

Questioning identities: being and becoming a lecturer.

**An exploration of how early years professionals from
a range of practice backgrounds are authoring
themselves as University Lecturers.**

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Abstract

This research sets out to explore the identities of University Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies from a range of early years professional practice backgrounds, and to examine ways in which they author themselves as professionally 'being and becoming'. The research is considered relevant in the context of ongoing discourses regarding recognition of professional status within Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), alongside neoliberal notions of commodification, managerialism and scrutiny in Higher Education (HE).

Employment of the theoretical framework of 'figured worlds', adopted by Holland et al (1998), is used to examine notions of how identities may be shaped as these lecturers encounter and navigate their way through the systems and structures of their professional landscape. The research focuses on a small and specific group of participants within one post-92 university in central England. Potentiality for improvisation, imagination and agency is explored through artefact elicitation and a narrative life history approach, directing attention to the stories the participants tell of their lived experiences and understandings of their identities.

Key findings draw attention to points of tension, challenge and opportunities for participants to re-imagine themselves set against the backdrop of deficit discourses and perceived lack of professional recognition. The significance of dialogue and discursive spaces emerge as central points of rupture in the familiar, expected and traditional plotlines shaping their figured worlds. In essence, what we tell each other matters. Implications are that the diversity of lecturers' backgrounds and experiences needs to be celebrated. Dialogic spaces to articulate and affirm professional recognition through lived experiences would provide space to reimagine academic identities and benefit and enrich students, colleagues and the wider HE community.

KEYWORDS: professional identities, figured worlds, dialogic spaces, improvisation, re-imaginings, agency

Thesis

Questioning identities: being and becoming lecturers. An exploration of how early years professionals from a range of practice backgrounds are authoring themselves as University Lecturers

Research aims:

1. To explore how University Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies, from a range of early years professional practice backgrounds, experience and author themselves as professionally 'being and becoming';
2. To examine critically how the systems and structures enacted within higher education construct discourses of the professional lecturer;
3. To theorise how early years professionals experience and enact their sense of identity as they encounter and navigate the changing HE landscape as University Lecturers.

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the context in which a group of professionals from backgrounds in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) identify as Lecturers in Higher Education (HE). Located within a post-92 University in the Faculty of Education in the English Midlands, the way in which this particular group of professionals enact their sense of identities is the central focus of this study. Challenges for identity facing those in HE are posited by Nixon (2015), who highlights aspects of neoliberal ideas of commodification as foregrounding times of change within the sector. He reflects on implications of "regulation, financial incentives, rewards, quality standards as well as academic, public and professional values" acting as an implicit "force-field" (Nixon 2015, p6) in and through which identities are being storied. Consideration of such force fields, as the systems and structures

that form the terrain of HE institutions and how these may shape identities for those navigating the landscape as 'predetermined spaces', are discussed as a way to critically engage with the lived experiences of a group of HE Lecturers.

Within this chapter, consideration of the context of early years practice is presented to initially foreground later discussions concerning discourses of professional identities for those who share commonality in career trajectory from ECEC into HE. Professionalism, professional knowledge and professional instability (Bartram 2021, Brooker 2014, Campbell-Barr 2019, Nixon 2015) are introduced as ways to direct attention to the historical and current cultural context through which the participants story themselves as professionally 'being and becoming'. In order to explore critically complex notions of identity, I draw on Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cane's seminal work, 'Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds' (1998), and their notion of 'figured worlds' as a lens which directs attention to cultural activities and cultural production of identities. Holland et al (1998), developing the work of Bakhtin and Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, consider identities located within and through activity in social and cultural practices as a continuously evolving process. Just as our activity is not confined to singular contexts, then neither is the development of 'self-understandings' (identities); rather, they emphasise the plurality and fluidity of identities. In articulating one of their central tenets of figured worlds, they maintain that they are historical phenomena, to which we are recruited or into which we enter, which themselves develop through the works of their participants. Figured worlds, like activities, are not so much things or objects to be apprehended, as processes or traditions of apprehension which gather us up and give us form as our lives intersect them (Chaffee and Gupta 2018). Holland et al (1998) develop a complex framework which opens spaces for new imaginings and ways of being. It is this notion of space where they suggest we come to author ourselves – maintaining that we are inextricably part of, but not a replication of, such practices – that is of particular relevance in supporting the exploration of how University Lecturers from a range of early years professional backgrounds experience and author themselves as professionally being and becoming. Identification with some of their key concepts is made in relation to emerging themes in order to begin to theorise notions of identity. The starting point for this research is presented as a way to contextualise the focus,

and is an important feature in how this chapter unfolds in introducing areas of uncertainty or 'sites of ignorance' (Wagner 2010) that have shaped the research.

By theorising discourses of identities, I seek to explore possible sites of struggle, resistance and potential space for agency, adopting Holland et al's (1998) figured world position on identity formation as a process which develops in a world of activity, as a consequence of a life lived. This activity, they maintain, develops over the course of our lives and encapsulates the personal world shot through with historical and cultural forms of understanding as well as social relations to others. Whilst detailed consideration of key aspects of Holland et al's (1998) ideas are discussed throughout this thesis – history in person, figurative and positional identities, orchestration and authoring of the self – it is perhaps their tenet concerning the agential capacity of individuals which holds most resonance for me, given my own starting point for this research in exploring how HE Lecturers experience and author themselves as professionally being and becoming.

The conception of identities as dialogic (Bakhtin 1982) is at the heart of Holland et al's (1998) work. Orchestration and improvisation, relating to our participation in the social world, our responses to it, and how others respond to us, are at the crux of their theoretical ideas of identity and agency. Therefore, an understanding of the way in which professionals author themselves as being and becoming is of central importance in order to explore how they enact their sense of identity as they navigate the changing landscape of HE as University Lecturers. This shaped the methodological decision of this study to utilise narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) and, in particular, a narrative life history approach. This places primacy on human life as interpreted in and through the stories we tell of ourselves and our experiences (Gill and Goodson 2011).

1:2 Starting point

The aims of this thesis have a clear connection to my own professional background in early years practice as increasingly I became interested in exploring how lecturers such as myself, from practice backgrounds outside of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), may be authoring themselves as University Lecturers.

As an alumna of an established post-92 university in the Northwest of England, I secured my first lecturing post in HE following my graduation on the course I had previously studied, that of Early Childhood Studies (ECS). The decision to seek employment with another post-92 HE institution, however, highlighted my interest in the potential for agency in predetermined spaces created within universities. Initially, although this new post had similarities to that of my first in terms of job title, role and responsibilities, this experience marked a significant rupture in my sense of professional identity. As an alumna and employee of my first university, I felt my identity was constructed in a particular way by myself and others. Professionally, I felt positioned by the notion that I was a student practitioner who had 'done well' by gaining a position as a lecturer. Storied by others and myself, I can reflect on the implications of that on my professional identity, creating a predetermined space where agency to be, and act, differently was limited. The experience of changing institution, however, appeared to significantly disrupt these narratives. Being storied differently, and now seen by others as a former lecturer and ex-employee of an established HE institution, shifted my sense of self. It proved to be a catalyst that opened up possibilities to enact new ways of being. Akin to Holland et al's (1998, p272) notion of improvisation or the embodiment of "human agency", this disruption called for different actions and behaviours and the authoring of a different self. Therefore, the significance of this experience resulted in an interest in exploring that of others, as they seek to find their way through what seems to be a determining set of discourses. Consequently, utilisation of Holland et al's (1998) figured worlds provides a way to begin to engage with the systems and structures that are enacted within higher education practice and how, as individuals, we may operate within and on such structures.

1:3 Sites of ignorance

The title of this research is significant not only in directing readers to the topic and subject of my research but in how it reflects my own career journey from early years practice to University Lecturer. A stance of being and becoming has resonance with my ontological position on identity, as one of flux, incomplete and entwined within and through the social, cultural and historical world in which we live. It also reflects my journey into research as an

emerging doctoral scholar facing a shift in my own sense of identity moving from one HE institution to another. Walker and Thomson (2010) maintain an unsurprising tenet that the production and pursuit of knowledge is central to doctoral research; however, I feel my own research sits more comfortably with the notion explored by Wagner (2010) where the act of facing 'sites of ignorance' becomes a catalyst for new knowledge. Not understanding an event was the starting point for me; as Wagner (2010, p34) suggests, this generative site of ignorance can be thought about in two different ways, as engaging with the "blank spot and blind spot" in research activity. The former relates to those familiar areas of research; looking at identities within the field of HE is not unfamiliar territory particularly at times of change within the sector. Set against an HE professional landscape marked by neoliberal discourses of massification (Hoesin and Rao 2021), commodification (Bartram 2021, Nixon 2015) and regulation (Gunn 2018, Hathaway and Rao 2021, Shaw 2015), this research is linked to current concerns regarding how those experiencing such uncertainty may be engaged in the complex and diverse project of identities, navigating the systems and structures of a changing HE landscape. Wagner (2010), however, emphasises the significance of engaging with the blank spots, and maintains that this is where our research gaze should be directed. In this case, choosing to explore how University Lecturers are experiencing and enacting their sense of identity set against a career history of early years practice, as a professional field where professionalism is itself a contested term (Brock 2013, Campbell-Barr 2019, Dyer 2018, Osgood 2015), may serve to uncover stories yet untold or unheard.

In order to engage with Wagner's (2010) sites of ignorance and at the same time address the research aims of this project, my attention needed to focus on the stories of others beyond my own experience. Discussions concerning my positionality as a researcher, whose own story places me as an in-between (Chhabra 2020), are addressed in later chapters. However, whilst there is a clear relationship and connectivity-between my own experience and that of my participants, this is not by any means an auto-biographical study. I have made a conscious decision to turn my research gaze beyond myself – other than to share my own experiences as a starting point – in order to focus on the stories of others. I do return to that starting point throughout this study as a way to contextualise and discuss my

positionality, but it is the exploration of participants' stories, and the implications of those stories, that is of primary importance in exploring the aims of this research.

Wagner (2010) considers what may constitute blind spots and illustrates how this may relate to research metrics, where there may be aspects that do not fit identified criteria: "Blind spot ignorance corresponds to matters that do not fit anywhere on the grid" (Wagner 2010, p34). This metaphor provided a useful guide when thinking about knowledge generation and the value of research which seeks to engage with matters that "do not fit" (Wagner 2010, p34). This was a site of struggle for me: how does one begin to engage with the unseen, incongruous, unobserved matters of identities? That position shifted, however, when I had the opportunity to present my research ideas to a membership group of the Professional Association of Sector-Endorsed Foundation Degrees in Early Years (SEFDEY) who were familiar with the field of early years professionalism and adopted a key role in supporting novice entrants. Following my presentation, the next speaker confidently called for – and received – agreement from the audience on the state of early years practice, as one marked by a lack of recognition, undervalued and underpaid, and unrecognised as a professional field. This highlighted the dominance of discourses from within the field where these tenets were viewed as legitimate by those seeking to support the next generation of professionals. Mindful of the aim to explore how University Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies from a range of early years practice backgrounds were experiencing and enacting their sense of identity, this experience served to illuminate a further layer of previously unconsidered issues. Concerned with matters of instability, legitimacy, being and belonging, as part of their claims to vocational knowledge and experience underpinning a career in HE, a blind spot of ignorance that demands exploration had, for me, become visible.

1:4 Early Childhood Studies: Career history & early childhood practice

An academic route into working with young children is itself a relatively new undergraduate offer emerging from the UK government drive to professionalise the early years workforce in the early 2000s into that of a graduate led workforce (McGillivray 2008, Miller 2008). As

Urban (2008) maintains, in England this pertained to the goal of the Children's Workforce Strategy (DfES 2005) to deliver on the Every Child Matters agenda (DfES 2004), in which the qualifications, skills and training of an early years workforce were key constituents to improving outcomes for children. Degree level knowledge was heralded as an essential aspect of high-quality provision for children across the maintained and private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sectors in England (Moyles, Payler and Georgeson 2014). As Hadfield, Jopling and Needham (2015, p6) state, since 1997 early years provision and practice had been the "subject of an avalanche of change". Macro level societal focus in England on provision of early years places, as a strategy to combat poverty and address rises in the costs of welfare through aiding parents into the labour market, were key driving forces (Hadfield, Jopling and Needham 2015).

In addition, changes within the sector were fuelled by a response to the government-funded research project, 'The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education' (EPPE) (Silva et al 2004), which emphasised the long-term benefits for children of attending high quality early years provision on positive future outcomes. Attention, concern and change which mark the current field of early years will be discussed more fully in later chapters; however, an important aspect is considered by Campbell-Barr (2019, p29) who problematizes the notion of policy driven change as one marking a top down "technocratic approach". It is this alignment between professional identity and a set of desirable attributes and skills which can, she maintains, lead to a lack of agency where such determinants act to silence alternative narratives and autonomy in favour of being and becoming "passive recipients of policy" (Campbell-Barr 2019, p21).

Professionalism within the field of early years is also questioned by Osgood (2012), who looks at how discourses for improvement couched in performativity, assessment and regulation marginalise the diverse experiences of those within the field. She maintains that where the "causal relationship between professionalism and quality" become entrenched and unchallenged, then alternative views of being and becoming a professional remain unheard (Osgood 2012, p129). By employing Holland et al's (1998) concept of 'figured worlds' and their precept of figurative identities, opportunities are provided to look at the activities or stories from our past, and consider how these act to position us as we use this history in person to "mediate...the present" (Holland et al 1998, p61). Therefore, a

consideration of this group of lecturers, and the way in which they experience and enact their sense of identity as they encounter the changing landscape of HE, may also reflect their professional past and the potential for agency within the field of early years.

1:5 Current Crisis

This research, looking at the context of identities for HE Lecturers with early years professional backgrounds, comes at a time of challenge and crisis within the early years sector (Early Years Alliance 2021). The notion of professionalism and professional status is a recurring theme debated and researched, with calls for professional recognition, investment in workforce skills, and parity with other education professions (Nutbrown 2012). As Hoskins and Smedley (2020, p184) maintain, in England this reflected a policy drive focused on the creation of a skilled “graduate workforce to improve outcomes for children”. Whilst this is looked at in greater detail within the following chapters, it is pertinent to set these debates against the current early years landscape in England. The Early Years Workforce Commission, in their recent report, ‘A Workforce in Crisis: Saving Our Early Years’ (EYWC 2021), highlighted many concerns from across the sector, which have been exacerbated by the COVID 19 pandemic. Among the most significant were funding challenges which “pose a risk to the sustainability of a quality workforce” (EYWC 2021, p4). Whilst the pandemic served to highlight the importance of the role of the early years sector it has also raised the need for urgent funding to ensure a high quality provision for all children.

A report presented by the Early Years Alliance (EYA 2021a) also highlights the challenges for early years settings in recruiting and retaining staff, putting the sustainability of early years provision at the forefront, particularly in areas of deprivation where they state that it is most needed. The EYA (2021a, p29) identifies the “lack of interest in the early years as a prospective career” as part of the issue that needs to be urgently addressed through government; it emphasises the need to determine “suitable salary ranges...in light of the pivotal importance of early years professionals in supporting children’s learning and development”. Lamenting on the jettisoning of government commitment to grow the graduate workforce put forward in the Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE 2017), the EYWC

(2021) maintains that a lack of clarity in career structure, pay and reward have compounded issues of retention. This is outlined very starkly by Hoskins and Smedley (2019, online) when reflecting on how graduates in early years practice are positioned:

Graduates will be paid on average £7.50 an hour to work in childcare, which equates to approximately £14,000 a year within a context of limited possibilities for career progression. But in other sectors of education, such as teaching, graduates can expect to earn starting salaries of £25,000-£30,000.

The report by the Early Years Workforce Commission (EYWC 2021, p4) calls for “funding, equity and clarity” in regard to the significance of helping to both safeguard jobs and attract high quality applicants. This is premised on a need to focus on changing perceptions or “changing the narrative” (EYWC 2021, p4) of early years careers, a role that is skilled and equivalent to teaching in other phases of education. This, they claim, is needed if the significance of the role in supporting the youngest children is to be recognised and safeguarded. The Government needs “to take a joined up and holistic approach to future strategies” (EYWC 2021, p5) in developing a cohesive vision of investment in the early years workforce which addresses vagaries in training and pay. This is key in both attracting future applicants and retaining those within a workforce that is recognised as skilled and a fundamentally important phase of children’s educational experiences (EYWC 2021).

Whilst at the time of collating this research the Government in England has announced an Early Years Education Recovery Programme (DfE 2022), how this contributes to an holistic vision or serves to focus on short term goals is yet to be disclosed.

1:6 Figured world of HE

Connection with the field of early years has been a consistent part of my own narrative as a practitioner, Early Years Professional (EYP) and HE Senior Lecturer working on an Early Childhood Studies BA (Hons) course. Consideration of this route into an academic teaching role based on vocational knowledge and experience is in itself not unusual; indeed Hathaway and Rao (2021) note the rise in academic staff with vocational experience where

no teaching qualification is held. This nationwide trend appears to be one that continues to grow UK wide with 5% increase from academic year 17-18 to 20-21 (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) 2022). Whilst this is discussed in greater detail within later chapters, it seems to indicate that whilst a teaching qualification may be desirable, it is not a prerequisite for entry into the field of HE. Initially this may be read as indicating the regard for subject knowledge gained from experience in a given field and how it underpins entry into being and becoming a lecturer in HE. Hathaway and Rao (2021), however, also state that many Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) in England direct successful applicants to the completion of a Postgraduate Certificate (PG Cert) in Higher Education, and an application to the Advanced HE Fellowship or Senior Fellowship schemes. Embedded in discourses of quality, promoted in The UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) (Advanced HE 2011), these schemes seek to support teaching excellence and continuing professional development, by endorsing "individuals and institutions in gaining formal recognition for quality enhanced approaches to teaching and learning" (Advanced HE 2011, p2). It is this requirement, therefore, which holds a core element of legitimacy, serving to raise questions regarding the sufficiency of vocational practice-based knowledge and experience. The significance of these systems and structures shaping the experiences of lecturers is, for me, in how vocational experience in the field of early years is being determined as part of the wider narrative of being and becoming a lecturer. When looking at the dimensions of the UKPSF (Advanced HE 2011) and what is being seen as key areas of activity, knowledge and professional values, only 17% (3 out of 17) of the desirable skills relate to praxis. These discourses associated with excellence, quality and demonstrating knowledge and skills appear to be relevant, as the participants in this research reflect on their professional identity as crosscutting the figured worlds of early years practice and HE.

Theorising HE as a cultural context or field, I find Bourdieu's notions of cultural fields and cultural capital helpful in exploring the complexities of relationships between institutional systems, structures and practices (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002). These notions offer a way to conceptualise how those professionals from practice backgrounds may be positioning themselves or feel they are being positioned in particular ways. Notions of being and belonging to the figured world of HE, in terms of both traditional and non-traditional routes, featured as part of the plotlines considered by the participants. Barron (2014, p255)

maintains that these reflect ideas of positional identities, social position and division that mark identity as not freely chosen but as a result of “improvisation from the cultural resources that history makes available”. Therefore how these participants were understanding the traditional and non-traditional became important in how they mediated their understanding of being and belonging to a world populated by those figures available to them.

Conceptualising identity as one of participation, Wenger’s (1998) theory of social practice as Communities of Practice (CoP) will also be considered as a way of exploring relational and interdependent aspects arising from those operating in the context of HE. Notions of boundaries and brokering also offer ways to begin to theorise the hybridity of identities related to career history, and how we might accrue multiple memberships of different CoP and how they might act as points of orientation, legitimacy, or as barriers to belonging (Kubiak et al 2015).

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Somekh et al (2005, p337) maintain that engagement with literature is at the forefront of research activity, and that this acts to “stimulate thinking...sensitise one to issues and alert one to what is likely to be significant...these trace out the strands of your thinking which have developed in the course of your reading”. From the outset, engagement with the theoretical ideas of Holland et al (1998) became key to the exploration of my own experiences. These provided the jumping-off point for my research aimed at critically examining how University Lecturers from a range of early years professional backgrounds authored themselves as professionally ‘being and becoming’. It was these ideas of Holland et al (1998), particularly in terms of their sociocultural, sociohistorical position of exploring identities, that helped to shape this review of the literature and became those significant ‘strands of thinking’ running through the research.

Du Gay, Evans and Redman (2000) infer that the way in which we look at identities and the lens we use is dependent on our interests, knowledge and position as researchers. In

recognition of my interests in seeking to explore how an identified group of research participants may be experiencing and authoring themselves by engaging with the stories they tell of their lives lived, my gaze was directed toward the position offered by Holland et al (1998, p5); they consider identities as:

Imaginings of self in worlds of actions, as social products...also as psychological formations that develop over a person's lifetime, populating the intimate terrain and motivating social life. [Identities] are important bases from which people create new activities, new worlds and new ways of being.

Representative of a number of key tenets, Holland et al (1998) offer a way of exploring the dynamic and fluid interrelationship between self and society in what they consider to be 'figured worlds' of activity. Chaffee and Gupta (2018, p798) maintain that a figured world:

Turns attention on the ways that individuals and groups create meaning, how this meaning develops over time within everyday practices, and how meaning and engagement are shaped by shared repertoires of resources (e.g. stories, tools, artifacts) and larger sociohistorical structures, patterns and discourses.

This view of identities also considers how and why as individuals and/ or groups we come to attach significance to some acts, activities, resources, structures and discourses, and not to others (Gee 2000). Therefore, it is through our everyday activities, our engagement in what may appear routineness of activity, that we come to enact our sense of identities and to create and imagine ways of being and becoming.

As Du Gay, Evans and Redman (2000) suggest, when thinking of identities we are in essence thinking of a number of complex and interrelated ideas that sit beneath this term.

Therefore, rather than laying claim to an all-encompassing presentation of current debates, an important aspect underlying this review of literature is to engage with those themes emerging from my reading that have informed, challenged and shaped my ontological position regarding identity.

In aiming to explore how University Lecturers from a range of early years practice backgrounds experience and author themselves as professionally being and becoming, I recognise that I am situating my position as one interested in the interplay of both the

intimate and social activity dimensions of identity (Nasir and Saxe 2003, Rogoff 2003) and of the social and cultural relational aspect of identities performed through social practices (Vygotsky 1978, Wenger 1998, Wenger-Trainer and Wenger-Trainer 2015). Wenger (1998) looks at communities of practice and offers a position regarding how the term identity may be used. The suggestion of identity as a concept may serve as a 'pivot' between the social and the individual; it encourages us to reject the 'either-or' and consider the interplay between the two (Wenger 1998, p145). As Wenger (1998) maintains, this recognises the "social, the cultural and the historical with a human face" (Wenger 1998, p145).

Consideration of the metaphor of pivot, whilst helpful in challenging the either-or of the personal and social dichotomy of identities, does little to resolve my emerging sense of its nebulous nature. Wenger (1998) suggests that such a term swings less between the intimate and social, and more towards the softer, more evolving nature of identity and the way in which that human face may also be a point of change and agency by internalisation of activity. Here I return to Holland et al (1998, p40) in their theorisation of the intimate and social identities in figured worlds, by drawing on Vygotsky's 'semiotic mediation' as directing their theoretical gaze "on the social and historical creation of identities as a means to self-activity". Viewing identity as heuristic, they posit how the intimate and social can be more usefully thought about as a process rather than a pivot:

(1) The genesis of the products (improvisations) that come from the meeting of persons, cultural resources, and situations in practice; *and* (2) the appropriation of these products as heuristics for the next moment of activity (Holland et al 1998, p40, author's emphasis).

Thus, discussions pertaining to identities appear to demand a need to go beyond a sense of interplay or a pivot between the intimate and social, and consider the heuristic, amorphous nature of such improvisations. Attention to the possibility of improvisations, if they may occur and what may foreground such activity as the lecturers encounter and navigate the figured world of HE, may provide the investigation with moments of production in how participants experience and author themselves professionally as being and becoming.

In addressing the aims of this research, I consider the following tenets to be of import: interest in authorship and imagination and the discursive nature of identity (Bahktin 1982,

Connelly and Clandinin 1990, Gee 2000, Tennant 2018); how we tell ourselves and others what we lay claim to as part of our identity; and the capacity for agency (Bourdieu 1984, Gee 2000, Holland et al 1998). The premise of Holland et al's (1998) figured worlds is based on a sociocultural view of identity which offers a way of theorising the manner in which society, culture and history shape our sense of selfhood. These theoretical ideas provide a framework for examining the systems and structures enacted within HE that may shape identities, but they also explore sites of negotiation and improvisation "not located solely in the individual, but rather negotiated in social interactions that take form in cultural spaces" (Nasir and Saxe 2003, p17). In terms of this research, the cultural spaces are those associated with professional identities within the context of HE for lecturers coming from a range of early years practice backgrounds.

2:1 Identity/identities: ambiguous, dynamic and nebulous

Reflecting on identity, being and becoming a Lecturer in Higher Education (HE) demands an exploration of what is meant by the term. Creating a definition, however, is a complex endeavour that requires engagement with the dynamic and elusive nature of such a concept (Du Gay, Evans and Redman 2000, Gee 2000, Tennant 2018). Gee (2000) offers a way of considering such ambiguity by maintaining how, as humans, we perform our multiple intersecting identities through our participation in and with society. Here he uses the term 'kind of person' to look at the multidimensional fluidity of identities:

When any human being acts and interacts in a given context, others recognise that person as acting and interacting as a certain "kind of person" or even several different kinds of person at once... "The kind of person" one is recognised as "being" at a given time and place can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context (Gee 2000, p99, author's emphasis).

This perspective allows us to call into question the connotations of the term identity as something finite, singular or stable, a hard concept that we hold in mind, directing our interactions within the world of activity. It rather draws attention to a softer, more woolly, nebulous nature of identities as multiple evolving states. As Gee (2000, p99) puts it, "All

people have multiple identities connected to ...their performances in practice". This perspective suggests that the term identity requires careful usage if the intent is to recognise how identities are multiple, shifting and intersecting. Consequently, it appears pertinent to opt for the use of 'identities' over 'identity' as a starting point if my aim is to engage with the multiplicity and nebulous nature of such a term and the vagaries of how at a given time and particular context we might come to act or perform as a certain "kind of person" (Gee 2000, p99).

Holland et al's (1998) social constructivist perspective can be helpful in considering the concept of identity, disrupting dominant discourses of stability and enculturation. The authors suggest that it is the way we internalise, arrange and respond to these pervasive discourses or voices which gives us agency; thus, the discourses themselves can become the tools of orchestration and authorship, allowing us to reshape our identities and tell ourselves and others who we claim to be. As they point out, we "work within, or at least against, a set of constraints that are also a set of possibilities for utterances" (Holland et al 1998, p171). As we make sense of the world and our place within it, an important factor that builds upon Bakhtin's notion of self-authoring is how these voices may be drawn together or orchestrated. This is not a smooth process but one imbued with meaning, coloured by sociocultural and sociohistorical interpretations, tensions and possibilities; or as Holland et al (1998, p170) put it, "Languages are...not only abstract semiotic systems but inevitably and inextricably also ideological and lived perspectives on the world." It is these possibilities to be and act differently that mark the vagaries of identities in cultural worlds and connote improvisation and agency. A significant element of my research is concerned with the exploration of how University Lecturers discuss and narrate their identities, as well as recognition of how these may be representative of the plural and nebulous nature of their lived experience.

When discussing identities in practice, Holland et al (1998) develop ideas of co-development regarding the existential and societal. Co-development occurs, they maintain, in the everyday, routine activity of lives lived where our identities form and reform:

Person and society are alike as sites, or moments of the production and reproduction of social practices...Improvisational responses to social and cultural

openings and impositions elaborate identities on intimate terrain, even as these identities are worked and reworked on the social landscape (Holland et al 1998, p20).

In relation to co-development, Holland et al (1998) infer a number of key principals in terms of positional and figurative identities which will be discussed in due course. However, it is this agentic or improvisational dimension that I find particularly relevant in considering how early years professionals experience and enact their sense of identity as they encounter and navigate the HE professional landscape. Therefore, as part of my analysis I will consider if improvisation is part of the accounts provided by the participants and what openings may elicit such improvisational activity. Lave (2009) points to activity in the social landscape of practice as a context of change and flexibility. Considering that people participating in activity and the social world of that activity cannot be separated, she posits that this activity is fundamentally a site of learning. Characterising this situated learning as leading to “changes in knowledge and changes in action”, Lave (2009, p201) feels that this central dimension of participation is one of learning and change. Therefore, alongside notions of framing and re-framing one’s sense of identity through improvisation, the way in which those participants’ situated activity leads to changes in knowledge and practice may be significant markers of social and cultural openings.

Pertinent to the discussion on improvisation and agency is the need to draw attention to possibilities for development of our identities, as Holland et al (1998) suggest. Framed by the social constructivist precept that discourses and practices to which we are exposed become the metaphorical tools we then use to construct our identity (Barron 2016), they deny the presence of individuals acting at will, but rather reflect on the systems and structures experienced in our everyday lives that act as constraining and powerful discourses (Chaffee and Gupta 2018, Pennington and Prater 2014, Khalaf 2020).

Holland et al (1998) offer a way to reflect on the sociohistorical aspect of such discourses in relation to their concept of ‘history in person’. They suggest that this “is the sediment from past experiences upon which one improvises, using the cultural resources available, in response to the subject positions afforded one in the present” (Holland et al 1998, p18). Therefore, our past experiences, self-objectification, objectification and self-direction, and

those choices, behaviours and actions we feel able to engage with or feel denied to us as part of the ongoing process of identity work, are shaped by our history that we bring to the present activity. If, as Holland et al (1998) maintain, our history in person is of such import, this directs attention within the research to how such sediment may foreground the positions, improvisations and agency of those HE professionals.

