

**The development of vocational learner identities
by 16-19 year-old learners in Further Education**

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Submitted posthumously
in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 2020

Introduction by thesis supervisors

Shamin Parthab was one of the strongest and most thoughtful postgraduate researchers that either of us have supervised. She really was a true researcher who approached her task with humility and humanity. We were delighted when, during the course of her study, she gained a post at our university, in the Lifelong Learning Centre. Tragically, Shamin lost her life to illness at a stage when she was just beginning her research and teaching career with so many plans before her.

This submission represents a near final draft that Shamin submitted to us. We gave feedback but the sudden onset of illness meant that Shamin was unable to finalise the thesis. Nonetheless, the draft thesis was presented for examination as it stood (and as presented here) and amply met the standard required.

We believe this to be an exemplar application of a bio-ecological framework used to examine the intersecting relationships between the learner and the environment. Interpretations of learning are made by applying learning theories which emphasise change. Applying a qualitative case study methodology, Shamin interprets the data through these lenses while remaining sensitised to the individual learner and their specific context. The result is an in-depth account of vocational teaching and learning, representing a complex mix of experiential learning, humanism and efficiency. Student, teacher and institutional identities all come into play in this scholarly study of vocational education. The relationship between learner and environment, argues Shamin, is shaped by context, knowledge domains and time, creating a dynamic which learners must navigate. The ways a learner navigated the vocational curriculum seemed to be related to confidence, disposition and motivation. The study has wide-reaching implications for vocational education.

We are confident in Shamin's statement in the draft that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This case study explored how two groups of 16-19 year-old learners, each on a two-year course, develop a vocational learner identity through negotiated processes that interconnected with the social environment. The two vocational courses were CACHE Childcare and Education, and BTEC Animal Care and Management, in one Further Education College in England. It asked two major questions: how does vocational identity develop by 16-19 year-olds on two further education full time vocational courses and how does identification with the vocation interrelate with dispositions to learn, using interviews and observations with students, their tutors and placement mentors, over eighteen months.

Learning has been conceptualised as negotiating meaning through participation in practice in the process of becoming; and the construct of identity is a tool to analyse learning of young people. The social learning theory of Etienne Wenger is the main framework, however other concepts from bio-ecological systems theory and transformative learning theory were included during the analysis.

Learners generally showed that when they felt a sense of belonging they were motivated to practice alongside experts. They develop independence in practice and recognise that dispositions to learning and towards the vocation, changes. There were a few exceptions, where learners did not identify with the vocation; their dispositions towards learning and the vocation did not show identifiable changes throughout the year. It is therefore possible to complete a course without developing a vocational learner identity.

To ensure learners develop strong vocational learner identities a recommendation would be the use of a systems lens approach to analyse the environment to identify how changes to policies affect the learner. Changing the focus of assessments from grades to learners' identification with a vocation is more likely to foster lifelong learning dispositions.

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Abbreviations

AM	Animal Management
CoP	Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998)
EY	Early Years
FE	Further Education
Names with numbers:	1 – data from the beginning of the course 2- data from the end of the first year 3- data from end of the second year
Names beginning with:	T - Tutors P - Placement mentors A - Animal Management Learners C - Early Years Learners
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification - based on the meeting of National occupational standards and therefore work based
TLC	Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education 2001-2005 focused of culture within FE
TLRP	Teaching and Learning Research Programme - major research project on education carried out in 2001-2007
VE	Vocational Education

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

The case study here sought to understand how 16-19 year-old learners develop a vocational learner identity on two different courses. Learner identity and vocational identity development may be crucial to the young person who might have disengaged from education had it not been compulsory. Vocational identity may be significant for guiding learners' practices when completing complex and challenging tasks, and be a source of intrinsic motivation, which strengthen their willingness to engage in practice (Klotz et al., 2014). Additionally, it can enhance performance and entry into employment; if the occupation is clearly structured then opportunities to progress in the same vocation (Winch 2013; Klotz et al., 2014). For some learners who have had unsuccessful educational experiences, a transition to college can be a second chance to reengage with learning. Learners on vocational education courses generally have the opportunity to experience work placements, and the programme of study could foster dispositions that are reflexive, adaptable to changing contexts and self directed, which are recognised as lifelong learning dispositions. This is a topic worth studying as strong vocational identities can promote lifelong learning and greater commitment to a vocation, or work (Virtanen et al., 2008; Winch, 2013).

While students are at college it is easy to see learning as something with a beginning and end, directed through teaching, however learning is social, happening through formal or informal participation in daily life. Rather than look at the process from an isolated individual perspective, I ask about the development within a socio-cultural context, over eighteen months. Numerous studies have identified the importance of the relationship between learners and tutors, the culture of the environment, and the nature of placements, but there has been limited research on how learners negotiate meaning within these cultures. The varying institutions that offer post-secondary courses are widely seen by the public as embedded in different cultures. There is some literature that have explored these differences, and I will expand on those that have focused on Further Education (FE) to understand how learners have engaged within these in the past, as the courses offered, tend to be linked to particular vocations.

An understanding of how vocational identity develops would need to take into account the context learners experienced previously and the one they are currently experiencing. In the past, students who finished school were encouraged to remain in education, however with recent changes, it is now compulsory that they study full time until eighteen years. Lifelong learning can be seen either as a policy goal, example the widening participation agenda through particular pathways and certifications (Level 1, BTEC award, BTEC Diplomas); or it could be a process that fosters particular learner identities (Tennant and Yates, 2005). Given wider changes in policy and different cultures, how do learners engage in education, more particularly how do learners on courses that are considered 'vocational', participate? In a later discussion, I will cover the instability of the FE College and lack of consistency in educational provision. Furthermore, do the courses really have the potential to create lifelong learners, who are motivated to continue learning, in work? To explore these issues this case study focused on learners within courses that were two years long and at one qualification level.

To understand the complexity of the culture and the processes that learners negotiated to navigate their own way through the course, the data was qualitative, gathered through interviews and observations. Apart from detail in the data, case studies can also take account of how relationships develop over time and how they become established. To analyse changes in learning dispositions and in the environment, over time, I collected

data at the beginning, middle and at the end of the course. Learners' changing manner in how they related to me as a researcher, and how I approached them over the two years resulted in data that needed to be analysed with a temporal lens.

FE in England has a unique place in the wider educational context and this position has meant that it is under-researched and underfunded. Therefore, this project contributes to a small, existing body of knowledge on the importance of the socio-cultural environment of Further education, and development of identity through a reciprocal relationship with the learner. The research was also an exercise in applying different theories to vary the lens through which the environment and the formation of vocational learner identities, is studied.

1.2 Personal Perspective

I cannot separate this research from my own experience, as it is through my role as a teacher in a college that I noticed changes in learners' dispositions over the two years on a course. A teacher in FE has generally, experience of working in a specified field. I had taught in a Primary school and worked in an Early Years setting before becoming a lecturer in Child-care in a Further Education college. Moreover, I am a mother who has had experience of using a child-care setting when I was at work. Having worked in Further Education for a number of years, I began to recognise that there were often changes in how learners talked about their work and how they were going to get to the role that they aspired to. This was different from the first few weeks of when they started the course. Clearly, they had grown, matured and become familiar with the college environment, but that did not account for all the changes I saw. I saw many learners committed to their studies, highly motivated to working in the field, despite challenges within their wider environment. Learners' aspirations were different from their portrayal in public, frequently as 'low', for not choosing Sixth Form College and the route to university. Did learners believe that their 'learning' has been complete in college? Where we as teachers sending learners out of college with the idea that they fit into an existing community, as we were following a curriculum that had been established years before? Given this situation - I was motivated to capture the engagement of young people, to give them a voice - to share what they think, what they aspired to and how they or do not develop strong learning and vocational identities, as this may indicate whether they would go on to develop as lifelong learners.

I was unsure of how the wider socio-cultural environment shaped ambitions and interests in the vocational field. Some learners had not achieved the required grades to go to Sixth Form College, and therefore their choice may have been strategic rather than based on their interests and ambitions. Despite these prior experiences, what was noticeable was a change in dispositions to learning over the two years. Learners enjoyed placement and were eager to work in the field. They became aware of other alternative careers and some changed their plans during the course of the year. They were more confident to practice independently, and were motivated to remain engaged with the vocation. Through this study, I wanted to acknowledge these transformations, their personal investments, their aspirations, resilience and their value of work.

If we can understand how they develop identification with a vocation and how their beliefs, values and attitudes change, then as teachers or adults we would be able to facilitate easy transitions not only from college to work, but also from young people to adults. As a teacher, I saw my role as creating opportunities for learners to develop strong identities, so that they entered the field knowledgeable and competent in practice, to transition easily into work. For young people who have had unsuccessful or unfulfilled educational journeys at school, the course that facilitates the transition to work, could help them have

more positive, fulfilling experience of learning. Learning for me is more than an academic exercise within an institution. It is part of growing and developing awareness of not only oneself but also the wider environment. Thus, I feel strongly that teaching should allow personal development and a lifelong engagement with learning.

Was there a connection between learning through participation and changing identity? Did the curriculum encourage lifelong learners? Could I as a teacher adapt my pedagogy so that I ensured learners engaged in a way that was more meaningful to them? The questions that I had at the beginning about learners on my course extended to questioning whether these changes occurred on other courses. All these questions highlighted that I would need to not only focus on the learner and how they experienced the course, but also the environment and their interaction within this.

1.3 Background to FE

Given the instrumental nature of FE (Further Education), there are consistent changes to policies and practice, argued as relevant for the wider economic status of the country, in relation to the rest of the world (Fisher and Simmons, 2012). Traditionally FE colleges offered a more practice-based curriculum as preparation for the workplace, as opposed to the academic curriculum in Sixth Form Colleges. It is an area that is instrumental in contributing to the skills-agenda of the government. With this view the term 'vocationalism', embraced by educators, may be seen as education that is 'relevant' as it is 'technical' and 'practical', linked to the workplace (Donnelly, 2009). To ensure that skills-demand is met, Further education colleges implement syllabi as created by other training bodies, which have worked with employers and businesses in designing courses that meet their own skill needs. I have seen changes in policy that follow these economic trends for example if the country is perceived as not producing the skills to compete internationally, there are changes to policies within FE.

In England, the Wolf report (2011) recommended closer links between VET (Vocational Education and Training) and industry, although there have traditionally been awarding bodies that worked closely with employers. This practice is unquestioned in most research, however Gleeson, Hughes, O'Leary and Smith, (2015, p.92) argue that the main effect of this has been to restrict learning and social mobility. "...the private governance of public money not only endow employers with a voice without accountability, but also forms part of what Berg (1971) referred to as 'The Great Training Robber'." The involvement of employers without accountability to employ and pay high salaries, means that the culture of devaluing of work continues. Furthermore, The Wolf report (2011) concluded that many vocational courses offer no route to employment or higher education. The lack of direct government engagement, as well as education of young people as instrumental, could account for the instability of VET with its changing policies and funding systems. With vocational education focused on skills, where does this leave the learner?

It is widely acknowledged that these vocational courses lead to jobs that are poorly paid, demand emotional commitment, and generally given lower status than many other professions (Davies and Tedder, 2003; Colley, James, Dement and Tedder, 2003). Students starting on these courses may not be aware of this, however, this is partly due to the context that may frame their experiences and how their vocational identity develops. An identity approach to learning is likely to capture the personal investments of learners on these courses.

Since the Wolf Report (2011), there have been some changes to vocational training as a result. Students in FE colleges are now on study programmes, which include English and

Mathematics if grades were below C (or Grade 4, from 2019) at GCSE. There are also fewer options of courses offered by colleges, but they include possibilities of progression onto higher levels of study such as a Foundation degree, or university. One change since the nineties has been the introduction of the diploma in 2008, with the option of going onto Higher Education (HE). The diploma at Level 3 is awarded by different training bodies and is equivalent to A levels. If students do not achieve the required grades in school, they could study at Entry Level, Level 1 or Level 2. These courses are generally one year and students could stay on and progress to the higher levels, so possibly get to Level 3 later.

Since 2014, the minimum age for compulsory education has increased from 16 years to 18 years. The role of FE in England is key to learners of 16-19 years as it offers further study after school. A practice-based curriculum includes but not always, experience in placements as a compulsory element of the course. Most 16-year-old learners would not have had much experience of a work environment before making their choices. Some learners are likely to identify with these practices, with a view of a longer-term commitment to the vocational field. So, what can educators do to enable vocational identity and lifelong learning?

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis provides a review of literature on the topic, some of which were used to design the research approach. The methodology chapter is followed by three chapters of findings and a discussion chapter at the end.

1.4.a Literature review

The literature review is divided into two chapters: Chapter 2 focuses on the macrolevel aspects such as the FE learning environment, including a closer look at vocational education. Chapter 3 analysed studies of learners on vocational courses. Key questions that the Literature review asked, were: How have others conceptualised learning, identity, vocation and work? What is vocational education? What do others say about how vocational learning identity develops? Do dispositions really change over a two-year period? Does identification with a vocation have the potential to develop lifelong learning dispositions? What theories did others use to study learning and identity? What were effective methodologies to study the topic?

Studies in the last twenty years overwhelmingly show that learning occurs through participation (Wenger, 1998; Bloomer, 2001; Lawy, 2006; Bonnar, 2007; Pang, 2015): learners make meaning within a social context through their active involvement. Furthermore, since the early 2000's there is a significant number of studies showing learning as a subjective experience (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2000; Lawy, 2006) that is not limited to situations where there is explicit teaching but learning is often implicit and tacit, expressed in the individual's behaviours, actions and attitude. However, literature on vocational learning still use the knowledge and skills acquisition lens, which may be connected to the narrow conceptualisation of vocational education. Having a narrow view does not really do justice or honour the engagement with learning that young people display. To be able to do this, more needs to be done to recognise their experiences of learning. This review looks beyond a narrow view of learning limited to an environment where there is some 'intentional instruction' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) for fulfilling a job role. Instead, it embraces the view that learning through participation can be transformative; and closely interlinks with the socio-cultural environment.

With this view, there is a close analysis of vocational education using a framework that included aspects such as the Wider context, Curriculum, Pedagogy, Assessments, Teacher identity and the student body. Furthermore, courses are closely linked to industry so the latter part of Chapter 2 also looks at placements and work, as students are not only in college, but, learning through their informal encounters in daily life which may also include their peer relations or volunteer work with scouts or a church youth group. One of the major studies of FE colleges was the Transforming Learning Cultures (TLC) project, of four FE colleges in England. The aim was to deepen understanding of learning in FE, identify strategies for improvement and encourage research in FE (James and Biesta, 2007). The project looked at how the culture within FE colleges transforms students and how the students transform the learning culture within FE, through a longitudinal study. While I will refer to the TLC, note that the research was completed in 2005 and there have already been some changes within FE since then.

To consider learning from the view of the learner then, the individual subjectivities or what may be called 'learning identities' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) is an important aspect of this discussion. Chapter 3 is divided into two sections : vocational identities and learner identities beginning with clarification of concepts. It highlights identity as a useful tool to investigate learning on a vocational educational course. Wenger (1998) argued that learning is about becoming. I was therefore interested in using social learning theory as a framework, given that it centred on how learners became someone (a role) over two years, as their identity evolved. Hence, Chapter 3 included studies on development of identities. Most studies focused on undergraduate students on placement, as there were minimal studies on learners in college.

Understanding the link between learning and vocational identification could bring greater value to vocational studies for students and employers as well. That is, developing a vocational identity may motivate students to engage in learning and a learner identity could encourage commitment to the vocation. Given these arguments it will be informative to investigate how vocational identity develops so that newcomers to the vocation remain engaged in learning. Within FE, therefore it is a valuable topic of study as it has the potential to transform learning experiences, lifelong

1.4.b Conceptualising Learning, Identity and Vocation

At the end of the literature review, is a conceptual framework I used (Chapter 3). However, within the Introductory chapter I have chosen to introduce the three main concepts of Learning, Identity and Vocation, as it also defined the other literature I chose to focus on. Each of these terms has been interpreted differently in other studies, for example, identity from a psychological perspective focuses on the individual sometimes to the exclusion of the environment. Vocation has been used as a 'calling' in some studies whereas in others it implies work. Learning can either be seen as skills and knowledge acquisition or meaning making through practice.

1.4.b.i) Learning

As learning has been conceptualised differently in the past, the literature review looked at how it could be used in this study. The participatory and transformative lens to interpret learning, is the most effective tool to represent the richness of the learners experiences. It allows learners to make meaning through their practices and acknowledges their prior experiences. Hager and Hodkinson (2009) classified learning into four groups. First, the propositional lens views learning as acquisition of knowledge. Most cognitive literature focuses on propositional and procedural knowledge and does not account for affect and dispositions, for example, confidence and motivation to carry out a task even though there is knowledge (Billett, 1997). Second, the skill-learning lens is seen independent of the

learner. Vocational education is usually regarded as skills training (Winch, 2009) where the outcome is the performance of specified tasks. Third, the human practice lens is where learning is seen as participatory; and finally the transformation or reconstruction lens is where the learner as well as the environment undergoes transformation through the learning process.

Learning through participation can be transformative for the learner as they are able to make meaning through their practice. Using this lens together with the concept of identity, provides a tool for understanding the specific contexts of participants and safeguards against reducing participants to a single voice of the FE learner, as it would respect their individual contributions (Johnston, 2012). The propositional and skill learning lens, are the traditional views and narrow in its conceptualisation because it does not acknowledge the wider social context of the learner. This view of learning, as acquiring new facts and information where the mind is a container, Eraut (2004) called 'codified knowledge', information that one can access in books. Sfard(1998) refers to this as the acquisition metaphor. Propositional knowledge, however cannot be ignored as there have been changes in the curriculum from NVQ's, with a focus on skills, to more recent Diplomas, with an increase of propositional knowledge in vocational education. Propositional knowledge could be used to account for practice where learners may make judgements and inferences without engaging in practice. The skills lens has always been seen as limited, as it is outcome based and therefore does not acknowledge processes. Furthermore, there are no links to learners' prior experiences or their dispositions to learn.

As I will show later, when looking closely at the Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessments within vocational education, that the propositional and skills learning lens are used in assessments. So, while favouring the participatory and transformative lenses, there is the potential for this study to contribute to empirically based reflections on how seemingly different forms of learning can work together or against each other to develop identity. To understand the transformations or changes through learning it would be useful to look at dispositions to learn and whether these change while on a vocational course, since "it is increasingly recognised that learning shapes the way we are, and that in turn influences what we learn and how we learn" (Paechter et al., 2001, p.2).

1.4.b.ii) Identity

Identity is an adjustable lens that can zoom in (Lerman, 2001) to the level of interaction between individuals and zoom out to look at the wider socio-cultural context (Stinson and Bullock, 2012). Zooming out to study identity entails looking at the socio-cultural environment in which learners negotiate the process of becoming. On the individual level, the future oriented nature of becoming aligns with Erikson's definition of identity (Pittman et al., 2011), as it consists of decisions, investments and commitments tied to future roles" (cited in Pittman et al., 2011, p.38). Therefore, identity is essential to student's beliefs about themselves as learners (Solomon, 2007). Their beliefs will guide their decisions and investments. Wenger uses the term identity as a learning concept because "it suggests the construction of sameness through change... and it brings in identification, which is a relational process by which the world and the person can enter into and constitute each other" (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p.147).

Identity therefore, is seen as a state of becoming. A vocational identity therefore could develop – this is sometimes conceptualised as a worker identity, where the learner begins to see him or herself as having a work role. In this study, identity will be viewed through an ecological lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Learners 'become' through engaging within a context and the social environment does not 'act' on the learner. It develops through interrelationships with the environment but may include how they narrate their story,

embedding their own values, beliefs and attitudes within. I will use the concept identity as one that is negotiated, and therefore a state of becoming through practice.

1.4.b.iii) Vocation

The literature review and the analysis of the data were mindful of how the concept of vocation was used. What appears within the literature is, that while the vocational education system sees it as skills acquisition for work, how learners talk about vocation is in the secular way where work is meaningful, and this is how the concept will be used in this study. A vocation could be a job role, profession or occupation since the individual derives meaning from participation in practice as "...it finds expression at the crossroads of public obligation and personal fulfilment. It takes shape through involvement in work that has social meaning and value" (Hansen, 1994, p.263). With this view, work has meaning for the individual and is personally fulfilling but at the same time is socially contextualised. Within the literature, the differences between the following terms are exaggerated: 'vocational', 'technical', 'occupational', 'professional' or 'job role' (Hansen, 1994; Anderson, 2008), the review therefore included these terms within the search, as there were no significant differences for this study, with how the terms have been used.

In the study by Attwood et al. (2004) learners talked about the vocation as something that they always wanted to do, and portrayed school as a distraction from achieving their goals: school was not relevant. How vocation is conceptualised by the individual could influence their relationship to their job in the future, for example, positive identification or moral duty. In the past it was closely related to a 'calling by God', a religious commitment to serve society, but in contemporary society while it still has some of this classical tone, the more secular connotation, refers to work that is deeply meaningful to the individual and valued by society (Hansen, 1994, Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Dik and Duffy, 2009). It may be used to describe what an individual hopes to achieve, how they feel and the beliefs they have about work (Dik & Duffy, 2009); but also has social significance, where they are more likely to be motivated not by money but commitment to a job. In a study of how zoo keepers voice calling, Bunderson and Thompson (2009) found that it was close to the classical conceptualisation where calling "...is that place in the occupational division of labour in society that one feels destined to fill by virtue of particular gifts, talents, and/or idiosyncratic life opportunities (p.36)". Workers can have positive experiences through feeling a sense of belonging: being amongst those who feel the same about a job can instil positive identification and this is how I will use the concept. The concept of vocation can be experienced by the learners as a sense of belonging, where it entails an investment of personal resources and where learners identify with a job. Seeing vocation as a calling however can have negative implications; as strong identifications and moral duty can mean that, there are personal sacrifices and high expectations from work as a community (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009).

I remain mindful that how the term 'vocation' is used can reflect the assumptions or its relative status (Donnelly, 2009) within particular socio-cultural contexts, for example the training for teachers or doctors are seldom referred to as 'vocational' or 'technical' but instead seen as professional (Hansen, 1994), even though both are training to fulfil a particular occupational or job role. Moreover, there is a distinction between 'pure' and 'applied' in subjects such as Mathematics and Science. There is a hierarchy that places the 'applied' as lower status, ensuing an educational provision that is divided into academic vs. vocational (Donnelly, 2009) implying that vocational education prepares the learner for work while 'academic', which is based around the traditional curriculum links to personal development and wider occupational opportunities.

1.4.c Research Design

The literature review, my personal experience and the purpose of this study, informed the methodological approach. While identity is frequently seen as a psychological concept and there was some literature on the measuring of vocational identity and dispositions to learn, this study wanted to also examine the social context in which they formed. Thus, the approach here was to seek data that was qualitative and detailed on how learners negotiate meaning within their environment. The approach is therefore interpretative using a social constructivist lens to frame the research questions and how the data was collected and analysed. As case studies tend to facilitate a detailed examination of practices and processes, that was the reasoning behind the choice.

Researchers have contrasting case studies (ref) but there is value in holding something that is similar to limit the comparisons I make. In my case, they are both caring professions but differ in the degree of time in placement, which is a factor I expect to make a difference to vocational identity. At the same time, the caring professions are arguably going to appeal to a sense of calling (ref)

As each course in FE is linked to a different field of work, how learners develop their identity, could vary, I therefore chose two courses: Early Years (EY) and Animal Management (AM). Both were two years long, in one Further Education (FE) college in England and had close links with employers, through placements. In EY Level 3 diploma students have to attend a minimum of 1080 guided learning hours and undertake a minimum of 750 hours of placement, over two years. While students are in placement, they have set tasks to complete, and are assessed on these through visits by a tutor from college and a practitioner in the placement. In AM, learners were in placement for two weeks in the first term of the course and were expected to volunteer in the field to engage in practice. Furthermore, there were many more visits to other settings as a group and work alongside the course tutor in college or on the visits, for example to a farm. There was no assessor in placements.

Research such as those of Higham and Farnsworth (2012) emphasise that tutors maintain links, between school and industry for the course to be truly vocational. Although they carried out the study in Canada within secondary schools, it nevertheless highlighted the need to define the term vocational education. A vocational course, is one where there is a close link with industry. Therefore, the methodology took account of observation of practice and interviews with placement mentors. Additionally the literature showed identification as a personal experience, therefore a qualitative approach was more suitable with methods such as interviews and observations.

Before collecting data, there was careful consideration given to the ethical issues that the research may throw. Apart from obtaining a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) certificate, it was necessary to obtain consent from the college, the tutors of the courses and the learners. The sampling was purposeful as the focus was on 16-19 year-old with little experience of full time work. Over the two years there was a strong repertoire built with the learners and therefore it was possible to also acquire respondent validation after the learners had finished the course. All data was transcribed soon after each interview and partly coded. The data was managed using NVIVO and the initial stages of analysis used coding. After all the data was collected, the analysis of the findings used other theories apart from Communities of practice that were more relevant: the Ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner and transformation learning theory. Recurring themes and patterns were explored before finally identifying four key themes.

1.5 Chapter summary

Given the importance of strong vocational identities for commitment to a vocation and the fostering of lifelong learning dispositions through VE, at the same time minimal studies of how learners develop this identity within Further Education college, this study has planned to address this issue. This chapter introduced the thesis as well as how key concepts have been used, with a brief overview of each chapter. The central questions for this project, around the development of identity of learners on vocational course will be addressed by beginning with the literature review. The following chapter is on Vocational education so setting the context for the case.

2 Vocational Education

2.1 Introduction

The introductory chapter presented a background to FE and highlighted the instrumental approach to FE that sees learners as resources. The practice-based curriculum makes it likely that they would experience the workplace through placements. To analyse these environments and how learners participate in them, the literature review has been divided into two chapters. Chapter 2 analyses the macrolevel features of the environment, including a closer look at the curriculum, which learners have immediate links to. Chapter 3 focuses on the learner, and analyses learning and identity at a level of the learners' experience, so how others have analysed learning, identity and dispositions to learn. The two chapters show that learning is informed by life experiences of the learner, and the context, as well as how these connect to other experiences in the past and what may occur in the future, which Bloomer (2001) called 'lateral and temporal connectivity' respectively'. Lawy (2006) exemplified this connective approach by stating that the context not only informs learning but there is a transaction with the environment where there are cultural influences that 'play on learning' (p.325). It is only by acknowledging the contextual nature of learning experiences it is possible to understand the complex process of learning (Bloomer, 2001).

The first aim of the literature review, was to identify what others have concluded about learning and identities on vocational courses more generally, and specifically the 16-19 year-olds who choose it. Furthermore, I believed that the culture in Further education is different from other educational institutions, so I wanted to find out how others had studied this. A second aim was to evaluate the perspectives and research designs, to arrive at an approach for this study. The final purpose was to assess where a contribution could be made to the field of studies, on the vocational learner and lifelong learning. Due to the limited studies of identity and learning of young people in Further Education in England, the search extended to courses that included a connection with industry or work. These studies were mainly of undergraduate students on placements, who were older, and the nature of the relationship with placements or work was different. I also chose to look at studies of vocational education in other countries to evaluate how the experiences of learners had been analysed. Other additional areas of the literature review comes as 'when and as needed' basis (Wolcott, 2019) and embedded in the other chapters.

To fulfil the aims, Chapter 2 focuses on the wider environment or context. Firstly, it will highlight how the concept of vocational education has been used and the value of including aspects such as curriculum, pedagogy and the student body. Each aspect is then analysed separated to form a detailed picture of the environment. Secondly, as learners on vocational courses engage in practice, it is worthwhile examining some of their other possible learning environments, such as placements or work. Key sources introduced, have relevance to vocational education, including how concepts were used, as these some way shaped this study.

When searching for literature on Vocational education it is easy to map the topics to policy changes at the time, in FE, as both have been closely linked historically. While there were numerous articles from the 90's and early 2000's on the curriculum (Bates, 1991; Bloomer, 1997; Bloomer et al., 2002; Hodkinson, 2005), more recently the focus has shifted to the professionalisation of the FE teacher (Bailey and Colley, 2015; Springbett, 2018); the unique culture of HE in FE (Feather, 2012; Avis and Orr, 2016) and issues surrounding lesson observations (Edgington, 2013; O'Leary, 2013; Bailey, 2014). There has been a continuous range of research using the lens of conflict theory, raising issues such as social reproduction and the creation of a poor working class. A number of studies analyse the neo-liberal practices of management control, performativity and marketisation within

FE (James, 2015; Illsely and Waller, 2017). Studies on how learners make sense of their experiences on vocational courses in FE colleges in England, are minimal. However to be able to contextualise their experiences it is necessary to study this environment that others have, one that looks at a range of different features where the learner is centred. Therefore, the term vocational education has been clarified early, due to the varying use within the literature.

2.2 Vocational education

2.2.a *Conceptualisation*

Beginning with a conceptualisation of vocational education will establish how key terms have been used in the past and clarify for the reader the stance taken here. Additionally, it would clarify how to operationalise concepts when collecting data. A useful frame was that of Higham and Farnsworth (2012) as it used empirical data and theory to develop a more nuanced concept, to include features such as the wider institutional context, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, staffing, resources and the student body. Vocational courses are widely seen as those that prepare learners for work, where learners are assessed on their competence to perform a job, as defined by the National Occupational Standards (UK Standards, 2019), but some literature, evidence that for learners it was other aspects of the course that mattered for re-engagement with learning, such as the relationships with the tutors and the relevance of the curriculum for what they hoped to do in the future (Attwood, 2004). Furthermore, the Wolf Report (Wolf, 2011) found that amongst courses categorised as vocation there were many that did not lead to work in the field immediately, nor did they lead to higher-level studies. Higham and Farnsworth (2012) conceptualisation was used to select the courses and guide the focus of their study of courses in one School Board in Canada. Their framework was useful as it encouraged caution when using the term 'vocational course', as a narrow view would limit the study of how learners engage in making meaning. Furthermore, it takes into account aspects within the social environment such as the role of the staff and their identity, as well as the student body and their prior experiences.

2.2.b Wider context including FE culture

In England, Further Education has been synonymous with vocational education as opposed to what is commonly seen as the 'academic route', within Sixth Form colleges. The cultures are distinctly different and generally, FE has lower status within the wider post-secondary school environment. Furthermore, education policies can also tell social and class relations and the value of labour. They reflect FE as a holding area for those who are not academic (Wheelahan, 2015), with a curriculum that narrowly focused on work tasks and roles. In 2015 the raising of the participation age in education and training, from 16 to 18, clearly brought with it new challenges and opportunities for colleges and young people. One key issue was that the extended time in education coincided with data showing that within the post-18 age range, there were a number of young people unable to secure work, justifying then, the view that FE is a 'warehouse' or 'holding' place for young people (Acquah and Huddleston, 2013).

The government discourse however, is one of social inclusion and education as crucial for economic growth and competition (Woodin et al., 2013). The challenge is to deliver high quality programmes, including learners who were not in education or training, and to ensure that learners either progress to higher levels of education or are employed. At the time of transition in raising participation age, numerous studies identified principles and necessary practices that needed to be in place to ensure that young people are engaged and their participation sustained: investment in support mechanisms and innovative approaches to learning (Maguire, 2012); relevance through a broader curriculum, progression routes and attention to Mathematics and English skills (Acquah and Huddleston, 2013). This will remain to be seen if any of these studies were used to moderate policies and practice.

There have been continuous funding cuts to FE since 2010 with further on the horizon. The government presently is committed to freezing base rate funding as it commits to funding the new T levels - but real terms may remain the same with extra money invested in increasing teaching hours on T levels, thus not extra money for resources, resulting in spending per learner as low as in 1998 or 10% higher than in 1989 (Belfield et al., 2018). A new funding condition from 2014 - removed funding from colleges for learners who were not studying English and Maths if they got below a C grade. The Funding formula forces institutions to support the learner in completing the course by withholding 50% of funding for those who drop out. Year one enrolment determines year two funding (Illsley and Waller, 2017). The challenge is delivering high quality programmes with reduced budgets.

Introduction of T levels is a change from vocation to Technical education (September 2020) in 25 different areas/ subject, each should offer students 315 hours of placements. The argument is that this will bring parity of esteem, as the courses will be equivalent to 3 A levels. T levels are supposed to raise the prestige (Belafield et al., 2018) and increase classroom and placement time, however the timetable for the transition is tight. It will be phased in gradually from the beginning of September 2020. There are still concerns that the T levels is focused on specific occupations at the cost of general skills, and furthermore it is unclear about the labour demand for these qualifications.

Marketisation has come to dominate FE practices through monitoring, meeting standards, and the audit culture amongst others, based on the neo-liberal idea that competition raises standards and therefore improves productivity. The implications for lecturers are the dilemma of compromising working practices to meet the funding requirements through the retention and achievement policy. This is reflected in increased stress levels and 'diminishing sense of professionalism' (Illsley and Waller, 2017, p.2), as funding is withheld if learners do not complete. FE has historically attracted learners who have had

'failed' previous experiences in education and therefore may rely on student-tutor relationships that are inspirational and trusting. "Basing funding on retention and achievement removes the foundations of these relationships" (Illsley and Waller, 2017, p. 5). The focus of teachers on income and job security instead of teaching or student, has encouraged staff to 'game' the system in that they provide what they are expected to - so high grades and retention. This creates conflict within the tutor as it compromises their professional values.

2.2.c Teacher identity

The identity of the teacher as a member of an industry and at the same time part of the education community, is a valuable resource that was only briefly acknowledged in most of the literature on the professionalisation of the FE teacher. Furthermore, they bring to the role, particular dispositions, beliefs, and values from their prior experiences with young people in FE (Bathmaker and Avis, 2007; Towler, Woolner and Wall, 2011). Emotional labour and pastoral work is central though unrecognised component of the FE teachers role, however this was not openly valued, instead criticised by fellow teachers as it was an 'un-technical' approach in teaching (Gleeson et al., 2015, p.87). Funding and marketisation have marginalised the pastoral aspects in FE. This view was argued by Hylands in 2006 for the importance of the pastoral aspects in FE and the negative impact on learners if this is removed. This is the invisible or hidden aspect of FE. Therefore, the centralised discourse is on abstract versions of VE however, the localised practices or more nuanced, embracing features of a socially inclusive space.

The interlink between college and industry referred to above, is mediated by the teacher (Higham and Farnsworth, 2012) and is a key aspect that makes a course vocational. In their study of Canadian vocation courses offered in schools, Farnsworth and Higham (2013) argue that the identity of the teacher 'mediates' school policies and learners experiences. The teachers' prior experiences and, in the Canadian case, current links with industry, is valued and encouraged, thus teachers were accountable to two different domains – industry and education or CoP and college. So vocational education is more than acquisition of skills: teachers have distinct identities that are 'hybrid', as they straddle two domains and may enact the curriculum based on their own values and beliefs, so that learners have an implicit link to industry through examples they use or how they prepare learners for work placement. However, even in that study they were not analysing the interpersonal relationships with learners that develop in college.

The theorising of hybridised identity is applicable in cases of teachers who have links or have had links in the past with the vocational field. In England, it is not common for tutors to retain a strong link with industry, as tutors have specific roles, either to deliver as a traditional teacher in a classroom following the syllabus of the awarding body, or as a tutor responsible for assessing learners in placements. Both roles are located within the college and not in the wider vocational field. The culture of the FE College is then the context for development of teacher identities. Teacher professionalism through post-graduate teacher training became compulsory relatively recently (around 2007 - 2012), but at the same time is heavily regulated through inspections and auditing processes (Bathmaker and Avis, 2012; Springbett, 2018). The professionalisation of teachers through teacher training, since 2013, has been indifferent by the government. In response to the professionalism as 'organisation', so less to do with the vocation/industry field of their specialism, the space or the culture within FE, does not encourage discussions that develop a critical understanding of either teaching or industry due to the lack of a culture of "collectivity" (Bathmaker and Avis, 2012). It is likely that tutors then have identities negotiated within this culture and not necessarily hybridised.

Therefore, it is likely that tutors identify less with the industry and remain removed from

the communities of practice, due to distinct FE policies and structure. In teacher education, for example, teacher educators in FE feel marginalised within the wider communities of practice of teacher educators, as they are governed by FE policies, which add different pressures related to performativity. The increase in research on FE teacher identity, focuses on these issues, rather than the negotiated identity through links with industry. Research on FE teachers, focus on teacher training (Orr, 2012; Richardson, 2013; Springbett, 2018); FE culture – the relationships between teachers and the institution (Bennett and Smith(ed), 2018) and HE in FE (Feather, 2011; Medcalf, 2014; Avis and Orr, 2016). Teachers negotiate their identities between FE culture and the professionalism as a teacher educator. Furthermore, the area of research on HE in FE is at undergraduate level with adult learners that may already have vocational identities shaped through different prior experiences.

One study that is relevant to this area is by Esmond and Wood (2017) on ‘dual professionalism’, where the participants were recently qualified teachers to work in workshop settings. They concluded that the current culture in FE is employment insecurity, so teachers draw on former practices, at the expense of their teacher identity. The result therefore, using terms from Margaret Archer, is ‘morphostasis’ rather than ‘morphogenesis’ implying that the system remains the same rather than develops professionally, with less opportunities to engage closely with the workplace/vocation/industry. “...that individuals draw on their former occupational expertise in their teaching hardly constitutes a coherent integration of education with the workplace.” Policy developments in FE do not provide the space for engaging with specific or genuine developments in the vocational field. Instead, tutors tend to develop expertise in other areas when there is a shortage of experts in those fields, so participating less in the vocation they were experts. Consequently, it is likely that the hybridised teacher identity, which may be the bridge between college and the community of practice at the beginning of teacher training, becomes weaker with fewer opportunities to participate in industry. Furthermore these processes, further de-professionalise FE teachers by not valuing practitioner research (Gleeson et al., 2015). This may have implications for those learners on a course that does not have direct links with placements.

Another issue with a dual professional identity is that teachers who have had a longer time in communities of practice related to the vocation with a professional identity of the industry, and those who had a short time, for example only a few years, identify more strongly with being a teacher – so positioning of identity is related to the length of time as well as the status the vocation has in society (Smithers, 2018). Teacher identity is clearly a valuable resource for learner identity but as shown above it is not seen as such within the wider culture, determined by FE policies.

2.2.d Curriculum and Pedagogy

A vocational education curriculum should include engagement in practice and a close relationship with industry, (Higham and Farnsworth, 2012), as it is taken to mean the totality of the experiences of the learners and not limited to a body of knowledge or syllabus (Kelly, 2009). It should also include a consideration of the purpose, and the “effects that exposure to such knowledge and such subjects is likely to have...” (Kelly, 2009, p.9). The recommendation of the Wolf report was that there should be stronger links with local employers – a “genuine link between vocational education and the labour market” (2011, p.143). The interconnections that the report identified were between the Awarding bodies, schools and colleges, and employers, where the awarding bodies are involved with planning the intended curriculum. The field has changed, however practices on courses differ, and may have to do with local resources. Stronger links with industry through placements, would therefore be a part of the intended curriculum. One would

therefore expect learners to be engaging in practice as part of the curriculum. Learning through participation and the work placement as the community of practice, will be examined below in the section on 'vocational culture'.

A distinct style of teaching on vocational courses develops through a process of mediation between the teachers beliefs and the dispositions of learners. In terms of pedagogy the study by Bathmaker and Avis (2007) found teachers used terms such as 'teacherly', 'pedagogic', 'schooling culture' to refer to style of teaching that were used. Teacher trainees use these terms to describe their style of teaching and management of behaviour, although this could be because the students were 14-16 years old and known by tutors, to be difficult to engage in education. Taking this as a possible style of interaction that has been mediated, implies there may be a culture in FE colleges that develop according to the student body.

The pedagogical approach can also sometimes be confused with activity. Pedagogy in FE has been seen as a move away from didactic approaches learners may have experienced in school, to one that is student centred, self directed, experiential and active 'learning', which Dziubinski (2015) terms postmodernist constructivist approach to the point that direct guidance is overlooked. Teaching is represented by endless planning of an assortment of activities to ensure learners remain occupied, as a result lessons sometimes could be overactive rather than interactive lessons. This is encouraged as part of continuing professional development according to what OFSTED would consider an outstanding lesson. However this could coincide with marketisation - so all 'singing and dancing' to make them more attractive to new learners - to engage the unwilling learners. Tasks are oversimplified and the problem is that it is too prescriptive and reductive (Dziubinski, 2015) on one hand but contextualised for the learners, on the other (Gee, 2004).

Above, may be an example of how the culture of the vocational college interrelates with the culture of the student body: the prior experiences of learners of the teaching style in school could mean that the college tutors adapt their teaching to accommodate learners' dispositions and learning identities. Most studies identify re-engagement with learning in college amongst learners who disengaged in school (Attwood, 2004; McPherson, 2019). They offer reasons such as more diverse choices that they are interested in, and the less hierarchical relationships with staff. They felt respected and a sense of belonging as staff were more approachable. So it is possible that teachers adapting their approach to one that learners value, means that learners could experience changes to the dispositions as they begin to reengage, which may matter for how they go onto identify with the vocation or with learning, but it also means that for some learners the course may be oversimplified and prescriptive.

2.2.e Knowledgeability and knowing

Young (2008) distinguishes three approaches to knowledge that have followed each other historically, but have avoided epistemological issues: knowledge based, standards based and connective approaches. The knowledge-based approach, seen by Young as being historically the original approach, is one that asserts vocational knowledge on the job cannot be acquired. The focus therefore, was on qualifications, and it excluded application, which was left to apprentices and employers. The standards-based approach assumed that employers and not educationalists should control the curriculum, therefore they should determine the skills and knowledge, and competence should be prioritised; so, the focus would be on what learners need to be able to do in work. 'Standards' were defined by different industries and in these cases, knowledge was secondary. This approach created tensions within knowledge based college courses and it also failed to recognise that knowledge within the workplace did not have its origins there (Young, 2008).

The final approach to knowledge is the connective, which others (Heusdens, Bakker, Baartman, Bruijn, 2016) do not emphasise but suggest that too often stakeholders see it as being acquired through education or formal training and applied in practice. It is thought of as dichotomies, which can limit understanding of what it is, since it is not just propositional, but procedural and implicit, learnt through participation in practice. The connective approach attempted to ensure that the qualifications were not completely knowledge based but “ ‘influenced by’ rather than ‘derived from ‘ occupational standards” (Young, 2008, p.142). This has however led in time to varied practices since some employers are more involved in leading on the planning of the curriculum, than others, confirmed in a study by Bathmaker (2013) who found that it was difficult to state who took responsibility for vocational knowledge beyond the awarding bodies. Certainly there was a role for employers; however there was no role for other specialists, for example researchers in the field, suggesting that knowledge is reproduced, using an economic lens rather than possibly a social justice lens for example, which may have the interest of disadvantaged learners as the focus.

Curriculum is closely connected to vocational knowledge, which in VE is often seen as procedural and declarative (Lawy et al., 2004; Schaap et al., 2009), with little access to theoretical knowledge. This is an area that has been debated in the past, as the writers taking a social realist perspective (Young, 2008; Wheelahan, 2015), do so with the belief that there is objective knowledge that is outside learners’ experience, therefore a focus on knowledge through practice is limiting as it reduces future opportunities or encourages reproduction of knowledge that already exists. From a social constructivist perspective, knowledge is what the learner makes of their experience - so what is meaningful in their engagement with practice: knowledge is not about information and becoming competent, it is about what is valued within the community of practice.

Vocational curriculum is based on what others have defined as important, showing that a body of knowledge has to be ‘acquired’ but learners are engaging in practice within placement with knowledge that has been negotiated. In vocational education it is placement that distinguishes it from other courses, therefore a weakness with the VE curriculum may be that it does not acknowledge the negotiation but values the objective, however the objective does not challenge or foster change but encourages reproduction of social inequality, as it has colluded in excluding the access of theoretical knowledge by its focus on skills for work (Wheelahan, 2015). The focus on widening participation and social inclusion does a further disservice as it restricts theoretical knowledge so those who are socially disadvantaged cannot then participate in wider debates or challenge and change practice. Students need this knowledge to be able make judgements about practice, to participate in debates in their field.

However, the reality is that learners are marginalised in schools by this priority to academic knowledge and for learners who needed the contextualisation to make sense - were seen as not motivated or not able. These are often the learners who choose VE, so do you marginalise them further or instead there needs to be wider changes to the system from the school level? As Gee (2004) points out, those who come from backgrounds that are more privileged make movement from folksy to academic knowledge more easily, as the academic language is embedded in the culture; in the activities they do outside, and the language they are surrounded with.

Placement is what distinguishes vocational education from other courses and this is where learners can engage in meaning making through practice, so an approach that is interconnected, and not thought of as dichotomies. The social learning perspective lends itself to this way of examining knowledgeability. A criticism by Young(2008) of the social learning perspective on vocational knowledge is that it is situated and therefore not wide

and general where it can be applied to other vocations. However, Wenger (1998) analysed learning processes where there was no explicit teaching as in the traditional sense. Perhaps, the perceived differences between college and work place learning are exaggerated (Hodkinson, 2005). The process of constructing knowledge is a complex relationship between the formal curriculum of the course; the socio-cultural wider environment of the learner, and their individual dispositions to learn, so not an individual activity (Lawy et al., 2004).

