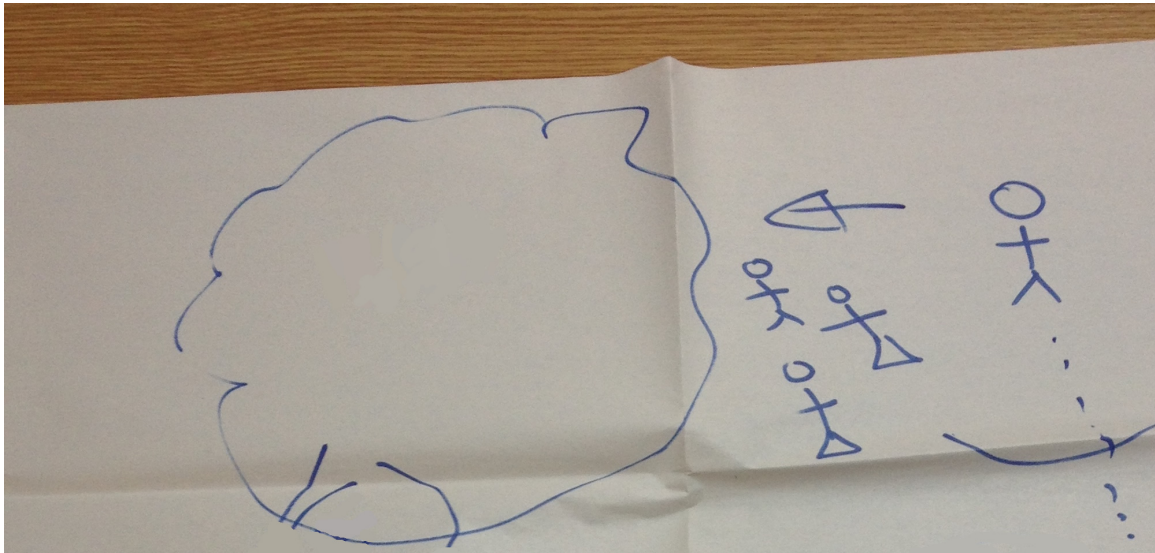
(**Picture 5.15** Pamela's (story 15) metaphor of the university represented by a large murky cloud with her teaching practices existing outside of this)

This meant that participants tended to find it quite difficult at times in terms of carrying on practicing in the way they had always done. Skelton (2012: 109) helps to explain this by looking at how the institutional constraints (i.e. policies, measures and rules) create a divide between individual values and how these manifest in approaches to learning and teaching practice. He saw that *"the enduring human struggle to 'live out' educational values in practice"* was an extremely difficult one, as participants bore witness to. Hence, there is much to learn from how these value tensions emerged and the continuing struggles of those who continue to practice in such a way, if institutions are to broaden their understanding of excellence in learning and teaching:

> *"The inspirational teacher award offered some form of coherence or credibility because I think sometimes I was always worried that the boundaries were too blurred. It is hard actually. You know that is what I love. I think 'oh no I overstepped the mark!' – and I do feel like all the time, but that is why the inspirational teaching stuff was really helpful."* (Sandra, Story 7)

5.3.2. Students perception of inspirational practitioners (sub-topic 3.2)

Bradley et al., (2015: 240) conducted a study on what students valued as inspirational teaching practice from award schemes and found that, *"the teaching awards scheme is not a measure of teaching effectiveness or scholarship of teaching. The awards are about student perceptions of inspirational teaching".* Participants in the present study talked about what their students had written about them within the university nomination process. Fundamentally, because these were student nominated awards, as opposed to the institution or management nominating individuals, participants felt they were deserving of such an award. Wording within student nominations tended to align closely with the value attributes and emotional characteristics of participants, where students reported these factors brought the subject/s to life for them.   Nominations were not about tick box metrics around assessment and feedback; instead students valued participants' passion for teaching, which shone through in the classroom.
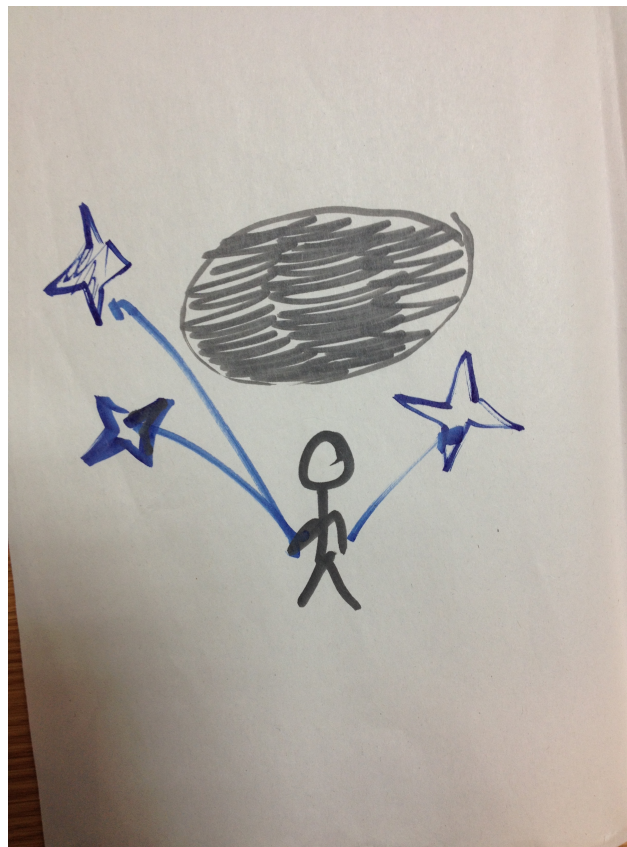
(**Picture 5.16** Simon's (story 21) metaphor of his own inspirational teaching practices shining out under the dark university cloud looming over him)

A couple of the participants believed their students nominated them because of their vocational skills, specifically how they helped develop students' own skills for use later on in their career. Other participants believed their students had nominated them for the support and enthusiasm they showed inside and out of the classroom (cf. Chism, 2006):

> *"Enthusiasm. And I support them and I think the whole accessibility thing is important. I think what I am good at is knowing intuitively what bits they are going to find difficult and where they are going to go wrong. I do a lot of supervision and that's why I got the award."* (Melanie, Story 18)

> *"Well of course it is – communication, it was compassion, it was about understanding what is going out in the wider world – well none of that you can put into systems."* (Holly, Story 9)

5.3.3. Criticisms of university teaching awards: 'The poisoned chalice' (sub-topic 3.3)

As the Literature Overview (Chapter Two) indicated, the increasing focus on metrics and performance indicators has led to HEIs needing to evidence teaching excellence through tangible award schemes. Teaching excellence has been an issue of increasing debate over the last decade and researched widely (Nawrocka and Bunting, 2019; Lowe and Shaw, 2019; Madriaga and Morley, 2016; Mitten and Ross, 2016). However, potentially due to the more recent nature of award schemes, there appears to be an empirical research gap focused upon looking more critically at the notion of student-led teaching award schemes within universities (Madriaga and Morley, 2016). Due to external policy drivers around evidencing excellence, institutions have felt pressure to be much more visible in *"their commitment to rewarding teaching excellence in learning and teaching strategies."* (Parker, 2008: 238). This has led to increased performative measures being introduced, with a commitment from institutions to evidence excellence through awarding such individuals. Fundamentally efforts should be much more focused around opening up the wider culture to enable others to practice in similar ways, but what this study observed was a further closing down of practice and limiting of individual diversity (Kay, 1993).

One participant in particular was quite cynical of the award scheme during our discussions, viewing it only as a marketing tool developed by the university. This resulted in them being extremely skeptical of actually receiving it at the award ceremony. They saw it more as a divisive method for evidencing excellence, which drew divisions between those academics who had been nominated and their peers. They felt that no one else in the university was interested in talking to them and asking what made them inspirational or special to their students. This was observed in Madriaga and Morley's (2016) findings concluding that award winners reported tensions in private and were highly critical of such award schemes. Taylor (2007: 507) goes on to badge such schemes as a *'poison chalice'* which polarise academics and their practices due to it competitive and divisive nature (Skelton, 2004). In her account, Taylor reflects on her award and the subsequent ceremony, viewing it purely a public relations performance used only for the sake of the university, "*I became public property and joined the performance of the university."* This resonated closely with one of this study's participants critical view of the awards ceremony.

Participants very much saw their teaching as a team game where everyone was in it for the same reasons. Building on Saunders and Remirez (2017) research, participants felt the awards were the embodied notions of a neoliberal agenda within this institution. In this sense, they epitomised the increasing drive for rationality and legitimisation of working practices. They again saw such award schemes as being a heavily divisive tactic for evidencing excellence at the institutional level, where one participant (Peter) in the study went so far as rejecting the award because of this:

> *"I was shortlisted and I took my name of the shortlist and last year I just let it go forward and then I got the win, which I felt very uncomfortable about. The reason that I rejected it in the first place was because, I tend to see this as a team game if you like and we are all working together and it doesn't seem right that some people get to be picked out to be better than others. I just think that this could be so divisive."*
> (Peter Story 6)

Other participants pointed to the narrow terminology of defining excellence used within the award schemes themselves, comparing it to a straitjacket from which institutions cannot break free. They saw that the university had created a commodified notion of excellence

itself and what it means in practice, played out through a symbolic ritual of giving a shiny award to a few, select individuals. Strike (1985) and Skelton (2004) pointed to this divide when trying to open up notions around excellence and related terminology, in so far as excellence needs to be much more widely embraced as a diverse term in order to influence a change in culture, not limited to just a few individuals. As the literature overview showed, the narrow award terminology around defining excellence (Shephard et.al., 2010; Warren and Plumb, 1999), especially using awards as a vehicle for this, can be seen to do little to motivate others to attain such levels in their own teaching. These award schemes therefore tended to be much more symbolic for the institution rather than development for the winners (Chism, 2006):

> *"Well I am a bit cynical about the inspirational awards anyway because I think what to one person is inspirational to another it isn't. I want to learn from other people and it just never ever happens and I think that there is so much opportunity. It is a funny thing that inspirational teaching award because people do get a bit put out – 'Well why have you got it and I haven't'.* You don't want all of the same, you want people to do things differently." (Holly, Story 9)

Participants pointed to the institution needing to embrace diversity within teaching practice, with colleagues learning from each another, practicing in different and unique ways, but with a common end goal of enriching the overall student experience. This then can be seen to create a collective culture of excellence (Amabile, 1996; Ekvall, 1991), allowing for flexibility and creativity to flourish. Participants felt strongly that students did not want all of the same form of teaching, and really valued difference and diversity in their own learning.

A few participants believed that other colleagues were all inspirational in their own right and could do things differently if only the institutional culture allowed them to. Gibbs (2012: 12) also took this view, arguing that the acknowledgement of excellence should be focused on programmes and environments not specific individuals, *"Awards and public acknowledgement of special achievement should be reoriented towards recognition of outstanding programmes and 'learning environments' that require the collaboration of many teachers, and away from public competition between individual teachers"*. One participant saw that the award they had won created resentment towards her from colleagues, further adding to the divisive view of such schemes. Burke et al., (2015: 41) also highlighted

performance measures and control systems block pedagogic innovation, and thus add to the divide between those that do and those who simply don't know how, "*individualism together with excellence as a regime of truth operates as a powerful mechanism to regulate practices and block pedagogic imagination.*":

> *"There is a suspicion though. I think, 'Why you, not me? I suppose the first year, I was intrigued to know what sort of things people were doing to get these awards, that I am not doing, but there was also a little bit of resentment'."* (Rebecca, Story 24)

Interestingly, some participants commented upon the darker side of such teaching award schemes, stating there was a negative culture arising around the award within the university. They told me that colleagues who have won more than three times were not allowed to receive the award again. One participant was also told not to apply for a faculty teaching award. Oravec (2017) explored this darker side of such award schemes and particularly how gaming and manipulation of awards data could lead to potential unfair practices going on, concluding, there were more losers in the system than winners. Oravec (2017) found these awards had minimal value in terms of the 'star players' being nominated. Therefore, despite the more transparent student award nomination process in place with the institution, there were still elements of manipulation stemming from management and individual bias creeping into the selection process for the award winners:

> *"I don't know whether you know this, another colleagues prize for winning three years in a row was not to be allowed to be nominated again. I was also told, don't apply because you won't get it. You are not kind of talking to us about our teaching, you are not valuing our teaching, you are not saying thank you for teaching, you look at the inspirational awards."* (Sam, Story 8)

5.3.4. Discussion topic 3 summary

This third discussion topic was a cross cutting theme across all four discussions sections, and in this sense, provided a unique glimpse into how individual values affect and drive inspirational practice (Research Theme 3).

This topic look at the value participants placed on winning the student-nominated teaching award. Due to the performative constraints in place, participants previously questioned if their own teaching practice which historically had been rewarded, valued and inspiring was actually now even productive within the institution's own eyes. Building upon the research undertaken by Mitten and Ross (2016), looking at faculty award winners and their internal drivers, this current study highlighted that through receiving the student-nominated teaching award, participants were able to an extent, validate their unorthodox inspirational teaching practices within the meso-institutional level. Outside of the metrics participants saw a link gained through receiving the award to the enhancement of the student experience. Therefore, in a positive light, the award itself instilled a strong sense of inner confidence and motivation for participants to carry on teaching in the way they always had done, despite increasingly restrictive measures forming around them.

However, despite winning the teaching award participants in this study still found themselves trapped in a moral void. One where their own value set around inspirational teaching practice became harder to act out in practice (Skelton, 2012). This enhanced Burke's (2015) findings around aspects of fearing emotional labor in higher education, where participants in this study knew that their own value set went a considerable way to enhancing the overall student experience and thus outwardly displayed them (hence the nomination), but much to their own detriment at times within the wider institutional culture.

The written student nomination aspect for winning the teaching award was crucial in deeming participants practices as being institutionally credible. Fundamentally, the nominations were not associated with exceeding objective university metric drivers, rather instead highlighted participants humanistic qualities, such as a deep passion for their teaching practices. In terms of specific teaching attributes students mentioned with their individual nominations, key elements across nominations were: enthusiasm, support and passion. This study enriches

Bradley's et al., (2015) research by enhancing the understanding and looking more closely at student perceptions of inspirational teaching practices within universities. In doing so, this study has built a unique case highlighting that diversity was crucial in the student nomination process, and showed that students were nominating winners on the back of their humanistic value driven characteristics being openly displayed in the classroom. This was contrary to the institutions view, believing participants were nominated because of their ability to fulfil/exceed the metric based performance criteria.

In terms of shining a more critical light on the divisive nature of university teaching award schemes, this study drew on the limited but evolving field of empirical literature arising around such schemes (Oravec, 2017; Chism, 2006). Teaching awards have been shown in this study to divide rather than unite individuals. This has been an increasing trend in terms of the growing commodification of teaching practice in order for institutions to try and evidence what good teaching practice is through an individual award, instead of rewarding and inspiring others who may feel they cannot ever strive to inspirational teaching award status.

Finally, this study has built upon this literature by Taylor (2007), enhancing the understanding of individual perceptions of such university teaching award schemes. In doing so, this study has shown that cultures which both nurture and enhance all individuals practice, rather than creating objective award schemes for a set few individuals, which are best suited to enhancing the overall student experience. In this sense, this study complements Skelton's (2004) work by highlighting that university teaching awards are simply bi-products of the neoliberal managerialist agenda introduced to evidence institutional excellence. Therefore, universities need to instead focus upon rewarding, recognising and developing the wider cultural aspects of teaching values, instead of shining an awards spot light each year on a specific few individuals working against the grain.