2:2 Identities: thinking about categorisation

Rogoff (2003) considers a reading of identity in relation to how we think about categorisation. As she reflects on those 'big' categories of race, ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic class, she focuses on a static view, "the idea that cultural spaces of individual lives are fixed in social address" (Rogoff 2033, p77). She encourages the re-framing of a categorisation view to take account of the dynamic and fluid nature of identity, which is useful when supporting theorisation of the vagaries of identities emerging within this research. She suggests that this fluidity is underpinned by a shift in the way we think about culture as separate categories, into which people may or may not fit, however variable, overlapping and subdivided; although this, she maintains, still requires critique (Rogoff 2003). Debates concerning gender are perhaps an obvious illustration of such re-framing, representative of a rejection of homogeneous binary views foregrounding how categorisation can and has been challenged and how perceptions of gender are marked by change, generationally, socially and politically (Butler 2004). Rogoff (2003) directs us to focus on individuals' participation in cultural communities and to consider the interrelated nature of our identity as played out in the way we act and think about ourselves and our place within the contexts in which we operate. Again, this turns attention to the notion of practice, in the wider vagaries of the term, as those activities we encounter in our everyday lived experiences (Barron 2016, Bennet et al 2017, Rush and Feco 2008, Williams 2011). In relation to this research, therefore, the inclusion of descriptions relating to gender, parenthood, educational background, early years professional roles and academic achievement may be discussed; but rather than being regarded as distinct features, there is a need to consider these as a pattern, woolly and nebulous with amorphous characteristics; or, as Rogoff (2003, p79) puts it, "interdependent aspects of a multifaceted pattern". This

research or review of the literature does not intend to malign other theoretical lenses that explore these categories and the powerful discourses directing identities. Rather, central to this enquiry is a commitment to explore how such categories are being understood and enacted and form part of the participants' stories.

2:3 Positionality: Figures in a figured world

As Holland et al (1998) consider the idea of lived identities, they draw on the concept of positionality to offer readings of aspects of power, status, relative privilege, and their negotiation. Here they discuss the importance of interrelated notions of positional, figurative and relational identities (Holland et al 1998). The nature of the lived experiences of figures who embody ideas of social, cultural and historical meaning offers us opportunities for reflection; we may or may not be drawn to such significant figures as part of our own lived experience and formation of our identities (Barron 2014, Khalaf 2020, Urrieta 2007). Holland et al (1998) draw attention to how these figures which act to position us offer privilege, affordances, legitimacy or denial; and how positionality is "inextricably linked to power, status and rank" (Holland et al 1998, p271). This offers a way of exploring the nuances of hierarchy and the implications for our own behaviours. Positional identities have to do with the routine day to day experiences of "power deference and entitlement...a person's apprehension of [their] social position in a lived world" (Holland et al 1998, p127). Shaped by context, address and activity, they suggest that "positional identities are about the acts that constitute relations of hierarchy, distance, or perhaps affiliation" (Holland et al 1998).

Owing much to the ideas of Bakhtin (1982) concerning dialogism and bricolage, figurative identities offer a way to conceptualise the narratives or storylines that populate our lived experiences and how we orchestrate the multiple voices, tools and resources that exist and are available to us (Barron 2016, Barron et al 2017, Pennington and Prater 2016, Rush and Fecho 2008). This, as Barron (2016, p329) argues, can act to both constrain and "open up possibilities" for agency. Figurative identities are about our responses to experiences (Barron 2016), or as Holland et al (1998, p128) suggest, simply put "are about signs that

evoke storylines or plots among generic characters". As Bennett et al (2017, p256) postulate, consideration of positional and figurative identities can provide opportunities to consider "how 'influence' is internalised", and how those discourses we experience as part of our cultural world may be being understood and enacted or may offer opportunities for reworking of our identities.

Relational identities from a figured world perspective offer a theoretical reading of how identities emerge and coalesce in relationship with others (Bennett et al 2017). This notion looks at our actions and behaviours that act as "indexical...claims to social relationships to others, mediated through the way one feels comfortable or constrained ...to speak to another, command another or enter into a space with another" (Holland et al 1998, p127).

When considering the figure of an HE Lecturer from a professional practice background who seeks to be or become aligned to such an identity, this becomes more than meeting a set of job role criteria; it allows exploration of how we might socially, culturally, historically and personally construct what it means to 'be' and 'become'. As Urrieta (2007, p109) posits, figured worlds are premised upon interaction and "people's intersubjectivity for perpetuation...people "figure" how to relate to one another over time and across different time/place/ space contexts". Given this tenet, therefore, what it means to be a lecturer is complex; there are subjectively rooted perceptions of what constitutes such a legitimate figure. Drawing on ideas proposed by Vygotsky (1978) reflecting play, mediation and internalisation, Holland et al (1998, p272) explore aspects of identities through participation, acting as "serious play". In the activity of answering and addressing others in multiple figured worlds that are populated by historically and culturally recognisable others, we come to imagine, role play, understand, reframe and re-enact our place within them. Bennet et al (2017), in their research on the experiences of student trainee doctors, utilise a figured world and Bakhtinian approach to dialogism; this helps to demonstrate how over time the trainees orchestrate the multiple voices of their experience. The authors maintain that the consideration of the experiences of medical students, and the manner in which everyday encounters are influenced and internalised, offer a way to expose sites of "inclusion, recognition, exclusion and humiliation" (Bennet et al 2017, p256), as students orchestrate the voices, figures and positions they encounter. How such everyday encounters are of influence, internalisation and orchestration, therefore, directs attention to the figured

world of academia, populated as it is with figures we may be drawn to and positioned by. Bennet et al (2017, p255) also utilise the theoretical position offered by figured worlds which provides opportunities to explore “diverse constructions of identity... in self-authoring”.

2:4 Academic Identities: change, challenge and crisis

In discussing identities, Nixon (2015) explores the significance of the institutional context in which being and becoming affiliated to an institution serves to frame identities in HE figured worlds of practice. Maintaining that institutional systems and structures influence the multiple explicit and implicit thinking and practice of our lived identity, Nixon (2015, p6) points out that “institutions shape us”. The ways we converse with each other, the ways we present ourselves, the categorisation and classification of roles, faculties and schools, and how we recognise accomplishments and failures are, Nixon (2015) suggests, all entwined implicitly and explicitly within the systems and structures that make up HE institutions. Gee (2000, p105) also considers “institutional identity position” as one element in his ‘fourways model’ of theorising identity. Here he posits the importance of “discourse and dialogue” that shapes and sustains identities in institutional contexts:

If no one talked about or treated professors as professors, then the university could not sustain them as professors. A given identity... can primarily be underwritten and sustained by the institution or institutional forces or not. When an identity is underwritten and sustained by an institution, that institution works, across time and space (Gee 2000, p105).

The centrality of shared meaning underwritten and sustained is therefore, as Gee (2000) maintains, premised on intersubjectivity. An understanding of professors’ – or indeed lecturers’ – identities is therefore embedded in context, in the systems and structures of the institution, and the shared understanding of those engaging in that context for perpetuation. Placing primacy on dialogue is fundamental to ideas concerning co-production of identity, as we address and are addressed by others in the everyday encounters of our lived identities. This concept is espoused by Holland et al (1998) who draw on the work of Bakhtin and his premise of the dialogic self. Roberts (1994, p247) discusses Bakhtinian terms

concerning dialogue and addressivity, suggesting that there is “no meaning, ...no word...or thought that does not enter into the dialogue or dialogic relations with the other that does not exhibit intertextuality in both time and space”. Therefore, in theorising how University Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies author themselves as being and becoming, it is necessary to consider the systems and structures enacted within HE that are underwritten and sustained in practice; this is important both in terms of how they are being understood and how they shape the nebulous contours of their identities.

As there is a need to appreciate how identities are non-fixed, this consideration is also applicable to the institutional context (Elliot 2021, Hosein and Rao 2021, Van Lankveld et al 2017). As Bartram (2021, p1) argues, the diversification of the HE sector in the UK comes at a time when HE is at a zeitgeist of “change, churn and challenges”, with an increasing range of institutions awarding degrees, with expansion in student numbers, alongside changes in funding and managerial structures, and with increased governmental scrutiny. Notions of a shifting landscape within HE appear to be a recurring theme when considering academic identity (Feather 2016, Hosein and Rao 2021, McMillan and Gordon 2017, Shaw 2018). Boncori and Smith (2020), Elliot (2021), Ennals et al (2015), Gill (2014), Shaw (2018) and Erickson et al (2020) consider that neo-liberalism or new managerial discourses related to commodification and globalisation of the sector, aligned with performative metrics, have led to a changing landscape where identity becomes one of fluidity. Neoliberalism as a dominant discourse has, as Elliot (2021) describes, become part of the way we think about the place of a free-market economy, to regard it as common sense or to rationalise what Erickson et al (2020, p2) maintain is “dramatic and cataclysmic change”. As Elliot (2021) suggests, the notion pertaining to how these dominant discourses may underwrite and sustain institutions (Gee 2000) has relevance to how these ideas may gain common parlance within HE and become part of the stories of identities told by the participants.

Ball (2012) offers a perspective relating to how as academics these discourses become part of our identity, embedded in the ways we think and behave. He defines neoliberalism as:

A complex, often incoherent, unstable and even contradictory set of practices that are organized around a certain imagination of the “market” as a basis for the

universalisation of market-based social relations, with the corresponding penetration in almost every single aspect of our lives (Ball 2012, p18).

He suggests that this marks implications of neo-liberalism, both from the outside through policy and governance, and the inside in how we orientate ourselves as academics. This raises questions in relation to academic identity in practice as one of performativity directing actions, where:

The first order effect of performativity is to re-orient pedagogical and scholarly activities towards those which are likely to have a positive impact on measurable performance outcomes and are a deflection of attention away from aspects of social, emotional or moral development that have no immediate measurable performative value (Ball 2012, p20).

Looking at neoliberalism, Ball (2012, p18) argues that this situates professionals within HE as needing to re-invent themselves “as units of resource whose performance and productivity must constantly be audited so that it can be enhanced”. Ball (2012, p20) maintains that “in such regimes of performativity, experience is nothing and productivity is everything”. How these two tenets of experience and productivity may be complementary or symbiotic is of lesser import to Ball (2012); however, the point it raises is how and if Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies respond to such discourses and how it may serve to place performance and productivity over experience. Also, it directs attention to how the experiences that early years professionals bring to their role of lecturer may or may not be understood as meeting the productivity needs of the institution.

Hosein and Rao (2021) take up this theme when exploring the importance of diversity within the academic population. They lament what they feel is the suppression in academic systems of opportunities for students to learn from their academics’ personal and professional experiences. Stating the importance of academics sharing lived experiences as part of the teaching and learning context, they reflect on the significance of such contextual knowledge that connects with both the subject and student experiences as enriching the curriculum and providing additional value to the taught syllabus. Therefore, considering the classroom (Hosein and Reo 2021) and the staffroom (Churchman and King 2009) as cultural spaces where through participation lecturers are, in essence, re-enacting their

understanding of what it is to be and become a lecturer, these become important but contested sites of identity development.

Considering the current HE context experienced by academics in the UK, it is suggested that they represent one of the most scrutinised groups in history, where their value can be measured by over 100 indices and metrics (Erickson et al 2020, Gill 2014). Whilst not seeking to suggest that the commodification of knowledge is new or that metrics are a recent phenomenon or valueless, what it does draw attention to is the landscape of HE as one of change and uncertainty (Erickson et al 2020, Elliot 2021), driven by a proliferation of specific markers. Erickson et al (2020, p15) highlight the negative impact of change on those navigating the context of HE in the UK, “characterised as being eaten alive by corporate logic and relentless metrics of punitive accountability”. Erickson et al (2020, p2145) reflect on the lack of resistance from within the academic community to performative structures. They suggest that managerial mechanisms which champion transparency through consultation serve to disrupt the collective voice “through the imposition of targets [and] performance criteria”. Thus, the commodification of both teaching and research lays bare a need for individual compliance like never before.

Researching academic identities, Churchman and King (2009) note the implications of how institutional objectives and a drive for collegiality can position those working in the field in particular ways. They suggest that institutional imperatives may result in individuals “jettisoning values” central to their academic identity (Churchman and King 2009, p508). As an example, they look at the import of accountability and efficiency in Australian universities, which reflects those current discourses in the UK as codified markers of metrics associated with marketisation of HE and league tables (Bartram 2021, Elliot 2021, Sumner 2021). Churchman and King (2009) consider the impact of these narratives on academics, who may self-sensor their identities to reflect those dominant discourses within HE in order to be ‘good’ academics. Institutional priorities, therefore, may serve to create tensions between professional values born out of practice in the subject field and academia, and the way in which they are congruent to those institutional macro level values. Their level of impact on lecturers’ identities and how they are being negotiated may provide opportunities to consider how individuals may feel positioned by such institutional discourses. Holland et al (1998) consider the significance of what they term ‘relational

identity' that comes about through the day-to-day participation of our lived experiences, arguing that our position is relative to those socially recognised others. The way we interpret our identity can offer up entitlement, censorship, affiliation or dissonance (Holland et al 1998) in how we see these values as important parts of a claim to being and becoming an academic.

Churchman and King (2009, p515) suggest that corporate control marginalises the plurality of lived experiences that academics can bring to their role in supporting "creativity... sustenance and innovation" as lecturers. They also reflect on the importance of the collaborative nature of life experiences or stories, and call for the recognition and space for the sharing of diverse stories and experiences as integral to the development of "spaces for where the multiple stories can resonate, grow and sustain identities" (Churchman and King 2009, p515). The position offered by these authors directs attention to the micro implications of discourses concerned with managerialism, space for the plurality of identities or the work of participants in that figured world, where negotiation, formation and reformation of lecturer identities may be marginalised. Churchman and King (2009, p515) offer recommendations emanating from their research into the hidden stories of academics in Australian HE institutions, arguing that drives for conformity associated with managerialism, whilst concerning, do not mark their "demise, but rather their manifestation in subversive forms". Calling for recognition of staff stories, they maintain that these need to be nurtured where spaces act as "communal sites of resistance, collegiality, sustenance and innovation" (Churchman and King 2009, p515). Therefore, whilst corporate control in its various guises within the figured world of HE may act to shape notions of identities, concern with how these are negotiated, or – as Churchman and King (2009) put it – subverted, also warrants consideration. Giddens (1991) offers a contrasting perspective, maintaining one of doubt and risk where the traditional openings, life courses and expected outcomes based on our traditional and historical understandings become disputed and fragmented. Exploring modernity, he claims, demands an appreciation of post-traditionalism, where this uncertainty demands reflexivity as one confronts diverse possibilities not perhaps available in previous eras (Giddens 1991).

2:5 Academic identity: tradition and myth

Erickson et al (2020) reflect on the societal and historical notion of university as one of mythical origins reflecting a long tradition and embedded sense of ritual. As an example, one may only consider the practice and regalia of graduation ceremonies and the ritualistic use of gowns, hoods or cowls, Tudor bonnets, mortarboards and colours that signify status, achievement and belonging, to observe how such tradition and ritual are part of the confirmation of the role of HE in securing its place and position as the gatekeepers of knowledge.

The ideas of cultural capital and habitus provide an opportunity to reflect on the significance of such discourses and explore this notion of mysticism (Bathmaker, 2010). Beyond that, consideration could be given to the obvious relationship of universities as institutions of Higher Education and research, how they feed into the knowledge economy and how this reflects ideas of cultural capital (Bartram, 2021, Bathmaker 2015, Elliot 2021). However, I wish to direct attention to the localised activity of graduation and how this may allow us to explore some of the more traditional structures and systems at play when considering notions of identity, position and the context of HE.

The shape of the cap, the style of the gown and colours of the hood imbue cultural capital as symbolic signs of value, status, legitimacy and belonging (Bourdieu 1984). In claiming a place of legitimacy as part of this practice, Bourdieu (1984) suggests that as academics we subsume these as part of our claims to cultural capital within the field. Consciously or unconsciously through an allegiance to, and participation in, graduation ceremonies, our actions become part of our publicly performed and internalised sense of identity. This also reinforces dispositions and values within an academic community and perpetuates a sense of mysticism and tradition that emphasises the continued relevance of HE within society.

Here Bourdieu's concept of habitus becomes useful. As Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002, p7) state, habitus "as a system of dispositions to a certain practice" can be understood as a historical and cultural production of activity and understanding "turned into nature", or indeed second nature. It is here that they suggest Bourdieu ties in the unconscious aspect, where we forget our history and normalise activities, practices and understandings.

Therefore, habitus is an embodied state, reflected in the ways we act, speak and behave in specific contexts (Bathmaker 2010). The way we embody the discourses of cultural significance and normalise practice – which in this example implies marching in academic procession and sitting on a dais wearing a cap and gown – becomes part of our claim to being and becoming an academic, and part of what Holland et al (1998, p127) name “figurative identity”, a recognisable plotline within the figured world of academia. Whilst this may be far removed from how we as lecturers present ourselves to students on a day-to-day basis, the potential significance of such markers, which cascade down through the rich history of academia, in how the identity of those within the cultural field may be shaped, is of relevance (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Traditions and artefacts reinforce discourses of hierarchy, affordance, and denial (Holland et al 1998). This public display, either as academic staff or student, highlights one’s relational identity as being or becoming part of that cultural field. Whilst Bourdieu emphasises the “power and positions in the field [as] manifest objectively by agents” (Williams 2011, p132), the concept of figured worlds offers a way to begin to theorise how these artefacts, cultural signs or markers of the field are mediated. Reflecting the Vygotskian influences on figured worlds, how these encounters “enter the psyche becoming interpersonal, being incorporated into one’s history in person and hence mediate future planning and reflection and thus action and scope for improvisation” (Williams 2011, p132) is of key interest in how lecturers navigate the changing HE landscape and enact authorisation.

2:6 Transitioning from the occupational professional to the academic

In their work looking at transitions from professional roles in occupational therapy to academics, Ennals et al (2016) discuss the challenges of fitting in with the world of academia, and the pervasive discourse of needing to engage with research as an act of legitimisation experienced by the professionals. To ‘do scholarship’ became part of the narrative expressed by the participants concerning what it meant to develop a sense of being and becoming part of the world of academia (Ennals et al 2016). This research raises

some important points for consideration. Despite the presence of academic employment roles that comprise of teaching only, teaching and research, and research only (Hosein and Rao 2020), the significance of engagement in research was seen as a very pervasive tenet to being part of the world of academia despite the role one had been employed to undertake (Ennals et al 2016). How this may impact on the participants in my research, and how engagement in research activity may act as a marker of acceptance or a barrier, may be significant to their sense of being and becoming a lecturer. Looking at academia through the lens of figured worlds supports the exploration of this from the conceptual idea of positional identities which “have to do with the day to day and on the ground relations to power deference and entitlement, social affiliation and distance” (Holland et al 1998, p127). Therefore the importance attributed to undertaking research acts to position one, marking legitimacy or acceptance to being and becoming part of that figured world.

Ennals et al (2016) also state that transition from a professional to academic role is one representative of an atypical career trajectory. Attention to the rise of professionally orientated HE courses is widely discussed in relation to neoliberal discourses concerning widening participation and employability (Clegg 2008, D’Silva and Pugh 2021, Kolkin Sarastuen 2019, Smith and Boyd 2012). Therefore, one may problematise the proposition of atypical routes into academia when set against a sector “in flux, driven by competing and evolving philosophies, expectations and demands” (Bartram 2021, p2). However, as previously discussed, when considering the sociocultural and sociohistorical understanding of figured worlds, it appears that spaces, places and discourse are imbued with signs and storylines that evoke actions that are either permissible or from which we are barred. Holland et al (1998, p128-129), drawing on ideas from Bourdieu, suggest that “localised figured worlds have their own valued qualities, their own means of assessing social worth, their own *symbolic capital*” (author’s emphasis). Therefore one may question how such symbolic capital may or may not be impacted by the vicissitudes of flux within the sector, given the position offered by Ennals et al (2016) and the importance in this research of considering the atypical. Ennals et al (2016) further locate transition for the group in terms of how evolving contexts within HE may have implications for identities and the development of a sense of belonging. The newness of professional courses, they suggest, is an additional factor:

Participants shared a sense of not belonging to a more scholarly world within university and of struggling with their academic identities. This situation perhaps resulted from participants' atypical pathways into academia, their membership of a profession that is a comparative new player in the academy and department (Ennals et al 2016, p443-444).

Being a new player draws attention not only to the challenges of newness of those transitioning into academia but also to the challenges presented by the relative newness of the subject discipline, potentially indicating a lack of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984). This is representative of an atypical route into academia and compounded by an atypical destination in terms of discipline. The consideration of new player disciplines in HE is an interesting dynamic, particularly when reflecting upon this research: Occupational Therapy as a degree in the UK emerged in the mid 1990s (Royal College of Occupational Therapists 2022 online) and Early Childhood Studies in 1993 (Silberfeld and Mitchell, 2018). Therefore, this may be of significance in adding a further layer of complexity for those seeking to navigate the changing landscape of HE as University Lecturers.

Ennals et al (2016, p444) offer interesting concluding remarks to their research in terms of the importance of "growing Scholarship groups [as] facilitating productive reflection on our being and doing as occupational therapy academics, contributing to our growing sense of academic identity". Although Ennals et al (2016) state that further research is needed, this recommendation indicates the importance of collegiate identity work and the potential it may have in how we tell each other the stories of being and doing within the figured world of academia. Holland et al (1998) argue that the manner in which we address and answer each other acts as a powerful medium for acceptance, transformation and the development of identities worked and reworked. They note the importance of Bakhtin's account in which "self-authoring the I-for-myself realizes itself explicitly in words and categories, naming the I-for-others and the I-in-myself" (Holland et al 1998, p178). They also draw on Vygotsky's ideas concerning how these mediating discourses become significant factors in how one may "control or modify one's behaviour" (Holland et al 1998, p178). It is in such activity, they suggest, that we come to author ourselves in how we orchestrate these voices, and in the way we resist, accept, reframe and improvise our actions and sense of selfhood.

Authorship takes place not as freewheeling agents but in the dialogue, actions and activities

we draw upon to author our improvised sense of selfhood; these are not “neutral perspectives ...the voices, after all, are associated with socially marked and ranked groups” (Holland et al 1998, p183). Drawing upon experiences is, for the authors, not a process of carbon copying but of improvisation and of how we understand, interpret and act out our place within society; it is this, they maintain, that foregrounds agency. Therefore, this recommended space espoused by Ennals et al (2016) may act as space for agency, interpretation, reinterpretation, resistance and negotiation where the participants author their sense of identity. This view focuses on personal interpretation and reinterpretation and the importance of identity work from within to elicit change, where the atypical is re-imagined through how individuals improvise their lived experiences. The relevance of this for my research may lie in whether such spaces are emerging for my participants. It will be interesting to see their impact in providing opportunities for orchestration and agency as the participants navigate their identities as University Lecturers against the backdrop of socially, culturally and historically understood figured worlds of HE.

Research undertaken in Norway by Kolkin Saratuen (2020) looking at the transition of staff from teaching roles (occupational practitioner) to becoming educators (vocational educator) offers a way to explore this aspect further. Highlighting the significance of context as more than locality, she focuses on the place of detachment and reconstruction of self. Utilising the theoretical perspective of figured worlds, she discusses the impact of detachment in terms of “letting go of practices distinctive to being a practitioner” (Kolkin Saratuen 2020, p258). It is this ‘building down’, she maintains, that is essential to the reimagining and reconstruction necessary to an understanding and repositioning of self. Kolkin Saratuen (2020, p259) states that this was illustrated by descriptions of going ‘backwards’ for her participants, indicating a retrograde loss of competence. Whilst challenging, she remarks on the significance of this from a figured world position as a key conduit to improvisation and agency, where “self understandings form the basis for creating new activities and ways of being” (Kolkin Saratuen 2020, p259). Therefore, whilst the process of moving from one professional context to another may involve reinterpretation of identities, the significance in terms of this research may lie in the opportunity, through the act of transition, to re-imagine; it may allow us to exercise some agency in the way as individuals we orchestrate those voices within the figured worlds we enter.

2:7 Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector: attention, concern and change

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) assists in clarifying the term Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). It maintains that this “includes all arrangements providing care and education for children under compulsory school age, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours or programme content” (OECD 2001, p7). It would be beyond the scope of my research to document a detailed history of the ECEC sector nationally or internationally; rather, my focus is on discourses and policy shaping the sector in England from the late 1990s as marking a time of unprecedented political attention and change (Hadfield, Jopling and Needham 2015). The emphasis on workforce development, and the role played by HE in developing undergraduate offers as part of governmental aspirations in England to professionalise the ECEC workforce (Cameron and Miller 2016, McGillivray 2008, Miller 2008, Silberfeld and Mitchell 2021), is particularly significant to this research. This will be kept under consideration in seeking to explore and contextualise how University Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies from a range of professional practice backgrounds experience and author their lived experiences.

The identity and professional background, or ‘history in person’ (Holland et al 1998), of the participants are entwined within the field of ECEC. This is reflected in their lived experiences and in aspects of their career histories (Appendix 4) working directly in supporting the care and education of children under school age, gaining subject discipline qualifications and as lecturers. As Holland et al (1998, p46) maintain, lived experiences relate to the plurality of the “ever becoming self”; identities are lived in and through practice, and the significance of history in person contributes to the multi-layered interaction, with and on activity, in what they suggest is an “untidy compilation of perspectives”. Therefore, the issues relating to ECEC from the 1990s need to be discussed, as part of those lived experiences that have shaped the professional landscape in England for this group experienced as workers, students and lecturers, in order to investigate and theorise how such untidiness is being enacted through the stories they tell.

2:8 ECEC: Policy context

Cameron and Miller (2016) discuss the political attention on early years provision in England from the late 1990s as reflective of targeted governmental reform, aiming at supporting children and families as never before. Consideration of ECEC as a “social investment” (Campbell-Barr 2019, p24) appears a common clarion call in England (EYWC 2022) and the UK (Brooker 2007, Heavy and Miller 2012, Owen, Sharpe and Spratt 2012). Internationally, organisations such as the OECD (2001; 2006; 2022) advocated the continued significance of quality early years provision and services as key to improving long-term outcomes for children; this would also increase economic prosperity in supporting families to integrate care and work responsibilities in order to support high employment levels.

In England, The National Childcare Strategy (DfEE 1998) marked a watershed within policy reform (Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay 2013, Hadfield, Jopling and Needham 2015), setting out ambitious plans for the identification, regulation and expansion of childcare. This strategy marked how the then New Labour Government (1997-2010) was placing childcare provision at the centre of their social reform policies (Osgood 2012, McGillivray 2011). As Osgood (2012, p6) maintains, this marked a raft of “initiatives, developments, and policies ...sharing the principal objectives of expansion, affordability, quality and accessibility” of ECEC services in England. Kay et al (2021, p181) maintain that political focus in England and internationally-positioned ECEC became a conduit to tackle inequity within society, by ensuring equality of opportunity to access quality early years provision as a way to “narrow the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more affluent peers”. Brooker (2014) notes that the significance of a politically driven agenda was also foregrounded on key research into early childhood education and care (Rumbold 1990, Moss and Pence 1994, Pascal and Bertram 1997). This marked a time of optimism and excitement in the field where “government funded investment into early childhood research was being translated almost for the first time into national policy” (Brooker 2014, p7).

Part of this policy reform was a desire to identify and bring together what was seen as both a diverse and uncoordinated sector to deliver on these objectives (Cameron and Miller 2016, Kay et al 2021). Prior to 1997, Cameron and Miller (2016, p105) maintain that ECEC was representative of a “split or fragmented system of education and care run for different

purposes by different government and local authority departments, with staff who often had different professional backgrounds". In their thematic review examining ECEC in the UK, commissioned by the then government, Bertram and Pascal (2000, p14) consider the historical context of the sector in the UK as revealing "a system which has emerged as diverse and uncoordinated, expanding rapidly...to meet periods of chronic need and crisis and waning in other times".

Reflecting on the nebulous nature of the sector in responding to such waxing and waning interest, investment and need, Cameron and Miller (2016, p104) consider one of the barriers to unification being the lack of agreement regarding identity: "The ECEC field is not united behind a single concept or organisational body. Various representative bodies had different ideas about the purpose of provision." Unlike other professions associated with education or health care, ECEC is one marked by fragmentation (Cameron and Miller 2016). The OECD (2006) noted the "tremendous progress" made in developing ECEC provision in England; this included the expansion of Children's Centres as hubs in key areas of social deprivation and extended wraparound care with before and after school and holiday provision. This was supported from a "quadrupling of funding in the UK between 1997-2007", according to Cameron and Miller (2016, p106). And yet fragmentation appears to be a pervasive and persistent discourse associated within ECEC in England with regards to state, private and voluntary provision and particularly the workforce (Bonetti 2019, Campbell-Barr and Berry 2021).

It is useful here to highlight the diversity of ECEC in England as comprising of the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors. The private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector encompasses a wide range of provision:

Operating in non-domestic premises [these] can be run as private, voluntary, or independent settings. This category also includes Local Authority day nurseries, Sure Start/Children's Centres and other providers registered to receive government funding (Bonetti and Blanden 2020, p10).

This range of provision sits alongside maintained or state funded provision (Blanden 2016); it is a mixed market economy where the maintained and PVI sectors all provide early years care and education (Campbell-Barr and Berry 2021). Considering the early years sector in

how education and care is organised, combining PVI provision and state or maintained settings is seen as a marker of diversity but also one of incoherence (Kay et al 2021).