Vocational education can imply knowledge in the traditional sense, however, it is situated in the vocational field and therefore we may conclude indirectly had informed the curriculum and the syllabus, however how is it selected, organised and transformed into the curriculum? This is relevant for learners at college who then are in placement with the intention of working later in the same field. Others argue against the use of the concept of vocational knowledge but instead, knowledgeability (Wenger-Trayer, 2015), as it encompasses experience and a level of negotiating of meaning by the individual. Knowledgeability within a social theory of learning, is not just information, but experience and 'negotiating one's position' within a wide vocational field. "You develop relationships of what we call 'knowledgeability' with many practices where you cannot claim competence" (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p.142) so, knowledgeability is neither information nor competence. Through participating in a community, learning through engaging in practice, produces meaning for the learner.

Bringing the focus back to the learner reinforces the significance of acknowledging their developing identity and prior experiences. The formal curriculum does not acknowledge this. However, when the personal is integrated within the formal curriculum knowledge, for the learner this can be empowering and can strengthen vocational aspirations, since the learner is more likely to remain 'grounded' in their immediate experiences, and use their knowledgeability to make decisions and choices (Lawy et al., 2004). To understand learning it is necessary to recognise firstly the theoretical perspective used, and secondly the relationship between college and workplace: learning should be viewed as a 'participatory practice' through the eyes of the learner (Hodkinson, 2005). This study could contribute to understanding how vocational knowledge is conceptualised and valued within local contexts by the learner.

2.2.f Assessments

Further education defines success using outcome-based measures such as completion, employment, further studies (DFE, 2018), however learners may see success as engagement and the achievement of personal goals (Zepke et al., 2011). Assessments according to the Awarding bodies, may be different from the placement, where there may be feedback from the mentor, around practice and the shared repertoire that is valued within the community. Success therefore by the college may be the learners meeting all the standards and competences, and rewarded through a qualification at the end. However, placement could be where learners are more confident in their practice and engage mutually alongside experts.

Success by the college is defined as high grades and achieving a qualification. According to the TLRP (Nash et al., 2008) the emphasis on outcome-based assessments has led to an impoverished curriculum in FE as it has led teachers to focus on raising grades by spending more time on explaining grade criteria. There is also the belief that raising grades would raise self-esteem and motivate learners to engage with the course but "students are 'achieving' more and learning less" (p.11). Moreover, learners find feedback as grades demotivating (Watkins, 2001, p.2) as "different learners approach achievement related tasks with different goals, orientations or motivation, and distinction between learning and performance is key".

One can see links between the demands of employers and the assessment process. To increase productivity employees are managed and therefore there is a priority on standardised skills and competencies. "In Britain, skills remain individual attributes or properties required to fulfil particular outputs, and qualification represent, not the end result of a process of vocational education, but certification of learning outcomes, whether achieved through training or practical experience" (Clarke and Winch, 2007, p.15). This practice is evident in the assessment of learners on placement where they have to display certain competences. The competence agenda has not been successful because it comes from formal learning environments. The statements that describe performance apply to outcomes that are explicit not tacit; nor does it acknowledge the processes of learning (Hager, 2007).

Assessments, and therefore success in practice through a demonstration of the acquired vocational skills (Virtanen, 2008), could be through self-assessments. Moreover, the vocational curriculum reifies some practices such as portfolio development and reflection on practice to encourage participation (Morley, 2016). However, the claim that through action planning and recording achievement using processes such as self-assessment or reviewing progress, individuals acquire control over their role as either a learner or worker, should be cautiously accepted (Harrison, 2001). The learner could see these processes as being less focused on their development but as having bureaucratic value for the organisation. The records are 'transition documents'. However, if the organisation designs the process for the benefit of the individuals then there is the potential for reflexivity and shaping of the individual's self-awareness and construction of a particular type of learner identity.

The assessment process, furthermore, may conceal a level of power by the assessor and therefore may encourage compliance rather than meaning making through practice. Hierarchical structures can reflect the underlying power relations between mentor and student, through the assessment of competencies. Wenger (Farnsworth et al., 2016) acknowledges this power with a small 'p' where power relations come to the fore by who defines competence. Students may not develop autonomy due to the culture of accountability. In Bates (1991) study, students were assessed through observations and graded on how they performed. They were given exact guidelines on how to carry out a task and thus graded according to those criteria, therefore not fostering autonomy. They should though, develop procedural knowledge, however this portrays a narrow view of learning that ignores meaning making and engagement by the individual. Using a participatory lens, then assessment and success should be around learning the repertoire and the way of talking from somebody who has been in the field, so in these instances there is value in feedback that is not graded. Since the Wolf (2011) report most vocational education courses include within their assessments an exam element which aims to make it of equal value to A levels and more acceptable to universities. This study therefore could make a contribution by investigation how assessments in general or particular types of assessments are valued by the different stakeholders and whether they encourage or discourage engagement with the course.

2.2.g The student body

The government led discourse on vocational education implies that if students were involved in their learning then this would lead automatically to higher 'levels of achievement', however this does not take account of the prior experiences of the young person. 'The student body' is the final concept from Higham and Farnsworth (2012), conceptualising vocational education. This section differs from the following chapter as it covers the macrolevel processes such as transition from school.

Transition from school

There are significant differences in attainment as an outcome in school, as well as progression into further education (Gorard, 2010), between learners from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those who are not (Dunne and Gazeley, 2008). While there have been national policies to address this disparity, based on increasing competitiveness within the global market as well as addressing inequality (Whitty, 2010), the differences still exist.

A change in culture within schools driven by national policies, has had an effect on how schoolteachers enact the curriculum. The English education system focuses on the cognitive and affective needs of the learner, however the increasing demands of the National Curriculum has meant that teachers have less time to be attentive to the personal, social and emotional needs of the young person. The learner identity of young people is stronger when they are encouraged to be autonomous in their learning through “planning, monitoring and evaluating” their practice as well as “making choices about activities from a bank of varied resources” (Lamb, 2011, p.70). They value being encouraged and guided by their teachers to be independent (Gorard, 2010). However, the increase of teacher control exerted through the pressures of examinations, means that learners lose motivation when they sense a lack of control of their learning environment, demonstrating a fragile learner identity (Lamb, 2011) from school.

Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to underachieve in school (Gorard, 2010), be excluded or *access vocational alternatives* (Osborn, 2001; McPherson, 2019). Additionally they may have been in lower attainment groups (McPherson, 2019) where they were more likely to have different experiences and views (Tereshchenko et al., 2018) such as an experience of lower teacher expectations, disruption to lessons and low self esteem (Dunne and Gazeley, 2008). Tereshchenko et al. (2018) found that learner identities of the different groups were constrained by the dominant ideology of ‘ability’ hierarchy (p.1). The division into ‘ability’ groups or the practice of setting is widespread and lies in the history of education in England and policies such as the Higher Standards, Better Schools for All (House of Commons, 2006). The practice continues despite research failing to identify the benefits. The impact observed by others, show divisions into “pro-and anti-school factions” and thus “investment in alternative forms of status” (Francis et al., 2017, p.8). This greater focus on their individual identity, encouraged through divisions according to attainment levels and identification as members of these groups (Osborn, 2001) provided little evidence of solidarity between learners in England. Given that a sense of belonging in school can motivate engagement in learning (Faircloth, 2009), if learners did not experience this, due to the divisive culture based on the discourse of ‘ability’ then they are more likely to disengage in learning.

2.3 Learning environment and vocational culture

The previous section looked at education but lacked detail for example, how the college interlinks with placements. If learning is seen as participatory then the learning environment includes placements. This section analyses the learning experiences in placements. Here there is little data on 16-19 year-old who are in college, but literature on Apprentices and undergraduate students at university.

One of the major studies of FE colleges was the Transforming Learning Cultures (TLC) project, of four FE colleges in England between 2001 and 2005 (James and Gleeson, 2004), which noted that a common feature was the constant policy changes that were acted upon without reference to practice before or what would happen in the future. Sites (Courses) within the college could however differ in their culture, for example regarding

the development of vocational identity, some sites did not lead to a particular vocation, such as Travel and Tourism. To work in these fields students needed to study further.

FE in England sees vocational education as acquisition of skills, where it is not only mechanistic but also atomistic where skills are broken down into individual tasks that are assessed. On the other hand to engage in practice and identify with the vocation there is an expectation that learners see vocation as a calling, which links to motivation, including that of the tutors, who are reinforcing practice when they show that they value the profession. As you will see below, learners can experience placement on the periphery and can be marginalised. Furthermore, practices could be restrictive, where learners are not empowered. So it is likely they will 'acquire the skills' but not identify or they may identify with a culture that is not empowering.

2.3.a Placement as situated learning

Situated-learning theory refers to learning that is unintentional and occurs through participation within particular contexts or cultures (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Learning is not confined to a particular place or location (Paechter et al., 2001; Lawy, 2002; Hager, 2011) but involves engaging in social practices (James and Biesta, 2007). The interrelationship between learning and the context is a central part of situated learning. It is where meaning making is constructed through social interaction (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000b).

Another way of conceptualising situated learning is seeing it as being contextualised by knowledge, power, teaching, learning and structure (Scott, 2001). The knowledgeability that is constructed through learning reflects a particular time and space a community is preoccupied with. Power contexts could be identified firstly by, who determines what knowledge is legitimate; secondly, access to resources; thirdly, there are power dimensions within the learning situation example the teacher has power over how learning is organised; and finally, the learning in a particular situation or space assumes reality for the learner in a specific way and this in a way closes other ways of knowing or seeing. The setting as a teaching and learning context also allows or inhibits the amount of control the learner has in terms of what is learnt and depending on how strongly or weakly framed the teaching device is, for example if it is text based or if it encourages discussions. These devices are the tools through which learners to interpret their experiences. Finally, his reference to the structural context refers to the spatial and temporal features of the environment. Scott (2001) does not specify if this would apply to learners who are on the periphery of the work place as in a placement from college but there is no reason why it could not apply. This explanation is theoretical and had not been evaluated in practice however it does provide a way of looking at the experience in workplaces as not only the acquisition of skills but also negotiating meaning within a particular culture.

The work placement in vocational education matters as it is a space where there is meaningful engagement. It can provide important cues or triggers for students to make sense of the job role; artefacts and clues that encourage recall and application, surround them. Clues in the environment supports learning, where learners observe the process and the result, and where they can see how an activity contributes to the totality (Billett, 1994). Being situated within a vocational culture, learners value the authenticity of activities and their engagement with expert others. They appreciate the guidance and insights of the expert. Furthermore, vocational dispositions develop through engaging in practice alongside or by guidance from the expert (Colley et al., 2003). In other words, the socio-cultural environment interlinks closely to learners dispositions and therefore this space should be examined closely.

2.3.b *Expansive and restrictive practices*

Students' vocational identity may depend on how expansive or restrictive are the practices, for learning (Virtanen et al., 2008). The diversity of the workplace environment can be placed on an expansive-restrictive continuum (Fuller and Unwin, 2011). Expansive tasks are purposeful and relevant: learners value these and it encourages further engagement (Billett, 1994), motivating those who had disengaged (Attwood et al., 2004). When students are motivated, staff tend to show higher levels of commitment towards the students to ensure they succeed (Avis et al., 2002). Restrictive practices could be differentiated (Scott, 2001) where there is an acceptance that the process of becoming knowledgeable about practice, is gradual. This can be limiting for learners on a college course, as they are there only temporarily on placement. Learners participate on the periphery, which Lave and Wenger (1991) saw as empowering but this can sometimes result in feelings of marginalisation, if the learner feels isolated from the community (Avis et al., 2002). It is possible that aspirations 'cool out' as learners take on the culture of the vocation that is restrictive (Bates, 1991).

While most communities of practice can be transformative, some may create barriers through their particular way of working, where the learner may be restrained from developing knowledgeability through a lack of access to practice (Pang, 2015) or access to participating alongside an expert. Additionally, over time some communities of practice may become stagnant and develop one particular way of thinking (Morley, 2016) and therefore be restrictive in how they engage with learner, leading learners not experiencing a sense of belonging. Practices that are restrictive (Virtanen et al., 2008), can be experienced by learners as frustrating and stressful (Johnston, 2016).

2.3.c *Tutor/Student Relationship*

Teachers and staff are key people within vocational education as they enact the curriculum. Teachers seem to act as a barrier to the effect or impact of, poor educational policies (Nash et al., 2008), so to the learner this relationship emerges as significant. They have shown that they can adapt their approaches to match the dispositions of learners, and they manage their expectations by taking account of learners prior experiences (Attwood et al., 2004). So, what in teacher approaches or pedagogies or curriculum, facilitate changes?

Placements can be valuable for identity construction as learners can make sense of the vocation through "observing, questioning and interacting with seasoned professionals" ((Jackson, 2016, p.1). Work placements by business undergraduates were shown to foster identity development. To make sense of what business graduates had observed in placement they reflected and appraised their practice (Jackson, 2016). However, a caution would be that the relationship between the learner and the teacher influences the nature of the knowledge that is revealed to the learner by the teacher/ skilled worker. Therefore, in the case of placements, skilled workers may only reveal to students/novices that which is relevant. "Information may be withheld to either maintain the expert-novice relationship or show consideration to the learners limited experience and understanding"(Billett, 1994, p.7). Apart from a relationship that may be disempowering to the learner, there is also the inclination to focus on 'support' from more experienced staff rather than learner agency and motivation (Morley, 2016).

'Empowerment', however, had been recognised by a study of student translators in placement (Marco, 2016). While the university saw work experience as an opportunity for students to develop confidence, competence in the field and empowerment, the study found that acquiring these skills depended on the relationship between the learner and the instructor. If the relationship builds trust and mutual respect, then there were more

opportunities for the learner to feel empowered (Marco, 2016). However, the instructor remained overall in charge and students do not fully experience being in power. This is a long process and does not happen in a short placement because students do not get to the stage of questioning and feeling empowered (Jackson, 2016) and therefore identity formation is still limited in placement.

Attwood et al. (2004) found that for learners to see themselves as successful in their learning there needed to be good relations with the tutor who encouraged and motivated the learner, including showing an interest in the student's life outside the course. Those that develop a synergistic relationship with the course tutors, enjoy the course and go on to develop careers in the same field (James and Biesta, 2007). Placements therefore are learning environments but there is more happening there than the 'acquisition of skills'. It is a social space where learners can engage alongside experts. However, it could also be a space that is restrictive where the learner may be marginalised.

2.3.d Social structures

In a series of interviews with Farnsworth and Kleanthous between 2007 and 2015, Wenger-Trayner was asked why the social learning theory "does not account for social structures and power relations in society." He suggested that there might be good reasons to combine social learning theory with a theory of structural power. I was mindful that the view I took, may limit my scope in being able to recognise the manifestation of power within the environment. I recognised that power may exist in the relationships the learners engaged in and therefore knowledge may be arbitrary, however I would consider whether it was meaningful to those who engaged with it. I chose not to include Bourdieu as used in the study of Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) –since I wanted to focus on how competence is negotiated on a smaller scale and do not feel that a study of structure can happen with depth at the same time. The focus needs to be on one or the other but with acknowledgement that there are larger social structures that are at play at the same time. In this instance, the concept of identity instead of 'habitus' is used. Habitus according to Wenger (Farnsworth et al., 2016) is how social stratification becomes embodied, largely subconsciously. He argues that these contribute to identity formation and therefore the concept that comes closer to habitus is participation but the focus is on learning rather than reproduction.

Gender

Students may come with a gendered identity shaped by their past experiences and what they have observed in the wider culture and their own personal interpretation of these. This may then shape how their identity develops while at college over the two years. Acker (2012) discusses gendered identities, where gender is a substructure, which is "constructed in the work place, but also brought with the individual into the organisation" (p.216). Each community of practice or vocational environment will come with its own expectation of worker behaviour. Some of this behaviour could be gender neutral such as arriving on time and wearing a uniform. Gendered behaviour could be feminine traits such as nurturing and caring or masculine traits such as physical strength or skilled with the use of mechanical tools. Acker refers to this as the 'gendered subtext' of an organisation.

Class

The study by Lawy, Bloomer and Biesta (2004) and Bates (1991) demonstrated that *class* could shape identity through choice of course to study. The ethnographic study by Bates (1991) of Health Care students were of apprentices who were mainly in work and were in college one day a week. Lawy et al. interviewed students making the transition from school to post compulsory education, and their results show students develop their identity through decisions they make about what to study. In their case study, they found

that the student from a poorer background did not feel very secure in pursuing a course that he may enjoy. He chose the course that had a clear vocation or occupation at the end to allay fears of unemployment. On the other hand, the student who came from a more affluent background did not feel the “need to ground her aspirations in terms of any vocational goals.” (p.220). Both studies raised the question of how learners make their choices, demonstrating the socio-cultural mediation of identity.

Here there is little research on the intersection of gender, ethnicity and class in the shaping of vocational identity. Although I will not be addressing this gap, I hope to move the field forward in this regard by attending to the topic as it emerges.

“Intersectionality is an analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege” (AWID, 2004). Using intersectionality as a tool could make clear the complexity of students’ experiences where different issues interweave. There may be other structures such as ethnicity, race and class shaping students’ identity.

2.4 Summary of chapter

The framework by Higham and Farnsworth (2012) has facilitated a more detailed analysis of vocational education that acknowledges the learner and the learning environment. It has shown FE as, a holding area with reduced funding; deregulating the professionalism of FE teachers who were always seen as provided trusting, inspiring relationships to reengage learners, and the curriculum as reproducing social inequality. Where does this leave the young adult learner leaving school? The following chapter focuses on the learner and identity as a tool to analyse learning.

3 Identity

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I showed that the Wolf Report (2011) called for an analysis of the links between college, placement and the awarding body as different practices create different possibilities for vocational identification. The lens had zoomed out to the vocational education context. In this chapter, the focus moves to the learner. The chapter is divided into three major sections: vocational identity, learner identity and the conceptual framework derived from the literature.

In the introductory chapter, identity was conceptualised as a state of becoming through practice. Learning experiences are situated within a culture of practice and therefore Billett (1994) called for the examination of the workplace as a context for learning. In VE, learners experience the workplace through placements. In vocational practice, what and how learners learn, expresses their attitudes, interests and values (Billett, 1997), could be a display of their identity. Learners therefore develop not only a vocational identity but also a learner identity, so multi-dimensions of one identity. To separate learner and vocational would offer an incoherent study. However, analytically there may be value nonetheless in seeing how aspects of identity, such as learner disposition or vocational disposition may have differential impacts on learning. Learners may express different aspects of it given the context. There may be practices that associate more closely to a learning identity and others with a vocational identity, which may be useful to distinguish. Identity therefore, is a useful analytical tool to investigate learning on a vocational education course.

3.2 Vocational identity

3.2.a *Conceptualisation of vocational identity*

Vocational identity as negotiated

Some have conceptualised vocational identity as a process, so as negotiated (Bathmaker and Avis, 2007) and inherited, and others as an outcome where the individual works independently, able to evaluate their own work and value challenge (Klotz et al., 2014). Although vocational identity may be an outcome in vocational education provision and important for how learners learn and perform, researchers do not fully understand its formation. According to Wenger, identity formation takes place on two levels: the negotiating process and inheritance (Farnsworth et al., 2016). Learners negotiate their identity through participation, so how they express their competence and how others recognise them. For Bathmaker and Avis (2007) the negotiation was between the individual's anticipated or imagined role and the role they begin to assume as they engaged with work. Negotiation implies a co-constructed process, which is evident in the following study of medical students. Through social relationships with role-models (qualified doctors who demonstrated qualities that students aspired towards) and developing knowledgeability of the role of the doctor, including a growing awareness of the power and responsibilities that they have, medical students experienced anxiety about the loss of aspects of their previous identity (Wong and Trollope, 2014) shaped by prior experiences. They were concerned about becoming desensitised to suffering. This study also found instances within the hidden curriculum of power imbalances and ethical dilemmas that shaped their developing professional identities. Here medical students had used reflective journals over an 18-month period which when interpreted, showed the negotiated process of identity development.

Vocational identity as inherited

Through participation, the experience “enters the constitution of your identity as a person more generally...you inherit some of the identity characteristics that reflect the location of your practice in the broader social landscape” (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p.145).

Vocational identity as an outcome

Others have conceptualised vocational identity, as the ability to plan, carry out and monitor their own work independently (Klotz et al., 2014) and the readiness to welcome change and value challenge (Armishaw, 2007). Armishaw used work identity in the same way as vocational identity and provided an extended definition that vocational identity is evident when the worker demonstrates a determination to commit to the values of the work group and establish an attachment to the work they do, to their employer and to the workplace. There were no studies however, of what attachment to work might look, instead there were fictional cases as examples. However, Virtanen et al. (2008) and Klotz et al.(2014) used surveys to capture student’s experiences of vocational education. Although this was followed by interviews with a smaller sample, they do not capture the negotiating process that learners go through to arrive at reflective dispositions.

According to Virtanen et al. (2008), in their study of vocational identity formation, vocational identity is evident when the student develops a “conception of her/himself as a representative of her/his own vocational field”(p.2). Question they asked was “What features of student’s vocational identity development can be identified during VE related workplace learning? What differences are there between different vocational fields in educational practices and the setting where their respective students form their vocational identity?” Identity was articulated by responding to 13 statements on their experience of work placement. The statements give a sense of how the study defined vocational identity. Students were asked to rate statements from 1-4, some of which focused on their change in thinking during work practice; their reflections on how to develop further; feelings about being a member of a work place; and their own vocational strengths and weaknesses.

Students’ views on educational practices were also collected through interviews. The study suggested that vocational identity is closely linked to social identity that students develop through their relationships with staff. Here students can influence the development of their own identity by forming relationships with other members of the workplace. It does not go into detail about what could be expansive or restrictive practices for learning saying that these would affect the development of the vocational identity of the student. They found that students considered things more critically during workplace learning periods. They began to understand what areas they needed to develop in the future. Different educational practices and structures of the vocational field create different possibilities for the formation of vocational identity so concludes that vocational identity appears to be constructed in relation with the educational practices and structures of their particular fields. This enabled me to recognise that a study of vocational identity should be carried out in the context where it occurs.

In this study vocational identity is seen as one that is negotiated through engaging in practice, however an awareness of inheritance and outcomes identified by others, is useful to guide methodology and analysis. To evaluate inheritance and outcomes, I believe requires possibly an ethnographic approach over a long period. Moreover, I earlier argued for the acknowledgement of the personal, and that learners may see vocation as a ‘calling’ that they are drawn to, which may be reflected in their beliefs about, and aspiration for work. The conceptualisation of vocational identity, also encompasses those of professional, pre-professional, worker and occupational identity, since this would enable the study to find out how learners on a vocational course identify with the profession when they are in different workplaces and in college on a two-year course.

Consequently, the reviewed literature encompassed studies of courses with experience of a work environment. The literature extends to undergraduates at university as there were limited studies on 16-19 year-olds in Further Education colleges. These studies used vocational and professional identity as meaning the same. Professional or pre-professional identity formation, in other studies (Bathmaker and Avis, 2007; Scholar et al., 2014; O'Connor et al., 2015; Jackson, 2016; Woods et al., 2016), was seen as occurring mainly amongst undergraduates in work placement, training to become a professional in a specific field, for example, nurse educators developing a professional identity through professional socialisation (Woods et al., 2016). I considered these studies because learners were required, as part of the course, to be in a work setting. Students' experiences of being on the periphery of the work placement community (Wenger, 1998), was also seen as relevant.

3.2.b Vocational identification

Vocational identification can vary on different courses, in terms of the levels of guidance from experts, suggesting that it is shaped by the educational expectations and practices within each field (Virtanen et al., 2008). It can also be shaped by length of time learners are in placement, their experience of actual work and the general atmosphere of and practices of the placement (Virtanen, 2008; Klotz, 2014; Johnston, 2016). Engagement in practice is one of three modes of identification or belonging, according to the social learning theory of Wenger (1998). The other two different forms of participation within a community of practice are imagination and alignment. Engagement refers to the learner working together with others, and the way they engage will shape their experience, as they learn what they can do through the response of other. Imagination is used by the learner to construct an image of themselves and the community, as a way to orient them so that they can participate. Learners as well as others in the community align themselves to make sure that their activities are in line with the goals of the community. Within the vocation, the 'Landscape of Practice' (Wenger, 2015), the learner forms their identity through the combination of all three processes, together with growing knowledgeability. Exploring identity in this way can make transparent, learners beliefs about the vocation (Solomon, 2007) and practices that facilitate learners becoming a part of the community.

Engagement

Through 'authentic experiences' (Billett, 1994; Jackson, 2016), "interestingness and novelty" (Andreas, 2013), learners have opportunities to develop their vocational skills such as problem solving and critical thinking (Jackson, 2016) through the guidance of expert others. When learners are 'assisted by others' and given feedback, (Andreas, 2013) they develop competence in the valued skills and through reflection become more confident and empowered (Billett, 1994; Smith et al., 2015). Smith et al. carried out their study amongst social work students on practice. They found that the more students engaged in practice they were more likely to express competence and report that they identified as a social worker, however placements varied in how they engaged learners. Their study about identity however was weak as they tried to examine this through the responses of participants to the statement: "By the end of placement I understood the unique role of social work as a profession". Understanding the role of a profession could have different meanings to each student and these may contribute to their identity but does not mean that they have developed a social worker identity.

A driver to engagement is a sense of belonging, which can instil a feeling of being in "one's proper place" (Colley et al., 2003), through the acceptance by staff (Walker, 2014). Learners are then motivated to form relationships, engage in activity and stay on and complete a course (Chan, 2016). There can be an increased sense of self as in a role, and growth in confidence (Walker, 2014) and commitment to the vocation (Johnston,

2016). This can occur gradually as learners develop a disposition that is informed by the culture of the vocation. In one study, when new nurses entered practice they did not initially identify as a nurse but rather as a student nurse, since they did not have a sense of belonging to a community (Camilleri, 2012). Learners took on shared beliefs through 'playing a role' (Camilleri, 2012), which can be initially forced, such as wearing a uniform, patients calling them 'nurse' and expectations of others to perform particular tasks. They were dependent on the more experienced staff and did not take full responsibilities, therefore did not engage as a full member. However, experience was different for those who were more socially confident (Camilleri, 2012), since they participated in discussions and therefore developed a stronger sense of belonging. As the nurse became independent, they had more of a sense of 'being a nurse'. This example shows that the disposition of the learner matters to how they engage in practice.

Klotz et al. (2014) results also show that vocational identity is closely aligned to the development of vocational engagement and competence and they concluded that key factors for identity formation are: free choice of career; high levels of integration in the practices at work, and practical experience. They found that "it is unclear whether and which elements of vocational education and training provision shape this process and if and to what degree forms of identity really matter for the actual vocational performance and the vocational learner" (p.11). The shortcomings however, is that their measurements rely on self-reports to assess learners' identity. In their measurement tool, they used statements such as 'I deeply enjoy my vocation' and this could elicit different responses at different times in different placements or learners may have different interpretations of what a vocation is. Additionally, choice implies a certain level of planning by the learner. However, it is not about 'planfulness', rather it is the context in which choices are made and these vary by historical experiences (Mortimer, 2009); therefore, choice is constrained and enabled by circumstances. Klotz et al.'s (2014) study was useful, nevertheless, because it considers identity and highlights the importance of practice, experience of work and integration into the workplace; but didn't give any depth to what experiences matter for the development of vocational identity.

Alignment

A readiness to welcome change and value challenge demonstrates alignment to work or the goals of the community of practice. While Wenger (1998) does not really refer to prior experiences, alignment implies that the learner 'shifts' or moves in some way to align to the vocation from a start position that was different.

Learners align to the vocation through a change in dispositions and attitude. Bates (1991) found that routine tasks and skills did not really mean an adjustment, but, aspects such as stress due to violence, incontinence, and death of the patients they were working with. Furthermore, learners assimilated into this prevailing culture over the duration of their training through their change of dispositions. Colley et al. (2003, p.471)) refers to this as vocational habitus, where learners begin to orientate to a set of dispositions which may be 'idealised or realised and begin to feel that they belong to that 'place' or vocation. This is further influenced by how the learner positions themselves or are positioned within the socio-cultural environment (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000b). Bates, however also cautioned against assuming changes were a result of vocational education. Changes in attitude could happen as a process of development from teenager to adult where learners may be taking on adult responsibilities such as a part-time job, or engaging independently in their studies.

A 'turning point' could be a way that learners align to the vocation. Placements provide an alternate setting to the college and therefore may be an opportunity for a learner to go through a 'turning point'. There are changes to dispositions: learners transform to orient to

sets of common dispositions that are both realised but also idealised (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2000). There are *changes to learners' values and attitudes* (Bates, 1991) during the course of their training. To cope with emerging identities students reconsider previously held values. In Bates' study, emotional reactions to work become tolerable. Students who initially thought they would not continue because the work they had chosen was not what they had aspired to do, changed their views about six months into the training and became more tolerant to the hardships because the job would have been unendurable otherwise. While the students felt shame and had feelings of inferiority when they had started, they embraced the culture of the work. Why they stayed on is not clear, in fact, Bates acknowledges this by stating that, that was the paradox. Some possible reasons could be that, the course was seen locally as of a very high standard where students had a day at college. Secondly, they may not have been able to readily switch courses or pathways. My study took into consideration Bates' investigation, looking in particular at the processes of identity formation. I also looked at the role of 'choice' because 'choice' can be implicitly influenced by social structures. While students still cannot readily change pathways, there may be more options in 2016 than there were in 1991.

Finally, identification could also be a response to a label. In this research, students can be labelled learner, animal care assistant or child-care assistant, amongst others. Their identity will be shaped by how much they identify with these labels and how they experience the label. In a series of interviews with Farnsworth and Kleanthous (2015) Wenger stated that identity could be both social and personal. He was asked to respond to the idea that identities can be formed in response to labels that are given to an individual. He explained that it would be "useful to distinguish the label, how much you identify with it, and how that label then becomes a living experience for you. This happens both 'outside in and inside out': how I see myself and how others see me" (p.7) This leads to questions about the nature of the environment; how the learner participates within this; and what, if any, are the transformations that occur through the learning process?

3.2.c Family and wider socio-cultural dimensions

While the wider socio-cultural environment informs learning to become a practitioner in a particular vocational field, there are not many studies of the role of this (Bloomer, 1997). As learners do not start the course as a 'clean sheet' without prior experience or an identity, it is therefore relevant to look at studies of young people developing identity outside the college. In this area however, there were not many studies of vocational identity.

Erikson (1995) did however find that learners formed their identities, through experiments with different types of jobs at home and through helping parents or working part-time. Lawy's (2006) study of an A level music student indicated that it is not only the content of the course or the curriculum framework that will shape a learner's vocational identity but their wider experiences. Lawy showed that to develop a "strong sense of identity in terms of who and what he (student) wanted to be" (p. 330) the student was immersed in the music scene. Wenger-Trayner refers to negotiation of one's position within a landscape of practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The music student also could see himself as a musician in the future. He worked on becoming part of the community of musicians outside college. He made a commitment to becoming a musician by then taking a degree in the same field. So becoming a musician meant not only engaging in the present but also thinking about the future. This links to the development of identity that, Wenger (1998) suggested, is invested in future participation in the community of practice or landscape of practice.

Prior experiences can influence how a learner engages in practice. In the culture of the extended family, young women tend to take on more domestic chores when mothers worked, more typically occurring within working class communities (Bates, 1991, Winder and Corter, 2016) and thus they can be more accommodating to domestic labour and unequal distribution of labour. An empirical study of trainee Early years educators showed that there was a modest link between their experience of parental involvement in their own school years and how they perceived family involvement (Winder and Corter, 2016). As learners do not start as a blank sheet then this is an area I could make a contribution, by taking into consideration learners' prior experiences and how they talk about their learning and vocational experiences outside college.

3.3 Learner identity

Learning identity, facilitates studying the learning journey to 'becoming' (Colley et al., 2003), conveyed through the stories the learner tells to others and themselves about their learning. In conveying a narrative, the learner makes choices as to what to include, implying a process of negotiation, either cognitively or socially. Stories often imply or explicitly include accounts of prior experiences or learning and aspirations for the future. As such, interpretation of how learners narrate their experiences and make meaning of these, uncovers the shaping of identity through participation in the social environment (Farnsworth, 2010). Furthermore, it could be negotiated, engaging in practice not only if activities are new to the individual but also if it requires repeating or reviewing actions (Billett, 2011). As learners participate, they negotiate meaning and negotiate their positions within different practices suggesting a process of becoming a certain person (Farnsworth et al., 2016). Learning 'to become' also implies change. Both forms of change, in the individual and within the environment, for example in work places, are central to understanding learning (Billett, 2011) and identity.

Learner identity could be defined through the discourses around learner and the policy context (Avis et al., 2002). Within FE, with the focus on retention and achievement it is likely that the relationship between the learner and tutor evolves through a particular culture, which may foster learner identities defined through the discourses around how the learner is constructed within a policy context (Avis et al., 2002). One interpretation has been that staff and students worked together to achieve the qualification, where staff cajoled and made threats and learners asked for 'help' or responded to advice. Here the discourse is around 'support' and 'help' in constructing the learner. Tutors interpreted independence as motivation to put the effort into completing a task and they were happy to work with the learners who they thought had a future. However, Avis et al. defined independence as directing them to resources rather than help. They found that lecturers offer help if they think the learner will succeed rather than direct them to find it for themselves. So on one hand tutors wanted learners to be motivated so that they have a control over their future as they would need to be independent in work rather than it be handed to them, but on the other hand they offer help without developing independence. One can therefore conclude that the interpretation of confidence and independence could be subjective, defined within the culture of the course of the FE college.

Learners may come from school with 'weak learner identities'. As we saw in the section on the Student Body (2.2g), in the previous chapter on vocational education, learners may come from school where they were not encouraged to be independent or monitor and evaluate their own work, thereby fostering a particular learner identity that may come in conflict with expectations and practices in college. Ability groups in schools also may have marginalised a large number of student who then go onto FE colleges. Fuller and Macfadyen (2012) found that a large number of learners on vocational courses saw

themselves as ‘academic failures’ as they did not achieve the grades in the traditionally academic subjects at school. They lack confidence and motivation to achieve higher levels (Avis et al., 2002) or even to complete the course. However, in these latter studies, learning is equated to the acquisition of information, so the traditional view of learning. Learners make meaning through experiences outside school, as one study showed that there is a widening gap with what interests learners in their lives outside school and within school, with differences according to family background (Crick and Goldspink, 2014). The culture of school nevertheless, may have fostered particular identities.

Learning dispositions

Dispositions as a concept is often seen as belonging to the psychological domain, as it implies the personal, subjective experiences of the learner that changes through time. It can include concepts such as ability and intelligence, which guides how experiences are interpreted (Carr and Claxton, 2002), suggesting therefore that capabilities and dispositions are interdependent (Sadler, 2002). Nunnally (cited in Billett, 1997, p.1) classified it as “interest, attitude and values”; Katz (1993), “patterns of behaviour that are directed to a broad goal” (p.2), and “orientation to action” in this case learning, according to Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000a, p.589). As I see the personal and subjective closely interlinked to the social environment, but could not find another concept acknowledging the context, I have therefore kept the use of disposition, but to highlight to the reader, that it is not used in the psychological sense. I will use it to refer to interest, attitude and values but oriented to practice. As you will come to see later that learning is seen as meaning making, that ensues through practice, so disposition to learning refers to the learner’s attitude, interest and values towards meaning making within a context.

While effective teaching can motivate learners to continue learning throughout their lives (Evangeline, 2010) and the culture of a classroom can give rise to different enactments of dispositions (Gresalfi, 2009), personal histories have a greater effect than does the curriculum. The source of dispositions is experiences in the past, for example participation in ‘communities of practice’ alongside experts (Billett, 1997, Wenger, 1998), as the study by Cook and Leckey, (1999) found that dispositions from school continued into the first year of university, despite the expectations of lecturers that students will be independent in their studies. The learner, making the transition to Further Education may have an identity already shaped by family background. Beyond the school and education policies, the family background and personal history can define how young people respond to schooling (Smyth, 2017), however studies in this area are limited. The Teaching and Learning Research Project (TLRP) (Nash et al., 2008) called for the recognition of prior experience and learning, a discussion of which was covered under ‘Transition from school’, when analysing the student body in the previous chapter.

Dispositions towards the vocation and learning can be indicative of the identification process that supports becoming, as it “can be identified in the action a person takes in a particular situation – for example, someone who is disposed to be ‘curious’ will demonstrate that in the manner in which they consistently generate questions and investigate problems” (Crick and Yu, 2008). A learner expresses their identity through their attitude, beliefs, and values on learning (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000b); their confidence and motivation to learn (Avis, Bathmaker and Parsons, 2002) or how autonomous they are in learning (Lamb, 2011). Furthermore, it can be used to better understand vocational learning (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2002) as it contributes to “perceptions and intentions for engaging in opportunities for learning at work” (Wojecki, 2007). Students who develop strong dispositions to learn demonstrated they were more likely to complete their vocational education course (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000) and remain in the vocational field. Therefore, it is a concept worth exploring.

To study further how learners' dispositions develop there are debates on whether dispositions can be measured since they are situational and not stable, (Sadler, 2002), changing over a short period (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000a). The term 'learning career' defined by Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000b) as "the ways in which a person's dispositions to learning and their experiences of learning, develop and evolve over time" (p.74), can be used to understand how learning identity develops. One feature of a learning career is: young people's dispositions to learning, aspirations, and career ambitions change over time and is connected to wider issues, so not only those within colleges such as the quality of teaching and learning experience. If it is connected to wider issues does this mean that it is negotiated or is it the environment that restricts or facilitates the change?

If learners value vocational knowledge, they may be more likely to engage with it, with effort (Billett, 1997). In secondary schools there has been a growing gap between what interests and engages students in their daily lives, and their experience in school: this issue is more severe amongst those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Crick and Goldspink, 2014). Vocational education has been offered in some colleges to young people of 14 years because they have either been excluded or demonstrated disaffection with school (Atwood et al., 2004; Bathmaker and Avis, 2007). Dispositions to learn, of some learners changed when they engaged with vocational education as they saw it as more relevant as it was preparing them for work. If the focus of vocational education shifts to dispositions, then learners are more likely to be better equipped to take responsibility for their own learning lifelong (Claxton, 2002; Crick and Goldspink, 2014). Dispositions towards vocational practice can therefore be a key aspect of identity of the learner.

According to Bloomer (1997), apart from school other factors such as "personal and career ambitions, perceptions of knowledge and their evaluations of learning opportunities" (p.6) can have an effect on learner dispositions. Some of these socio-cultural aspects were identified in the previous chapter. The findings of the longitudinal study by Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997) reflects closely my experience teaching within a Further Education college on a course for 16- 19 year-olds. Students are not always sure about what they want to do in the future. Their interests centre around what they enjoy. Sometimes students registered on a course and within a few weeks became disinterested and left; while others got as far as the second year before losing interest. Some students became more interested in their studies and their aspirations changed from initially seeing the course as a route to work, to wanting to go to university. Davies and Tedder (2003) in their longitudinal study of students on vocational courses suggested that there was a complex interrelationship between students' vocational aspirations, learning and identity. They found that vocational aspirations of students on a two-year course changed during the course and this was not related to the grades they had initially received and their achievements. There were other influences that may not be in the control of the college such as part-time work in a different field, long-term relationships, attitude to moving away from home, and the need to earn a wage which comes with increased financial independence and autonomy. It is possible that students could develop a vocational identity through their engagement beyond the college course. I have found that students' dispositions to learn were not fixed, but changed with their social interactions in college and outside. However at the same time all the policies in further education were based on the idea that students know what they want to study and will stay on the course they originally chose.

Learners experiences of learning frames how they assimilate their new experiences (Posner cited in Billett, 1997, p.3). Through reflection and connecting experiences from different contexts in the past and chance happenings, dispositions develop (Lawy, 2006). Furthermore, as dispositions develop through the meaning making process (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000), meanings form and reform through social interaction, values and beliefs change, taking time.

3.4 Identity change

Vocational Education can be a space for learners to change dispositions and therefore, how they identify as a learner. The environment could also foster strong learning identities that ensures lifelong learning. In Bloomer and Hodkinson's (2000) study of 50 young people over four years, they saw not only transformation in the lives of young people but also transformation in their dispositions to learning. Learners respond to changes in their everyday life differently and experience transformation in action. There is transformation in attitude towards the subject matter, a change from negative to successful educational careers and change personally such as sense of self (Yair, 2009). 'Critical turning points' acts as a stimulus for learners to appraise themselves and therefore their learning identity (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000). A critical turning point could be a move from school to college. Placements or starting a college course could be where learners experience 'turning points' (Strauss cited in Bloomer, 2001, p.443; Lawy, 2002) or personal transformation (Yair, 2009), conceptually conceived as a "break in the sequence, which leads from the past to the future" (p.353). Yair also identified organisational preconditions for going through a 'turning point', such as a new teacher, and being given a second chance to succeed in education. Here it would be useful to use a transformational or reconstruction lens where the learner and the environment experiences changes through learning as it can be seen that vocational education can foster changing dispositions and learning identities.

The arguments for strong vocational identities stated in the introductory chapter, can be also applied to learner identities. As young people develop strong learner identities, they are more likely to remain engaged in learning (Attwood et al., 2004) and the literature identified some of the conditions that should exist for this to happen. The study (Attwood et al., 2004) of provision within FE of excluded and disaffected young people from 14 to 16 years, showed that students can, from a much younger age, identify with a particular vocation. The younger students who had disengaged with their studies at school showed greater interest in their vocational training because most saw it as relevant to getting a job in the future. Students said they already knew what they wanted to do and school did not prepare them for their vocation. They interacted more positively with the socio-cultural conditions of the college. One implication, is that there may be students who, before they begin their studies at college, already have an established vocational identity from their previous experiences. While the study by Attwood et al., represented the experiences of students on a vocational course, the students, because of their age, were a minority in the college. Their experiences may have been different because the college had to make adjustments to accommodate them. These included the tutors employing different strategies to engage students who were older.

3.5 Summary of Literature review

While the dominant discourse in vocational education is around work skills or about learners who had disengaged with learning at schools there are limited studies that recognise learners own views and experiences of vocational education, studies that show respect to the individual learner, the context, their background and prior experiences from their point of view. There are few studies that show their motivation and engagement in learning through participation in a vocation that they felt a 'calling to', but at the same time respects the curriculum, the tutors, the placements and policies that they are demanded to meet. An identity approach to education is more likely to recognise the personal investments of young people in vocational education.

Few studies put the learner at the heart of the study and treat the learner as a holistically individual. There are passing references to family and occasionally there are categorisations but few get beneath the person and their identity; their commitment and their allegiances, and motivations such that we understand the person and how they engage with the vocation. From the literature review, it is evident that there is very little literature on learners in vocational education in England since changes arising from the recommendations of the Wolf Report in 2011. Furthermore, while there is some literature on vocational identity of 16-19 year-old there are few investigations on the relationship between disposition to learn on a vocational course and vocational identity.

There is minimal research on vocational students' development of vocational identity, how their aspirations shape vocational identity, and how practices within vocational courses mimic or replicate those in placements. Amongst the literature reviewed, none of the studies looked in depth at whether identification with practice in some way shaped students disposition to the course, and to learning generally, and indeed, whether they foster strong learning identities that could possibly sustain lifelong learning.

Learners on 'vocational' courses are supposedly engaged in practice, through their placements or in simulated work environments. Studies highlighted changes to dispositions to learning and critical turning points in the learning careers of young people. The study by Attwood et al. (2004), show changes from disaffected to motivated demonstrating individual dispositions to learn which changed due to a change in environment. I believe, a participatory and transformative learning lens will provide for a study that recognises the complexity of the processes and systems that contribute to the formation of vocational learning identities. As the learners are on courses that are two years long with a link to industry, it would be useful to look more closely at the learners dispositions as well the community of practices. I will therefore look at learning as transformative through participation and how vocational knowledge is conceptualised and reified in practice. While the learning environment is key in understanding the experiences of the learner, the dispositions of individuals towards learning is very much part of their learning identity. Most studies seem to focus either on learning or on identity but little on the relationship of both, that is, how we see ourselves and what we learn or how learning can change how we see ourselves (Paechter, 2001).

As I developed my analysis, I have introduced new literature, which I will bring in later. One of these is transformative learning, which was not a part of my methodology, but appears later.

3.6 Conceptual Framework

3.6.a Introduction

A theoretical framework is a useful structure to guide thinking, and the processes of a systematic and organised project, which is a reason for keeping it separate from the literature review. The literature review, analysed what others had established about the topic. I expected to be more critical through examining the problems encountered in other studies, or what worked, and what was missing, and did not want the review to limit my focus, which may have happened had I defined the frame earlier. I anticipated the literature review would compel me to look for ‘alternate ways of framing ideas’ (Maxwell, 2013, p.14). Finally, I needed to reflect on my own assumptions, beliefs and values of the world as a source for the design, apart from existing theory/research such as experiential knowledge, pilot or exploration research and ‘thought experiments’ (p.44).

I have in the Introductory chapter, given a background to my personal stance, so I will briefly reiterate those here, highlighting some of the drivers that led me to the choice of concepts and theories in creating a framework for the research approach. The framework draws concepts from Communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), and other literature, namely situated learning and identity. It is presented as a map at the end of this section, but evolved later to include the Bio-ecological Systems theory of Bronfenbrenner and Transformative learning.