5.4. Discussion Topic 4: Defining a culture of excellence in practice

Discussion Topic 4 explores ***Research Theme 4:*** *Reflect on what a culture of excellence means for the sector.*

I have explored this Research Theme using seven separate sub-topics derived from the participants narratives:

1. **Sub-topic 4.1:** Teaching and emotions
2. **Sub-topic 4.2:** Teaching as relationships
3. **Sub-topic 4.3:** Embracing diverse learner styles
4. **Sub-topic 4.4:** Teaching as performance
5. **Sub-topic 4.5:** Notions of creative play and fluid pedagogy
6. **Sub-topic 4.6:** Valuing the lecture
7. **Sub-topic 4.7:** The well-rounded academic role

Discussion topic four examines participants' toolkit of pedagogical teaching strategies found within the micro (individual) level and fundamentally how these played out in practice within the meso (institutional) level. Sub-topic 4.1 begins by examining the upfront emotions displayed by participants and how these emotional drivers subsequently placed them in a vulnerable position within the institution. Sub-topics 4.2 and 4.3 cover the importance of relationships, and how participants embraced diverse learning styles in their day to day teaching. Sub-topic 4.4 examines an aspect which came out in many of the participants narratives, namely their own teaching practice entailing elements of performance (in the sense of a show). Many drew upon their own lived experiences in order to bring subjects to life for their students. Sub-topics 4.5 and 4.6 then focus upon the notion of creativity and fluid pedagogical practices to enhance the traditional lecture environment. This chapter draws to a close in sub-topic 4.7 by examining the evolving nature of the academic role, given the changing institutional environment and macro-level regulatory reforms.

5.4.1. Teaching and emotions (sub-topic 4.1)

It was strikingly clear that all the participants who had won an inspirational teaching award, placed their own emotions at the forefront of their pedagogical teaching practice. They appeared to exhibit high levels of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) and used this to inspire others around them. However, it was such open displays of emotions that were feared within higher education, due to their pedagogical diversity (Burke et al., 2015). These emotional drivers which the award winners openly displayed on their sleeves, tended to place them in a fragile position of vulnerability within the institution. Open displays of emotion within teaching which were obviously recognised by their students, shining through in their subsequent written nominations, tended to lead to *"a reinforcement of the divisions between the rational and the emotional"* (Burke, 2015: 391) for participants. This further emphasised the growing tension/s between the constructivist award winners' emotions and values clashing up against the more sterile institutional performance measures. Barnett (2011) discusses how potentially a productive conflict (between emotions and performance) can help aid diversity in pedagogy and enable multiple creative modes of teaching to flourish. In this sense participants took this to mean enabling a climate of challenge and debate to occur. One participant went on to talk about her own emotions versus teaching identity and how it was difficult separating the two elements out when pursuing new developments:

> *"Teaching is such an emotional job. The thing with my research it is very difficult to be a teacher and just have a professional identity, there is you in there as well. You can't separate the two because you are dealing with human beings and it is all about talking and listening."* (Victoria, Story 25)

In terms of participants own emotional drivers and how these created a close connection to teaching practice, Leathwood (2009) and Butler (1997) discuss having a *'passion attachment'* for a subject. Many of the participants in this study talked about their 'teaching passion' being the driving motivation within the role. However, this personal emotional attachment can also be abused by an organisation, as is the case with any form of emotional love for something. This was something that these award winners were experiencing through the gradual erosion of trust within their relationships. The passion itself is seen to be interlaced with participants'

own identity, one where values and emotions cannot simply be detached for the sake of adopting preconceived organisational cultural norms in their teaching practices. Leathwood (2009: 103) also saw that identities cannot be simply discarded and new values adopted:

"What motivates me, teaching is a passion, my experience – it is not about me anymore, it is about, it is these guys. It needs to be engaging and it is a two-way process and that's again really were people have just forgotten that it is not just about the tools that you are using it is about the individual and the way in which they deliver."
(John, Story 4)

Participants additionally demonstrated a strong sense of emotional empathy with their students, describing this as fundamentally being the glue which bound them together. In this sense, the *'passion attachment'* was obvious when talking to participants about how they practised. However, this inevitably left the participants in more of a fragile emotional position within the institution, where they were more exposed the burdens and conflicts of the organisational measures put in place to standardise practice. The emotional empathy and closeness with their students was one of the key stand out motivating factors for the majority of participants, and one which caused many of the intrinsic value conflicts for them on a day to day basis. Most stating they would simply leave the job if they were not allowed to teach in the way they wanted. Putting teaching at the centre and trusting those who do teach to do it to the best of their abilities was strikingly obvious from all whom this study observed.
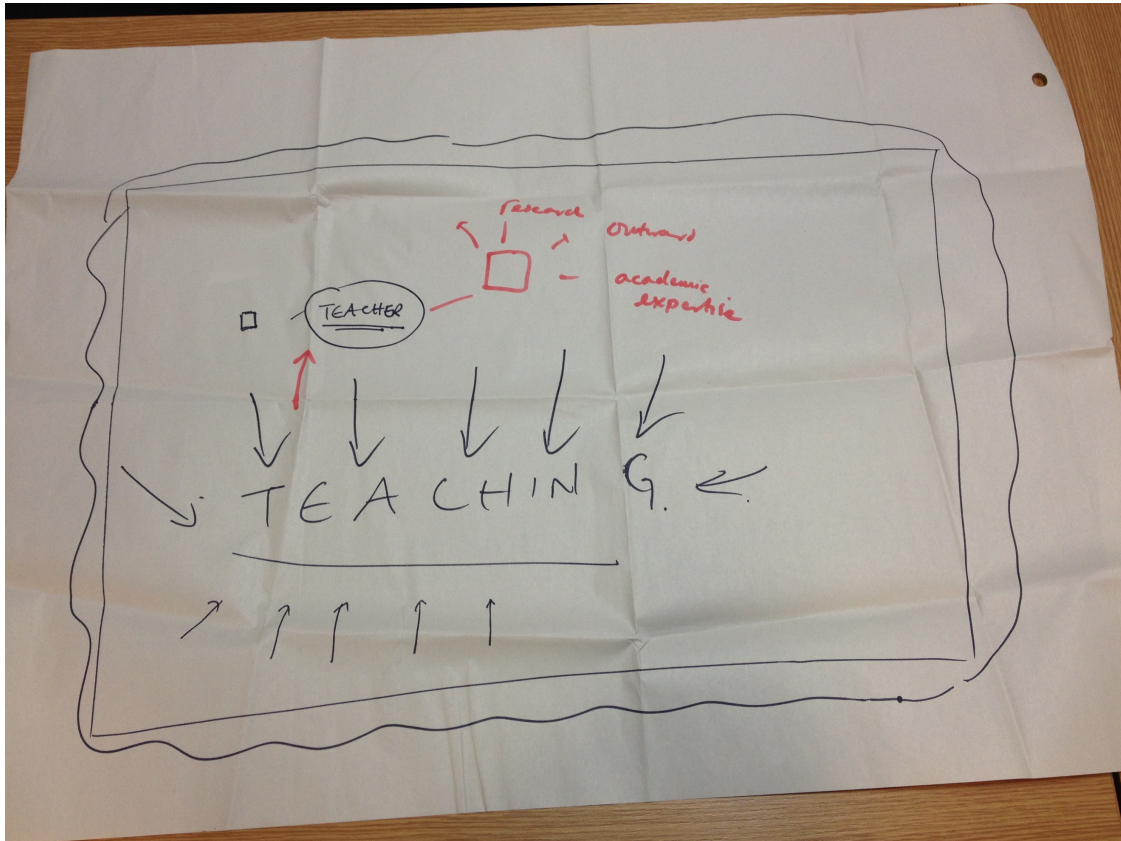
(**Picture 5.17** Rebecca's (story 24) metaphor showing her passion for teaching within her academic role)

5.4.2. Teaching as relationships (sub-topic 4.2)

Participants reported that having a close relationship with their students was a key standout element that motivated them and helped to make them happy at work, thus enhancing their overall wellbeing. However, this study found that the standardised measures the university were introducing to cope with teaching at scale, were having a severe detrimental effect on this pivotal social interaction. Beard et al., (2007: 236) looked specifically at this relationship in teaching, finding those who embraced it were highly emotionally intelligent. Key attributes displayed by them were: *"realness and genuineness, prizing, acceptance and trust, and empathetic understanding, although arguably many of these features of authenticity are under attack in increasingly performative and managerial cultures"*. The emotional aspects of trust, empathy and authenticity – amongst others – were all standout characteristics displayed by the inspirational award winners in the present study, and thus characteristics perceived by their students as making them appear inspirational within the classroom. Trying to somehow remove or restrict these characteristics was met with considerable resentment

and on occasions anger from participants. Two participants told of how it made them feel angry when the university was trying to drive a wedge through their relationships with their students. They, like others, saw this happening because of the increasing performativity occurring around them, along with the drive to make the relationships with learners like those of a consumer-based transaction:

> *"It makes me feel – annoyed really is the word – annoyed, angry, but I just kind of keeping pushing anyway because I have a real passion for students and a real passion for making their experiences amazing as they possibly can be. So, despite the owners of the zoo and those that make a profit from it you know those are the people (students) I want to support and that is what drives me."* (Sam, Story 8)

Alongside this, participants tended to exhibit higher levels of inner self-confidence and a clearer idea of who they were as an academic. This in turn allowed them to do things in their own way, as they deemed appropriate. Participants talked about this confidence and how it allowed them to shape unique learning environments for their students, albeit these might not necessarily be consistent with how the university wanted them to teach and facilitate their students. Participants reported that the once close working relationship they enjoyed with their learners was gradually being eroded by the central performance mechanisms. One participant, Philip (story 26), tells of how he felt that the cost of this move to a transactional relationship with his students had a major influence, not only on how he practiced but also the overarching student experience. Other participants also mentioned feeling an emotional numbness in terms of their classroom interactions, due to the students' mentality changing to that of a consumer. This specific element of the overall learning process is therefore not something that can be simply overlooked by an institution when thinking about teaching excellence, and one where there is a clear connection occurring between individual student identity, how they learn and overall outcomes (Herrmann et al., 2017).

Two participants, Tony (story 26) and Henry (story 16), told of how they had needed to adjust their own mind-set to being more consumer-oriented in order to survive. They were now seeing their relationship with students purely as a financial transaction and went on to discuss how, in return for the university income via fees, students deserved a high standard of teaching from them. This factor was however limited to only two participants in the study,

and more apparent in the participants who had recently joined the university from a commercial background, highlighting that a different type of university teacher could potentially emerge. Others, like Geoff (story 12) simply rejected this market-based notion of the student as a paying customer, instead clinging onto the premise of them as an independent, self-directed learner in an educational environment. However, participants still pointed to the fact that these students deserved a high level of good quality teaching in terms of the transaction being made. Gourlay and Stevenson (2017: 391) found, along similar lines, that the marketised approach had a severe negative effect on the academic-student relationships, concluding that it had only exacerbated the notion of a fee-paying customer undertaking a financial transaction with the institution:

"Well because people are effectively now clients, our students are clients, we have lost the notion of what education actually is. And the other thing that goes with that is if you have got a client who is buying something, what happens is the romance, the desire for a personal response from the student is subjugated to 'I have brought this, you need to give me this, I come in and I get it.'" (Tony, Story 26)

"They are customers. There is nothing about our relationship with students that defines them as anything other than customers. One of my colleagues said 'When are we going to stop mothering them?', and I really think we would turn out more capable and more able students if we did stop mothering them. But when we stop wiping their arse for them then I think they will actually perform better and come out grateful for it." (Henry, Story 16)

Many of the participants saw their relationship with the learners (students) in completely the opposite vein to a sterile transaction, instead clinging onto much more of an equal pedagogic philosophy of learner-to-learner interactions. Research shows that this type of teacher-learner relationship is highly effective for the students learning and development, but difficult to effectively measure in terms of achievement (Crick and McCombs, 2006), hence why the university found it hard to value or evidence through metrics. Cox (2015:1) goes on to state that *"Educators who use a learner-centered model, view learning as nonlinear, multidimensional and a phenomenon that occurs relationally within a social context."* This was very much the case for the participants involved in this study, who opposed the linear,

static stance the university was now adopting. To some extent the restrictive commodified culture forming around them drove a closer sense of both teacher and learner autonomy to form. This meant that for these participants, they now saw themselves much more as facilitators rather than directors of their students learning:

> *"I think we're fighting on the same team; the goal is to get the students to be of a standard where they can go out and change the world, not just to clock up a qualification. The students know that they now have the toolkit to go and achieve something that they might not have been able to do beforehand – that is the measure of success really."* (Ben, Story 11)

> *"My perception of students is that I treat them as intellectual partners. I teach them as people who are learning to go in to employment. I think they need to be treated as scholars and be given every opportunity to have intellectual dialogue, not just be pushed by a grade."* (Amy, Story 10)

In conclusion, a deep sense of caring, empathy and support in participants was apparent when they spoke about how they approached constructing a conductive learning environment. Elton (1998: 6) also found similar elements existed, when looking at the dimensions of teaching excellence within a university. He found the key characteristics students really valued and perceived as excellence in teaching were, *"Relationships: Empathy with students, [and] involvement of students".* From this study and the rising wave of managerialism now being introduced, it is hard to say how much of these emotional characteristics still exist.

5.4.3. Embracing diverse learner styles (sub-topic 4.3)

Participants had a strong awareness of the diverse student learning styles they were encountering within the classroom environment, and thus were more attentive, changing their approach to varying students' needs. They placed a strong value on this diverse pedagogy and how they deployed it within the classroom to enhance all of their students' learning in different ways. Embracing, and crucially valuing this difference was key in their day to day lives, rather than making everything the same:

> *"I do really value individual and new, unique pedagogies, and I think that is really important. I have become very quickly personality-wise institutionalised, very quickly, and it is a weakness and I have to be wary of that. Students learn differently, so if every tutor on the course was like me or I, we were all like other people on the programme, then we are satisfying one particular group of students and we are relating to them and I just think there is that difference of relationship."* (Nicola, Story 2)

Participants recognised their role as teacher was to challenge their students, but doing so with an equal measure of support in place. Gaining the right balance between these factors with fundamental in many of the participants' daily teaching practices. Participants seemed to demonstrate an intrinsic deep understanding of this particular pedagogy, reflecting Daloz's (2011) *'Challenge Versus Support'* model, where in order to push students up in to the 'high performing quadrant', both factors (challenge and support) need equal attention at different times for different students. Crucially, participants in this study constantly recognised the need to interpret, redefine and rethink the balance of enough challenge in the classroom, combined with effective support mechanisms put in place by them on a student by student basis. They appeared to, as Daloz's (2011) model suggests, push the students no matter their background through to the high support/high challenge (top right) quadrant to enable higher levels of learning outcomes from their student cohorts. Participants were therefore enabling their students to feel much more empowered, committed and engaged self-directed leaners:

> *"They are expecting this is the environment they have been brought up with: they know the walls, they are comfortable, they know where the boundaries are. But obviously as graduates they can't stay in there forever; they have got to get out. And my job is to*

basically, by hook or by crook, to get them over the wall because that is a big barrier

for them… They have to get over that wall and get out into the scary area of learning

how to learn." (Margaret, Story 3)

"I want kids to fall out of trees. Bollocks to health and safety! How do you learn that it

hurts? You learn by falling out of the tree; then you are a bit more careful next time."