Central to the outcome of policy intensification is workforce reform. Osgood (2012, p42) argues that this political interest marked the orchestration of the landscape of ECEC, positioning those that work within the field as “guardians of the nation’s children”. Charged with the “execution of government policy”, this repositioned the workforce (Osgood 2012, p43), marking a significant shift from one of a laissez-faire state approach to that of responsibility and pressure to carry out these aims. This not only highlighted the importance of the ECEC workforce but also placed unprecedented expectations to deliver on the government’s agenda as never before.

2:9 Discourses of quality and the workforce

Campbell-Barr (2019) draws attention to the term ‘quality’, and whilst acknowledging the tenuous nature of such a term, she discusses how this places early years workers at the forefront of the quality agenda. She refers to the influential longitudinal study, The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project (Sylva et al 2004), as the first major European study of a national sample that looked at children’s development between the ages of three and seven years. The study focused on the effectiveness or otherwise of preschool education; researchers collected information on more than 3000 children, their parents, home environments and the wide range of preschool settings that they attended (Sylva et al 2004). Findings discussed the impact of attending pre-school, the type of setting attended, the importance of home learning and the effects of quality and specific practices in pre-school. When considering the characteristics of effective pre-school settings, their findings direct attention to the positive relationship between staff qualifications and improved outcomes for children:

Children made more progress in pre-school centres where staff had higher qualifications, particularly if the manager was highly qualified. Having trained teachers working with children in pre-school settings (for a substantial proportion of time, and most importantly as the curriculum leader) had the greatest impact on

quality, and was linked specifically with better outcomes in pre-reading and social development at age 5 (Sylva et al 2004, p4).

Whilst this research was conducted in 2004, the importance of high-quality staff in supporting positive outcomes for children is a pervading discourse within the sector. This is still seen as a key issue within the early years workforce, together with concerns over fragmentation and a lack of a uniformed vision to address issues of status, pay and career structures that attract and retain high quality staff and are in parity with other educational professionals (DfE 2022, EYA 2021, EYWC 2021, Hoskins and Smedley 2020). Whilst the EYWC (2021, p5) acknowledge the positive implications of government funding at this time, they point out that this fails to address the importance of a strategic view of the sector, maintaining how “piecemeal reform has consistently failed, leaving the sector with an uneven landscape in which there are varying degrees of pay, staff support and quality of provision”.

According to Campbell-Barr (2019, p24), the importance of “high quality staff with high quality provision” as integral to delivering improved outcomes for children places increased scrutiny on the early years workforce. Dahlberg et al (2007, p96) further discuss notions of quality in ECEC, stating that “a discourse of quality has been applied to the field of early childhood institutions in a number of ways, including research, measures, standards and guidelines on good practice”. They reflect aspects of quality as foregrounding certainty, predictability and order in the sector as both “a necessary technology for practices of dividing, classifying and allocating and, as such, a means to impose order and for the exercise of disciplinary power” (Dahlberg et al 2007, p87). By utilising a postmodern lens, they critique this reductionist dimension as one of control and conformity by maintaining the subjective nature of quality, as a socially constructed term based on “values, beliefs and interest rather than universal reality...with multiple perspectives or understandings of what quality is” (Dahlberg et al 2007, p5). Therefore, given such a multitude of understandings, Dahlberg et al (2007, p109) argue that reconstruction of quality can be an unproductive “wild goose chase”. The authors posit that the quest for identification and demonstration of quality represents an externally imposed and static concept and does not support what they feel is a far more fluid and dynamic construct. They maintain that this leads to an unquestioning taken for granted approach to quality where, as practitioners, we forget to

challenge and explore what we understand by this and how it relates to the children and families we may work with (Dahlberg et al 2007). In order to engage with discourses of quality they suggest a need for:

Researchers, practitioners and others who view the world from different perspectives to engage in dialogue with each other, not to prove who is right, but to seek mutual understanding and recognition and to understand how and why they have made their choices (Dahlberg et al 2007, p110).

This position offers a postmodern way to begin to think differently about issues of diversity within ECEC, and to consider how discourses of quality may be silencing alternative readings in relation to the workforce and range of provision. McNaughton (2003), in her work looking at Habermas, further situates this postmodern reading in light of the significance of knowledge and reflective practice as tantamount to adopting a transformative perspective in order to question dominant discourses associated with practice. This, she maintains, supports alternative readings premised on the acquisition of tacit knowledge, reflection and actions that transform practice.

In exploring elements of quality, and how this relates to group based early years provision, Sakr and Bonetti (2021) synthesise nine sets of survey data undertaken by three sector organisations in England from 2015-2018. Utilising data gathered from National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA 2016), Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY 2018) and CEEDA (2018), an independent early years research organisation, they explore how these surveys can be used to highlight commonalities, discrepancies and gaps in perceptions of continuing professional development (CPD) within the workforce. Whilst discussing shared perceptions across the data set of CPD as an important feature in driving quality, they also explore the type of CPD that is being engaged with. Commonalities, they suggest, indicate a prevalent focus on mandatory training, with those engaging in accredited higher levels of qualification making up between 2% (PACEY 2018) and 27% (NDNA 2016) of the surveyed workforce. 'Higher levels' account for qualifications above Level 3; it is unclear if they may equate to a graduate Level 6. Sakr and Bonetti (2021) seek to explore the nature of CPD, and raise questions concerning what is on offer and how accreditation may reinforce particular knowledge rather than develop or improve the quality of the workforce:

Synthesis suggests that managers and practitioners in England are typically seeking CPD at level 3. This is despite the fact that more than 70% of the workforce is already concentrated at a level 3 qualification in EY education. It would seem therefore that even when CPD is formally accredited, it ‘holds’ practitioners at level 3 rather than enabling them to progress towards a level 4 qualification and beyond (Sakr and Bonetti 2021, p13).

Whilst calling for specific research to explore these findings further, Sakr and Bonetti (2021) highlight a need to address accreditation of CPD as a vital issue in promoting clarity and progression. Sakr and Bonetti (2021, p13) maintain that “accreditation of CPD and its relationships with achieving a more qualified and, in turn, valued workforce” is of central concern nationally and internationally. However, if CPD does little more than provide skills that have already been demonstrated, this raises issues for social justice and equity for those working with young children, and makes the aim of developing a more qualified workforce problematic.

2:10 Workforce identities in ECEC

In terms of ECEC identities in England, it is important to consider the composition of the workforce as made up of 97% female workers (DfE 2022). In their report, ‘The early years workforce: recruitment, retention and business planning’ (DfE 2022) looking at the early years workforce, recruitment and retention, the Department for Education (DfE 2022) in England reported on the workforce demographics, stating that despite drives to promote gender diversity, currently male workers only represent 3%, and this has remained unchanged since 2018. This English picture is one reflected in Europe. Cameron (2014) points out that despite progressive ECEC services in Denmark and Norway, where there have been successive policy drives to address gender imbalance, the percentage of male workers has not risen above 10%. As Cameron (2014) discusses, issues of a low paid workforce have been addressed in some Scandinavian countries; but this does little to redress the gender imbalance foregrounded on historical, social and cultural constructions of a workforce premised on the care and education of its youngest members.

Cameron (2014, p128) argues that the association between care and female traits perpetuates normative maternalistic discourses, or “gendered practice”. The hetero-normative discourses running through the field of ECEC, positioning women as natural carers and encapsulating a gendered workforce, are much debated in relation to professionalism and professional identity (Cameron 2014 and 2020, Campbell-Barr 2019, Robert-Holmes and Brownhill 2011, Wilkinson and Warin 2022). The naturalisation of particular stories of being female serves to legitimise participation and professional identity as innate, a romanticised view that upholds particular narratives of what an ECEC worker needs to be (Ailwood 2008, Osgood 2012). As Campbell-Barr 2019 suggests, services associated with ECEC can be seen as sites of cultural understanding and perpetuation, where sociocultural notions are deeply embedded in ideas of childhood and how best to care for and educate children:

Women are given consistent messages about right and wrong behaviours that are closely aligned to cultural discourses on femininity and motherhood. Thus, who is an early years professional is not just about gender, but about particular performances of gender (Campbell-Barr 2019, p16).

To care, or to have the innate ability to care or nurture, then becomes a discourse that both opens up possibilities of entrance to the field and legitimatisation as equipped with the natural skills required to take up a role in the sector (Miller 2008, Cameron, Moss and Owen 1999). Akin to Holland et al’s (1997) notion of positionality, these narratives become part of the positional ‘I’ in the way these sociocultural, sociohistorical discourses serve to locate one in terms of what one may or may not do. These ideas become internalised, and form part of how one is positioned in relation to others in the “deference, entitlement, social affiliation and distance” that one may experience (Holland et al 1998, p127). Campbell-Barr (2019) draws attention to how such biological determinism precludes men – thus half of the available workforce – whilst at the same time devaluing the place of skills and knowledge as part of the complex role of working with young children.

It is perhaps beyond the scope of this research to delve further into issues of power, performativity or gender equity, but it is fitting to acknowledge the potential of such ideas in terms of how they may serve to shape the narratives of those involved in this research.

Osgood (2012, p118), in her exploration of the professionalism of a “hyper feminised ECEC workforce”, looks at professionalism in depth and proposes how, as an active construct, it is related to “performance”. It is perhaps this notion of performance that is relevant to this research and provides an opening that enables us to theorise how participants narrativise their performance. As all participants have experienced being part of the ECEC workforce, then the details that emerge from these plotlines will provide opportunity to explore how these one-time ECEC professionals experienced their sense of identities as sites of acceptance, challenge or resistance to such heteronormative discourses.

When considering those who work in HE and investigating the gender makeup of Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies, specific data may be problematic to extrapolate. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects data across the four nations of the UK regarding staff working in key areas. This can be an issue due to data not being singled out regarding the specific area of Early Childhood Studies; rather, it is part of general data looking at education as a whole (HESA 2022). Data relating to gender makeup within the category of education identifies that in the academic year 2020-2021, 59.26% were female (HESA 2022). Whilst this is not surprising in terms of education generally (Miller and Cameron 2014), it does not drill down sufficiently to identify how this dynamic relates to Early Childhood Studies. Also, how this seeks to capture those who did not align to this binary is not indicated. Therefore, how this translates from a female dominated workforce to those Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies becomes more about supposition than evidentially based. When exploring University Lecturers from a range of professional backgrounds in ECEC, the prevalence of a female orientated workforce becomes the basis for this supposition and, indeed, may identify scope for future research. It would be interesting to consider if and how heteronormative discourses emerge, and if they may be part of – or rejected as part of – how participants author themselves in the figured world of HE.

2:11 ECEC workforce identities: an ageing workforce

The DfE (2021), in their Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers (SCEYP), identify age profiles and qualifications within the workforce as indicating a broad stability since 2018,

with a slight increase from 20% to 24% in the over 50s. It was this group that the research indicated as most qualified and more likely to be employed in school-based maintained provision, with younger workers in the under 25 age group predominantly based in PVI settings. However, Bonetti (2019), in her analysis of workforce data for the Education Policy Institute (EPI), draws attention to this as one of long-term concern, particularly in light of a stagnation in recruitment of practitioners and the ageing, more broadly qualified workforce:

The sector is ageing and faces an increasingly uncertain future. In 2018, around 90,000 childcare workers were 55 years old or above. A significant number are likely to exit the workforce in the next decade and there is little indication that sufficient numbers of younger workers will replace retiring older workers (Bonetti 2019, p43).

Discussing the slow and at times erratic trends towards qualification requirements in England, Bonetti (2019) states that between 2016 and 2018 there was a decrease in workers holding a Level 3 qualification, and those studying towards higher qualifications as Level 6 graduate workers fell from 22.7% in 2008 to 14.9% in 2018. Reflecting changes in policy commitments in England – ranging from initiatives to have a graduate led workforce in every ECEC setting to no legal requirement to do so at all – serves to place graduates or those wishing to gain a Level 6 qualification on very uncertain ground (Campbell-Barr et al 2020, Cameron 2020, Bonetti 2019). As Campbell-Barr et al (2020, p6) suggest, incentives for those who do have graduate Level 6 qualifications regarding pay, working conditions and career progression have led to a situation in England where “even for those with a degree in early years there is little economic incentive to remain employed within the sector”. This appears to paint a very particular picture of the ECEC workforce, as predominantly feminised and low paid, where those most qualified are most likely to leave the workforce soonest, and where incentives to upskill seem to be at best erratic (Bonetti 2019). Sustainability of the ECEC workforce in England is therefore one of concern. According to Cameron (2020), this is exacerbated in light of leaving the European single market, limiting opportunity to recruit from Europe and retain those practitioners within the sector.

2:12 Early Childhood Studies: HE

It is useful to contextualise the development of ECEC degrees in relation to wider shifts in the HE landscape. A focus on education, and in particular widening access to HE as an essential aspect of developing personal and economic capital, marked a more direct governmental approach in the late 1990s (Driver and Martell 2000). Power and Whitty (1999) draw attention to New Labour's third way policy commitment to prioritise education. They discuss how the UK pre-election campaign mantra of 'Education, Education, Education' was intended to mark a new vision, third way break from previous political doctrine and a commitment to investment in the field as essential in responding to societal changes in the knowledge economy, and to globalisation (Power and Whitty 1999). The Dearing Report (1997) commissioned by the previous Conservative government was key in shaping New Labour policy. Outlined in the report is the vision for HE to act as a conduit for responding to societal and economic needs and progress:

The purpose of higher education in the development of our people, our society, and our economy is central to our vision. In the next century, the economically successful nations will be those which become learning societies: where all are committed, through effective education and training, to lifelong learning (The Dearing Report 1997, p7).

As Waters (2013, p3) suggests, the report appears to be based on a premise that an "educated nation is required, for the growing competitive globalized market economy", a view that appears to coalesce with that of Blair and his New Labour UK government of the time.

Recommendations in the report also outlined a need to support wider accessibility of HE within the population, which elicited ambitious aims by government to provide opportunity for "50% of the population to go through HE by 2010" made by the then Education Secretary David Blunkett (Walters 2013, p264). The report additionally highlighted the importance of attracting wider diversity within the student body, diversity of degree offers and a closer alignment of learning that is responsive to employment needs (The Dearing Report 1997). It is this new vision, third way, or as Power and Whitty (1999) state, a "sharp break in political

continuity” that needs to be appreciated within the context of this research as foregrounding a climate for greater diversity of professions to be drawn into the field of HE, reflecting skills and knowledge as transferable and aligned to employability. Wider diversity within the student body also may be conceptualised as providing opportunities for members of society for whom a university education may have seemed hitherto unnecessary or unobtainable. Changes in funding and an expansion of institutions offering HE courses were also part of the drive to reimagine HE as relevant, progressive and an essential part of the “learning society” (The Dearing Report 1997, p7). Consideration of the context of HE as one foregrounding the emergence of ECEC as part of this politically driven third way vision becomes important within this research as it marks the emergence of identities that bring together the figured worlds of ECEC and HE as never before.

Early Childhood Studies degrees were developed in the UK in 1993 (Silberfeld and Mitchell, 2018). Brooker (2007, p7) suggests that this marked a time for “excitement and optimism” within the field, driven by a political focus and ideology that centred the need for investment in services for children and families. The introduction of government funded places in the private and public sector in 1995 followed-up by New Labour through the Sure Start programme and EYFS accelerated the rise of Early Childhood Studies degrees as part of a developing a graduate led workforce. The advent of the Childcare Act (2006) in England demonstrated governmental support to professionalise the ECEC workforce through attracting and developing graduates. The subsequent development of Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) for graduate leaders was supported by the Labour government’s (1997-2010) Graduate Leader Fund as part of wider support for workforce reform (Cameron 2020, Campbell-Barr et al 2020, Lloyd 2012, Lloyd and Hallet 2010). However, as Cameron (2020, p72) observes, without structures in place to ensure these EYP graduates “earned a graduate wage or had career progression”, how this status was to be recognised or valued still appears to lack clarity and holistic vision. The Coalition government (2010-2015) sought to replace EYPS by Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS). This still situated delivery within HE; however, as with the preceding EYPs, they continued to lack parity with schoolteachers in terms of pay and conditions, despite their graduate status (Cameron 2020, Bonetti 2019).

Campbell-Barr et al (2020, p5) highlight this tension in their review of Early Childhood Degrees, stating that:

While degrees are recognised for their pedagogical contribution to the quality of early years practices, the benefits in terms of employment conditions accruing from having a degree are not evident. Fluctuating policy commitments have resulted in a two-tier system, whereby staff in the maintained sector are required to hold a degree with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), while the commitment for a graduate led workforce in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sectors has been removed.

Therefore, whilst degree level qualifications are important in connection to discourses of quality, their status for those within ECEC as students, graduates or educators appears to be on very shaky ground. If the scope of knowledge relating to this relatively new degree discipline within HE is potentially deemed of less value than other educational knowledge, this may have significant connotations for those coming from practice backgrounds and taking on the role of HE lecturers.

In England, data gathered by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA 2018) relating to graduate outcomes of alumni working within the early years sector were assigned to a 'medium skill' standard of occupation and skill category. Recent changes in classification, however, in recognition of the knowledge and skills of those working within the field, have now redefined their role as one affording the status of an 'associate professional occupation' (ONS 2020). This reclassification of graduates working in early years education, identifying their role as 'associate professional status', demonstrates an acknowledgment of the standards of graduate outcomes and points to a shift in value. However, this still falls short of aspirations to create equity with other educational professionals. It also constructs a particular plotline of value and status of ECEC as a discipline that may be relevant to how the participants negotiate their sense of identities in the figured world of HE.

Chapter 3 Methodology

The central premise of this research is concerned with the investigation of identity. This chapter will discuss the methodological thinking, approach and design underpinning this thesis. My aim is to explore how lived experiences are understood and storied, allowing for appreciation of sites of struggle and resistance as part of the notion of identity as 'being and becoming'. As suggested in the preceding chapters, the decision to look specifically at the ways in which University Lecturers navigated the context of Higher Education (HE) resonated with my own professional background; it reflected a route into HE via professional ECEC experience outside that of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). This personal background has led to an interest in how others with similar professional practice backgrounds experienced and authored themselves. Reflecting on my own position, as one entwined with that of my participants, demands theoretical investigation of positionality and how this has influenced my methodological framework. An exploration of notions of insider-outsider status (Berkovic et al 2020, Chhabra 2020, Ryan 2015) provides an opportunity to discuss this complex relational position in and across the context of HE. Multi-faceted and important issues of "positionality, power and representation" (Merriam et al 2001, p405) will be discussed within my methodological approach.

In order to critically explore the complex notion of identity I am drawn to the theoretical framework proposed by Holland et al (1998) and their notion of figured worlds. It is their discussion concerning the interplay between identity as a situated and active process, by which we address and are addressed by others, which is central to the methodological considerations shaping this research. As a graduate student and subsequent employee of my first university, I felt my identity was constructed in a particular way by myself and others. Professionally, I felt positioned by the notion that I was a student practitioner who had 'done well' by gaining a position as an alumna-lecturer. Storied by others and myself, I reflected on the implications of my own construction of professional identity, as one lived in and through activity, shot through by the social and historical landscape of practice. Holland et al (1998, p270) focus on notions of co-development of selfhood where "improvisational responses to social and cultural openings and improvisations elaborate identities on intimate terrain, even as these identities are worked and reworked on the social landscape". Therefore to investigate openings for improvisations in being and becoming lecturers, the theoretical perspectives offered by figured worlds hold great resonance. This is particularly

pertinent in relation to co-development, as a thread which runs throughout the methodological decisions shaping this research.

3:1 Starting point

Ontological beliefs regarding reality, and how we orient ourselves epistemologically in coming to know about the world, are considered as the fundamental driving forces for alignment of philosophical and methodological approach with one of purpose (Mills and Birks 2014, Denzin and Lincoln 2018). According to Crotty (2015, p2), this requires careful consideration of the very “assumptions about reality we bring to our work”, the understanding we hold about what constitutes human knowledge, the value we place on such knowledge, and what is possible to know.

Rejecting the presence of an objective truth or meaning waiting to be discovered, my ontological beliefs as a researcher led me towards an interpretivist theoretical perspective (Birks 2011, Brown and Perkins 2019, Crotty 2015). This foregrounds an appreciation of the ways in which understanding is always relative, and therefore should be viewed as socially, culturally and historically “stamped” (Crotty 1998, p52). This ontologically and epistemologically positions knowledge as subjective and relative to those experiencing a phenomena; it places primacy on how as a researcher I seek to explore experiences constructed by those who are participating in, and of, the social world, and the blind spots which I hope to expose (Gergen, Lightfoot and Sydow 2004, Mills and Birks 2011, Wagner 2010).

Reflecting on the tenet that we are part of, but not replications of, our cultural world gives opportunity to consider how we may enact choice, autonomy or agency and to consider possible sites of rupture, where there may be opportunities to be and act differently. Here I am drawn to consider the tenets of social constructionism (Burr 1995, Crotty 1998) as a way of looking at the systems and structures at play within the field of academia for HE

Lecturers, and how through participation in that world they construct and reconstruct their sense of identity (Holland et al 1998).

Burr (1995, p7-8) suggests that an important aspect of coming to understand a social phenomenon is in attending to the “interactive processes that take place routinely between people”, rather than the “individual psyche [or] social structures”. When thinking about this interactive process, Hruby (2001, p51) argues that social constructionism draws attention to how a “life world is constituted by considering how collectives generate meaning”. This may or may not be intentional; however, Hruby (2001) indicates the power that such meanings hold within a community. Meanings, he suggests, become embedded within the community, as value laden, factual, common-sense aspects of how one views the context and one’s place as either within or excluded from it (Hruby 2001). This appears to invite exploration of how certain sorts of understandings are being arrived at, and the discourses which may be at play in shaping understandings of those experiencing and navigating the context of HE as University Lecturers.

Contemplating the generative nature of language, Hruby (2001) suggests that a social constructionist perspective demands that we take account of users as “wilful constructors of shared understandings and metaphors” (2001, p51). This position directs attention to those experiencing HE as active, as they respond to what may be determining discourses. Here Burr (1997, p7) also demands that we pay attention to how language acts “as a form of social action”; as in the action of telling, we do more than retell; we reconstruct in and through our interaction with the social world (Burr 1997). This notion of narrative as generative and active is useful in how I consider the epistemological position of this thesis. This view adds a further layer for consideration in relation to what may be possible to know by exploring the interactive ‘life world’ of HE experienced by the participants, and the potential for ‘wilful constructors’ as they narrate their experiences. Opportunities for people to tell their stories can be encouraged and facilitated as a way of understanding how participants are authoring, enacting and imagining their sense of identity (Archer 2021, Gee 2011, Holland et al 1998, Khalaf 2020). This appears pertinent in guiding the methodological decisions framing my research, given the aim of exploring how University Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies from a range of early years practice backgrounds experience and author themselves professionally as being and becoming.

3:2 Theoretical Framework: figured worlds

In considering the centrality of how we construct meaning, Crotty (2015, p44) discusses “how the world and objects in the world are our partners in the generation of meaning”. In terms of identities, Geijsel and Meijers (2005) draw attention to the ongoing nature of how we as individuals are driven to make sense of self, in and through our contexts, drawing on past, present and future experiences. Drawing upon Holland et al’s (1998) figured worlds, Bennett et al (2016, p3) consider how this theoretical perspective may provide opportunities to explore the reciprocal relationship between the mind and social contexts, where “the individual is a social and historical product, and that formation of the individual occurs in social contexts, through practical activity and in relationships of desire and recognition.” Holland et al’s (1998) work therefore provides a useful theoretical tool to explore the place of Lecturers in HE in and through specific social and historical cultural contexts; or, as Holland et al (1998) maintain, a figured world. This figured world is inhabited by people, artefacts, traditions and understandings relevant to a specific context or cultural world where we address and are addressed by interactions with others who populate or have populated a particular context (Gunter, Gullberg and Ahnesjo 2020).

Bennett et al (2016, p256) argue that the use of figured worlds can provide opportunities to explore “how ‘influence’ is internalised, through figured and positional identities in the cultural worlds in which we move, and through orchestration of the discourses we encounter”. The ideas offered by Holland et al (1998) provide a useful theoretical framework to consider the experiences of lecturers as occupying the figured world of HE. They allow exploration of how lecturers may be positioned or are positioning themselves, the influence of other figures, and how they orchestrate relationships relative to others. As Gee (2011) maintains, figured worlds provide a way of exploring the typical stories and the taken for granted narratives that we draw upon to understand our world and our place within it.

Holland et al (1998) suggest that the way in which we understand many of the rituals and trappings of the academic world – such as graduation ceremonies, gowns and hoods, degree classifications and measurements of student satisfaction – may form some of the markers of the cultural world to which we may or may not feel we belong. They highlight the specificity

of artefacts and discourses as signifiers of a particular context, imbued with socially, culturally and historically located understanding (Holland et al 1998). Drawing on Vygotsky's notion of cultural tools, Holland et al (1998) argue that through attribution of meaning developed collectively, objects can be viewed as artefacts imbued with meaning that shape actions, interactions, emotions and behaviour. Participants make meaning of themselves in relation to, as Bennett et al (2016, p250) suggest, the "multiple available discourses". Therefore, this directs attention to how participants' appreciation of self is mediated not only through language as a cultural tool but also through artefacts and objects as part of their lived experience (Smidt 2009).

Drawing on Holland et al's (1998) notion of addressivity, Bennett et al (2016) postulate that it is through the process of meaning making that we respond to and understand these as signifiers of particular discourses framing what it means to be and become a lecturer. However, Holland et al (1998) suggest that whilst we may embrace such activities, traditions, artefacts, and objects as ways of understanding as we position and are positioned within a figured world as legitimate participants, they may also act as barriers to preclude us from entry into a particular world. Therefore, methodologically this places primacy on dialogue, attending to the stories we tell ourselves and others, of our active participation in the figured world of HE, and how objects and artefacts act collectively in shaping how being and becoming a lecturer may be understood.

Nasir and Saxe (2003, p17) argue that adopting a figured worlds lens infers a sociocultural view of identity where it is "not located solely in the individual, but rather [it is] negotiated in social interactions that take form in cultural spaces". The consideration of identities as a continuous process, located within and through social and cultural practices, opens spaces for new imaginings and ways of being (Holland et al 1998). It is perhaps the premise of negotiation which may relate to the active and interactive nature of human activity which Burr (1995) maintains is significant to how we come to know the world and our place within it. Consideration of the importance of engagement in the practices of a community seems to position "discourses and practices to be the tools that build the self in contexts of power, rather than expressions of stable interpretations of world and values that have been imparted to the person through enculturation" (Holland et al 1998, p27). Therefore, this view offers a way to explore such instability and theorise how social practices, discourses

and artefacts may be being understood, valued and enacted in a way which may indicate identity as a dynamic rather than static construct.

This research is based on an ontological and epistemological position that seeks to explore multiple realities arising from the subjective interpretation of those experiencing the context of HE (Birks 2014). This places primacy on Denzin and Lincoln's (2018, p20) notion of a co-construction between "the knower and respondent [in the] co-creation [of] understanding" in order to begin to explore how such stories of identities are being told and understood. Akin to Vygotsky's notion of intersubjectivity, this understanding is premised on how we might, through dialogic encounters, recognise, share and interpret key reference points that foreground intersubjectivity (Holland et al 1998). Epistemologically, therefore, I feel drawn to how a narrative research approach provides opportunities for dialogic space where co- construction of meanings becomes a prominent feature underpinning this research methodology.

Contemplating interconnection between theory and method (Lee and Peterson 2011), I feel drawn to narrative inquiry as a methodological framework. However, it is important here to draw a distinction between narrative life story and narrative life history in order to state how and why I feel aligned to a life history approach to narrative research. Whilst both come under the umbrella of narrative inquiry, a life story position is suggested as representative of a starting point (Bathmaker 2010, Clandin and Connelly 2000, Goodson and Sikes 2001, Richards 2019) where the lives told open up opportunities for tellers to interpret their lives in the telling. Goodson and Sykes (2001, p16) postulate that these reflect a "partial selective commentary", an interpretivist layer of representation offering an examination of the lives told. Whilst useful in exploring how University Lecturers from a particular practice background experience and author themselves as being and becoming, it is also important to pay attention to the wider social, historical and cultural contexts in which these stories are told and the "social relations of power" offered by the narrative life history research (Bathmaker 2010, p2). As Gill and Goodson (2011) suggest, the manner in which narratives are located within and against a backdrop of social and historical contexts presents an important way of examining the processes or "story of our actions" (2011, p258). Considering the opportunity for utilising life history as a narrative approach, Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p187) also reflect on the potential for researchers to "build up

a mosaic-like picture of ...individuals...events and people around them". This offers, as Sikes (2010) postulates, layers for interpretation of lives lived and the potential to explore capacity for agency. It is therefore a narrative life history, as representative of an additional layer of interpretation, which is an essential aspect of consideration if I am to explore those systems and structures enacted within HE which are being navigated by the participants.

Gergen and Gergen (2006) consider the importance of dialogue in terms of how social interchange can be understood as discursive action, as having potential either to limit or open generative spaces to be and act differently. They offer an argument based on the relational character of self within an organisation, where familial and sustained discourses about what it means 'to be' become internalised, and where one may come "to live the narrative" (Gergen and Gergen 2006, p119). This, they suggest, may act to limit opportunities for agency and imagination to be, and act, differently (Gergen and Gergen 2006). This therefore further establishes the significance of social interchange as part of the research methodology, providing opportunity to explore how University Lecturers from an early years practice background may be experiencing and authoring themselves as being and becoming.

Drawing on a social constructionist view, Gergen and Gergen (2006) maintain the practical connotation of their position as highlighting the importance of language as a generative force, and the use of narrative inquiry within research as a way to invite reconstruction which may then provide space for alternate readings or discursive action. This argument clearly places primacy on how one works to create a space for discursive imagination and reconstruction within the participant researcher relationship. Whilst this may be problematic in addressing the power dynamics between researcher and participant, identifying this as an important aspect demanded careful consideration of how this type of space and narrative activity might be facilitated in the research design; it was important to provide opportunity not only for telling the story, but also for reflecting and revisiting in order to expose sites of imagination to be and act differently. Therefore, attention to facilitating narrative life history data generation as a process, rather than an event, helped to direct the research method design. It was important to provide opportunities to reflect on the stories told, not just for the researcher but for the participants as part of the research process.