I consider that my own identity may have been shaped by experience of growing up in South Africa, where education was a right that was fought hard for. As a result, I view education as a powerful tool to raise expectations and widen opportunities, but at the same time, there may be constraints within the wider environment. These social, cultural and historical experiences will inevitably shape the focus, for example, noting that in England the FE sector is often seen as having the potential to reengage learners who have had negative experiences in school (Thompson, 2009; Amalathas, 2010; Baird et al., 2012 and) and raise expectations. Additionally, relevant here is when I became aware of the value of learning through practice, early on at University. Having started a degree in Computer programming and Mathematics I soon realised that it did not offer the practice that I could derive meaning from. It was theoretical and the problem solving done through writing rather than trial and error on the computer, to identify the program that worked. The following year I switched to a Fine Art degree and gradually became aware of a socially constructed divide between the Science and Art, Fine Art and Craft and, University and college. Vocational college and vocational education, culturally is often seen as having lower status than 6th Form College, exemplified by the lack of funding and focus on skills for employment that is often low paid. The framework needed to allow an exploration of the environment, the identity of the individual learner and how both are interlinked through processes involved in learning to become.

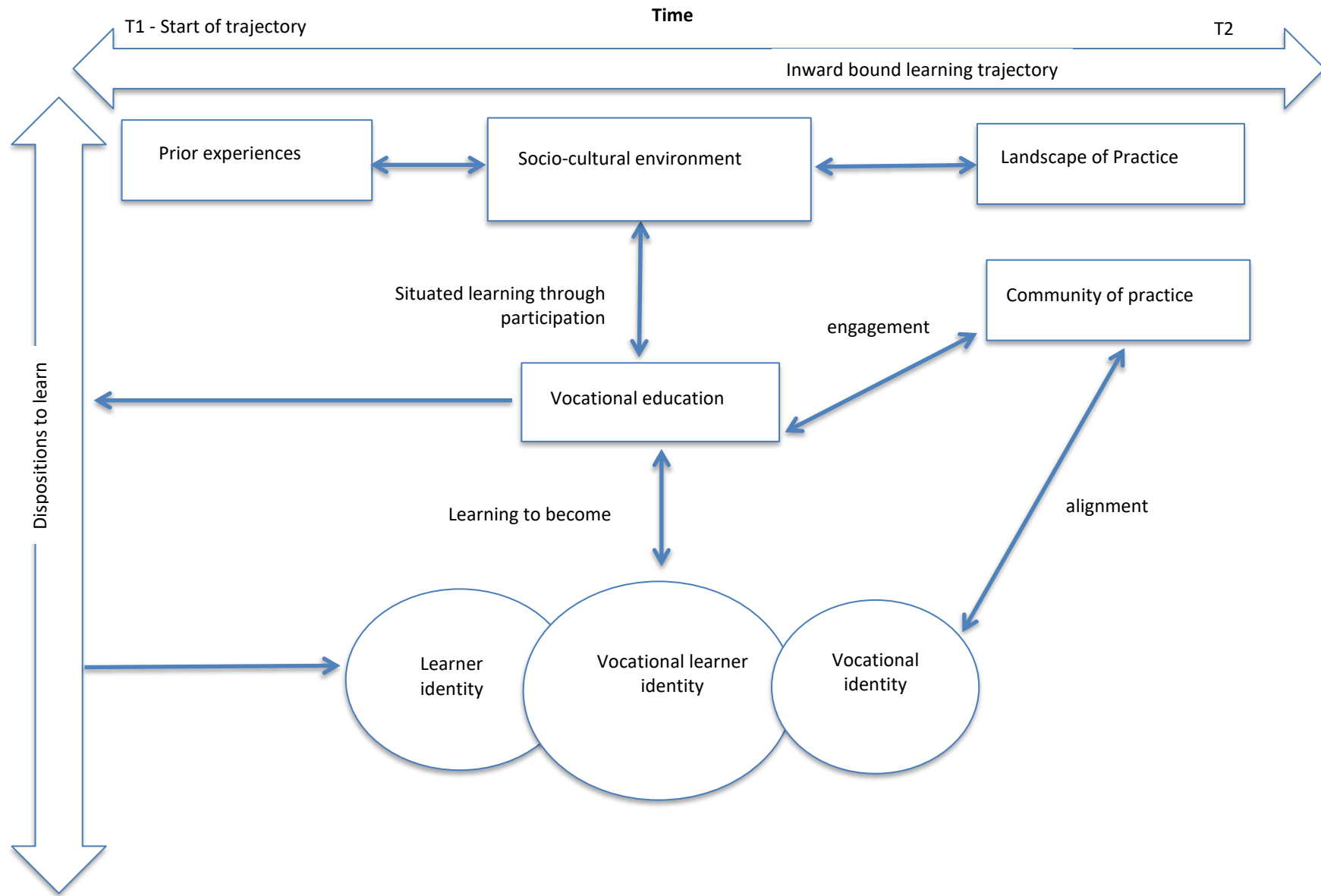


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3.6.b Learning, Practice and Identity

Learning - from Introduction (p.

The learning lenses that I will use are participatory and transformatory as this takes account of the subjective experiences of the learner within a social environment and varying identification over time (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2014), however, I am mindful that in VE, it is the propositional and skills lens is used. Using the term learning though is very broad so it would be useful to look more closely at practice using experiential learning and Vygotsky's More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and the Zone of proximal development (ZPD) is useful (Vygotsky et al., 1978).

Identity - from Introduction (p.

From the previous chapter one can conclude that identity can be a useful tool to investigate learning through participation and learning to become. It therefore is a key concept within this study but how will it be used here? Identity here is taken to mean the attitudes, values, interests expressed through dispositions towards learning and towards the vocation. It may be negotiated over time within the context and there are aspects that may be inherited from the culture that the learner is embedded in. Learners identification with the vocation will be analysed through how they align, imagine and engage in practice. This may be expressed through a sense of belonging.

Learners may interpret experience in different ways, and this may shape their actions. The focus here, however, is on both their interpretations and how they negotiate identification within the environment. Most of the literature studied on vocational education, refer to the social conditions of students' vocational training (example Bates, 1991; Bloomer, 2001; Attwood et al., 2004; Fuller, and Macfadyen, 2012). I will not be looking in detail at how learning or vocational identity is expressed individually, but how it develops within particular environments. Identities are framed within a social, cultural, and historical context.

Vocational identity is linked to identification with a vocation, which implies an inward bound trajectory into a different environment, where learners practice. The focus in this study is the process and this is where a contribution can be made. The concepts from Wenger lend it self to explore some of these processes - how learners negotiate participation in practice and the expression of their sense of being a member.

Inbound Learning Trajectory

A key part of changing identity is the trajectory reflected in the journey into a community of practice, which incorporates experiences and investments in future participation, in how the learner negotiates present practices. Besides the temporal nature of the trajectory, it also includes learning in different environments. The past includes the learners' school experiences as well as aspects of family background; the present, in this instance includes the context of the college and placement as well as the broader social and cultural environment. While students are in college, they are not fully part of the community of practice but on a learning trajectory into it. Students are learning to become

Dispositions

Dispositions will take account of the socio-emotional or the personal resources of the learners. They are not fixed and constantly change. If learning trajectories are influenced by internal and external experiences then the culture of the college/department such as the dominance of a particular gender/ gender of the tutors, ethos of the department, could influence knowledgeability, practices and identity associated with the vocation itself.

Knowledgeability

I will use the term knowledgeability instead of knowledge as this considers the meaning-making process of the individual and though it might be arbitrary as according to Young (2008), it encompasses practice knowledge, so not as acquisition of information but developing competence and becoming knowledgeable in vocation practice either in placements or in college

Space

I have applied this concept of space to the social position the students find themselves in, in relation to their experience. As they become more knowledge and competent within the space they move from being in a peripheral position to one that is more central. This may entail complex practices that include mutual engagement, rather than working alongside the expert, or being an onlooker.

The concept of space has been borrowed from social learning theory of Wenger-Trayner where identity is shaped by the position of the student within 'the geography of competence' (Farnsworth et al., 2016). According to Wenger each community evolves with it's own repertoire and, positioning of the members within the community of practice will be defined by their competence in these practices.

Temporal and lateral connectivity

Identity is negotiated over time and would have been shaped by their experiences in the past, present and aspiration and plans for the future. To understand changes it is necessary to look at how learning connects with the context, which Bloomer refers to as 'lateral connectivity' (2001)- "of how learning connects with context and with the life experiences of the learner(s) concerned"(p.429).

3.6.c *Communities of Practice*

Wenger's (1998) Community of Practice, would allow me to study learners participation in practice. Communities of Practice relates to how learners align to the practice, how they imagine participating within it and how they make meaning. As learners in a college, some of their experience may be restricted or expanded. Wenger saw his theory as middle ground concerning scale – individual and the social interplay – practice and identity occupy this middle ground (Farnsworth et al., 2016). Communities of practice theory was useful in focusing the enquiry on how learners engaged in practice. A weakness in Wenger's CoP is little acknowledgement of individual agency (Morris, 2012) or individual dispositions.

Legitimate Peripheral participation

Participation is not always physical (Wenger, 1998) but could be in preparing tasks with an audience in mind or when there is a level of accountability to competence, when carrying it out. The term, using 'peripheral' implies that full participation is withheld.

I reflected on the conceptual frame, as I believed that if I had a coherent design, then the result would be a more convincing study. Maxwell (2013), used the metaphor of the ship, Vasa that sank on its maiden voyage "A flawed design leads to poor operation or failure" (p.2). The theoretical frame provided a structure to which other aspects of the study such as the approach, methodology and methods linked, and I expected that this would lead to a case study of depth and legitimacy.

3.7 Research Questions

From the literature review, I have identified that there are few studies on development of vocational identity of 16 to 19 year-old. The environment is significant how identities are negotiated. Furthermore, prior experiences of learners while appear important for how they go on to engage with learning, is not acknowledged in the formation of learning or vocational identities. The research in the past has focused on policies and culture, with few studies on how VE learners identify with a vocation. The aim of the study is to address the areas where a contribution could be made, through exploring the following research questions (A and B). The subsidiary questions will support me in ensuring that I collect sound data. Taking into account the aim of this research project and the theoretical frame the research questions have been frames as below:

1. How does vocational identity develop by 16-19 year-old learners on two further education full-time vocation courses?
 - a) *What aspects of the learner's family background and socio-cultural environment shape identification with the vocation?*
 - b) *What is the relationship between the formal and practice based learning experiences provided through the course and students' developing identification with the vocation?*

2. How does identification with the vocation interrelate with disposition to learn?
 - a) *What are the prior learning experiences and disposition to learn of the student?*
 - b) *How does the students' disposition to learn evolve or change over the two years of the vocational course?*

4 Methodology and Research Design

4.1 Introduction

To design how I would approach the research I have used the framework and concepts from the previous chapter, my own experience of teaching in FE and how others have studied the concepts that I identified in the framework. I have essentially taken a case study approach as it allowed me to explore the topic using a range of methods in collecting data through being immersed in the environment. The research design was fixed from the beginning. However, I elaborated on the conceptual frame during the study, which in turn led to more focused semi-structured interviews towards the end of the course, and interviews with the placement mentors that I had not planned initially. I also used other theories that were not in the original conceptual frame to interpret the findings.

4.2 Methodology

4.2.a Philosophical assumptions

Ontologically the study is based on the belief that there is no reality that exists independent of the individual experiences, so there is no one true experience of a vocation or learning. There is no objective reality where learners' experiences can be measured. Underlying the whole study is the belief that identity forms through the learners experience in the social world so there is more than one reality. How individuals experience the world and construct their identity varies on their own derivation of meaning so there is a subjective experience of the world, leading to an underlying theory that is neither objective nor positivist. As experiences vary and are interpreted differently by learners and researchers, a suitable approach would have been interpretivism. However, as the environment is significant, a social constructivist rather than interpretivist was more appropriate. I believe that there are no definite answers to the research questions but how learners interpret their experiences within the social context they inhabit.

Social constructivism is about individuals seeking to understand the world (Cresswell and Poth, 2018). The learner constructs meaning within a socio-cultural context. Meanings are formed through interaction and through historical and cultural norms. This construction can draw from previous experiences as well the imagination, expectations and aspirations for the future. Within the wider frame of social constructivism I chose a range of relevant theories and concepts to guide my methodology, keeping in mind that theory is validated by not whether it is true or not but whether it is useful in focusing the enquiry (Wenger cited in Farnsworth et al., 2016). Using a social constructivist perspective meant that I needed to focus on specific contexts in order to understand the settings of participants.

4.2.b Qualitative data

Qualitative data is a much more suitable approach to explore social phenomenon as experienced by individuals, compared to quantitative means (Johnston, 2016). It also emphasises greater understanding of practice and processes of social change. The research approach used here, was exploratory - exploring how identities develop in one context and not about generalising: it was not about explaining why they develop the way they do. I was not searching for causes. Human behaviour is complex and quantitative data would not reflect this complexity (Harding, 2009). Finally I wanted to identify what was important to the learner holistically, how they talk about their engagement I was also interested in processes which I could describe, interpret and analyse over time to build a complex picture of learning through participation. I interviewed learners four times and observed practice twice. The interviews after the first observation were to clarify details that I had noted. Tutors interviews provided data on the development of students' identification with the vocation and their outward approach to the course. These methods

were developed after reviewing how other researchers had approached the topic and reflecting on my own experiences.

Furthermore, this required qualitative data. Transition of medical students to doctors have often been studied through an ethnographic lens (Wong and Trollope-Kumar, 2014). A method for reflection on practice has been a portfolio of narratives. An ethnographic study would have allowed me to observe and engage with learners in college and placements, however this would have meant a commitment that was not possible due to my own work, so a range of considerations had to be taken into account when designing the research. As I was interested in change over time, I chose a longitudinal study over two years.

4.2.c Insider research

It is engagement as a teacher, as an Early years educator, that I take to being a researcher. I could not suppress this experience or allow myself to be 'overwhelmed' (Reason, 1988). I needed to reflect consciously and consider it as part of the research process. I was aware of learners beginning to identify with practice through their reflective writing, done to different levels of depth. Some identified more strongly with the vocation at the end, than others. Why was this so given the learners were experiencing the same curriculum?

"It is generally accepted that biographical experiences arising from individual and social characteristics have (more or less) influence on, and import for, the research interests people have, the methodologies they adopt, the methods they use, how they interpret and analyse their data, and the ways in which they re-present and disseminate their 'finding'. (Sikes and Potts, 2008, p.5)

I consider myself as an insider to the Early years and childcare vocation as I have worked in the field and familiar with the practices. I therefore chose another case study, where I am not an insider, so that if there are any possible weaknesses of this approach of investigating identity, could be countered. Being an 'outsider' to the department of Animal Care and Management I expected may provoke reflections on my interactions, which I may not be aware of being on the inside.

There are many advantages of being an insider. Access to the project is easier because I knew the structure of the college and who to approach to collect reliable data (Sikes and Potts, 2008). However, Sikes and Potts and Smyth and Holian (2008) raise awareness of the centrality of relationships in the workplace, and the possibility that the researcher gaining information about colleagues could alter this. For this reason I chose a college that I did not teach in. I ensured that confidential information was not shared and data anonymised through being written in a manner that did not pose a threat to the participant. Staff will also have an opportunity to read information and carry out member checks before it will be shared more widely.

Another advantage of being an insider researcher was that my data had the potential to be detailed because I have inside knowledge of the culture of the Further education colleges (Smyth and Holian, 2008). I looked at interactions or experiences that may not be noticed by an outsider and, what I decided to focus on was relevant to the practice of both courses. Furthermore, this highlighted to me issues, I was then more aware of, when observing and within the animal management department, for example the nature of the relationship between the tutor and learner.

"Observations and learning are grounded in the very often messy and difficult to access multiple realities of organisational life, rather than filtered through a research approach concerned with only admitting data that is regarded as objective, measureable and triangulated" (Smyth and Holian, 2008, p.37)

Other advantages that I exploited, were my access to placement mentors, as I had myself been in that role in the past and I was able to ground my study in everyday issues (Smyth and Holian, 2008). I was able to develop rapport quite early on, so that staff were relaxed in their exchanges with me. However, I was also aware that staff sometimes were telling me what they thought I had wanted to hear. When analysing the data from staff both in college and in the Early years settings, I needed to remain cautious and reflective on their responses.

The above has been recognised as a weakness of insider research as it can appear as the researcher 'over identifying' with the culture or group (Smyth and Holian, 2008). I had to therefore give particular attention to issues of validity. Although I did not over-identify with the staff, reflecting back on my questions in the first interview, I recognised that there were times I was able to probe more deeply into the practices of the Early Years students than Animal management. I addressed this specifically by the second interview, by ensuring that if questions around practice were expanded to probe deeper, then the wording was noted, so that the same structure was used for both groups and examples, while different, referred to the same issue.

I accept the view that Smyth and Holian take that there is no pure objective observation of human behaviour. Insider researchers include information about how they may have influenced the process which other researchers do not so. "The tests of good research here are rather around reflections on links between theory and practice, understanding meaning and the significance and impact of constructions of meaning, making knowledge shareable and useful and relevant to practice." (2008,p.37).

It was useful to focus on how other studies arrived at their conclusion and not only on the final results itself (Wolcott, 1994). There were numerous studies of vocational identity using quantitative methods of collecting data (Virtanen et al., 2008) While these were useful in understanding how vocational identity was operationalised they were brief in the actual processes involved. The study by Virtanen et al., 2008 used 13 statements that students had to rate on a scale of 1-4. These statements did not allow the participant to describe what they mean, for example, one of the statements was related to having a feeling of realising a dream. These do not provide any depth in understanding the learners' experiences.

Bates (1991) used an ethnographic approach to observe training and explored the links between social structures, training and identity. Within structures there are social processes such as surveillance and accountability that contributes to a change of attitude towards work and therefore concludes that training can serve to reinforce links between class, gender and vocation goal, and there reproduce labour inequalities though it's greater control. As I was going to focus on the learner and the socio-cultural environment I could have used ethnography, however chose not to for practical reasons. As an ethnographic study, I would have studied closely the placement practices of learners, but this would have required being embedded within a setting for longer periods that I had available.

I instead chose to use a similar approach to the TLC, which studied the learning culture with Further Education colleges. They had used nested case studies as they were looking at a range of courses within different colleges and focusing on culture. (Why)

4.3 Research Approach

4.3.a Case study

The case study allowed an in depth investigation of the experiences of students over the two years using a range of different methods as: “Case study assumes that ‘social reality’ is created through social interaction, albeit situated in particular contexts and histories, and seek to identify and describe before trying to analyse and theorise” (Stark and Torrance, 2012, p.33). There are debates however, on whether this section should be coming under methodology as Stake (2006) sees it as a choice the researcher makes on what to study and is defined not by the methods but the boundaries the researcher places. I have taken case study as a methodology: a type of design in qualitative research that may be an object of study as well as a product of the inquiry” (Cresswell and Poth, 2018, p.96).

The purpose throughout was to promote understanding in an area that is comparatively under-researched compared to schools and universities. Given my research questions I needed cases, providing as full a picture of this journey as possible, while also being contained in a reasonable time. The case study approach allowed for “the opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale” (Bell, 1993, p.8). I chose case study as the research approach because it was the most suitable strategy to use to answer ‘how’ such as, how learners begin to identify with the vocation (Yin (1984). Further, the study was of a real-life context where I did not have control over the events but there were a variety of evidence already available. Learners could talk about their learning experiences before coming to college.

There are obvious criticisms of case studies that I needed to consider to ensure reliability and validity. Firstly, there is often little basis for generalisation, so I needed my data to be detailed so that the reader could assess whether it resembled their own situation, to then generalise, which Stake (2006) refers to as ‘naturalistic generalisation’. Other criticisms refers to the possibility of representing a biased view through a lack of rigour in collecting data, and lack of transparency. Furthermore, in collecting data that was detailed, the study would take a longer time. As I wanted to explore the context and change of learners dispositions I needed to interview and observe them over the duration of the course, which was two years.

Look at research where case studies have been used

Outline of the case

Previous empirical research has found that students’ work place learning differed on the different courses, in their assessments, the guidance they received and the level of critical reflection on their practice (Virtanen et al., 2008). Different courses offered different learning environments (Virtanen et al., 2008). I therefore planned to explore how students’ identities are shaped through their preparation and participation in two different vocations – Animal care and management and Early Years care and education. I chose a college that I did not teach in and another course that I was unfamiliar with, but that was two years long and had a placement as part of the curriculum. Thus, given the perspective I started out with, that is, a social constructivist, qualitative study, the case study approach with the learner at the core became the most suitable approach. To build the case study I needed to find out about the college, its location, its intake, aims of the college and more detailed information about the two chosen courses.

I chose to look at two programmes of study at Level Three, rather than two departments because each department included different levels of study. These levels and courses could have different awarding bodies and therefore may have presented too many

variables in an analysis of the curriculum. The amount of time in placement also varied. Although I chose courses that both took two years to complete and offered the option of going into employment I still anticipated different practices, since each course prepared students for different vocations. Both courses had work placements where students could engage in practice.

Early Years and Animal Management can be seen as two different communities of practice, where the people involved or the members of each community have similar purposes and goals. The Early Years community of practice, for example, would encompass organisations and members whose focus is care and education of children under five years. Animal management may include settings such as a veterinary clinic or an animal rescue shelter. Further Education (FE) courses prepare students to enter the community with some knowledge and competences that would encourage participation when students are in placements. The curriculum design, through modules of study, is directly relevant to the chosen vocation, for example, Child Development in college and in practice carrying out observations and activities with children, learning how children develop skills. In Animal management, a module on animal nutrition and in practice may feed and monitor the diet of various animals.

4.4 Research methods

Using a social constructivist perspective leads to using methods that would allow data to be interpreted and collected about the context and the process in which learners engage with within the context, I therefore used interviews and observations. Using different methods illuminates the different facets of learners experiences (Johnston, 2016). Talking to tutors and learners enabled a “comparison of perspectives, permitting patterns to be detected and dissenting accounts to be brought into focus” (Johnston, 2016)

Wenger-Trayner (Farnsworth et al., 2016) saw labels as reification. It is easier he says to investigate labels or reified markers of identity (early years practitioner for example) because it is easier to collect visible evidence. Meaning making requires investigation of both participation and reifications and the interplay between. Therefore, labels can be taken or given by others but also important is how the learners make meaning through participation. How do they inherit the characteristics of others? How much do they make it part of themselves? To do this I needed to observe them in practice but also talk to other practitioners in the vocation to see what characteristics they valued and whether learners begin to inherit these values and beliefs. Sfard and Prusak (2005) used narratives of how learners tell stories to investigate the experience of participation. The interviews were semi-structured so that learners could tell their own stories but within the limits, I had created to answer my research questions.

A feature of case studies is to have multiple sources of data (Yin, 1984). Using a variety of methods can also allow for methodological triangulation. The table below demonstrates how the research question was investigated using a range of methods.

Research questions	Subsidiary questions	How was it answered
A. How does vocational identity develop by 16-19 year-old learners on two further education full-time vocation courses?	What aspects of the learner's family background and social environment shape identification with the vocation?	Interviews with students to ask about life experiences related to their choice of vocation and learning career
	What is the influence of the formal and practice-based learning experiences provided through the course on the students' developing identification with the vocation?	<p>Observation in college and placement.</p> <p>Discussion of lesson with tutor</p> <p>Interview with tutor following observation in placement and college</p> <p>Interview with student after observation</p> <p>Interview to include questions, to explore how transfer of knowledge occurs</p> <p>An analysis and interpretation of what may be happening implicitly in terms of students learning and development will be put forward to students and staff to reflect on and tell me if they ring true or not.</p> <p>Documents, publicity and media related to recruitment on particular courses</p>
B. How does identification with the vocation interrelate with disposition to learn?	What are the prior learning experiences and disposition to learn of the student?	First interview with student and tutor
	How does the students' disposition to learn evolve or change over the two years of the vocational course?	Interviews and observations carried out at three different times over the course and analysed for changes in responses.

Below is a table of how I have approached data collection and analysis based on the theoretical frame developed in the previous chapter

Epistemology	Theories	Methodology	Methods
Social constructivism	Social Learning Theory Situated learning theory	Case study Qualitative Interpretive	Interviews Observations Inductive and deductive coding Thematic analysis

4.4.a Observations

Observations of students were carried out in placement and in college at least twice- once at the beginning, and the last observation a few months into the second year of study. They were used to identify how learners participated in practice and it became a discussion area where I could then analyse how they talked about the practice I had seen. Observing classroom practices and discussing what I have observed with the tutors provided information that focused my observations in the work placements, especially of the course that I was not familiar with (Animal care and Management). It was also a starting point for the interviews. These also provided me discussion points with the student's mentor, when carrying out the interview. Observations allowed me to note behaviour and actions that the student did not consider worth discussing but was evidence of identification with the practice. Observations are particularly useful in studying practice and how learners engaged with it. It allowed me to engage with learners and talk around their participation highlighting aspects that learners did not consider as significant. It allowed me to observe the environment and resources learners were using or had access to. When unstructured, it can an effective way to develop a narrative account of how learners engage in practice. I used these to focus the interviews by developing targeting questions at the beginning around what I had observed.

Since I was visiting students and not working with them, I saw myself as carrying out non-participant observations as I did not want to intrude, as in EY learners were engaging with children who I did not know. While I would have liked to have students not knowing that I was observing, this was not possible as I could only have access to the settings through the Placement assessor. This was not possible in Animal care either as students were only in placement for two weeks. The tutor from college suggested that the first year students will still be adjusting to work and therefore to visit in the second week, which for different reasons, did not always work.

Observations were uncontrolled since I did not plan them and could not manipulate what they were going to be doing (Mann, 1985). When students knew I was observing, they may have adjusted their behaviour, which is the reason I then followed up the observations with a short discussion. A limitation of observations was that they were short and lacked depth as I could not observe for long periods how they interacted with other staff, without other children or other staff changing how they interacted with the learners.

In EY, I carried out two observations, one at the beginning and another at the end of the course. I revised the time difference between observations as students in AM did only one short placement. As it was short, I carried out only one observation in the middle. It was

not appropriate to go at the beginning as the learner was settling in. Comparing the first and last observation in EY gave me data to analyse how students practiced differently and if there were changes in their disposition.

Social practices that I observed in placement were: arrival routine; how much direction do students take from staff to complete different tasks; do they ask questions and what type of questions do they ask. When carrying out tasks I observed if they did the same as other staff and if they talked to other staff about what they were doing. I also took note of anything surprising or unusual and discussed these events in the interview. In college the observations focused on how the curriculum is enacted and whether this linked to practice in placement. Observations were in the form of written notes so that others, who had not given consent, were not included; for example children in child-care placements.

To develop my skills in observations before going into a class or placement, I carried out some observations in public spaces to develop my techniques. I also used my experience as a teacher of child-development observations to be objective in recording exactly what I saw and heard. I also prepare a recording sheet with some abbreviations or codes to record quickly and accurately, for example if a task was carried out independently or supported. However, I found this not very useful as in most cases I could engage with the learner and it seemed appropriate to do so and I could ask them immediately why they did things the way they did.

There were certain drawbacks with the observations as these were done around the learners' assessments, as I was going in with the assessor - I did not get permission to go to a range of setting due to the presence of children...Learners may not have been relaxed as they were also being assessed during this time.

Observations of practice in college allowed me to talk to tutors and personal mentors to then triangulate what learners talked about in the interviews to be able to better understand the process of changes to their identification with practice or changes to their dispositions to learning.

Reflections on observation

At the beginning of the data collection, I could have done observations alone, but the college wanted to ensure that relationships with placements were not jeopardised in any way. Therefore, although I had my DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service certificate) I could only observe learners in placement (only in Early Years) with the assessor, so I was dependent on their timetable. In some cases where I did not observe I still had the post observation interview with students. Interviews were easier to plan and carry out and I had to then think carefully about these, especially in AM, so that I could get learners to reflect on their experiences in placement. When I observed the learners (EY) in placement the first time, I went with the assessor, so the activities were always planned. The second observation was less formal.

While I recorded my observations on the learners as data, I reflected on my experience of the visit and the environment in my diary. These additional notes are included under fieldwork

4.4.b Interviews

Interviews facilitates a degree of flexibility by being semi-structured and therefore could be extending if I need to probe further (Robson, 2011). They could be adapted, where I could change them if I needed to explore different areas that were specific to the individuals. I needed to do this in the second interview as I referred to details from the first interview. Finally, interviews are useful to capture views, perceptions, attitudes, and biographies, meanings that have been attached to different experiences and to examine

the related environment (Hennick, cited in Harding, 2019, p.44)

Learners experiences were socially constructed so I wanted to explore how these were experienced subjectively and the most suitable way was to talk to them, therefore I used semi-structured interviews at the various stages of the course. Within the social constructivist frame, seeking to understand how learners make meaning - the interviews allowed for learners to talk about aspects of their experience that they considered important. Further, there was always a brief discussion after observations in placements, followed by a semi-structured interview in college soon after. I needed to listen carefully and therefore chose to record all interviews so that I could go back to ensure my interpretation was close to what I thought the learner meant. At the last interview I presented to the learner, what I had interpreted from the previous interviews and observations and asked if that rang true to them.

I interviewed learners four times including one final interview with four learners four months after they had finished. I found that in the first interview I was still adjusting to being a researcher and not an insider or a teacher /Early Years practitioner. When I reflect on the questions I asked, there were some learners not sure what I meant when I referred to 'observations' as this followed an observation in class. Learners from school did not fully understand how these are done or the purpose of them, however no one had asked a question in the class. It was clear through the interview - that I was making assumptions. I found that by the third interviews in the second year I had myself been out of college for two years and I was beginning identify as researcher myself. Consequently, I came to appreciate doing four interviews, as I could be more focused in my questions at the end than I believe I was at the beginning.

The interview questions were encoded taking into account the research questions. However, I also reflected on my knowledge about learners and how they may have perceived me (Froddy, 1993). Students may have assumed that because the college was the gatekeeper in my case, they should only talk about information in college. I therefore considered this when probing learners to reflect more widely about their practice.

I considered the impact of preceding questions. Students maybe did not understand my question because, they may appear out of context. I believed they would look for "clues afforded by the way the question is worded" and "clues contained both in the previous related questions and in answers the respondents have already given to these questions" (Froddy, 1993, p.75). I therefore sometimes gave a reason for asking the question.

The four interviews with students over the duration of data collection were: before and immediately after observing the students for the first time; at the end of the first and end of the second year. The first was at the beginning of their study to identify their aspirations for the future, how they talked about their learning career and previous experience of work. The second was used to reflect on the experiences of the first placement. The third interview at the end of first year, reflected on their progress over the year, identifying if there had been changes to their aspirations and dispositions to learn, and whether their participation in placement mattered for their learning careers. The final interview was in the second year, where students were asked about their experiences of the course. They were also asked about their plans for the future.

Interviews with staff helped triangulate what students had said. After the classroom observation I discussed with tutors the goals for the session and these related to vocational practices and placement. According to Yin (1984, p.91), "The most important advantage presented by using multiple sources is the development of converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation".

4.4.c *Research journal including field notes*

I kept a journal that served to increase my own understanding by raising awareness of my own subjectivities (Alrichter and Holly, 2005). It included my reflections on interviews, observations as well as other relevant information when I was collecting data, such as the context of the interviews. The journal was used to reflect on how I may have influenced the research implicitly through my background and experience (Smyth and Holian, 2008). I also included my reflections on the college culture, such as policy or organisational issues, which helped explore some of the social processes of the educational context.

Field notes included observations notes that were in between those recorded - like the technician who brings in the dog - for dog grooming

4.5 Sampling

I used purposeful sampling of participants, who were under 19 years old and intended to do the two-year Level three course. Cresswell and Poth (2018) define this type of sampling as “can best inform the researcher about the research problem” (p.148). The students were in one Further educational college that offered courses with placements. This information I had gathered from brochures and visiting on their Open day. I did not consider the plumbing, construction and engineering courses as the qualification they offered allowed learners to qualify at the end of the first year. This sample would have been unreliable if some participants went onto the second year and others did not.

Why 2yrs – long enough – growth – investigate change
Why Level 3?

I asked for learners to have had no previous experience of full time work. I spoke to most learners on the two courses (29 in EY and 11 of the 21 in AM who were present on the day) about the research and asked for participants. I provided an information sheet and a questionnaire that asked about their previous experience and what they planned to do when they finished. Those who were interested had to include a contact number or email address so that I could approach them later. I had 16 students from EY and 6 from AM. These 22 students became the sample of all the 16-19 learners who were a subgroup of all learners on both courses. Other participants were chosen using convenience sampling. The tutors were the programme managers of both courses and taught most modules on the Level three programme. As the assessor was observing students in placement, they had a different perspective of the learners practice and therefore I asked if they would participate. While I had not planned to interview placement mentors or other tutors - I found that I was often talking to them as I explored the learners experiences, so data includes a sample of placement mentors and other tutors from college who engaged with learners over the two years.

4.6 Ethical considerations

I followed the ethical procedure of the University and, in the first instance considered the sample and methods of data collection. Before I began collecting data, I sought permission, not only of the programme managers but from the Heads of Department and Human resources department of the college. Participants were informed about the research in writing as well as verbally so that they could give informed consent. The information I provided included the purpose of the research, how the data will be collected and used, how confidentiality will be respected and what their rights were throughout the research. I ensured that all participants were aware of the length of the study and the frequency at which data was going to be collected. They could however withdraw at any time if they chose to.

Anonymity

Students and staff could be identified from my descriptions so I used a pseudonym for each participant, whereby the link with their name was kept on the original consent forms. This paper copy was only for my use, to help me remember, because I was collecting data from each participant over a year and a half.

I asked all participants to read a summary of the interviews and observations at the end so that they could decide on the level of anonymity. However, I was clear about the extent to which I could change information without affecting the credibility of the data. I agreed to errors of facts to be corrected, to remove anything that could cause harm, and alternative interpretations will be included but as footnotes (Miles et al., 2014). However, none of the participants suggested any changes or disagreed with my summaries

Confidentiality

I assured confidentiality verbally and through a consent form. Participants were asked for their permission to talk to their tutors. Only relevant information was shared with course tutors. I accorded staff the same level of confidentiality and no data was discussed publicly or with senior managers where the staff could be identified, since this could be a threat to their position.

I expected students to share information during the interview that might have suggested a need for other support. This type of information is normally shared between tutors. According to Morrow and Richards (1996) there has been the assumption in the past that the researcher had the duty to pass this information on to a professional however they suggest that the researcher first discuss with the young person what options they would like to pursue. However, the researcher as the adult should recognise their responsibilities to protect young people who are at risk. I resolved to discuss with the learner if any such issues arose.

Differential Power relations

I had considered giving students a questionnaire at the end of their first month in college, and then drawing my sample from this. My concern with collecting data earlier is that students would have just started, and may have felt they had to consent to take part, because they might not have been clear about my role. Students might be vulnerable as they might not have had any experience with a researcher (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). I made my role clear, verbally and through the information leaflet. Students might have been concerned about me judging their practice and passing information to tutors, so I reassured them that the information that they shared during the interviews and observations was kept confidential and only shared with their permission

4.7 Trustworthiness and credibility

While positivist research design and methods meet the criteria for validity and reliability, researchers using qualitative methodology do not generally use the same terms but similarly ensure that their research is trustworthy, credible and may be transferable.

To ensure that there was credibility I have considered well-established methods where I could ensure through prior practice that I have developed my skills in observation and used carefully considered questions to capture data (Shenton, 2004). Credibility was attempted through the use of triangulation of the methods as well as the data sources. Interviews followed observations so that students and staff could shed more light. Tutors were interviewed and their viewpoints and experiences were verified with the experiences

and information from the students. Having twenty-four learners from meant that I could also check information across participants and identify common references. To understand how some practices or experiences may implicitly influence students' developing identities, I put forward to the participants my interpretation and analysis of observations, interviews and practices for them to reflect on, and respond if it rang true. I took account of their input, reflected on it and discussed with my supervisors ensuring I maintained confidentiality.

While credibility may find its equivalence in internal validity, transferability could be compared to external validity. Transferability is whether the study could be applied to other situations (Shenton, 2004). While each case study is unique and I collected data at a particular time from participants, I provided detailed descriptions of the context and all the factors that came to bear on the data collected so that others could decide for themselves if the situation was, in some aspects, similar to their own, and apply carefully the information gained from this.

Both cases were sometimes compared and I sought recurring patterns so that some cross case generalisations could be made, I don't expect that these generalisations could be applied to all courses that may appear to have a similar organisation. Each case is unique because of the participants and the socio-cultural context.

Triangulation

Given that I chose to use a case study approach, to ensure a high level legitimacy of my data and the interpretation process, I considered how I would triangulate my data. Firstly, I did not want to corroborate data, instead, I planned for them to enrich the study as a whole. I planned data triangulation using different methods and interviewing not only the learners but tutors as well. Furthermore, observing learners in placements and then interviewing them after, facilitated more focused and in-depth interviews. While in placement I assessed whether talking to placement mentors would add more to topic as the staff worked for longer periods with learners and could add to my observations as these were done alongside the assessor and was generally planned by the students. This had not been planned as I had assumed that staff would not have the time – having worked in similar childcare settings – the ratio of child to adult in the room has to be maintained and staff cannot generally leave. However in some settings staff were keen and made arrangements, I exploited this opportunity and later in the interviews I used these as well to reflect with learners if there were inconsistencies (make sure I cover this in the findings chapter)

While I initially chose the social learning theory – using other theories allowed me to explore certain aspects that were not possible through Communities of Practice for example how learners engage in practice so that they begin to engage mutually rather than peripherally. The process of alignment, changing of values and perspectives could be captured in depth through a transformative lens. However, the most effective approach to capture the learning environment of the college and placements was the ecological systems of Bronfenbrenner. These theories are used in the analysis of the findings but are implicit in literature review and interview questions

Finally, I chose to triangulate through my methods by interviewing before and after an observation at the beginning, middle and the end of the course. I also interviewed tutors and placement mentors to give me different their perspective on how they engage with learners in the different environments. Data from these different sources did diverge, but not significantly and has been discussed in the findings chapters.

Given the literature review, theoretical framework and the findings chapters I have decided to bring together the analysis of the data around the presuppositions of the eco-

systems framework, according to Rosa and Tudge, which is around process, person, context and time. The communities of practice framework a useful tool to analyse the: process of identification, belonging and knowledgeability through negotiating meaning and developing competence; the context is the environment that learners inhabit, in which they identify; person is the learner and how they ...and finally time – the

Respondent Validation

Initially 6 participants received a summary and interpretation of all three interviews and observations. Four responded immediately whereby I then phoned to check if I had captured what they had hoped to convey...(what did it included)

4.8 Data analysis

Analysis was ongoing and iterative, as amount of data in a case study could be overwhelming (Yin,1984). Since the data collection was happening over a long period, Miles, Huberman and Saldana, (2014) suggested that data analysis happen concurrent to data collection. This allowed me to be critical throughout and make adjustments if there were any issues that needed exploring, further. I used my conceptual framework to find patterns, categories and map relationships between key concepts when working with all the information (Miles and Huberman, 1984).

4.8.a Phase one - Data Processing and Management

The first stage can be seen as data processing (Wolcott, 2002) or data management (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I transcribed interviews and wrote up field notes. At this stage, I used NVIVO, I attached key words, or codes, to each interview and observation summary soon after they have been carried out.

First cycle

I had used 'partial attribute' coding (Saldana, 2013) example when I sorted within NVIVO AC/CC, male/female, Tutor/student/mentor, and the timing/date of the interview. This helped to describe participants and contexts. I could have developed this further by looking at previous academic or practical experience and the level of experience of the tutor. Simultaneous coding – where some sections coded under both vocational identity and learner identity, or under activity and initiative. Found I was doing this when chunks were long. I hoped that this would help with identifying patterns later when I looked at how the codes and which codes linked together. However, Saldana advised caution using this type of coding because if used excessively to could suggest lack of clarity or focused purpose..

Descriptive coding – to start with where basic labels were ascribed to different paragraphs. Found I was using this with structural coding. Passages generally were described, for example if a student described what and how they carried out an activity, I deduced whether they had used their own initiative or not. "Descriptive codes from data collected across various time periods are charted in matrices are essential for assessing longitudinal participant change." (Saldana, 2013, p.88)

Structural coding – was used for example vocational and learner identity which directly related to the research questions. I found that this was confusing since I was looking at the research questions but also tried to use the codes from social learning theory. Most of my coding was probably structural since they acted as labels so that I could quickly access the data that is likely to be relevant to answer my research questions These codes led to a summary of the data which is what my initial intention was and almost essential for the next stage

Codes came from what students or tutors had said, or they were process codes, action

words or value codes that reflected the students' attitudes or beliefs (Miles et al., 2014). "Value coding is appropriate for studies that explore cultural values, identity, intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions in case studies." (p.75). Some provisional codes I used, have been extracted from Bates (1991) study, were: initiative, motivation, authentic experience and aspiration.

Second cycle coding

Some codes were In Vivo but did not solely use this method even though it prioritises the participant's voice. Although I valued the learner's voice, I was also interested in the voice of the tutors and mentors and how they contributed to an expansive learning environment, whether explicitly (gathered through the interviews) but also implicitly (through lesson observations). Some codes that arose from what students said such as 'confident' or 'get used to'. Using the codes and themes I attempted to locate these in broader categories that are related to my conceptual framework. When coding for vocational identity I chose codes from Wenger's (1998) *Communities of practice*. I soon realised that the cases I was studying were not in placement full time and therefore they were on an 'inbound trajectory' and participating on the periphery of the community. I also needed to consider other theories that took into account the students experiences in college as well as their unique experiences as being on the border of college and placement.

Coding does however have some negative characteristics where the meaning of the whole could be lost. I realised that when coding I was sometimes placing extracts in what were opposing values such as 'independence' and 'passive' for example. I realised that my definitions were not stated clearly and therefore I was coding a paragraph sometimes in about six different nodes. This highlighted to me a weakness of coding exclusively: the issue of losing the meaning of the whole by focusing on small 'chunks' of text'.

4.8. b Phase two: Data interpretation

During this stage, I started to explore recurring themes and patterns, through a comparison of both courses (Star and Torrance, 2005). I searched for changes over time using the concept of 'turning points', which were moments or events that were influential in producing a change in thinking or practice. Were there shifts in the way students engaged with practice and were there changes in the way they spoke about their practice? (Nasir and Cooks, 2009). Interviews were analysed for themes related to the practices and experiences that enabled the development of a vocational identity, such as 'autonomy' and 'independence'.

4.8.c. Phase three: Using theory

The final stage is where I attempted to draw some conclusions from the themes and relationships between concepts, which I checked by going back to the original data. I checked for confirmation or negation with data from tutors or other documents (Miles et al., 2014). Since I was carrying out the analysis myself, I valued the exchanges with my supervisors as my critical mentors especially when I was beginning to draw conclusions.

Bio-ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner

What I had not given much thought to at the beginning, beyond community of practice and vocational education, was conceptualisation of the environment. Towards the end of the data collection, I realised that I had been looking at different environments of the learners. The initial frame facilitated me collecting data on the learners prior experiences and the social environment. However, during the analysis process, I recognised that using an ecological framework to interpret data on the environment, allowed me to look more closely at the relationships and the interlinking aspects between the learner and the environment.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory focused on the development of children within a context. Later revisions of the theory, referred to as 'bio-ecological', emphasised the study of: the

context in which the individual spends time; the relationships within the context; the characteristics of the individual and those they interact with; the time in which they live, and processes that drive development. According to Rosa and Tudge (2013, p.251) “the Bio-ecological model presupposes that the four elements of which it is formed (process, person, context, time) simultaneously influence human beings’ developmental outcomes; their effects are not merely additive”. Bronfenbrenner (1977) emphasised the role played by the individual and social processes they engaged with or were ‘proximal’ to.

The theory allowed me to analyse not only the context that is immediate to the learner (he termed this the microsystem) but also the indirect aspects (the exosystem). To begin with, in the microsystem, the face-to-face interactions are important for how learners negotiate meaning (Farnsworth, 2013), such as social relations with tutors and peers. They also had other microsystems that I did not have access to, however, learners referred to them, such as their place of part-time work or their home. Secondly, the mesosystem refers to the interactions between microsystems, which can be seen when students are in placements for long periods of time whilst still at college, for example in EY. They were part of the microsystem at placement and at college, both interacting in ways that were individual to each learner. Thirdly, the exosystem, I have taken as the intended curriculum, that learners interacted with through the course. Various writers (Kelly, 2008; Billett, 2011) have used concepts of the ‘intended’, ‘enacted’ and the ‘experienced’ curriculum. Additionally, “associating curriculum with syllabus ignores the hidden curriculum – all of those experiences not explicitly stated in the syllabus that arise through the enactment of experiences and the learner’s construction of what they experience” (Billett, 2011, p.189). Finally, the macrosystem according to Bronfenbrenner, is the culture and society, partly discussed in the literature review under Policies and practices of Further education colleges and here including the culture of the college.