(Henry, Story 16)

This view of mentoring of student and the impact it has on their learning and development has been widely researched and documented, highlighting that effective forms of mentoring enable smoother knowledge transmission, application and conceptualisation of concepts within the classroom (Hudson, 2013).
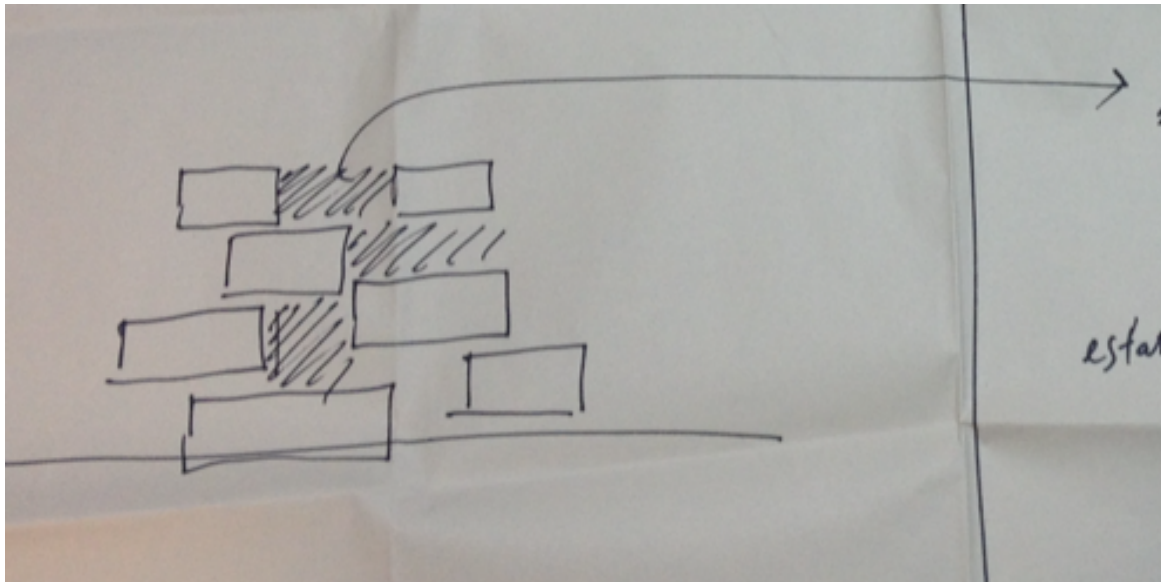
(**Picture 5.18** Craig's (story 14) metaphor indicating the student building blocks and how he fills in the gaps)

5.4.4. Teaching as performance (sub-topic 4.4)

Viewing their teaching practice as being predominantly performance-driven was a theme that came up a number of times within the participant discussions. Participants saw their own in-class activities as akin to an actor delivering a theatre performance. Some, like Alan (story 13) had backgrounds the theatre, which they said gave them a certain element of flair and confidence when confronted with students. Other participants told me they drew upon their musical or dance performance backgrounds as inspiration for their own teaching practices:

> "I joined a theatre for a bit; I used to do local performances. I quite often think of it. I do the seminars as a performance because it has a certain structure to it. I learnt a lot about behavior management through doing that and when you work in the theatres, getting an audience in and performing." (Alan, Story 13)

Participants drew greatly upon their own lived experiences to enhance students' learning. They tended to draw on these characteristics in their day to day working lives in order to make themselves stand out and deliver an entertaining lecture or seminar to their students, and thus get them to better understand the materials being delivered. Horning (1979) refers to this particular characteristic as the *'wow technique',* which provides an alternative view on teaching students and also a way to judge *'good teacher'* abilities. Synergies between teaching and performance, is a concept that has been touched upon by researchers in education. For example, Felman (2001) in the paper *'Never a dull moment: Teaching and the Art of Performance'*, relates her own autobiography and talks about how performance actively engages her audience; students talking not simply about what they learned in the classroom, but much more crucially, how it made them feel. Pineau (2005) likewise drew analogies between teaching and performance, and looked at it as a metaphor between actors and participants, specifically in terms of how teachers communicated within a classroom environment. Healey (2018: 403) saw performance in teaching as being part of language itself, where '*spoken language can immerse students in meaning through its cadence, intonation and pacing'*. Morgan-Fleming (1999) argued that teaching itself could be seen simply as improvised theatre, drawing direct comparisons to folklore stories and how they were told within society. This is closely reflected in the way many of the participants saw their teaching:

as improvised story-telling, taking the student on a journey through their own learning.

5.4.5. Notions of creative play and fluid pedagogy (sub-topic 4.5)

In line with the creative element this study observed, two participants stated that instead of viewing pedagogy in a strictly linear A-B manner, they felt it was much more fluid and dynamic. This fluid aspect of teaching was also common across other participants, with many talking about the push-back against the standardised university movement. As highlighted previously, many felt their own creative practices did not fit with the prescriptive norms being introduced within the institutional culture. Participants many diverse styles of flexible teaching practices embedded within their own practices, in turn creates far less structure but in doing so, opens up much more beneficial dialogue between learner and teacher (Kettle, 2013).

Cox (2015: 383) drew a connection between learner-centered teaching strategies, concluding that, *"learner-centered instructors favor flexible approaches to teaching that create space for students to learn about topics of interest with greater depth".* Participants in this study also clearly deployed tactics, specifically around more fluid styles of learning for their students. Building on the theme of fluid learning styles in practice, three participants in the present study discussed utilising elements of creative play techniques within their teaching pedagogies, as a way both of enhancing in class activities and also within assessment tasks. Stockwell (2016: 262) has previously recognised the importance of allowing creative play to develop for students in the classroom, finding that *"learning is a social process in which 'legitimate peripheral participation' plays a crucial part".* Stockwell's (2016) research goes on to point out that creative play allows students to develop as autonomous learners who are better equipped at solving complex problems.

Bell et al., (2014) found that where teachers implemented creative play and ideas within the classroom environment, students' cognitive learning processes flourished, and key elements of divergent thinking techniques were drastically increased. One participant within this current study made analogies to playgrounds in their metaphor drawings, where individual and team play were integral to delivery. This discovery process was central to bringing participants lived experiences into the classroom environments, creating a safe space where

elements of curiosity and play enlightened their student learning experiences and encouraged new ways for them of looking at the world.
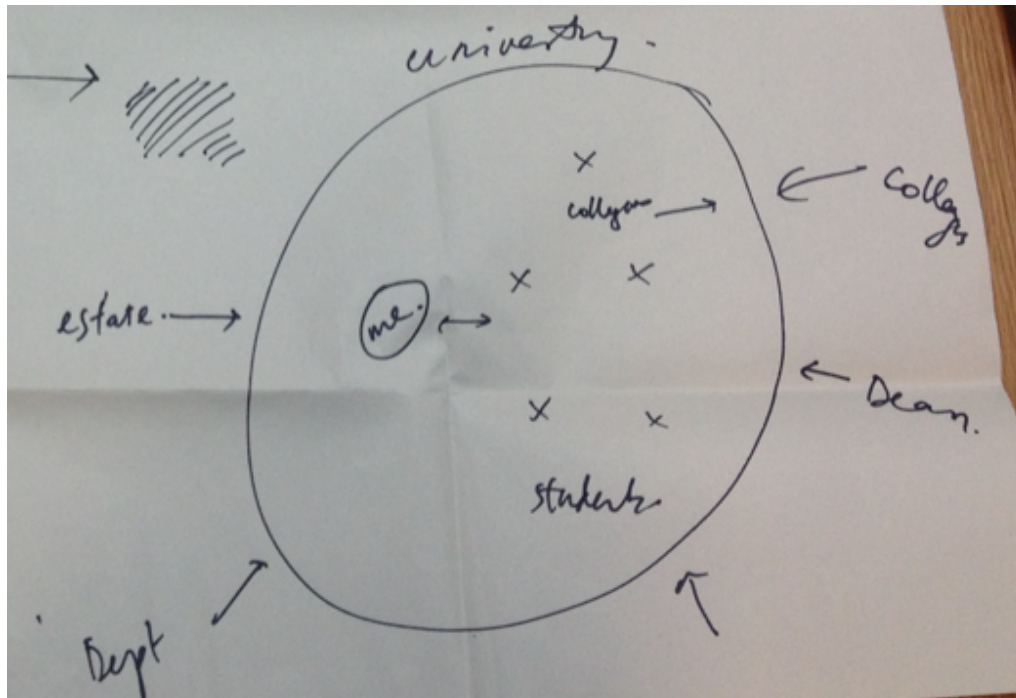

(**Picture 5.19**. Craig's (story 14) metaphor showing the safe environment he has created for both himself and his students)

Rickards (1985) saw the aspect of participants creative delivery as a *'personal discovery process'*, allowing them to escape from their own mental stuckness within the institutional culture they operated in. In this sense, participants embraced notions of seeing learning as a creative game, and one which students could play along with:

> *"The assignments are a game, so hopefully that makes them less stressful perhaps but of course there has got to be a certain amount of adrenaline there but they are a game that we are playing together. I think there has always got to be a challenge there otherwise it is not motivating."* (Ben, Story 11)

Hennessy and Amabile (2010: 575) found that if *"learners are given freedom to think, to question, to reflect, and to interact with ideas, objects and others"* they are better able to construct learning, forming understand and meaning. The facilitation of such abilities was clearly at the forefront of participants' practice in the present study, where they have created

playgrounds of creative potential, allowing learners of all abilities to flourish in terms of their cognitive development, often overcoming quite significant performative institutional barriers.
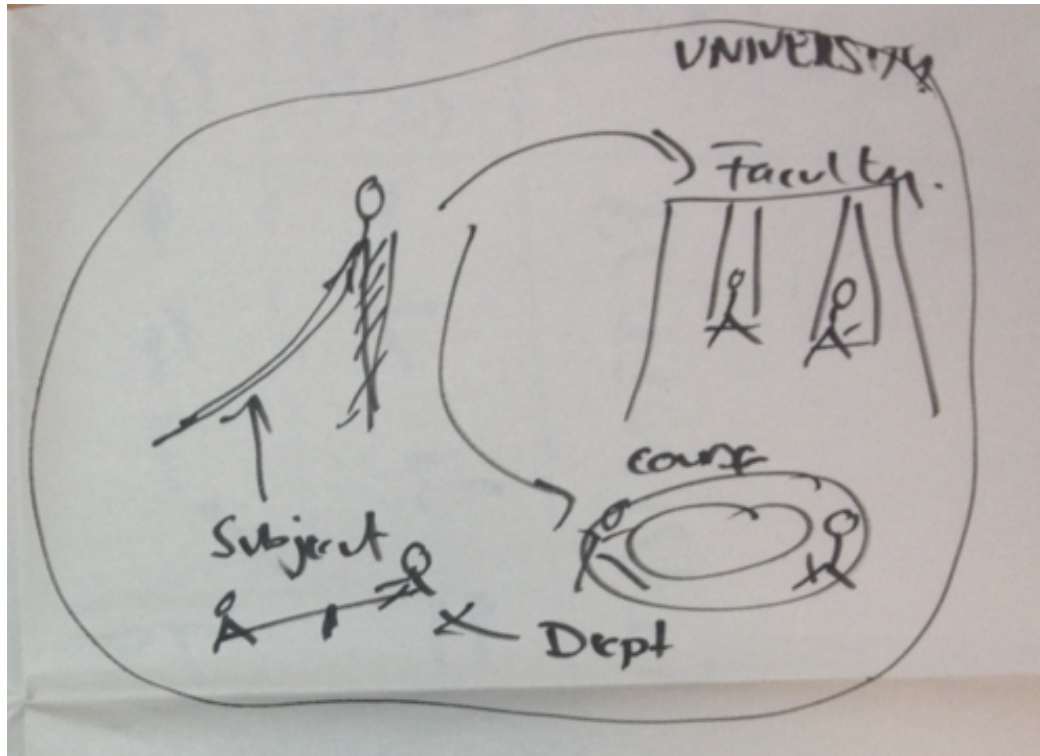
(**Picture 5.20** Nicola's (story 2) metaphor of the university creative playground)

Outside the HE context, Miller and Bizzell (1983) and Marcon (1992) have previously explained that children who are exposed to more constructivist approaches to their learning do much better in education in the long run. In this respect, participants appeared to be consciously crafting a much more conductive climate, embracing entrepreneurial elements of failure, mistakes and risk-taking in order to enhance their students learning:

> *"There is nothing wrong with failure: It is fantastic. If you can say that 'Yeah I have failed before' and of course it is more the traits of entrepreneurship. I call it the playground; just go and play! Making mistakes is no problem."*

(Craig, Story 14)

5.4.6. Valuing the lecture (sub-topic 4.6)

Participants in the present study reported that they still passionately believed in the lecture as a core teaching medium. The rationale may reflect Penson's (2012: 75) argument that lectures provide a place where the bigger picture is put forward to students: *"A university course based around a lecture series is an ideal way to achieve these aims. It has been said that there is nothing like the lecture for developing the grand view."* Penson saw, in the same way the inspirational winners did, that the lecture must be central in pedagogical developments for successful student learning:

> *"I believe so strongly in lectures still and I know there is still a place for them. I really do think that is why I got that award. I bloody love it; it is the best part of the job for me."* (Nicola, Story 2)
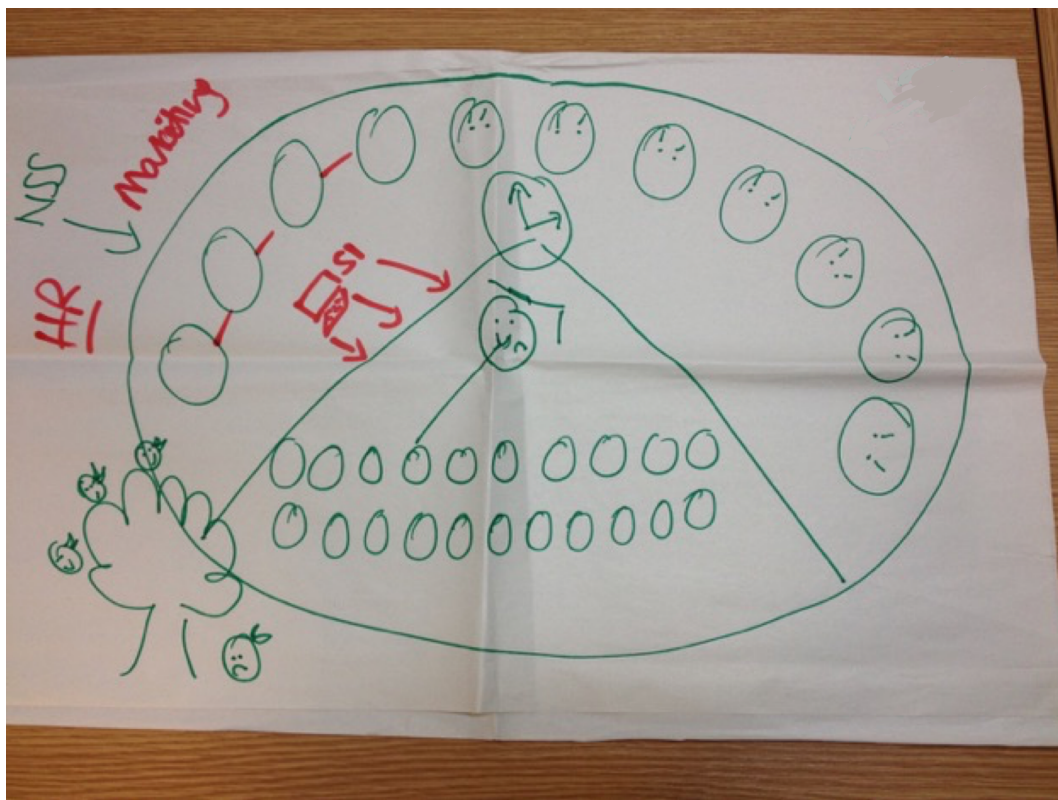
(**Picture 5.21**. Holly Story 9's metaphor placing herself smiling within her safe lecture environment)

(**Picture 5.22** Bill's (story 20) metaphor of himself safe inside the lecture theatre)

Two participants, Margaret (story 3) and Joanne (story 22), reported valuing the lecture as a formal process of knowledge transmission, stating that it was fundamental in creating a vibrant, well-rounded education experience for their students. French and Kennedy (2017) also found that there was a strong case for keeping the lectures, when they were delivered well, they engaged, informed and inspired learners.