3:3 Collective dialogic spaces

Burr (1995) offers an important point when considering a social constructionist perspective on systems and structures relating to professional identities, in a need to pay attention to the importance of “social practices engaged in by people and their interactions with each other” (1995, p 3). This, she maintains, conceptualises understanding or knowledge as not something one does or does not possess, but rather, “something people do together (Burr 1995, p8). This places an importance on how we actively engage in knowledge production and where language is seen as not just expressive, but productive, as it becomes the primary conduit in how we interact with others as the “world becomes constructed” (Burr 1995, p7). When looking at institutions and those who occupy places within them, Camargo-Borges and Rasera (2013, p2) suggest that language from a social constructionist perspective is less about describing reality or the pursuit of accuracy, but more reflective of a dynamic account, drawing upon the “cultural and historical aspects available”. In considering the significance within research of establishing space for conversations where multiplicity of views can be expressed, they emphasise the importance of dialogic space (Camargo-Borges and Rasera 2013). Rejecting this space as a way to find out the realities of a situation or the right ways to understand a concept, they draw attention to the potential of a generation of new realities, co-construction, reflection and reflexivity for participants and researchers.

Dialogic spaces within the research process, reflecting tenets of conversational space and opportunities to share perspectives as generative, possesses far more than opportunities to gather data; rather, they hold the potential for sites of authorship and imagination. This appears also to position the researcher as part of the narrative process, a co-constructor. Riessman (2008) maintains that this requires a shift in researcher interviewee dynamics from a question-and-answer exchange to one reflecting a conversational approach. This, she posits, is where the interviewer takes on a facilitating stance whereupon all are viewed as active in the co-construction of narrative and meaning (Riessman 2008). This demands consideration of sites of power and control, where in creating space for co-construction there may be shifting positional dynamics. Seeking to balance or ‘level out’, power dynamics is an ethical consideration much debated in the field of narrative inquiry (Camargo-Borges

and Rasera 2013, Riessman 2008, Sykes 2010). In her research on the experiences of undergraduate students' sense of belonging, Richards (2019) comments on the relational context of the narrative inquiry methodology which seeks to reduce power dynamics and provide an equal footing between researcher and participant. She emphasises the need to provide a shared space "where the participant is considered as the expert in their own life story" and suggests that this is "key to establishing a responsive and respectful climate" (Richards 2019, p175). Consideration of a narrative life history approach illustrates how the researcher and participant work together; it demonstrates the importance of the relational context, reflecting one of "intensity and intimacy" (Goodson and Sikes 2001, p28). Therefore I walk a thin line within this process as I occupy that insider-outsider position, or as Chhabra (2020, p315) puts it, an "in-betweenner". My place as part of the conversation becomes undeniable. I am there, therefore I am addressed. The comments or questions I make draw me into this dialogic space and yet as a researcher I seek to distance myself from such a role in order to illicit and explore participants' perspectives. Whilst I discuss this positional dichotomy later in the chapter, an approach which centres on reflexivity and honesty is of importance where, as a researcher, one makes clear the nature of the research relationship, the intent of the research focus, and one's positionality, which needs to be consistently reviewed (Sikes 2010).

3:4 Ethics of trust

Lewis and Adeney (2014) view the sociocultural position of the researcher and how this places relationality as a central focus; this is useful when considering the place of narrative life history methodology. It demands careful consideration in terms of how such a relational approach may be achieved and nurtured throughout the research process (Chhabra 2020). The need to establish trust was interwoven through the ethical considerations; clarity was vital in gaining informed consent and securing anonymity (Berkovic et al 2020, Chhabra 2020, Flick 2014). In order to make clear my research gaze and positionality as representative of a general shared career experience, it was necessary, as a fundamental ethical consideration, to present an honest and authentic picture of my focus, intent and position (Sikes 2010). This became central to the development of the relational context to

this research, driving the provision of information relating to my own professional experience and research interest from the outset.

This relational tenet in ethical procedures, in terms of clarity of information, confidentiality and anonymity, was an important aspect in foregrounding such a climate of trust and respect (Lewis and Adeney 2014, Sikes 2010). However, such measures can be problematic in relation to any research which involves aspects of autobiography, as in the telling of a life lived; it invariably makes reference to particular contexts of early years professionals as lecturers, to family, friends and colleagues, with the potential to expose the identity of the narrators (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, Lewis and Adeney 2014, Mills and Birks 2014, Sikes 2010). This was of particular concern to all my participants. Careful consideration was needed in how I sought to present the individual pen portraits, data and analysis, as part of the continual interrogation and reflexive action in developing my research aim to maintain anonymity through an honest and respectful approach. The first layer in ensuring anonymity was to offer participants the choice to omit any information they considered to be identifiable. As part of the data generation process, providing opportunities for individual reflections was premised on trust, honouring the narratives that participants wanted to share and acknowledging them as the story tellers of their own lives. This was an important feature in developing this respectful and ethically mindful layer. It was a consistent approach throughout the research process, as opportunity to reflect on discussions and the choice of what then to share with me was combined with the chance for participants to redact data from all final transcripts; this informed the ethical decisions underpinning the research relationship. Here I need to make clear that the selection of participants were those who met the criteria of University Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies, coming from a range of early years professional backgrounds, with whom I also had some professional knowledge prior to the research. However, out of respect for my narrators and following my own ethical position I do not intend to provide further details.

3:5 Validity

Lewis and Adeney (2014, p169) maintain that central to considerations of validity within narrative research are issues of “believability and authenticity”. Reflecting the interconnected nature of philosophy, methodology and methods, the question of authenticity can be conceptualised as one respecting the authorial integrity of the narrators, presenting their narratives not as truths but as their stories on the world as they see it. Therefore, this places primacy on respecting those narrators as experts in their own story (Richards 2019).

Tension concerning validity, and how in narrative inquiry one seeks to maintain the centrality of the voice of the participant one strives so hard to capture, is one of the key challenges in how one presents research inquiry (Lewis and Adeney 2014, Sikes 2010). In their seminal work, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that consideration of the audience is an undeniable aspect of validity in research activity, and this can shape what we write and present as researchers for the consumption of others. This audience can frame what a researcher may count as valid in narrative inquiry in respect of other scholars, value to the field, or in this case, how research forms part of the doctoral process of confirmation. Although mindful of the tensions this presents and how any work sits within the social, cultural and historical landscape for others to view, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) maintain a need to balance these determinates: voice (participant’s story), signature (researcher voice and interpretation) and audience (who will read the research). Whilst claims that a dispassionate, removed stance may be disingenuous and disconnected to the narrative inquiry methodology and methods (Boncori and Smith 2017, Goodson and Sikes 2001), Clandinin and Connelly (2000) consider that the antithesis, reflecting a voyeuristic intimacy, is equally unsuitable. Rather they posit a need to embed within the research how one addresses each as dynamic strands, where the balance may favour one aspect over another and be redressed at others (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

Therefore, what was most pertinent in relation to this research as part of the doctoral process in terms of validity was to acknowledge this openly in the writing and to the participants, whilst seeking to retain focus on how this research contributes to wider discussions and knowledge concerning identity. Lewis and Adeney (2014) state that in looking at narrative life history we need to remember that life is messy and uncertain; therefore our role as researchers reflects this ambiguity. However, they also maintain the

importance of attending to these stories, as “it is in and through narrative meaning making that humans gain insight and understanding of lived experiences; we are the stories and the stories are us” (Lewis and Adeney 2014, p175). Therefore, the challenge in balancing the need to present research which is impactful with the primary tenet of ‘do no harm’ (Lewis and Adeney 2014, Richards 2019) is the tie that binds both ethical and validity claims within this research.

3:6 Storytelling: Focus group

Narrative inquiry covers a plethora of methods; however, according to Goodson and Sikes (2001) and Riessman (2008), working with groups is perhaps far less common, but can add an additional layer or texture within research. Goodson and Sikes (2001) discuss group dynamics and the tenuous nature of how they may or may not be productive, reflecting on the implications for researcher in lack of control; or as Riessman (2008, p8) adds, the messiness of group work without a “middle or an end”. Goodson and Sikes (2001) also discuss group dynamics and the implications for familiarity or the absence thereof, with a lack of trust limiting engagement within a group of strangers; and how when participants are known to each other or share experiences this can lead to assumptions being made and common taken for granted narratives pervading. However, Goodson and Sikes (2001, p29) postulate that if within the group relationships and dynamics are aligned, “group work can be very productive, in that accounts given by one person can jog another’s memories about similar or contrasting experiences or perceptions”. Despite the negative connotations discussed, the collaborative nature of group work as a discursive space seems a pertinent development of an opportunity for co-production, particularly in light of the commonalities of professional experience, and also that the participants had some professional knowledge of each other prior to the research encounters.

Holland et al (1998), drawing on the theoretical ideas of Bakhtin and Vygotsky, note the significance of discursive activity on the private and public planes, where authoring oneself comes about in the way we author the “I” for ourselves, and the way in which we author others. Therefore, despite the messiness of group work, by providing a discursive space on this public plane – be it in a very specific way as part of a research focus group – it appears

appropriate if the intent was to explore how participants were experiencing and authoring themselves as professionally 'being and becoming'.

3:7 Position as a researcher: Insider-outsider status

In committing to research I seek to make clear how my position as a researcher is entwined with that of my participants – a phenomena originating from my own experience, identifying with participants with a similar career history. Considering tenets of insider-outsider positionality in qualitative research therefore demands attention (Chhabra 2020, Lewis and Adeney 2014, Ryan 2015). The insider paradigm seeks to acknowledge the position of the researcher as being able to relate to their participants by the sharing of characteristics or common ground, where there is an intentionality in how as a researcher we align ourselves with those experiences we intend to research (Berkovic et al 2020, Bridges 2017, Merriam et al 2001). This is then contrasted with an outsider positionality where this is not the case. Chhabra (2020, p307) posits that by adopting an outsider position we recognise dissonance from the group as a subjective “non-member”. Concern with exploring the experiences of others, who like me were navigating the HE landscape, highlights the intentionality of my position as one reflecting an insider research paradigm where we share a common ground. Berkovic et al (2020) suggest that this can be positive in terms of how it may serve to act in balancing power dynamics between researcher and participant, where being recognised as ‘one of us’ aids credibility and serves to establish a relational context where language genre and nuances can be more easily understood.

However, as Merriam et al (2001, p405) comment, this binary is far more complex than the ‘either or’ of research and highlights “slippage and fluidity”. In this case, whilst I undeniably share common characteristics with my participants, I needed to be aware that this may shift if I am adopting a view of identity as fluid, unfinished and active. Kahalf (2020, p440) states that “identity from a figured world perspective directs attention to how we may

simultaneously inhabit multiple often competing figured worlds". Therefore, how these intersect or overlap may reframe my position as a researcher, as one positioned as an insider to that of an outsider. In her endeavour to explore the dynamic nature of insider-outsider research, Ryan (2015, np) similarly posits the 'either or' tenet in how it "underestimates the multi-layered identities of researcher and participant" and the dynamic nature of identity as emerging as part of the process of gathering data. Therefore, whilst alignment between my own experiences and the aims of this research might at first glance be seen as illustrating insider positionality, this needs reflexive consideration, as what may first seem common ground may not be representative of participant experiences or how they story their identity as being and becoming lecturers. I may have a sense of affiliation with my participants, but this also needs to be interrogated in light of how this shifts within the research process as I respond to the discourses of being and becoming (Berkovic 2020, Chhabra 2020, Ryan 2015, Sikes 2010).

Ryan (2015) offers a useful tenet in considering the multifaceted and dynamic nature of "multi positionalities" in insider research, highlighting the need to embrace the instability by employing a reflexive approach in continually reviewing and negotiating positionality throughout the research process. Here I draw attention to the position offered by Chhabra (2020), who suggests that the stance of an "in-betweenener" is useful in theorising the problematic nature of the polarities of insider-outsider status: "This critical, fluid position allows for the incorporation of... complexities and multi-layered identities more freely at the different stages of the research process" (Chhabra 2020, p315). As Holland et al (1998, p53) maintain, figured worlds are non-static, "formed and reformed in relation to the everyday activities and events that ordain happenings within it". The commonalities between my own experiences and those of the participants are representative of this fluidity as we interact as part of the research process. Engaging in dialogic encounters, as part of the focus group, interviews and reflective writing, becomes part of that everyday activity (Holland et al 1998). Although Holland et al (1998) appear to give little consideration to this beyond everyday activities of the groups they studied, recognition of the potentiality for forming and reforming of multi-dimensional positions within the research process becomes an essential element which demands attention within the methodology and methods framing this research. Consideration of a staged process of data collection is useful, not only in

gathering rich data but in supporting opportunities for reflection and reflexivity for both researcher and participant. Therefore, appreciating these stages as important sites for the formation and re-formation of identities in practice, epistemologically the in-betweenness offers an effective way to conceptualise the multi layered, fluid and generative nature of what I am aiming to uncover in this research.

3:8 Analysis

Narrative life history inquiry is built upon the centrality of storytelling (Chase 2011, Harnett 2011, Richards 2019). Chase (2011, p656) maintains that “a narrative communicates the narrator’s point of view, including why the narrative is worth telling”. Therefore, what has been “said, written or visually shown” became the focus of attention (Riessman 2008, p53). Here I feel drawn to the tenets of thematic analysis, where Riessman (2008 p53-54) argues “primary attention is on what is said rather than “how,” “to whom,” or for “what purpose” (Author’s emphasis). The way in which participants expressed their stories as worthy of telling, therefore, made thematic analysis a pertinent way to bring together a research gaze, with the focus on the content of what was being said.

Braun and Clarke (2006, p86) refer to thematic analysis as “searching across the data set...to find repeated patterns of meaning”. They posit a six stage step upon which I was able to base my analysis, beginning with ‘familiarisation’. Positioning myself as part of the research, engaging in the focus group interview was the start of this familiarisation process. As discussed previously, being part of the activity of data collection through storytelling reflects the multi-positionality in-betweenness status of my position as the researcher (Chhabra 2020, Ryan 2015). However, in choosing to be part of the story as the narrators address me also foregrounds the familiar stance deemed so significant to analysis. The use of tape recordings of the focus group and interviews provided multiple opportunities to revisit the data and a choice to personally undertake transcription rather than use computer based software; whilst time consuming this was an essential-aspect in getting to know my data further. Here I take Osgood’s (2012, p35) tenet of the significance of this research activity supporting “an intimate familiarity with the discursive landscape” as essential in establishing

robust analysis. This level of familiarity allowed for evaluation and re-evaluation of my understanding and an opportunity to interrogate this further.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) second step refers to the generation of initial codes; whilst being mindful that elements of data can, and did, result in being thought of simultaneously under different codes, this activity marked the next layer of making sense of the data. A central part of this activity demanded reflexive action, returning on multiple occasions to revisit and interrogate the data and reflect on my rationale. Colour coding was utilised to support the process of identifying the emerging broad topics discussed by participants. This activity was also integral to the ongoing intimate familiarisation with the data (Osgood 2012).

Braun and Clarke's (2006) third step is termed 'searching for themes'. This reflected my intent to utilise Holland et al's (1998) notion of figured worlds in the theoretical framework shaping this research. Therefore it is more useful at this point to refine the term 'thematic analysis' into that of a 'theoretical thematic analysis approach' (Riessman 2008). As Goodson and Sikes (2001, p34) claim, "Analysis is about making sense of, or interpreting, the information and evidence that the researcher has decided to consider as data"; therefore, it is important to be clear about my own decision regarding what theoretical framework I intend to use. There is also a need to recognise positionality. Holland et al (1998, p25) argue that one's social position "defined by gender, race, class and any other division that is structurally significant potentially affects one's perspective"; therefore it is my interpretation of these theoretical ideas set against such structural determinants which guides my understanding and application of this theoretical framework. Collation of data was part of this process. As Osgood (2012) maintains, these ideas act as illustrative examples taken from the data and are intended to "expose and document" the reasoning process, thereby offering the audience "opportunity to evaluate and dis/agree" with how and why these were presented (Osgood 2012, p39).

This, however, raised an unforeseen dichotomy as I tussled with the weight of responsibility as the gatekeeper for the voices of the participants alongside my aim to present research that is accessible, understandable and relevant to the wider debates concerning identity. As Lewis and Adeney (2014) point out, narrative inquiry very much constrains the researcher to honour the stories told. Consideration of how to accomplish this became a significant

project, given the tenet that positions narrative researchers responsible in seeking to “keep a story intact” (Reissman 2008, p53). However, a key point of rupture for me was in recognising that these stories gathered were data. In representing the stories told in narrative inquiry, our actions as researchers mirror those of our participants, in what we choose to tell, what to include, what to omit, and the decisions we make to suit our purpose (Sikes 2010). Here I return to the interpretivist paradigm underpinning this research and reflect on the position offered by Riessman (2008); just as the “narrators interpret their past in stories rather than reproduce it as it was; investigators, in turn interpret the interpretations” (Riessman 2008, p188). How I choose to re-present the stories as data, therefore, becomes my representation or interpretivist account of my findings, just as the narrators’ accounts are their interpretations of their identity. One may surmise the validity of such layers of interpretation. However, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state a pertinent position regarding the significance of attending to interpretations presented in narratives, by maintaining: “Narratives do not establish the truth of ... events, nor does narrative reflect the truth of experience. Narratives create the very events they reflect upon. In this sense, narratives are reflections *on* –not *of*–the world as it is known” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p7, Author’s emphasis). In recognition of the theoretical framework shaping this project of figured worlds (Holland et al 1998), this tenet may be representative of how participants as narrators are experiencing, internalising and self-authoring their sense of identity. Therefore, interpretation becomes of central importance in seeking to investigate participants’ stories or reflections ‘on’ their identity as a way to explore authorship. Holland et al (1998, p173) observe:

“The self is a position from which meaning is made, a position that is “addressed” by and “answers” others and the “world” (the physical and cultural environment). In answering (which is the stuff of existence), the self “authors” the world – including itself and others.” (Author’s emphasis)

Therefore involvement in research becomes a social activity, a space for authorship akin to other activities which populate the landscape of lives lived, a life in practice (Wenger-Trainer and Wenger-Trainer 2015). Whilst this activity is part of a research project, it can be understood as nonetheless a generative opportunity, valid in terms of offering space for self-authorship.

Reflecting Braun and Clarke's (2006) fourth stage of theoretical thematic analysis, Flick (2014, p422) proposes that this is representative of "refinement". Although essential, this proved to be time consuming, as I sought to interrogate the data further, going back and forth between the data, reading and reflection. A key point was not in the occurrences of aspects arising from the data, but to seek to identify those moments of rupture where participants expressed their authoring of self, agency or lack thereof, as they encountered and navigated the HE landscape as University Lecturers coming from a background in early years practice. Refining the data for each story was the starting point for this fourth thematic stage. This was an important factor in the layered approach to analysis in looking at the individual, then in considering what the collective narratives might be telling me about the wider field of identity. A key aspect for me as part of this research was that of semiotic mediation as part of the process of sense making (Vygotsky 1978). This I see as an integral part of the refinement process. Taking opportunities to discuss my thoughts, themes and research journey became sites of knowledge creation and rupture as a researcher. As I presented at a range of conferences, discussions with my supervisory team became essential conduits for interrogation, mediating my understanding of my data and its thematic refinement. In this stage I began to look across the stories to initiate the process of identification of themes. Again this was a problematic endeavour; as previously discussed, this challenged the tenet of honouring the stories told intact (Lewis and Adeney, 2014 Riessman 2008). Whilst this again required careful consideration, I was also mindful of the notions of value discussed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) mentioned earlier in this chapter. In seeking to explore and theorise how early years professionals experience and enact their sense of identity as they navigate the changing HE landscape as University Lecturers, I needed to be mindful of the accessibility of these stories. If I was to open up discussion – and potentially further research interest – in these experiences, this required making decisions regarding clarity and coherence. Therefore a key driving force was to find a way to structure and re-structure the narratives in order to create a balance of the determinants of voice, audience and impact (Clandinin and Connelly 2000), so that I was honouring the stories told, whilst exposing value to other scholars and to the wider field.

Pulling the stages together in a coherent way is described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as the fifth stage. As Flick (2014) argues, this relates to a mapping exercise. Here, stages four and

five came together as an extended stage of refinement. This was manifest in how I continued to look across the whole data set, making decisions regarding those themes that I felt supported the telling of the narrative life histories. Defining and discussing the themes was an important part of the process of sense making and shaped my findings and analysis chapter. As Riessman (2008) observes, when reflecting on a range of exemplar case studies from narrative research, analysis needs to be recognised as “methodical and painstaking” (Riessman 2008, p73). This is pertinent to this research, as the stages of familiarisation, generating codes and searching for and refining themes, needed to be methodically worked through. They were an integral part of the mapping that underpinned this fifth stage and the final presentation of findings, analysis and discussion.

Here we arrive at Braun and Clarke’s (2006) sixth stage of report writing. Happy reading!

Thematic analysis overview

This overview encapsulates Braun and Clarke’s six stage methodological approach with that of the theoretical framework of figured worlds discussed above.

Six stage approach to analysis Braun and Clarke (2006)	Stage 1 Familiarisation	Stage 2 Generation of initial codes	Stage 3 Searching for themes	Stage 4 Theoretical Thematic Analysis	Stage 5 Pulling the stages together	Stage 6 Report writing
What did this look like?	Collating data into individual stories. Personal transcription essential to familiarisation.	Initial colour coding centred on the research aims. Narratives explored as individual stories.	Drawing together of individual colour coded data. Reflective comments added to illustrate rationale for identification. Initial connection to broad theoretical ideas	Focus on theoretical framework of figured worlds to draw together the emerging themes across the data set.	Analysis of data into key theoretical themes. Consideration of how these themes overlapped and coalesced into the broader concepts explored within figured worlds.	The identification of the four themes in Chapter 4.

			from figured worlds made.			
Outcomes	<p>Essential part of getting to know the data.</p> <p>Opened up space for reflection.</p>	<p>Identification elements of the narratives connected to research aims.</p> <p>Comments option used to add reflection on initial analysis and make connection to concepts from the theoretical framework. (See appendix 7)</p>	<p>Broad theoretical themes identified in each individual set of data.</p> <p>(See appendix 8)</p>	<p>Drawing together of all stories to support identification of common theoretical themes across the data set.</p>	<p>Exploration and articulation of my understanding of theoretical concepts and how they may begin to be brought together in order to be able to provide a robust rationale for discussion.</p>	<p>Clarity of structure of each part of Chapter 4 .</p> <p>Introductory comments to each section utilising rationale developed in stage 5.</p>
Analysis		<p>To explore how University Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies, from a range of early years professional practice backgrounds, experience and author themselves as professionally 'being and becoming'</p>	<p>Adressivity Agency Impovisation Altruism Artifacts -conceptual - re-storying self by use of artefacts</p> <p>Figurative identity Figures traditional - non traditional</p> <p>History in person- education markers of</p>	<p>History in person- Educational history. Being and belonging Achievement</p> <p>Career Storying Happstance Chance Relational identity Spaces for rupture-</p>	<p>History in person Positional identity power and agency</p> <p>Career storying Happstance Chance Relational and positional identity Mediation</p>	<p>History in person</p> <p>Detailed rationale presented in each opening to sub- chapters in Chapter 4 (p78)</p> <p>Career Storying</p>

		<p>To examine critically how the systems and structures enacted within higher education construct discourses of the professional lecturer;</p> <p>To theorise how early years professionals experience and enact their sense of identity as they encounter and navigate the changing HE landscape as University Lecturers.</p>	<p>being and belonging</p> <p>Mediation</p> <p>Orchestration-space to think</p> <p>Positional identity -power</p> <p>Positional identity-hetroglossia</p> <p>Practice- vocational experience-orchestration</p> <p>Relational identity</p>	<p>agency re-storying</p> <p>Figures Artefacts and addressivity</p> <p>Performed selfhood</p> <p>Markers of importance</p> <p>Traditional -non- traditional</p> <p>Orchestration and Hetrogolia</p> <p>Semiotic mediation.</p> <p>Cultural tools Reflection-agency</p> <p>Opportunity to exercise agency re-story</p>	<p>Figures and Artifacts-cultural tools</p> <p>Being and belonging</p> <p>Positional identity-power</p> <p>Figurative identity</p> <p>Space to imagine</p> <p>Orchestration Rupture</p> <p>Semiotic mediation</p> <p>Reimagination</p>	<p>Figures</p> <p>Space to imagine</p>
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3:9 Methods

In this section I outline my thinking regarding the selected methods, and discuss the rationale, as connected to my wider methodological position. In recognition of the entwined nature of an ethical approach to research, I include an ethical alert section following each data gathering method to highlight specific concerns and how I sought to address them. I utilise the data generation schedule from my work in gaining ethical approval from my awarding institution. This also formed a component of the information shared with potential participants as part of gaining informed consent.

Data generation schedule

Date	Activity	Aim & Activity
September	Invitations sent to target group Option for introductory individual meetings	To elicit interest in joining research To provide written information to support informed consent To provide consent forms To personally introduce myself as a researcher, providing opportunity to ask questions
This information was provided to all participants.		
October	Stage 1 Focus group	Your stories. You will be asked to bring an image or artefact which you feel represents your identity as a lecturer. Opportunity to discuss their relevance to you and hear from others in the group.
December	Stage 2 Text Writing 1 Reflection	You will be asked to undertake some reflective writing focusing on your own story, considering important aspects to you arising from the focus group discussion in relation to your own identity. These will be shared with me prior to Stage 3 at a mutually agreed time
February	Stage 3 Individual semi structured interview	Collaborative dialogue based on reflections. You will be asked to bring another image or artefact which you feel represents your identity as a lecturer.
April	Stage 4 Text Writing 2 Final Reflection	You will be asked to undertake some reflective writing focusing on your interview, considering important aspects to you and your identity as a lecturer.

August	Final stage at which you are able to withdraw your data	Prior to final revisions you have an opportunity to review your data and decide if there is any aspect you wish to withdraw.

In consideration of the theoretical and methodological positions foregrounding the research methods is the significance that I place on narrative life history inquiry. My decision to work with a group of participants who share elements of my own experience, coming from a professional background in early years practice into academia, was in order to explore how others may be experiencing and authoring themselves. Therefore this acted as the selection criteria for my participants. My role as part of this figured world, crosscutting early years practice and HE, supported my access to this specific group. Once I had gained ethical approval from my awarding university, prospective participants were contacted and provided with an overview of the research (Appendix 1). Three out of ten contacted asked to meet me in person and these three subsequently agreed to take part.

3:10 Ethical alert

Aligned with the ethical guidance stipulated by my awarding university based on the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) guidelines, ethical approval was sought and gained prior to any measures to gather data. A detailed outline of how I intended to frame my research and research activities in an ethical manner was key to gaining approval to undertake this research, with an overarching tenet of “do no harm” to those involved (Sikes 2010, p14).

Provision of in-depth participant information giving details of the outline of the research aims and my approach to their involvement was the first step in gathering my data (Appendix 1). This was an essential underpinning aspect of gaining informed consent from my participants (BERA 2018) (Appendix 2).

The option for a face-to-face meeting was planned as an opportunity for participants to ask questions for clarification. However, this emerged as something very different from my

initial idea of a chance to seek clarification and became an important first step in developing the narrative enquiry methodology. The relational ethics aspect to narrative life history acknowledges the significance of interpersonal connectiveness of this methodology, in facilitating openings for personal accounts in the teller's own words (Shacklock and Thorp 2005, Sikes 2010). Therefore, rather than an information exchange event this became a significant aspect in starting the researcher participant relationship. As Richards (2019, p175) maintains, this is essential in building "respectful interactions wherein the participant is appreciated as an expert in their own life". Rather than providing information for clarification this became a way for participants to begin to explore aspects of trust. Whilst the participants were known to me as professional acquaintances, the relationship between myself as a researcher and their role as a participant represented a shift in positional identities that required renegotiation. On reflection I recognise that this face-to-face meeting became a conduit to this negotiation. Key concerns regarding anonymity and confidentiality were central to this first set of meetings. Acknowledgement regarding the significance of research-informed practice, and how engagement in undertaking research as professionals themselves was part of the figured world of HE and early years practice, led to a dichotomy for the participants; whilst they viewed research as important, they became the subjects of research with the potential to expose themselves and their stories as professionals. Concern that their position as part of the HE and early years communities would lead to identification was a key aspect in being participants rather than researchers themselves. How I intended to appreciate their stories and protect their identity was part, not only of the ethical procedures I needed to follow as a researcher, but integral to how I was able to demonstrate that I could be trusted with their stories. This brought into sharp focus the responsibility one takes on as a researcher, and the commitment not just to complete research by offering a contribution to knowledge, but as a custodian, to do no harm to those brave enough to tell and share their stories (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, Sikes 2010, Shacklock and Thorp 2005).

Sharing my ethical approach to anonymity was particularly important at the outset, in addressing their concerns. Speaking to those who had undertaken research themselves was beneficial in relation to terminology and awareness of ethics, but it was also challenging, in that there was no place to hide. However, this became a distinctly positive aspect of the

research, considering my narrative life history approach. Key to protecting participants' anonymity, as both an ongoing and collaborative process, was having conversations discussing my approach, and putting steps in place to ensure participants were happy at each stage with procedures to protect their identities. This not only helped to support transparency, but was an essential aspect of ensuring anonymity together as part of building a respectful researcher-participant relationship.