Later phases of Bronfenbrenner’s work focused on processes over time (chronosystem), emphasising interaction over extended periods. Using this framework facilitated an analysis of, not only the context but also how individuals interacted within different situations over the two years. The chronosystem is reflected in all the chapters through the focus on change and transformation within the microsystem, over time. However, there were changes within each of the other systems, such as changes to FE education policies and teacher training. Changes at the micro level also draws attention to development as a process that involved the learner and other individuals, encouraging me to reflect on my role, as a researcher collecting data over time. Focusing on the context also illuminated the answers to one of my sub-questions of the research, namely: *What aspects of the environment shape identification with the vocation?*

Bronfenbrenner did not pay much attention to the relationship with objects and symbols (Rose and Tudge, 2013) in the environment but emphasised the individual characteristics and interpersonal relations. According to his studies dispositions of the individual is likely to influence the outcome: skills, knowledge and experiences become resources over time to develop identity. However, dispositions or characteristics are also a developing outcome, therefore it would be useful to look at how they develop, with the resources available within the space.

Transformative Learning

Chapter 6 used the transformative lens to explore changes to dispositions during the course. Mezirow (1990) coined the term ‘transformative learning’ to acknowledge changes to learners’ beliefs, habits and perspective of the world. His initial work used data from adult women learners returning to college after a period of absence. It focused on the individual with little attention to the social context that defined the ‘experience’ (Taylor, 2009). Nohl (2015) addresses this limitation through using a range of cases across

different ages, gender and educational backgrounds and describes the process of transformation in 5 phases. However, the data in this case study, showed only some aspects of these different phases; there were other processes evident, that could not be captured using a phased approach. Furthermore, there were overlaps with some phases and some appearing recursive. While there were limitations it still however, proved useful to understand changing dispositions, and in drawing out common dispositions at the end of the two years. I used this theory to illustrate changes that I could not do with the other theories, so the analysis therefore did not use the phases comprehensively. The five phases were: a non- determining start where new practices are added to old habits; exploration of novel practices; appraisal of others; shifting relevance where some practices become more significant to the learner and finally arriving at a position where social relations stabilises.

4.9 Summary of Chapter

Limitations of the methodology

Reflexivity

The following chapters begin with an analysis of the context of the college and the two vocational courses of Animal Management (AM) and Early Years Education (EY) in Chapter 5, while Chapter 6 will introduce the learners, their dispositions and the process of transformation. The last findings chapter, Chapter 7, will analyse closely, how learners engaged in practice and aligned to the vocation, on their learning trajectory into the vocational landscape or community of practice.

5 The learning Environment

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will focus on the learning environment, however the Community of practice will be covered in Chapter 7, where I discuss vocational identification. That will be unpacked later as it was a significant part of the course and learning through practice. The findings corroborates the view that the individual and the environment were closely interlinked (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wertsch, 1998). The environment appeared significant in how dispositions developed and changed, and identities formed, reinforcing that: "It is not just that each person learns in a context, rather, each person is a reciprocal and mutually constitutive part of that context" (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004, p.168). Given this perspective, the learner and the context appears in all the following chapters. Moreover, the use of a systems framework to analyse the environment facilitated a close look at the reciprocal, or interrelationship of the individual with the context. The analysis framed by the Ecological Systems theory of Bronfenbrenner and concepts of the intended, enacted and experienced curriculum, draws on data that informs on the institutional and vocational culture that framed learners' experiences for the duration of the course. The systems approach allowed me to interrogate the data at the level of the learner's experience but also how this experience interlinked with the social and cultural environment. The following chapter, Chapter 6 on Learner Trajectories, will cover a more in-depth analysis of personal histories of learners and their learning, and how these mattered for their developing identity, emphasising that they were not separate from the context in which they developed.

5.2 Eco-systems Framework as tool for analysis

The ecological systems framework was useful as a tool in uncovering some of the characteristics of the context, the nature of the relationships, and some of the processes learners engaged with, in development of their identity over the two years. It shows that the environment was a challenge and learners had to negotiate their way. This topic was explored as the literature suggested that identification could guide how learners completed challenging and complex tasks (Armishaw, 2007). The tutors appear to be important in how this happens as they have a unique identity. Here I recognise that the case study is in itself a snapshot in time as the teachers were qualified, as this was a requirement at that time. However, by the end of the study FE teachers did not need to have a teaching qualification. This may have implications, which I will come back to and reflect on, in the Discussion chapter.

Using a systems approach in the analysis proved useful as various aspects of the learning environment were interlinked. The college mission statement and the course requirement for participating in 'work', linked together through the curriculum: students on both courses had work placements. Learners worked alongside experts and received feedback that proved, for some, transformative. Experience of practice, either in college or in a placement setting, framed the microsystem of the learner, showing that they mattered for identity development.

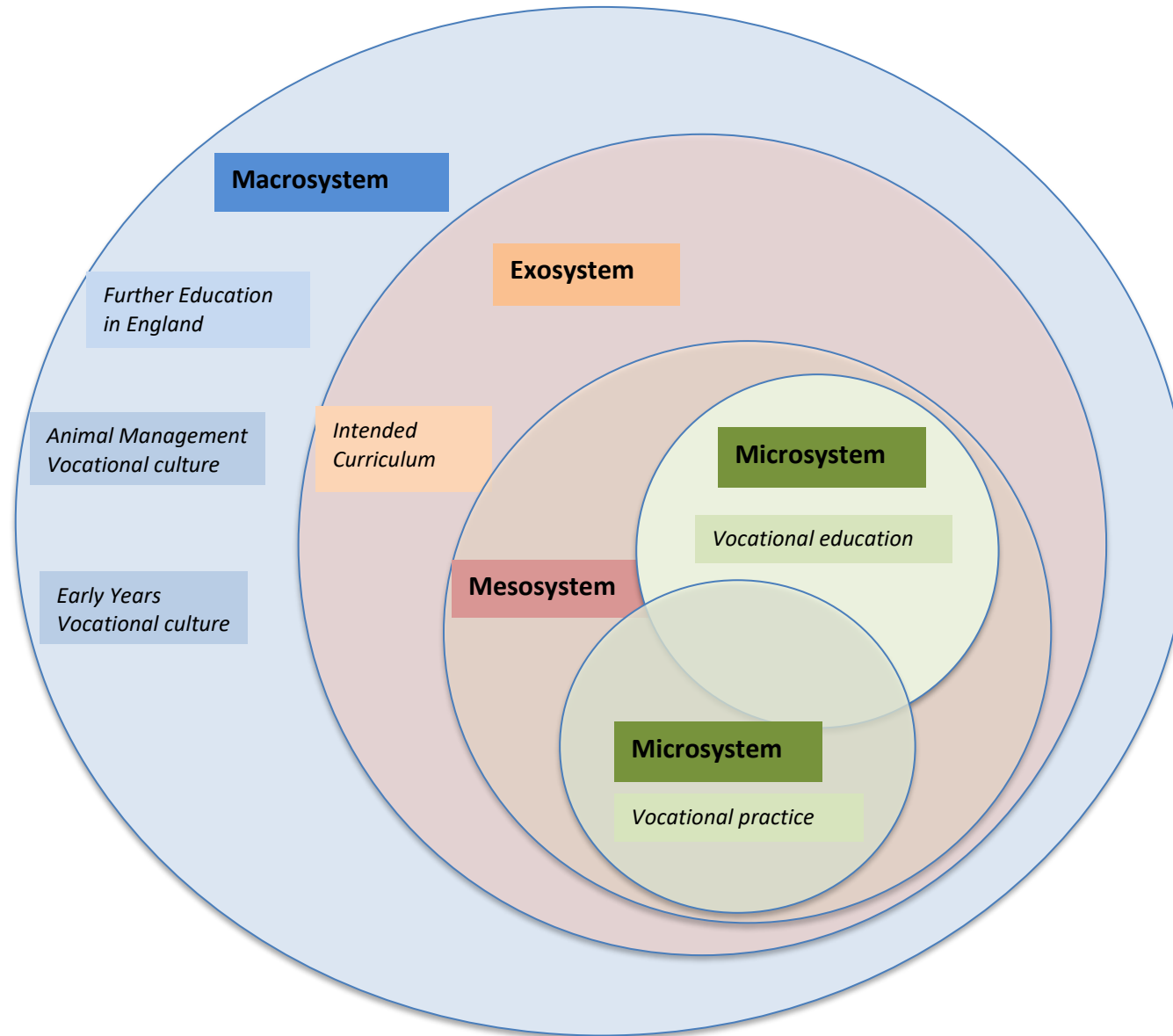


Figure 2: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems frame used to analyse the learning environment

5.2.a The Macrosystem

The macrosystem included: the culture of the college framed by the policies in FE; the culture of vocational field interlinked to its own history and policies, and the wider social environment of the learner. Taking the perspective that learning is connected temporally then learners' prior experiences in school are going to matter for how they go onto, or not, to develop lifelong learning identities. Therefore, this section should include a brief look at the schooling culture, where most learners engaged with, in the not too distant past. The school – Sixth form divide will be discussed within the exosystem as learners experience this differently however for learners from school their initial experience of college implied a culture that differed.

5.2.a.i) Wider social environment

For most learners there were a combination factors that may have been interlinked in learners developing identity, before starting at college. Within the wider culture as experienced by the learners in FE, there is a big jump from school GCSE's to 6th Form and not all young people are prepared or manage this transition. Learners evidence through their experience, the quality and lack of funding for career advice in schools, which has been a topic of discussion for over a decade (Gatsby, 2014; Long et al., 2020). *"I only had one career talk about which college I wanted to go to. They didn't really sit down and speak to you"* (1Caitlin). In addition to this, most learners came from families where there had been no attendance at college.

"in my family I was the first child going to college so I was pretty scared" (1 Cameron).

This however, did not apply to all learners, as there is a diversity of prior experiences, as Carys demonstrates: *"Yeah we used to have a progress coach that used to come in and ask us what college we want to go and what courses we want to do"*. Added to the lack of career advice, the environment appeared disruptive to some learners:

"You know in my science, from Year 11 we had one teacher for a couple of months, he left for a few months, we had different supply teachers everyday. That was really hard because we didn't really get taught properly and then we had one supply teacher for a couple of months and nobody passed in my class. We were all predicted Cs and Ds but everyone got Fs" (1Connie).

However, there may have been one teacher in a school that made a difference:

"I went to a school they were very not good. It is in special measures with Ofsted now and they have been for the past few years so we didn't have much fun, I didn't really get to talk to anyone about it. We did have one teacher and she pointed me in the right direction" (Casey).

Learners therefore even before beginning the course, evidence implicitly, that they were embedded in a system that was precarious, with little career advice, disruptive teaching and families themselves not always having the resources to offer when making the transition from school to college.

5.2.a.ii) College culture

The key mission of the college was for learners to succeed in life and work, conveyed through a discourse around knowledge and skills 'acquisition' and employability, creating a contract that the student agreed to: if they completed the course it would lead to a job. However, the college was in a small town, that despite having over 8000 businesses, the

government still classed as deprived, as many of these employed less than ten workers (OFSTED, 2018). Two key indicators of deprivation (ONS, 2009) were 'Education, skills and training' and 'employment'. While the college did not explicitly make connection with deprivation or OFSTED, the focus on work may have been an aspect of the intended curriculum, to engage with issues that may have been of concern for OFSTED, arising from previous inspections. The responsibility was on the learner then, to work in the vocation they trained in, however there may not be those jobs available in the town. Some learners may have wrongly thought doing the course guaranteed a job.

As having experience of work was the key mission, this was publicised in the marketing portfolio to learners, that learners will have the opportunity to engage in practice. To this end, simulated work environments were clearly valued. There were centres or rooms that were set up within the college as 'demo' rooms, facilitating practice in what was like, a 'real work' situation. AM had a yard at the back of the building with cages and sheds that housed small animals such as guinea pigs and rabbits. Additionally, both courses required students to complete work placements. This emphasis on learning through practice was clearly valued by all learners, some choosing the course for the very same reason. However, as will be shown later, on going to placement learners had to negotiate their identity between their own anticipated or imagined role and the role they began to assume as they engaged with work, as was similarly seen in the study by Bathmaker and Avis (2007), where they looked at the development of teachers professional identity when on teaching placement. So having a work environment is not sufficient as there is a level of individual negotiation that also is required.

In addition to employability, the college also focused on retaining learners until they completed the course. Tutors were aware of the funding implications if learners do not finish, whereas, this is not a focus for learners: it is not explicitly informing their world, their motivations and actions, but it might be implicit as tutors were mediating their learning experiences. The AM tutor felt blame would be directed towards them: *"Yeah they are young people they are at 16, 17 they are going to get it wrong, but you know what colleges are. 'It is your fault; you are a rubbish teacher that is why they have left"*. Colleges in general lose funding when students leave without qualifying (FEWeek, 2017), so the challenge for tutors was to manage the expectations of learners so that they stayed till the end of the two years.

In AM the two students who did want to leave during the first year left at the end, with a qualification that was a 'Certificate' instead of an 'Extended Diploma'. An example of how the macrosystem linked to the mesosystem and microsystem was one where tutors worked together to convince learners to stay. The course tutors' formal role did not include pastoral attention to learners. A new policy of the college was the introduction of 'Progress Coaches', who monitored attendance and offered tutorials to discuss personal matters and assignments. The tutors in AM saw non-attendance as a sign of the learner not completing, as in the case of Amal: *"Amal is just not wanting to be on the course and we didn't understand why so we sat down with her and I think that she is just finding the science part quite difficult"* (Taylor- Progress coach). They show that they worked together to ensure that Amal completed her first year. It is possible that if the mesosystem is strong, learners may be convinced to participate in a vocation that they did not want to align themselves to in the future.

The issues of 'retention' are not any different from the common discourse on vocational learning, as highlighted in the Literature review. Issues of 'achievement and retention in FE (NOA, 2001; Edwards and Miller, 2008; Ozan, 2009), and how the curriculum was thereby enacted through tutor, may demonstrate a different agenda from the students'. Students who push themselves to achieve high grades might be assumed to be engaging with the curriculum and therefore forming a vocational learner identity, but not all learners

were motivated by this. Another aspect of the FE culture was one of 'achievement' where the college had to evidence to OFSTED that they provided a progression route of qualifications and learners achieved not only their qualification but there was a proportion of learners with high grades (OFSTED, 2018). Some learners found this push stressful. The macrosystem policies, are clearly linked to experiences within the microsystem of the learner. The systems lens allows the above critical point to be analysed and how it would be a false assumption to correlate grades with identity.

With the macrosystem, there is a set of assumptions that shape the context of the courses, where there is weak educational rigour, teachers are not expected to have a teaching qualification, but have experience of the vocation. The requirements of both courses, regarding tutor expertise, implied that the tutor should be able to facilitate learners making the transition from college to the sector. Additionally, the college would have met the approval of BTEC and CACHE to be able to offer these courses. CACHE expected staff to demonstrate that they had the 'relevant occupational knowledge and/or occupational competence, at the same level or higher as the units being assessed and internally quality assured' (QualHub, 2018). BTEC expected tutors to make links between 'theory and practical application and that the knowledge base is applied to the sector' (EDEXCEL, 2013,p.19). Pedagogic competence is extraneous: teachers in FE, since 2013, do not require a teaching qualification, but did so, since 2007. Possibly as a response to that, the teaching staff that participated here, have a high level of academic qualification and a high level of occupational experience, to be the same level as teachers in other fields. Both course leaders had or were working towards Masters degrees.

The policy changes at the macro-level in FE can be unstable, and this is very much part of the framework that tutors worked within. Tutors, therefore, not only had responsibility for the course content, as required by the awarding bodies, they had added pressure to be seen as 'good' in teaching, evidenced by the number of learners who completed the course or achieved high grades. Here we can see how a policy of the college may affect the behaviour of the tutor and therefore, experiences of learners. The culture of retention and achievement at a macro-level partly framed the enactment of the curriculum and experiences of the learners at a micro level. To make claims about vocational identity means looking at more than just whether the learners completed the course, and in this context there can be learners who lack commitment and passion, for whom this course is not their calling. Chapter 6 and 7 will draw attention to the experiences of the learners and how this culture interacted with their identification with the vocations related to their course.

5.2.a.iii) Vocational landscape

Vocational cultures, have different routes in. The two course were chosen purposively as they embedded placements within the curriculum, and I saw this as one route. In AM, the awarding body worked alongside members from the landscape of practice (vocational domain of Animal care and management) to design the intended curriculum, and argued that the qualification takes into consideration the needs of employers (Edexcel, 2013) concerning the technical skill that they need from the learner in the future. BTEC involved the Sector Skills Council (Edexcel, 2013) in designing the curriculum but the latest Specification (Pearson Education Ltd, 2019) is more specific about the employers they worked with, for example The British Veterinary Nursing Association and Norfolk Dog Training (p.1). So on the one hand the curriculum is designed to 'meet the needs' of possible employers, on the other hand however, learners needed a higher level of qualification to enter the vocational landscape, or no qualification at all but some experience. Learners did not need a Level 3 qualification to do dog training but they needed a L3 in Vet nursing to go onto a higher qualification to work as a vet nurse. This

by implication, means that learners do not need the course to go directly into the vocation. Tim confirmed this.

“No you don't really need a L3 for any of these, dog grooming, pet shop, that is the thing. The course serves as an entry to university really for half of them, and the other half will go off and do this, but they didn't really need to do this L3 course really... What really opens doors, is them going out and doing voluntary work” (1Tim).

The course is a chance to safely explore the role and the workplace, through placements and authentic practices with animals. Although the Retention and Achievement policy is relevant here, some learners may be doing the course knowing they do not have to, but it can help them decide their future engagement. Having no clear route into the vocation, showed that for those on the course, their learning trajectory changed direction through experiencing the curriculum. The connection formed with the vocation suggests that is probably not that much about the vocation itself but about the mediation of their engagement by the tutor, with the vocation. This may be implicit and not recognised fully by tutors, students or the curriculum design. How the tutor enacts the curriculum and how this is experienced by the learner will be discussed in the following pages.

Within the EY landscape, in contrast, a Level 3 qualification is a 'license to practice' as learners need this level, to work with groups of children independently. Some are offered jobs towards the end of the second year as they near achieving their qualification. Learners were in placement every second week throughout the two years. The placements were generally nurseries (Private and state run) and schools. (Discussed further below, under Exosystem). Staff within the setting sometimes were looking at students as potential future members: “Sometimes we have said would you like to do some work with us if we maybe need some extra staffing, and she said she is quite happy to do that so it is just giving her the opportunity and then when she has done all her training, she was ready” (Petra - Cameron's placement mentor).

The macroculture matters for learning identities as learners have expectations and aspirations and use these to align to the vocation. If the routes in are unclear then they may well leave and not identify with the vocation. Despite this, I will show later, it was not the macroculture of AM that mattered for some learners, it was the microsystem, through their interactions with tutors in college. Some learners do go on to volunteer, to further align to the vocation.

5.2.b Curriculum as the exosystem

5.2.b.i) Intended curriculum

The intended curriculum and how tutors enacted it, linked closely to how learners experienced participation on the course. It is through the intended curriculum that learners take part in placement. Here the focus is at the course level curriculum and not at the level of the lesson, and therefore the emphasis on placement and the reasons for placement assessment. Both courses were at 'Level 3'. Study at Level 3, required learners to have achieved at the previous level, which were a number of GCSEs or Level 2, including a Grade C (Grade4) or above in English and Mathematics. According to the Qualifications Framework, the higher the level the more difficult the qualification (gov.uk, 2018). Level Three, according to BTEC, 'provides highly specialist, work-related qualifications in a range of vocational sectors' to prepare for work (Edexcel, 2013). At the extended diploma level, Pearson (Edexcel) and CACHE (2017) state that there is the potential to go into direct employment and is mainly for those who wish to enter a specialist area of work.

According to Bronfenbrenner, the exosystem does not contain the learner but it impinges on their environment, 'thereby influences, delimits, or even determines what goes on there' (p.515). The intended curriculum acted as the bridge across which the learner interacted with the environment of the college, and the placement or, the community of practice. This system indirectly framed aspects of the learners' experiences within the mesosystem and the microsystem, for example the relationships with their tutors and placement mentors.

The intended curriculum of the college aimed to prepare learners for work immediately after finishing, or for further studies: this dual route posed challenges for both tutors and learners. On one hand tutors needed to motivate learners to engage in topics, "*what the university requires, ... they must have Genetics...it looks better on paper when they see they have got Biochemistry, Anatomy and Genetics rather than Pet Shop management...*" (AM tutor). On the other hand, some learners did not see these as relevant if they were not going to university. Amal had no plans in the future to go to university: she wanted to care for animals when she finished the course:

Yeah I thought it had to do with animals but it is all science... No. it is all science and I am like I don't really need science. I don't really need any qualifications for what I want to do (Amal).

Amal had not expected the course to be science based, so she rejected the course and possibly her identity as a college learner, and left the course at the end of the first year.

It appears that to justify the course as worthy of being accepted as a prerequisite to university, the awarding bodies included "*hard sciences on purpose, so it does not seem as a 'micky mouse' course and has parity with A Levels*" (AM Tutor). While this was the case only in AM, what was similar, was the number of written assignments. Most learners talk about practice being easy and the course being easy but the amount of work/assignments appears overwhelming: The deadlines, if you get behind, it is coming to the end of the year and if you get so far behind you will have to stay later than anyone else. I have realised that meeting the deadlines was challenging this year (2Christie). The amount of written work also meant that for some there was very little time to reflect:

It is a bit more unorganised than A levels because with A levels you know what you have to learn and how long you have to learn it. You have targets you can set yourself on what you need to know and how you are going to know that for the exam... With this, the teachers expect you to write it down immediately onto paper without having to review it that much (2Amber).

Is it possible that the course is misrepresenting what lifelong learning is? To prepare for university there is the underlying belief that learners should be able to write a lot. However, surely it is the quality of the writing, the logical reasoning, the problem solving and meaning making that goes into learning that should be valued above 'lots of writing'. Therefore, it is possible that meeting deadlines may have been a challenge for some and they chose not to participate in the course as a way of aligning to the vocation.

5.2.b.ii) Work Placements

Both courses differed in how they offered placements: EY students had to work with certain ages of children and had a wider choice of settings to choose from. They were in a placement every second week for four days, visited by an assessor at least 6 times over the two years, and the placement officer (another role altogether), established a relation with the placement before a student went in. There was a strong focus in placement, on vocational specific skills and competencies. On the other hand, AM learners were in placement for two weeks at the beginning of the course and were encouraged to volunteer throughout the two years on the days they were not in college. Tutors did not

assess in placement, however a tutor did go and visit them once to ensure they were safe. The focus of the two weeks was not on vocational specific skill but to engage with developing a 'work ethic', so to practice, for example, being punctual, independence in getting there regularly, and communicating professionally. As the purpose and the length of time in placement differed on both courses, the process of identification differed. This will be revisited in the following chapters where I will draw out the comparisons.

The learning environment therefore differed, despite the common expectation at college that they have experience of work settings. Yes, the college had policies and structures that guided practice, for example the mission for all learners to engage with work placements and for staff to have some experience within the vocational field. However, it was the training bodies that defined the content and provided guidance on how to deliver it. The syllabus for Early Years came from CACHE and Animal Management, BTEC.

5.2.b.iii) Early Year Education and Care - CACHE

Sixteen of the learners were on the CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Early Years Education and Care (Early Years Educator). The qualification intended to prepare learners for work with children under five years and provide 'knowledge' of children below seven years (CACHE, 2017). Learning outcomes related to knowledge and skill acquisition. To succeed on the course learners must have: GCSEs in English and Mathematics at Grade C (Grade 4) or above; pass all 15 mandatory units (no optional units); complete an 'Effective Practice' study and pass an externally set, externally marked assessment (CACHE, 2017). Each unit had an aim and learning outcome, which identified what the learner, should 'understand' or 'be able to do'. The learners complete the 'be able to do' skills in a work setting. CACHE recommended a range of different assessment methods, for example, direct observations, professional discussions, expert witness statements, reflective diaries, activity plans or planned activities, and learners own work products (CACHE, 2017). On completion, learners could work as an Early Years Educator or go onto further studies at a higher level. Unlike AM, this level of qualification is a legal requirement to work without supervision, with children in an Early years setting.

The CACHE course is different from what most learners would have experienced before, as forty percent of their time was in placement. Apart from learners who had completed a Level 2 in college the previous year, all other learners were in school or a 6th Form college, where there would have been minimal engagement with a 'work' environment. CACHE recommended that learners spend 730 hours split across the age ranges (0- 2 years, 2- 3 years and 3-5 years), in a work environment. To achieve this number of hours, learners spent four days every second week in placement. Assessors expected to identify the learner's skills in their performance in placement. All EY learners had a Placement/Assessment workbook to complete, which included frames for planning, evaluation and reflecting on a range of activities. The skills were listed beginning with the words, "Be able to" for example, '*be able to implement a learning experience which supports the development of sustained shared thinking in children from birth to 5 years*' (CACHE, 2013). The discourse of the assessment booklets was one of 'competency based learning outcomes', where learners demonstrated that they are able to perform certain tasks, with the booklet and signatures as evidence. According to the intended curriculum, learners have acquired a skill when they have completed a task and been assessed by the tutor. This interaction between the assessor and learner is one of the key microsystems, in EY.

The intended curriculum focused on assessing skills or 'competences'. It has shaped what learners experience in the other systems. According to Tina the intention for completing the placement booklet is:

All assessments are planned, ...so that they will know what they are doing, what resources they need, how to differentiate activities, making sure the environment is safe. All that would be planned, ... which is in the booklet, if they have it and the assessment takes place, then there are questions and feedback is given, so they know what to do for the next assessment (Tina – EY assessor).

Within the mesosystem, the tutor had enacted the curriculum, to facilitate interaction with the learner in placement. EY learners prepared for this assessment, where they completed the activity in the presence of the tutor, who in turn provided feedback. Here we can see links between the exosystem (curriculum), mesosystem (assessor link to placement) and microsystem (learner interaction with tutor). Learners may be independent, as shown below when Tina 'assesses' Chloe. How learners experience this interaction, matters for the process of identification with the vocation. One way of thinking of this is that for the learner vocational identity, it was not the course curriculum as it was intended but the mesosystem and the microsystem is more important, as this is where the curriculum is enacted and experienced.

There was more uniformity and conformity of practice compared to AM, driven by regulation, as OFSTED monitored all early years settings. The Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFS) formed the basis for the curriculum. However, settings varied in their practice, depending on the age range, for example there were more safety controls working with children under the age of two. Students therefore, had to change settings to participate in the full age range. All students wore a uniform that identified them as a student, for safeguarding purposes. Some placements encouraged learners to be more actively involved – setting activities, engage with children even when not being assessed by college tutor. The learner interpreted this as the staff wanted the learner to feel comfortable: *"They want me to do things so that I feel comfortable"* (1Carys – EY learner).

The curriculum within the exosystem required learners to be in settings and the example below shows that learners brought their own values into how they interacted within their microsystems, and how this gave rise to some ethical dilemmas for a few learners. This is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 7. Settings varied in EY, some were private nurseries, where a few learners recognised that, while they used the Early Year Foundation Stage Framework as guide, the settings were managed differently, in that the focus, according to one student, was managing finances rather than the care of the children: *"They are run more as businesses so it is 'how can I make money they are paying us, go the furthest it can go, so how can we cut corners, how can we make the parents think that their children are getting this really good care' and actually they are not basically (3Chloe).* She found that the day was less structured and *"there was nothing to do"*. Furthermore, she felt that staff were *"not as honest with parents, as a school"*. This learner clearly did not like the idea that the setting was dishonest to parents:

...so, for me that was the hardest part where you have to sit there as a student and you know that it is wrong ...you would be annoyed to because there is nothing you can do. You can't go and say, actually they didn't have anything (Here she was referring to the staff feedback to the parent that the child had eaten their food when they had not). This highlights an issue that it may be worth placements being evaluated regularly or possibly EY have a 'traffic light' system for learners to report good, poor and alarming practices at placement.

One way of interpreting this could be that the learner's disposition, values, beliefs and identification with the vocation was strong, however as a student she felt powerless to challenge the practice. Learners on both courses imply a lack of power over their practice in the settings. The context here can be seen as confronting learners with different sorts of ethical dilemmas. This example demonstrates how the placements as part of the

intended curriculum linked closely to the microlevel of the learners experiences, which is discussed further under Microsystem (below) and in greater depth in Chapter 7

5.2.b.iv) Animal Management - BTEC

Six learners were on the Level 3 Extended Diploma in Animal Management. According to Edexcel, the course was based on the “ knowledge, understanding and technical skills that employers will need from learners entering the sector”. Similar to EY, the outcomes related to knowledge and skill acquisition. Other key features was the intention to provide opportunities for developing “personal, learning and thinking skills” and “skills and techniques, personal qualities and attitudes essential for successful performance in working life” (Edexcel, 2010, p.5). One way of thinking about the course was that it aimed to prepare learners for general work in animal management, for example:

Meeting new people turning up for work, meeting colleagues, being punctual, learning what the world of work is like, work hard, you got to get on with other people, get on with others ...The content doesn't matter at this age, experiencing what work is like, does (1 Tim – Course tutor AM).

The course is not a legal requirement to work in any animal care field, for example, learners whose placements were in retail did not need the Level 3 to work there, but learners had the experience of work in general. According to Tim the course is “just a stepping-stone into the animal world” as, “the animal care field is very broad, very loose and not specific: there are no formal pathways”.

Learning was assessed through internally set assignments guided by the grading criteria set by BTEC, using formats that were decided by the centres/colleges/ programme managers or unit tutor. Centres were encouraged but not directed, to make assessments practical and to provide realistic scenarios and with this in mind, BTEC expected staff to be familiar with current practice in the field (Edexcel, 2013) and use their experiences to make links between theory and practice. According to Edexcel, this flexibility, allowed the local or internal context to consider the learners’ needs and the available resources: “*I mean some of the units we can't teach because we do not have access to the facilities, for example Kennel and Cattery management, dog grooming as well*” (Tim, AM tutor). The exosystem, in this instance shows that within the intended curriculum, staff were expected to do one thing but how this is enacted within the mesosystem depends on the resources available.

One mandatory unit was, to ‘Undertake and Review Work Related Experience in the Land-Based industries’ (Pearson, 2013). Key here is the word ‘review’. They were required to carry out 300 hours of ‘related study/work’ to complete the unit, which did not have to be in a work environment. There was a two-week mandatory placement in the first semester, but tutors and, in the second year, learners too, recognised that this was the minimum. The intended outcome of work related experience was the opportunity to develop social skills that would enable the transition to work. The guidance to tutors suggested that learners should “ideally be given the opportunity to gain actual work-based experience” (Edexcel, 2010, p.5) and it could include voluntary work within an environmental and land-based sector. Learners were therefore in college for only part of the week, and were encouraged to do volunteer work in the rest of the week. Most students, who chose to volunteer independently, did so at the end of the two years. It may be that they were not clear about the field that they wanted to go in, and as they neared the end of the course, they thought more about the future. Alternatively, it may be that the process of engaging with volunteer work, needed to be made explicit, or there may not have been the work settings available in the local area. Both cases of volunteering, cited later, involved a tutor in finding the placement and getting the required forms for the learners.

Here again we see that it was the micro and the mesosystem that was important for the learner - so how the tutor chose to interpret the intended curriculum. While she was not expected to find a placement for the learner, she does. It was not what the student was expecting:

Tamar gave me, she went down in her lunch break bless her and she got me one of the slips you have to fill in, like an application form to be able to do work experience. So I did that for, I did 90 hours and then I have carried on now as a volunteer. Without this course, I obviously would not have been able to do that (3 Alyssa).

The exosystem does play a less visible role as learners are expected to volunteer, however it was enacted within the meso and microsystems.

One specification of the course was that, the time taken should address all learning relevant to the outcomes 'regardless of where, when and how the learning has taken place'. (Edexcel, 2013, p.3). This was different from CACHE where there were identified skills that the learners had to demonstrate. In AM, learners practiced as a group, for example in an animal rescue centre, on a farm or through group visits to the Zoo. Animal management had an outdoor space and one room indoors with glass tanks and cages, all housing different animals. Students were involved once a week on a morning in cleaning the cages and preparing food for the animals.

Tutors did not assess learners in placement, but in college, for example, on tasks where they researched and evaluated career progression opportunities as well as reviewed their experience of practical work-based activities:

The whole point of being here is to get a job... They are not A level students and they could be doing BTEC for a reason. It is meant to be a technical qualification, linked to the working world rather than be purely academic. It is important to get the life skills (1 Tim).

Clearly, preparing learners for work was part of a commitment of the tutor. As placements varied in their goals (retail, veterinary surgery and education) students were engaged in very different environments. One way of thinking about the difference in the management of placements compared to CACHE, is, BTEC focused on discrete skills for work and therefore a variety of practical activities would facilitate the teaching of these. Furthermore, the nature of the work environment in some cases proved challenging to facilitate learning through participation of learners from college. So in AM, placement was important for general work skills such as communication but specific vocational skills for example 'handling animals' were assessed in college. The course therefore, appears on the weaker end of the spectrum of 'vocationalism' (Bates, cited in Farnsworth and Higham, 2012), as there were more forms participation, within a wider landscape of practice.

Learners who came from Sixth Form did not find the course content challenging.

(Quote)

Support this a bit more

The challenge appears to come meeting deadlines in submitting written assignments, so the issue appears to be workload rather than the syllabus. The found the curriculum more practical compared to Sixth form. On the other hand, learners from school found the content challenging. This may say something more broadly about the Science curriculum in schools.

I came from A levels. It is a bit more unorganised than A levels because with A levels you know what you have to learn and how long you have to learn it. You have targets you can set yourself on what you need to know and how you are going to know. In A-levels, we didn't have constant assignments...(2Amber)

Therefore, it is possible that the course is undermining what some learners could do by setting unchallenging tasks.

5.2.b.v) Staff resources

Tutors on both courses, while not presently in practice within the industry, had wide experience of the industry and of engaging with young people. They valued placements and work experience and chose to enact the intended curriculum in a way that demonstrated this, however they did not have to do this. Terika (EY course tutor) questioned student motivation if they did not show interest in placement. She expected learners to treat placement like a job.

“...because at the end of the day that is why they are coming into college is because they want to work in a setting or go onto university to be a primary school teacher so if they are not showing an interest in the setting then I ask why are they doing the course” (2Terika)

Placement was valued because at the end... *“it sets them up to move to a job role in another setting” (3Tina).*

There is some flexibility in the system for teacher identity as a hybridised identity (Farnsworth and Higham, 2012), to enhance vocational learning. Although learners did not refer to their tutors' breadth of experience, the tutors embodied the vocation. Tutors used examples from their practice to engage learners. *“We have shared our experience and I tell the students what I had seen and what I have experienced” (Terika 1)* and Tim: *“I draw upon working at vets and working for the RSPCA. I draw upon those two all the time when I am teaching...I draw upon the real life work side” (Tim1).* Tim (Am-course tutor) had worked on a trout farm, with the RSPCA and then is a Vet practice before studying part time for a degree in Environmental Science. He then taught in Secondary school before going back to Vet practice as a manager and a vet sales representative before returning to education to teach in FE.

Tim had a particular vocational commitment, where he ensured that young people experience the working environment, because for him it was part of his identity. According to Tim, they did not have to take learners to a farm. *“You don't really have to but to make it (the course) half decent you got to” (1Tim).* When Tim took the class to the farm they worked alongside the learners. *“I go every week with different students and we go and see the poultry farm and we do work there” (Tim).* *“They told Tim what to do and Tim told us. There were people from the farm there, but they didn't tell us what to do (Alexis – AM learner).* To this end, they arranged visits. They had the confidence, ability and knowledge that they could engage in practice alongside the learners. Additionally, they arranged other visits to a research laboratory and an abattoir, and had visitors talk to learners in college. Tim also encouraged AM learners to widen their practice with animals by volunteering as just doing the course would not get them a job.

We don't tell students come here and you would get a job, we just tell them that this is a Level 3 qualification that will get you into university and it might get you a job in the animal industry if you do volunteer work. I always tell them that they have to do volunteer work as well, if you want to go into the animal industry.

Terika (EY tutor) had trained in Childcare, then worked as a Nanny before working in a day nursery: *‘worked her way to being the manager’*. They then worked in different hospitals taking care of newborn babies and then, babies of mothers who were substance misusers, before becoming an Assessor and then teacher in FE. Here we can see that tutors are not only vocational teachers but they are experts in the vocational field as well. They trained in two domains and they can operate across the boundary of teaching and the vocational field. This links to the macrosystem where the culture within FE is to

employ tutors who have experience of both. Moreover, within the exosystem, the training bodies required teachers to have worked in the vocational field. Within the microsystem, tutors bring their identity in their engagement with learners, to the effect that some learners want to do what their tutor had done: *"She (Tamar - tutor) had worked in a zoo with the big cats, she had been to Africa and I thought wow I would like to be like her to travel and work with animals"* (2Amber).

The course tutors and placement assessor, draw on their experience for examples that would facilitate learner transition from college to work.

Tim: *"I teach biology... at the vets we constantly had dogs with cruciate ligaments and hip dysplasia, hip displacement. When I worked for PH the main product was an anti-inflammatory for arthritis so I talk about that all the time"* (Tim- AM tutor).

During a lesson-observation the course tutor in EY had brought an example from an Early Years setting, of a child's 'learning journey' (a photographic journal of growth and development). She clearly showed that using examples from practice was a valued pedagogic practice and using the resource demonstrated her experience of the vocation. They also provided scenarios or case studies, and encouraged reflection on problem solving: *"Imagine how you would manage a child who swears a lot in school"* (Chloe – EY learner). Students seem to value the vocational expertise of the staff. Some recognised that their tutors had vocational experience. Chloe said that she 'learnt a lot' from the stories the tutors say.

She (Course tutor) does not just tell the story she also tells you what she did at the end. This morning she told us about where they had one child who was always swearing and then she said after the incident she told the child not to say those words, she didn't like hearing them. Then, she said she explained to the parents and said she didn't like hearing those sort of things. So, I thought if a child swears in my setting then I would know to say to the child I don't like hearing that language, so you know how to tell them.(Chloe)

These examples demonstrate the tutors as experts in two domains, which learners value: they can act as the bridge between college and placement

Moreover, tutors show awareness of young people making the transition to adulthood. *"We prepare them to be as well rounded as we can make them, we try to develop their CVs, we give them work experience, try to set them on a path.*(2Tim). *"But it is normal for this age as you will know working with 17 year-old. I have to keep cracking the whip all the time with some of them"* 1Tim. For Tim the qualification was less important than the learners having work skills such as punctuality and willingness to learn. Tim had a strong belief that if the learner had the 'drive', a strong ambition to work with animals then they need to find work like they did in any setting and work and make sacrifices. Qualifications is only part. *"I would never had the job had I not done that every Sunday morning, so you get out what you put in. most of them do not have that. They don't have that approach to life. They are working but some are working for money."* 2Tim. This can be viewed as Tim having a clear commitment to the learners identifying with the vocation, through practice. There was one case of the college tutor helping the learner to find a placement that she thought the learner would be able to experience the vocation she wanted to do.

Well Taylor helped me, my other tutor because she went down there when she used to go to college here and I needed some work experience with horses for university anyway and she said that she knew somewhere so I got in touch with them and they let me go down and I have been going ever since.(3Amber)

What is implicit in the macrosystem but explicit in the meso and microsystem, is that the tutors bring to course, not only experience of education and the vocation but they draw on their past experiences of engagement with young people. Course tutors engaged with learners from a position of their understanding of young peoples' social development.

Terika (EY course Tutor) had learners at different times over the two years who were pregnant, and she saw her role as “*getting those ones through because they obviously have time off to go on maternity*”. This links to the learners microsystems, which would have been different as they were not at college or placement some of the time, but additionally their meaning of child development (subject of the course) may have developed through personal experience. The macrosystem of college policies may have guided Terika, however she enacted it differently with each of these learners, aiming so that they still succeeded in qualifying.

5.2.c The enacted curriculum as mesosystem (link between college and placement/link between microsystems as identified by learners)

The mesosystem encompasses a system of microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and is relevant as learners were in college and in placements – two environments within which they were interacting with others. According to Bronfenbrenner study of the interactions between settings can “highlight the possibility that events in one milieu may influence the child’s (*learner’s*) behaviour and development in another” (1977, p.523) therefore the study should look at the joint impact of the settings and not one without the other. Below is a diagram of some of the interactions that learners experienced directly or indirectly. Examples of two microsystems interacting, were, the placement mentor and the learner, and the assessor and the learner, in the setting.

While there was an intended curriculum, the enactment on each course and in each placement was different. “What constitutes how the curriculum is enacted is inseparable from the individuals who have to implement it” (Billett, 2011, p220). In this section, I will therefore, look at the enactment of the curriculum, as they had a bearing on learners’ experiences.

I will begin with an interpretation of the arrangement between placements and the college, displaying how the intended curriculum of work experience differed on both courses and how this mattered for learning through participation in practice. The mesosystem is different on both courses as there were no placement assessors on AM. There were more group visits with the course tutor, and they were the key link as they established and maintained communication with the settings and was the expert when learners visited (as shown above)

Below is a diagram that places the learner at the centre around which there were other mesosystems.

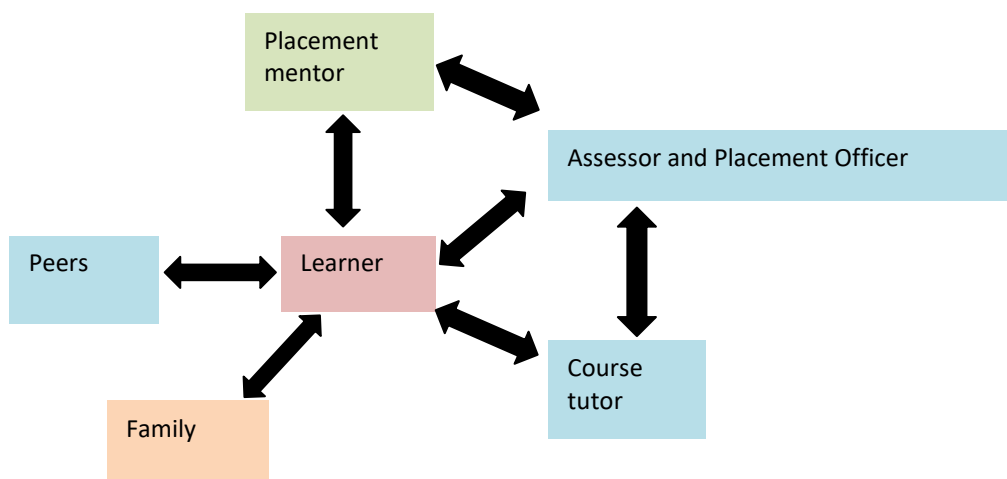


Figure 3: Context of learner

Enactment of work placement practice varied. Both courses, prepared learners for work, by monitoring punctuality as well as fostering behaviour that aligned to the work placement.

It is mainly them realising that it is like a work environment. They have got to turn up on time. They are not allowed their phones. The phones go into a box and they are allowed them at their dinner times. It is just the routine. It is like an eye opener to working life (Prisha – Placement mentor for Carys - EY).

On the one hand, in AM, the intended curriculum regarding practice included caring for animals in college and visits as a group. Furthermore, learners were encouraged to volunteer in the field they were interested. It may be that tutors did not assess in placement due to: criteria of the assessment; not having sufficient staff, and settings were limited and varied widely in the breadth of experience they could offer learners. Experience of engagement varied and whether the learning environment contributed or not to strong identities can only be known by examining learners' reflections, which is explored in Chapter 7 when looking at the experienced curriculum in the microsystem.

On the other hand, in EY learners were in a placement for four days every second week and had to complete set tasks on which they were assessed. These tasks were for assessment of competence as defined by the awarding body. The mesosystem though did have some challenges if areas were not clear as to who was responsible. Tutors and mentors were not clear who was responsible for the children when the assessor was there: *"They (placement staff) think that they are helping by backing away when really they should be dealing with it (challenging behaviour of children)"*. Learners in these situations were not clear about their role towards the children when being assessed.

Sometimes the setting does all singing and dancing when they know students are coming in, like when Ofsted goes. Some of the settings have achieved 'Outstanding' (Highest Grade from OFSTED) but we know that the practice they are doing is not outstanding (1Terika – EY course tutor)

Nevertheless in EY: *"Most placements will give them a mentor, others don't, and I do find that those who give them a mentors perform better because they have got the person that they can go to if they need help with anything."* (1Tina – EY Assessor). There was a stronger mesosystem in EY than in AM which the AM tutor recognised, which may be due to the curriculum. In the vocational field learners a Level 3 qualification was not valued. At the mesosystem level, tutors tried to maintain relationships with placements. On the one hand, in AM the course tutors established contact with some community of practices. *"To be fair we just ring them up and we get a relationship going and hopefully when they meet the students it (students) does not put them off (Tim)*. On the other hand, in EY placement officers established links with placements, meeting managers and carrying out Health and Safety checks before the learners started. The mesosystem is more structured. They visited the learner soon after they started to ensure learners were 'settled', checking pastorally rather than assessing skills. While the Health and safety aspect is part of the policy of the college, the enactment showed concern for the learner's emotional wellbeing. Moreover, learners were not nervous about this visit, as it was not an assessment of competence. A hidden aspect of the relationship with placements may be, that the college wanted to maintain working relationships with placements, for future learners, as placement officers sometimes were involved in resolving potential conflict between settings and learners.