Despite arguments for abandoning the lecture, most recently during and in response to COVID-19 crisis (Pearce et al., 2020) authors have nonetheless made a strong case for keeping lectures, when delivered well, and engaged, informed and inspired learners (French and Kennedy, 2017). These are the pedagogical attributes deployed in a formalised institutional setting, that their students deemed to be inspirational due to the way in which participants outwardly practiced. Most participants in the present study stated they tended to move away from what they termed the 'formalised' style of delivering a lecture, to adopt a far much more fluid and engaging delivery approach.

The way in which these individuals both designed and delivered their lectures, helped motivate their students to learn in new and varied ways. In this respect however, participants

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often felt a value tension arising from the notion of delivery of a pre-determined lecture through standardised mechanisms, when they really wanted to be much more creative and transmit the content using more dynamic mediums which broke free of technology. One participant, Geoff (story 12), reported a sense of boredom with lectures. However, looking at this another way, boredom was the thing that actually spurred him on, motivating him to constantly innovate, particularly around reinventing lectures and materials on an annual basis to keep his teaching practice current and fresh. Another participant, Pamela (story 15) stated the benefits of a more hands-on approach to seminar and lecture delivery, as a way of putting the theory into practice for learners and encouraging modes of active learning. The active learning pedagogies displayed by participants in this study have previously been closely linked to a social constructivist educational epistemology, which when deployed in the classroom, allow greater understanding for students, a strong focus upon reflection and help to aid intrinsic motivations for learning (Chattaneo 2017).

"I get bored easily, I get bored very quickly, I am already bored of the first lot of lectures. Looking back at them now I am like 'They are rubbish' and that is why I try and do new things all the time, to try and keep it fresh. I think it is also not being frightened to try a session out and finding that it completely bombed out."

(Geoff, Story 12)

An apparent over-confidence in participants' own teaching abilities sometimes came across at times during the discussions, evident in their body language and the clear rationale being provided around their own practice (Researchers Reflexive Diary). This provided participants with a higher level of tolerance for both failure and dealing with uncertainty in the deployment of diverse learner pedagogies. Tauritz (2016: 101) explored the notion of embedding uncertainty and dealing with complexities in a learner's education, observing that in the fluid 21st century, it was crucial to prepare learners for the demands that would be placed upon them by industry. Tauritz (2016) concluded there were difficulties for educators to facilitate this in a safe educational environment and that *"a radical change to the way we engage them pedagogically [was needed]. Research into the teaching of uncertainty competences is still in its infancy. We know very little about the ways in which teachers can improve their students' competences for handling uncertainty and (super)complexity"*.

Participants appeared to be able to shape a much more conductive learning environment (Young, 2014) for their students. One where students had a stronger sense of their own identity and crucially allowed them to fail, make mistakes and deal with ambiguity.

5.4.7. The well-rounded academic role (sub-topic 4.7)

Etzkowitz's (2008) triple helix of competing university agendas, around the three strategic priorities of: teaching, research and knowledge transfer was discussed across all participants during their narratives. Interestingly, rather than seeing these areas as conflicting, participants in this study instead appreciated the overlap that these provided for them enhancing their own teaching practice. More specifically, participants discussed how research and knowledge transfer activities could be successfully integrated within their own teaching to allow students to gain wider perspectives on employability skills. As Jenkins (2000) has observed, if the close relationship between research and teaching can be effectively combined, then it is of tremendous value to benefitting students learning. In the present study, as Geoff (story 12) put it:

> *"You tell the students how the research is applied. They all see why it is relevant to their degree, so making boring topics interesting. They see the link. They are getting their own perspective. The very first thing you do is put the what, the learning into context before you start, don't give them the learning and then put it into context. I put it into context before I start so it keeps them listening and engaged."* (Geoff, Story 12)
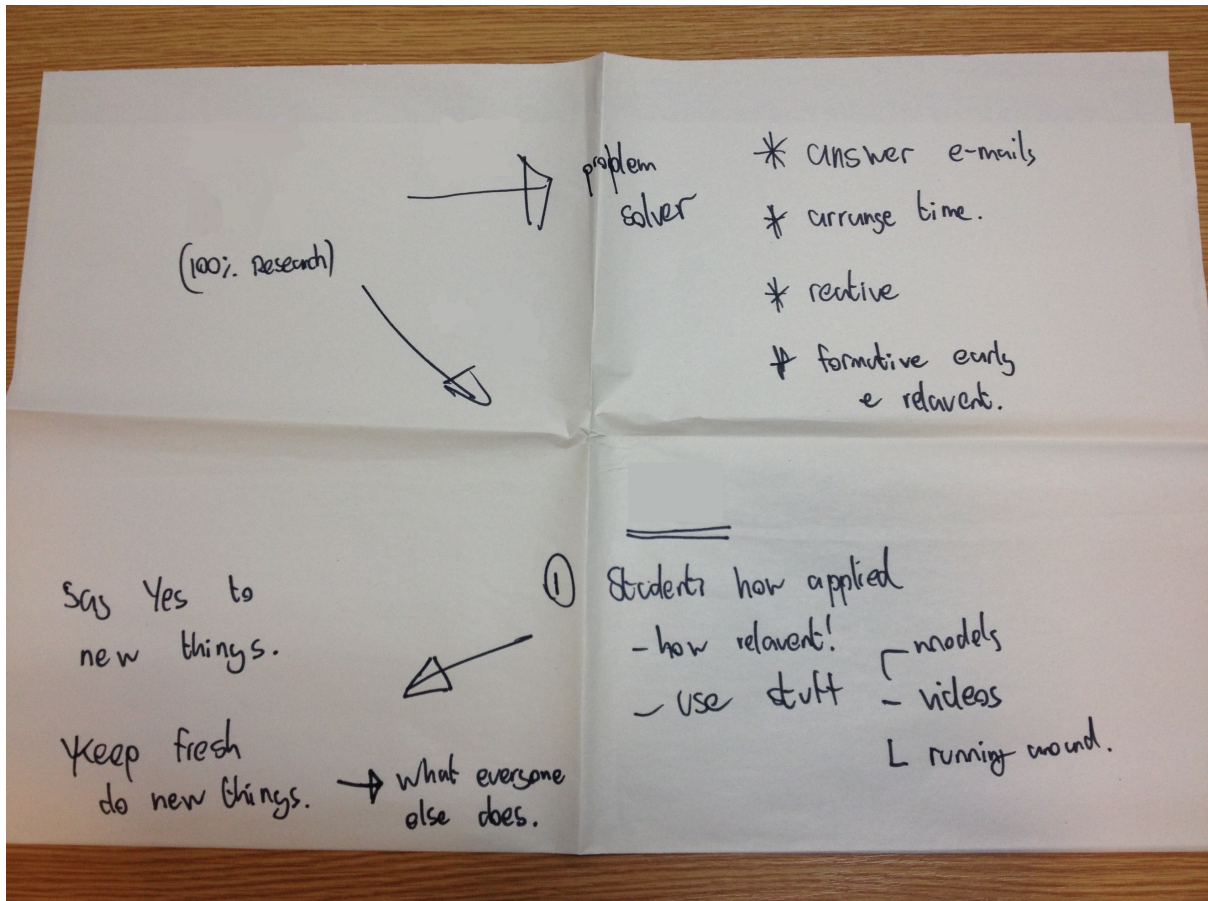
(**Picture 5.23** Geoff's (story 12) metaphor linking teaching, research and application)

Participants on the whole demonstrated a well-rounded, holistic viewpoint of what they believed the academic role should be within a university environment. They spoke at length about how research informed their teaching to make it more interesting and relevant for their students, both within lectures and also seminars. Much of this particular aspect also came across within the student nominations process, where students were forthcoming in writing about how the application of research was used in lectures to stimulate insight and imagination for them and make the topic more interesting. Crucially, participants did not perceive teaching and research as being separate entities, but instead saw them as complementing one another, as an art form:

> *"I want to do a bit of everything. I want to do research and that is how I see myself, so for me personally being in a university is about teaching but it is about research; it is about academic expertise but it is also about being outward facing as well."*
>
> (Rebecca, Story 24)

A few participants also talked about how knowledge transfer or the professional external activities they have been engaged with/or still involved with, were able to support their teaching, bringing a more practical focus into the classroom environment. The student nominations for the award the staff received really demonstrated this particular aspect was particularly valued, making the topics much more relevant and providing a wider skillset for use after university. The importance of embedding knowledge exchange within teaching practices has previously been emphasised by Davenport and Prusak (1998: 9), who claim that *"values and beliefs are integral to knowledge, determining in large part what the knower sees, absorbs, and concludes from his observations"*.

It was clear from that all participants had strong values, derived from their own previous educational and/or professional backgrounds. The tensions predominantly arose where these inherent and deeply engrained values that were often mixed with emotions, collided with the constructed reality of the institutional structures in place to shape, direct and inform a particular, objective view of teaching practice. Working a pedagogy around these overlapping and sometimes competing areas is both challenging but also created significant conflicts for the individuals involved. Skelton (2012: 264) observed these same value conflicts between competing agendas within institutions, and argued that they *"led to significant personal and professional discomfort for the individuals concerned"*. Skelton went on to note that these conflicts came about because individuals believed *"they were not teaching in a way that was fundamentally 'right' and/or morally defensible. The conflicts evoked a feeling that something needed to change and students were being let down"*. Participants in the present study articulated the same emotions, feeling guilty they had in some way let down their students, whilst trying to persevere with how they taught in the classroom despite institutional conflicts around them, increasing the personal tensions.

Two of the participants in the study were employed on research-focused contracts. They stated that they felt that this provided them with much more credibility within the university. They did however see it as a continual struggle to try and balance effectively the conflicting demands of teaching, research and knowledge transfer work on a daily basis. Participants went on to discuss how the teaching part of their role tended now to take a 'back seat' in their view of what the institution favoured for reward and progression. This meant they tended to gravitate towards areas (such as research) valued institutionally (Skelton, 2012):

Participants felt strongly that there was an apparent and stark growing divide between teaching and research within the institution. This created significant value conflicts in the form of identity struggles, for participants who were heavily involved in their teaching practice, but saw the institution instead favouring research, complementing the more visible performance indicators (i.e. the REF). Winkler (2016: 127) found that identity was built up from emotional experiences, and individuals may suffer *"strains with regards to creating and maintaining a work-related identity".* This was the case in this current study given the tensions around multiple demands being placed upon participants around teaching and research priorities. Participants appeared therefore to struggle at times with both their own academic teaching and research identities, and crucially how these fit within the overall institutional culture.

5.4.8. Discussion topic 4 summary

Using Discussion topic four as a basis to reflect on what a culture of excellence actually looks like in practice. Layton (2011: 168) highlights that universities now tended to adopt a *'narrow view of teaching and learning'* when pursuing cultures of excellence. What the commodified cultural state has now created within the meso (institutional) level, was a clear developing paradox of two existing, yet competing agendas existing side by side. These being on the one hand the universities own performative agenda around increasing metric drivers to enhance teaching practice and evidence teaching excellence, versus participants own unique teaching pedagogies acted out through diverse individual characteristics. Gunn (2013: 14-20) too observed these paradoxical discourses existed when concepts of excellence were used to promote excellence in teaching practice which inevitably were brought about by a neoliberal managerial agenda, concluding there was an increasing empirical gap (filled by this study) occurring in educational research around quality enhancement, strategic thinking around excellence and what academics actually do in practice on a day to day basis.

It was clear that within their practice, participants appeared to exhibit high levels of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) and used this to inspire and enthuse their students on the subject matter. This study therefore adds significantly to enhancing this body of knowledge by its focus upon the emotional characteristics and lived experiences of the individuals. It does so by concluding that all the participants whom had won an inspirational teaching award, placed their own emotional attributes at the forefront of their pedagogical teaching practice (Burke et al., 2015). In doing so participants made themselves vulnerable to the institutional performative drivers increasing around them. Fundamentally, not one set of inspirational characteristics stood out, but was instead it was much more of a combination of emotional intertwined elements including: empathy enthusiasm, compassion and understanding for their students. Participants had a broad ranging pedagogical toolkit they deployed in a variety of contexts to enhance the culture around them.

Play and performance contributed a large part to participants teaching practice. The study enhances the understanding of these novel pedagogical aspects within teaching, building upon the work of (Healey, 2018; Felman, 2001; Pineau, 2005). Many participants simply saw their teaching as improvised story-telling (Morgan-Fleming, 1999), in the sense of taking the

student on an unfolding journey.

Building upon the work of Crick and McCombs (2006) and Cox (2015), pedagogical diversity within each participants practice was key in unlocking a rich, vibrant culture for their students. These cultures embraced the core building blocks of relationships, creativity and play (Bell et al., (2014), as well as placing the more traditional lecture format at the heart of the subjects they teach (Bradshaw and Lowenstien, 2011). These award winners enriched the institutional culture through their much more fluid, learner-centered (Healey, 2018) teaching methods being deployed.

Interestingly, what this study appeared to be witnessing was the development of a new academic mindset evolving. One which is much broader and open to seeing education in a different light, firmly rooted in past experiences and emotions (Winkler, 2016). Crucially, rather than perceiving teaching, research and knowledge transfer as conflicting strategic areas (Etzkowitz, 2008), participants in this study more readily appreciated and accepted the overlap that these areas provided for them as an opportunity to enhance their own teaching practices. This builds upon the work of Jenkins (2000), adding in the area of academics' perception of varying institutional agendas in practice and how these play out in reality.

To conclude, this study found that participants believed that inspirational practice could grow and proliferate across the university if only the institutional culture allowed and rewarded such individual diversity for others to teach pedagogically in ways they see fit. Complementing Gibb's (2012) focus upon environments and not specific individuals for recognition of achievement, this study has shown that when a more open culture is achieved, diversity in practice flourishes and better end performance end outcomes will inevitably be produced. Enhancing the studies by Skelton (2009), definitions of excellence focused on upon narrow quantified proxies are not embraced by teaching practitioners. Attempting to standardise such diverse practice within limited terminology, only results in a dilution of creative teaching practices, loss of innovation potential (Gardiner and Jackson, 2012) and inevitable erosion of a collegiate culture.