Of course, this was a risk in that they may decide to redact something that I felt was significant within the data. However, if my aim was to gather the stories others wish to tell me, then this is based on those participants being secure in the knowledge that I use the stories they want to tell; and if they decide that something needs to be omitted, then that is the narrative they are comfortable to share. Therefore, this demands that I respect individual choice as an ongoing aspect of informed consent. This also applies to information in the Participant Consent Form (Appendix 2) stipulating a right to withdraw from the research at any point with or without reason (BERA 2018). Provision of personal contact details was shared with participants so that if this was to occur, I might seek to explore any issues sensitively, to see if any adaptations might be made to allow reconsideration and re-engagement.

Practically, this led to providing the opportunity for participants to see copies of all data collected, with the option to confirm accuracy or redact parts should they wish. In gathering pen portraits for each participant, a particular challenge was to provide sufficient information to illustrate each person's professional context without making identification possible. This could only be completed by working closely with each participant to ensure that they were satisfied that their anonymity was being protected. Sending participants' reflective text-writing as electronic documents served to circumvent this type of to-and-fro activity in general, as the reflections written by the participants were in effect already approved. Pseudonyms were used in the storing and analysis of all data on password protected devices from the point at which they were received. All communication was through participants' private email to ensure references to their HE organisations were not indicated. Explicit information regarding confidentiality, the use of pseudonyms and measures to limit identification of previous or present professional contexts, was particularly significant to the participants, given the nature of data which may have included

reflection on their professional practice backgrounds which could inadvertently expose their identity. As discussed, participants' right to withdraw with or without reason was communicated from the outset.

3:11 Focus Group: Interviews

The selection of the focus group method for data collection as the initial stage in the data collection very much rests on the provision of dialogic space. Highlighting the vulnerability for participants, Barbour and Schostak (2011) consider how the relative positions of those who participate in relation to each other and to the researcher can have implications for vulnerability, censorship and performance. Whilst potential for censorship was a consideration, I align my choice of data generation method with that of Holland et al (1998) in terms of addressivity and authorship, and how in being part of the social world we are always in the process of addressing and being addressed as we author our sense of identities. Therefore, the context of a focus group can be seen to provide space for addressivity as participants to author themselves as HE Lecturers and give voice to important aspects of their professional identity. However, recognition of this as a social dialogic space needs to take account of how such interactions may act to limit as well as open up space for exploration. Mindful of issues of censorship, power and position, the important aspect of consideration was in the act of addressing and being addressed. This dialogic space still held resonance within the research design, as through involvement participants and researcher became active co-constructors in the story telling process (Bathmaker 2010, Riessman 2008). Aware of the potential for censorship and the need for time for reflection after the first meeting, I decided also to include individual interviews as part of my research design. Whilst considering researcher positionality and power, and the artificial nature of this as a contrived dialogic space (Waller 2010), I felt this offered a different, more intimate social context where there was potential to express narratives that participants may have been less willing to express in a wider social group. Holland et al's (1998) proposition of co-development is an important tenet here in the context of providing a range of opportunities for the participants to tell their stories; the focus group and individual interview with the researcher as a social opening was not only useful but an essential element in considering identity. The authors argue that co-development becomes

a way of thinking about the interconnectivity between the “intimate and public venues” of identity in practice (Holland et al 1998, p270). Therefore, whether engaged in a focus group or individual interview these became social openings that foregrounded life history narratives.

3:12 Ethical alert

The data gathered was recorded, transcribed, personally encrypted and stored on a password protected device. Pseudonyms were used throughout all transcriptions and only known to myself and the participant concerned. To protect anonymity, any institutional, real names or identifying content directly or by inference were replaced by asterisks. Data was divided by participant and sent via email to individuals for individual agreement. Any changes put in place by myself or as directed by the participant were denoted by asterisks prior to being stored.

Mindful of BERA (2018) guidance, any data that may lead to identification was particularly pertinent, not only for participants but in respect of how others may become identifiable in their relationship to the participants, personally or professionally. Therefore, careful scrutiny and consultation with participants to ensure that we were both satisfied with how this was to be addressed in the different forms of data was essential to my ethical approach. This consultation occurred at every stage of data collection. If any issues arose, then two avenues of action were open. Steps to gain informed consent would have been pursued from identifiable others, or the explicit data could be redacted. Additional consent was not needed, however. The act of consulting with participants and the use of asterisks-ensured transparency, supported a respectful relationship, and ensured a duty of care was being enacted not only to my participants but also their wider personal and professional contacts. Whilst this does not guarantee that identity could not be deduced, the steps proposed and subsequently taken were presented and approved by the ethics board of my awarding university as sufficient to address these issues. In recognition of the complexities for undertaking research, these were judged to present an ethically sound approach in line with the institutional protocol of the awarding university and the BERA code of conduct (BERA 2018).

Potential reuse of data for future research was part of the approach to informed consent and transparency from the outset. The anonymisation of data is to ensure that procedures are ethically sound in the current context and as archived data that may be used for future research.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) draw attention to the relational aspect of narrative life history from an ethical standpoint; they highlight the challenges of developing a research relationship that facilitates a physical and emotional environment, where others feel free to tell their stories against a need to be mindful of one's own safety. They propose the importance of considering where and when interviews take place and the need to establish a professional footing to ensure as a researcher one is not put in a vulnerable or dangerous position. Whilst this was not my first consideration in engaging with this group of participants as fellow professionals, it supported me in thinking about the vulnerability of one's role as a researcher, the uncharted territory with a group of people in a novel situation, and how I sought to locate my focus group in a way that predisposed a professional rather than personal discussion. Therefore, I booked a space in an HE institution to hold this first meeting.

3:13 Focus Group: Artefact elicitation

As part of the first focus group I also drew on the significance of the use of artefacts, akin to notions of photo or artefact elicitation in research data gathering (Edwards and l'Anson 2020, Kara 2015, Rowsell 2011). I chose to adopt this by asking participants to "bring an image or artefact which you feel represents your identity as a lecturer. There will be opportunity to discuss their relevance to you and hear from others in the group" (See Appendix 1). The rationale for this decision very much reflected how Holland et al (1998) draw on the Vygotskian tenet of cultural tools and Bakhtin's voice as value laden. As they maintain, we attribute meaning to objects and it is by "habitual use these cultural tools become resources available for personal use" (Holland et al 1998, p50); these are never neutral or context free, but carry with them cultural, social and historical meanings. It is important to consider the significance of how these artefacts were being understood, rather

than the objects themselves. These act as part of the internalisation and arrangement of ideas, or, as Holland et al (1998, p178) suggest, the “voices orchestrated”, as sites not only to position oneself within the figured world of academic activity, but as sites of transformation. Holland et al (1998, p178) argue that this process is “dynamic, uniting the intimate and social sites of cultural production”. Therefore, how these artefacts were conceptualised by the participants became acutely indicative of how they felt they had become not only signifiers of identity but also sites for imagination.

3:14 Ethical alert

Use of a focus group and artefacts provides a discursive space, as discussed. Ethically, why this was relevant as a data generation stage needed to be clearly communicated as a relevant method, reflecting the theories and philosophy shaping the research (BERA 2018). Recognition that participants may be drawn to sharing their stories in particular ways and not in others required the clear communication of my rationale. Aiding transparency and seeking to continue the thread of informed consent and respect demanded opportunity to share my thinking with participants.

Grounded on an ethical awareness of confidentiality, discussions regarding preparation, engagement and subsequent reflections were confined to the meetings organised or requested by participants, or as online documents. As acquaintances it was agreed that any meeting in a professional context would remain separate to this research involvement, supporting confidentiality and anonymity for all participants.

3:15 Text writing and reflection

An important consideration for the methods of data gathering is discussed by Gill and Goodson (2011, p160), who posit how one may build on the initial stories told as opportunities to engage in “grounded conversations”, conversations with a purpose, building on what has been exposed as indicative of life history narrative inquiry. Therefore,

it was important that opportunities for each participant to reflect on the previous data gathering event were built into the schedule. Placing primacy on this as part of my data collection methods also reflects the collaborative nature of life history research (Bathmaker and Harnett 2010, Waller 2010). This was achieved as participants were asked to share their reflections with me prior to the individual interview as a basis for the next conversation. Goodson and Sikes (2001) highlight the value of sharing researcher analysis with participants in order to gain their views; my choice to build this into my research design by asking for reflections on each stage was therefore aimed at capturing participants' responses. This reflected aspects of their analysis and was integral to ensuring that I promoted and respected their voice (Richards 2019). Space for reflection and reflective writing which I asked participants to share with me was an essential part of the research schedule in including individual interpretation and analysis of the experience of storytelling. As Richards (2019) emphasises, storytellers are the experts in their own narratives; in attempting to develop a respectful relationship with my narrators it was important to start with what they felt was significant to say or were willing to share with me. To this end I chose to structure subsequent meetings by utilising those reflections as my starting point. Whilst not seeking to deny that the next meeting reflected my interpretation of the narrator's reflections, I felt this helped to provide balance in terms of the determinants discussed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) of placing the participant's voice as central in grounding our next conversation.

3:16 Ethical Alert

Opportunity to reflect in this way can be a deeply personal endeavour and may lead to the exposition of issues that participants may find unsettling. It is with this in mind that I need to be aware of the potential challenges of reflective activity when asking others to examine their identity. As Goodson and Sikes (2001, p73) claim, narrative inquiry focusing on the professional context is not something which can be looked at in isolation; rather it is "located within the whole life perspective". As Richards (2019) argues, this demands the researcher to adopt a sensitive, empathetic approach that respects what participants want to share and to be aware that such stories can elicit strong feelings. Highlighting self-

reflection in narrative inquiry as emancipatory and empowering for participants, Goodson and Sikes (2001) look at the positive connotations, but neglect to discuss how such understandings may lead to questioning and uncertainty. Therefore this activity, as Richards (2019) claims, needs to be recognised for its potentiality in eliciting powerful emotions. In relation to this research, it places primacy on maintaining awareness that self-reflection on identities encompasses intimate and professional terrains and as such, needs to be responded to sensitively as a provocation for discussion rather than an interrogation of its meaning. As the data gathering progressed, a further aspect to sensitivity emerged. Respect for the participants' changing professional and personal circumstances led to a decision not to pursue the final text writing reflection, as each for differing reasons found this element difficult to fulfil.

Within the research, consideration of legislation on General Data Protection Regulations (Data Protection Act 2018) guided the decisions regarding what personal information was needed for the use, storage and disposal of personal data. Compliance with the awarding university's GDPR policy guided my decisions and actions. A minimising approach was taken regarding the necessity and relevance of any personal data. For this research this did not go beyond name, age and gender, reflecting the terms set out in the guidance that no "sensitive data" was taken and no "special category data" was taken.

Names were present on the signed consent forms only; these were encrypted and stored in a password protected area made available by the university to me as a research student. All documents were stored in this space and password protected. From then on all information was pseudonymised. The pen portraits (Appendix 4) indicated age and nominated gender; this was to aid clarity of contextual information. This was shared with participants to ensure that anonymity was protected and the rationale for inclusion made clear. Participants were informed of these data protection steps including the disposal of documents following the university procedures. Email communication with participants was from my student email and thus protected by my awarding university systems. All communication with participants was in relation to their own data only.

Chapter 4 Findings, Analysis and Discussion

Findings, analysis and discussion are presented in the next chapter. Emerging from the thematic analysis undertaken outlined in the previous chapter this takes shape as what I consider to be four important themes: History in Person, Career Storying, Figures and Space to imagine. How these themes developed is presented within the appendices (5,6,7, 8). Each theme is introduced and contextualised in light of the ideas explored within this research and the theoretical framework. Key data is discussed and each part presents my concluding thoughts.

4:1 Part 1: History in person

Exploring identity through the lens of figured worlds demands that we pay attention to the sociocultural and sociohistorical backdrop through which we live our lives. Conceptualised as “history in person”, Holland et al (1998, p8) draw attention to how our life history shapes our position as individuals within what they suggest is the wider and more pervasive “cultural game...shot through with the activity of social positioning” (Holland et al 1998, p279). Taking an anthropological view, they consider how sociocultural structures and past experiences come together, how we mediate such experiences within the cultural landscape of lived identities, and how in turn these serve to shape notions of selfhood. This provides a useful lens through which we can begin to examine the deeper historically-located structures and experiences that may direct, shape or restrict notions of identity.

It is significant that comments relating to educational experiences were common to all the research participants. They expressed their sense of being positioned by educational discourses as part of their historical backdrop, and by their conceptualisation of social position; Holland et al (1998, p127) refer to this as their “positional identity”. The way in which such positions were expressed within the narratives provided an opportunity to theorise how their lived experiences were being accepted, resisted or disrupted.

Anne considers her personal history and a desire to enter the field of early years education and care upon leaving full time education. Opting to take a well-established diploma course ratified by the National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB), she reflects on the challenges

this presented and the connotations regarding how she felt positioned by these events and experiences:

When I left school to retake some of my O-Levels to get onto the NNEB the way I wanted, I had to be held back a year, I was constantly on the back foot, constantly looking for some kind of approval to say that yeah, because I kind of always felt I kinda knew I had more in me. (229 – 230)

Anne places considerable emphasis on the accoutrements of educational achievement and indicates a sense of vulnerability. Although she successfully gained entry onto her chosen course, needing to retake her O-levels as part of legitimising her suitability forms a significant part of her narrative that seems to take precedence over her ultimate success. Whilst acknowledging her own capabilities, Anne appears to embody a deficit stance positioned by educational experiences in which confirmation of her abilities ultimately lies with the dominant discourses, where compliance is key and affirmation must be earned.

Carol similarly expressed a sense of vulnerability when reflecting on her early educational experiences and how she felt positioned by educational discourses. Shaped by signs which represent achievement within education, Carol contemplates how these acted to distance her from being or becoming a professional:

I came away with only, I think only five O-levels to my name so I was just rubbish at school (181) ... and so I went through life feeling quite apologetic to everyone, that's how I was really because I knew I could do it but I didn't do it and I messed about and I squandered my education, and then you're left on the back foot aren't you, that's I how I felt. I suppose I've always felt on the back foot and I was always needing to apologise for the fact that I didn't really have anything professional to my name.

(196 – 198)

Imbued with notions of educational value and power, Carol considers how her achievements distanced her from her view of the socially identifiable figure of a professional. Whilst gaining five O-levels may represent significant achievement, in Carol's narrative this symbolises an important plotline to the contrary. Carol appears to embody a disposition shaped by a discourse of underachievement, connoting a sense of acceptance in

how she feels positioned by these events in her past. As she suggests, this became part of her publicly performed identity, exemplified in her need to feel apologetic to others about her status. This narrative forms part of how Carol stories herself, not only shaped by past events but in how she would see herself moving forward, as always “on the back foot”. The significance for both Anne and Carol in how they narrate their educational history highlights how they both felt and continue to feel positioned by these early educational experiences.

The research design included a suggestion of bringing an artefact or image to the first focus group that supported the individual’s narrative. Lamenting the absence of a mortar board as part of her original graduation regalia, Anne brought her own to the focus group which she had purchased, and considered the significance of this cultural artefact as a claim to knowledge:

My artefact was my mortar board and having shared this with the group I realise that I saw this as a validation of my intellect, that whilst I was not clever at school I was to an extent intelligent enough to have a degree. (404 – 406)

Anne explained how this artefact acted as a marker of significance. She reflects on how her claim as a legitimate academic figure is embodied in how she presents herself and is addressed by others within and beyond the immediacy of the ceremony, opening up space to resist and remediate her position:

I wanted to have photographs with mine (mortar board) because I just didn’t feel like it was real (41 – 42)...I think it was about the fact that I wanted to be seen that I had done the same as everybody else, and I knew that I was going to have a photograph on the wall that would forever show that I hadn’t because I hadn’t got a cap to go with it. (71 – 73)

For Anne, having a photographic portrait to mark graduation indicates an important aspect of resistance within her narrative where acceptance of the systems and structures she was experiencing were non-reconcilable with her view of being a graduate. The absence of a mortar board appeared to undermine her ability to stake a legitimate claim to being or becoming this figure. The significance in how Anne authored herself as an ‘unauthentic’ graduate without this artefact also suggests the importance she places on how others

address us. Having a portrait without a mortar board for Anne was untenable; therefore, she exercises her agency and bought her own to wear in her portrait.

Beth also reflects on how significant it was to change her graduation regalia from a mortar board to a “floppy hat” when attending graduation ceremonies:

*I don't feel like a proper doctor without the floppy hat, it's always a floppy hat so I get them to change it because ***** (HE institution) is a mortar board. (58 – 59)*

As a marker signifying particular activity, achievement, power and status recognisable within the figured world of academia, a floppy hat becomes a conduit through which Beth states her claim to the figure of a “proper doctor”. This cultural artefact is therefore an important resource in how she frames her own identity, authoring who she is in a world where others share that understanding. Whilst both of these accounts portray the significance of the trappings of academic regalia as cultural artefacts, traditional and recognisable, it is in how they are being used by both Anne and Beth that is significant. Moving beyond acceptance or resistance they become part of the notion of selfhood, mediated in very personal ways and deeply embedded in the stories they tell of themselves and in the way they address others. Holland et al's (1998) notion of social position and agency provides an opportunity to theorise how such actions indicate more than a continuation of tradition. It allows us to consider how these actions represent agency, where refusal of a position offered can lead to the creation of one more favoured, in which both Anne and Beth exert agency in ways that are significant to their own selfhood.

Beth refers to a conversation outside of the research environment regarding feelings of being an imposter, and suggests how these have been disrupted. Inferring that gaining a doctorate has resulted in a shift to a legitimate position for her – and that it will be for me too – highlights the significance she places on this as representative of entry into the world of academia, previously unobtainable:

We've had a conversation about that impostor syndrome stuff... when you get that doctorate you won't be, because somebody else has said that you are good enough and it really does change... for me it changed my thinking. (530 – 532)

Gaining the academic status of doctor appears to act as a site of rupture for Beth in her narrative where she felt afforded a legitimate position within the figured world of HE, a position not available previously despite her degree achievement. The significance of the notion of addressivity is central to this shift. Rather than considering it a demonstration of knowledge or skill, the critical factor for Beth is that it is underpinned by recognition from others.

Beth considers how this space resulting from being a doctor has not only impacted on her thinking but also on her practice with early years partner organisations:

I did say before, the label that made a difference to me was having the doctor... and yeah and the hat matters and because people ...automatically ask you stuff and it's, and respect your opinion or seek your opinion or value what you have to say... because at (Partner organisation) they call me Dr Beth, I'm their Dr, this is our Dr Beth, you know (laughs)... they like to use it because it gives them a certain amount of... I suppose it's sharing that kudos again, being able to share it ... So they feel very proud of it ...which is ...nice because then they use it in their marketing, you know we are working with Dr Beth... (409 – 419)

For Beth, becoming a doctor evokes a particular storyline or plot associated with power, position and value that reflects Holland et al's (1998) concept of figurative identity. In considering how others address her and how she answers, Beth identifies this as a site of change in practice where opinions are sought, valued and respected. How her identity as a doctor is being understood beyond the immediate HE environment may infer a sense of how the figurative identity of being a doctor cuts across professional boundaries. As Beth suggests, identification with her as a recognisable figure possessing "kudos" is one which is understood and transferable as a marker of value by association.

4:2 Concluding thoughts

Use of the conceptual framing of Holland et al's (1998) history in person provides the opportunity to explore how the participants' past experiences are being understood. It is perhaps unsurprising to note how discourses associated with education feature as part of how this group of HE Lecturers discuss their identities. Reflecting on the data, it is clear to

see the significance of educational achievement in relation to the stories participants tell about their own lived experiences of affordance, legitimisation and position. However, this is not so much about themselves as educators but about the systems and structures of education itself. Cultural artefacts of educational achievement act as powerful indices to claims of position within the group. Plotlines of educational achievement, ability to enter onto a course, significance of wearing a mortar board or a floppy hat, all become important demonstrations of being and becoming legitimate. Reflecting on the notion of relational identities helps to explore the vicissitudes of such plotlines, as Holland et al (1998, p138) state, “People tell each other who they claim to be in a myriad ways.” As we internalise or mediate the discourses of education, we position ourselves in relation to these. These influences become internalised, embodied in the ways we think of ourselves and our place in relation to others (Bennet et al 2016). It is significant to note how the shadow of previous educational experience positions the participants – in their view – as potentially unworthy, particularly in light of their backgrounds and achievements (Appendix 1). This draws attention to how experiences, skills and knowledge gained in practice seem to have been silenced. Using the lens of a figured world opens up a way to begin to appreciate the deep-rooted nature of feelings of being “constantly on the back foot” or, as Beth suggests, “an imposter”. This aspect also opens up wider consideration of an HE landscape that espouses diversity in degree offers and connection to employability where lecturers with vocational experiences may secure employment but may be positioned to see themselves in very particular ways.

4:3 Part 2: Career Storying

This section considers career trajectories as storied by the participants. Sites of acceptance, affordance and rupture come to the fore as they consider their route into early years education and the figured world of HE Lecturers. An emerging commonality within these individual narratives appears to be the significance of being addressed by others and how these voices are mediated and acted upon. At first reading, these trajectories appeared to indicate a sense of happenstance rather than aim-orientated or focused career decisions. However, Holland et al’s (1998) tenets concerning addressivity provide an opportunity to reconsider these narratives, allowing reflection on the social and cultural milieu through

which these participants are weaving their stories. Drawing on Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism, the notion of figured worlds pays attention to how our identities comprise of the ongoing negotiation of the signs, symbols, codes and culture of human existence. As Holquist (2002, p47) suggests:

So long as I am in existence, I am in a particular place, and must respond to all these stimuli either by ignoring them or in response that takes the form of making sense of producing...meaning out of such utterances.

Therefore, an important factor of lived experiences of identities relates to how we understand and respond to the world around us as an ever-forming lived activity (Holland et al 1998). However, the lens of figured worlds also provides ways to think about the production of meaning. Considering the Vygotskian tenet of mediation, Holland et al (1998, p170) reflect on how identities provide possibilities for different understandings, actions and expectations rather than “carbon copies” of what has gone before. This offers a way to consider the career trajectory of participants as one of negotiation, response and sensemaking, rather than one of chance encounters or unplanned career choices.

Carol stories her move as a practitioner into the field of ECEC as one for which she feels equipped, where being a mother may be understood as offering affordances that legitimise a choice of action in taking up the role of play leader:

Just through the children I got into becoming a play leader in a local playgroup because it was closing down and I was a rota mother and that's really how it began.
(179 – 180)

Considering the historical and cultural context of ECEC as one reflecting a highly gendered workforce embedded in particular performances of gender concerning “femininity and motherhood” (Campbell-Barr 2019, p16), Carol responds to these social discourses shaping her identity as a mother as entitling her to become part of the ECEC workforce as a play leader. Responding or answering to this socially and culturally recognisable backdrop, Carol therefore positions herself as an actor in a plot that she accepts as legitimatising her suitability as a woman and as a mother of young children.

Being or becoming a mother, however, acted as a site of tension and disqualification for Anne, where her claim to be part of the early years workforce through the conduit of study were at odds with her suitability to pursue her career. This indicated a rupture in how she viewed her career choice as she sought to gain a qualification as an NNEB nursery nurse working with young children. For Anne, this meant that becoming a mother and continuing to study were incompatible and resulted in her withdrawing from her course.

But then I ended up going and having children and then it wasn't until somebody said why don't you go and have a go...and then suddenly it went from there...but I was always looking for recognition. (232)

The storyline of being a mother carries certain assumptions that appear to give little option in Anne's story for an alternative course of action other than to make a choice between motherhood and study. Considering the notion of approval, Anne suggests that her choice to return to her studies was based upon how others were encouraging her. Therefore, how she was being addressed and how she responded through her action was pivotal to opening up a space to reclaim the narrative of being and becoming a student. What was said and who addressed her is unclear; however, the significant point appears to be that this interaction created a rupture where Anne was able to exercise agency in taking up this previously unavailable course of action of being both a mother and a student.

As Beth speaks about her career, she also reflects on the significance of being addressed by another, and how this led to a rupture or change in how she was storying herself as an early years practitioner. Whilst helping out at her daughter's pre-school, Beth recalls the event and her responses to a visiting female college tutor, who asked:

Have you got a qualification?.. Um no!.. Well there's some EU funding, would you like to come and do it, we've got a part-time course for adults, yeah and it's free. So I did the BTEC National part-time student ...so I was working there and she came back in to assess another student at another point and said, um we've got a job as a lecturer at the college, would you be interested? (276 – 279)

Beth refers to these seemingly coincidental series of events as significant moments in her story; in the act of answering and responding, hitherto unimagined activities opened up to

her. Whilst undoubtedly Beth exercised agency in how she acted in taking up these activities, aspects of intent and aptitudes within her narrative appear to be absent, in favour of luck and coincidence. The dichotomy between happenstance and choice regarding career trajectories here is useful to consider. As Holland et al (1998) maintain, our identities have to do with figurative and positional identities. The former is associated with those familiar plots, behaviours and characters that we recognise, feel affiliation to or dissonance from. Here, Beth stories the move from practice into lecturing as serendipitous; however, this may also be one of affiliation as she recognises and sees herself taking her legitimate place in a plotline that she understands. It may be significant to reflect upon gender orientated discourses associated with childcare and education (Cameron 2014, Osgood 2012) in considering this chance-orientated career shift as less about happenstance and more about how familiar plotlines shape Beth's logical next step. As Holland et al (1998, p53-54) state:

A figured world is formed and reformed in relation to the everyday activities and events that ordain happenings within it...the storyline is not prescriptive but significant as a backdrop for interpretation.

Therefore in Beth's case, becoming a mature student in ECEC and progressing to lecturing is less about luck and more about how she is able to understand or imagine this as a plotline to which she has legitimate claim. Whilst this may unquestionably relate to gender identity and the highly feminised nature of the ECEC workforce (Cameron 2014, Campbell-Barr 2019, Osgood 2012), a figured world lens acts as a way to appreciate the importance of this as a backdrop to how she may see herself taking a legitimate role as a student and lecturer in ECEC. As Holland et al (1998, p52) maintain, figured worlds are "sociohistoric, contrived interpretations or imaginations that mediate behaviour and so, from the perspective of heuristic development, inform participants' outlooks". In terms of positional identity (Holland et al 1998), where one's identity is relative to those socially identifiable others, Beth's decision to take up what may be considered as a suitable next career step to which she felt entitled may be shaped by the backdrop of socially and culturally gender-orientated narratives, where entry into the field of ECEC for a female is possible.

Being and becoming an academic in HE

There appears within Carol's narrative implicit reference to practice experience working with children in the early years. Greater focus, however, is placed on her work supporting students who were gaining placement experience in her workplace, and this was significant in relation to how she sees herself as developing professional capital once viewed of as unobtainable:

I started on an NVQ and I did a level II then a level III and then gradually they realised I'd gotten an aptitude for working with students and becoming a mentor and then they asked me to teach. Gradually I developed into something, I never dreamt of thinking that that's what I'd be doing! (337 – 338)

Reflecting on the significance of qualifications gained whilst working in the field of early years, Carol stories herself in relation to how this served to open up space where she comes to recognise an aptitude for working with students. An important point in her movement into teaching here appears to have been sparked by a response to the invitation offered by others. In this act of being addressed and responding, Carol infers the importance of the experience in how she was able to take up identity as a teacher, in a way she had not previously considered as part of the storyline of a practitioner working in the early years.

Carol relates her personal experience as a mature student balancing study with full-time work and family commitments to how this creates a sense of connection with other mature students. Drawing on her history in person, this relational identity frames Carol's narrative as a Lecturer in Higher Education:

I think you can relate to the students in a new way, in a way that traditional academics can't do...and it becomes almost like you are still on a journey with them I feel, I feel when I'm teaching students especially when I'm teaching mature students as I have in the past, I was teaching students who were starting, embarking on the same journey that I had been on where they were working and coming in the evening and doing their degree that way, and the rapport we developed because of that, I just felt as though I was walking in their shoes and they were walking in mine and it's priceless isn't it? (146 – 151)

Carol's position as able to identify with and relate to mature students provides her with a connectivity that she considers "priceless". Reflection on Holland et al's (1998) consideration of artefacts can be a useful way to explore how in a dialogic sense this life story becomes a psychological tool that Carol feels is an important part of her identity in practice. As the authors maintain, "Artefacts 'open up' figured worlds. They are the means by which figured worlds are evoked, collectively developed, individually learned, and made socially and personally powerful" (Holland et al 1998, p61). Therefore, in this context the dialogic "rapport" becomes a significant and powerful artefact within her practice, her symbolic capital. Carol stories herself as part of the figured world of HE in supporting others who share her story as a reciprocal way of addressing each other; they confirm their legitimate position within this teacher-student act of storying.

This type of connectivity and shared plotline is an important aspect in how Carol positions herself as an academic, and one that she considers traditional academics do not possess and cannot claim. Whatever Carol means by this term 'traditional' may be difficult to discern, although it does denote how she is storying herself as a non-traditional figure. Reflecting on her career in practice as providing affordances to enact a 'new' way to be appears to suggest how, for her, this relational identity may act not to disqualify her from becoming and being a traditional academic, but rather to open space where she feels able to address others in staking her claim to a legitimate identity as an academic.