The role of the placement officer may have been more complex than appeared, as the placement may also discuss with the officer whether the student had met expectations such as punctuality and attendance and this did not appear as a concern for learners. This level of interaction within the mesosystem seems to remove potential conflict from

the microsystem of the learner with staff in the setting. Potential conflict could also arise around ethical dilemmas the learner may have. In the case of Cate, she was nervous that her two nephews were in the same room as her, and a staff member told her that she had to make sure that she is confidential when interacting with her sisters, as she should not discuss other children. *"...I will be speaking to the placement officer. I really like the nursery though, but that is one thing that I am worried about. I was just thinking that it is not only me that could get into trouble but it may be my sister as well."* (1 CATE- EY learner). Cate in this instance may have been looking for reassurance, that if a conflict around confidentiality arose in the future, she could approach the officer for advice on resolving it.

Within the microsystem of the learners, the example above also demonstrates how the learner had interpreted the issue of 'confidentiality', which had been discussed in college as part of the intended curriculum: *"I know that about confidentiality since we have done it in college...So when we learnt about it, it is something you keep in mind. But she (placement staff) was saying that basically I shouldn't discuss things with my sister about what happens in the nursery even if she asks"* (1 Cate). It is possible that how this learner understands the meaning of confidentiality relates to her personal experience of how she would moderate what she discussed with her sister, due to the interaction with the staff member around this issue. It is an example that demonstrates how the learner connected theory to practice.

5.2.d Microsystem as the experienced curriculum

5.2.d.i) Initial experience of college

Most learners experienced the college environment as more relaxed, with greater freedom than at school. To the learners from school there was a distinctly different culture in college:

School is like a prison. You have to stay in the grounds from 9 to 3. College you are allowed to get your lunch (get lunch outside college) and do what you like (1Christie).

I have enjoyed it so much, coming from high school to this. I prefer this rather than school." (Alexis – AM learner). *"Yeah I liked it but I think I prefer college. It is better than school (1Charlie – EY - learner).*

They expressed excitement at the beginning of the first year as they had expectations of the course or had imagined what they would be doing in the future. To some, 'everything was new', others saw it as a beginning of their journey to becoming or getting a job in the field that they wanted to. It was clear that they had different aspirations, and when they would enter a 'community of practice'; some had longer-term plans of going to university, others were hoping for jobs as soon as they had finished. Aspirations for the future in some cases seemed to support a more resilient attitude to challenges faced as a learner. Accordingly, using the definition of vocation by Billett (2011), where he proposed that it was "personally directed and assented but often socially derived practices, that reflect an individuals' enduring aspirations and interests..." (p65) it seems apt to discuss aspects of learners' personal, subjective experiences, given the investigation into the development of identities. This is covered in the following chapter where the focus is on the learner.

Learners expected the course would be practical and the content of the college sessions would link directly to a vocation. They would be shown for example how to do 'displays' (2Cara). There would be opportunities to engage in practice. It would be different from school. From the literature and widely held views, Further education is seen as offering more opportunities to engage in practice.

Although most learners experienced college as more relaxed than school at the beginning, they did not always experience the curriculum as relaxed later on the course. While tutors felt under pressure to ensure learners get high grades and complete the course, most learners highlighted the, higher than expected, number of written assignments that they had to manage. Some learners experienced the intended curriculum, as 'hard' and 'a lot of work'. Furthermore, the 'achievement' goals of the macrosystem expected learners to pass and some to achieve high grades. In response to the challenges they have experienced Connie said *"I think the hand-in dates for the assignments, because we have got quite a few tutors and they have different units and it can get a bit confusing especially when the deadlines coming closer..."* (3 Connie). Carys responded that, *"it seems like we are getting units piled up on top after another after another"* (2 Carys). Amal and Abigail (AM learners) found managing the written assessments 'hard':

It is hard and it is a lot of work; with Tim (Am Tutor), it is Science, and with Taylor (AM tutor), it is behaviour. I got about 4 or 5 assignments to do and he (Tim) said one of them is due today and the other on Monday.

Clearly in the first year, learners are having to balance the demands of different microsystems and therefore shape unique learner and vocational identities depending on how this challenge is resolved. Within the microsystem of the college, tutors showed a breadth of experience within two domains, evident in how in how they interact with learners. They show empathy. In the example I use, Taylor appears to 'tune into' the learner's emotional state, during a visit to placement. *"I went to assess a girl and she broke down into tears as soon as I walked through the door and I thought it was because she was nervous so I was giving her comfort."* She empathises with learner by alluding to her experience with observations:

They are nervous because they are being watched and being assessed by somebody coming from outside as well as all the staff, they have got to know. They are being watched and they don't like it, well nobody likes being watched, so I make sure that they feel ok.

She almost does not like the fact that she has to watch them. She reflects on this then decides what she is going to do:

I ask them what they want me to do, do they want me to join in with the activity so they are more comfortable and so they get to know me a bit more or do they prefer me to sit really far away and just move around so that I am not just staring at them? Some of them prefer me not to write while I am there. I give them the options because I don't want anyone to feel uncomfortable. I want them to make sure that they can perform and do the activity they have planned as best as they can without stuttering, worrying and forgetting things (Tina- EY Assessor).

One way of thinking about this is, Taylor had training in how to observe or assess learners as part of her training as a teacher. In the past OFSTED inspectors had observed her and given feedback on how to assess learners. She may have reflected on these but equally she may be drawing on her emotional reactions to observation assessments, to create a space in which the learner can be comfortable.

According to the AM tutor, having continuous assessments instead of an exam lulls learners into believing that the course would be easy and more practical than Sixth Form. **Quotes** The curriculum was enacted so that learners were taught to the assignments, where each lesson fulfilled a criterion for an assessment, which was "no fun" for tutors. Ironically, the students focused more on the industrial or the vocational criteria. They wanted to know aspects of the vocation because they wanted to use it.

5.2.d.ii) Placement as a microsystem - This is discussed in greater depth in chapter 7

Learners are initially nervous about assessments in placements but as they realise that the tutor is well meaning and focuses on the criteria and there are no personal judgements made they tend to relax and towards the end of the second year are more relaxed. Being relaxed and having a trusting relationship with the assessor means that learners are able to perform as naturally or as close to a staff member. Indeed, they would have in most cases discussed with their placement mentor what they had planned. However, in some cases where learners did not have a trusting relationship this is something they could talk to with tutors in the college and in some cases learners changed placements. Having trusting relationships within the microsystem is important for building confidence to participate in practice.

In placement, most learners developed independence as they became more familiar with routine tasks, through either observing others or practicing it themselves. Learners talked about things '*getting easier*' as they got '*to know*'. '*Knowing*' extended to knowing how to be, how to participate. In EY, once learners knew the names, interests and personalities of children, it became easier to interact with them as well as staff: they could communicate more around activities and planning. The learner had more to discuss around, in placement and in college. It then became easier to be more actively involved. As learners became familiar, they often felt more comfortable in the setting. Learners were able to describe this change themselves. They noticed things in their environment and gradually became more confident in their engagement. Christie found that she became familiar once she knew how staff organised activities in placement. She then could set up these tables independently:

Now I know they have different tables and I know what goes on each table. They have stickers at the back of the chairs so I know what goes where, but at first, I didn't have a clue where everything was. I depended on staff members to help"
(Christie, EY learner).

When Tina (EY Placement Assessor) assessed Chloe, the activity did not go to plan and Chloe had to make a judgement spontaneously, to show that she was aware of how the children in her group were participating. "*To be honest I thought: 'oh dear this ice is not melting very fast I am going to have to do something or lose their attention so let's sing a song'...I knew that they knew the song and I knew that they liked the song"*. Learners were learning how their own behaviour created the context to become more resilient or respond appropriately. How learners become more independent, will be discussed in detail in each of the following chapters, as it is an example of their changing dispositions through the course. It mattered for how they learnt through engaging in practice and therefore, their identification with the vocation. Finally, developing independence was a process in their learning.

In AM, learners on retail placements found it easier to participate alongside staff on meaningful tasks, but these were not always what learners felt, related directly to animals. The role of the mentor may have also, either constrained or expanded the practices of the learner. In vet practices, where there was a high level of accountability to the pet owners, learners' engagement varied. In one of the vet surgeries, the learner had few opportunities to be involved actively since the veterinary nurses saw the student as not having the necessary 'clinical' training and certification, that one would expect to have at a higher level of study (Phillipa – AM Placement mentor for Abigail). However, in another practice, Adene (AM learner) had more opportunities, which may have been due to the disposition and level of authority of the vet surgeon. Both places varied in terms of the role of the mentor, one was the nurse and the other to the surgeon. The roles of staff in placement appear to have framed some of the practices of the learner.

5.2.d.iii) Family as a microsystem

In EY there were other family members not necessarily in childcare, but working as a social worker and the student talked about becoming someone, by being like someone else- referring to cousins. It is quite common for the students to have pets showing some interest or a caring for animals: generally no one in the family working with animals but parents involved in feeding and cleaning. They got some guidance on the course choice from those around them: family members, church figures or a career adviser at school. Parents are encouraging of students, for example in the case Abigail, her dad suggested to her that she would enjoy it because she had been with animals since she was little:

In Croatia because I had a big garden, I had pigs, goats, chicken and dogs and cats ...My dad told me to take this because I didn't know what I wanted to do... He just thought I would enjoy it because he knew I had been around animals for a long time.

In EY, students referred to caring for younger siblings, babysitting or taking a younger family member to a nursery or school. Students also referred to placements they had done either at school or on a Level 2 course the previous year.

This subjective experience appears to guide their choice of course and implicitly the vocational field they may identify with in the future. By recalling past experiences learners seemed to have aligned themselves temporally (Lawy, 2008). Furthermore, choice is made not only through planning, as implied by Klotz et al. (2014), but can be constrained or enabled by circumstances, as will be further elaborated below. Learners therefore show links to other microsystems and histories, which matter for how they engage with practice and form their vocational learner identity.

In some cases, parental pressure also added some challenges for students, for example the student who felt under pressure to go into veterinary science. 2Cai talked about the stress at home with granddad with dementia, an annoyed dad, unemployed older brother, family financial stresses, as well as the workload on the course. (She was not in placement for some time as well, as a child had hurt her neck: she finished the course however did not think she would work in a childcare setting). I sense Cai's home microsystem is upsetting and destabilising which may carry over into other microsystems, for example, how she participates in placement. Thinking positively was a strategy Cai used to complete the course:

I have to I try not to think about it. I always think on the positive side I don't like thinking of the negative but my dad always says negative things to me and that makes me unhappy. I talk to my mum I get along better with her. In the afternoon, it is only me and my brother in and he sometimes go out so that is when I do my work when it is quiet. I got my room and I have a computer (2Cai).

5.2.d.iv) Other microsystems

Learners were connected to other microsystems at the same time as those related to their studies. On the one hand, it could be valuable as in the case of Adene, who reflected on her experience of communicating professionally in hospitality, and how they mattered for how she engaged with animal owners:

With hospitality I have customers who come regularly to see me and you build sort of this nice relationship and I feel like that you would 100% do the same in a vet surgery and that is even more important in a surgery because those people are instilling their trust into you to provide them with the utmost care for their babies at the end of the day.

For Cai, she had her church group, where she volunteered, to talk to about what to study at college: "I told them what I wanted to do and they said yes we can see you doing that and so that put my confidence up". On the other hand, the microsystem could make demands that learners cannot manage:

“But, I got work placement on Monday so I don’t know if I will have time to hand it in (that is why she was meant to hand it in today) because it is from 8am to 4pm and then I am working on the weekend” (Abigail).

As Amal felt there was too much to do, she lacked the motivation to start:

It is hard. Especially since, we had 4. I have got 4 now to do and one is due today. Because there is 4 of them and when you come to do them and you see them all stacked you like have got no motivation to do it because there is just so much, so like ‘No’ (Amal).

Chloe had a part-time job working with children:

When you got a job, you can’t act like a child. You got to... it does grow you up in my opinion. I work at a play gym so I am a party coordinator, so when you book a party for your child at the play gym, then it is up to me to sort of look after you when you are there ... (Chloe).

It is clear that learners were managing different microsystems and while they valued the higher level of ‘freedom’ college afforded them, some found the variety and amount of written assessments too high, which meant that to manage it they could not be as independent as they may have wanted to be. Fostering of independence as a valued skill, appears to be implicit in the enacted curriculum, but not one that all learners identified. Some learners had personal difficulties which they found challenging to balance with completing assessments. When reflecting back at the end of second year one student said that they wished that they did not, ‘let’ difficulties at home make them fall behind with college work. It is possible that learners needed a level of guidance in how to balance their participation in different microsystems and this was not a consideration of the intended curriculum. Tutors however brought their own dispositions, values and beliefs in how they enacted the curriculum. During tutorials the Progress tutor met with learners on a regular basis, creating a space for learners to complete assessments.

5.3 Conclusion

Taking a view that the environment does not shape the learner but both are interlinked, allowed me to analyse how the individual learner experiences interlinked with aspects of the environment. Seeing the environment as a system allowed me to then, further analyse the complex interrelationships. The analysis attempted addressing the more nuanced conceptualisation of vocational education (Higham and Farnsworth, 2012), to include issues such as Teacher resources, curriculum and assessments. This in turn highlighted how a valuable way of engaging students was being missed with the focus on criteria and standards. The intended curriculum reduced opportunities for tutors to bring their own resources and experiences of the vocational field into the class, as teaching had less to do with work but how to meet assessment criteria.

Both courses required a Grade C(Grade 4) or above in at least five subjects including Maths and English. This may be significant due to the number of written assessments and one key aim of the curriculum design of preparing learners for the academic rigour of university. I have implicitly excluded then, those learners who possibly were at risk of disengaging and those who may have chosen the vocation but did not get the grades, so those who may feel the vocation is a calling and would have chosen it had they got the grades.

The different systems discussed in this chapter matter for learner and vocational identity as they interlink to the microsystem. The macrosystem had policies that required learners to complete work placements and this created greater opportunities for learners to engage in practice alongside experts. Within the exosystem the hybrid teacher identity was a resource that learners could draw. These social relationships were important for how learners negotiated their developing dispositions to learning and the vocation. The following chapter will look at learners’ dispositions and how they develop and change over the two years.

6 Learner Trajectories

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the learner, their personal histories and dispositions within the microsystem, and the learning processes they negotiated. Here the Transformative learning lens is used although it did not appear in the literature review. The following chapter uses Communities of Practice to interpret participation and identification with the vocation. While I have taken to discussing the disposition of the learners in one chapter and the learning environment in another, this is a device to look at each in more detail. The reader should not see this as dualistic views of learning, but that they 'articulate with each other' (Hodkinson, Biesta and James, 2008, p.27). Chapter 5 examined aspects of the environment in response to parts of the first research question. "What aspects of the learners' wider social environment shape identification?" and "How do students engage with the formal learning experiences provided through the course?" The learning environment appeared significant, as through interactions between the different systems, learners experienced the curriculum and engaged in practice. The mesosystem interlinked learners' microsystems, some of which were with the college, with placement, with their families and other significant environments such as work or religious spaces.

Chapter 2 (Literature review) summarised dispositions, as patterns of behaviour that are directed to a goal, and guided interpretation of experiences. It showed that learners started with dispositions that may have evolved through prior experiences (Gresalfi, 2009). Furthermore, it related to learners' views on the purpose of learning, perceptions of knowledge and the assessment of value that knowledge holds for them. It is individual, connected to wider issues and can change over a short time. While other studies referred to change in dispositions towards learning, learners here, also talked about changes to the values, attitudes, beliefs, aspirations - for most, the course was transformative.

The intention here is to provide a detailed account of dispositions towards learning; how they changed over the duration of the course and how they mattered for learning and vocational learner identity. The construct of learner identity applies to the vocational education community of practice that holds certain principles, practices and repertoires about how people learn, so the chapter analyses data for evidence of this. Much data demonstrated learners' motivations, aspirations and confidence. Transformation occurs in a safe space, as this facilitates the learner reflecting on their practice with others in a trusting relationship (Mezirow et al., 2009). To analyse the relationship between the expert and the novice (learner) Vygotsky's concept of the 'more knowledgeable other' was useful (Vygotsky et al., 1978). Finally, for the learner to have experienced changes to their dispositions or values and beliefs, there was authentic practice (Billett, 1997). When looking at the processes of learning, it could begin when 'new practices are added to the old habits' (Nohl, 2015, p.45).

6.2 The process of transformation

It may be revealing to begin with an examination of learners' histories and prior experiences as this will also demonstrate dispositions that learners displayed at the beginning and how they change through practice.

MAP of the PROCESS

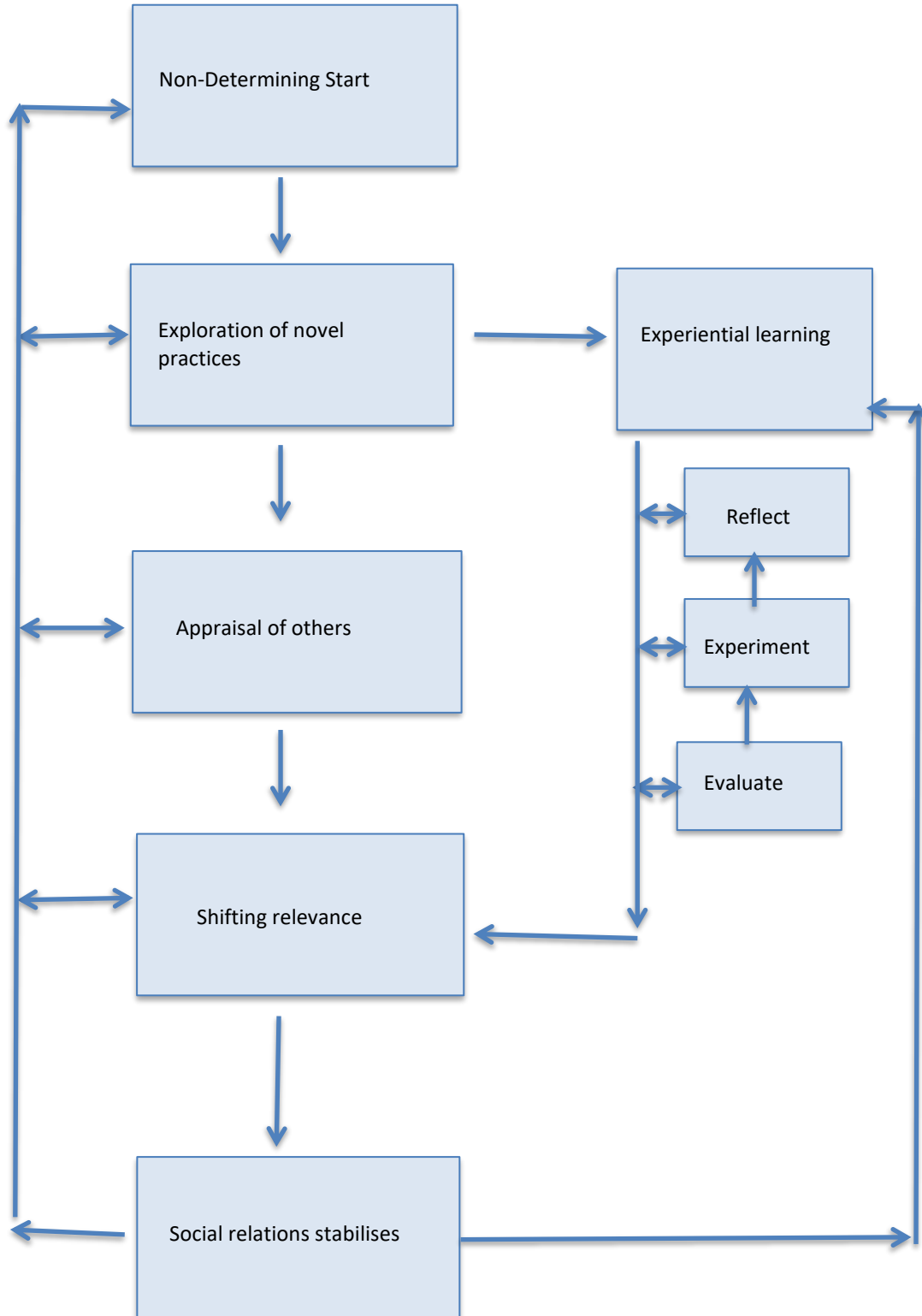


Figure 4: Transformative learning cycle

6.2.a 'when new practice is added to old habits'

Starting the course is a novel experience, but there were new practices added throughout the course, so the transformative process is not linear but "recursive, evolving and spiralling" (Taylor, cited in Nohl, 2015). Learners came from an educational setting, some from Sixth form colleges, a small percentage from the same college, the rest were in secondary schools, and each had their own personal narratives to draw on. However, there were also some common dispositions too, arising possibly from the shared environment. These prior experiences can affect how learners go on to negotiate novel experiences, which matter then, for how they learn through practice. According to Nohl (2015), transformation may begin incidentally or casually. Some students did however, come to the course having experienced a dilemma such as not getting the grades that they expected, to go to university. The start of the process however is 'non determining', as the learner does not know, whether the novel experience will be transforming or not.

By looking at the different groups of learners I tried to analyse whether and how these prior experiences mattered for their learning through practice. As you will see their learning dispositions at the beginning was sourced from these experiences but change during the duration of the course. The AM course tutor saw the learners as exercising 'learned helplessness', when they start, where learners want to be told what to do and some afraid of getting anything wrong: they wanted to be 'spoon-fed'.

6.2.a.i) Sixth Form learners

In Animal management, fifty percent of participants were from Sixth form, where they had 'failed' assessments, despite getting high grades at school. They found Chemistry, challenging. They then believed, they may not be able to go to university and enter the vocation they wanted to: *'Blown my chances of doing the easy mainstream way of getting to university and becoming a veterinary surgeon'* (1Adene). With this 'failure', they experienced anxiety, feelings of sadness and low self-confidence. However, within a few weeks of starting the course they were reasserting themselves as 'successful' learners, even though they were not sure if their
They enjoyed college and gradually concluded that Sixth Form was a wrong choice because it did not offer practice with animals. They began to reengage with 'science': they found it easier because they were repeating what they had done before and were being rewarded higher grades in assessments: *"I did A levels Biology so I know a lot of the background stuff"* (Amber) and *"I did biology and chemistry at A levels. It has helped so for example the digestive system I had done in biology."* (Alyssa). Having done a year of science, one learner was able to be the 'expert' to her peers in class by explaining when they did not understand, and this gave her confidence, reaffirming to her that she 'was not 'thick' (Alyssa).

Reasserting learner identity as one who was capable meant Alyssa could also present herself as more able than her peers. Reengagement for some meant that they could realign to their chosen vocation or reconsider university. New practices within college and placement and how they experienced these, may therefore be reflected in how they go on to explore other authentic practices. Furthermore, perceived failure the year before appear to have supported a more resilient approach when faced with challenges on the course, a discussion of which will follow later when analysing motivations.

Another disposition that these learner show, is that, while at the beginning, they blamed the schoolteachers (or the curriculum): *"The wording (exam paper) was really bad and the teachers were just they didn't seem as if they know the stuff themselves so we kind of had to teach ourselves"* (Amber – AM learner) or "... *"That school is in special measures now*

because of the poor teaching. (1Alyssa – AM learner), in later interviews the same learners acknowledged that they could have 'tried harder': they seem to be able to reflect on their past experiences taking into account their own role: "... when I was in Sixth form I didn't really take it seriously. I was completely different to how I am now. I never used to do my homework, I didn't revise for any of my exams and that is why I failed, well that and the teachers, they didn't help." (3Alyssa). This level of self-evaluation or reflection on their own dispositions was not evident in most learners at the beginning and only in some learners at the end.

6.2.a.ii) Learners from school

Learners from school faced new practices in college differently from those who were in Sixth Form. On the one hand, while the learners from Sixth Form College were being rewarded for their engagement on the course, some AM learners who came from secondary school found Science as a subject, problematic: *"It is hard and it is a lot of work"* (Abigail). They had to evaluate how they learnt. Amal did not like the course because *"it is the science of animals. I prefer to do more hands-on with the animals"*. Some learners therefore experienced the curriculum as restricted by abstract or theoretical, domain specific knowledge and the high number of written assessments. Furthermore, they found meeting deadlines on assessments, challenging. Amal: *"It is hard. Especially since we had 4 (assessments). I have got 4 now to do and one is due today. Because there is 4 of them and when you come to do them and you see them all stacked you like have got no motivation to do it because there is just so much so like, 'No'"*. So apart from science being challenging they may not have had the opportunity to develop effective strategies to manage their workload, which those from Sixth Form appeared to have. Thus, these factors were challenges that prevented some learners from school entering the vocation through the course.

At college, the pedagogic approach was to encourage independence, which most learners valued. However, this is not something that some wanted at the beginning. *"Because I came from high school and that was the way we were taught at the beginning I didn't really like it but you do get used to it and you realise no one is going to help you do it and you have got to do it yourself"* (Alexis). Not every one embraced this or felt that they had the support in developing independence. At the end of the course, Cai still preferred school as it was more 'supportive': *They seem to help us more in school, I didn't feel as if I was getting support here* (3Cai). It appears that learners were not explicitly taught at college how to become independent, they gradually negotiate an independent learner disposition, but there was an expectation that learners would embrace this approach, and not everyone did. The 'dependent learner' is a disposition common in school, which, Amalthas (2010) identified as a feature of the UK education system and is still evident in how learners talked about their experience in 2016. The learners felt that they were 'spoon fed in school': *"It is more like in school you had to ask everything and was told everything what to do"* (1Charlie). From this is it clear that learners starting the course have dispositions that have been sourced from their prior experiences, which may describe how they negotiate practice at the beginning.

The quotes above also highlight another challenge that learners in AM encountered that EY learners did not - the issue of negotiating abstract theoretical knowledge represented through written work, which appear to be valued in schools. What appears as a feature in the curriculum that learners were unprepared for is the level of domain specific knowledge and written assignments. Learners expected this to be a smaller proportion of the course and that they would be engaged in practice. This led to loss of motivation to finish the course, and therefore non-participation in the vocation through the course. EY learners from school, on the other hand, found college 'easier' than school as there was only 'one

subject', which I assumed as a single focus on children. Besides, some saw the subject as 'common sense' (Clara, Chloe). Knowledge was situated in their practice. This may say something about the curriculum of the different courses or the individual dispositions of the learners that they varied and therefore learning through participation differed.

6.2.a.iii) Prior college experiences

At the start of college, learners' choice of qualification level and course is constrained by the grades they achieved in school. Most learners, who were not at school or at Sixth Form the year before, were in college (seven of sixteen learners from EY). Five of the seven learners completed the course (two left within few months of starting). These learners had completed Level 2 and were progressing onto Level 3, a representation of the college's social inclusion and widening participation agenda, where learners work towards higher levels of qualification that could lead to university entrance.

Having a L2 qualification for most learners, was a useful resource in changing dispositions towards practice. They could refer to previous year's notes for information to complete assignments. *"I am actually quite glad that I did Level 2 in Childcare because it is helping me a lot, the work and stuff and it comes in handy now. You know it is different because now we look at things more deeper..."* (1Connie). In placement it appears as they are given more responsibilities. *"I think they leave me with the children on my own because I have Level 2 as well"* (1Carys). *"I had experience from being in placement last year when I did my level 2 so they obviously seen me progress and decided to back off a bit"* (2Cameron). By the staff 'backing off', implies that the learner was practicing independently, as a result of staff trusting her to carry out a task on her own. When there is a level of trust or I refer to this later as a 'safe space', learners can negotiate meaning for themselves of what is valued, developing dispositions that show a strong learner identity.

For others having some previous experience of the field or content knowledge meant their approach was more tentative. They were nervous about starting a course at a higher level, a level that they could not register on the year before. These learners had doubts about their own knowledgeability or competence and therefore developed confidence when they were rewarded with high grades or appraisal by staff. Having done a Level 2 course, in one case, the learner assumed that the requirements of the assessments would be the same.

In L2 they didn't give you any sheet, I didn't know that you had to write the activities down, I thought I am just going to go there (to placement) and do it . Now I am prepared (3Chris).

She realised that to pass her assessments she would need to plan and write out her activities differently from before. There is a level of self-reflection through comparison with how it was done before and the expectations of her on Level 3 . A period of uncertainty may mean that she was slower in developing confidence.

6.2.b exploring novel practices – experiential learning

Authentic or novel practices were ones that learners appeared to encounter for the first time and they recognise the value it had for the community or vocational landscape. In EY, some of these practices were set out as competences to be completed and assessed as part of the intended curriculum: *It was one the theories you have to go with. I think it was Piaget and it was about physical development and about fine motor skills. Based on the theory you had to think of something that allow the children to go and prove that his theory is right.*(2 Connie). In this instance, there is value in the assessments as they push learners to explore and experiment with novel practices. As these assessments are

carried out throughout the two years, learners are likely to return to this stage a few times. They expressed enjoyment, enthusiasm and interest when tasks were varied, suggesting that routines had to be interspersed with new tasks, to maintain interest and motivation. If tasks were overly repetitive and no new tasks initiated, students became bored. In AM, one learner used her experience of practice to decide whether she would continue with the course. She found that she could not explore and experiment in many tasks and got bored mainly observing others. However there was value in repetition as in most cases they were then able to carry tasks out independently, as they became familiar with them.

There were also strong feelings associated with practice, *such as excitement or enjoyment. They feel 'good'*

I also enjoyed it when we went to the farm. We went and cleaned out the stables, but it weren't stables, they had pigs and goats. That was fun and different because I had never,..I had been to a farm but I had never actually cleaned and cared for animals that were on a farm. (1Alexis)

At the beginning, they practised these tasks by **helping staff**. *"Well when they were cleaning the animals if they needed us to hold the animals or help them clean or give them guidance on how to clean it then we would help"* (1Amber). Through meaningful activities, they learn through practice. They may have been asked or observed what other staff were doing; so in the case of Charlie: *"It was something that when you go in and watch other people, the other staff members you pick up what you have to do."* Chloe talks about going for a walk to the café with a group of children and her anxiety about keeping them safe, showing that she feels accountable as an adult: *"I got a bit anxious when we took the children to the cafe and we had to walk on the path next to the road but it was quite a narrow path"* (2Chloe). While Chloe was 'helping', she also felt accountable, showing a disposition that is not self directed but arises through the practice.

Through engaging alongside staff, opportunities arose to reflect on their beliefs or views, for example the issue in AM of euthanasia. Students may not have had to think about this before; however, while on practice, the vet asked the student whether she wanted to observe an animal put to death. Having observed the condition of the animal, she was able to rethink her views and according to her, understand why it is necessary:

"...I appreciated the opportunity to see that. You don't know how you are going to react. I was asked if I wanted to see it because I think it is important, especially if you want to go into that line of work you are going to have to deal with things like that on a weekly basis. You do get sick animals. It was interesting to see how I would react myself to seeing something like that and also how it was done as well. I found that it was alright. It was a bird. It was so so sick, so I felt almost relieved for the animal so I wasn't upset by it or anything like that, which I think is a good thing especially if I want to go into something like that. I know it is not going to affect me personally or make me have a different view of things. (2Adene).

Learners explored new practices by also experimenting with what they had seen: *I saw them play with the cards before and I thought they (children) will know what they had to do. I would explain to them as well and they (children) will know what I am talking about. That is why it will be easy for them and me as well (1Chris – when talking about why she planned a particular activity).*

I was at placement, and I saw a wreath and thought what if I did a wreath, a version of that. I 'Googled' 'Christmas tree' and I saw one that had loads of ideas and the hand one looked good and it was messy and children like getting messy don't they? (2Carys)

Therefore, there may be value in repetition of some activities.

Jarvis (2006) referred to novel practices as episodic experiences, which contributes in time to transformation if learners reflect and evaluate these practices, but at the time they “do not comprehend the biographical significance of their new experiences, and hence cannot integrate it into biographical plans” (Nohl, 2015, p.45) or ‘identity’ (Illeris, 2014). When learners experience novel or authentic practices later on the course they reflect and evaluate these with greater knowledgeability and stronger learning dispositions, through having evaluated and reflected on prior practice, as seen in the first example above by 2Connie. Some learners do explore practices in a more self-directed way, a strong learning disposition, showing that they may be identifying with the vocation.

6.2.b.i) Self directed

Some learners deliberately put themselves beyond their comfort zone: here it is not a dilemma, or crisis or incidental, the learner instead wanted to learn through experimenting. Activities were consciously chosen by the learner, where they wanted to introduce a challenge, for example overcoming a fear, to expand their comfort zone.

When I started I didn't entirely like the snakes and I finally got round to it. I started stroking one and then a couple of weeks later I then picked one up and then a couple of weeks later after that I was removing or if they needed to be picked up or if they are at the door they need picking up and put back in. It is things like that overcoming things that I thought that I would do and that is what I am proud of. My next target is the tarantula, I still have to hold that (2Alexis)

Here I saw Alexis working on this during a visit to the class just before interviewing them for the second time. They worked alongside one a peer who held the snake, while they cleaned the cage. I see Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal development (ZPD) as such as zone (Vygotsky et al., 1978), where dialogic interactions with more experienced others, creates a space for negotiating and co-constructing new understandings (Eun, 2019). In Amber's case she referred to holding insects. During the session I was there, she had to clean the cage with the hoppers and the tutor asked her to remove the dead ones. She could not, so the AM tutor, took one hopper and asked her to hold her hand out so that she cupped them between her hands. She did for a second and dropped them back in. By the end of the second year, she said that she was removing them on her own. Here learners display a strong learner disposition. This zone according to Eun (2019) is a dynamic region of sensitivity to instruction by both the learners and the expert, where learners are ready to negotiate meaning and the expert captures this at the right time. I suspect that while this may have happened in college, due to the teacher training, it was less frequent in placements, as the learner was peripheral. Only a few learners mentioned these negotiations with placement mentors.

While exploration was self-directed, there were other factors that made this possible, apart from practicing alongside someone who is more knowledgeable. Charlie thought that one could only explore novel practices through the use of initiative, which only comes “...when you got more understanding.” (3 Charlie). This in turn develops vocational confidence to explore more activities that are authentic. Staff were more likely to introduce the learner to more challenging activities when they recognised growing confidence and the use of initiative. Vocational confidence therefore could come from the learners prior experiences or through becoming familiar and having a greater knowledgeability of practice. This in turn can motivate learners to experiment more.

While they are exploring, it appears that these learners show agency and strong learner identities using reflections to find meaning and not necessarily the appraisal of others.

I always feel quite pleased when I see something that needs doing and do it before I am asked and I think yes I am getting there, so it is little things usually, like if the milk needs to go in the fridge and I go and do it and yes, they don't always notice I have done it or one of the children will come up and say can we put out more fruit and I will go and do it without somebody else asking me to do it. So, I feel quite proud of that (2Chloe)

I am also afraid of spiders. Anything more than 4 legs I am terrified of. I held her (Tarantula) and I will clean her pen out. It has taught me that if I don't think too much about it, I am not that scared, but if I overthink about it then so I have to just walk in without thinking about it (3 Alyssa).

They use their own responses to evaluate whether they are becoming competent and more knowledgeable. In these instances, feedback is when they realise that they can do something, there is no expectation of feedback from others. They find meaning through experimenting and then practice differently with greater confidence. These learners show strong learner identities as they are evaluating their own practice.

Those learners who tend to use their initiative or set themselves challenges also appear to be more socially confident. It might be that they feel safe in the space or they have developed confidence through prior experiences. From the above quotes, it is clear that this begins to happen more often towards the end of the first year. These are also the learners who at the end of the second year demonstrate strong identification with the vocation. The few learners who did not enjoy the course or had doubts about whether they would work in the field did not show this level of initiative or self-reflection on their practice.

I do try and ask if there is things that needs to be done and most times she says no and when there is she approaches me herself and that is the only time she properly has a conversation with me, can you laminate things and I say that's fine and I just go and laminate and come back and she is like thanks and that's it. I think I am just not confident to ask really (2Clara)

College work as providing the resources to access the community

6.2.c. appraisal by others

Most learners value appraisal although as seen above some set their own standards to evaluate their practice. Tutors encouraged students to carry out tasks on their own or in groups, so it is likely that feedback came from peers as well as staff. Appraisal of others also was not limited to within the college and placement but learners show that they were received feedback from other microsystems such as their families:

"Yes, even my mum says "you are good with kids". She is surprised when she sees me with my nieces and nephews she is like you are the expert, you are good with kids. You are supposed to have a lot of patience with kids, aren't you? In addition, I think I am patient. I don't think I always was but over this year, I have got more patient (3Connie).

Feedback appears significant for learners for a range of different reasons. Learners felt they needed praise since they sometimes did not value themselves (3Christie) or were unsure if they have done a task well, or as staff members would do, so they were uncertain. Learners liked praise and this boosted their sense of self:

" Yes that was the best one I did because Tina liked that and she told me that I was more confident then" (Cai). Others valued feedback as this reassured them

that what they were doing is 'right'. *"Last year I didn't really use my initiative a lot. I would go in and would be dependent on the adults to do it and when I got my observation, I would forget about them. Now, Tina (tutor from college) even gave me really good feedback that went really well. She gave me pointers to pick up on..."* (2Christie).

Charlie had feedback from Tina (Assessor), as well as after an interview, before she accepted that she was 'on the right track'. Feedback therefore is used by learners to negotiate what is valued within the community. Furthermore, it can change dispositions when the feedback itself is valued by the learner.

In EY, aspects of the appraisal process was structured within the exosystem and enacted by tutors when visiting students in placements. Learners were assessed on their practice by a tutor from college. They were expected to plan and carry out particular activities while the tutor observed them, they were then given feedback on their practice. Most learners were nervous about these visits during the first few months but relaxed after a few visits. A few learners enjoyed these because they felt that they were challenged and they had some control over their activity. One learner said that when she felt nervous, she tried harder (Chris) and she felt this is when she was learning most, showing that she was using feedback as motivation to improve her practice. Learners valued the feedback they received from the assessor after an activity. By 2nd year most learners were less nervous when being assessed on practice – they knew the tutor, understood the process, knew what was expected, and they were clearer about what to do. However, a few were still nervous at the end, suggesting that it was not only appraisal of others but the dispositions of the learner that mattered for how they practiced. For others it shows that feedback later on the course was received differently from the beginning as dispositions change.

They reflected on why they lacked confidence (Amber) or considered how they need to change (Carys). In the case of Carys she said: *"sometimes when I do an observation I think what others (Practitioners) are going to think. I don't need to do that. I need to put trust in myself"* (2Carys). Others said that they are shy. Towards the end of the second year these personal dispositions may not have changed however they are managed so that they do not hinder learning and practice.

In some settings, staff were aware that the dispositions of learners could change and they directed tasks that were not assessments, but could be used by learners to explore and experiment. According to Nohs, for learners to transform they needed to expose their new "practices to the appraisal of others and have the opportunity to reflect on them in the light of the reactions of their interaction partners" (Nohl, 2015, p.41). This served for learners to test their practices at a collective level, and according to Nohl's, understand the value of the practice within the social context.

In the case of Carys the staff 'made' her sing and read stories: *It is just about confidence and then I think a few times in my second year they made me do singing with them and try to read stories to boost my confidence. She (placement mentor) was like I know how you feel and I know that you don't want to do it but if you want to be working with children this is something you need to do and I know that you are going to think what if everyone is listening but that is something in your head."* (3Carys). The staff member empathises with the learner her feelings about being observed, as learners (Carys, Christie), did worry about being judged by other staff.

"So in fact when I used to read them a story I used to think what if they (staff) are listening, what will they be thinking about how I am reading. Or when I used to sing songs I used to be like oh I don't want to really sing this in front of them." (3Carys)

Carys shows a change in her disposition arising from the appraisal of staff. She

recognised that she should not be concerned about being judged as this would stop her from exploring practices that were valued in the setting

Learners valued feedback from their assessments. They showed greater self-belief after the first year through the feedback that they receive.

"I have done and managed to get Bs knowing that I have done the work myself. When I first came I didn't have a clue about the work but I have done them myself and passed them" 2Charlie

I feel that I can actually do things that I can achieve better in a way because I came out in the first year with a distinction so that reassured me that I should not doubt myself because I am capable of good things. (3Alexis)

The above two quotes could also be indirectly referencing their prior experiences as both were in school before the course. They show that they may have had doubts about whether they could get high grades. While this may not indicate learning, it reflects a situation that is common in school - where grades are equated to learning. Therefore, these learners may be using grades as feedback on their learning. Grades were used by Terika (EY tutor) to convince Caitlin (EY learner from school) that she should consider university, which she had not done before.

While most learners value feedback from staff, Chloe included reflection on her beliefs about herself. She did not fully accept feedback from others as she decided for herself: *I feel that they say I am really good in placement but I never feel like I am but that is kind of just me. I never feel like I am as good as other people at stuff. I am not good at taking control. They can take control of a group. However she had taken a group: I have actually sat in front of all of them and done carpet time and they have listened so I guess that is a good sign.* Chloe shows that while she may possibly use feedback from others, she has expectations of herself that she does not share, but tries to meet, a disposition that is valued in lifelong learning. She is self-directed and sets her own standards.

While appraisal on practice and feedback on grades, was valued there was indirect references to the space in which this happened. Amber began to trust her own judgements. While Amber may have scrapped her work and started again, at the beginning, there was less of that by the end of the first year. She blamed the teachers at school for not giving feedback when she did anything good but made her feel horrible when she did something wrong. She concluded that her insecurity was due to not knowing what was the 'right' thing. At college, she realised that mistakes were acceptable and there were opportunities to correct them, for example, resubmit an assignment. Amber saw these as minor mistakes that could be corrected. Therefore, maybe it is not about appraisal - it might be about how others respond - in subtle implicit ways. In this case, the response of the tutors to the learner's practice, mistakes were acceptable.

Accountability

Mutual engagement facilitate learners experiencing accountability to competence within the community that for staff had been negotiated historically. In EY accountability to the vocation is encouraged at college through a police check, then preparing for practical assessment tasks, which required domain knowledge. The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) or police check had to be received before learners went into placements. Once students had been allocated a placement, they then were also accountable to the setting about attending regularly and following their practice. However, the meaning of child safety was interpreted through practice, for example the procedure at the end of the

day when children are 'handed over' back to their parents. There were no such external checks in AM. Learners felt that they had to act 'like an adult' where they didn't swear and were responsible for keeping the children safe. Accountability was evident in how learners responded in placement for example Charlie noticed that there were not adults with the children when they went to wash their hands. She went over when she noticed that the staff were not aware. *Well once, when I was first going you could hear them singing or they would tell me can you go and see then in the bathroom so I kind of picked it up 1 Charlie.*

Accountability in EY was often to the setting but the settings were accountable to parents. This sometimes restricted participation and therefore mutual engagement. It also gave rise to concerns in the learner so that engagement was tentative. Various students worried about being 'told off' for the way they interacted with children, so there was fear of parents being critical. In two cases, students in EY had family members in the nurseries. This concerned the students as they were afraid they would mistakenly say things that would breach Data Protection and Safeguarding policies.

Is this individualised

Which learners ask for support

How are learners supported in college

6.2. d *Shifting relevance by negotiating meaning*

As learners explored novel experiences, they sometimes reflected on this and found meaning. Most learners received appraisal for their practice, which contributed to negotiating what is meaningful within the community. The relevance of specific practices become more significant for the learner, than they were at the beginning. Their new practice moves from being marginal to focused and with growing confidence, they use their initiative more. It will be seen in a number of quotations the negotiated nature of how learners come to recognise what is meaningful. I interpreted shifting relevance as learners making meaning so that the relevance of the practice matches what is valued within the community.

By the end of the second year, most EY learners tended to focus on the needs of the children, and relied on the children's responses instead of the judgements of staff. *"The children you just need to be expressive and that is what they are like don't they. So you being expressive and you showing emotions they come to you"* (3Carys). Here Carys has shown that she has moved from mimicking the staff member and thinking about the purpose of being expressive before then using what is appropriate for the child. She appears to have got a repertoire and use this in a way where she judges professionally the feedback that she receives from the child.

They noted how children reacted to their practice and if the child responded, they felt confident in knowing that they had carried out a task in a way that was valued in the community.

"At nursery there was one where we had a new child come in and they were constantly crying and no one could settle him and I sat and taken time and got toys. he sat in front of the door, so I sat with him in front of the door and got the toys and he finally settle and people were praising because I settled him"
(3Cameron)

Learners reflected on their practice to find meaning. In the process of shadowing (Carys

above) how to read to children, where she did what other staff did and used expression in her reading, after sometime she said to herself 'shall we do the actions': *I didn't learn that from shadowing them but from myself I thought well they(children) are not going to enjoy the book if I sit down with them. It is just having more confidence, I wouldn't have done that when I first started.*

While most were reflective at the end, some learners were reflecting on their practice in the first interview: "if you are quiet children won't listen to you" (1Carys, 3 Cara). Reflection is evident in how they talk about learning (3Carys, 3Charlie, 3 Cara, 3 Amber, 3 Alexis). Alexis was not prepared to engage with snakes at the beginning but in the final months he was not bothered by them. Reflection therefore can be seen as useful when negotiating meaning through practice, but for some this is more evident at the end of the course than at the beginning. Furthermore, through reflection the transformation process becomes cyclical through the introduction of a new challenge.