5.5. Chapter five discussion summary: macro, meso and micro-levels
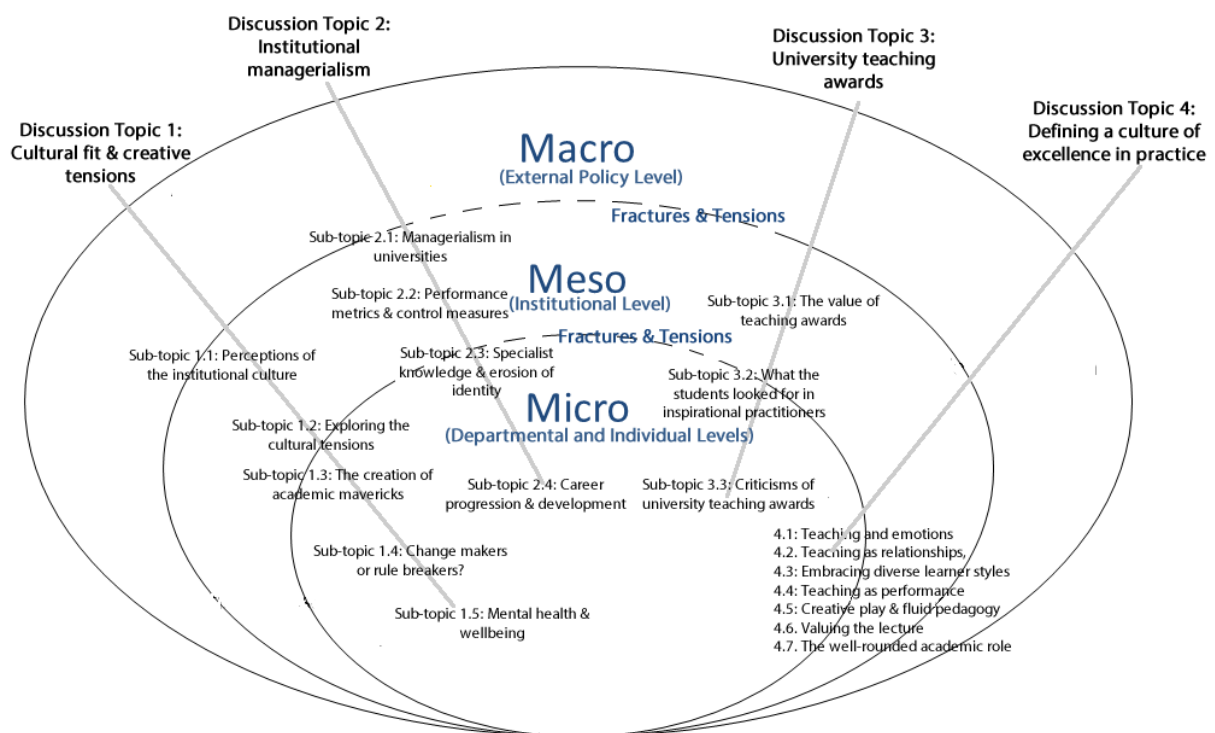
Figure 5.24. Tiered Representation of the tensions existing at each institutional level

Referring back to the tiered representation of the university environment above (figure 5.24), in order to synthesise the tensions being experienced by participants to provide this final holistic summary. The four discussion topics have clearly highlighted that the relationship between the three layers: macro, meso and micro is not static, isolated nor detached but instead is one of an interconnected, cascading movement down through the institutional environment. This relationship is often not understood in its entire complexity, or as often is the case, can be unfortunately ignored and overlooked. Discussions were synthesised to draw out the complex interplay which was occurring (i.e. fractures and tensions occurring for the participants). This study highlighted that the rising culture of auditing and increased academic accountability was now prevalent across the institutional levels, and could be seen to be slowly eroding academic identity and fundamentally what it means for participants own creative teaching practices.

5.5.1. Macro-policy level

The study found that the ambiguous and often complex nature of the macro-level policies and reforms had created ideological control systems generated from within the meso-(institutional) level, which in turn meant that individual creative teaching practices often clashed against these and pushed participants further outside the cultural boundaries. This, as discussion topic one indicated, created the notion of academic mavericks operating outside the periphery much to their own detriment. Many of these macro-level policies had been thrust upon institutions within rapid succession in a relatively short space of time. This meant that with even greater haste new governance, structures, control systems and processes were born within the meso-(institutional) level in order to try and deal with the metric requirements the state now sought. These policies then seeped through the layers of the meso and micro-levels and were materialised, and in most cases legitimised through strategic ideologies in order to re-shape the learning and teaching landscape with little understanding of their impact on individual practice.

5.5.2. Meso-institutional level

Teaching awards were a symbolic knock on effect on how these macro-level policies where interpreted within the meso-level, aimed to celebrate individual excellence rather than embrace wider cultural diversity. This had created a paradoxical state within the meso-level, where on the one hand the universities own performative agenda around increasing metric drivers to enhance teaching practice, often clashed with participants own unique teaching pedagogies acted out through diverse individual and often emotional characteristics. However, this study highlighted that through receiving the student-nominated teaching award, participants were able to an extent validate their unorthodox inspirational teaching practices within the meso-institutional level. Tightening control mechanisms engulfed each level and were enforced through the managerial agenda aiming to ensure quality control, standardisation and governance. This had the implication of further pushing these award winners out to the periphery of the institutional culture, where they sought to continue to practice how the deemed fit in accordance with their own values and emotions. A breakdown

in both relationships and communication ensued between both the meso and micro-levels of the institution, and a reluctance to question decisions or the impact they might have. At times, this went on to reduce levels of motivation for staff involved in the delivery of teaching.

5.5.3. Micro-individual level

The study has highlighted a discourse occurring between participants intricate teaching practices existing within the micro-level, set against a backdrop of a lack of support, recognition and reward for these kinds of behaviors located within the meso-institutional level. This ultimately set participants at odds with the more rigid processes found within the meso-level around aspects of teaching quality management, and thus made themselves vulnerable to the institutional performative drivers developing around them. Fractures occurring at the individual micro-level tended to be specifically around the strict management of systems, processes and quality measures within the institution (meso-level) and fundamentally the way these were being implemented and enforced. These measures were perceived by participants to increase accountability in their own teaching practice through the implementation of meso-level control levers, but were often by-products of misinterpreted macro-level policy indicators. Trust issues and cultural separation between departments and individuals was apparent further down the institutional levels which manifested within the micro-level, where participants felt stressed, demotivated and untrusted at times within their academic roles. A move to standardise practice in order to lessen risk was apparent within this lower micro level which also led to a loss of autonomy and perceived loss of academic identity for participants involved due to the erosion of their inherent individual values. At the root of the micro-level quite severe wellbeing struggles were evident. The study found that the reasons behind these were predominately due to increasing administration burdens, quality measures and metrics, and the loss of individual autonomy within teaching roles.

Chapter Six: Conclusion, contributions, limitations, reflections and recommendations

In this concluding chapter of the thesis, I synthesise the issues raised within each of the four discussion topics, as well as reflecting on the overarching research question. The chapter begins with a brief summary of key findings before seeking to establish the thesis' empirical, methodological and practice-based contributions. reflections, limitations and opportunities for future research developments are then considered, before the chapter concludes by outlining implications for both policymakers and universities.

6.1. Summary of the research study

Tackling the research question *'How do teaching award winners experience the drive towards evidencing institutional excellence'*, this study has highlighted deep and growing divides between inspirational teaching practitioners and university culture. The aim was to was uncover these divides and look more closely at what was occurring from a practitioner perspective. On the one hand, the teaching award itself was an enabler for the institution to evidence excellence in learning and teaching, embodied through the winners (participants). What the study uniquely uncovered however, was the deep-rooted value tensions these individuals were experiencing in trying to continue to practice in the way deemed inspirational. In this respect, the study has built upon the work by Deem (1993), Hayes and Wynard (2002), Skelton (2004) and Morley (2003), looking at aspects of value tensions, culture and performativity for individuals within universities.

What participants in this study were reporting was a severe narrowing of their creative operating environment (Munson, 1994). The institution had created performative controls (assessment, feedback and pedagogy) to steer them to perceived success but in doing so had created a divisive culture around teaching practice (Strike, 1985; Burke, Stevenson and Whelan, 2015). Crucially, due to the above cultural constraints in place, participants questioned whether their own practice, which historically had been rewarded, valued and considered inspiring, was now even productive in the institution's eyes (Baumol, 1990). More

specifically, participants could no longer see the causal link between their constructivist, daily teaching outputs and how these add value to the metrics and measures used for evidencing teaching excellence. Participants felt pushed to the outskirts of the institutional culture, alone and isolated. What this commodified cultural state had now created within the meso-institutional level was a clear paradox between two co-existing, yet competing agendas: on the one hand the university's own performative agenda around increasing metrics to evidence teaching excellence, versus participants individual, inspirational teaching practice acted out through unique and diverse values and emotions (Chaharbagi, 2007; Mitten and Ross, 2016).

This study found a clear discourse occurring between the participants teaching practices, which had been viewed as inspirational by their students and hence the award nomination, yet an apparent lack of institutional support, recognition and reward for this type of practice. The tensions experienced by participants due to the performative culture, tended to manifest themselves within a complex mix of emotional value tensions on a variety of levels (Grummell, 2009). Ultimately, these clashed against the performative aspects of the institutional culture, hence placed participants in a fragile and sometimes stressful position (Abourserie, 2006) due to conflicts occurring between diverse pedagogical practices and the institutional drive for standardisation (Wilkinson, 2020; Tight, 2014).

These value tensions (Ball, 2000) emerged around three distinct areas, often resulting in intrepid unresolved paradoxes (such as control vs. freedom; diversity vs. standardisation and innovation vs. risk aversion) within the institution: (i) Value conflicts predominately arose where these inherent and deeply engrained values mixed full with emotions, collided with the constructed reality of the institutional structures in place to shape, direct and inform a set view of teaching practice. (ii) Value tensions resulting in a loss of self and individual identity, due to the restrictive culture forming around them, which wasn't now allowing them to continue to practice in a way they saw fit and beneficial. (iii) Value conflicts arising out of the quality metrics being imposed, which clashed with the award winners set way of teaching and entailed a more standardised format for delivery.

Such measures have intensified within the sector over the last decade or more since the

introduction of macro-level quality measures such as the National Student Survey (2005) and the Teaching Excellence Framework (2015) to inform some sense of 'added value'. This has inevitably led to a much more marketised approach to higher education management (Hayes, 2002). The policy measures arguably resulted in an institutional knee jerk reaction and as a consequence accelerated the new managerialism movement in higher education (Deem, 1998).

This research is also particularly poignant and timely due to the institutional and turbulent market changes the English university sector is currently facing. The drive for HEIs to realigned themselves with the marketplace, given the increasing competition for students and drive towards teaching excellence places this research at the centre of a growing depository of knowledge around institutional identity, managerialism and performativity. This study has positioned itself in a niche area, where it could offer a new way of organising for excellence. It provides alternative viewpoints to the empirical research base focused around the importance of placing culture (rather than strategic mechanisms) at the heart of teaching practice.

This study concluded that excellence cannot be defined by narrow quantifiable measurements or management terminology (Gibbs, 2016). Trying to objectify such diverse practice within limited terminology is futile and only results in a dilution of creative practices alongside a loss of innovation within any educational establishment. This study has therefore enhanced the understanding of individual perceptions of cultures of excellence (Taylor, 2007; Morley, 2003) through adopting a novel Hermeneutical approach. The study has highlighted that institutional cultures that are more individualised and focus efforts on rewarding a limited few 'best' teachers ultimately prove to be counterproductive in enhancing the overall student experience (Madriaga and Morley, 2016). In this sense, this study has built upon Skelton's (2004) and Gibbs (2016) research on defining excellence, by broadening and troubling the debate around excellence terminology, focused instead upon creating open, supportive high-trust climates (Amabile, 1997; Ekvall, 1991) rather than feeding divisive cultures (Kay, 1993) through awarding individual teaching practitioners. This study is therefore crucial if institutions are to widen their understanding of excellence and how diversity within teaching practice can be enhanced and better supported through educational policy developments (Elton, 1990; Strike, 1985 and Chism 2006).

The following sub-chapters will consider how the areas of contribution to knowledge evolved out of the Hermeneutical discussions that took place. The contributions made by this thesis fall into three main areas: empirical, methodological and practice-based. These are set out below:

6.2. Empirical contributions

This study, in line with the novel use of the Hermeneutical methodology and narrative enquiry, sought to observe the feelings, emotions and lived journeys of teaching award winners. In doing so, the study has provided deep, novel insights into how these participants' behaviours constitute inspirational practice within a restrictive performative environment. This research study also contributes to the growing number of empirical management and educational research based on qualitative data collected on real world phenomena in higher education. In this respect, the thesis contributes directly to the growing bank of research surrounding managerialism and performativity, specifically looking at the impact these institutional aspects have on teaching practitioners.

6.2.1. University managerialism and performativity

In terms of practice based approaches to teaching excellence, this thesis straddles both management and educational empirical studies, and in doing so has built upon the extensive literature around aspects of teaching excellence and the impact managerialism, enacted through performativity, has had within institutions. This thesis contributes to the field of managerialism in higher education by demonstrating its counter-productive, even pernicious effects on precisely those practitioners who were meant to be recognised and rewarded by its systems. This critique is grounded in a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of experiences, extending the literature around values and emotions, providing a voice to those experiencing tensions in their daily work.

Managerialism in higher education has been widely research by authors such as Alvesson and Spicer (2016), Davis (2016), Deem and Brehony (2005); Lynch, (2015); Trowler (2010), Chaharbaghi (2007); Jarvis (2014) and Grummell et al., (2009). There appeared to be minimal research about the impact of managerialism on individual teaching practitioners, specifically looking at the impact on values and emotions within the university meso and micro-levels (Santiago, 2012). This current study therefore helps to connect the experiences of participants teaching within this institutional culture with current debates around rising forms of performativity and managerialism and the impact these have on individuals.

More specifically, this study fills the empirical gap by looking more closely at the fractures and value tensions from an individual practitioner perspective. The study drew out key insights around tensions arising when award winning individuals are trying to pursue unique pedagogies and teaching innovations, which ultimately clashed against the institutional performative drivers. One key aspect which this thesis contributes is in terms of broadening our understanding of how the performative tensions being encountered by these award winners played out on a day to day basis within each of the corresponding institutional levels. In doing so, the study builds upon the work of Hayes and Wynard (2002), Skelton (2004) and Morley (2003) by focusing more closely at how the lived experiences, emotions and value attributes of these individual teaching award winners are key drivers in enriching the overall student experience. The study therefore enhances the understanding of what specific aspects of a restrictive managerialist culture (Pritchard, 2000) cause individual conflicts with teaching practitioners and how these could be prevented.

This study enhances the empirical research around performativity occurring across the university sector (Hayes, 2002; Morley, 2013; Jones et al., 2020; Skelton, 2017; Muniesa, 2018) by providing first-hand accounts through the participants' own eyes on the impact such performative measures have leading up to the erosion of the once collegiate university model (Tight, 2014). Specifically, the study found a gap in the literature around the erosion of academic identity due to the implementation of standardised practices being introduced by management. In this sense, it broadens our understanding of the aspect of identity struggles in higher education from previous work undertaken by Martin (2020), Jazvac (2009) and Skelton (2012). Uniquely, the study has used the university award scheme as the catalyst in

order to show how macro (external) policies are being misinterpreted, with the result being complex power and control struggles occurring within the meso and micro-levels. Ultimately, these have created the university auditing culture, which has put accountability above creativity and uniqueness.

6.2.2. Cultural dimensions of teaching excellence

This study has demonstrated original contribution to the growing bank of empirical research defining teaching excellence (Taylor, 2006; Gibbs, 2016; Elton, 1990; Skelton, 2009; Chism, 2006; Morley 2016). Layton (2011: 168) highlights that universities now tended to adopt a *'narrow view of teaching and learning'* when pursuing cultures of excellence. This current study specifically goes some way to broadening our understanding of cultures of excellence and specifically how this plays out in daily teaching practice. There are limited studies currently examining the cultural and value tensions experienced by individual teaching award winners trying to continue to practice in a way that significantly enhances the overall student experience.

In doing so, this study has indicated that there can be new ways of organising, developing and managing academics, that do not necessary need to rely upon neoliberal performative measures to evidence high quality teaching outputs (Shepard, 2017; Winter, 2009). Universities are currently geared towards standardised strategic approaches to learning and teaching in what is perceived to be the most efficient and effective way (Ritzer, 1983). However, this allows very little scope for individual creativity and innovation to form within the narrowly defined quality parameters (Kay, 1993). The pivotal role creativity and innovation plays within an education setting is in this sense not new. Empirical studies (Amabile, 2006; McLean, 2005; Peter and Waterman, 1982; Bate, 1984, Ekvall, 1991) have all attempted to show a direct correlation between culture and climate, linking it to end innovation and decision-making. Whilst to some extent they achieve this, what this present study has done is to translate these to an educational context and highlight an empirical link between restrictive university cultures and how this limits pedagogic creativity. This builds upon Gibb's (2012) focus upon environments and not specific individuals for enhancement of practice and in doing so, creates a clear case for a much more open collective culture to form.