The notion of traditional academics, what these may be, and the extent to which participants may feel affiliation or disparity towards them, are considered in greater detail in the next section. However, here Beth reflects on her career trajectory and her experience of practice in relation to how she feels this frames her view of what a "good" but non-traditional academic figure looks like:

*All of us have worked within the industry and bring that in, and that's in our teaching and that makes us **good** academics because we don't live in the dusty world of books and elbow patches, what we live in is the real world but we have a love of knowledge and expertise that we can trans...can pass forward and I think we are really really valuable. (129 – 132, Beth's emphasis)*

Beth draws on assumptions of a shared history of practice-based experience across the focus group, and juxtaposes this with what she considers to be traditional HE narratives populated by recognisable figures. She maintains the centrality of industry experience for herself and others as shaping affordance to the claim of being an academic. She also maintains that this creates a sense of dissonance between those traditional, recognisable figures “living in the dusty world of books and elbow patches” and her own identity as an academic. The legitimacy of this claim may appear questionable and contain sweeping generalisations and assumptions about the modern day academic; however, what appears significant is the disparity that Beth feels exists between those with industry experience and the traditional and recognisable characters in the figured world of academia. Beth states that this sense of cultural capital, afforded by what she maintains is real experience in the field, binds the group together as both non-traditional and holders of valuable, relevant and current knowledge that positions them in a particular way.

4: 4 Concluding thoughts

In light of the reality of a highly gendered ECEC workforce (Campbell-Barr 2019, Cameron 2020, Osgood 2012) it is no surprise to find that social, cultural and historical understandings of motherhood act as powerful discourses in shaping how the participants each story the vicissitudes of entry into the field. Not wishing to dismiss the importance of challenging such issues, particularly in relation to critical feminist perspectives, use of the theoretical lens of figured worlds supports an exploration of this as a social, cultural and historical backdrop against which identities are being negotiated.

What appears to be emerging from within these stories is the centrality of being addressed and the responses that such encounters elicit. It seems that the way in which we tell each other about the possibilities of ‘being and becoming’ can lead to significant moments of re-storying. In address, the participants come to envisage different courses of action: the interjection of others asking why identity as a student was incompatible with being a mother; an educator introducing the possibility of gaining a qualification; or how the telling of one’s own story to students conveys legitimisation as an educator: *“I just felt as though I*

was walking in their shoes and they were walking in mine and it's priceless isn't it?" (Carol, 151). Therefore, what we tell each other matters. As the participants appropriate the view of how others see them, it appears to create a rupture in their own notion of selfhood. So, rather than thinking of their career trajectories as the occurrence of chance, the use of figured worlds directs attention to the significance of these dialogic encounters in re-framing how the participants see themselves as students, educators and professionals.

Beth also alludes to the significance of addressing others as part of her way of navigating some of the tensions she feels in staking claim to the identity of a legitimate academic. Whilst this is looked at in depth in the next section, here this directs attention to the ongoing dialogical nature of identities. For Beth, the act of addressing others regarding claims to the social capital of workplace experience is entwined with her position as a “good” academic. Telling others is important to Beth and Carol and appears to reinforce and remediate what an academic identity means for them.

4:5 Part 3: Figures

The terms ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ academic were common features highlighted by all the participants. Sites of affiliation, distance, position and rupture in relation to how they articulated their position of being and becoming lecturers appear to be intertwined with ideas of traditional and non-traditional academic identity. Holland et al (1998) talk about two distinctions in identities that have to do with the figurative or the positional. The former describes generic characters, signs that evoke recognisable storylines. The latter is to do with “one’s position relative to socially identifiable others, one’s sense of social place, and entitlement” (Holland et al 1998, p125). The authors suggest an interconnection with Bourdieu’s idea of habitus, but fundamentally they talk about how these figures populate our experiences in the context in which we find ourselves, and how we read and adapt to these in and out of awareness. Whilst traditional and non-traditional academics may be debatable terms, utilisation of the theoretical lens of figured worlds directs focus not to how these may be understood or challenged but rather to the significance that these terms have

within the narratives of those who use them. It is therefore important to consider how they may serve as generic characters that populate the lived experiences of the participants.

As she discusses her conceptualisation of the traditional academic, Beth expresses the tension that she feels this presents in relation to how this differs from her own experience and career trajectory. In foregrounding her claim to being and becoming part of the figured world of academia, Beth highlights the implications of such difference on her own identity and those who share a similar vocational background. Maintaining a particular view of the traditional academic appears to raise issues of legitimacy for Beth. While one may question these assumptions, there is no doubt how significant the figure of a traditional academic is within Beth's narrative:

*And by traditional and what you mean is someone who's come through A-levels to university to work in academia purely as a researcher ...I think we are the traditional route and I think we need to stop apologising for it because actually we couldn't do our job if we'd done it the other way, how would you do your job.... I think we've got to stop apologising for it, I think it makes you an **incredibly effective** academic. (343 – 351, Beth's emphasis)*

The position and character of the traditional academic is one that Beth feels she needs to lay claim to, suggesting the importance she places on this. She identifies characteristics and behaviours that she feels encapsulate the typical, traditional academic. As Chaffee and Gupta (2018) suggest, this is representative of the relational identity where such behaviours act as markers, indicating affiliation or dissonance. Beth challenges the differences between these indices and her own experience by maintaining that vocational experience is justifiable as a marker of effectiveness as an academic rather than "someone who's come through A Levels...to work in academia purely as a researcher" (343 – 351). As a sign of resistance, Beth refutes what she feels is the accepted view of generic academic identity in favour of a re-mediated version, where her own history in person becomes a legitimate and valued marker. Here Beth seeks to disrupt the discourse of the traditional academic which she feels acts to deny her own claim to being and becoming an academic figure. Beth emphasises the value she believes her vocational experiences equip her with as an academic, shifting from an apologetic to defiant stance. This becomes part of a narrative

indicating agency as she authors herself as a legitimate part of the figured world of academia. Beth also calls for those who align with her own vocational history to take action in telling themselves and others how effective vocational experience is to their academic practice.

During her interview Beth continues to reflect on how routes into HE are, for her, imbued in notions of relative value, which position her in a particular way. She questions how such values become internalised and the implications that this has for silencing alternative narratives:

You also made me think about, why we are accepting of a vocational route into academia as being any less than any other route into academia? And in fact it isn't. It is a route which offers a greater quality of experience for our students because we can bring together the theory and the practice and show them what is possible. I think we need to re-gain the narrative (376-378). We need to start to value what we have, to celebrate it rather than keeping it as our own deep dark secret. (381 – 382)

As Beth reflects upon the importance of her skills in bringing together theory and practice – where vocational knowledge relates directly to quality experiences for students – she lays claim to being and becoming a desirable and influential figure within her area of HE. The consideration of herself as a role model appears to be an important aspect in how she is exercising agency, resisting and re-mediating prior perceptions of what it is to be an academic. As part of this re-mediation, Beth considers the significance of agency for those who, like her, come from a vocational background. She calls for action, reflecting on positional identity that she feels has become a disposition of lesser value for those with vocational experiences. Interestingly, here she identifies the source of this reimagining as needing to come from within. As she laments the marginalisation of vocational skills that perpetuates the discourse of dissonance, she calls for a need to re-evaluate and celebrate these skills to “re-gain the narrative” in authoring and positioning oneself as a player of significance in the figured world of academia.

Reflecting on the systems and structures of the figured world of HE, Carol considers her pathway into being and becoming part of that world. She returns to the notion of her history in person and how this juxtaposes with her understanding of the traditional figure of the academic:

I feel as though I haven't...traditional route at all, I haven't. I haven't done the same sort of stuff as most people have done. (220 – 221)

Assuming this places her in the minority, Carol suggests her lived experience sets her apart from that of a traditional figure. Whilst previously considering how her lived experience as a mother, practitioner and mature student formed an important part of her identity within the figured world of HE, she goes on to articulate the significance of how these experiences also position her as non-traditional and what that plotline means for her:

Because you don't go the traditional way you sort of feel as though you're like a second class. (234 – 235)

Imbued in notions of hierarchy, with cultural capital gained from experiences that differ from her own, Carol considers a dissonance between her positional identity as an academic and those whom she understands as traditional figures.

Anne's narrative concerning her own educational history and choice of university also falls within that traditional and non-traditional discourse in how she feels this positions her relative to others:

It was like I'd gone down a route that most people don't normally choose, open universities (41 – 42). Open University is never necessarily accepted or seen in the same light so then I already started thinking that my degree wasn't as good as everybody else's because I didn't have the university experience and then not only that, I had the gown but not the cap. (44 – 46)

Anne assumes that others view her choice of undergraduate HE institution as a route outside of the expected, desired or desirable. She questions the validity of her degree achievement with its connection to a university that she feels holds connotations of being less prestigious or “never necessarily being accepted or seen in the same light” (44 – 46) as others. This appears to compound a notion of being outside the traditional. By esteeming

the choice of this non-traditional HE institution as of less value, Anne explains how she felt her “*degree wasn’t as good as everybody else’s*” (44 – 46). For her, the absence of a university experience and a mortarboard appear to shape this narrative of being outside the normal. They act as significant barriers in how she addresses herself and how she feels others address her in terms of being an alumna with a legitimate claim to becoming an accepted figure within the world of HE.

However, as Anne engaged in the third stage of data gathering there was a sense of shift in how she was storying herself, from a non-traditional figure with questionable claim to being part of a figured world to a very different position:

Now if you’d asked me when I first came here I’d have said that I felt I was an impostor here and that I had no idea why they’d employed me at all and I didn’t feel as if I was a University Lecturer at all, now fast tracking forward today I feel very comfortable with that title... I feel comfortable about the idea of doing a PhD and things like that, I feel comfortable with being known as an academic... And I think it’s because I’ve been able to prove myself through being, doing writing and engaging with other professionals in dialogue, and so where I’ve come from isn’t as important as where I am now if that makes sense because in actual fact I don’t feel I’m any different to anyone else in the team. (450 – 454)

Engagement in specific activities and behaviours associated with undertaking a PhD in the field of higher education, such as writing and contributing to professional dialogue with colleagues, appear to be significant markers within Anne’s narrative. In her understanding of this it seems important to her to provide proof to others of her abilities by engaging in recognisable behaviours. Reflecting a sense of comfortableness with addressing herself and being addressed by others as an academic, Anne claims that she no longer feels any different from anyone else in the team. Considering her history in person, this may indicate that a previous sense of disconnect has been bridged, since it appears that where she has come from is not as significant as it once was. This engagement in recognisable activities within the community of practice acts as a mechanism whereby Anne feels she is able to cross the boundary from outside to inside and legitimately stake a claim to being an academic.

Anne reflects upon how others view her and how the emerging sense of belonging and respect has afforded opportunities to be and act differently, and to “step out” (504) beyond what may be possible:

I think it is that sense of when you belong and that you are... Respected is an interesting word, but basically that people are very comfortable with your ability, then I think it gives you the opportunity to then step out of that and experiment and not have any fear of that and it's only when those experiments and those challenges that you can really start to grow and that's what I'm doing... Suddenly my ideas are shooting out from everywhere and it's because I'm looking for something I think, looking for new challenge, I am excited about the changes and, and that's what I enjoy. (503 – 509)

The importance of being respected by one's peers and to feel that others appear comfortable with one's abilities provides a sense of entitlement and space for Anne to be and act differently. This narrative appears to be taking precedence over the previous reticence and fear of the need to seek and gain approval. Here Kolkin Saratuen's (2020, p259) notion of “building down” is pertinent in considering how, for Anne, this position required a sense of letting go of those previously valued skills and knowledge in favour of re-framing. Whilst Kolkin Saratuen (2020) recognises the retrograde nature of this, by using the lens of figured worlds she also suggests that this marks a point of self-reflection, where moving from one professional context to another encompasses improvisation and agency. Therefore, the way in which Anne is positioned by others within her community of practice as a recognisable figure, wrapped up in the title of Senior Lecturer, provides her with the space and validation she was seeking. This space also created a rupture in her previous position where she was able to re-frame and reimagine herself as one with valid ideas “shooting out from everywhere” (503 – 509). Whether these ideas are connected to her vocational skills is unclear; however, aligning herself with those practices associated with academia are emerging as important factors in how she now feels able to experience a sense of belonging.

4:6 Concluding thoughts

The significance that participants place on how they feel positioned by the plotline of traditional academics, and what this may connote, emerge as deep rooted and palpable parts of their narratives. The dissonance between their experiences and what they feel counts as valued serves to distance them from being and becoming part of the figured world of academia. Not attending a traditional university to obtain one's degree, taking what is perceived as a non-traditional career trajectory, matter deeply; as Carol stated, *"Because you don't go the traditional way you sort of feel as though you're like a second class"* (234 – 235). Much attention has been given within this research to the systems and structures experienced in the course of our lives and how they act as powerful and constraining discourses (Barron 2016, Chaffee and Gupta 2018, Khalaf 2020), shaping our framing and re-framing of identities as professional lecturers. Imbued with aspects of power, status and privilege, the figurative identity of a traditional academic distances this group from claiming legitimate positions in HE. Beth identifies this as a particular issue for individuals coming from a vocational background in ECEC who may feel apologetic about the 'lesser value' of their status. She claims that there is a need to shift thinking, not so much in response to the systems and structures shaping the contours of HE, but as active agents from within: *"We need to start to value what we have, to celebrate it rather than keeping it as our own deep dark secret"* (381 – 382)... *"we need to re-gain the narrative"* (376 – 378). Only then can change take place and these individuals' rightful place as academics, albeit 'non-traditional' academics, be taken.

Discussions concerning academic identity and the evolving nature of HE with the emergence of professionally orientated degrees relate to what Ennals et al (2016) suggest as the atypical academic identity. However, focusing on the context of ECEC, this atypical figure appears to be set against a backdrop of uncertain and contentious claims for professional recognition within the field – a backdrop where graduate skills are imbued with notions of driving quality (Campbell-Barr 2019, Dahlberg 2007, Sakr and Bonetti 2021) but where the recognition, pay and status afforded other educational roles is still lacking (Cameron 2020, Bonnetti 2019). Therefore, since vocational skills are so entwined with the way in which participants' claims to being and becoming an academic are perceived, this backdrop provides an additional layer of complexity, contention and challenge that may need to be navigated.

4:7 Part 4: Space to imagine

This section incorporates a number of key ideas explored by Holland et al (1998) pertaining to language used to author, orchestrate and imagine. Built on ideas of semiotic mediation and dialogism from Bakhtin and Vygotsky, the notion of figured worlds draws attention to the importance of how we come to accept, reject and arrange “multiple available discourses” (Bennett et al 2016, p250) that populate our lived experiences. As a conceptual idea, this considers how we may make meaning and respond to particular discourses as a way to orchestrate and author the world and our place within it (Holland et al 1998).

However, primarily the intent within this section is to consider shifts in understandings, or ‘sites of rupture’, in the stories of identity presented by the participants.

It is important to reflect on how these participants imagine different understandings of their identities, the sites that promote these shifts in understanding, and the potentiality for them to exercise improvisation and agency within the backdrop of HE. Here I return to a key point previously highlighted by Holland et al (1998, p5) relating to identities and imagination. They suggest they are:

Imaginations of self in worlds of actions, as social products...also as psychological formations that develop over a person’s lifetime, populating the intimate terrain and motivating social life... [Identities] are important bases from which people create new activities, new worlds and new ways of being.

It is this imagining and how this leads to improvisation that first caught my attention as a reader of figured worlds. The way in which the authors apply this idea, firstly with their work with Naudada women and later with the figured worlds of romance and Alcoholics Anonymous, drew my attention to the possibilities of utilising this theoretical framework. These studies gave an insight into how we respond to the dominant discourses of our context through lived experiences, the possibilities of imagining different courses of action, and the opportunity to be and become our own version of that figure by creating and imagining new ways of being (Gee 2000). Therefore, the notion of imagination and improvisation becomes an important feature in how these participants may be navigating

the systems and structures enacted within HE. By exploring the narratives of their lives in practice, consideration can be given to how they may experience a rupture of familiar plotlines that may come to elicit different actions, understandings, imagination and agency.

Discourse

The opportunity created by this research for Anne to tell her story and think about her own identity indicates a significant point of realisation and site of rupture in how she addresses herself. As she shares her educational journey in the public space and talks about the route she has taken into her current role, she reflects on her sense of vulnerability and how insecurities may be triggered by thinking about and discussing her life history:

My final reflection of this process is very much the realisation that it is my insecurities that can hold me back... not the qualifications. Unfortunately these insecurities can be triggered when there is a discussion about school qualifications and the place of study is brought up in conversation. (427 – 428)

Here Anne notes the significance of her own feelings of insecurity about her educational history. She admits that these feelings hold her back and have an impact on the way she addresses herself; these types of discussions trigger insecurities and act as a tangible barrier to her seeing herself as a legitimate figure in academia. It is interesting perhaps to note here how these triggers are focused on educational markers; consideration of her practice experience within the field of early years as an indicator of competence or entitlement are notably absent from this narrative.

Carol relates the importance of telling her story in relation to sharing her experiences of HE teaching and research. Maintaining the place of affirmation offered by a colleague, Carol suggests this was a catalyst for thinking differently about herself:

I talked to her, she was like clearly quite taken with the stuff I was telling her that I'd done ... it was a bit of a catalyst really because as I started to talk about some of the stuff I'd done... I'd forgotten it all and the more I talked the more I realised, hang on a minute I've actually done a lot of really good stuff (laughs), and she clearly

recognised that because she was saying, crikey there's enough here, there's plenty here for you to get this ...and that really encouraged me, it made me think, hang on you know, I am okay after all and I have done some good things and I have got lots of plans ahead and I suppose really that has made me feel quite different about myself.
(461 – 465)

There was a sense of tension within Carol's narrative as she tussled with her decision not to embark on a specific higher level pathway. Although she suggests that it was a conscious choice not to go "for that one big thing" (345), her decision was significant in that she felt it positioned her differently from others. However, that narrative seemed to be disrupted as she engaged in discussion about her practice as a lecturer in teaching and supporting learning. In the act of articulating her experiences and the "stuff" that she had accomplished, the value of what she had done seemed to support a remediation of her own story. Being told by another that the lived experiences she recounts are representative of what it means to possess the professional values of a high level award in HE, Carol felt an important rupture in her narrative. As she drew on such socially recognised acts, space appears to open up for her to re-negotiate her positional identity as an academic.

Carol continues to reflect on this event. She laments the way she had focused her attention on discourses that had positioned her differently from other recognisable figures, and how this had overshadowed other aspects that contributed to her own sense of selfhood:

Strange isn't it because I suppose looking back of course I knew all the things that I had done but I'd somehow buried them and I was only looking forward at what I hadn't got and what I wasn't ...and what I wasn't becoming, and I knew I wasn't going to become it...and I suppose it made me feel quite... down about myself. Yep...I just think instead of worrying about where I'm not going I ought to celebrate where I am, where I have gone and where I am going. (433 – 436)

The discourses of achievement, and the markers which constitute recognisable attainment, or the ability to attain this within the figured world of HE, act as powerful plotlines serving to censor Carol's narrative. A lack of connection to specific higher level studies appears to render her achievements insignificant to her, and therefore "buried". It is only when others

legitimise these by telling Carol that they demonstrate her ability to be recognised at senior level that she feels able to reclaim them.

In her final interview Carol again returns to the issue of not being on a specific pathway and how she felt this served to position her on the boundary of the community of practice. She considers the significance of semiotic mediation in opening up space where the powerful discourses shaping her position at the edges of this community could be explored or, as she suggests, unlocked:

*I'm not on this ...pathway therefore I'm not being part of other things and I'm not sharing in conversations and I'm not this...(pause) So everything got blamed on that in my head although I hadn't even articulated it, I think it's the fact I've been **made** to articulate it ...actually that has been the secret to unlocking everything, weird isn't it... (536 – 537 Carol's emphasis)*

As Bennett et al (2016) state, figured worlds provide possibilities to explore the intimate and social terrains of identities. They maintain the significance of how we internalise discourses or voices which populate the social context of the figured world. Here, Carol discusses how she felt positioned by the significance of not being on a specific academic pathway, and how this placed her on the boundary of being and becoming part of this community of practice. Sensing a *fait accompli*, she suggests how she internalised this and how this previously held no possibility for rupture. Drawing on the theoretical ideas of figured worlds, Bennett et al (2016) highlight the importance of how we arrange or orchestrate these voices as part of the ongoing project of identity. Holland et al (1998) state that it is this orchestration that leads to the potential for imagination, improvisation and agency. For Carol, being involved in research has become an important social context that connotes a sense of reorganisation of these voices, thereby giving rise to new understandings. Articulating her story became a conduit for reimagining her position, for the “unlocking” of inner understanding.

The coercive nature of being “*made*” to articulate these feelings, however, highlights for Carol the uncomfortable nature of sharing one’s life history with others. As a researcher this brought into sharp focus the potential challenges inherent in narrative life history (Bathmaker 2010, Goodson and Sikes 2001). Whilst methodologically I felt secure in the processes and procedures framing my approach, this response from Carol leads me to

question the illusionary nature of how as researchers we view such processes and the power we exert in setting up a social context where narratives are key.

Artefacts

Reflecting on a dichotomy between accepting and rejecting labels, Beth considers how this space resulting from being a doctor has not only impacted on her thinking but also on her practice with early years partner organisations outside the university environment:

I did say before, the label that made a difference to me was having the doctor... and yeah and the hat matters and because people ...automatically ask you stuff and it's, and respect your opinion or seek your opinion or value what you have to say... because at (Partner organisation) they call me Dr Beth, I'm their Dr, this is our Dr Beth, you know (laughs)... they like to use it because it gives them a certain amount of... I suppose it's sharing that kudos again, being able to share it ... So they feel very proud of it ...which is ...nice because then they use it in their marketing, you know we are working with Dr Beth. (409 – 419)

For Beth, that figurative identity as a doctor evokes a particular storyline or plot associated with power, position and value. In reflecting on how others address her and she answers, Beth identifies this as a site of change in practice where opinions are sought, valued and respected. How her identity as a doctor is being understood beyond the immediate HE environment may infer a sense of how the figurative identity of being a doctor cuts across professional boundaries. As Beth suggests, identification with her as a recognisable figure possessing “kudos” is one which is understood and transferable as a semiotic marker of value by association. According to Gee (2000, p105), identities are underwritten and sustained through intersubjective understandings that “work across time and space”. The cultural capital and kudos associated with being a doctor, therefore, carries significant value as a shared meaning, even though set against a current HE landscape experiencing change and challenge (Bertram 2021, Hathaway and Rao 2021).

Beth reflects on her identity as taking up the social position of a “serious academic” shaped by markers within the field of HE regarding essential and desirable skills and attributes:

I had recently seen a couple of job applications, which if I were not happy here, I would be applying for. This is when I realised that I have become a serious academic. When I read the essential and desirable criteria I fit them all, this is the first time this has been the case for me and I feel validated (389 – 319)... I thought I have everything on there in spades (533 – 534)... made me feel really good. I didn't want it but it made me feel really good because then actually I am where I need within my world of work, that's where I need to be. (536 – 537)

Beth recognises and accepts these skills and attributes as a valued part of her professional identity and her position within the field. In the act of answering what others deem to be identifiable activities and achievements, this serves to validate Beth's position as a serious academic by representing a definition of what it is, and therefore also what it is not.

Orchestration

Returning to the notion of the label of doctor, Beth rejects how this may single her out to others as a “*special*” figure, but rather focuses on the affordances she feels it offers her. Choosing to author herself in this philanthropic manner, Beth takes a stance in orchestrating what the academic title of ‘doctor’ means to her:

It's not about seeing me as special but it gives me the ability to do things that I couldn't do before (436 – 437) ... it gives me the right to do it, no....permission to do it not the right, but permission to do it. I mean I always did things before but maybe because of what it is... I have access to more, and if you have access to more opportunities then there are more things you can spread about. (449 – 452)

Beth focuses on an altruistic notion of what she can now do for others. However, underpinning this narrative is the sense that these options were not available in the same way prior to becoming a doctor. Beth potentially reflects her own history in person as she places significance on how she was addressed and the opportunities it afforded her. This seems to be a thread that runs through the way she now orchestrates or makes sense of her identity as a doctor and the behaviours she feels constitute that identity. There is no doubt that the label of doctor is shot through with discourses of power and stratification. As Beth

authors herself in a way that has relevance for her, a sense of agency and imagination is conveyed in how this is mediated, imagined and played out in her actions.

Talking about validation, Anne reflects on the significance of her personal life and her experience in the field of HE. She contemplates how balance or orchestration of competing narratives foreground space to reframe her position:

*I'm feeling much more grounded in my academic life, my career. I'm feeling much more grounded at home as well so I'm wondering if there's a balance there and I do think it's to do with age that and the process of time rather than my actual age, and my children are now much more settled in different areas and I've come to terms with who I am now as... as a woman so to speak, sounds very Zen-like but I think that's what it is, I tend to feel much more... happier with who I am (465 – 469)...I think it's allowed me to say that it okay for me to spend time doing this, that this is seen as a **career**, it's not just a job. (471, Anne's emphasis)*

Anne reflects upon the importance of being grounded personally as well as in her work. She considers the sense of balance she is experiencing, and why this is important, as she discusses what she feels forms her identity; this appears to be inextricably interconnected with the multiple figured world that she encounters in a life lived through activity. She talks about the various figures inhabiting these worlds within different spheres of her life – those of being a mother and a woman, assumptions regarding her age and experience – and how these all contribute to a sense of being grounded. The way in which she has orchestrated these different voices and claims to have achieved a balance has had a significant impact in re-framing her workplace activity from a job to a career; they have become a crucial part of her identity in a way that was not previously part of her narrative.

4:8 Concluding thoughts

The intent of this section was to reflect on sites of rupture in the participants' narrative exposition of their identities. By directing attention to these shifts in how they reflect on their identities, it was hoped to begin to explore sites of imagination, improvisation and agency as participants responded to their lived experiences.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, powerful emotional responses emerged. Asking participants to engage in narrative life history research requires an emotional investment from all those involved (Richards 2019). Tenets of insecurity, feeling pressured to self-reflect, and in Carol's words "*made*" (537) to face uncomfortable issues that disrupted or challenged understandings of identities, were palpable themes emerging. These aspects are perhaps less fully explored by Holland et al (1998). Their focus is more on how we bring together the voices that populate our lived experience of identities, leading to the possibilities for new ways of being, sites of imagination and improvisation. Whilst discussing how we take up or resist such discourses, what foregrounds this activity is less considered. However, these ruptures, or spaces to be and act differently, may be fraught with challenges – challenges that we may or may not consider equipped to engage with. Attempting to disengage one's emotional ability to react to multiple discourses highlights this as an important aspect of meaning-making. It appears to highlight the possibility of imaginative and improvisational responses, embedded in internally rooted emotional capacity.

As Anne reflects on the significance of being "*much more grounded*" (465), this appears to support her ability to engage with imagination and agency, both personally and professionally. Being in the right place and the right time emotionally appears to allow her the opportunity to respond to such ruptures. This notion of the 'right time' can also be reflected in the artefacts associated with the figured world context. For Beth, appropriating the label of doctor was significant in shaping how she felt this had changed or ruptured her sense of selfhood. As she reflected on how this may be seen as space for a re-working of her positional and figurative identity, she was able to reimagine her status as one imbued with "*kudos*" (409). This was, for her, the right time and the right place, where affirmation of the cultural artefact of doctoral status elicited agency in responding to previously unimagined opportunities. Receiving affirmation from others was important for Beth, both in being bestowed the title of Doctor and from the way others responded to her. It was in this space or rupture that she states she was able to act differently, to improvise and imagine new ways of being. Beth viewed the altruistic dimensions of being and becoming a doctor as being given the "*permission*" (449) to spread her ideas to support others. This, in essence, showed her ability to exercise agency in terms of her identity and to imagine being the kind of doctor she wanted to be.

This perhaps emphasises the importance of discourse and dialogue. Through speaking with others, a space of significance is presented for imagination and agency. Here I return to the idea that what we tell each other matters. As Carol spoke to a colleague about her accomplishments, this acted as a “*catalyst*” (461) for re-framing her skills and experience, where the buried became visible. For Anne, dialogue with herself was important as she listened to competing narratives. Initially, discussions with others about the place of study had a tendency to trigger insecurities; but coming to terms with who she is has, as she tells herself, “*allowed me to say that it is okay*” (471). And for Beth, engaging in dialogue with those outside of HE gave rise to space for improvisation and agency.

Chapter 5 Summary and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this concluding chapter is to draw together my research and contemplate the significance of the emerging themes. I discuss how the theoretical lens of figured worlds has enabled an exploration of the narrative life history data and what this may indicate as important to discourses of identities within the fields of HE and ECEC, as well as to wider discussions pertaining to professional identities. Key theoretical concepts were drawn from figured worlds throughout this project and continue to shape the themes within this summary and conclusion. Drawing upon the literature, I return to recurring discourses of changing and contested professional landscapes to explore possibilities and potentiality for reimagining and re-working of identities. The implications of dialogic encounters emerge as an important theme. This reflects the imagination, improvisation and agency that Holland et al (1998) maintain are key to identities in figured worlds. These dialogic encounters or

spaces may be manifest in several significant ways: in what we say to one another and how we respond in addressivity; in how we affirm or add to the available voices to be orchestrated; and as appropriated understandings that shape activities as part of the ongoing project of identities (Holland et al 1998). The themes discussed in this chapter direct attention to the implications for professional identities for those who move from vocational to academic fields. The 'Implications and Recommendations' section (5:7) reflects on the importance of these dialogic encounters. The connotations at individual, organisational and institutional levels are explored in terms of how these spaces may be recognised, valued and enabled as important sites where identities may emerge in response to challenging professional contexts.

5:2 Starting point

As a starting point for this chapter it is beneficial to return to the three research aims in order to consider how this project has developed in supporting their exploration:

1. To explore how University Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies, from a range of early years professional practice backgrounds, experience and author themselves as professionally 'being and becoming';
2. To examine critically how the systems and structures enacted within higher education construct discourses of the professional lecturer;
3. To theorise how early years professionals experience and enact their sense of identity as they encounter and navigate the changing HE landscape as University Lecturers.