While Noh (2015) states that appraisal of others is a phase before 'finding meaning' this may not apply sometimes. Here learners show that may they find meaning through practice by possibly reflecting on domain knowledge from a taught lesson, for example on how to keep children safe or 'hopscotch' could be a maths activity: *If I saw them play hop scotch I would have thought that they are just jumping and it was not to do with numbers* (3Cara).

In Chapter 5 there was a discussion of the interlinks between the micro and exosystem and how the system managed conflict that learners may experience. Here I will look at it from the learners perspective, when they are faced with an ethical dilemma, how they negotiate this to arrive at a solution that match their own beliefs and values.

Becoming competent describes the learners negotiating what is of value by using the shared repertoire of the setting (Kopsen and Andersson, 2018). Knowledge needed to be relevant to practice. Amber showed previously, how she negotiated how to identify the personality of the animal and it does not depend on just simple descriptions. It takes close observation of the animal over time to do this.

The dialogue with parents at the end or beginning of the day, was a valuable practice in some EY placements, Staff were aware that learners needed to become competent in interacting with parents. In one case, the staff asked a parent for the learner to practice 'handing over' their child and giving them feedback on the child's day. Towards the end of her second year, she did this confidently on her own. Learners gauged their growth in confidence by their ability to talk to parents. *"I think my confidence has got better because I am starting to talk to the parents as well as the children"* (Cara). Another learner described how she behaved at the beginning and how this changed.

"I used to be really shy when the staff asked me to go and talk to them and I kind of edged backwards but now I will let the parents in and speak to them and I feel more confident doing that". (3Cameron).

What perceptions of knowledge did they have? Did they make an assessment of value of certain types of knowledge

According to Lawy (2002), the process of change in dispositions to learning is gradual, as they deal with experiences from the past and consider what they may be involved with in the future. "Learning is undertaken in this way, through a process of 'creeping knowledgeability'..." (p216).

Meaning from doing - in reading a book using expression - recognised that children were engaged and therefore decided - Let act it out (3Carys). So no appraisal from external source but from her own meaning making - seeing children engaged

There was a general pattern in motivation to complete the course, as most were eager to engage with the course at the beginning. Surprisingly, not all learners were motivated by practice during the middle of the course, and this may be related to what was happening in other microsystems. In the first year, some learners do not see the relevance of some of the domain knowledge that is taught in college. Furthermore, EY learners were tired with the full days in placement and some also had part-time jobs. They ‘force’ (1Cameron, 2Carys) or ‘push’ (Alexis) themselves to complete. Therefore, it is likely that there is a degree of agency needed in the middle to finish the course and engage in practice. However, it is also likely that after two years learners begin to accept the culture as they have invested personal resources over two years on the course.

6.2.e Social relations stabilises

For learners to develop confidence in their practice they needed to feel welcomed, and their social relationships had to extend beyond the procedural, with staff having an awareness of the social awkwardness that is sometimes experienced by young people. In some cases however, this was not as important for the learner since they had a level of confidence (3Adene, 2Chloe) from previous experiences, for example, they were used to dealing with people and ‘*dealing with things head on*’ (3Adene), therefore were not anxious of placement and exploring and experimenting. Prior experience in this case, of communication with customers, is useful in how the learner interacted with others.

Transformation is evident when social relations stabilises new practices for the learner and they begin to practice mutually, alongside staff. There is a sense of knowing, and confidence in how they engage (Erikson, cited in Nohl, 2015, p.46). Learners feel a sense of belonging either with the placement or more generally to the vocation. This is discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

Changes to disposition such as greater confidence, motivation and independence, here interrelate with how the learner practices. Learners show changes to align with dispositions they see are valued by staff. Some learners talked about being able to act, so act happy, change their voice, or learn to raise their voice to ‘discipline’ a child. On the last point, the student was told how to raise her voice. Therefore, in changing her voice she was practicing a disposition that was valued by the community. It is likely that as learners do this often they develop a vocational disposition that strengthen alignment to the vocation.

Reflecting on changes in their dispositions through practice could possibly be a motivation to remain aligned to the vocation:

It is mostly I am willing to do this. I like the challenge like if I get a stubborn animal I am like oh we can change this.

S: Did you find out this about yourself or you always knew this
I found out this about myself because before if you put me with a stubborn rabbit or dog that would not listen I would give up on it and say it is not going to work but now I am like no we are going to change this we are going to do this.(3Amber).

By the end of the second year learners could see the end of the course and were motivated to finish and move on in the vocational direction that they had planned, for example going to university or working. University was going to be a novel experience and most were excited about this. For some it was taking them closer to the vocation that they imagined that they would do in the future (3Adene). Others were looking forward to starting as full members at work (Christie, Clara, Charlie). If dispositions are situational, Sadler (2002) argued this approach would encourage the taking into account the nature

and the role of end goals: “When learners perceive themselves to be making progress towards an end that they themselves value highly, a strong disposition towards learning, which can ultimately carry forward into lifelong learning, is likely to follow” (p46). This can be clearly seen at the end of the course in most learners who identify with the vocation.

6.2.e.i) Shared dispositions

Some dispositional changes were more evident towards the end of the second year, implying that it may have taken longer, through a range of different experiences. These were also likely to be more transformative such as, greater independence in practice, less distracted, great belief in themselves and what they can do, and more agency in using their initiative: “*My mind slowly changed. Working with children is not as bad*” (3Carys). Dispositions that learners recognised were valued in the vocational field, were those of the experts. When both staff and student worked together, it allowed the students to negotiate what is meaningful within the community including, observing staff or the ‘expert’ and the dispositions that were valued, for example, ‘patience’ when working with children or ‘inclusivity in practice’ (2Connie). The disposition of being able to manage or lead a group of children is valued in EY. Vocational dispositions that were valued in AM was to not be ‘squeamish’ and be comfortable to ‘muck in’ (3Alyssa, 1Amber). Some learners saw ‘passion’ towards the vocation, as a disposition to aspire towards. I would like to be as qualified and have the same kind of passion they have.(2Alyssa)

This passion can be seen in how 3Amber relates her experience with the horse Maple. She gets feedback from the animal, which differs from her imagined view at the beginning, of animals. There is also a level of pride that she was able to get the horse to come to here, where others have not succeeded.

Well obviously, when before you come, you think they are all so nice and cuddly and you just want to play all the time. You can get some right grumpy animals. At the yard (her volunteer placement), there is this horse called Maple and he hates anyone coming near him; so this past 6 months I have been trying to build a friendship with him. It is working, this sounds funny but I have a video of him letting me stroke him. He does not let anyone get close to him: he always threatens to bite you. It is the owner’s horse but he is quite old now. He is a stallion and he is getting so much better with me. Every time he sees me, he makes these whinnying noises like ‘come to me’.(3Amber)

It is therefore possible that to develop strong learning disposition, there needs to be interest, feedback from the negotiating process of engaging in practice, authentic activity, a level of challenge and a measure of success, for some learners.

Do these take account of the change

The tutors were not only specialist in their field – both teaching and industry, they showed an awareness of the young people, social and emotional development, which is not acknowledged within the curriculum or in placement, as these place other demands as either a student or as a worker. This is valued by the learners and may be significant for changes in dispositions, aspirations and motivations towards the learning.

6.2.e.ii) Confidence in practice

Confidence develops gradually as learners’ competence in practice, advances. It is a process that took time and varied with each individual. The quotes I use will demonstrate the dynamic nature of growing confidence and the cyclical nature of transformation as growing confidence changes practice. An example that demonstrates this gradual process was Alexis developing confidence with handling

the snakes (see under Exploring novel Practices - Self directed) *It is things like that overcoming things that I thought that I would do and that is what I am proud of* (2Alexis). This must be clearly motivating as he is proud of getting to that stage of lifting the snakes and putting them back in. It demonstrates a level of persistence that he exercises later on the course again, when he set another target of holding the tarantula.

To advance their skills they first needed to become familiar with practice, for example routines within the community of practice. *"I think placement makes me feel more confident with kids that I can look after them..."* (2Cai). In childcare learners were in placement for four days every second week. After a year or in some cases after a few months in the same placement, learners knew children's names and were able to respond to the different personalities and behaviour. Having access to this information allowed learners to talk more and interact more regularly with the children and staff; thus overcoming the challenges their shyness presented at the beginning for most learners.

"I feel more confident because I understand more things now from when I first started my placement I was really nervous. I didn't really understand since I had not been in a setting before but now I am confident because I have been here longer and I understand the different things you have to do"(3Charlie).

However, becoming familiar was also about their relationships with staff. Staff may have encouraged learners but not pushed them to do anything that they did not want to do. By the end of second year, some learners in childcare still did not feel confident in singing or reading to a large group on the carpet. Cai was allowed to choose whether to engage with a larger group since this was not required in any of her assessments and she chose not to. So while there were the opportunities to do particular tasks the individual learners could decide. Christie was asked to engage with a large group of children to do 'circle time'. She chose to engage with what the staff member was encouraging her to do.

"I already had the confidence to meet new people but it is different when you are with a lot of children. They might say do circle time. I am ok, I get up in crowds and stuff, I will talk but I get nervous but now I get up and I am more confident to talk to a big group of people. Like because I know them all and they know me and it is not that hard to talk to them" (2Christie).

Therefore, confidence appears to grow when learners are more willing to embrace participation as a 'pseudo staff' rather than student. Apart from familiarity with practice there appears also to be a level of self-reflection on their own dispositions and where lack of confidence may have arisen. Alexis felt there was a stigma around snakes and therefore he was scared of handling them.

"When I started I believed they were dangerous...however after spending loads of time with them you get to realise they are not as bad as the media portray them to be. I now pick them, like when we are changing the water, they like to come to the glass so we don't like them to escape so we have to pick them and put them back in. At the beginning I don't think I was prepared to do that, like when we got given the animals to do I remember saying I don't want to do snakes, but now I am not bothered about it." (3Alexis)

Self-reflection included a level of self-awareness of how they should behave when they are confident. Learners were encouraged to 'act' confident around animals because according to the tutor animals can sense when a handler is scared. Similarly,

some childcare learners talked about children sensing when they (the learners) were not confident around them, the children were more likely to 'play up' or 'not listen' to them, and therefore they had to 'act confident'. Learners who recognised how to 'act' confident were able to therefore go beyond what they were comfortable in doing and thereby show greater levels of accountability with the vocation.

Self-reflection was also evident when they realised that there were things that they could do, for example, observations or cleaning the snake cage, which they could not do at the beginning. Greater confidence meant that they were more independent. It also meant that for some they used their initiative because they knew what they could do, for example, putting a child to sleep when they noticed they were tired (3Charlie) or going into theatre to observe an operation on an animal, without being asked. Knowledge of the symptoms of illness in children, gave learners more control, for example, a learner telling a staff member when she thought a child might be ill. In childcare they knew how and when the children went to sleep, and whether they slept in a cot or bed. In some cases, how learners interacted with children changed. They did not '*stand in a corner or hover about*' (Cameron).

"Once in placement on the week you were there, they were doing the bear hunt book, instead of reading to them I said shall we do the actions to it. Like instead of sitting down and reading it we were pretending we walking through a cave and going through the grass, so they enjoy the book more rather than sitting down so they are doing the pictures while you are reading. I didn't learn that from shadowing them but from myself I thought well they are not going to enjoy the book if I sit down with them. It is just having more confidence, I wouldn't have done that if I first started" (3Carys)

I didn't feel confident at the start and obviously needed quite a bit of guidance in terms of what I needed to do and I kept asking what shall I do next whereas towards the end I felt much more confident and I knew more jobs that could be done so I used my own initiative to get them done. I knew all the products for the animals and so I could help out with the customers as well (1Alyssa)

Confidence in practice therefore arises from familiarity but also what the expansive practices within the setting and the dispositions of learners. Furthermore the examples above demonstrate that growing in confidence means that learners can engage more fully in practices that the vocation values. Learners who show greater confidence and motivation, aligning closer to the vocation. They demonstrate vocational identification as a source of motivation (Klotz et al., 2014). Others who are uncertain about their trajectory may be cautious about investing personally in the same way. Overall, learners' growth in confidence meant that it changed how they related socially outside college and the course. Chloe found she was talking more and defining more what *she* wanted to do when she was amongst her family. Instead of sitting in the same group, they are more comfortable working in different groups after being in placement.

Developing independence seems to come from the enacted curriculum, their own reflections and the learning environment. EY learners showed independence, exploring activities that were set out as competences by the awarding bodies. Furthermore, it is Connie's reflections on her practice that shows how she made meaning from it.

It went quite good but I had to explain it a few times because they didn't understand about the 'hula-hoops' part. Well with being outside I was a bit nervous because anything could happen, they could fall, or they could trip over the hoops and I was alone just with the assessor but there were only 5 children so it was ok (2Connie)

In college, the pedagogic style of the teacher may have fostered independence. Tutors confirmed that they saw their role as to encourage learners to become more independent. Their own identity comes across in how they view the learners and how they enact this aspect of the curriculum.

"We are trying to develop them to be independent learners...which I call 'learned helplessness' where they turn up and just sit there and they must have got it from school...so we try to facilitate but it takes a long time ... Try to get them to think for themselves as much as we can. I am not the font of all knowledge and it is not good for them to come to me for all the answers. I've got to give them the tool kit to work it out for themselves. To me that is what it means to empower (1Tim).

Use of initiative gave learners some control over their participation, for example, at the beginning learners in childcare often told staff if a child did not listen to them. However, by the end of the second year they could manage the behaviour of children without involving a staff member. They were more confident that the children would listen to them.

Dispositional change could be due to maturing (2Cara) or through practice. Cara was less silly and more serious about the course: *"I used to leave my work to the last minute but now I get on with it before the dead line."*

Cameron found that she could stay focused for longer and work independently. Cameron also appeared more accepting of her dyslexia:

Yeah, I pushed myself to work and learn differently because of the dyslexia. I have looked at it now and do think it is now with me for the rest of my life. I have worked a way around it and I am like I don't have to push myself anymore, I have to learn with everyone else. I am the same but I struggle with my spelling and reading. Therefore, I have changed in that way (3Cameron).

As learners became more independent they were more responsible for how they aligned to practice in the present but also planning for how they were going to be participate in the future, for example Adene choosing to do Vet nursing rather than Vet surgery knowing that her parents did not fully agree with her choice. They show motivation and growing confidence in making decisions, by overcoming challenges, to align to the vocation. Staff recognise it in their interactions with the learners and may feed this back to the learner. Learners show that in the transformational process that they value feedback from others. All of these processes take time and is closely linked to their practice. Furthermore, during reflections on practice learners demonstrate that they set their goals aligned, not to the intended curriculum but to practice. This may be an implication for future practice to consider how the value of practice could be acknowledged beyond the grading system that presently exists.

6.2.e.iii) Agency and confidence

By the end of the year as learners became familiar with the expectations on the course either in placement or in college, they were less 'scared' and more confident about completing the tasks (2Chris). However, this was not the case with all learners. While Chloe was given positive feedback, she did not feel that she was good because she felt that she was not good at taking control of large groups of children. So while staff may offer praise to boost confidence the praise needs to be for aspects that the learner values. It could also be that Chloe does not trust or rely on the praise of others but need to meet her own internal standards.

As learners developed confidence, there were more demonstrations of agency. Learners show that they are more reflective later on the course and they seem to be able to self-regulate their actions.

“When I came I was kind of in a different mind-set at the time and through the course of the year I have pulled my finger out and thought right I have already failed once, this is the only way I can get to university so I am going to start giving above and beyond what I had been doing previously.., (Alyssa)

This shows development of the disposition to learn through reflections on prior experiences and actions in the past (Lawy, 2002; Hodgkinson et al., 2008).

Learners were clearer about what they wanted to do in the second year.

“Yes it has made me more confident in what I want to do now. I have said I want to get that years’ experience in the nursery and then hopefully go for teaching” (3Carys).

Some became more confident in their own abilities and aspired to do a job that initially they were unsure that they could do.

“At the start I thought I couldn’t do teaching and I thought I would do this course and then do something else but now I know everything so I am comfortable with it that is why I want to do teaching” (3Chris).

Caitlin only considered going to university, towards the end of the course. She initially wanted to work with babies but at end wanted to teach children in the Early Years (here not necessarily agency but more informed as well as being encouraged by Tutor) – wants to study further because she enjoyed the course.

6.2.e.iv) Motivation to align further to the vocation

Motivation was expressed by change in behavior and how they aligned themselves to the vocation: *“I am enjoying what I am doing and I am actually doing it at home, and I am aiming high and I have got the motivation because I am enjoying it” (Alyssa).* To reengage some push themselves, while others leave the course. 2Carys decided to leave part time call centre work since it was tiring showing how she managed her many commitments. Resilience was observed in the learners’ abilities to adjust their expectations to their experiences. The two students who left in Animal management came from school. It is possible that those from 6th Form are more resilient because they did not want to ‘fail’ or ‘waste a year’ and therefore worked even harder to overcome difficulties, so it could be that for some perceived failure in the past appears to make them more resilient to challenges in the present.

Motivation to explore practice is linked to learner and vocational dispositions. Some were eager to ‘jump in’ and engage fully in all aspects of the community of practice, while others needed more time. As learners explore practice, they developed confidence and independence. However, some appear as though they already had the disposition that was valued, but they also experience dispositional changes through practice. Chloe talks about placement in detail. She recognises children’s feelings and moods. Staff trusts her judgement and this was within the first few months of starting the course having come from school. However, her disposition does change. She realised that she struggles to read children’s books and therefore started to explore other professions, as she started to realign away from teaching. She did complete the course and was offered a job in a private nursery. She turned it down when she realised that the values conflicted with hers. Although she may want to be part of the community, she is also wanting to be in one where she shares their values, so a community of practice instead of a job. Furthermore, she was the only learner who wanted to explore other practices with children that were not in a nursery or school. It seems that dispositions to the vocation is not only linked to learner dispositions but also values and beliefs that they hold.

6.3 Cases that differed

For some learners they did not experience college as transformative as when they finished they still were not sure whether they wanted to participate in the vocation, suggesting that practice does not transform all learners. There were two cases that stand out in terms of transformation in those who completed the course. Cai preferred school rather than college as she had more 'support' (See analysis of learners from school). Clara was more distinctive in how she spoke about practice over the duration of the course. This had not changed and it is therefore possible that a student could do the course and not go through changes. Like Cai, there appeared to be no changes it is unlikely that Clara identified and there were contradictions throughout. While she wanted to get a job in one of the settings, she talked about being bored in placement, during every interview.

6.4 Conclusion

Features or processes that enabled changes in dispositions can be summarised as: being rewarded with high grades as some used this to reassert their learner identity as 'capable'. Having some prior experience of the field or content knowledge, realigning idealised view or expectations, to realised experiences, authentic practices as these created opportunities to reflect on the beliefs but also experiment and evaluate their practice.

As most of the chapter looked at the transformation process, there were certain challenges that may have hindered transformation or facilitated different learner trajectories to the ones predominantly expressed through the course. Barriers or challenges to participation were: the assessment load in college; previously formed dispositions, such as shyness, fear, and lack of confidence; tiredness; unsupportive placements and parental or home pressures.

This chapter refers to the learning process as alignment through the course. In the following chapter, identification is discussed further with a focus on alignment to the vocation, and less on the dispositions of the learner but it will show that they are interlinked. The engagement in practice by the learner did not depend solely on their disposition but how they aligned with the disposition of the experts too.

What do learners do on the course to align with the vocation.

7 Vocational Identification

7.1 Introduction

Separating learner and vocational identities is not a meaningful way to discuss developing identities of learners on a vocational course. Nevertheless, separating analytically certain aspects, such as dispositions to learn from vocational identification, can add depth to the discussion, as long as the reader keeps in mind this is only a device. Additional to the transformative processes in the development of learner identity, in Chapter 6, the process of identification with a vocation, are widened here to demonstrate how they matter for the formation of vocational learner identity, within the social context of the community of practice or the landscape of practice. In this chapter I reaffirm that learning is conceptualised as meaning making through practice, and “identity is theorised with specific reference to changing ways of participating in practice” (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p8), so the state of becoming.

One microsystem identified in the Chapter 5, was placement: in AM for two weeks and EY four days every two weeks. AM learners also engaged alongside college staff as ‘experts’, on visits or in practice within the college. Furthermore, some AM learners volunteered within the wider field of the vocation that the college had no links with. The learners went beyond the expectations of the course through placements in a pet shop, and went in search for placements where they were doing more than caring or selling products. So in this chapter while I use concepts from Wenger’s communities of practice (CoP) to analyse identification through practice, the environment for AM may not be the community as conceptualised by Wenger in 1998, but resembles what his later works refer to as, the ‘landscape of practice’ (2014). Within the framework of Communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), however the learning trajectory is bound with ‘identity as becoming’ through engagement, alignment and imagination of practice, which in this case, is afforded through the course and can also be linked to the wider field of the vocation.

While placements may share a common language in how they talk about the vocation, not all have the same values about engagement of learners as new comers. Some placements encouraged engagement as a ‘pseudo’ staff member, so in meaningful activities, while others required a form of participation that placed the learner as an onlooker. This chapter analyses how learners participated in practice and identify or dis-identify with the vocation. It is divided along Wenger’s three modes of identification (Alignment, Engagement and Imagination) and how these are negotiated to facilitate a sense of belonging. To begin with, I will show how I saw belonging in the data, then the rest of the chapter covers how the different aspects of learning enabled identification or was a gradual move towards it, organised around comparisons between both courses.

Chapter 6 mapped out learners transformation, by learning through practice. It was not the environment acting on them but the different processes negotiated by the learner, to arrive at the meaning of a practice or confidence in their social relations with staff. This negotiation, together with identification, Wenger (1998) described as a sense of belonging. According to Wenger (1998), belonging can be experienced through imagination, engagement in practice and aligning of an individual’s energies and actions with the domain of practice. This section presents belonging as experienced by students and the possibility that engaging in practice and imagination, strengthens identification with the vocation. While students mainly expressed belonging to the setting some also spoke more broadly about identifying with the vocation: *This is where I want to be for my career* (3Christie). Therefore, to be able to identify with the vocation learners needed to experience belonging. Belonging seems to intrinsically motivate learners to remain engaged.

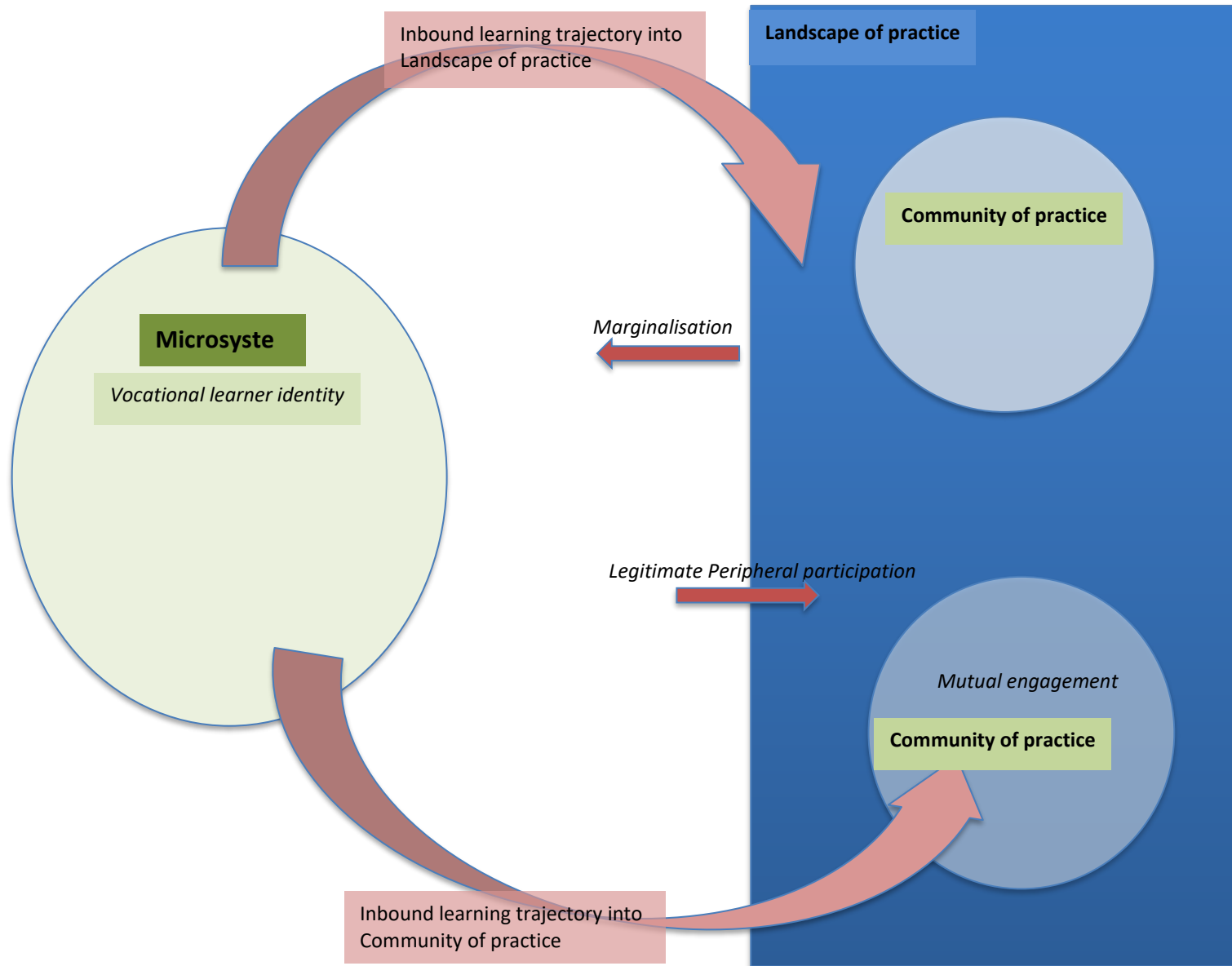


Figure 5: The Learning Environment including Communities of Practice and Landscape of Practice

This was expressed through their enjoyment in placement and used to reaffirm their alignment to the vocation: *“in the future I have to work with the children and therefore I am glad that I enjoy it”* (3Cameron). They see placements where they can be themselves (2Casey). A sense of belonging required a level of investment of emotion: *“I am more happy I am a different person”* (2Cara). Feeling the same as the teachers for example not wanting to walk with the children on a busy road because it is stressful keeping the children safe. *“What can you do but if you don’t do it they are never going to learn are they”* (2Chloe). They saw the profession as a community because everyone had the same purpose. *“If you all have the one thing in common, we all got the same aim of making things better for animals then I will fit in”* (3Alexis). However, how did the alignment, engagement and imagination foster or hinder belonging within the different courses?

7.2 Alignment

Alignment, according to Wenger (1998) refers to what the learner does to engage in practice and identify with the community of practice (vocation). It can be seen as a process that learners engaged with throughout the two years, as Cameron stated that you have to accept that there are good and bad days, and Charlie who came to the decision on full time work in childcare, rather than pursue a career in Accountancy. In Chapter 5 I showed that the family as a microsystem did have some influence on how learners made their choice of course. They may have had experience in the vocation, or advice from others. Furthermore, the resources available within the wider system, such as career guidance may or may not have been available for learners to make informed choices. Learners themselves were also responding to what they saw as their calling. Learners align further to the vocation by choosing the courses that they did, as evident in Chapter 6. Aligning through seeing the vocation as a calling implies investment of personal resources in their practice. Furthermore, the course facilitated participation in communities or the landscape of practice. Learners then adjust their alignment: *During the year going to placement and experiencing it like that has made me want more to do it. Going through what the staff go through”* and she implies that she has not been discouraged to stop participating by ‘bad days’. *“Some days you have a good day and some are bad days and obviously most people are put off with the bad days”* (2Cameron). Alignment therefore appears to require energy and practice, an active engagement in selecting from a range of options. Learners do what it takes to become part of the community. Making a choice to align through the course was one action, however throughout the course, alignment was motivated by a range of factors: personal satisfaction, authentic and novel practices, course as something to fall back on and being treated as a member of the community. For most learners the main motivation at the end was the offer of being a full member of a community.

7.2.a Early Years

To align to a vocation actively, implies an awareness of choice, however some learners showed that they were not aware of the breadth of choices before starting. *“First I wanted to work with animals but I am allergic so I couldn’t. I help at church looking after the kids so I decided I wanted to do that”* (1Cai). There is no energy to their action or co-ordination of a range of actions. They appear to comply with the suggestions of others: *“They (staff at the college) said do a Level 2 but I had already done a Level 2 at high school so they said “why don’t you do Childcare” so I did”* (1Connie). Learners may have complied, as the macroculture appears to limit their choices: *“When I came to college I originally wanted to do Health and Social Care but I couldn’t get on it because I didn’t have a C in English”* (Connie). *“I initially wanted to go into Health and Social care but when I came to enrol in college they said that I couldn’t do it because of my maths (Grade was lower than*

a C)” (1Carys). In EY, the course therefore was not their first choice. Both Connie and Carys therefore started with a L2 in EY before progressing on the L3. Their alignment therefore was less coordinated but limited by the environment. This may imply then that if is not active - learners may not identify with the vocation, however they do, so there were clearly other factors.

Others learners show some active decision making as they wanted a different experience from school, but again appear to be restricted by what was available within the macrosystem: *If I was going to 6th Form College you have got three options to pick and there weren't three options (subjects) I wanted to pick, so it was just easier to come here than to do two other options that I didn't want to do* (1Charlie).

In some instances, seeing the vocation as a calling meant more co-ordination of action. Cameron, for example, uses her past experience of babysitting, showing her trajectory into the vocation began before the course:

I've always wanted to look after children since I was quite young. I used to go out with my dad, and his friends used to have 'bairns' and I would be sat there. I used to always like playing with younger children and since I have got older, I have been babysitting (2Cameron).

Most EY learners cited prior experience, they 'liked playing with children': *I really like staying with the children and playing with them and that's why I think I have made the right choice* (1Chris).

Alignment continues throughout the course. Carys enjoyed working with a particular age of children and began to think about going to university, however this changed when she was offered a job. She then decided to work and get 'proper experience without relying on anyone', before going to university. She implies that as a student, she did not experience the role fully and there were areas that she wanted to practice independently as a full member. Similarly, Charlie had looked at doing an Accountancy apprenticeship when she finished the course, however when she was offered a job she decided she would stay in childcare for three years. *"I had to rethink about doing Accountancy. It was more important for me to do child care, so that was decision I had to make that I was not going to do that (Accountancy) since I decided to stay here and go into full time work. So that was a big difference"* (3Charlie). After the course, she registered on a Foundation degree in Childhood Studies. Both these learners showed strong identification, even though Charlie thought about Accountancy. Is it possible then that strong identification does not mean that learners are not open to changing vocational paths, but there is an active process of making decisions that would align them to what they do want to do at that moment. Alternatively, using studies from the literature, it may mean that Charlie and Carys, has been socialised into the job, as it was not Carys's first choice (see above). Charlie and Carys, displayed strong learner identity in that they used her initiative often and engaged beyond their assessments in placement. Towards the end, both were practising like a staff members, mutually, not looking for support or advice and both were offered jobs in their last placement.

7.2.b Animal Management

In AM there were more instances of active alignment before learners started the course as three out of six learners were in Sixth Form and had chosen subjects that would lead, in the longer term, to vocations with animals. The three learners from school had plans to get jobs immediately after finishing. This may say something about the macroculture as well as the common dispositions of these two groups of learners. Those in Sixth Form had already planned for alignment over a longer period before entering a community of practice as a full member. Furthermore, they would have had high grades in Science to

have been accepted into Sixth Form College, where they is the widely accepted view 'knowledge' is more academic and theoretical than a vocational college. Amber demonstrates the active co-ordination of her energies the year before.

Well I wanted to go to University. I knew exactly where I wanted to go. I was hoping to do veterinary physiotherapy. I did a lot of research into it. I proper like working with animals. I have always wanted to do it and then when I was researching the jobs that one just stood out to me and then I found out all the best places to go and the best courses to do. The best A levels to do for it (1 Amber).

Amber showed that she had carefully planned how she would get to be a Veterinary Physiotherapist. She chose the A levels that she thought that she needed. As she did not get the grades, she decided to do the AM course, but again she faced another barrier, as the universities that she wanted to go to would not accept a BTEC qualification. She showed that she was motivated throughout to get the grades she needed and having this as a goal may have meant that was self directed in her learning, using her own standards as a guide. Chapter 6 analysed how these learners transform on the course from starting out with low sense of self having failed A Levels, to aligning to a different route into the vocation, apart from Amber, who did go onto university to do Veterinary Physiotherapy.

Alyssa considers conservation studies: *"I can't be a vet because I failed my A levels..."* Therefore, some learners changed their initial aspirational role, through engaging in other communities and refined their expectations for the future. Adene recognised that to train as a vet would challenge her beyond what she is able to do and thus she refined her alignment to her future role of being a vet nurse.

Yes, absolutely. I couldn't imagine going to do a vet course because it would stretch me too much but the idea of being a vet nurse is just right I think and the tutors have really supported getting me to this point where I am now with regards to sending out applications. (3Adene).

This demonstrates that there were other aspects of the course that were useful in providing resources for learners to align to their future role.

The learners from school chose the course very much like most other learners since they used it to find out if it was something they wanted to do, as they enjoyed caring for animals. They then, through the course attempt to align to the vocation. Two of the three learners from school left at the end of the first year and decided to not align to the vocation through the course. The possibility that the domain knowledge may have been difficult to access and they may not have had the confidence to approach staff for support when they may have needed it, was discussed in Chapter 6. The prior experiences of learners from school may have not prepared learners for the demands of the AM curriculum. Alexis who did complete, showed transformation in his disposition to learn, when he met the same challenges. He was confident to ask for support not only from tutors but from his peers as well. This suggests that alignment requires a co-ordination of energies and actions from the learner, but for some it may not be enough, the environment has to also accommodate these. Both learners did complete the first year despite not wanting to, this also says a bit, about how the Retention policy of the college was enacted.

Alignment is linked to their future plans as they use these to adjust, for example, whether to accept a job and become full member or to go to university. Some were not confident in their 'choice' at the beginning as they were not sure of what options were available in the future, so they use the course to find out if it is a vocation they want to be part of in the longer term. Towards the end of the course most learners are able to make informed choices, decisions sometimes against what their parents wanted them to do. This was easier in the second year or appears so, because they talk about deciding for themselves,

Decision making may have been easier because they have already had some experience of what the vocation could be like. *“When I told my parents I didn’t want to go anymore they were so gutted. Oh my gosh. It proper upset me. They know that I will get to where I want to be in my life just through a different route so”* (3Alyssa). Other learners choose not to align to the vocation through the course as the energy and action required was more than the learner was prepared or could invest, as their prior experiences and the curriculum were possibly major barriers to overcome.

7.3 Imagination

Imagination according to Wenger (1998) is about expanding the self beyond time, thinking about being a member in the future. This also means going beyond the space they inhabit to imagine practicing in different environments. Learners used it to locate themselves in the vocation by transcending engagement in practice, and possibly align to where they wanted to be. This clearly implies that the roles they imagine for themselves, may be based on stereotypes and sourced from their own prior experiences but this is not the case. Most often imagination is sourced from their experiences on the course. Learners had imagined what college would be like, for example, more independent working. When students started college, some imagined what they would do in placement and in a related job, for example, working in a monkey sanctuary or in a children’s nursery. In EY, they imagined their role would be to encourage the children to be more independent. Some of these images are realised through practice, and some they align to as they become informed on how they could get there.

7.3.a Animal Management

Adene was initially motivated by money and therefore aligned herself towards the roles in veterinary surgery. She clearly had an image of these roles as being financially rewarding. With this in mind, she chose to be in a veterinary practice where she knew the vet and was confident that she would have the opportunity to participate alongside her. She had also done her work placement at the same practice when she was at school. *“I think at first like it sounds really ridiculous but it was sort of money driven, like sort of the end of it, what I was going to paid as a vet surgeon”* 3Adene. She is able to identify towards the end of the second year, that her motivation may have been influenced by her family at the beginning, but her imagination of where she could be in the future, changes. *“... going to uni open days and things, it was then that I sort of realised that actually there is more to it than just giving these treatments and getting animals fixed... I think it is the bit that I am more interested in rather than the procedures and such which is what I did initially want to do”* (3Adene). She begins to recognise herself in the role of a Vet nurse instead of a Vet surgeon.

However, as we saw earlier Amber was motivated throughout the course by her role as a Veterinary Physiotherapy. She had no prior experience of this, however a dissection of a rat helped her decide what she did not want to do. *“I tried dissecting a rat once here and I cut open its stomach by accident so I don’t think I could make a very good vet surgeon and they smell awful as well”*(2Amber). She draws on this experience to develop her idealised view of what the role of vet is. Later in the same interview, she talked at length about rescuing a hedgehog and her frustration at not being able to find a vet who would check-up on it without her family having to pay. Her analysis was that vets only do the job for money and she wanted to do things differently because she wanted to help the animals: *“We just couldn’t believe no vets would take it. Vets are there to help the animals...I don’t know how to explain it but I think most vets, not all are in it for the money and I don’t want to do it for the money, I want to do it because I want to help them”*(2Amber). This could be an example of how imagination was negotiated. She is using

these experiences to locate herself within the vocation. She is seeing the vocation as a calling, one where there are personal sacrifices for the purpose of the care of animals. Identification therefore is a process of negotiation, in the latter example, of imagination and practice.

Two weeks in one placement, meant that learners in AM practiced mainly as a class in college. In some cases learners volunteered in other settings towards the end of the course, for example either at the kennels (Alexis) or RSPCA (Alyssa). Furthermore, as part of the curriculum, AM learners engaged with practice through visits to the zoo and a farm, they had visitors come to college to talk to them and they cared for smaller animals in college. These can be seen as openings to practice, they may observe and not engage mutually in a community of practice. Through these wide range of practices however they have a developing understanding of the various communities within the wider landscape of the vocation. Developing imagination through engagement in practice expanded students' views of how they could or would practice in the future.

Practice varied on visits and there were some instances they were in conflict with how learners are taught to care for animals, for example on the farm learners felt that, the animals were mishandled. This however was used by the learner to reflect on how they would engage differently when they participated within a community.

The farm we went to, it wasn't the best, the animals outside, like the pigs and goats they were alright but there was this shed that looked like that it hadn't been cleaned for ages and it still had animals in...it was just the conditions they were living in, looked like it was left for a while and nobody had gone and cleaned it out. That had helped me, I know not to do that anyway but that just gave me an example of what can happen if you don't look after it right and if you are lazy at looking after the animals. (2Alexis).

In placement, Abigail had found the practices restrictive as she could not engage directly with the animals at the vet. Practice in some cases was different from how the student imagined it to be: “*I didn't expect to do washing because that is nothing to do with it. Like clothes, like dog beds and that was upstairs... had to fold it all. It was just boring. Every day it made me tired*” (1Abigail). Most animals came it for operations and the practices were seen as 'clinical' so learners were encouraged to observe. She found observing and not mutually engaging with others, boring. Observing through participation in placement gave her access to practice but she then had to imagine whether she could locate herself in the future in a vet practice. As this is removed from her lived experience, in this instance she was not able to identify through imagination. While the enacted AM curriculum was the same for all learners, she was clearly experiencing it differently as she did not use the visits, observations and excursions to identify with the vocation, through imagining herself within a related community. Furthermore, as I showed in Chapter 6, the domain knowledge was too abstract, which she also found challenging. Explanations for possibly not aligning could be, that practices were restrictive, or the learner disposition and knowledgeability could not be accommodated within the community. It might also be that learner's imagination of the vocation or another vet practice, could not be negotiated to consider that it might be different elsewhere. Thus, similarly to Amal, they both did not identify with the vocation through the course.

Some learners in AM wanted to participate beyond the placements. Two learners who were in pet shops for their placements considered the placements restrictive in affording engagement in practice with animals. Both learners then volunteered in other settings. “*I did 90 hours and then I have carried on now as a volunteer*” (3Alyssa). These learners were engaged with other microsystems that were part of the broader landscape of the vocation, and therefore aligning further to what they wanted to do in the future, but more

significantly they chose to do this even though it was not linked to any assessments, demonstrating self direction their practice, but more importantly their willingness and energy to expose themselves and explore new relations with the vocation. Thus, imagination was expanded in these cases and was used to identify with the vocation.

7.3.b. Early Years

The use of imagination to identify was less frequent in EY and this may have to do with the extent of engagement in practice through placements as they saw themselves doing almost everything the staff were doing (2Cara). At the beginning, however, they do use imagination to see themselves engaging with practice: *“Just encourage them is what you got to do”* (1Clara). Chloe uses an example from her teacher to imagine how she will respond if she was in a situation, for example needing to respond to a child swearing (1Chloe). Here the college tutor had given her an example and while she did not use that information, she thought about what she would do.

They used imagination to prepare for placements: *“I thought more about playing and stuff and I forgot that you have to do cleaning. I still enjoy it but I forgot about the nappy changing...”*(Caitlin). In EY, learners have opportunities to imagine how they could be involved through preparation of tasks: *“I think I am going to sit with one table and talk to my table and it is easier than going around to all the others”* (1Charlie). They planned how they were going to do an activity, who was going to be involved, the resources they would use and sometimes the questions they would ask. This level of imagination afforded identification without engagement, at this stage. They observed staff, thinking about whether they could do the same. In most cases, there were fewer examples where imagination transcends a long time into the future, or space, as it is grounded in practice. The instances where it differed is for those learners who wanted to be Early Years teachers, but they could not practice this, as the macrosystem appeared to restrict access to it. This was reserved for learners at university who were in the same placements as the EY learners. They observed other teachers, and this motivated them to remain engaged so that they could then go onto university: *Well I like being with the babies, like nursery school, that's why. I thought from the start that I wanted to be become a teacher, of reception or year 1 that's why.* (1Chris). Chris started EY at Level 2 and remained focused on this goal to the end of the course, although at the end she worried more about the environment she was going into. *I am thinking that university is going to be really different and how am I going to get on there because I feel I am different from others. I am from Pakistan and sometimes I feel that I don't know that much English, I can't speak it properly and I get nervous sometimes.* Chris clearly shows her negotiating her identity within a wider culture that may have been challenging.

The other examples refers to aspects of the role that learners could not participate in, for example being a key worker to child or a role in a different space not accommodated within the course. They observed these roles and imagined what they would do. Chloe was the only student who mentioned a space beyond what was offered by the course. Once Chloe had made a decision she did not want to be a teacher she wanted access to other spaces, for example the hospital:

I am quite excited about it. Well basically, quite a new idea I have got. I thought I would be a teaching assistant or like a practitioner in a nursery. That is what I initially thought I would do when I thought I could not do teaching, so somebody mentioned to me that you do know that there is this job called a health care play specialist and what you do is that children who are in hospital long term, with illnesses such as cancer and they are in hospitals a lot, you are in charge of making activities when they are in. (2Chloe)

She was willing to explore a new relation to practice. The macroculture in terms of college

policy did not establish a range of links with practices related to the vocation - however there was a flexibility to accommodate the learner if they requested it. In this instance, it is Chloe's disposition and imagination that motivated her to ask for exposure to other spaces. *In my head, if they stopped me from doing that how would I know if that was right or not right for me?* (2Chloe). The curriculum does not have this embedded for those who may not have considered this.

Whilst most learners appear to adjust their imagined and idealised view, it is possible that those who do not adjust, do not identify with the vocation. Cai expected that children 'will know how to play'. This is an idealised view. Through the course she appears to have developed knowledgeability about children's play that was more localised and shows that her imagination of children's play had not extended to what may be global practices.

I didn't like it. In the nursery, they were young and they didn't know how to play... I don't know, I thought that they were a bit rough. They pulled your hair and things. The main reason that I wanted to quit because a child jumped on my back and pulled my neck right back so that put me off because it really hurt my shoulder as well (3Cai).

Cai completed the course but did not enjoy college or placement, and at the end of the two years was not sure about whether she would work with children. She did however concede, that as she had finished the course she may try and work as nanny with one child, to see if she enjoyed that.

While imagination appears to be used less often in EY, most learners still identify with the vocation. It is therefore likely that in EY engagement in practice was more significant for identification.

If imagination is about expanding the self and transcending time and space, how does the environment facilitate this and how does the disposition of the learners, facilitate engaging with this? How does the student recognize themselves as part of the environment. Learners in AM had access to a range of practices either as a visitor, observing or engaging alongside peers. This allowed them to create new relationships with the space but involves a different kind of work for them, as they needed to imagine being a member or having a role within that space in the future, and this was the case for EY learners who wanted to be teachers. This clearly did not work for all learners especially those who wanted more mutual engagement in practice. I believe that Alyssa who decided not to go to university at the end, but chose to volunteer, needed more exploration and exposure to the vocation as she had the energy and willingness to be involved with animals but could not imagine her position within the wider landscape of practice. On the other hand in EY Clara was bored in her placement as she wanted to do what the teacher was doing, and could not imagine being in the space over time. She was using only her practice in identifying with the vocation. Chloe chose not to align as she observed the teacher and imagines the challenges she would experience once she had her own family. It is possible that imagination is more a hindrance in EY as it could be based on stereotypes as it is so closely connected to practice. Exposure and exploration is limited to the placements that the college has access to, so there are few opportunities to transcend space. There is however, placements where learners do observe different practices and therefore they can imagine and align to the kind of person they want to be in the community. So, they do identify with the vocation through imagination.