Turning this around, there were limited empirical frameworks looking specifically at what actual cultural elements were needed to unlock creative pedagogies and enhance teaching practice within higher education. This study has therefore led to an increasing understanding of the specific elements needed to create a more diverse collective culture of excellence. The study has contributed to the identification of 'Six Key Cultural Dimensions' (Figure 6.1) all of which can be seen to unlock a more vibrant, creative culture within a higher educational setting.

1. *Freedom* – ability for academics to direct their own work practices

2. *Autonomy* – alongside freedom and linking in to individual creativity, autonomy to decide how best to conduct work more broadly i.e. including teaching.

3. *Flexibility* – Ability to be proactive and flexible when working within the university.

4. *High Trust* – Formation of a high trust culture, allowing academics take risks and drive new pedagogical innovation(s) forward.

5. *Openness* – The creation of collegiate working environment. One where equity, diversity, inclusivity and transparency are embedded across all elements of academic practice (teaching, research and administration).

6. *Supervisory support and encouragement* – Recognition and reward strategies from university management focused upon quality between teaching and research. Development of teaching focused career pathways outside of the more traditional research track.

The above 6 elements above tended to clash (Gardiner and Jackson, 2012) and cause value tensions with the more rigid work practices being deployed within the institution. In the same vein, where the following characteristics are not evident, the climate as this study has shown can have a severely damaging impact on academic wellbeing and work practices (Winefield, 2008).

Figure 6.1: Six Cultural Dimensions for Higher Education Institutions (adapted from Amabile, 2006)
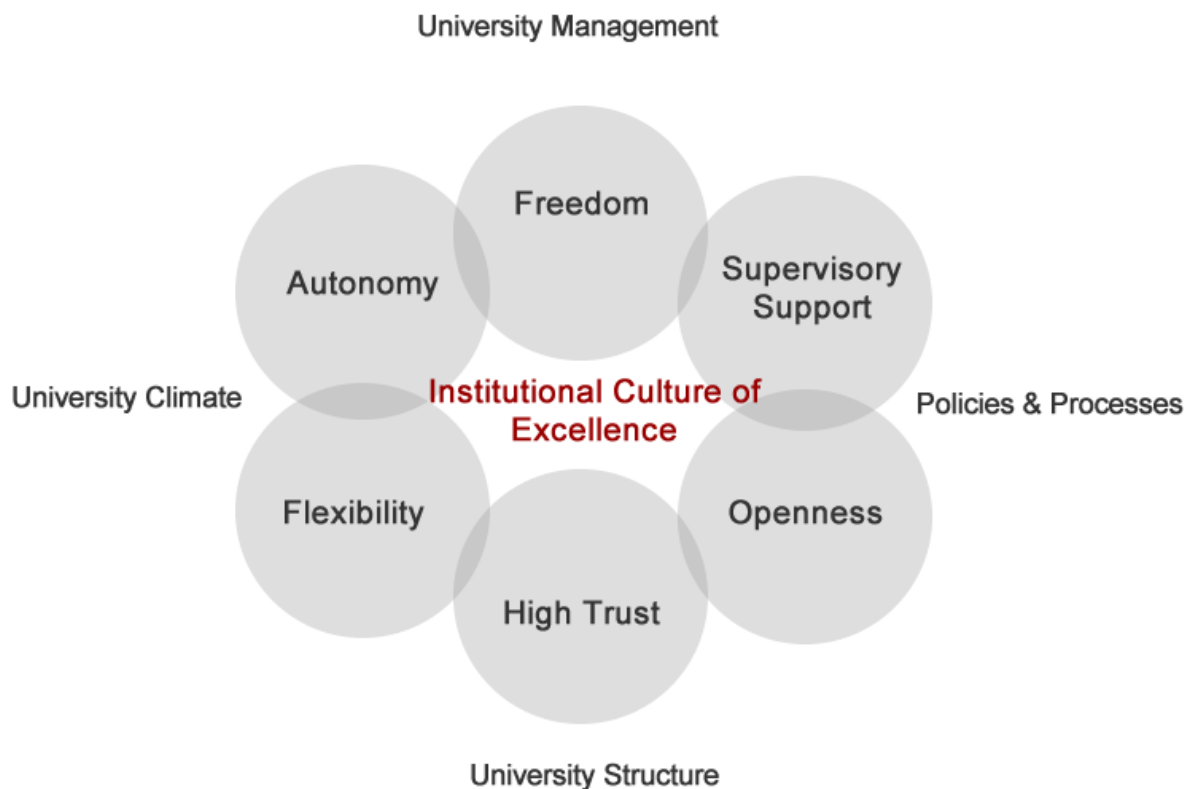
6.2.3. Deeper insights into academic mental health and wellbeing

A key empirical contribution of this thesis has been gaining a deeper intrinsic understanding of individual academic award winners mental health and wellbeing struggles. To date there has been extremely limited research undertaken around aspects of academic mental health and wellbeing in UK universities, with the majority of previous studies based on US and Australian research orientated academic staff and universities (Winefield, 2008; Trakakis, 2020 Urbina-Garcia, 2020; Fetherston, 2020). Despite this, more often data collected around wellbeing is done so at an institutional (meso) level, where survey data metrics are amalgamated across staff and lose the individual from the associated issues. The majority of UK studies have also focused attention around secondary school, university UG and PGR student mental health struggles, most recently experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic (Office for National Statistics, 2020). The academic mental health and wellbeing struggles

found in this current study were being seen firsthand from this studies participant accounts hence making it stand out as a contribution within this field.

Additionally, this study observed a sub-group of predominately teaching-focused academics. Previous research by Winefield (2008) and Trakakis (2020) only focused upon wellbeing struggles in research-orientated academics. In this respect, this current study found that some of the institutional triggers were unique to them because of their 'frontline' position placed them directly in the firing line of quality measures and student issues. This current study enhances Fatherston's (2020) and Bezuidenhour and Cilliers (2010) studies around excessive working conditions for academic staff, by highlighting the five key wellbeing factors affecting teaching focused academics in this current climate:

1. Increasing administrative burdens
2. Imposed teaching quality measures and metrics
3. Increasingly heavy workloads around teaching
4. Loss of individual autonomy and control around teaching decisions within their roles
5. Lack of promotion and career progression opportunities for teaching orientated staff

In this sense, this study has unlocked Pandora's box around these wellbeing struggles being encountered by these award-winning academics. These are usually hidden or not discussed out in the open. It is hoped the findings from this study can show how universities must better support those academics struggling, not because of their own weaknesses or inability to cope but to address areas such as workload pressures and conflicting demands this study highlighted. Increasingly the study has provided a case for institutions not to underestimate the potential of a healthy culture to enrich individuals working lives and provide purpose.

6.2.4. The notion of academic mavericks operating within universities

Discussion topic one (Chapter Five) highlighted a lack of cultural fit for the inspirational teaching practitioners who took part in the study, and as such they were labelled or perceived as being maverick in nature by the institution. This research builds on the empirical studies of mavericks undertaken within a corporate US context (Labarre and Taylor, 2006; Ray, 1997; Semler, 1993; McMurry, 1974). These studies were predominately trait orientated and examined 'maverickism' in terms of entrepreneurship and promoting innovation within the corporate sense. The findings indicated that around a third of the participants in this current study reported labelling either themselves, or being labelled by the institution as mavericks. As discussed, these award winners were not as McMurry's (1974) would describe as "nonconformist" (Ray, 1996: 21) but instead inspirational teaching award winners who had been forced by the institutional performative measures to operate on the outskirts of the cultural parameters.

This study therefore contributes to an empirical research gap in terms of taking the traditional corporate, predominately US notions of maverick entrepreneurs whom choose to operate outside of the organisational culture; placing this in a public sector university context. The study grounds the notion of academic mavericks and subsequent value tensions in working on the cultural fringes within a university environment. Crucially these individuals were not maverick of their own choosing but being labelled as such because of their unorthodox teaching practices being a bi-product of the divisive culture forming around them. This placed participants' in a fragile, unstable position within the institution, and ultimately had implications for their own wellbeing. In doing so, the study provides a clear rationale why such maverick behavior is extremely counter-productive to the overall institutional culture. Whilst it is fine for a few individuals each year to be recognised for their achievements doing so against the odds, there is much more wider benefit to be had by freeing up the culture so that more individuals can practice in diverse ways.

6.3. Methodological contributions

6.3.1. Application of the Hermeneutical methodology within an educational context

The application of a Hermeneutical methodological framework, combined with narrative and metaphorical story telling methods was novel in the way it was applied within the contexts of both management and educational research (Morgan, 2006; Musson, 2014; Alvesson. and Skoldberg, 2009; Guillemin, 2004; Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). This has provided a contribution specifically to extract deeper meaning and understanding around diverse individual values, emotional struggles and lived experiences, by utulising this form of methodology within a university performative context. In this sense, the choice of methodology was crucial to unlock and interpret the ambiguous elements of organisational culture, from teaching award winners lived experiences as a snapshot in time.

More traditional quantitative research methods, as Gummesson (2000: 36) highlights only look at the 10% of observed practice. By using this methodology, I was able to an extent gain a glimpse into the other 90% (off the radar activity). This choice of adopted methodology, supplemented with a variation on Gadamer's (2013) Hermeneutical Spiral allowed me to gain a much deeper understanding of this complex cultural phenomena's such as: managerialism, performativity and teaching excellence taking place in higher education from an individual perspective. As Geertz (1973) pointed out, when looking at aspects of culture, this is something we cannot do with the more traditional scientific research methods, and must instead turn our efforts to the more complex interpretative methodologies in order to elicit useful meaning. In other more positivist research studies, getting down to this level of laid bare emotions has simply not been possible. It also allowed a commonality between research and participants and access to a deeper level of individual enquiry specifically around the emotional struggles these award winner academics were experiencing in continuing to teach in the way they had done within an increasingly restrictive environment. In this sense, it is a valuable addition to quantitative methodological research, helping to provide a suitable platform, from which to understand such a complex socially constructed phenomenon of lived experiences of individuals, emotions and values.

Inner experiences (Dilthey, 1923) such as emotions and values are hard to capture at the best of times. What this methodology essentially did was bridge the gap between participants own feelings, intrinsic values, lived experiences and inner struggles, combined with my own interpretation, knowledge and understanding of those experiences. This was no small task and I am not alone in this, as researchers have struggled with this concept of being and meaning across the ages (Heidegger, 1927). Hermeneutics therefore allowed a shared frame of reference to emerge between myself and participants. Indeed, it simply would not be the case that the novel empirical contributions such aspects as mental health and wellbeing, academic mavericks, alongside deep emotional views on management and performativity arose out of the conversations without Hermeneutics. This was due to the methodology opening up dialogue through its iterative nature. It therefore allowed participants a chance to discuss in detail topics which were important to them. This additionally highlights the critical role this form of qualitative empirical research has in an educational setting.

Hermeneutics utilised open modes of dialogue and interpretation in order to extract meaning from a phenomenon which traditionally is hard to study and explain in any sort of empirical format. Therefore, the discussions I held with participants, unlike most, were not formatted around pre-defined questions, but instead utilised unstructured approaches to conversation. For example, the themes and level of detail being discussed were driven by participants and therefore they had a sense of authority and ownership within the discussions. In this sense, Hermeneutics allowed them to open up a lot more around topics being discussed. As researcher, I was there to direct and interpret meaning out of what they were saying but this meant that I did not know what would come out of each discussion, hence keeping my own mindset open around the emergent themes.

6.3.2. Application of visual metaphors

Complementing the Hermeneutical approach was the novel way the story telling, combined with the use of metaphor drawings was applied in qualitative research terms in order to open up access to dialogue around lived experiences and emotions from each of the academics.

The contribution arises in how metaphors were being placed centrally within the discussions as a method to unlock and open up dialogue with each participant. In essence, the metaphor drawings directed the discussions and made the process of interpretation of events participants were experiencing much smoother. Drawings were used to highlight participants feelings and emotions of where they saw themselves in the culture, an aspect which is often easier conveyed with metaphors than using words. The drawings were rich in detail and unique to each participant. They were a vehicle for each participant to convey their struggles through their own representation, whether that be a large elephant or a shepherd in a field of students. Each metaphor provided a truly unique glimpse in to their own mindset and perceptions of the thesis's themes. Since the discussions had no predefined structured questions, the metaphors enabled (to some extent) a shared framework of enquiry from which the various topics could be launched from. For example, they allowed order to be found in the complexities of cultural phenomena such as managerialism, performativity and culture. Participants struggled to express some of these aspect through words alone, and being able to put pen to paper allowed a deeper access in to the meaning of these and wider forms of expression.

This aspect enhances previous work around metaphors by Morgan (2006), Musson (2003), Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) and Guillemin (2004). By utilising this form of metaphorical enquiry, it provided the thesis with a rich source of insight into the emotional struggles and turmoil participants were facing, whilst adding a layer of understanding around aspects of culture and individual value tensions. Uniquely, this study allowed the metaphors to direct participants' discussions, in the sense of telling their story through an evolving timeline (Heidegger, 1927). There was much insight to gain from this novel approach, particularly in the areas of ambiguity around culture and perceptions of complex working practices, such as

participants own perceptions of how they saw the performative measures forming around them.

6.3.3. Narrative story telling

Supplementing the metaphors was the aspect of story-telling. Narrative storytelling allowed for a much wider socio dimension of enquiry around the thesis topic being explored. In doing so, a rich sense of individual values emerged out of the stories, and the impact culture had on each participant. Indeed, stories in society are not new and we have been telling the historical accounts of individuals struggles for generations. In this sense, the thesis built on this and was able to keep the humanistic aspect to the research and to record a moment in time from unique individual viewpoints on aspects such as how they saw their own teaching practice fitting with the institutional norms. The stories were a vehicle to provide structure around the experiences that each participant discussed and the inner tensions they conveyed.

The stories developed as part of this thesis allowed for the issues being discussed to keep their own individual authenticity throughout the process, and not become trivialised or diluted. Enhancing Musson's (2003) work around values and social practices within organisations, the stories allowed unique new insights and meaning to be explored through open dialogue between participant and researcher in a trusting environment (Ricoeur, 1978). Uniquely narrative story telling was applied in order for participants to more clearly express their own understandings of events during a lived moment in time within a university context (Musson, 2014; Mishler, 1986).

As researcher and storyteller, I had the difficult task of piecing together the narratives in to a coherent account. In this sense, the stories helped bring out the issues being discussed by each participant and (to some extent) keep some sense of the associated emotions and feelings with them. This was a key part of the story telling approach, as we can all remember reading a story which evokes our own inner sense of emotion and empathy with the person we are reading about. As humans, we can all remember the stories that touched an emotional chord with our own lives and difficulties we face. That was the novelty in presenting 26

carefully crafted narrative account of the tensions these individuals faced on a daily basis, told through these teaching award winners own eyes.

6.4. Practice-based contributions

6.4.1. Enhancing understandings around university teaching awards schemes

This study adopted a unique perspective on student nominated teaching award schemes, in so much as seeing it through the award winners own lens. There has been limited empirical literature focused specifically upon the individual award winners themselves, with most studies choosing to look at perceptions of inspirational teaching practices more broadly in terms of the award itself from an evidencing excellence perspective (Bradley et al., 2015; Mitten and Ross, 2016; Chism, 2006; Davies et al., 2012). The research was unique in the sense it had observed a collection of individuals for whom winning an award was a celebration of their achievement and to some extent helped to validated participants' creative and unconventional teaching practices occurring within a performative institutional culture. Specifically, this study has built a unique case highlighting that diversity was crucial in the student nomination process, and indicated that students were nominating winners on the back of their emotional value driven characteristics (Burke, 2015) not the institutional assumption of enhancing metric based drivers (e.g. NSS, TEF).