In order to aid clarity, it is beneficial to reflect on my own starting point as one representative of a rupture in my sense of identity, as a professional coming from the field of ECEC into HE as a lecturer. The move from one post-92 HE institution to another highlighted an interest in space for agency. As an alumna and employee of my first HE institution, my identity was, I felt, being storied in a particular way, both by myself and others around me. Professionally, I felt this had served to create a predetermined space where agency to be and act differently was limited. The transition from one institution to another, however, significantly disrupted these narratives, opening up spaces which allowed

me to reimagine and redefine my sense of self as an academic. It was this space for agency that ignited my interest in exploring the experiences of others who may be seeking to find their way through what might appear to be a determining set of discourses. It is perhaps this notion of change, churn and crisis in the fields of ECEC and HE that may also connote the significance of this research project, not just to address my own site of ignorance (Wagner 2010) but as a way to consider the potentiality for change and re-imaginings for others as they respond to challenges within the field.

5.3 Literature

This research appears to be pertinent in light of the literature already considered, undertaken as it was during a time of change and challenge within the world of HE and ECEC. The literature revealed not only crises of pay, retention and professional identity within ECEC but also neoliberal notions of commodification, managerialism and scrutiny in higher education; these have acted like never before to create instability for those within the field (Nixon 2015, Bartram 2021, Hathaway and Rao 2021). At such a time when change, churn and crisis are being experienced in the fields of both HE and ECEC (Bartram 2021, Elliot 2021, Erickson et al 2020, EYA 2021, EYWC 2021), being and becoming part of these professional communities appears to be on 'shaky ground'. In terms of ECEC, even though discussion in the literature regarding an ageing and gendered workforce was explored, this aspect was not explicitly discussed by the participants beyond how, as mothers, they felt equipped (or not) to enter the field of ECEC. Although the participants in this study may correlate to these themes in relation to age and gender (Appendix 4), it is perhaps this very lack of attention within their narratives that may indicate the way in which familiar plotlines shaping such figured worlds can become appropriated, normalised and accepted parts of being and becoming. In particular, the historic nature of a gendered and undervalued workforce, typically associated with a female 'caring' profession, may well have insidiously contributed to perceptions of low status in the participants. Discourses in the literature concerning the place of a high quality ECEC workforce and the importance of graduate level practitioners highlighted ongoing issues of low pay and low status and other areas of instability and concern, and these resonated strongly with my findings. A recurrent theme

within the literature in terms of ECEC is the call for governmental intervention in raising the professional status of the workforce, rather than a focus on how individuals within the field may take action for themselves. Here, calls for intervention via policy appear to take precedence over the way in which such discourses of undervalue and parity with other professions may be challenged or disrupted on an individual or personal level. This emphasis on policy within the literature appears to marginalise any kind of responsibility or opportunity for individuals to challenge this. The data, however, revealed how a shift in identity from the participants' own position within HE and ECEC was located in discursive encounters on an individual and personal basis.

5:4 Methodology

Dialogic spaces

Interest in the socio cultural context of professionally 'being and becoming' drew me to the theoretical ideas proposed by Holland et al (1998) pertaining to figured worlds. By utilising their theoretical framework, the intent of this research endeavour was to explore the complexities of notions of identities. 'Figured worlds' has provided a way to begin to consider the plurality and nebulous nature of self-understanding, and to view identities as part of a continuous evolving process, experienced within and through activity in social and cultural practices. Holland et al (1998, p170) suggest the importance of language from a Bakhtinian perspective in how it is never neutral, but rather "inevitably and inextricably also ideological", as lived perspectives of the world. In view of this, it seemed pertinent to provide dialogic opportunities for the research participants, with collective and individual spaces where they could reflect and tell their stories; this idea was directed by the theoretical framing of figured worlds, and predisposed the methodological approach of narrative life history. Giving attention to the voices of those individuals as narrators of their own life experiences (Gill and Goodson 2011) was paramount in seeking to explore how they experienced and enacted their sense of self-understanding as they navigated the social,

historical and cultural backdrop of their lived experiences. This draws attention to the ongoing importance of opening up spaces for dialogue to enable the sharing of narratives within professional contexts. The telling of their stories, their experiences and their understandings was fundamental to addressing the aims of this research. I am humbled by their candour in sharing their personal perspectives and ever grateful for their willingness to be part of this research endeavour. I thank them all.

Artefact elicitation

Artefact elicitation was planned as a methodological approach that framed the initial stage of this research. It was intended as a conduit to support participants in the telling of their own stories as experts in their own lives (Richards 2021), and as a way of providing opportunity for individual expression concerning their construct of the term 'identities'. Within the initial meeting, issues that were personally and professionally significant to each participant emerged, shaped by their personal exposition of their selected artefact. Issues such as a sense of not belonging, embedded in not having recognisable graduation regalia; being on a non-traditional route; the ups and downs of achievements against perceptions of traditional career routes; and being recognised as altruistic as a personal exercise of agency – these all emerged through the conduit of the participants' artefacts. The power that these artefacts conveyed was at times palpable, and an unexpected outcome from this approach that I had not fully envisaged.

Here I return to the notions explored in the literature regarding how attribution of meaning is never value- or context-free (Holland et al 1998); rather, the objects become signifiers, part of how we come to internalise ideas or imaginings. The use of these artefacts was therefore indicative of how these lecturers were orchestrating the voices of their lived experiences (Holland et al 1998), and I consider this research would have been poorer without their inclusion. When looking at literature concerning narrative life history, whilst the use of photos and artefacts does emerge (Edwards et al 2020, Kara 2015), the personal selection of artefacts is perhaps less explored as a way to support narrative life history exposition (Bathmaker 2010, Clandinin and Connelly 2000). As an individual I do not claim to

be fully abreast of all research activity, but I would recommend artefact elicitation to provide a conduit to narrative life history for future research of this type. This recommendation, however, does need to include a word of caution. Although they proved important in opening up deep rooted notions of selfhood, these objects also need to be recognised as having the potential to provoke highly charged emotional responses. As researchers, this demands awareness in how we understand and respond to them as value-laden aspects of lived experiences and the stories they connote, and not merely as a way to start a conversation. On balance, however, this approach adds a richness to the dialogue that I feel would be difficult to replicate in another way.

Whilst it may be impractical to use artefacts to support narrative exposition within the workplace and wider arenas, their valued use in research does draw attention to the importance of providing opportunities to tell and share stories, and what it might mean to be heard, both for ourselves and for others. Stories of our experiences from our past provide space for appropriation, re-appropriation and imagination. Recognition of the value of dialogue as generative highlights the importance of how such opportunities need to be sought and safeguarded within professional spaces.

5:5 Findings

Encounters and addressivity

Through contemplation of the data explored in Chapter 4, an overarching theme emerged in terms of the significance of dialogic encounters, how they may be internalised, and the affordances they may foreground in legitimising or constraining our sense of self. The possibilities of 'being and becoming', therefore, come about through the myriad of ways we tell each other who we claim to be (Holland et al 1998). Mediated through our lived experiences, what we tell each other matters. It matters to how these participants felt able to take up opportunities for study, for careers, for being and becoming academics in the figured world of HE. It matters in relation to re-framing selfhood, imagining and enacting agency. As Carol maintained in her experience of telling another her story, this acted as a "catalyst" for uncovering what had been buried. It is this interjection of others – the action of addressivity – that repeatedly seems to indicate sites of rupture in the stories shared by

the participants. Utilisation of the lens of figured worlds has provided an opportunity to explore these dialogic encounters and consider them not as happenstance, merely part of everyday life, but rather as spaces for semiotic mediation, for reworking of selfhood, for imagination, for agency. They may be considered ultimately as generative, not only in how these encounters open space or rupture for appropriation of how others see us, but also in relation to reappropriation in how we see ourselves. They have implications for the wider ECEC and HE fields in how dialogic encounters are facilitated, both formally and informally; these could perhaps be conducted through professional development discussions or professional and public forums that shift the focus onto our experiences, our aspirations and imaginings, to establish and reaffirm professional identities.

Dialogue: sediment from the past

Considering the social, cultural and historical basis of identity, Holland et al (1998, p18) draw attention to how entwined our past experiences are in the ongoing projects of identities, where it is the “sediment from past experiences upon which one improvises, using the cultural resources available, in response to the subject positions afforded one in the present”. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that the research participants reflected on such ‘sediment’ in relation to their narrative life history accounts – sediment in which their narratives were deeply embedded. The systems and structures shaped by discourses of education and educational achievement seemed to pervade the way in which the stories of positionality were being expressed. Plotlines positioning participants as inferior, who *“don’t go on the traditional route into HE so feeling as though your second class”* (234 – 235) indicate the implications of such sediment. The conceptualisation of traditionality and the way in which HE systems and structures for conferment of achievement serve to either afford or preclude improvisation, imagination and agency, were significant aspects emerging from this research. They formed an important part in how the participants not only

experienced the field of HE but in how they drew on the cultural resources of their life experiences, or 'history in person', as deep-rooted understandings of identities.

The consideration of professional practice backgrounds, as foregrounding legitimate claims to being and becoming part of HE, seemed to create a dichotomy for the participants. They appeared to tussle with claims to being and becoming lecturers against the positioning notions of ECEC vocational experiences; in one sense they esteemed these as incredibly valuable, yet at the same time as a "*deep dark secret*" (Beth 382). While they viewed ECEC knowledge and practice experience as valuable in terms of what it meant to be a *good* academic and in enabling meaningful connectivity with their students, the pervading traditionality and deep-rooted understanding of the figurative identity of an HE Lecturer created a dissonance with their own identities that was difficult to re-story. Such dissonance may reflect the backdrop of ECEC as one associated with historical and current themes of undervalue, lack of professional recognition, and low pay and status (Bonetti 2019, Cameron 2020, EYWC 2021). This perceived lack of value in their vocational backgrounds may have become entwined in the formation of their identities as HE Lecturers, creating a dichotomy for the participants. However, the apparent significance of these systems and structures in HE, commonly associated with discourses of traditionality, power and status (Barron 2016, Chaffee and Gupta 2018, Khalaf 2020), became disrupted through the activity of address in each participant's case, either directly in dialogic encounters with me as the researcher, with co-workers, or with professionals from outside the institution.

This disruption through address may also be relevant to our own role in affirming to ourselves and others that vocational experience is to be valued. It draws attention to the significance of taking opportunities to talk with others, to continue to lay claim to academic legitimacy by activities such as sharing our experience in our work with students, engaging in professional dialogue with colleagues, attending conferences, or working beyond the institution in a wider research field.

Orchestration, emotional capacity and affirmation

As the participants recounted moments of significance, moments of shift, moments of rupture within their stories, the emotionally charged nature of their experiences was brought to the fore. What emerged from the stories within the data is how entwined one's

internal emotional capacity is within the project of selfhood. Improvisation, imagination and agency appear to be foregrounded in being in the right place and at the right time emotionally, in order to respond to the multiple discourses available. Holland et al (1998) maintain the importance of orchestration as representative of the human activity of sense-making, in how we put together the multiple discourses or voices of our figured worlds; they pay less attention, however, to the emotional aspects of how we may be open to hear and respond to these discourses. Here, affirmation takes on an important place in the notion that what we tell each other matters – not as hollow flattery, but as dialogue supporting agency and space for re-imaginings. Affirmation for Beth furnished her with the permission to imagine to be and become the type of doctor that she envisaged. Affirmation for Anne came from within, allowing a resolution of discourses that she previously recognised as limiting. Affirmation for Carol became a *catalyst* for recognition and reframing of her identities.

A further dimension to the import of dialogic affirmation is added by drawing attention to the backdrop against which these stories are set. It is here I return to the notion of shaky ground and the potential for impact on emotional capacity. As discussed within the literature, the professional landscape of both ECEC and HE appear as contested spaces. As such the potential for emotional uncertainty may be entwined with their stories of identity. Emotional capacity to hear and orchestrate these multiple discourses appears to be based on a premise of being in the right place at the right time, and may relate to having a sense of confidence and of being at ease with oneself. Such professional self-esteem has valuable connotations for professional resilience and the ability to respond to the changing HE landscape. Whilst this may develop over time, it also foregrounds the need as an institutional priority to nurture professional self-worth given the challenges within the field of ECEC and HE.

5:6 Limitations

One of the specific limitations of this study was in its size and scope. While it was hoped to recruit a larger number of participants, this did not come to fruition. As I was looking to explore the experiences of a particular group of people, this also acted as a focus and a constraint, limiting the data set and the exploration of other vocational routes into HE.

Despite having a small number of responses to invitations to join the study, I decided to proceed. This led to possible missed opportunities to broaden this research out to other HE lecturers coming from a range of vocational backgrounds to explore the differences and commonalities when questioning identities.

Within the methodological discussion, notions on insider-outsider positionality were considered. This was pertinent due to my connectivity with my participants in terms of my professional identity, coming as I did from ECEC into HE. Personally, this led to an overwhelming sense of privilege that these participants were willing to trust me with their stories – stories that may or may not echo my own, but that they were willing to share. However, I found this created tension between my responsibility to the storytellers and the purpose of this as a research activity. During the analysis stage, this tension was brought into sharp focus. The entwined nature of my story with theirs, and a need to uphold their narratives as told, made maintaining objectivity an ongoing dilemma. At times, the way in which I judged their words, highlighted some aspects and not others, and identified key themes, conveyed a concern that I might be disingenuous to the stories told by chopping up the narratives for my own purposes. It is perhaps this reticence that acts as a challenge and constraint within narrative life history research, compounded with my own connectivity to the topic and stories told.

Recognition of my role as a researcher was also embedded in dialogic encounters of address and response with and through this overlapping figured world of research activity. I cannot ignore that in setting up this project I created a context where, through the discourse of research and research activities, my participants and I were placed in a process of address (Goodson and Sikes 2001) which, as Holland et al (1998) maintain, demands a response. Therefore, I became part of the data. This adds yet another layer of complexity to this methodological approach. While I acknowledged the entwined nature of my own experience with that of my participants, it was this notion of address which was perhaps most challenging. At each point of interaction, the 'in-between' nature of my position mattered (Chhabra 2020). The way in which I responded to their comments, body language and gestures, the tone of email I adopted when thanking them for providing text writing, all mattered and were part of this dialogic encounter called research. Therefore, it is important

to recognise the embedded nature of my own position, in that without my intervention these stories would not have emerged in this way.

5:7 Implications and Recommendations

As identified within the literature, and as played out in practice in my own research, there is a propensity for researchers to look into one specific area of vocational routes into HE (Ennals et al 2016, Kolkin Sarasten 2019). Therefore, a cross professional dimension would have been a useful path to investigate. This is something worthy of consideration moving forward. A continuation of this research theme, exploring professional identities and how those from a variety of vocational backgrounds navigate the context of a changing, and still changing, HE landscape, would be particularly relevant.

What emerges as prevalent from this research are discourses connoting undervalue when compared to other professions and professionals. Advocates and researchers looking at the professional status of the ECEC workforce appear to focus attention on how the sector is perceived by government and wider society as a way to elicit change. Challenging the dominance of these plotlines of undervalue needs to be recognised as important projects, just as petitioning government recognition. Whilst undoubtedly this is an important avenue to pursue in seeking to raise the status of those within the field, this research directs attention to the agentic implications of how we may come to reimagine our sense of selfhood from within the sector. What we tell each other matters, and therefore the internal capacity for imagination, improvisation and agency plays a central part in how members within the field of ECEC come to stake a claim to professionalism. By the same token, this notion that ‘what we tell each other matters’ has implications for how we converse with our students as University Lecturers. The consideration of emerging identities becomes an important factor in how we support the next generation of the workforce – not to replicate our own experiences, but to create possibilities for them to re-imagine and improvise their own sense of selfhood. By sharing and discussing our own ECEC vocational experiences and providing opportunities for dialogic encounters, we have a role in contributing to the available voices for orchestration and imagination of identities. Here, workplace experiences as part of HE take on an important and invaluable role in the ongoing nature of identity. Through such encounters students may be supported in their recognition not just of

high quality practice but of professional and academic knowledge within the sector. This may equip them, as future ECEC professionals, to co-construct a positive identity, and to challenge discourses of undervalue and professional recognition, from within.

The research findings shone a light on possible vulnerabilities of those entering HE via non-traditional, vocational routes. As a figured world shot through with social, cultural and historical ways of 'being and becoming', it is important to recognise the pervasive nature of these plotlines of traditionality. Action should be taken from within to ensure that institutions celebrate diversity by opening up dialogic spaces to explore different career pathways into HE. Professional experience and vocational skills need to be recognised and celebrated alongside doctoral status as bringing added value and as a conduit to future activities.

In terms of potentiality, again I return to the research findings, that what we say to each other matters. I suggest that this actually goes beyond mere 'mattering', because dialogue can become an incredibly important tool for opening spaces for agency. What we say to each other adds to the available discourses for orchestration and reimagination, and this can prove to be transformational. Within the context of HE, addressivity and dialogic encounters can become vital channels for affirmation – dialogue that focuses not just on one's past or current identities but that opens space for possibilities, for imaginings and improvisation. If what we tell each other matters, this has clear implications for all areas of HE. Within HE teams, recommendations regarding supervision, management and collegiate work could direct attention towards dialogue and open forums, focusing upon what people can bring through experience, and upon their hopes and aspirations, rather than what they have or have not achieved within the realms of academia. In this way, crucial opportunities would be created for the facilitation of individuals and teams to become part of these journeys of becoming and reflect individually and collectively to assert more agency over professional identities.

5:8 Concluding Thoughts

As indicated in the discussions above, this research has met its initial aims in exploring the way in which University Lecturers identify as professionals, although the range of practice

backgrounds would ideally have been wider, had circumstances permitted. It has examined the way in which HE systems and structures and associated discourses impact on the emerging identity of the professional lecturer; and how University Lecturers from ECEC backgrounds develop their sense of identity and navigate the changing HE landscape.

The methodology chosen proved to be fit for purpose in gathering relevant data to meet these aims, despite some misgivings as to 'insider-outsider' status on the part of the researcher, and concern over possible discomfort to participants as they shared their life histories with others and revealed deep-rooted notions of selfhood. Artefact elicitation as a methodological approach proved to be even more useful than anticipated, providing a space for participants to share their lived experiences in metaphor through their own personally-chosen objects.

Analysis of the data using the theoretical framework of Holland et al's (1998) figured worlds identified several key themes, the greatest overarching one being the importance of dialogue, the idea that 'what we tell each other matters.' Being heard, being given the opportunity to express oneself, the interjection of others, the action of addressivity, all appeared to create possibilities for improvisation, for re-framing identities, imagining and enacting agency. These dialogic encounters seemed repeatedly to indicate sites of rupture and proved significant in reframing how the participants saw themselves. Being in the right place and the right time emotionally, being acknowledged and affirmed by others, allowed them to hear and respond to such ruptures and to reimagine their status. When the lens of figured worlds is utilised, these dialogic spaces become tremendously important. That affirmation and ability to verbalise thoughts acts as a way to internalise these messages and reappropriate these ideas, and that is what indicates that shift or rupture in the way participants see themselves.

I originally set out to examine the nebulous nature of identities from the specific perspective of the HE Lecturer with a background in early years practice. Findings indicate that my participants, all HE Lecturers with ECEC backgrounds, had felt "*second class*" (235) and "*always on the back foot*" (197) in terms of the lesser value of their status, their non-traditional routes into HE, and in being and becoming lecturers in the figured world of academia. The reason, I suggest, for this somewhat self-deprecating identity that appears to

position them differently from others may well originate in the deep-seated societal, historical and current landscape of ECEC as being an undervalued and underpaid sector. This deficit discourse could influence the way participants begin to think of themselves and their place in relation to others, adding to the sediment of past experiences. Despite continued efforts on the part of successive governments to improve the sector and to professionalise its workforce, the lack of recognition of professional status is still a perpetuating factor.

My conclusion from these findings is that professional recognition both as lecturers and as practitioners has to come from within as well as from without. In terms of the ECEC workforce, there has to be a change in the dominant discourses that repeatedly claim that we are underpaid, we are undervalued, we are not recognised as being professionals. We cannot wait for government, for legislation, for economic stability, to make the changes. As holders of important skills and knowledge, we need to shift our thinking and shift the discourse; as Beth suggests, *"We need to re-gain the narrative (376-378). We need to start to value what we have, to celebrate it"* (381-382). This research has directed attention to this notion of voice, available voices as part of the orchestration of the nebulous nature of an ever-developing selfhood. For me, it has been self-affirming and life changing. It has opened up a whole new possibility to be and act differently. It has indicated the centrality of the premise that what we say to each other is key to exercising agency in opening spaces to celebrate, value and affirm the field of ECEC and our place within it as professionals. It becomes vitally important not only to recognise but engage in dialogic encounters that offer opportunity for others. This research matters, as a means of highlighting the need to challenge the dominant discourses associated with a deficit focused view of ECEC. It is research that adds to the available voices acting as a conduit to reimagine identities not from a deficit position, but from one of value, relevance, and expertise. It celebrates the highly valuable skills and knowledge that may be gained from experience in the ECEC field, and it highlights the fundamental importance of how we as professionals recognise and draw attention to such potential in others, and the implications that this may have on how they might reimagine their own identity. Whilst advocacy within the field on a policy and political stage is undoubtedly important, using the lens of figured worlds illustrates that this is an integral part of how we as professionals may raise the status of the field.

In terms of HE, it is the richness of our lived experiences that needs to be emphasised. Being acknowledged and affirmed, within a hierarchical system that often appears to value status in terms of achievement rather than experience, would open up possibilities for re-storying, imagination, improvisation and agency. Dialogic space could be created to articulate, affirm and celebrate lived experiences not only for the benefit of students but in order to share aspirations with colleagues, managers and wider HE communities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Participant Information

Dear

I am writing to ask if you would be interested in participating in a piece of research which is associated with my Doctoral thesis. This research is associated with exploring notions of identity.

I am interested in the experiences of those who come into university lecturing on Early Childhood Studies degrees from professional practice backgrounds, rather than what may be considered as a more traditional route into teaching, Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

This interest has a strong connection to my own route into Higher Education as a lecturer from an early years practice background. My own experiences of being employed in HE and then changing from one institution to another has led me to consider, how and why we construct ourselves in specific ways and an interest in how this may serve to frame our identity or open up spaces for agency within such a context as HE. By exploring notions of identity; how we see ourselves in particular ways, why we act and respond to others in the ways we do, the opportunities and challenges we encounter and how we understand and respond to these may all be a part of the stories we tell and how we may come to

understand ourselves as professional HE lectures. Therefore the aims of this research seek to create dialogic spaces where reflection on such stories can unfold and be explored as part of a collaborative research process.

The aims of my research are:

To explore how University Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies, from a range of early years professional practice backgrounds, experience and author themselves as professionally being and becoming.

To examine critically how the systems and structures enacted within higher education construct discourses of the professional lecturer.

To theorise how early years professionals experience and enact their sense of identity as they encounter and navigate the changing HE landscape as university lecturers.

Involvement in the research would entail

I am seeking to involve up to six lecturers who are working on Early Childhood Studies related degrees within a university. Your route into lecturing needs to come from a professional practice background rather than QTS. Experience of working in HE for more than three years allows for reflection of this as a professional context. A key selection requirement for participation would be an interest and willingness to reflect on your own experiences of being and becoming a university lecturer. An interest in engaging in a dialogue to explore your own professional story, what it means to you and a willingness to engage in reflective writing as a basis for further dialogue is also key. Focusing on the collaborative nature of research between participant and researcher is an important aspect of this study and is therefore embedded within the data collection approach.

Date	Activity	Aim
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September 2018		Stage 1
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Focus group

Your stories. You will be asked to bring an image or artefact which you feel represents your identity as a lecturer. Opportunity to discuss their relevance to you and hear from others in the group.

November 2018		Stage 2
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Text Writing 1

Reflection

You will be asked to undertake some reflective writing focusing on your own story considering important aspects to you arising from the focus group experience.

These will be shared with me prior to Stage 3

February 2019 Stage 3

Individual semi structured interview Collaborative dialogue based on reflections

April 2019 Stage 4

Text Writing 2

Final Reflection

You will be asked to undertake some reflective writing focusing on your interview, considering important aspects to you and your identity as a lecturer.

If you are interested and would like to be considered as a participant in this research please contact me, karenwilliams64@hotmail.com no later than 23.08.18.

I will acknowledge your expression of interest by 30.08.18 and will provide an opportunity to meet with other participants. This will give you an opportunity to meet others interested in engaging with the research, receive further information about the study and ask questions. At this point informed consent forms will be disseminated for your consideration. If you are happy to proceed then please sign and return to the above address by 21.09.18.

Please note that you have the right to withdraw from the research at any point

To summarise recruitment criteria is based upon:

Employment as a Higher Education Lecturer working on an Early Childhood Studies degree

Three years HE experience

Professional background in an aspect of early childhood

Non-Qualified Teacher Status

Demonstrate a commitment to engaging in opportunities for reflective practices

Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information or clarification

Regards

Karen Williams

karenwilliams64@hotmail.com

Appendix 2 Participant Consent form

Title of Project: A question of Identity: being and becoming a lecturer

Name of Researcher: Karen Williams

Participant Identification Number:
the box

Please initial

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving reason.
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give my permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses
4. I agree to the focus group and interview being audio recorded
5. I agree that information shared in the focus group will not be shared with any other parties
6. I agree to take part in in the above project

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Lead Researcher

Date

Signature

To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant

Appendix 3 Ethical Approval

18/06/2018



Project Title: A question of Identity: being and becoming a lecturer.

EthOS Reference Number: 0637

Ethical Opinion

Dear Karen Williams,

The above application was reviewed by the Education Research Ethics and Governance Committee and on the 18/06/2018, was given a favourable ethical opinion. The approval is in place until 30/09/2019 and is based on the documentation submitted with your application.

Conditions of favourable ethical opinion

The Education Research Ethics and Governance Committee favourable ethical opinion is based on the following conditions

Adherence to Manchester Metropolitan University's Policies and procedures

This ethical approval is conditional on adherence to Manchester Metropolitan University's Policies, Procedures, guidance and Standard Operating procedures. These can be found on the Manchester Metropolitan University Research Ethics and Governance webpages.

Amendments

If you wish to make a change to this approved application, you will be required to submit an amendment. Please visit the Manchester Metropolitan University Research Ethics and Governance webpages or contact your Faculty research officer for advice around how to do this.

We wish you every success with your project.

Education Research Ethics and Governance Committee

Appendix 4 Participant Pen portraits

Anne

Female 52

Leaving school at 16 Anne maintains that she left with no results. After retaking O-levels and embarked on an NNEB course. However she left this incomplete as she married at the age of 19 and started her family soon after. Undertaking work as a part-time nursery manager in a private preschool, catering for children 0 to 5 she completed her level 3 qualification in early years. Working part-time this role near to her home in the Midlands, she suggested this was an important aspect as it fitted in with the responsibilities of her growing family, and she stayed in this position for 10 years.

As her children reached school age Anne took on the post of a teaching assistant at a local primary school working term times she supported teachers with children from reception to the end of key stage 2 (4-11 years). During this time Anne opened and ran a breakfast club, after school club and holiday club at the school. She gained her higher level teaching assistant qualification (HLTA) and also embarked on and completed an Open University part-time BA (hons) Childhood and Youth Studies. Working in a school Anne decided that the role of a teacher was not for her but had an aim of “getting a better paid job or a career”. Anne’s eldest daughter had just completed her degree and had gained at PG CE in Post-Compulsory Education (PCE), it was at this point that Anne decided to continue her studies and undertake her PG CE in Post-Compulsory Education at the same local HE institution. As part of this qualification Anne opted to complete some additional pieces of work and gain credits towards a Masters level qualification.

Anne secured a full-time post as a lecturer at a local FE college. This college were partners with an HE institution and at this point Anne was invited to teach on the Foundation Degree in Early Years. And stayed in this post for 4 years becoming program lead for the Early Years Childcare and Health and Social Care courses. As well as leading the program’s Anne also taught from level 1 entry into further education through to the level 5 foundation degree students. During this time and completed her MA Childhood and Youth and an MA Education.

Anne has been at her current higher education institution for 6 ½ years the first five years as a lecturer and the last one and a half years as a senior lecturer. During this time Anne has coordinated and delivered programs for undergraduate Early Childhood Studies students wishing to gain a professional status as part of their degree, integrating practice skills with academic studies. Continuing her studies Anne started a PhD two years ago. After taking a sabbatical for a year she has now recommenced her PhD studies. Anne has been involved in securing bids to undertake research in area of the early years workforce and this research has led to presentation at conferences local, international and local, and forms part of her ongoing studies.

Beth

Female aged 62

Leaving school at 15 Beth worked in sales and marketing for 15 years. Involved in training and managing others and developing products this was a job she maintained was one she loved and was good at. During this time Beth undertook a City and Guilds qualification in adult teaching in further education alongside her day job. This led a part-time role teaching retail and marketing in a further education institution.

Beth married and started a family as a bit of a, “late starter”. Beth continued her work in sales and teaching however, a missed sports day for one of her children acted as a catalyst for Beth to make a decision to give up both of these jobs.

Becoming a full-time mum Beth became involved in her children’s school as a chair of the parent teacher association (PTA) and volunteered as a helper at her child’s nursery. Being within the maintained nursery was something she found rewarding and she was offered a post working one-to-one with a child in the setting. Encouraged by other professionals within the setting she decided to undertake her BTEC National diploma in childcare. When the role of teaching assistant within the school came up Beth applied for it, although she was unsuccessful she did become a regular supply teaching assistant within the primary school. Working within the reception class and taking charge for two terms while the class teacher was unwell Beth experienced an OFSTED inspection and with their positive remarks regarding her practice she decided to pursue her work in the field of teaching. Gaining an

Advanced Diploma in Childcare and Education (ADCE) and reflecting her experience in further education Beth worked as an associate lecturer in a local college also completing her Cert Ed.