7.4 Mutual engagement

Mutual engagement is the learners ability to take part in meaningful activities and interactions (Wenger, 1998). Students engage with staff when they knew what the normal practices for the setting are. For example, for a student to identify when a child is ill s/he had to know what is the expected behaviour or personality of the child to recognise a change in behaviour. Participation is peripheral as there are some practices that learners cannot participate in fully for different reasons. In child-care settings, one familiar practice is for children to have a key person that they would develop a 'bond' with. This key adult is usually the one who would observe the child, 'monitor' their development and plan age appropriate activities. Thus, learners were not fully involved in the planning, which meant that they could not be fully engaged on all levels. Other practices that they could not do were nappy changing or toilet training since the child's key worker mainly did these tasks. According to Wenger (1998), learners are legitimate peripheral participants before becoming full members. One way that learners made the transition from being a learner to a staff member, apart from being paid, was when they could do the above two tasks, and this was seen towards the end of the second year when there were a number of learners employed as either casual staff or staff on a temporary contract even though they had not completed their college work.

7.4.a Animal Management

AM learners went to range of settings where practice in each differed: farm, Veterinary surgery, pet shop, dog kennel, RSPCA, vet physiotherapist and they routinely cleaned and fed the caged animals in the college. It can be assumed that here it would be appropriate to talk about a landscape of practice. In Chapter 5, the analysis showed that there were no clear routes into the vocation as this level of course is not needed for immediate entry. This in itself does not prevent identification as learners still work on this through their imagination, alignment and engagement. Most of their practice is alongside the tutors in college and some volunteer in other settings towards the end of the second year.

In AM, as placements were short it is staff at college who engage with learners in practice. Staff demonstrate how to carry out tasks while working alongside the learner. It is possible that they engage differently from staff in a community of practice, because they have trained to teach young people, for whom this may be a novel activity.

I know how to do it (hold an animal) but when it came to doing it, I was so scared. Tamar (AM tutor) was there and she helped me with how to do it and how to hold it properly. With the theory you have to know the method and if you know the method when it comes to doing it I overthink too much on how to do it and I am taking too long to think on how I hold the animal and obviously the animal gets uncomfortable and then it starts wriggling and moving in a way that they shouldn't and then you begin to panic and forget what you are doing (2Alyssa).

While Alyssa had abstract knowledge on how to handle animals, it was through practicing that she negotiated meaning. She implies that thinking about it was a hindrance here, she needed to engage directly with the animal to work out how to best hold it, and having the tutor demonstrate she could become more competent in this activity.

Meaning making is social as in both courses there were some learners who had more experience than others in the class, and therefore acted as the expert in group-activities. However, this relationship is more obvious in AM as they practiced closely in college. *On the first Tuesday we had to clean out the animals, I had to clean out the frogs on my own while everyone had someone else to work with and I was like what am I meant to do,*

because I hadn't done it before. I got someone who had done level 2, they helped me, and they showed me how to do it properly (2Alexis).

For some learners working alongside their peers was valuable as they were more comfortable asking questions than they would of the tutor. These small groups meant that they were not being observed or were not in the spotlight so they experimented more with how to complete certain tasks.

In placement at the beginning they saw themselves as helping and working alongside more experienced staff.

So I helped someone clean them (rabbits) out, change the food... They gave me the feeding, emptying, watering jobs while they would be next to me be doing a different job because they would have to medicate them (ill rabbits). The staff member was not always next to me if the animals were not ill (1Alexis).

This was just as valuable for identification as a shared reality is created and there is sustained attention on mutual engagement.

In AM it is also through practice in college learners develop accountability to the vocation. In placements such as the vet, Abigail mainly observed, as staff were accountable to pet owners and learners could not engage in clinical processes. However, on a macrosystem level, the vocation may be accountable to animal rights groups and most AM students felt accountability to the vocation more widely in that they felt the need to care and protect the animal, so they may have experienced accountability to the landscape of practice rather than in a community.

Placement facilitated a particular form of participation that may have resulted in some learners not engaging in some practices, through choice. Here there is less engagement in practice, participation is through tasks that are repetitive, 'boring' (1Abigail), lack challenge and the learner sees as lacking value, such as cleaning and making tea. Abigail was in Vet practice that was clinical and there were not many ways, apart from observing, that could engage the learner in practice with animals. Within Abigail's microsystem, there were other challenges that may have contributed to deciding not to participate in AM in the future. Having short placements as in AM may have further restricted engagement.

7.4.b Early Years

There were many more opportunities for mutual engagement in EY as learners were in placement for four days every second week. Their level of engagement developed gradually, as the environment and social relations became familiar, "*getting used to their way, the things that they do*" (2Charlie). Students were generally nervous or shy when they started, but became comfortable when, for example they knew the children/staff and what they had to do. Being comfortable gave them the confidence to ask for support or do tasks independently: they knew how the staff were going to respond to either their questions, actions or to not knowing how to do a task: "*Like when I am not used to it then I feel nervous, like if I ask something then they might like say no, but when I am used to it then I know that if I ask this person then they won't say no to me and I am comfortable with them*" (Chris).

As placements were formally managed in EY, learners were expected to plan activities for their assessments. In some settings, staff worked with learners in planning these, so the level of mutual engagement was greater. The relationship between the student and the placement mentor was generally a negotiated one. According to Vygotsky et al. (1978) the potential to learn can be spotted through guidance or coaching from a 'more knowledgeable other'. In Cameron's placement the mesosystem appeared strong. The placement mentor shows awareness that prior experience may define how learners

engage.

If they had just come from school, we would make sure the staff are aware that they might need a bit of extra support and you (staff) might need to explain things. They (student) might not do something right and explaining to them why you (staff) do not do such things and how to do it right just talking to them. So it is really when they are in the room is observing them all the time, which we (staff) would all do (Petra, 1Cameron's mentor)
This approach was important for all learners even those who were confident in their practice.

Engagement alongside staff developed further when students felt that they were given tasks that they considered meaningful; tasks that were necessary and demonstrated responsibility, independence and in some instances accountable to the setting. *"Staff treat you like an actual teacher instead of a student"* (2Cara). Reinforcement of the students' sense of belonging can be seen by staff mentioning to the students that the children asked for them when they were not there. (2Carys). Amongst the children in there was often a display of affection or being called 'teacher' by the children. With this label, they felt a stronger sense of belonging. *"They would ask me like a normal teacher, like can I do this or can I go to the toilet"*.(Caitlin)

They begin to understand the purpose of routines such as checking doors are shut and why children are encouraged to be independent. Towards the end of the second year, learners were able to make decisions about their practice and there is more mutual engagement with staff. When Charlie was observed towards the end of the second year in practice, she was on her own in her own space with a child, making them sleep, which shows that she had built a secure relationship with the child and staff trusted her to do this task on her own. She was making decisions on her own about when a child was tired and needed to go to bed, showing she recognised what was valued in the setting and addressed it, thus engaging in meaningful activities.

While practice on both courses varied there were experts that they could engage with. Learners valued being engaged in meaningful activities as this gave them a sense that they belonged.

7.5 Disposition of the expert

The staff and teachers are important for learners developing identity as they mediate the curriculum by enacting it, or placement staff through engaging alongside learners. These relationships appear significant for learners. Depending on the level of expertise of the mentor and the disposition of the learner – so if increasing independence and challenging tasks are valued by both, then learner who is intrinsically motivated engaged with these and if routine, unchallenging tasks were valued by the staff but not by the learner then some learners became bored while others saw this as a temporary placement and could imagine it changing therefore while bored saw value in it. Learners discussed the 'expert' dispositions they valued, so that they could engage alongside staff, and participate albeit, peripherally.

7.5.a Animal Management

In AM, learners had the opportunity to develop familiarity with the animals, confronting fears they may have had of either the snakes or spiders. Tutors in college who were experts, made themselves available to students who expressed fear. They were mainly empathetic. In placement, Adene found that her mentor was likeable and kind, and 'allowed' her to do things. The tasks were complex and the vet showed and explained to her as she worked. Engagement was extended, by giving her a book to read about

procedures and saving her a carcass that she could practice stitching muscle and tissue – activities that Adene had not done in college. Her the mentor went out of her way to expand her repertoire.

In all cases, staff decided what activities students could actively engage with, depending on their (staff) role within the practice. In the vet surgery, students could watch an operation but it was generally the vet nurse that assisted the vet. The procedure was seen by the nurse as being a clinical process that students from college could not be involved in, so there were some tasks students could not practice. However in one practice as above the vet did allow the student to take on a pseudo role of vet nurse – preparing and passing tools during the process of inserting a feeding tube – it was the vet that took on the mentor role and therefore taken accountability for the safety of the animal (Adene). With Abigail, her mentor was the vet nurse. Therefore, it could be that negotiating meaning of certain tasks may be different in each community of practice depending on the role of the mentor. (Abigail was in a large practice, which also took students who were studying to be vet nurses and vet surgeons. Adene was in a smaller practice that specialised in particular animals, in this case exotics, and the student had been there before on school placement. The student themselves came with different resources, Abigail from school, was quiet and socially less confident. Adene had worked from the age of thirteen years in the family business, meeting people and she knew the staff at the vet practice. Therefore, it might be that engagement in practice was either facilitated or hindered by dispositions and roles of the experts within the community.

This could change if the process of participation within the CoP was formalised as in EY, however I would suspect that this would mean a change to the curriculum with increased hours in placement but also an ethos within the landscape of practice to facilitate participation. There would need to be changes to the macro and exosystems to ensure the process is formalised.

7.5.b Early Years

The process of participation in a community of practice was formalised in EY by a range of different roles in college and placement. In college, learners were engaging with their course tutors, placement officers, placement assessor and in placement, they had a placement mentor. Learners appreciated staff that were friendly but at the same time appeared to encourage some independent working, ensuring the learner was not on their own for long.

You know when we were out to the park they gave me a group and they said you go here and look for some things like insects and draw it. They trusted me with the children, which was good (2Connie).

The nature of social relations encouraged a sense of 'fitting in'. Students felt part of the practice/placement when staff engaged them by either: speaking to them, smiling, welcoming them, explicitly telling students that they were part of the team, asking questions, explaining tasks and proposing tasks that were seen as important. Some were supported with their college work as staff had done similar courses before. Other behaviours included being invited to the staff room for lunch, discussing social life together, being alerted to forthcoming events and including students in staff social life. Talk revolved about other stuff and not only about work (2Connie). Learners were also included in team meetings. So to belong staff had to engage with learners as a 'pseudo staff member'.

While in most cases confidence grew, there were particular activities that posed

challenges, some of which were harder to resolve than others. In the case of Chloe who was diagnosed with dyslexia, reading a book to children was difficult.

"I mean I have had it all through school anyway so it is nothing new in that sense. The only thing I found new is how it has affected my placement because you feel a bit rubbish, can't read a children's book..." (2Chloe).

In this case, she felt she was accommodated in a sensitive manner but this may not be how all settings practice childcare.

"I think my placement teacher has noticed but has not mentioned it to me because I once had an observation and I was going to read a story and they gave me the story to take home the night before to learn. They didn't actually say it is because you can't read but I just thought they must have noticed that I struggle." (2Chloe).

7.6 Reification

To demonstrate how identity may show itself, Sfard (cited in Wenger) focused on the reificative aspects by describing the context in depth. Through engagement, physical and conceptual artefacts are used as tools. "Artefacts without participation do not carry their own meaning and participation without artefacts is fleeting, unanchored and uncoordinated" (Wenger, 2009, p.1). He suggested that the reificative nature of work gives the job a particular character: both vocations in this case, being one of care and accountability to competence that is valued by the community. Through the course learners become familiar with the shared language, routines, actions, artefacts and of the vocation, for example in EY the acronyms such as PILES or EYFS is not explained since it is widely understood in childcare that this would be domain specific knowledge that everyone shared. While they may come across new terms in college, they become more meaningful in practice.

In AM students, for example talk about 'desensitising' meaning becoming less fearful handling certain animals, or 'health checks' on animals. Students in childcare were introduced to 'observations' in college, they were then asked to carryout an 'observation' of a child in placement, where they observe a child and record what they see and hear. In the process of preparing this activity, they talk to staff and find out that it is done differently in each settings. Students create their meaning of what an observation by doing one. Through participating, they then use this term more confidently. There is also pride expressed, when they are asked to carry out one on a child. This could be because they then feel that they are being accepted as a staff member or member of the community since they understand what and how to carry out an observation. One of the modules that they cover in college is on observation and they are told that a 'key person' normally carries it out. A key person is an adult who is responsible for a group of children but work on developing an emotional bond with the child so that they feel secure and safe in the setting. Through participation, students became familiar with routines and activities.

Charlotte's mentor in placement recognises that, when she talks about her listening to a child read. Charlotte appears to know how to respond that is similar to how staff might do. *She has a really good understanding and when she comes back and give feedback to me she would say he did really well, he was looking at the pictures more or he did really well but him still doing using a lot of his phonics. So she has a really good understanding of that and she supports them instead of just telling them no that is the word, she gives them a good push rather than giving it to them* (3Palash)

7.7 Conclusion

Course choice as the initial step to alignment, is as carefully planned as it could be, with the limited resources that are available. It does not happen on its own for most learners who do not have a learner identity that values school work. Alignment to the vocation, through the course, therefore is a more active process after they have started the course. Here the placement proved significant for many, more especially the EY learners due to the length of time. Learners could choose where they wanted to go; leading to learners re-aligning to future participation, however in Animal management as seen in Chapter 5, choice of placements were limited, so another example of how participation within communities of practices was restricted by the macrosystem, and therefore alignment may have been restricted for those from school who wanted to work instead of going to university.

Towards the end of the course, learners were making informed choices suggesting that they were using their practice, in making decisions about the future. It is possible, as will be shown later, that engagement in practice could mean that learners begin to identify with vocation despite it not being a 'calling' at the beginning, therefore practice was more significant for alignment long term, than how choice was made. Through engagement in practice learners adjusted how they participated, not always recognising that they were doing so. While Wenger implies that alignment is agentic, where the learner is making premeditated decisions, the data here appears to show that it may not be so conscious. Nevertheless, when thinking of the difference between alignment and imagination alignment was more active and purposeful. Participation therefore facilitated realignment to the vocation and future identification, demonstrating that the process is continuous.

Imagination is a useful resource for AM learners to identify with the landscape of practice, however EY learners identified mainly through engagement in practice. This can be seen as the role of the curriculum. Imagination develops through practice however this also meant adjustments from an idealised to realised view. Those who retain an idealised view without adjustments tend to not identify at the end. Both alignment and imagination were refined through engagement, where learners practice as newcomers is linked to becoming familiar with the reified objects and shared repertoire of the different placements or in the case of AM the vocation. The expert novice relationship is important in learners developing a sense of belonging or developing knowledgeable ability.

Wenger-Trayner (Farnsworth et al., 2016) refer to this adjustment and refining as the modulation of identification, which "suggests that identification has degrees and is dynamic over time and space" (p.153). This has been demonstrated by the data. Given this, it is therefore possible that some learners have weak identification during the course that may be a result of the space. The final discussion chapter will bring together the discussion of time and space and how this mattered for identification.

8 Discussion

8.1 Introduction

According to the literature, it was not clear how vocational identities developed, but it is possible that through engagement in placements, learners could form particular identities. In VE, learners can experience practice through placements. From a personal perspective, as a teacher in FE, I saw changes in learner dispositions from when they started a course to the end, where they were motivated by practice and aspired to remain engaged in the vocation. I wanted to understand the process so that I could improve my teaching approach. In the introduction, I argued for a more in-depth study of learner experiences on vocational courses as there are dispositional changes that matter for long-term identification with learning and a vocation. Additionally, strong vocational learning identities can promote lifelong learning and a greater commitment to the vocation (Virtanen et al., 2008; Winch, 2013). Within FE, the learner's experience is underrepresented, and I planned for this study to do justice to this area by giving learners a voice and sharing the findings within the broader education and vocational society. To be able to do this effectively I needed to explore the process of identity formation and the socio-cultural environment. This study therefore contributes to a field of education that is under researched, but under constant change, driven generally by economic policies.

Within a participatory and transformative framework of learning, the environment was significant and therefore the first question sought to interrogate aspects of the social environment that shape identification: What aspects of the learner's family background and wider social environment shape identification with the environment and how do students engage with the formal and practice -based learning experiences provided through the course? The environment is important for how dispositions and identities developed and this is a contribution to the VE field as I show that the learners are not dependent on this environment but there is reciprocal relationship between both. The environment encompassed social relationships, social processes and had particular features that were drawn out through the use of theory. However, an important aspect is that the context is a snapshot in time and not static.

The intended curriculum ensured learners engaged with practice but the process varied on both courses. AM had a two week placement but EY learners were in placement 40% of the time. Additionally, it is not only work placement, but it is participation in practice, sometimes alongside the college tutor as the expert or staff in placement. Nevertheless, learners on both courses showed the formation of vocational learner identities, some stronger than others, reinforcing then that it was not only the environment that mattered but how the learner and environment interlinked. It is not only engagement but learner dispositions, their attitudes, beliefs and values mediated through the environment that fostered change and formation of identities. The environment through the course, affords learners the contextual experience that they could explore the vocation. They reflect, evaluate, imagine, face ethical dilemmas and in the process change, thus reinforcing Lawy's (2006) assertion that there is a transaction with the environment. This dialogic relationship with the environment is the first theme within this discussion, where the value of using the Ecosystems frame to analyse the environment, is recognised. The second theme of Vocational education as widening choices is linked to the Ecosystems frame as in the study it was seen as part of the exosystem. It is also relevant for the formation of Vocational learner identities as learners are able to make choices from more informed positions at the end of the course.

The third key theme answers in part the second research question, which was about how identification with the vocation interrelated with dispositions to learn. The two sub questions were: What are the prior learning experiences and dispositions of the learners

and how do dispositions to learn evolve and change during the duration of the course? Learners have individual dispositions that may have developed through their prior experiences, which is used to imagine an idealised view of practice that is then adjusted to a realised view through participation. In making this change most learners negotiate meaning and realign to the vocation and in doing so dispositions change. Most develop confidence, are motivated to self direct their practice and in some cases inherit characteristics of the role that they become familiar with in the local context of their placement, dispositions that demonstrate strong vocational identification (Klotz et al., 2014). While the literature highlighted that identities are negotiated, inherited or visible as an outcome, the findings show that it was mainly negotiated in this study, however as there were some instances learners show inheritance it is likely that had the study followed the learners for a longer period there may be some characteristics that are inherited. The surprise finding concerning outcome was that there were at least two learners who did not show vocational identification or a change in disposition to learn, therefore it is possible that learners could complete a two-year VE course and not identify with the vocation. The third theme therefore is the learner trajectory into the vocation, which highlights the development of vocational learner identities through changes in dispositions.

The fourth and final theme that this chapter draws, is the concept of time as for most learners it takes time to form a vocational learner identity. Negotiating takes time. Developing confidence and motivation takes time. Becoming familiar with practices take time. These processes occur with a backdrop of VE that is changing itself. A noticeable feature in the data was a dip in motivation towards the end of the first year, common to most learners. This may have to do with the number of written assessments that were due. At least two learners from the sample leave at the end of the first year and therefore do not use the course to align to the vocation and develop their VE learner identity.

8.2 Summary of each findings chapter

Through a brief summary of each chapter I will recap the findings, before returning to focus on the different themes arise from answering the research questions. The findings were divided into three Chapters: Chapter 5 used the ecological theory to interpret data on the learning environment and demonstrated how different systems interlinked to shape the learners' proximal space, which mattered for how their identity developed. Learner Trajectories (Chapter 6) detailed the formation and changes to dispositions towards learning and the vocation, showing the importance of prior learning experiences; and Chapter 7 focused on vocational identification. Using different theoretical frames in each chapter allowed for focused analysis of particular areas relevant to vocational and learner identity.

8.2.a *Learning environment*

The learning environment of the course created a space where most learners could explore the vocation. While this varied within both courses, most learners still identified with practice, so there were features within both courses that mattered for how learners participated. The curriculum in EY provided closer connections with placements, and the syllabus in AM meant that there was engagement with a wider range of practices as a class, not as individuals: here tutor identity was important. It seems that all systems, the macro level of the college and exo-level of the curriculum, interlinked to the micro of the learners' experiences. Whether learners identified with the vocation or not, depended on their individual experiences of this space over the two years.

College tutors were expected to do one thing, but how curriculum is enacted by tutors and experienced by the learners within the different systems, depended on the resources available. The intended curriculum did not acknowledge the learners prior experiences,

however, tutors appear to empathise and recognise the different dispositions, taking these into account in their enactment of the curriculum. The tutors in this case had experience of not only vocational practice and education, but of personal development of young people. The college culture and policies, however did not appear to acknowledge this identity, either in the design of the curriculum or policies within the college, even more concerning is a move to deregulate teacher training in FE. This devaluing of tutor expertise is further evident in the practice that, while tutors were encouraged to volunteer in industry, they did not have time away from teaching to do so – in fact, the placement officers (Admin role to manage placements) and Progress coaches (new roles to cover pastoral care), further removed them from the industry, through their roles. In EY the placement assessor was experienced in the vocation and was able to be the expert when she visited students in placement, however her teaching role in college was limited to placement issues, so her role appeared fragmented in relation to the learner experience. Her role was very much one of being on the boundary (Wenger, 1998) between different community of practices.

Over time, it is likely that the course tutors' vocational expertise may vary from the learners experience in placement. Charlie (EY learner) found that the way the tutors showed her how to record her assessment of a child's progress in college, varied from her practice in placement: *"So you had to write them up (child observations in college). I did that here but the staff here struggled to help me because that is not how they do it anymore, so as a student it was different, but being here I am being taught how to do it like the way they do it"* (3Charlie). The learner now did short video recordings of the child and these were annotated and uploaded onto a site that parents had direct access to. This was an area that was not covered in college.

Finally, Chapter 6 also uncovered that within the recent changes made to both courses, where there is now a greater emphasis on preparing learners for both university and work – EY there already existed a need for this level so it may be a motivating factor for some learners, however in AM there is no need for this level within the landscape of practice and thus learners, unless they want to go to university may not be motivated to complete the two years. Therefore, it is possible that learners do go onto developing a vocational identity in the field by leaving, and working in the vocational field, instead. Therefore, a consideration for course developers is to look at the vocational field and what within it could motivate learners to stay in college and complete a course of two years.

8.2.b Learner trajectories

Chapter 6 found that learner trajectories were shaped around the curriculum and individual dispositions, addressing in part the second research question on dispositions to learn. The transformative lens showed changes in attitudes, knowledgeability and aspirations over the two years. The learners frequently identify how engagement in practice, alter their values, beliefs and sense of self; a process that differs from their experiences in school and was a 'turning point' or opportunity to realign (Wenger, 1998) to their plans for the future. While learners may share common experiences from school or Sixth Form, they respond differently when undergoing new experiences, therefore development and change is individual and personal (Lawy, 2002).

For some, negative thoughts associated with failure changed to a positive disposition to learning, within a short period after starting the course. This reaffirmed what the literature showed, that Further Education Colleges could be a second chance for some (Avis et al., 2002; Foster, 2005; Bathmaker, 2013). Learners are excited by the different experience college offers, at the beginning. Furthermore, some of their expectations, for example greater independence in how they manage their own learning are fulfilled by tutors making these demands. This is the shared culture that learners may feel that they have to

inherit if they want to be a college student. At the beginning, there is almost an eagerness to realise this ideal, which gradually changes to an intrinsic motivation through engagement in the practice of being a college student, an indication according to Klotz et al. (2014), of vocational identification.

Prior experiences however varied, and it is likely that the curriculum design does not take account of this. It appeared that learners from school were not prepared with the skills that tutors at college were expecting them to have. Therefore, while they may be ready to make that transition to college, the expectations implicit within the curriculum design may have posed challenges. The learners (Abigail and Amal) who left at the end of the first year, did not feel that they could approach the tutors when they did not understand the content or manage the workload. It may be the lack of confidence to engage socially within the class that could have hindered a change in dispositions by seeking support when they needed it, or it may have been they had not recognised until it was too late, that to complete the number of assessments, there needed to be a degree of management and planning. These learners had come from school where the culture was different from college, and it is likely that their dispositions had been sourced through this experience. This confirms some of the literature that dispositions are sourced socially (Billett, 1997; Lawy, 2002; Gresalfi, 2009), developing and changing on an individual level (Lawy, 2002) or shared through engagement with a common culture (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1999).

8.2.c *Vocational identification*

In Chapter 7, the microsystem related to practice, was analysed further. The main focus was on the process of identification through engagement in practice. Placement was one environment, which was distinctive and allowed learners to negotiate identification. Overall, the findings showed that there were many variables to identifying with the vocation. Learners dispositions were socially sourced so it did matter for how they participated at the beginning. Participation is tentative and towards the end, there are still some practices that they do not engage in, showing that they were peripheral to the community. While most learners experience placement on the periphery some learners experienced a form of participation that was not proper engagement. These learners do not experience belonging and therefore were less likely to identify with the vocation at the end of the course. Others afforded learners opportunities to engage as 'pseudo staff' depending on the dispositions of staff towards learners. Here social relationships with experts and having or feeling a sense of belonging was important, so in a way some were socialised into the roles. Identification through a sense of belonging was intrinsically motivating (Klotz et al., 2014) for most learners to practice independently using their initiative and being accountable to the community.

Alignment is constantly adjusted and refined over the two years through practice. Not all learners choose to align to the vocation - some leave after the first year while a few complete the two years but are unsure whether they want to work in the field. Furthermore, dispositions change, facilitating realignment to their future plans. Learners draw on their imagination to make choices as engagement in practices expands their views on what they can do. While imagination is a useful resource, some learners have an idealised view that does not change with practice. These learners are therefore more likely to have weak vocational identities.

8.3 The value in using the systems approach

The systems approach highlighted the importance of proximal processes, where there was interaction between individuals, for example learner and placement mentor or learner and staff. It allowed a closer investigation of, for example, how the teachers within the college enacted the syllabus planned by the external awarding bodies. The issues at the macro level related to policies such as Achievement and Retention, staff recruitment and employability. Employability gave rise to a discourse around skills and competences, which is reflected in the intended curriculum of both courses where there was an element of work experience. While the focus on the wider social context in Chapter 5 covered the learning environment there clearly had to be boundaries to how far the systems could extend. With the focus on college and placements, I clearly did not focus on learners' other affinity groups, for example part time work or volunteer work, as these matter also for the development of lifelong learning identities. Learners clearly participated within other microsystems such as those linked to: volunteering "at a day nursery" (1Cayla); family, "... like being the oldest sibling and having three little sisters. I have always helped them out in the house or with their homework"(1Casey) or part-time work in a cafe. While the analysis focused on learners through the course, the data may not reflect fully their learning through practice in other affinity groups (Gee, 2004). Identity as becoming, therefore, should keep in mind other ways that learners align to a vocation that is linked to their histories and wider experiences. These may be connected to how the learner identifies with the vocation.

The systems interlinked differently in each of the courses. In EY, while the intended curriculum (exosystem) seemed important it was less visible; the system that linked placements (mesosystem) and the proximal environment of the learner (microsystem), appeared to be stronger, due to the relationships with experts and the resources within their immediate environment. There was a system that linked college to placements, through the placement officer and placement assessor. For AM, the microsystem of the learner in college is stronger and more dominant, than other systems. These give rise to different processes in how meaning was negotiated through the identity of the teacher – as learners who do not have a developed microsystem around a CoP needed to practice alongside the tutors within the college, who were the bridge into the landscape of practice and longer term alignment through further study at a higher level.

If the microsystem and the mesosystem matter for vocational learner identification then this requires a further look at how changes in the other systems could strengthen these two systems. In EY there was a placement officer and a placement assessor so one possibility is to ensure that there are these roles with AM. However, this would then mean change to the curriculum that increases the number of placement hours. This also may encourage a range of placement experience as AM curriculum appears to prepare for a landscape of practice. An increase in practice may mean that there were fewer written assessments. If students value the relationships with the tutor then there ought to be more engagement with the tutor as an industry expert and less on the management of assessments or meeting targets concerning Retention and Achievement policies.

From the literature on the wider context of VE, grades are correlated with learning. To study at Level 3, as on the two courses here, the Awarding body required learners to have a Grade C (Grade 4) or above in five subjects including Mathematics and English. This requirement therefore possibly excluded those who may disengage if the demands from the curriculum design are similar to those at school, where learning is equated to grades. However, this focus on grades also excludes those who may have wanted to do the course by choice and had a strong calling to the vocation, but did not have the required grades. The present VE system does not fully exclude these learners, as the progression routes, for example starting at a Level 1 or Level 2 and progression to a Level 3 takes account of those that had lower grades but those learners who also have a strong calling,

take longer to get there. Here the exosystem, is playing a key role in whether learners do go on to developing a vocational learner identity. The curriculum design and the assessment process on both courses equated grades with learning through written and skills assessments. The curriculum design does not prioritise identification with the vocation.

In FE, policies associated with marketisation implicitly does this through the focus on retention and achievement policies (Nash et al., 2008; Illsley and Waller, 2017; OFSTED, 2018). However, most learners who choose vocational studies traditionally did not achieve high grades in school (Fuller and Macfadyen, 2012). Equating grades with identification fails to acknowledge the personal investments of learners who learn through engagement in practice. It does not acknowledge their prior experiences, their changing dispositions, their commitment to the vocation and possible the development of lifelong learning identity. Furthermore, vocational aspirations changed on vocational courses and they were not related to grades (Davies and Tedder, 2003). The findings show the pressure and stress experienced by tutors on ensuring a proportion of learners achieve high grades. There were certainly some students who came to the course not having high grades at school or at Sixth Form. Some of these learners saw themselves as failures at the beginning, and therefore were motivated by grades on the course, as they could then realign to the vocation through study at university. However, the findings showed that not all learners with high grades identified with the vocation. Certainly high grades for some was motivating and meant that they developed confidence in themselves as possibly capable of negotiating complex knowledge. Most of these learners were also motivated by further study at university, for particular roles within the landscape of the vocation.

It is likely therefore that the design further excludes some learners for whom written assessments were a challenge. To say anything about vocational learner identity therefore you need to look beyond grades as the learner engages in practice to become. There are changes to dispositions beyond motivation through grades. It also means that the concept of learning needs to extend beyond acquiring knowledge.

Some learners hinted at the lack of complexity in the curriculum and little time to reflect on theoretical knowledge in college. Learners who had come from 6th Form college, identified A levels as having more time to revise and review domain knowledge. However, in FE there appears to be a greater focus on written assignments. The 6th form and FE divide that was reflected in learners narratives was more academic vs. vocational. Within FE, it appears as though courses are assumed parity by the amount of written assignments. Furthermore, some learners did not like repetition, "there is only so much you can do with the animals" (3 Amber). Here Amber was referring to cleaning out the cages in college, which they did every week. The same applied to EY, for some learners practice became boring as they got familiar, and there were no new, authentic activities. For some, what they did in the morning was repeated in the afternoon with a different group of children. Is there something here that confirms studies that show that the qualification is instrumental and learners are socialised into accepting the routine without question.

The curriculum in the case of EY directed learners to specific ways of participating in the community of practice, through the assessment of skills and competences. As a starting point it may have acted, in some cases, as a task around which the learner engaged with the expert in the setting. This created the environment to facilitate engagement. In AM there were no set tasks, however in college and on visits there were opportunities to engage with the tutor as the expert, and other peers who had expertise of the vocational field. Practice provided the learners issues and problems and most often the resources to work through these either by reflecting or engaging with experts. So for example in Chapter 5 Chloe experienced an ethical dilemma on whether to tell the parent the truth that the child had not really eaten and therefore what the staff member was saying was

untrue. As a student, she felt powerless to respond and it would have meant her contradicting the staff member who was an established member of the community, while her position was still peripheral. Although she did not respond in that instance, the environment gave her the dilemma that she could then reflect on how she would have responded to the parent differently. This scenario would not have arisen in college due to the absence of children and parents. Certainly some did admit that it practice could be boring when tasks are repeated by limited engagement as peripheral members of the community. If vocational identification guides practice when completing challenge tasks (Armishaw, 2007) then a lack of challenge or engagement with complex tasks implies missed opportunity to identify through practice. This could have implications for availability of affordances in the environment to engage with challenging tasks.

Equating high grades to identification assumes a narrow conception of learning. An implication for future changes in the curriculum would be the embedding of more authentic experiences that challenge and are complex requiring problem solving skills but additionally the time and space to explore this could develop greater confidence and lead to self direction in practice. Here a different system of assessments for example possibly assessment for learning, that encompasses a view of learning through practice will bring the focus to identification and acknowledge and value the prior experiences of the learners. This could be more fair and equitable and gain parity between VE and the academic 6th Form route.

8.3.a Dispositions

Challenges could pose barriers to developing confidence, however most learners draw on individual and contextual resources to overcome these. Learners set their own targets or were encouraged to do tasks that they may have found challenging, whether it was to sing in a large group or clean out the snake tank. There they demonstrate agency. These learners overall showed greater engagement with the course and the vocation overall. Alexis became more confident in his handling of the snakes and he then set himself another target of holding the tarantula. Overcoming these challenges was not a requisite of the course but were valued by the individuals. Adene saw overcoming fear as important to not holding her back in her work, so she 'pushed' herself. What was valued was not what others valued, so Chloe needed to feel that she has in control of a group, for example and not others telling her she has manage a group of children. Here it is not grades that are motivating but authentic activity and challenge.

Learners' behaviour and dispositions were closely interlinked to the social space that enabled engagement, when learners felt comfortable they could exercise a level of independence. When they felt part of the community and seen like a staff member they had a sense of belonging. Knowing that they were trusted meant that for some they were confident to engage more and initiate actions. For others who were felt marginalised they were less sure of initiating activities. Staff dispositions mattered for whether learners they could approach staff if they were unsure or how they received feedback. EY learners also used the responses of the children as feedback to how they expressed their confidence. They felt that if they were not confident and did not say much the children would not listen to them. Therefore, in this case they may have acted confidently but may have not felt it. Further when children trusted the student or got involved in their (student's planned tasks) activities many felt that they were playing the role of a staff and this gave them the confidence knowing that they were doing something '*right*'. While the learners needed a trustful space to receive feedback and to engage mutually it could be argued that this is in contradiction to the macroculture that does not lend itself to such values (Donovan, 2019), as competition and marketisation has become normalised.

Taking the perspective that learning is connected temporally then the teachers prior experiences and their training could shape the learning experiences of learner. By having

boundaries around the wider social context, there was less focus on teacher identity, which would possibly change given the recent changes to de-professionalise their roles. To acknowledge the personal investment of tutors through their attention to the social and emotional aspect development of learners, their recognition of the challenges that the intended curriculum imposes on learners, more needs to be done to embrace their professionalism. They ought to be included in any policymaking concerning VE and their voices ought to be heard.

Given the diversity of prior experiences and learning dispositions, one would expect a curriculum designed to address this. However, the findings show that there is an assumption of a common denominator. Learners choose the course and therefore are motivated to engage in practice as a route to work or university. As the requirement is a Grade C (Grade 4) in English and Maths and at least 3 other subjects, learners would meet the assessment requirements through the delivery of the curriculum by the college. What is implicit, however is the individualised support provided by tutors that go beyond the curriculum to include the socio-emotional needs arising through the prior experiences and wider socio-cultural conditions. Tutors used a range of professional practices to identify these needs however it also depended on whether learners asked for support. Learners who were not socially confident did not feel that they could discuss personal difficulties arising from their other microsystems, for example at home. Most learners value their relationship with the college tutors: while they do not refer to the tutor's industry or vocational experience, most refer to their trusting, empathic and approachable dispositions, demonstrating the value of this particular microsystem.

It may be that vocational learner identity is not only about how it is negotiated, inherited and an outcome, but could also be about how it is mediated by others, in this instance mediated by the tutors. The pedagogy and teacher identity mattered for how learners experienced the curriculum as these were enacted in particular ways. Placements and demo rooms were important but equally important was the identity of the teacher who was expected to be an expert in two different domains and have social and emotional awareness to engage pastorally. One might even go to the extent of claiming that identification is not much about the vocation itself but the tutors who mediate the learners engagement with the vocation. The findings in Chapter 5 suggested that some learners choose the course to decide what they want to do in the future, and in these cases it was not so much about the policies or the intended curriculum but the tutors mediation of it, that mattered for identification. This is implicit and may not be fully recognised by tutors, students or the curriculum design.

8.3.b Teacher identity

An example of which can be seen when some learners who wanted to leave initially in AM, did complete with a qualification at the end of the first year. The different agendas of the college and tutors from those of the learners, meant that the two learners completed the first year, through the mediation of the Retention policy by the tutor. Other examples of tutor mediation in AM could be seen when some learners go on to volunteering, to further align to the vocation. This was not an assessment but a discussion led by the tutor based on their experiences within the landscape of practice, where they saw volunteering rather than the qualification as more important in identifying with the vocation. For learners who use the course to decide if the vocation is right for them, could be put off by the curriculum, however depending on how this is mediated they could identify with it. An example was Abigail, who at the beginning did not know what to do, so she tried AM to see if she would enjoy it. In placement, she felt that she was not engaged directly with the animals and the scientific content of the course was cognitively challenging. Abigail did indeed leave after completing the first year.

Some of the challenges that may arise from the present context is one where the tutor

identity changes, through the lack of engagement with the vocation or if curriculum changes are made by those with limited engagement with the vocation, so in effect creating a mismatch between teacher identity and the curriculum. Tutors have left the profession a while ago but were still tasked with delivering a fixed curriculum that has made presumptions about practice. The important thing that one would hope that teachers would come away with, is that the learners would be lifelong learners. This is not recognised by the tutor, however the dispositions they foster such as self directed learning or the use of initiative as a way of identifying with the vocation interrelate to strong learning identities. Moving the focus of VE to lifelong learning and identification with a vocation, would need changes in the macroculture away from meeting targets. The focus will move to the learner rather than the goals of marketisation.

In AM where learners were being prepared to enter a landscape of practice rather than a community, is it realistic to expect a teacher to have experience of the breadth of industries within one vocation. Would teachers in these areas do a disservice to learners if they offer a narrow field or they are not trained to convert their experience into a way that learners can derive meaning, for how they enact the curriculum. Furthermore would a lack of experience with young people also mean that they are unable to enact the intended curriculum in a way that was meaningful to learners, where their precarious early experiences of learning fostered identities that were fragile or learning identities that showed a lack of confidence and low sense of self? One of the recommendations then would be that teachers of young people in VE, are trained to work alongside young people, recognising their prior-experiences as well as maintain a strong link with the vocation. The development of the curriculum should not only include the employers but a wider range of professionals so that the dynamic nature of the vocation is accounted for in how the curriculum is enacted.

From previous studies and a reaffirmation in the analysis here, teaching in VE and the macro-level is aligned to the perspective of learning as acquisition of skill and propositional knowledge, and learning as practice through participation. However, with the focus on summative assessments prioritising written assessments and in AM the focus on propositional knowledge as a way of preparing learners for university. What if teachers approached teaching and fostered student learning as a form of identification? It is then possible that learners who may not want to go to university and who are able to identify with practice could become lifelong learners as well. Their prior experiences outside schoolwork would be valued and they learn through practice.

8.4 Vocation education as widening choices

The literature review highlighted the topic of how learners make choices for the future (Mortimer et al. 2002; Lawy et al., 2004; Klotz et al., 2014). These were made grounded in their prior experiences sometimes mediated by their socio-cultural environment and for others the 'free choice' of career, where the latter implied that there was a level of planning. However, the context can constrain, but there were limited studies on how this could be experienced by learners. In chapter 5 the systems lens facilitated a close analysis of the environment and demonstrated that choice for identification with the vocation, could be restricted by conditions within the macrosystem and exosystem, such as the availability of jobs in the area and limited placements that would engage learners through legitimate peripheral participation.

When learners enrolled on the course, there is an assumption by the college that the choice was made freely. Tutor have said that the learners have chosen the course because they wanted to. However, the findings show that choice can be constrained by other factors such as the grades received at school or restricted access to resources in

making decisions. Furthermore, there is also a weak sense of self as a learner, dispositions that have developed through prior experiences. Learners were also embedded within particular socio-cultural environments where the 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson et al., 1996) may have contributed to how choices were made. Learners referred to talking to family members and there being very little guidance in schools. Choice therefore may be strategic or through having a sense of calling. Indeed some learners clearly expressed their choice as a calling and only after further probing during interviews, it was evident that their choice was strategic.

How choice was made however, was not a barrier to learning for most learners, only to a few who did not identify with the vocation at the end. Most learners aligned or adjusted to see the course as their calling which was evident in their dispositions towards learning and the vocation. College therefore, for some learners increased the resources available within their microsystem, such as the experts in placement, engagement in authentic activities, and development of imagination through an exploration of the landscape of practice. They experienced belonging and find new choices to make, for example through further study at university. Therefore, their choices for the future were widened.

So, yes, they may have made the choice of course because they were poor and felt the need to work (Lawy et al., 2004) or planned it (Klotz, 2014) or because as 'working class' have been socialised into certain roles (Bates, 1991), but college or the course widened, for some learners, the options available. Their subjective, personal experiences through VE was empowering, as the learner uses these to ground their immediate experiences. Aspirations changed, for example, those who were motivated by money or status early on changed later as they wanted a role that was more suitable to their dispositions or made them happy, for example (Adene), chose not to go to university to be a Vet but a specialist college to train as a vet nurse. Others were empowered to go to university as they were motivated by the feedback from their tutors that focused, on not only grades but engagement with practice. A sense of belonging in the settings were further motivating for some as they could imagine themselves taking particular roles within the community of practice.

In AM aspirations did not really change as those who wanted to study at a higher level at the beginning and had started out with A levels, still had the same plans, but may have chosen a different degree. The learners from school who wanted to work full time with animals, sooner, remained focused on their initial choice. The courses still however widened their horizons in terms of roles within the vocational field. In EY, most learners were the first in their family to come to college or aspire to go to university. There were more learners who chose to study a Foundation degree at the end of the course but had not planned for this at the beginning. The aspirations of these learners for their future career had changed.

Vocational education could be seen enabling. However, it can still be argued that the vocational field that the learners were going to enter was mainly female and poorly paid. This is an issue that needs to be considered within the wider educational field in England. For instance, some universities do not recognise the BTEC or CACHE qualification, or even if they do, they do not openly advertise this in their recruitment: requirements often state A Levels and this can be misunderstood by some learners. The learners who chose the Foundation Degree could have gone onto Degrees as their Level 3 qualification was equivalent to 3 A levels subjects. Furthermore, you may argue, their choices through VE were narrowed, as it limited their choice to a particular landscape of practice through the curriculum design. Therefore, more could be done at macrosystem and exosystem level to widen choice and aspirations even further.

8.5 Vocational identification

In the literature review, some studies conceptualised vocational identity as a process of negotiation and inheritance, while others viewed it as an outcome. Chapters 5 and 6 looked at how identification was negotiated within the learners microsystems, and what aspects were adopted from the learning environment, such as the 'ways of being', which learners display either in the narratives or their practice. The process of identification was not static, but together with imagination and engagement evolved. Wenger-Trayner (cited in Farnsworth et al., 2016) refer to this as the modulation of identification, which "suggests that identification has degrees and is dynamic over time and space" (p.153).

One feature that previous studies do identify as an outcome for vocational learner identity, is reflexivity, which some curriculum designs have embedded (Virtanen et al., 2008). It is something the learner has to practice. However, being reflective could also mean that the learner decides that they don't want to identify with the vocation, so it could be a conscious choice. At the beginning when learners leave, it could imply that they are reflective on their choice or that they are self-directed in that they have decided that the course is not what they want to do. Those who continue are reflexive not only on how they align themselves in the future but also how they practice, so strong vocational learner identities. This implies that the curriculum design has reflections embedded or the teacher enacted the curriculum in a way that fostered it. I had not collected data on this but certainly in EY, learners were reflecting with the Assessor and individually when planning and carrying out activities as part of their assessments. However, those who do not identify are still reflexive on the course but not on the vocation - they are still unable to say much about practice.

The microsystem of learners was complex due to engaging with different affinity groups (Gee, 2004), only one being placement. In this study some learners did vocationally related part time work: in EY Chloe organised and managed children's parties, Cameron did casual hours as an unqualified child care worker; in AM all learners volunteered or worked part time either in hospitality (cafe, restaurant) or with animals (dog walking, charity such as RSPCA). These learners brought other aspects of their dispositions to how they engaged with practice, for example, confidence in how they interacted with others.