The study contributes to the limited literature on the negative or darker side of university teaching award schemes (Oravec, 2017; Chism, 2006). It does so by finding increased forms of institutional propaganda around such schemes only further divide institutional cultures rather than uniting. Participants had strongly held negative views on the teaching award they had been given, some even turning it down. The award also had the effect of making participants stand out and appear different in some way amongst academic peers, hence being subject to resentment and hostility on occasions. In this sense, we can gain a better understanding of the impact of such schemes, which are designed to celebrate best practice, have the opposing effect and limit it.

6.4.2. Defining what constitutes inspirational teaching in practice

Gunn (2013: 14-20) indicated an increasing empirical practice gap in educational research around what academics actually do in practice within the classroom. This study enhances this field by further enhancing our understanding of which specific individual pedagogies and teaching characteristics students were recognising as being inspirational. This has the duality of further enriching the institutional culture, whilst also giving the academics support and development opportunities to aspire to teach in their own way.

In terms of specific inspirational drivers, this study filled a practice gap by looking at specific individual value attributes associated with winning the award. In conclusion, these attributes were not unique to those individual award winners or something which may seem unattainable to others, but were instead attributes which could be widely embraced and uniquely applied, given institutional support. If the culture allowed, others would and could practice in similarly diverse pedagogical ways.

It therefore contributes to the growing field of defining inspirational characteristics, highlighting *four distinct pedagogical characteristics* within participants practice, outlined within their award nominations:

1. *Emotional values driving practice* – including opening displaying empathy, enthusiasm, compassion and understanding for their students (Burke et al., 2015). Enhancing the work by Beard, Clegg and Smith (2007) who examined close teaching relationships, this study found that this particular element gave rise to high levels of trust, genuineness, empathy and attachment for the subject. Therefore, at the heart of it this study has showed that putting emotions and values at the forefront of teaching practice is key to inspiring others. Each and every single academic can bring diversity into the classroom if the culture permits.

2. *The art of play and performance* – Performance based approaches to teaching practice and how participants drew upon elements of their own personal performance experiences added greatly to the enhancement of the subjects. Whilst there is some

research around this aspect (Horning, 1979; Felman, 2001; Pineau, 2005; Morgan-Fleming, 1999), this is all rather dated and limited to a few instances of performance art used within classroom environments to enhance communication and language. This study further expands our understanding of how elements of lived performance and past experiences can create the 'wow technique' (Horning, 1979) and how these were applied practically to bring the subject matter to life. In this sense, this study shows how important language and communication is in order to bring complex topics to life, through the use of lived experiences and stories (Morgan-Fleming, 1999). This study further enhances the work of Pineau (2005) who looked at metaphors between actors and participants, alongside Healey (2018) whose study framed language as being a core aspect of teaching itself.

3. *Embracing pedagogical diversity* – Building upon the work of Crick and McCombs (2006) and Cox (2015), pedagogical diversity within each participants practice was key in unlocking a rich, vibrant culture for their students. These cultures embraced the core building blocks of relationships, creativity and play.

4. *Learner-centered relationships* – Creating equal pedagogic philosophy of learner-to-learner interactions (Crick and McCombs, 2006; Cox, 2015) for their students to becoming more self-directed, take risks and become more creative thinkers (Hennessy and Amabile, 2010).

6.4.3. Informing teaching focused career progression and development pathways

The study has contributed around a better understanding of teaching orientated academic career ambitions and goals within a university. Enhancing the bank of empirical studies around academic career progression and development (Smeenk, 2006; Gibbs, 1995; Visser-Wijnveen and Petegem, 2014; and Deem et al., 2007) this current study has highlighted how predominately teaching focused academics view their own career development and aspirations. Participants pointing out they did not see any career promotion in to management roles or having any prospects within their own teaching role. The study additionally highlighted the deep divisions which have existed within universities due to

differences in contractual positions and promotion opportunities, especially in terms of a growing division between management and academics. This meant that universities need to readdress the balance of equity between research and teaching status, and in doing so define clearly outlined pathways of promotion for teaching practice outside of the research orientated performance indicators.

6.4.4. Identification of a fifth type of Value Orientated University Culture

Building upon the foundations of McNay's (1995) Four Types of University Culture, this study has contributed a fifth type, termed *Value Orientated.* Table 6.1 below indicates that this type of culture encompasses emotions, lived experiences and passion drivers for learning and teaching. To be clear, this is not a distinct cultural subset, but rather a cross-cutting aspect (found across all discussion topics in Chapter Five) of the other four types of culture, and one which in the current context of marketised HE is uniquely individually driven.

The key characteristics (as outlined in table 6.1) the Value Orientated Culture embodies are the *dominant value (1)* of individual values and emptions. What this study found is that is that this type of value orientated culture is a counter culture to the materialising performative movement in higher education and a shift is now needed. It places individual uniqueness at the forefront of practice, quashing the standardisation approach to learning and teaching. It is only placing values and emotions central in the organisational culture, that new innovations and enhancement of student experience with form. What we have seen over the last few years is that universities are relying on the 'good will' of their staff to innovate. Contrary to this, what this new cultural dimension highlights is that to stand any chance of long term sustainability the 13 associated attributes of the Value Orientated Culture need to be embedded across all functions (administrative, management, quality) of the university operating environment.

One of the key elements, is the role of *central authorities (2)* being facilitative, and the dominant unit within the university being located at the micro (individual) level. Within this cultural type the control span of implemented procedures and policies are loosely coupled, rather than tightly enforced. This allows for individual autonomy and freedom in daily job

design (teaching), thus having a strong focus on the *internal referent (10)* being the reclamation of the professional academic role.

Where this cultural type differs most considerably from the other four is in the areas of *dominant unit and management style (4* and *6).* There is a strong focus on placing lived experience at the forefront of practice within this *culture (3)*, and in doing so, management as a function takes on much more of a nurturing/facilitative based role to enhance personal development and encourage *pedagogical diversity (13).* It was clear from the study's findings, that all participants had strong values and views, created from their own previous educational and/or professional backgrounds which provided them with a clear sense of academic identity. They did not see themselves as being servants of the administrative core anymore and wanted to reclaim control around their own *professional practice (10).* They placed these values at the forefront of their everyday practices, and it was this that made them stand out to students within the classroom.

The student as customer mindset has now been seen to have taken hold across the sector, and this has dramatically changed the *student status (12)* and fundamental relationship they have with the university. It is only by embracing the notion of partnership working in the Value Orientated Culture that progress with be made in chancing this mindset. The study found that where the student-academic relationship is on an equal par, enhanced learning and development will follow. The study also found that it is only through this aspect, that many of the quantitative measures of the student experience (NSS) will be successfully enhanced.

Thus, what we are seeing over the last few years is that the *'environmental fit (8)'* is not a good one for most institutions and the shift in balance of priorities must now change again. Institutions therefore are having to reply on their inherent cultural attributes and individual values to circumnavigate a way through this complexity. *Timeframes of change (7)* are now much quicker and dynamic across the HE sector, therefore institutions must value longer term internal strategic approaches and place trust at the heart of this culture. It is only through doing this that more organic and proactive *cultural forms (9)* which stimulate creative and innovative teaching practice will flourish.

This type of culture matters now more than ever because when faced with times of increasing instability, uncertainty and constant change. Institutions once again find themselves placed in a vulnerable position with senior management not knowing what decision to make (or not necessarily making the right ones). The *dominant decision-making unit* (4 and 5), which once relied upon corporate strategic insights are now needing much more *collective decision making and experiences* (3) of individuals in order to successfully solve (or lessen) more complex problems they are facing.

Table 6.1 McNays (1995: 109) Summary of Characteristics of Four Cultural Models (adapted to include the fifth (in red) - Value Orientated Cultural Ideal)

Factor	Collegium	Bureaucracy	Corporation	Enterprise	Value Orientated
1: Dominant Value	Freedom	Equity	Loyalty	Competence	Values and emotions
2: Role of Central Authorities	Permissive	Regulatory	Directive	Supportive	Nurturing
3: Handy's organisational culture	Person	Role	Power	Task	Experience
4: Dominant Unit	Department	Faculty/committees	Institution/senior management team	Sub unit/project teams	Individual
5: Decision Arenas	Informal groups networks	Committees	Working parties with senior management team	Project teams	Autonomous collective
6: Management Style	Consensual	Formal/Rational	Political Tactical	Devolved leadership	Facilitative, professional and supportive
7: Timeframe	Long	Cyclic	Short/mid term	instant	Long-term, trust driven
8: Environmental Fit	Evolution	Stability	Crisis	turbulence	Sustainability

9: Nature of Change	Organic innovation	Reactive adaption	Proactive transformation	Tactical flexibility	Organic and proactive
10: Internal Referents	The discipline	The rules	The plans	Market strength/students	The academic professional
11: Basis for evaluation	Peer assessment	Audit of procedures	Performance indicators	Repeat business	Teaching diversity
12: Student Status	Apprentice academic	Statistical	Unit of resource	Customer	Partnership
13: Administrative Roles: Servants of…	The community	The committee	The chief executive	The clients, internal and external	Pedagogical enhancement and development

6.5. Researcher reflections

6.5.1. Reflections on the process

Reflecting back on the research process, to some extent the part-time PhD study route allowed an opportunity for a longer period to study a cross sectional group of university teaching award winners. Additionally, it also allowed me to track wider developments within the higher education sector (such as TEF) as they unfolded and the impact this would have on the study's findings. Adopting Hermeneutical modes of dialogue and interpretation in order to extract meaning from a phenomenon which traditionally is hard to study and explain in any sort of empirical format isn't an easy choice for any research let alone a PhD thesis. For those new to research like myself; due to Hermeneutics lack of structure, methods and constantly evolving interpretative nature (Caelli, 2000) it has meant that within my own role, throughout the process reflexivity needed to be constantly demonstrated and tested. I had to demonstrate an awareness of the responsibility to understand my role as researcher, as well as being upfront with myself and participants around prior knowledge on topics being discussed (for example, quality management and teaching) alongside my own emotional baggage (views, feelings and beliefs) surrounding my role as a teacher along with an appreciation of the shared social context (university sector) we were operating within. Essentially, I had my view of the world but wanted to gain a glimpse in to how other academics perceive the world around them, and the only way to do so was to lay bare my own pre-understanding, experience and emotions with others in order to progress up the Hermeneutical Spiral and evolve a fuller picture (whole) of the specific tensions that were occurring. Gadamer (2013) see all of this 'baggage' as a tremendous benefit when using Hermeneutics, as it allows a fuller understanding of the phenomena under investigation allowing dialogue to be opened up. It is just this that allowed a closeness of relationships to build the duration of the discussions, and thus enabled the ability to extract unique new empirical themes, such as exploring teacher's mental health and wellbeing. Gadamer (2013) termed this a *'true conversation'* and one which assumes difference, roles and intent.

The award itself being voted for by students and outside of the internal politics provided this study with a unique opportunity to observe a phenomenon from different perspectives. Most

studies looking at awards have focused upon a particular faculty or university department; this study had access to award winners from right across the university, and therefore provided contrasting findings from a range of varying subject perspectives. Commonalities around culture could therefore not be taken for granted, as were being seen across different faculties in a similar way. Therefore, tensions being experienced by a particular group of participants, despite being in different departments could be grouped together in order to make sense of.

On reflection, this approach allowed me to remain in a longer state of ambiguity than a pre-determined deductive approach would ever allow: ambiguity and living with uncertainty were key aspects of the approach, in the sense that they are to be: "*interpreted and reinterpreted – not explained in any scientific sense. The 'texts' are highly affected by the readers' social, political, and cultural biases*" (Stanish, 2008: 1360). This element also meant that many of the novel and unexpected discussion themes and research contributions around culture emerged. As a researcher, I had to be comfortable with this aspect as it was far removed from a linear pre-defined causal research process. This involved me revisiting previous stages, looking deeper in to areas, and reviewing and refining stories based upon my new-found understandings, knowledge and views.

6.5.2. Challenges faced and how they were overcome

The Hermeneutical approach did bring with it some considerable challenges from a researcher perspective. As McCaffrey (2012: 215) highlights about the approach: "*every attempt to undertake a research study in the name of philosophical hermeneutics is beset with difficulty from the start.*" Along these same lines, one of the key challenges was trying to fit the unorthodox Hermeneutical methodology, combined with the process of meaning and interpretation (Gummesson, 2000) into a traditional PhD thesis format. This was difficult in the sense of the researcher trying to stay true to the deductive aspects at each stage moving up the Hermeneutical spiral (Gadamer, 2013). Even Gadamer (2013) assumes that there is no set method for such research, and instead sees Hermeneutics as a philosophy from which we can use to interpret the world around us. Whilst this can also be seen to give the researcher

supreme freedom and flexibility in how they approach studies, such freedom is a double edge sword when it comes to a more traditional thesis write-up. Additionally, unlike more traditional research methodologies I didn't have a prior theoretical lens from which to launch my investigation. Caelli (2000) also notes that there is a lack of research methods around this particular type of approach and how we therefore understand them. As researcher, this was extremely challenging as I had to make my way round complexities, rather than being reliant upon previous pre-defined frameworks to assist. It did however encourage me to learn new ways to solve research challenges, for example how to interpret my findings using thematic modes of analysis and then how to construct stories which enabled meaning to be extracted out of them.

This meant that throughout each stage of the process, sections needed to be adapted and rethought to fit the approach. This is not necessarily a criticism, as it also assisted in providing some structure to the study during the various stages. This however did mean that certain sections of the thesis deviated from the more traditional, causal process. A fully structured approach to the relevant review of literature was not possible in the Hermeneutic tradition, because there were by its very nature no predefined research question/s from the start. These would again have restricted the interpretative aspect of such a philosophy. Data collection was also upfront in this process, so as researcher I had to be open to new ways of seeing the evolving areas coming out of the discussions and on occasions change my reading, views and understanding of topics which emerged. McCaffrey (2012: 221) also outlines that *"data analysis is another term that ought to carry a hermeneutic health warning, although it is no bad thing once more to draw attention to the tension between the generally given structures of research and the far more fluid interconnections of a hermeneutic study."* In this respect, the literature itself formed an important part of the interpretative research process from start to finish (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010) and became the building blocks of my own interpretation and understandings: *"another aspect of data collection is getting to know the literature about the topic. In philosophical hermeneutics, this goes beyond a literature review, both in content and style."* (McCaffrey, 2012: 220). Hence, I overcame this challenge by supplementing the traditional literature review with 'sensitizing (overview) of themes' (Gilgun, 2002; Charmaz 2003; Blumer, 1954; Bowen, 2006). This was used to explore the phenomena with an open mind and more fluid research approaches in order to remain open

to new and novel insights emerging from participants.

Remaining true to the aspect of individual authenticity for each participant narrative right up until the very end of the study posed a challenge in terms of the actual duration of time required for crafting the narrative stories. As all researchers know, there are much easier options for the analysis of any data, particularly using modern software programmes. However, I wanted to remain true to the overarching philosophy of approach in order to effectively convey participants individual emotions, feelings and values through each narrative, in essence staying true to Gadamer's (2013) view that data collection still remains part of the process of understanding and meaning. In this sense, I felt the considerable time taken for the narrative construction was worth it, particularly in terms of the benefits and outcomes achieved. I was the story-teller of each individuals journey in higher education and this bestowed on me a sense of privilege, obligation and responsibility to remain true to each individual account, right up until the discussions Chapter Five, where a more holistic approach was then adopted. *"To be authentic is to realize that your own life-story makes sense only against the wider story of your community."* (Guignon, 2002: 99).