In communities of practice, identification is about imagination, alignment and engagement. Alignment does not happen on its own for most learners who do not have a learner identity that values school work. However, most learners align with placement practices over time. Alignment was one process that was refined over the two years. If learners are adjusting their alignment throughout the course, it is likely that learning trajectories differ between learners and the process is not linear or smooth. The intended curriculum, afforded learners the opportunity to imagine what practice would be like and through engagement, they become knowledgeable and competent within the community. For example, for planning of activities in EY, learners needed to imagine how the children would respond. Alignment is also about engaging with feedback on placement. Some also enter without imagining the vocation as something they desire but simply end up on the course. The dominant pathway to identification for EY then seems to be engagement, which is through placement. However, even placements can be uninspiring and engagement not happen. Some learners here in EY, keep on anyway, because they knew that they could change placements, but in AM, engagement was mainly in college. Therefore, in AM the dominant mode of identification was imagination as they were exposed to the landscape of practice through visits, excursions and had visitors come and talk to them. They transcend engagement by using this exposure to locate themselves in a role. So if engagement in practice and imagination is important for identification, but it is limited by a greater value placed on written assignments, then it is likely that some

learners do not identify with the vocation. Clearly, a higher percentage of EY learners had stronger identification and a number were already employed in settings at the end. Within AM, although the time in placement was shorter, some learners still identify with the vocation at the end, but the process was different for them. There was greater engagement with the course tutor. Therefore, placement is not necessarily a factor but the environment and how it affords learners opportunities to engage in practice.

While most learners show developing vocational identity and strong learning dispositions, such as setting targets beyond their comfort zone or recognising their own role in the learning journey, there were a few learners who did not identify with the vocation despite participating on the course. They showed dispositions such as dependence or isolation from relationships, which Crick and Yu (2008) suggest was indicative of weak learning dispositions. Vocational learner identity was reflected in individual dispositions.

8.4.a Dis-identification

It is possible that individual dispositions may mean that barriers are negotiated differently. Learners show that they are motivated when they can see themselves change, and more likely to engage in further learning. Interestingly all four learners that showed dis-identification with the vocation and possibly little change to the dispositions to learn, were from school. When they don't receive feedback that they value, they were more likely to disengage (Abigail, Amal) or dis-identify with the vocation (Clara). Furthermore, to be motivated to engage there needed to be some interest (Renniger and Hidi, 2016). For some EY learners the time in placements was too long. These learners were not sure whether they wanted to work in the field and one clearly showing she was bored in every placement. Although she finished, she was not attending placement regularly. According to the tutor, they did not identify even though one of them had feedback from placement that contradicted how the learner thought they engaged in practice.

In these cases disposition to learning and to the vocation were fragile. Amal and Abigail used imagination to locate themselves within the landscape. Imagination is useful to a point. There has to be engagement in practice for meaning making. They could not imagine how they would fit into the landscape if they did not enjoy science. Abigail experienced her placement as marginalised as she could not engage in practice, she could not imagine how she would engage in practice in the future. Furthermore, these learners appear less confident to initiate or set challenges for themselves and demonstrate weak vocational identity as this can guide learners practice when completing challenging tasks (Armishaw, 2007). Abigail and Amal worked closely together and did not appear to engage with the rest of the class. They also do not appear to reflect on their practices but rather on the environment where their discussions were negative towards the space (Abigail, Amal, Cai and Clara).

Some learners even at the end of the course still do not use their initiative and prefer to be told what to do. One particular case stands out because the learner preferred to be told, while the others were seen by staff as not using their initiative. Cai preferred to be told what to do as she believed that while she was in placement she was a student, and therefore by implication not responsible to the children or accountable to the setting. There was a lack of curiosity and excitement with setting challenges. Interestingly it is also Cai who also found reflecting on the course or her practice, challenging. On the surface, there appears as there was little dispositional change from the beginning of the course. At the end, she was doubtful whether she would remain engaged with the vocation.

It might well be the timing of the affordances within the curriculum for these learners, did not match when they were ready, or placement did not offer the challenge to engage them. It is possible that some learners from school may benefit from another experience between school and college so that the transition to the course is made over a longer period or the curriculum design recognises that some learners from school may need further differentiation in how the curriculum is enacted. Here the expectation was that there would be individualised support and this was seen through how the Achievement and Retention policy was enacted. However, how and when do tutors enact this if learners do not ask for it? This links to the discussion on the de-professionalising of the teacher role and how this may affect these learners in the future.

Given that each learner comes to the course with particular learning dispositions and imagination of the vocation I expected that some learners may not identify with the vocation, however what was apparent was level of support from tutors to ensure that learners complete the course or in AM complete at least the first year. Here one could infer that it may be because of the retention policies within FE and it being tied to funding, however tutors appeared to be genuinely concerned for how the learner would negotiate their future without the structure of college, given that studies of learners in FE show that they often come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

8.4.b Becoming knowledgeable

Learning can be a cultural process where the environment is filled with resources to make meaning; where information and knowledge is contextualised. Given the prior learning experiences of learners it is likely that schooling and the course is where learners come across the use of specialist language that differs from their everyday use of language. "Such academic varieties of language are integrally connected to complex and technical ways of thinking. They are the tools through which certain types of content are thought about and acted upon" (Gee, 2004, p.3). Knowledge or information that is not in context, in other words abstract do not hold meaning for some learners, and is not motivating to remain engaged in (Gee, 2004). Each vocation has its own specialist language, which is a tool through which practice is thought about and acted. This may be similar to the shared repertoire of the community of practice. College therefore was a space where learners encountered the language, and practiced it through their assessments and in placements. Placements is about linking the academic language to the experience. So, is AM more about specialist language that some learners find a challenge, which is easier for 6th Form learners as they had already encountered it the year before? Whereas in EY the placements throughout the two years facilitated learners in contextualising academic language.

While I had clearly set out to focus on identification, collecting and analysing data on how learners make meaning through practice and have taken a social constructivism perspective overall, an underlying conflict I had experienced reading Young(2008), remained. Social constructivism, proposes that all knowledge is a product of social practices, which focuses on interests of any social group(Young, 2008), and this implicitly embodies a set of power relations, in this case power between employers, educators (college) and the state. A second proposal is that knowledge is situated or contextualised. According to Young, both of these instances, shows that knowledge content becomes arbitrary around interests and context. However, in the precarious work environment in the present day if learners develop knowledgeability around the vocation, are they also doing so in a way that they go on to be lifelong learners so that they can make meaning within the landscape of practice or even wider outside the vocational field?

Most learners are confident when they can do something without thinking about it (3Cameron - doing it in the way that the setting does things - "not like you would it at home". Knowledgeability is about how things gets done in placement. They do sometimes make an assessment of value of certain types of knowledge for example Cameron believed there was no need to know about growth of a foetus in the womb or about vaccinations, as a practitioner they would be working with someone else's child and this is the knowledge for parents not practitioners. So some may not see the purpose of some of the modules or units taught in college. From the data it was clear that the intended curriculum included 'knowledge' that was not immediately meaningful to all learners. However, during the second year, not the first, most learners begin to make meaning of the knowledge and information in college as they have had experience of the context or the space. Cara - "If I saw them play hop scotch I would have thought that they are just jumping and it was not to do with numbers". According to Cara, she was able to make the link between hopscotch and maths after her 'Maths unit' college. Other learners who showed strong learner dispositions from the beginning of the course, such as Chloe appear to approach practice with a level of abstract knowledge. For example, when she did her first assessment with a group of children the ice she was using took longer to melt than she had planned for. She later said that she started to sing as the children were too young to stay at the table doing nothing and would get bored waiting. Here she implied an awareness of the age differential in the attention levels of children. In this instance, there is a display of a vocational learner identity, using both propositional and practice knowledge and therefore there is a need for both.

Knowledgeability is valued by learners, but in AM all 3 learners who had been in school the previous year, found the domain knowledge, challenging, despite the enactment of the curriculum through contextualisation by the tutor, and practice. The findings here reflects the work by Gee (2004) where learners from more privileged backgrounds make the movement from folksy to academic knowledge more easily. This suggests that the college curriculum had to be mediated by the tutor taking account of the prior experiences of learners of the school curriculum including their wider social environment. Those learners who had a year in A levels, were able to make the transition to VE more easily in this regard. This may have to do with the additional time but also the dispositions of the individual learners.

However, there has been little in the way of changing the wider educational system. There is still a difficulty in access to these types of knowledge in school and therefore it is more likely that learners with higher grades are from the more privileged families as they are already familiar with the associated abstract language. Unless this issue of access to academic and theoretical knowledge, is addressed at school curriculum level there will continue to be lack of parity between Sixth form colleges and Vocational education, where VE is seen as for those with the lower grades as it is linked to practice, even though the curriculum has included abstract knowledge, which has not been acknowledged by other studies. Furthermore, to address social inequality, there ought to be more done to make language that is unfamiliar, familiar to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. One way to do this would be more practice in schools as this will contextualise unfamiliar language, so experience and practice should be valued more. There is more likely then, that learners would be able to make informed choices about course they want to take after school.

Alexis who had been in school before college, engaged closely with his peers and asked tutors questions when he could not make meaning of aspects of the lesson. Towards the end of the course, he was setting individual challenges such as holding the tarantula. He was socially confident. Gresalfi (2009) suggested classroom practices play an important role in learner dispositions. Therefore, if a learner finds abstract knowledge difficult to negotiate and has limited access to personal resources such as social confidence, they may not continue to engage. Socially situated and experiential learning is important for learners to engage on a 'deeper level' or in a more meaningful way. It is possible therefore, that learner dispositions and prior experiences are used to negotiate abstract, theoretical knowledge. If this was recognised within the exosystem (curriculum) either through the design or how tutors mediate this then more learners could be motivated to identify with the vocation through the course and develop stronger lifelong learning identities.

8.6 Time

The concept of lateral and temporal connectivity (Lawy, 2002) were relevant concepts to understand how the context and time shaped vocational learning identities. The context informed learning and learner dispositions and learners aligned to the vocation through future planning. One context is the CoP, which the curriculum assumes is static, however it has its own history and evolves in time. Learning processes that transform learners also take time. An example of a process that takes time is where learners, although they find college relaxing they tend to change later as there are more demands with regards to assessments. This however is motivating for some as this is what they imagined college would be like.

The transition period is long enough for learners to gradually change, with tutors who show empathy or provide specific guidance on how to become independent. The transformation process implied changes over time. To begin with, the data and my role in the process, I found that learners revealed to me information that may not have been possible in their first year, as they were new to the course and I was also at the beginning of my journey as a researcher. So for one, learners did not reveal that they may have been diagnosed with dyslexia as the process of assessment may not have begun but for some they might not have felt comfortable to talk about to someone they were unfamiliar with. These learners talked more openly about their challenges in the last interview and this could be because I was familiar to them, some had already been diagnosed and others who came across challenges that they may not have expected, not being able to read a children's book fluently to a group of children. There is fear, embarrassment and frustration with spelling and reading when interacting with members of the community so

not only the staff but parents, children and staff. Therefore, it is likely that identity is shaped around these experiences and how others respond and engage with the learners. Tutors in college were generally aware but could not share this information without the student's permission. It may be that some learners were more trusting of staff in the community of practice and therefore could engage more fully, and others marginalised by a lack of awareness of how dyslexia may manifest in the behaviour of the learner.

Community of Practice as dynamic

From the analysis it became clear that the community of practice or the placements were seen as spaces that were static, so a curriculum created to meet the needs of the community during a specific time. However, these communities are not static - they have their own history and own trajectories that make them dynamic places that change over time. For example, learners may leave the community when they return to college or go to another community, when they return it may have changed by either having new staff members or in EY different children. Another example was seen in EY where all assessments of young children were recorded electronically and uploaded on a system that parents had immediate access to. This way of recording was not covered in college. Therefore, within the literature there is an assumption that the communities were spaces that were static. At the same time teachers who have come from the industry are not provided the time and space to research and engage directly with these communities. Training in FE is mainly around teaching and not industry or vocation specific. The syllabi are prepared by employers who are considering their immediate needs. A curriculum that does not take account of the dynamism of communities of practice, is short sighted.

Furthermore, tutors who have strong hybrid identities and who still identify with the vocation maintain links that are valued within the wider policies, for example given reasonable amount of time to maintain links. We instead should be fostering lifelong learners who are reflective and can self-direct their practice, bringing new ideas and innovations into the community and not one where they are adapting to fit into the existing community. So presently we may be doing learners a disservice if at 16 years, we are preparing them for one supposedly static community of practice. This study however does show that learners enjoy college, they engage with practice and most show strong vocational learning identities at the end.

There was a diversity of prior experiences, which means that we cannot assume all students come in with the same dispositions or competences. This was addressed within the wider VE context where courses were offered at different levels, however there is an assumption that at Level 3 learners were independent and able to complete a high level of written assessments. Within each course the assessments were designed to be graded according to four levels: Distinction, Merit, Pass and Fail, with additional criteria for the higher grades so learners had more written work rather than more complex analysis for the higher grades.

Prior experiences did matter for how learners interpreted and engaged with authentic experiences. Most EY learners from school considered the course as focused on one topic, which they regarded as 'common sense'. Seeing the course in this way for some like Clara, meant that she was bored as it did not provide any challenge. She wanted to be able to do the same as the teachers but for the teachers to tell her what to do. For others like Chloe, she could then reflect on how this applied to each setting and it gave her the confidence to use her initiative in practice. Chloe showed strong vocational learner identification at the end as she was able to set her own challenges, by putting herself outside her comfort zone. As tasks became familiar to most learners, those who showed strong identification were ones who then set other challenges.

Learners who came from Level 2 and those who were in 6th Form the year before had the furthest to go to reach a learner vocational identity. For 6th Form learners it was a second chance to get to the role they aspired to. They re-establish themselves as self-directed learners and they value learning through practice. They find abstract domain knowledge more accessible than they did in 6th Form and enjoy setting new challenges in their practice. They are confident and self direct their learning more so than the learners from school. Therefore, for these learners the course is valuable for their vocational learner identity. While the course itself did not really lead to a professional qualification, it is needed for university. For the learners from school, who did not plan to go to university, this level of qualification was not needed, so they did not need the summative assessments but may have benefited from a focus on identification through practice and maybe assessments for learning related to this. In terms of placements in AM the exploration and experimenting meant that they develop their imagination to place themselves within the vocational field and therefore were making choices that are more informed.

In EY learners from Level 2, the additional year meant that they had a choice on whether they could go to university or not. They reaffirmed their identity as strong learners through practice and the written assignments. The extra year meant they were better informed about choices. In placements they engaged for a sustained period in practice and therefore a longer period may have supported a more competent and knowledge disposition towards the vocation, which all learners demonstrate in their identification with the vocation at the end.

The debate on VE as perpetuating social inequality and ignoring social justice as it does not foster making judgements, evaluating practice and innovating may still hold true for some courses. With EY and AM, there was a strong theoretical element in the domain knowledge covered by tutors in college. Both courses, more so EY, encouraged reflection on practice with ongoing guidance from the placement assessor, during visits. Both courses at Level 3 facilitated learners entering HE. In part the curriculum within these course appear to have addressed some of the issues identified a few years ago and this may have to do with issues of parity of esteem between Sixth Form and FE. In conclusion this chapter summarise the answers to the research question.

8.7 Conclusion

In response to the Research Questions, I will summarise the discussion below.

Vocational identity develops through the interlinking of a complex system whereby the macroculture of FE education policies and the culture of the culture is linked to the exosystem of the curriculum of the learners' course. However, the learners themselves come with prior experiences and learner dispositions that have developed. These may have developed through school where there is a distinct culture based on learning as acquisition of knowledge. The knowledge is often abstract and some learners may need this to be contextualised. This could explain why learners enjoy college as they engage in practice that they see as relevant to a future role they have imagined they would participate in. Learners also may have experience of childcare through having young siblings or in AM, most learners have pets. There appears to be a strong relationship between the practice based learning experiences and learners developing identification with the vocation, with most learners at the end planning to remain in the field. However not all learners identify with the vocation even through they engage in the course and the practiced based elements of it, through placements or tasks in college. A reason may be that these learners do not use the course to align to the vocation. They were learners that, apart from the beginning of the course in every interview that followed - expressed discontent with placement. So it is likely that for some placements were places where they may have felt marginalised through either what they considered unchallenging boring tasks or through not imagining that they would belong.

Those who identified with the vocation, which was evident in how they talked and engaged with practice also showed strong dispositions to learn as they were motivated to set challenges, they were reflective in how they for example talked to children or held an animal. They also expressed an awareness that as students they were not full members and recognised that they have not had access to the full range of possibilities of engagement. The learning space needed to feel safe and trusting for learners to engage with feedback from experts. Those with stronger learning identities tended to set their own standards based on their own values and feedback even when positive, still left them questioning how they could do things differently. The transformative lens attempted to capture the process of gradual development through practice, where there was a period of exploration, then feedback that in most cases were from tutors or their peers before the practice became part of the learners repertoire.

What was significant in the process of identification and changing dispositions was the space. It was complex and layered together with dispositions that were individual shaped by prior experiences.

Common dispositional changes were: greater confidence in vocational practice and their social interactions, more reflective on practice than they are at the beginning, motivation to align further to the vocation, agency to use initiative and independence in managing time, practice and different demands. It is a process that was cyclical in most cases, over the two years but key was the exploring of authentic experiences and a shift in what was meaningful. Some learners needed more time to process domain specific knowledge as they experienced the curriculum as too focused on deadlines.

Those with strong learner identities evaluated their own practice. Given the prior experiences of most learners were precarious, the data showed that learners valued greater independence rather than being 'spoon-fed' as in school. Using the transformative lens in Chapter 6 highlighted the authenticity and complexity of vocational jobs and learners excitement about them. It pushes learning in a way that some get excited about finding new things. They engage in activities beyond the assessments. Here using the experiential frame showed that in time these contribute to changes in dispositions through reflection and evaluation. Furthermore, they have the confidence to engage independently, so meaning-making on their own and not always with an expert. These dispositions are recognised within lifelong learning - reflection and self-direction. They are more reflective as they do not need feedback from others to judge whether the activity is valued or not. The learners who were generally excited showed strong dispositions to learn as they also were initiating and self-directing some of their practice (Klotz et al., 2014). Furthermore, they were setting their own goal or challenges an indication of strong identification (Armishaw, 2007) As learners began to identify and realign some extended their practice through volunteer or casual work to align further. These are dispositions one would relate to a strong vocational identity.

The advancement of skill and the interrelationship with developing confidence, suggests that learning is not just about identification. Learning is about setting challenges and placing oneself in uncomfortable situations. Identification can motivate to do this, so identification can push learners to engage with learning and therefore if learners strongly identify they are likely to engage in lifelong learning. An example of this interrelationship can be seen in Charlie. She displayed a strong learner identity in that she used her initiative often and engaged beyond her assessments in the setting. Towards the end she was practicing like a staff member – mutually, independently, not looking for support or advice and confident. She was offered a job to cover Maternity leave and when I called her a few weeks later, she had a full time job in a different setting, and had registered on a part-time Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Education.

9 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

The literature review in Chapter 2 and 3 gave an overview of relevant studies, showing that research in Further Education in England, on the development of vocational learner identity, is minimal. Since the Wolf Report of 2011, there have been some changes to FE policies and I was keen to add to the discussion on vocational education, but from the viewpoint of the learners. Moreover, the perspective of learning used in most studies was of learning as acquisition of knowledge and skills, so in FE, competence to work in a particular vocation and contribute to the economy. I argued that this view does not consider learner dispositions, their depth of engagement in learning, and personal investment in developing vocational learning identities. Seeing learning as participatory and transformative would acknowledge these, and they were more likely to engage in lifelong learning through participation in practice.

A source of information has been the research in FE culture by the TLRP that was carried out in 2004 to 2007. However, in the last month I came across another major project by Vicky Duckworth and Rob Smith titled UK Further Education Transforming Lives project (2016-2019) which concluded that despite three levels of 'student objectification' of the FE policies, most learners lives are transformed through their experiences in FE. The three levels refer to: firstly, the 'skills' discourse around learners where they are seen as instrumental for the economy; secondly, the qualifications framework where there is a divide between academic and vocational which potentially objectifies FE learners as low achievers and, thirdly the incentivising of teachers and managers to view recruitment of learners in funding terms. Despite this culture, learners' identities are transformed through -a learning environment that accepted who they were. (Duckworth and Smith, 2019)

9.2 Personal reflections

I have tried to keep a check on my views, opinions, or my identity as child care worker, teacher and a researcher and not let it overshadow the data I collected and how I have analysed it. A reason for choosing a different course from childcare was that it would help me maintain a level of distance. There were occasionally times when I wanted to react as a practitioner for example when Cai talked about children being rough and not knowing how to play. I found this challenging, as she was at the end of her studies and did not appear to recognise that children learn through play. Furthermore, she still wanted to be told what to do at the end of the course, but she could be working independently or on her own with children in a few months after the course, as she would have received her license to practice in the form of certification. She was clear that she did not want to engage with groups of children but could be a nanny. When I asked Terika and Tina if it is possible for learners to complete the two years, without developing independence, and still not identify with the vocation, they both agreed yes, but it was not often. These learners chose not to participate and left the course generally by the end of the first year.

Each chapter of the findings used predominantly one theory as they offered a strong framework of concepts to analyse the chosen area. The ecological frame facilitated a closer look at the context, so not only that which the learner engaged in directly, but wider social aspects that indirectly affected the environment of the learner. The framework however, did not provide a structure within the learners proximal environment that could be used to analyse how learners engaged in practice. The transformative lens described change in stages and sometimes change was not so obvious. It nevertheless allowed for a different perspective from CoP, with the focus on the individual and their personal histories. The focus was on change within the individual. It also allowed analysis of learners' engagement with the course, more fully, through their own reflections at the beginning and at the end of the two years - so really the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner), around the learner. Finally, the process of transformation was recurring and spiralling whereas the CoP implied a more linear route. Cop framework was more suitable for examining participation and engagement in practice through which identities were negotiated.

A project of this scale would inevitably transform any researcher, as reflection and self-direction match the process the learners in this study went through. My identity has changed from one that was primarily defined by my role as a teacher to one that now encompasses being a researcher. This has not only entailed practice as a researcher but my general disposition as well, to one that searches for the detail and complexity in most aspects of life. Clearly, I have reflected on how I could have done things differently but then it would be another study. However, there were areas that I felt I wanted to explore further but could not help wondering that with so many other relevant studies on FE, why has policy development thus far ignored them. Maybe there are wider cultural issues in England that needs challenging. While I came to the end of writing this thesis I chanced upon a recent study by Duckworth and Smith, 2019, title Transformative Learning and Teaching, that captures the narratives of teachers and learners in FE that demonstrates that studying in FE is transformative indeed.

9.3 Theoretical concepts and frames

A criticism levelled against community of practices is that it carries the connotation of belongingness, which may not exist in all groups (Gee, 2004). Gee refers instead to affinity groups, which come together around common interests, or practices where newcomers are not separate from experts and each engages according to their own choice. Furthermore it encourages using 'dispersed knowledge' so knowledge that may not be from the same space. Learners could therefore be part of a group and not feel belonging but share a common interest. Their identity is linked to the affinity group.

The Systems framework was useful to analyse how different aspects of the environment were interlinked to shape the learners' experiences. It provided a frame to analyse the macroculture of the college, the exosystem of the curriculum and it's relationship to placement, the mesosystem and, the two microsystems of the learner - the college and the placement. There were structures within the macrosystem, for example demo rooms and placements and within the microsystem the negotiation at an individual level that learners had to engage in, which the system does not provide the tools to analyse the processes within each system. It is useful for describing the systems and what the links were, but not the nature of the links. The ecological frame did not have the tools to analyse dispositions and experiences at a microlevel. So, as learners were negotiating their imagined and realised view of the vocation, within the microsystem - there needed to be another level - another layer of analysis that required another frame. In these instances, the other theories were useful.

Chapter 6 used the Transformative lens, as the ecological frame places minimal emphasis on the learner as an active participant. It used Mezirow's theory on transformative learning that was adapted into 5 phases, by Nohl (2015), to analyse dispositions and how they changed over the two years. The examination focused on the interrelationship between identification with the vocation and disposition to learn. The theory provided some useful tools to analyse dispositions. However, the phases were not distinct as suggested by Nohl (2015), so the frame was adjusted to represent the data in this study. When learners encounter a novel experience, at the beginning they engage with these drawing on resources from their prior experiences. They explore these showing that they value appraisal by others. This was important for some learners as feedback raised confidence. However, there were learners who deliberately chose challenges to expand their comfort zone. When learners do this, they appear to use a reflexive stance to evaluate their practice instead of feedback from others. As most learners become more knowledgeable and confident in their practice, they are willing to initiate and engage independently.

Yes, they come with resources but how do they use their resources in practice. The transformative frame was not used in its totality as the data did not fit the phases, so the frame included also experiential learning and reference to Vygotsky et al. (1978). The phases were not followed in the exact cycle as some learners, after experiencing novel activities did not need appraisal, but found meaning through repeating and experimenting - so they reflected and made judgements themselves. Appraisal by others was not enough. For some there had to be an evaluation or reflection or reflexivity on how they viewed their own practice or a more personal appraisal was more valuable than appraisal from others.

Community of Practice (CoP) concepts of Wenger (1998) were useful to analyse learners alignment and engagement in practice. Although students were not full members within the community, there were concepts that could explain their experience, such as 'legitimate peripheral participation' or 'belonging'. It was effective when used to analyse participation within EY but for AM, as learners were looking to join widely different communities, 'landscape of practice' was used. CoP was useful to understand changes in identity through analysing the move from the periphery to being full members or the analysis of the trajectory from the outside to inside the community, but learners were not only becoming knowledgeable, they also showed changes in values, beliefs and attitudes over the two years.

CoP's are not fixed and we may be doing learners a disservice by approaching it as such, through the curriculum. Another reason for not using CoP as the only theory, as identified by Wenger himself (1998) - CoP are insular and therefore can be an obstacle to learning. It can entrap the learner to sustaining the identity and therefore exert a power that facilitates social inequalities or social injustice. Additionally, these communities could be static - so not a learning community as Wenger envisaged. If the learner is to become a full member with no new practices to add, is it possible that they do not continue learning once they join the community - so no lifelong learning... - so how does the course bring new practices that are changing in relation to the wider world for example the introduction of Technology and social media, if the tutors themselves are not given CPD (Continuing Professional Development), specific to the industry or continue engaging in learning themselves, beyond pedagogic practice? If we approached the communities or the landscapes as changing then it is likely that learners are prepared for changes - more likely to create lifelong learner.

The case study approach allowed an exploration that could be adapted over the two years of data collection. Learners' identities were developing and changing so the methods could capture change through how learners talked and practice over the two years. The

analysis process could then draw out the changes at the end. A concern at the beginning was, what if the learners who chose to participate were those who left after the first year? This however was not the case in EY but in AM 2 learners left, which further reduced participant numbers. Therefore, this could be a draw back of the method I have used that is of collecting data over two years. The study had not planned for it to be generalised to the wider population, but the concern was that the difference in numbers between the courses could have meant that I would be drawing mainly on the data from EY. The learners in AM though, were deeply reflective and required very few prompts to talk about their experiences with rich detail.

9.4 Contributions to knowledge

I have not identified any other study of VE that have used the ecological lens of Bronfenbrenner, which I believe has been very effective in highlighting the complexity of the vocational education system that affects the learner indirectly. It allowed the analysis of macrolevel features that directly result from policy changes to the microlevel of the learners immediate experiences, and showed how they are interlinked. When evaluating policy impact in FE I think this lens can be useful in moderating changes that are hastily implemented or introducing too many changes within a short period without first assessing the impact within all the systems. I believe changes presently are only evaluated at the macrolevel not at the level of experience of the learner. The focus on space matters as it made the familiar strange. It allowed me to focus on how different aspects were linked - how the intended curriculum by the awarding body is enacted so that the learner can make meaning. The vocational syllabus is prepared with the involvement of employers who use a skills acquisition lens, which objectifies the learner and sees them as shapes to be moulded in a form that would suit their needs. However, the enactment by professionals with experience of young people makes this altogether a more meaningful experience for the learners. This issue in turn highlights the value in being transparent about educational strategies.

Fostering independence appears to be implicit in how tutors and placement mentors enact the curriculum, even though learners do not appreciate this at the beginning of the course. In engaging with how the tutor has enacted it, most learners become aware of their own learning. There is therefore value in being transparent with learners about educational strategies that we use as teachers, instead of only having expectations, as learners who were aware, engaged in a practice through negotiating self direction in their learning. By being transparent, it is likely that those learners who were not aware, could benefit from being reflective on their own identity as a learner.

9.5 Recommendations

Changes to policies in FE needs to be considered holistically, for example if no teaching qualification is needed, what would be the implications of this for learners, especially when the personal and social investments of tutors are not acknowledged presently within wider college policies. If a teacher only has expertise of the vocation – would they be able to work alongside learners and effectively engage so that they develop a vocational learner identity. The systems lens brought into the focus the frequent changes to the macro culture and the curriculum but there are few studies on how this affects the learners over time. If there are changes to teacher training requirements how will this affect learners if teachers are experienced in industry but not in education. Where they may not know what and how to use effective pedagogies within the mesosystem to shape learner trajectories into the landscape of practice rather than into one community.

Tutors were under pressure to 'retain' learners, as we saw in the case of Clara, Abigail and Amal, and learners were considered as having failed if they did not complete the course. Moreover, learners could not change courses in the middle or after a few months. They would need to leave and register the following academic year. In the case of Clara she herself did not know what else she could do as there was not anything else she was interested in. Change here would need to be at the macrosystem level, so learners are not seen as 'failures' if they decided early on that they did not want to not align to the vocation. This was an area that frustrated me as a teacher as I felt there were limited options for the young people who were still unsure about what they wanted to do long term.

A recommendation for Awarding bodies would be reduce the number of written assignment, but set more challenging tasks, to bring more focus on reflecting and reviewing content, through practice. This could include careful consideration to how assignment questions are sets, for example have only one question for which learners could achieve a Pass, merit or distinction, instead of a range of criteria for each grade. Taking this approach may encourage a change in pedagogy so that while encouraging independence and fostering confidence in practice, there could be more practice that encouraged problem solving and self directed learning. Furthermore, a focus on identification with the vocation is more likely to foster dispositions to learn lifelong.

Literature review saw course as being broken down into tasks but in practice both courses within college there was engagement with theoretical knowledge. However, from the comments of a few students, this was not challenging enough. Furthermore learners talked about the amount of assignments so a time factor rather than the content being challenging so there may be an element of truth about the content knowledge - that yes it is not enough to only make meaning in practice and this limits the ability to bring something new to the vocation. The courses did bring in theory but this is something some learners did not find meaningful, more especially those who did not have plans to go to university. Wheelahan (2015) suggested a different curriculum, one that offers opportunities to develop reflexivity, self-direction and flexibility in adjusting to different contexts. So maybe the move is not away from theoretical knowledge but contextualising knowledge through practice and fostering these dispositions.

The precarious prior experiences from school needs to be taken in to account in how they make the transition from school to college. In this study college tutors make these adjustments in how they individually enact the curriculum for example AM focused at the beginning of fostering independence in how learners practice, managing deadlines for assignments and volunteering in the landscape of practice as the course only requires two weeks in placement. Here you can see the personal investment so tutors, however this ought to be part of the curriculum either at school or in college.

To share the findings and recommendations of this study I plan to firstly identify seminars and conferences where there may be an interest in the field. This will be done through the University of Leeds initially. I also plan to contact Research Centres that have studied Vocational Education in the past and prepare a summarised report with the intention of entering a dialogue into how the enquiry could be improved or used in the future. Finally, I plan to write a journal article to share with the wider educational environment including secondary schools and vocational institutions.

Identity as a concept is used widely to understand not only society and culture, but the psychological individual too. As a concept therefore it can be confusing as its use crosses so many different domains, however this is also an advantage as it contributes to the study of the multi faceted nature of learners' lives. Each study as this one has, defines it to be used as a tool, in this study to analyse learning to become, in young people. It has allowed a closer examination of the processes that learners experience in a space, and the changes to their dispositions over time. As this study sought to highlight the personal

investments of these young people in an educational culture that has always undermined and undervalued what they do, it has been an effective tool.

The other tool was ecological approach using Bronfenbrenner's systems theory, as this facilitated a close examination of the varying systems at play around the learner. The research questions at the beginning had not anticipated such a complex interplay of processes and systems over time that interlink in the formation of vocational learner identities.

Furthermore, a case study approach facilitated an in-depth study of a small facet of the learners' experiences. There were microsystems outside college that learners mentioned that could not be explored, as there needed to be constraints on the amount of data that could be collected in the time given. However it has highlighted areas that would be worth exploring that were significant in the lives of these learners. A number of learners had part time work so how do these contribute to developing dispositions. I did not find any studies in this area for this particular age range. Furthermore, many learners had challenging or difficult home lives outside college, which they alluded to, especially in the last interview. This may be to do with the nature of our relationship having changed over the two years - it became more relaxed. Some of the studies in the early 2000's (Bloomer, Hodgkinson, Colley, Bathmaker) had explored aspects in this area, but had any policies addressed them and if they had, are they effective in addressing the personal challenges of learners? The home life or the wider socio-cultural environment certainly contributes to the dispositions that learners develop towards learning and the vocation - this would be an area worth exploring to add to this study.

While I covered some of above, and there are already some existing studies, clearly there areas that a different methodology could explore. The gatekeeper in this study was the college, which may have bounded learners' responses in their discussions, as the interviews were in college and I visited EY learners with the assessor from college. All of these may have meant that learners in the interviews only told me what they may have thought was relevant to college (Grice, 2006). The education system in England prioritises social inclusion at the expense of social justice - so there may be value in using a social justice lens to highlight weaknesses in the system before learners get to VE. In this area I think we have much to learn from the European education system where there is much less of an issue with parity of esteem between vocational and 'academic' courses and the learner and their personal investments in vocational education is valued.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Grid of participants

Name	1 st interview	1 st observation	1 st post-observation Interview	1 st placement mentor interview					2 nd interview		3 Final observation	3 rd interview	3 Placement mentor interview	Emailed summary-phone interview
Chris														
Cayla														
Coco														
Chloe													Phoebe	
Charlotte													Palash	
Cameron				Petra									Petra	
Christie													Prem	
Caitlin													Peggy	
Cara													Pauline	
Charlie													Purnima	
Connie				Patti										
Casey														
Cai														
Carys													Prisha	
Cate														
Clara														
Abigail				Phillipa										
Adene														
Alyssa														
Amber														
Amal														
Alexis														
Name	1 st interview				1 st lesson observation	2 nd lesson observation	3 rd lesson observation	2 nd interview				3 rd interview		
Terika														
Tina														
Tanisha														
Taleb														
Tim														
Taylor														
Tamar														
	All complete/ Emailed and responded				Transcribing/writing field notes/ Emailed & waiting			Left or didn't carry out/ emailed but no response					Not carried out	

Appendix 2 - Sample field notes

23/11/15

Terika invited me into the staff room where I spoke to Tina to plan visiting students with her. She goes three times a year to assess students. Students have a booklet ...Tina is very busy overseeing at least 80 students. She has asked the students to prepare a healthy eating task for their first assessment., so all students can do this but also gives her the opportunity to then have a look at the setting, talk to mentors so that she knows what tasks a student can or can't do in that setting. For some students the first visit could be as late as Feb or March (Term starts end of August) so that was when my observations and post-observation interviews with, so in terms of the data some learners had more experience by then.

Found I was reassuring staff that I was not observing to make a judgement about their practice as one would do for an Ofsted observation,

27/11/15

Before students entered, Tamar came in to talk to the course tutor so I had a chat with her. She said that some students don't have placements yet. They are asked to find their own placements and students don't really care and don't make a real effort to look. If they are rejected or told no they give up, they don't look further. In AC students 80 students have to be placed and there is not enough places in the area. I asked why this is not staggered over the two years and she said the module is taught as a thick short module, which I understood as short and cramped within a few weeks, also it is difficult to manage the assessment if students are doing it at different times.

14/6/2016

First day of interviews 2. In the childcare building, there is a lot of construction and the students are in a new classroom so I had to find a space on my own. Staff didn't know where I could be, went to the café and it was very noisy but managed to still hear however atmosphere not relaxed enough for reflections.

Cameron – quietly spoken but more confident than the first time. Would like to earn and would experience a real dilemma if she was offered a job. Still had to ask a lot of questions – not enough depth.

Last observation of Charlie: 2019

The staff were busy doing displays and other staff getting snack. Didn't see staff get down to the level of child in the room. Children seemed happy. Did hear staff tell a child off loudly, all the others went quiet and looked at Charlie - she looked uncomfortable. She briefly implied that she was not happy and there were quite a few students on her course who were not going into childcare. She turned round so staff could not see she was not happy but I think that she was not as engaged or enthusiastic when I last saw her.

Appendix 3 – Consent form for learners



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

How vocational students develop their identities in relation to their chosen vocation

Agreeing to Take Part



Please tick the box to answer these questions about taking part.

If you don't understand something, please ask me or someone close to you to explain.

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
I have read the information sheet		
I have been able to ask questions		
I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason		
I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded		
I agree to be observed in practice		
I agree to the use of anonymous quotes in publications		
I want to take part		

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

THANK YOU



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Appendix 4 – Participant information leaflet

Potential Benefits of participating

- You will have focused time to reflect on your progress in your course
- You will have an opportunity to learn how research is carried out
- You will be paid £10 at the first and last interview.



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Identity

An invitation to take part in a research project about young people



The research is about
How vocational students develop their identities in relation to their chosen vocation

Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What will you be asked to do if you took part?

I will ask you to take part in three interviews, (beginning of your first year, end of your first year and four months into your second year), each lasting about one hour. I will also observe you twice in your work placement, once at the beginning of your studies and the second in your last placement in your second year.



Some questions that you may have

What happens to the information that is collected?

During observations I will take notes and the interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. This research data will be stored safely on the university network. Any personal data will be made anonymous. I will interpret and analyze the findings before presenting this in a thesis as part of my assessment. I will present the findings to the college to use in a way that will support their aim of ensuring the best for the students. When presenting the findings I will ensure that you are not identifiable. You will be offered the opportunity to read the transcripts of the interviews and summaries of observations, if not soon after,

Who can take part?

First year students who are on one of the two chosen courses and who are between the ages of 16 and 18 years old

How long is the study?

I would like your involvement to be a positive experience and hope that you will be involved for eighteen months, where I will meet you three times.

What happens if you do not want to take part or if you change your mind?

You decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Who I am...

My name is Shamin Parthab and I am a PhD student at Leeds University. I am interested in how young people, who are on a vocational course, develop a worker identity. I am hoping to involve 24 students from two different courses, and follow their development over 18 months.

Appendix 5 – Interview questions with students and tutors

First Interview of students

Pre-interview personal history

Purpose:

To find out about

- influences from the past in the three different contexts - broader social context (home, other environments); formal learning environment (secondary school and college) and work contexts (other experience related to vocation or previous work)
- To find out how students see themselves as learners
- Aspirations for the two years of study and long term beyond study at college

Questions:

School	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell me about school? 2. Did they offer any advice, support in your choice 3. Did you have any work experience through school?
Choice	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why did you choose this course/vocation?/ why not apprenticeship 2. Who do you know that does a similar job, 3. What experience have you had of the vocation before starting the course? 4. How did you get on the course
Family	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me a little about your family? 2. What do they think about what you are doing?
Plans	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are your plans for when you finish your diploma? 2. Why? 3. Do you know of anyone else doing the same?
Other interests	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell me about any work experience you have had in the past (paid, unpaid, part-time, volunteering) 2. What interests outside college do you have? Do you belong to other groups?
College	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell me a bit about your experiences thus far on the course? Do you like being a student? 2. Which parts of college/ course are you enjoying? What do you enjoy? Which activities do you enjoy? 3. Can you tell me about your our relations with your tutors? 4. Do you have visiting speakers? 5. What type of practical activities do you do in college? 6. Have you been on any visits? 7. What activities do you do in college that is directly related to what you do in placement? 8. Refer to observed lesson? What did you learn in that lesson? Why is it relevant?
Placement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What were your expectations? What did you think it was going to be like? Were there any surprises? 2. Tell me about your placement. How did it feel when you started? How did you get involved? 3. Give me some examples of how you applied what you had learnt in college

Second interview with students at the end of the first year

Purpose:

To find out about:

- learning experience since the last interview
- aspirations for the second year and the long term future
- experiences in the community of practice
- other work experience
- changes in learning disposition

Questions:

I want this interview to be where you talk about what you want to talk about and if how I have worded my questions don't make sense to you and if you would rather talk about something else that is relevant then that is ok. So, if you have a story that is relevant to how you identify with the vocation or the process of learning then tell me.

Give students time to reflect on the year.

1. Tell me about your **first year** on the course – What have you most **enjoyed**? What was your worst part/ **challenges** on the course? How did you deal with these? Consider time in college and in placement. You have now done a year on the course, tell me about yourself now as compared to when you began. If you had to **describe yourself now would it be different from the beginning** of the year in terms of your level of confidence, your ability to think or reflect on situations or events, personality, dressing.
2. What type of **activities** did you enjoy? Were there any activities you didn't enjoy or thought were not necessary for you to do? Can you tell me more about these? (ex AC4 didn't enjoy taking the dead stick insects from cage and appeared less confident than the others in practicals).
3. Was there a time when you felt **anxious** about something? What did you do
4. Incident during observation (talk about **an activity** they did – since I have not seen it) – I was very interested in the way you did that...Do you often do this? Is this a good way for you to learn? **How did you experience it?**
5. What do you think about the course? Do you think **this course is preparing** you well to be a AC/CC worker. You have been in placement and have seen what it is like and met people who you thought were very good at what they did. Do you think you are getting the skills that you will need?
6. Are there any things that you have done that you have been particularly **proud of and feel good** about doing well? Are there any things you wish you **had done better** or want to improve on as you continue the course?
7. Is there an experience that you had that **confirmed this was a good career** for you / or was there any experience that made you doubt that it was a good career for you? Tell me about that time when it clicked for you or when you thought that you were so glad I had learnt that because it helped me with the particular situation.
8. Now that you know a bit about the culture of the workplace, do you think you will **fit in**? Why? From these experiences, do you think you will get along with **your future workmates**? Do you have opportunities to learn about the culture of the workplace? Tell me a bit about the culture at in your placement.
9. Did your **practice/placement make you think differently**?
10. **Has how you approach problems or unknowns changed** since you started college? Can you think of an example where you had to use your own judgement even after teacher told you what to do? There was a certain amount of leeway to how you carried out the task. For example the feeding of the animals, I noticed they didn't always use a scale to measure quantities. Alternatively, how to carry/handle the animals. Alternatively, in CC they weren't told how to exactly interact with children, to respect family values?

11. What **are your plans for next year** and when you finish? Do you feel the same way about the course going in to the second year as you did coming in at the beginning of the first year. Is this the same from the last interview? If different then what has brought change?
12. Therefore, **do you see yourself working in AC/CC in 5 years time**. Do you feel like you are becoming like someone who really wants to do this as their job? If you had to imagine where you would be and what you would be doing when you were 25 what would it be?

Last interview with students in AC completing the one-year subsidiary programme

Same as above

1. What are your plans now that you have finished?

Second interview with Course leader at the end of the first year

Purpose:

- To help me to think of what I could ask the students
- To be more attentive when doing my analysis
- To get the teachers view of how students are negotiating the process of becoming professionals in the vocation.
- To find out the tutors' values since this will shape how they deliver and position themselves in the course.

I want this interview to be where you talk about what you want to talk about and if how I have worded my questions don't make sense to you and if you would rather talk about something else that is relevant then that is ok. So, if you have a story that is relevant to how you see students/yourself identify with the vocation or the process of learning then tell me.

1. How is the course going? Students have now completed their first year do you think they are getting there (closer to **being good practitioners**)?
2. Tell me what it means to you to be a good animal care/ childcare worker? What kinds of things do they need to know and be able to do? Do you think that your students are being prepared to be good practitioners by going through this course? Do you think that your students are being prepared to be good practitioners by going through this course?
3. Do you think this course prepares them for the vocation in these days? **If you could make changes** to the course what would you do?
4. Placements, what do you think about the value, length of time, .students thoughts about the value/ experience? Is this working? What do students make of it? What would be better or different?
5. This course is supposed to prepare students for the vocation. Is this the only aim? Do you think college plays a role in their **becoming rounded young people**? Which do you think is most important?
6. Now that you know your students better and have an idea of their practice, do you think that they will get along with their **future workmates** from these experiences? Do you think they will all become professionals in the field? What would it take for them to be successful? Can you see them in 5 year's time?
7. Students who are leaving or have already left, Do you think there were **challenges these students may have faced**? Are there any early signs that students planning to only do the first year?
8. You have been within the profession practicing as childcare worker animal care worker and now you are a teacher within a college, tell me about **your experience of this change**? What is this course about to you?
9. The college has changed the way students are mentored. What do you think about this?

Last interview with students

Purpose:

To find out about:

- Learning experiences in the second year
- Plans/Aspirations when studies are over
- Work experience in the second year
- Attitude/disposition to learning
- The activities, events, relationships that were observed in second observation (Child care)

Questions:

1. What are your plans in terms of work or studies now that you have come to almost the end of your course? What has been the most influential in your choice?
2. If there is a change - disposition to learning, plans (ref to 1) from the first interview what events, thoughts have brought about the change. Do you think you have changed over the last year? In what way?
3. Tell me about second year on the course – What have you enjoyed this year? What were the challenges? How did you deal with these?
4. Have you changed in the way you learn /type of learner you were at the beginning of your course? Why/how?
5. How do you now learn best? What strategies/methods do you find most effective?
6. Do you feel prepared to now work in animal care? In what ways are you prepared/ not prepared?
7. What were the challenges in practice? How did you manage the challenges?