As researcher, I had to be comfortable with the unstructured nature of the discussions with participants and be able to facilitate them successfully, utilising the visual techniques (metaphor drawing). As Vandermause (2011: 370) outlines*: "many interpretive approaches require a feeling of trust between the researcher and participant(s), and use unstructured questions to elicit description."* With this current study, gaining a sense of trust was important and participants needed to feel that they were part of something that had both meaning and an outcome to it. With set interview questions and structure this is easily done, however when this is removed it can just seem like having an informal chat. The challenge to me, was to facilitate these in such a way that discussions flowed freely and participants both felt a sense of ownership of the issues they were discussing and were doing so in a trusted environment. The drawing of the cultural metaphors did help overcome this to some extent, allowing a freedom and opening of expression within a shared framework.

Due to some quite sensitive issues being discussed by participants I had to be genuinely empathic with my audience and the struggles they were describing, as it *"allows us to see the co-constructed, hermeneutic character of empathic understanding as it emerges within a*

specific context" (Hooker, 2015: 549). If this empathy was perceived to be faked in some way, then I would have lost their trust and conversations would have inevitably closed down. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) also saw the aspect of trustworthiness in Hermeneutics being a powerful element for both the credibility and transferability of language. In this sense, the Hermeneutical element of putting bias upfront in discussion ultimately led to a deeper common understanding of the lived culture being experienced around myself and participants: *"hermeneutics acknowledges researcher bias and infuses it into the text, along with the interviewee's perspective, to create a new meaning altogether"* (Muganga, 2016: 67). There were lots of commonalities I had with participants, and combined with my understanding of the academic role and status of higher education, this really helped to create a very trusting and close relationship with participants and thus enabled a genuine sense of closeness of issues to emerge. Owen (1999: 9) supports this opening up, and sees it as an opening up of culture and shared minds and *"a feeling that moves from one person into the conscious mind of the other…empathy an ability to be open to one's own "unconscious" processes as they connect with the preconscious and then the conscious aspects of one's own consciousness"*.

Demonstrating reflexivity throughout and constantly looking back on my own lived experiences as an academic member of staff working in higher education allowed for a shared sense of values around aspect of teaching being discussed and genuine empathy for the tensions being experienced. Archer (2003) sees reflexivity as being the internal conversation we have with ourselves. Indeed, it was only through acknowledging my own reflexivity as an on-going internal thought process throughout the study that ultimately illuminated the findings and gave any sense of meaning to them at the end. Bourdieu outlines, (1977: 22-23): *"objectivism erroneously adopts a mechanistic view of human conduct".* In this sense Hermeneutics really helped gain access to these social/cultural phenomena's, whereas more traditional methods simply wouldn't allow. This really helped the relationship with participants grow within the discussions, and some of the quotes from them during the interviews showed just how much they really valued this opportunity to open up and be listened to about their lived experiences within the university. Hermeneutics as a research philosophy, allowed all of this bias baggage to flourish and help uncover deeper meaning of similar issues being faced within the sector. I was a position I did not take likely and a

privileged experience I will draw upon for a very long time.

6.5.3. Researcher reflections from undertaking this journey

I started off this research journey simply choosing to look at these individuals who break the academic mould and win the teaching awards, not sure what if anything I would uncover from it. I very much now embrace Schuback's (2021: 168) notion of how we see meaning and language as being an intertwined element: *"Meanings and values must become flexible and fluid, full of "plasticity," clothed in the beautiful promise of the freedom of "becoming" – otherwise they cannot be "sold," "traded," "imaged," "exchanged": in short, otherwise they cannot "exist."* That is the benefit Hermeneutics bestows upon its researchers; the ability to explore and freely research a subject without the limitation of predefined questions or set objectives. In this sense, I jumped straight in at the deep end, fully embracing this once in a lifetime experience. I understand that to some extent time was on my side at that early stage, and it allowed me to explore and delve in to the various evolving literature. Throughout, I had to have what Foster (1991) terms a *moral confidence and conviction to carry on*, despite at times thinking to myself, *"where is all this going?".* As discussions evolved and time passed, my own understanding grew and now I find myself at the end of this interesting research journey, finally being able to join the dots on many of the issues that were discussed. Being one of the earliest forms of philosophy used within the ancient biblical world, it certainty stands out as being a valuable research approach for understanding and interpreting the complex lived world around us today.

I now find myself being a part of the 'Hermeneut research club', feeling privileged with regards to having had such discussions with participants. Undertaking this research journey has changed both my positionality and ontological views of the world around me and how they function. Gadamer's Hermeneutics in essence was all about having a broader understanding of myself and *"ontological focus (Being) and capacity to not only interpret human understanding but misunderstanding as a mechanism for effective communication."* (Regan, 2012:288). I feel I have achieved this to some extent, now having a much deeper intrinsic understanding of social interactions and how these are constructed within differing cultural contexts (Crotty, 2013). I've learnt so much more about the world we live in and

organisations from undertaking this study, particularly around culture and how we, within our roles (as actors) all play a part in creating an organisational sense of cultural coherence bringing meaning to daily working lives. In some regards it has been like putting on a pair of x-ray spectacles, ones which show the complexities of the inner workings of relationships alongside organisational rituals and norms. Ultimately, I now have emerged with different views on the institutional reality unfolding around me within my own academic role (Snape and Spencer, 2003), and how important individuals and their emotions are within the unfolding cultural reality we all have a role in creating. I wouldn't go as far to arrogantly profess wisdom, but the adopted philosophy and associated teaching have set me off on the path of intellectual enlightenment (Foucault, 1984) and in a sense provided me with some form of practical wisdom (Gadamer, 2010) and the ability to respond and understand changing social circumstances (problems) more proficiently: *"because it provides the only viable model for an adequate self-understanding of the humanities"* (Gadamer, 1993: 319). Like all things, cultural elements which this study observed are open to differing interpretations and as a result of undertaking this study I have a much broader understanding of these impact of these at the varying university levels, benefitting me into the future.

The study has provided me with some sense of authority and legitimacy on the issues (university culture, values, teaching excellence and emotions) as well as deeper insights in to the individual impact university wide teaching decisions ultimately now have at varying institutional levels. Gadamer sees this evolving legitimacy as a core element of the Hermeneutical process, due to us gaining a better understanding and meaning through our own personal experiences and partiality on the subject - something which the sciences would frown upon (Gadamer, 2010). I now have a much broader understanding of the cascading pressures both Institutions and their respective management functions have to now deal with in a rapidly changing sector. In this respect, I am obliged on some way because of the privilege positionality this research bestowed upon me, to help change things within higher education for the better and put forward other ways of practicing to support the emancipation of others experiencing difficulties. Finally, it has definitely made me think about my own value set, what matters in terms of productive work and how I can practice more flexibility within the constraints around me.

Moving on from the PhD, I see my role now as supporting other teaching practitioners, providing them with the confidence and mind-set to explore new ideas and promote the deployment of innovative pedagogies – helping to bring productive meaning to their work and overcome some of the historic institutional barriers in place. In this same vein, Habermas (1975: xviii) saw Hermeneutics as "*the self-emancipation of man from the constraints of unnecessary domination in all its forms"* which ultimately frees us from our own view of the worldly constraints around us. The research has shown that there are clear cultural barriers to this type of practice. It is only through a process of understanding arising out of studies such as this one that these barriers can be broken down within the sector. It's only now, reaching the final stage of this thesis, I've ultimately come to understand that this is the only the start of the process and not the end…

6.6. Limitations of this study and opportunities identified for future research

Firstly, for the purpose of the PhD requirements, and limitations around timescales the study focuses only upon teaching award winners from a single university. Whilst highlighting the rich data that emerged, the findings must be taken in context, during a specific time period and within a specific institution, and one that is teaching-focused. However, this said, much of the evidence presented in terms of the findings is now being seen across most institutions as political reforms take place. Alongside this, the Coronavirus pandemic in 2019 has also opened up and on-going debate about how universities can now enhance practice and evidence value for money for their students.

Secondly, the large quantity of data obtained, particularly in the area of transcriptions and stories, combined with metaphorical drawings and making sense of these. Whilst the Hermeneutical methodology was beneficial in extracting and interpreting themes from these, and outlining new and novel areas of the research, it took a lot longer than most because of the depth of detail I had to go into in order to fully extract thematic meaning. In this sense, the unstructured aspect of Hermeneutics allows for such a rich wealth of information, some of it unrelated to the study, which a more pre-defined methodology would eliminate at the interview stage through its structured and focused questions. The discussions would therefore often go off in a tangent and as researcher my role was made more difficult in then trying to interpret this and make sense of it. Following on from this, there had to be a reduction in the amount of complexity included within the thesis format. This meant that only a small proportion of the 26 stories could be included in the main Findings Chapter Four.

To some extent my own positionality, bias and personal experiences could have been seen to be a limitation within this research study. Looking in to the findings, one could argue they were my own interpretation of events which were unfolding or influencing discussions. However, Hermeneutics openly invites and places are the forefront researcher knowledge, bias, experience as the only way of deriving meaning and understandings of complex cultural phenomena's such as this (Gadamer, 2013). This was also a key benefit from the approach as outlined in the reflexive sections.

In terms of building on this study for future research, I would recommend widening out the research to other national and international higher education institutions (HEIs), looking at varying models of teaching excellence and award schemes. Additionally, there are now opportunities for deeper research and analysis of the Teaching Excellence Framework (2015), looking more closely at the gold award winners, to identify examples of best practice and case studies of institutional cultures which enhance teaching excellence more broadly. There may also be a correlation of findings from gold award winning HEIs, linking these to the emergence of Value Orientated cultures.

6.7. Recommendations at the institutional level

This study has argued that there needs to be a cultural shift within universities. One where both research and teaching are given better equal status. Alongside this, there needs to be much less emphasis on external government measures and metrics, such as the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and National Student Survey (NSS). More attention needs to be placed on allowing individual institutions to be the best judge of how to enhance students' learning, thus promoting a broader culture of excellence for all.

This study has highlighted how metrics have been interpreted and internalised at the institutional level, has only resulted in restricting practice for academics. It thus suggests that the university management function in its current state of performative reforms needs to adopt radical change. In doing so it needs to move away from a culture/strategy of standardisation and accountability towards the generation of a much more individual focused culture of openness, trust and transparency. The study understands this is no easy move, but in the midst of limited creativity, lack of innovation and falling student satisfaction, the majority of institutions need to take this leap of faith if enhancement and development of teaching practice is to occur.

Whilst on the surface this study found that elements such as teaching award schemes had good intentions, ultimately, they only resulted in creating a divisive internal and competitive culture. It is therefore proposed more focus and effort be placed upon relinquishing control

mechanisms and promoting and enhancing broader ways to view pedagogical excellence in practice, rather than focusing on awarding a small number of selected individuals each year. This step will also help emancipate those academics who do not see any other way outside of the measures in place to govern teaching, and instead allow a more open collegiate culture to evolve.

In order to demonstrate any progress in enhancing student learning and experience, this study has shown there is a clear need to redress (or rediscover in some cases) the academic-student relationship. In doing so, an institutional shift needs to happen aimed at challenging the notion of the student-consumer driven mindset. Granted some of this needs to be led from central government but university management teams can have influence. Fundamentally, students appear to want and really value diversity, uniqueness and, critically, a learner centered relationship (Beard, Clegg and Smith, 2007) with academics during their time at university. Current performance measures in place aimed at standardising teaching practice have simply pushed this relationship further and further apart, aiming to eliminate any pedagogic diversity.

In respect of the individual-level outcomes, university decision making and understandings around performance of academics needs to change, especially those who choose to focus more upon enhancing their teaching practice, rather than their own research. A review of internal quality measures and mechanisms for enhancing and support is required. For some institutions, this may involve ripping up the rule book and starting afresh in order to see which quality measures ensure broader operating parameters (Ray et al., 1997) for enhancing and nurturing individual creative practices. Alongside this, the recruitment, selection, training and development of specialist academic managers within higher education requires more due diligence and attention. These individuals have tremendous influence on creating the overall institutional culture, and in this respect, must have a deep pedagogical understanding of the impact their decisions make on day to day teaching practices. In this sense, a healthier climate for learning and teaching will inevitably emerge.

Finally, as the study highlighted more focus needs to be placed upon the wellbeing and mental health of all academics, not just those on the 'teaching frontline'. One way of doing this is to

create more of an open collegiate culture around teaching practice, one in which teaching loads and work planning is shared more evenly. Some of the struggles this study highlighted were around individual value tensions occurring around conflicting pedagogical practices. These conflicts need discussing in open arenas and more time taken to consider how policies and measures can buffer (support) such diverse modes of pedagogy not restrict them. Mental health also needs to be taken out of just the broad sweep institutional wellbeing surveys, and more attention needs to be focused around the individual, their values and how these fit with the institutional culture. Institutions need to understand how they can help shape individual goals, support teaching values and thus enhance practice to create a positive healthy working environment, with the added benefit of enhancing the overall student experience (Shek and Chai, 2020). More research is needed within this area as this current study has highlighted.

6.8. Recommendations for macro-level HEI policy making

The narrative accounts and subsequent themes identified, have significant implications for future policy making across the sector and have raised some important areas for improvement around both the measurement and enhancement of teaching practice. The study sought to raise questions fundamentally around the notion that excellence is an abstract concept lived out in practice through individual cultural values and pedagogical ideals. In this sense, policymakers acknowledging this is the first step in beginning to reassess how universities function within society. Teaching-focused policies need to move away from market-based approaches to enhancing student experience and focus much more upon enabling rich diverse institutional agendas to form around higher educational aspects of quality, pedagogy, assessment and feedback.

In this current unknown, post- Brexit period universities have a pivotal role in enabling the UK to remain competitive within the global knowledge economy and graduate market place. The government's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) places universities at the centre of its post-Brexit innovation strategy. BEIS's most recent policy paper: *Innovation Strategy: leading the future by creating it* (2021) places an enormous emphasis on research and knowledge collaborations at an institutional-level, but again the

graduate upskilling and teaching aspects are severely lacking. As highlighted above, if the UK is to remain competitive in any form over the next decade, much more investment in enabling high quality teaching to occur with institutions needs to be established. It is crucial with have academics who feel able and supported to equip students with the enterprising skills and education that are so vaunted by business. A major part of this is freeing institutions from policy and funding shackles they have been tied to for far too long.

Bringing this research study full circle and to conclude, it is timely that Dame Shirley Pearce's Independent Review of the Departments for Educations: *Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework* (TEF) (2019) has recently been presented to parliament in January 2021 for consideration of its recommendations. Within the Department for Education's (2021:6) government's response to Dame Shirley Pearce's TEF Review, the government firmly outline their commitment to enhancing higher education's ability to *"set students on the right path towards excellent outcomes"*. However, the term 'excellence' now occurs 178 times throughout the 126-page document, an increase from 97 times from the 2015 TEF policy document. It is disappointing, but not entirely unexpected to see that the TEF has again fallen into the trap of using metric measures (as termed in the document) to define teaching excellence across HEIS in order to provide a rating/ranking: *"We propose that all providers receive a full set of subject-level metrics and that failure to sufficiently address variability in subject performance should act as a limiting factor on ratings of the aspects of assessment and the overall provider rating."* (Department for Education, 2021: 9).

The additions to the document do make some move towards broadening the perspectives on excellence, with mention of making sure the TEF *"effectively delivers for everyone across a diverse sector"* (Department for Education, 2021: 11) aiming to do this through institutionally determined evidence to highlight differences in subject provision. However, the document reverts to a reliance on metrics for evidencing this, stating that that HEIs must be able to *"articulate and measure (quantify if possible)" (*Department for Education, 2021*: 10)* such evidence of the teaching experience provided for students. Much of this study has shown that, on the contrary, student experience cannot (and in most cases, should not) be measured and must instead be an inherent part of a value orientated institutional culture. Culture is however only mentioned once in a strategic sense at the very end of the document

(Department for Education, 2021: 99), used only to indicate *"differences in mission and culture of institutions".* It is therefore sadly still the case from a policy perspective, that what does get measured, gets managed within higher education.

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