During this time Beth taught across all of the early years courses being familiar with further education meant that she was familiar with the processes as well as the content. When the opportunity arose Beth took on the role of Head of School with responsibility for the early year's courses and those applicable to teaching assistants. In liaison with a higher education institution she worked to develop a provision to deliver the foundation degree program by which students completed part of their degree within FE and then went on to complete a top up at the University. In order to facilitate this Beth felt she needed to gain her MA Early Childhood degree, which she did successfully. Beth also encouraged colleagues to undertake their MA qualification. It was when one of these colleagues continued on to gain their doctorate that as Beth maintains she became a "little jealous", so after much soul-searching she also enrolled on a doctoral program. Beth spent 13 years in this role.

Moving to her current role as senior lecturer within a higher education institution Beth has been in post for four years working on a variety of early years programs. Beth gained her Dr of Education two years ago. In this post Beth has taken an active role in early years workforce development both locally and nationally. She is published within the field of early years, and has delivered at conferences locally, nationally and internationally. She is engaged with securing funding bids for research within the field of early years. She has responsibility for developing practice opportunities for undergraduates and working with local employers to develop employability skills.

Carol

60 year old female

Leaving school at 16, Carol worked for 10 years in a family publishing business. Marring, relocating and starting a family Carol took a break from work. When her youngest child was three she volunteered at a community run early years preschool, catering for children aged 3-5. Taking a post as a playgroup leader Carol undertook her NVQ Level 2 and 3 vocational qualification in Childcare and Education and moved to take a post in a privately run children's day nursery. Carol stayed in post for 6 years progressing to become a deputy then

acting manager. Mentoring staff and students who came to work in the nursery setting was part of her remit and one that she relished. When the opportunity arose to take on the role of assessor as well as mentor Carol completed her NVQ assessors and internal verifier award. Supporting students from the local collage also led to an opportunity to share her knowledge and experience with others as she was approached to run training sessions related to early years practice within the collage.

Moving to a new area provided Carol with an opportunity to take on the full time role of an NVQ Assessor, “visiting students and keeping up to speed all over the country and in a range of settings and schools” was, she found an interesting and enjoyable aspect of her work. Carol found this so rewarding that she undertook an adult teaching certificate and obtained her Cert Ed in Adult Education. Taking a post within a collage as Director of Childcare she was involved in setting up a children’s centre and day nursery, and commissioning training courses for those working with young children.

Relocating to a new area of the country she became a local authority Development Officer for the next six years. Responsibility for training and developing courses related to early years practice were elemental to her work in supporting the upskilling those working within the early year’s workforce. “This was a really great time for me I could do so much stuff, there was funding and you could just reach so many practitioners”.

At this point Carol also completed her MA in Early Childhood Education. Managing links between the Local Authority and a university looking to develop a newly introduced Foundation Degree in Early Childhood with a top up option to gaining a full BA Honours led to an offer to work Carol led to an offer to work within this new department and help develop this emerging provision. Carol subsequently joined the team as a Lecturer and stayed in post for three years

Joining a university based in the North of the UK Carol took a temporary role leading on student experience as part of a BA honours Early Childhood Studies degree team. During her three years at this university she taught the degree and her role developed into a lecturing position. Moving to her current university post as a Lecturer on an Early Childhood Studies degree, Carol has been in this post as a Lecturer for the past 13 months.

Appendix 5 Data Stage 1 Focus group

Containing initial analysis: Colour coding to research questions and theoretical framework

Data was re-visited and comments added as second level of analysis see screenshot below

<p>Title: A question of Identity: being and becoming a lecturer. An exploration of how early years professionals from a range of practice backgrounds are authoring themselves as university lecturers Comment option was used to record initial rationale for coding and analysis comments</p>
<p>1. To explore how University Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies, from a range of early years professional practice backgrounds, experience and author themselves as professionally being and becoming.</p> <p>Q: How are University Lecturers in Early Childhood Studies, from a range of early years professional practice backgrounds experiencing and authoring themselves as professionally being and becoming.</p> <p>Theoretical framework Key points: Backgrounds how are these being articulated? –History in person- How are they seeing themselves? Storing themselves Storied by others? How are they professional?</p>
<p>2.To examine critically how the systems and structures enacted within higher education construct discourses of the professional lecturer.</p> <p>Q: How are systems and structures enacted within higher education to construct discourses of the professional lecturer</p> <p>Theoretical Framework Key points: Systems and structures significant to the field Social markers/signs & signifiers connected with higher education Performance indicators/ awards Determining set of discourses (what are these in relation to the data)</p>
<p>3.To theorise how early years professionals experience and enact their sense of identity as they encounter and navigate the changing HE landscape as university lecturers.</p> <p>Q: How are early years professionals experiencing and enacting their sense of identity as they encounter and navigate the changing HE landscape as university lecturers</p>

Key points: Agency & Navigation (active intentional or unintentional) actions/choices-exploring/
challenges boundaries- Space for Agency –Responding to narratives -How are we operating within
and on the structures and systems

Comment option was used to record second stage of analysis

16 All: Laugh
17
18 Karen: If you like to would you like to decide who would like to go first
19
20 Anne: Yes um. Oh ya..me (looks around at others)
21
22 Carol: Go on
23
24 Anne: This is mine.
25 Anne takes an academic black cap out of a large brown paper envelope.
26 And there's a reason for this, why this comes with me everywhere. So basically I did my degree through the Open
27 University, and Open University don't have caps as a standard part of their ceremony.
28 Um and I felt that in actual fact in terms of the professional aspect of it and recognition. I didn't feel like I had actually
29 graduated and I wasn't actually there, and I think I never truly believe I am there actually, there is always that, but you

30 could choose to buy a hat a cap if you wanted to, so I thought I'd buy the cap so that I feel like that when I have my
31 photograph taken I can wear the cap and the gown so that my picture looks the same as my daughters picture who'd
32 her graduation.
33 And I think it's because I just felt it was not the same thing but ever since then I wear it now, I've worn it for my Maste
34 and I wear it every time we have the students and it's a kind of reminder of where I've come from but.... yeah, other

Comments

becoming an academic by choosing to
@mention or reply

Williams, Karen
The structure of education being a part of / photographs indicating a positional identity of significance within society
@mention or reply

Williams, Karen
Recording makes it real. Addressivity real for self and real for others perhaps
@mention or reply

Williams, Karen
Seeing the open university in a particular way not a normal choice
@mention or reply

Karen: When we first met and we talked about the project, stage 1 of the project, the focus group, my idea was perhaps in order to help you to talk about and think about your own professional identity it might be useful to have an image or an artefact or something, that was significant to you, that helped you to think about and talk about your professional life, your professional identity.

Obviously this is the first stage so the idea of a focus group is to just perhaps to bring to the fore those ideas that may have common resonance or bring up things that you hadn't thought about before, I see this project going forward in terms of how we can create spaces for, reflection, spaces to think about who we are what we'd like, where we want to go opportunities for us individuals so this is our first steps into that it will lead on to subsequently hopefully then reflecting on the this experience and recording that in which ever way you like you may want to use an audio file as you suggested in our information meeting, or you may want to write down some reflections, it's up to you. That is the second stage of this process. Then we will use those for the third stage of the data collection which are individual interviews. The way I had envisaged is

Carol: Show and tellin choosing to

All: Laugh

Karen: If you like to would you like to decide who would like to go first

Anne: Yes um.Oh ya..me (looks around at others)

Carol: Go on

Anne: This is mine.

Anne takes an academic black cap out of a large brown paper envelope. And there's a reason for this, why this comes with me everywhere .So basically I did my degree through the Open University, and Open University don't have caps as a standard part of their ceremony.

Um and I felt that in actual fact in terms of the professional aspect of it and recognition I didn't feel like I had actually graduated and I wasn't actually there, and I think I never truly believe I am there actually, there is always that, but you could choose to buy a hat a cap if you wanted to, so I thought I'd buy the cap so that I feel like that when I have my photograph taken I can wear the cap and the gown so that my picture looks the same as my daughters picture who'd had her graduation. And I think it's because I just felt it was not the same thing but ever since then I wear it now, I've worn it for my Masters and I wear it every time we have the students and it's a kind of reminder of where I've come from but.... yeah, otherwise so that's that kind of significant

Carol: Could I ask a question Anne, did you find others, had others bought caps at the ceremony or did most people not have

Anne: Most people didn't have them so by the time we went on to the stage and during the time we were sitting there were no caps, but for the photographs I wanted to have photographs with mine because I just didn't feel like it was real it was like I'd gone down a route that most people don't normally choose open universities.

Open University is never necessarily accepted or seen in the same light so then I already started thinking that my degree wasn't as good as everybody else's because I didn't have the University experience and then not only that I had got the gown but not the cap and it was like agh. I still was not there um so I thought I could buy it... I could buy it so that I can feel like it's its real and then when we were talking about it and I was thinking but that's the eight years it took me to get, to complete a degree because it had a bit of time in between with family and everything else it took me such a long time to get to that point that I needed to remind myself that that...

Beth:

You had earned it

Anne:

Yes yea

Carol: you deserve it

Anne:

I feel better about it now, I but I only felt better about it because once I got my masters because I kind of started feeling well okay, haven't just got a degree I've got something else and then I did end up graduating from here because I did a PGCE and that was a cap but I still fall back on this

holds the cap up

so when we go to our graduation ceremonies I don't put down that I've got that, I think I want to separate myself from that, I want to saythat how do I, its..reflecting

on the fact that I yea I don't... I feel different sometimes and sometimes that's a good difference and sometimes yes that's a difficult one don't know if I've explained that well

Beth:

In fact yes , what do I do at graduation with my hat because I don't feel like a proper doctor without the floppy hat its always a floppy hat so I get them to change it because *****is a mortar board

Karen : Oh ok

Beth: so I ask them to change it and they do..... Because it's about, that's what it was to me

Anne: I think it's about the fact that I wanted it to be seen that I had done the same as everybody else even though I've done a different route into it and I **knew** that I was going to have photograph on the wall that would forever show that I hadn't because I hadn't got a cap go with it.

Beth: *****So what was it then**** why question there should be no question you had done a degree

Anne:

and automatically everybody when you see the images on if you do clip-picks and things like that there's always a mortar board and a scroll and it just symbolises that

Carol: very powerful... what a meaningful cap that is,

Anne: Yea its been everywhere..

Carol: its like it tells a story in itself

Anne: I hadn't realised until you were talking about it and it's funny because I took it with me to my daughters graduation and I gave it my grandson to wear and he said he can't wait until he can get his own and oh yeah and I thought yeah in terms of family you don't realise that at that symbolic moment is **SO** important in terms of that recognition and reward of opportunities Interestingly similarly isn't it but yea

Carol: so very important

Karen: Ok thank you very much that's really interesting

Beth: interestingly ...similarly... I've brought my mug..... And it's not just is not just about the title....

Holds out a mug

when I think about me because...you asked us about our identity as an academic I like the title because it has meanings to other people its automatic it's a bit like your hat it says actually...

Karen: I am sorry the title?

Beth: doctor it means you have done the study you've put in the graft you've done in

the work but I think what means more to me is what's written on the back and there are two things I've got to share and it says

congratulations, and this is really embarrassing... To the most amazing and inspirational tutor and mentor and this came from Kim (name changed explicit details removed to guard anonymity)who is now the girl who got a job at a university that I talk about that I had at a level 3 student who was in my class when I was teaching at the college, when we did the level 3 research project she looked at children and she challenged and questioned the system because of her own experiences and we've always kept in touch and I met her in a the car park and said Oh we've now got a foundation degree why don't you come and do it and then a little while later I met her in a car park and said Oh we've got a top up degree would you like to come and do that then we met again and I said we have a job do you want to come and work for me and so she came and worked for me and for me as an academic how I see...

You make... You did make us all think..... so so I'll be honest with you I went out of there and I and Anne and I had a conversation and we said don't know if I want to do this because what we thought was actually are we looking at our identity beingnot as good as... A traditional academic and then I started to think about what it means to me to be an academic and what it means to me is the opportunity to give to people opportunities that I've been lucky enough to have.

Shows pictures

and when you think about all the opportunities this is Faith you have met Faith (speaks to Carol) she used to work at college and I made her to her degree and her Masters and she managed to manage it. And this is Janet she went off to university and now she's advising on policy

so when I started to think about, I did think Umm because like you I felt am I a real, am I a real academic and when you look back on what you doing absolutely for me being an academic it's not about me and what I've done it's about what being it gives you the opportunity to do and I think now I feel good about that I feel good that I can make things happen.... I'm not sure I can now and actually it's more to do with the job being a manager rather than lecturer..... But it is.....

Karen: do you feel as a manager you are able to.....

Beth: as a manager I didn't feel like an academic and as an academic I don't.....

Laughs

I don't know, I find identity hard because I don't know what you mean.. I don't I honestly I don't know what it means and I find this very difficult and I was thinking um am I talking about the journey... And actually it's not necessarily about the journey its about I am an academic..its like aa I am an academic that is my job rather than my persona

Karen: right okay

Carol: wow that's so interesting what you've just said because so much of that relates to me.... Yes....oh well, I'm not ready, are you ready

Beth: I think so unless anyone would like to make comment on those things...I think actually no I have not finished

All laugh

Beth: I think part of what I've seen all of us do and I think Karen you started this thinking about the different routes into getting here and all of us have worked within the industry and bring that in, and that's in our teaching and that makes us good academics because we don't live in the dusty world of books and elbow patches what we live is in the real world but we have a love of knowledge and expertise that we can trans-can pass forward and I think we are really really valuable qualities that as academics and that for me I would change that label of academics in that it is about its about a job it's not who I am it's my job but within that job you're able to support people's academic journeys I suppose.

Anne: I would perhaps go one step further as well talking about supporting learners I think that I feel that I can relate so much more to a lot of the students we have here who are also starting a journey that I recognise and then I feel that I am there to give them a helping hand and support them along that journey knowing that it can be tricky at times and to give them that push

Carol: Yes

Beth: it's empowering yes I was talking to you about Carols group that we disturb on a Thursday and we were talking about where their at and what they are doing and I said for instance this is where I started, this is what I did this is the route I've taken...and they just went anything is possible... Laughs.... And it is and I'm hoping your research will contribute to changing that narrative about what it means to be an academic because it isn't somebody you know in their robes and whatever it is your job and your job is to teach and teach people and just teach them at a higher level but what we bring because we've got that life experience and that work experience makes that even more powerful I think

Carol: I think you can relate to the students in a new way in a way that traditional academics can't do

Beth: its inclusive not exclusive

Carol: it is and it becomes almost like you are still on a journey with them I feel, I feel when I'm teaching students especially when I'm teaching mature students as I have in the past I was teaching students who were starting, embarking on the same journey that I had been on where they were working and coming in the evening and doing their degree that way and the report we developed because of that I just felt as though I was walking in their shoes and they were walking in mine and it's priceless isnt it

Beth: and I would say the best way to look..... If you look any of the Jeff Petty stuff any of the Maslow stuff it's the relationship that enables people to learn if there is a barrier between you and them they're not going to learn so our job is not to do that ha ha look at me I've got all this but you're not going to get there you do everything you can use all of those affective domain skills to ensure that they are successful you invest in your students it's still a job because I wouldn't do it if they didn't pay me and if they didn't pay me and if I didn't have a job then I wouldn't be an academic okay because that's your job

Karen: thank you

Beth: I'm done now

Carol:

okay so I've got some strange pictures really I didn't know I was thrown as well from that meeting like you and I felt I didn't know what to do, I don't how to describe myself I don't know how to talk about my journey I just didn't know **what to say really** I thought do I look at my journey or do I talk about how I feel is professional now and I'm not sure like you I'm not sure quite how I do feel as a professional now,..... so anyway I'll show you these funny pictures I've got so this is what I felt

Carol: I felt about mountain peak first and I thought okay and I think that's the Matterhorn

Beth: yes it is my husband proposed to me in front of the Matterhorn so it is

Carol: Can't beat that anyway ...anyway this is the Matterhorn this is a mighty peak and I'm thinking in a way I feel I climbed a mountain getting where I've got and then **I thought actually I haven't I don't feel as if I've actually reached one peak, if that makes sense and then I thought I looked at where I've got series of sort mountain ranges really which is what the second one is meant to convey because I keep sort of doing stuff that takes me up the mountain and then I do something else and it takes me up another one and in a way I don't feel that there's been one big peak that I have climbed I feel like I've been up and down, up and down a lot of my life since really I left home and got married and how I've got into what I'm doing now is such a strange route and it's so wacky compared to most people because I left home I messed about at school I was really naughty and I left school as soon as I could and my father... We won't go into that but he persuaded me to work for him and it was in a ***** book publishing and it was a cottage industry but I became very good at just that little bit of my job and nothing to do with what I'm doing now but I became very good at proofreading and typesetting and bookbinding so very interesting I suppose but **then when I left home got married we moved I got into just through the children I got into becoming a play leader in a local playgroup because it was closing down and I was a rota mother and that's really how it began.....I came away with only I think only five O-levels to my name so I was just rubbish school really****

Anne: and me

Anne: yep

Carol: no A-levels

Anne: no

Carol: no nothing really

Anne: no

Carol: **and so I went through life feeling quite apologetic to everyone that's how I was really because I knew I could do it but I didn't do it and I messed about and I squandered my education and then your left on the back foot aren't you that's I how I felt I suppose I've always felt on the back foot and I was always needing to apologise**

for the fact that I didn't really have anything professional to my name... And so anyway I started on an SVQ and I did a level II then a level III and I was the first SVQ three person to finish it. I was the first person to finish it where I was and that I suppose was my claim to fame and then gradually they realised I'd gotten an aptitude for working with students and becoming a mentor and then they asked me to teach in an.... And so gradually I developed into something I never dream of thinking that's that what I'd be doing

Carol point to pictures of traffic islands

Carol: so what I think I wanted to convey by this is that in a way there have been a lot of roads that go that I but I have no particular route.... If you like I had I had no goal like ...like this this is my mountain this is where I'm going to get to and this is how I'm going to get there it was never like that for me I've been on all sorts of different routes and and going round and round and this is spaghetti junction as you know it's like all roads leading nowhere and this is the magic roundabout in Swindon don't know....

Beth: I've been around that

Anne: laughs

Carol: oh boy it's like as you approach it and you don't know where you're going and there's 5....7 different roundabouts around one big roundabout and cars are going all which way and in a way that's how I felt about my journey it's like I've not had one direct route into anything and when I've got in and then when we moved and then I got into assessing first I was an assessor and then as internal verifier and then I got into lecturing then I had that spell in local authority and I was very happy there...I think it was because I was managing and autonomous and I had so much scope to do so much stuff and I loved it... But the third time the university asked me to join them I joined them and then ever since then I've been in academia.....and when they first asked me I said I can't work there and they want me to lead up the program the new program starting because I'd been on the panels and everything, and I said no I can't do that (whispers) but then third time round I did join the team but I felt then I don't know what am I doing here and I was doing my masters at the time at the same time as XYZ and got to know her quite well yes and who I am I feel as though I haven't, traditional route at all I haven't I haven't done the same sort of stuff as most people have done

Beth: Yes you have

Anne: I think a very similar to what I've done

Carol: now I'm hearing your story I didn't even realise

Anne: No when I left school and had to retake some of my O-levels to get onto the NNEB the way I wanted I had to be held back a year and then felt like exactly that that I was constantly on the back foot constantly looking for some kind of approval to say that ya because I kind of always felt I kinda I knew I had more in me but then I ended up going and having children and and then it wasn't until somebody said why don't you go and have a go at and then suddenly it went from therebut I was always looking for recognition

Carol: yes I think that's what what I'm trying to say it's been..... Because you don't go the traditional way you sort of feel as though your like a second-class

Anne: yes yep

Beth: I'm taking issue with the traditional route

Anne: yes

Carol: I suppose I shouldn't be talking like that

Anne: well then yep in terms of this university which is why I think I like this university is there isn't a necessarily traditional student in that context

Carol: yes ya

Beth: and by traditional and what you mean is someone who's come through A-levels to university to work in academia purely as a researcher

Carol: yes

Beth: and that isn't... And that isn't what modern day higher education is about and I think we have to stop apologising for it and stop feeling that it's its

Carol: yes

Beth: and its onlyyou did this (points at Karen) because I was thinking oh.. I don't want to tell the do do

Karen: are you pointing at me

Beth: yes

All laugh

Beth: and I thought don't want to tell the dirty tail of because um like you I left school at 15 I was the last year the was able to leave at 15 because what use was that it was the 70s for crying out loud you could get 10 jobs with no... And I worked in retail and I was good at it and so I worked in other retailers and so and was fine about going into management positions and then I had children I was a bit of a late developer I didn't get married until I was 29 then I had children and then like you I started helping in the playgroup and then I ended up running the playgroup

Carol: yep like me

Beth: yep and then I was helping in the nursery and then my daughter went and somebody came in from the college and said um.. To assess one of the students and said oh have you got a qualification um no well there's some EU funding would you like to come and do it we've got a part-time course for adults yea and it's free so

I did the BTEC National part-time student and then I started all that's good so I started work in the nursery where she'd seen me and thenso I was working there and she came back in to assess another student at another point and said um we've got a job as a lecturer at the college would you be interested you would be really good because I had already got.. I knew I had missed because I'd been working part-time at the college as a lecturer lecturing on retail and marketing because that was my background

Carol: Um yes of course

Beth: and somebody just said to me one day one of the mothers groups I was in, have you thought about teaching in college I haven't got anything but with all that experience you could teach in the retail course so I did and that's when I I didn't do my Cert Ed I did I did my 7307 City and Guilds and so when she said there's this job and I said well actually have already got a teaching certificate for college so I applied and was turned down.... Because I didn't have a degree and then they advertised again and invited me to apply three months later and the principal said.... well what's happened since we last saw you by this I was pissed off

Carol: laughs

Beth: well I haven't got a degree in the last three months if that's what you mean at which point the head of faculty said Beth we are trying to find a way to give you the job oh and so I had the job well as a lecturer well they offered me a job as point 5 contract and point 5 hourly paid because I hadn't got a degree and well no because if I'm doing all the hours if I can do half of it well then.. So we had another conversation about that and I started as a lecturer in college and the manager got me into all this left and..... I hadn't really thought about it because I hadn't been there that long a friend and others said why don't you apply so yes the devil we know in a sense so I applied and I got it so that was fine and then I started on the academic journey I done my HND..... And that's when I started teaching at the college and I was being taught the second year and teaching the first.... And then Jo said teach the foundation degree.. Oh god ..and oh so it won't matter.... its fine you know your stuff and will ya but it's not the.... And they went to the first graduation and I was obviously invited to the platform party and I thought what am I going to wear and I was that ...bit like you and your hat I was like... Oh no no I can't, and it was beautiful James Brown at X University said have an X University gown so I did he was very lovely and he was doing his PhD at the time and I just needed to do something about this and so I didn't do a full degree I did a Masters..

My... I looked at X university and I thought I'll apply late they won't take me I haven't got this and they said no that's fine and I thought Oh no.. Now I'm gonna have to do it I thought of all sorts of excuses but they must have been feeling very desperate for money and

Carol: no they have a good attitude really

Beth: but they didn't know me from Adam because I've got no real recommendations but that's what set it off and then Jo followed and my other friend followed and then Jo did her Ed D and I didn't I took a step back because I suppose I thought I don't need it and then I was very jealous so then I did it and..and.... This is the thing we talk about the non-traditional well if we took a survey and we did statistics the traditional route here is to go to work in your sector develop your expertise and then do the training that is a traditional route into vocational

Carol: and in a way..... Maybe

Anne: and work and study at the same time

Carol: Yes yes and and thats that the bit its tough

Anne: and I think that puts you in a different mindset and thats maybe what you bring to the students that understanding of that balance between two

Beth: but not accepting that that's a reason to do it

Carol: no no not an excuse they can't make any excuses because you've been there yourself

Anne: yep

Beth: but empathy works... And I know it's difficult

Carol: and I think they realise that you are hay Rogers characteristics again that congruent in what you say that you really mean that you really genuine

Beth: yep

Carol: that your the genuine article if you like

Beth: yep

Carol: cause you can talk about practice and you can talk about the route you've taken and it all means something to them

Beth: yep it means that on the degree what you're sharing with them has purpose because when when when the students come on open day and parents are like um well you know I say thank goodness you've done vocational course I'm really impressed and the parents are looking because you know we wanted them to do A-levels but you know but if you've done geography A level what you got at the end of it I've got geography well show me a job where as if you done early childhood or hairdressing I hate mixed the two or construction or sport you have a job there is a clear focus and so I I think we are the traditional route and I think we need to stop apologising for it because actually we couldn't do our job if we done it the other way how would you do your job.

Beth: Its those tales to tell if you haven't got the tales to tell

Anne: yes it is the tales to tell

Beth: its what makes them laugh on a Thursday afternoon those tales to tell I think we've got to stop apologising for it I think it makes you an **incredibly effective academic**

Anne: it makes you unique doesn't it

Carol: yes it does in a way

Karen: it's very interesting to hear the different perspectives and I think perhaps by being brave enough to share them even though it's a small group like this may give you something perhaps to think about that you hadn't quite considered before and obviously there are some commonalities between the three of you and your experiences but I think if I can encourage you to think about your own responses to this that would be really beneficial because I can't recreate this discussion it's so rich so interesting so if you can capture your thoughts that would be really great I would be very grateful thank you

STAGE 2 DATA Text Writing reflection: Example

Initial analysis: Colour coding to reflect research questions

Second level of analysis comments option used to reflect on initial analysis and theoretical framework

The screenshot shows a document titled "Reflection for Karen following the focus group;". The text is color-coded in green and pink. To the right, there is a comment thread with four entries from "Williams, Karen".

Reflection for Karen following the focus group;

I decided to go first as I often feel apprehensive when waiting to take a turn and I am never sure about how much I want share. I was apprehensive about the meeting until I started to consider that it was about where I was now and not a judgement of where I came from.

My artefact was my mortar board and having shared this with the group I realise that I saw this as a validation of my intellect... that whilst I was not 'clever' at school I was to an extent intelligent enough to now have a degree. Strange though it seems I still felt insecure about this as my degree was with Open University. I feel at times I want to be recognised by peers as an equal yet this feeling of imposter seems to follow me. Indeed I went on to gain 2 masters yet still feel the same at times.

From listening to the group I reflected that their stories which were closer to mine than I realised. I agreed with the discussion around life experience and empathy for students. I felt it was very important in enabling students to reach their potential. I recognise that I often enjoy and engage well with the more mature students (those that perhaps like me thought that Higher Education was not ever going to be an option). I consider this to be a benefit of my experience as a lecturer, though I still feel that there is an element of snobbery related to such students. There has been much debate over what is a traditional HE student but so often lecturers coming from academic 'A level and more prestigious universities (or even those with QTS) see students like this as devaluing or lowering standards in HE. I think unlike one of the participants in the group for me academics is about gaining a professional identity... there are time when I need the institution to be highly about professional recognition... for example in my first job in FE I realised how naive I had been in assuming you required a degree to gain employment. I had taken years of study to gain the job yet when I arrived I was the most qualified and the least paid. Others had many years of vocational experience and had been employed with L3 qualifications not degrees. I hindsight I understand this was important to teach students in terms of the service industry they wished to enter. However for me the sense of achievement over my degree had now been overshadowed by the realisation I could have done the job years earlier without the education journey...

Williams, Karen
Background as concerning...judgement + connotation that this is something which they are not comfortable with opening up about

Williams, Karen
Validation during early educational experience casts a shadow

Williams, Karen
Addressivity as significant

Williams, Karen
Significant aspect around that shared history with students Position / disposition

I decided to go first as I often feel apprehensive when waiting to take a turn and I am never sure about how much I want share. I was apprehensive about the meeting until I started to consider that it was about where I was now and not a judgement of where I came from. My artefact was my mortar board and having shared this with the group I realise that I saw this as a validation of my intellect... that whilst I was not 'clever' at school I was to an extent intelligent enough to now have a degree. Strange though it seems I still felt insecure about

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So for me it has always been about chasing the illusion of an acknowledged professional identity. I feel that it is very much mixed with the idea that at some point I will be found out as someone who is not clever enough to be at the university... This was certainly reinforced by a request last year (by email), of all staff who held QTS. Yet again I felt I needed to justify my experience as good enough..

I feel I may have gone off topic a little... but I like the others seem to have struggled with the lack of original qualifications at school... it seems we have been chasing to catch up and looking for validation... I wonder if there is too much credit (or I place too much credit) on having GCSE, or A Levels. I will also say that to be the best at what I do I certainly did need the life and work experience.

My final reflection of this process is very much the realisation that it is my insecurities that can hold me back.. not the qualifications. Unfortunately these insecurities can be triggered when there is discussion about school quals and place of study is brought up in conversation.

Stage 3 Data collection individual Interview: Example

Initial analysis: Colour coding to reflect research questions

Second level of analysis today comments option used to reflect on initial analysis and theoretical framework

The screenshot shows an email interface with a list of messages on the left and a detailed view of a message on the right. The messages are numbered 1 through 16. The text in the messages is color-coded: green for phrases like 'reflecting back because obviously', 'felt a little bit about the fact I felt aggrieved', 'actually getting this qualification when I could have fast tracked', and 'this place and time in a much quicker time'; blue for 'now fast tracking forward today I feel very comfortable with that title...and is I feel very comfortable about the idea of doing a PhD'; and purple for 'from isn't as important as where I am now'. The right-hand pane shows a comment thread for the message starting with 'History in person significant...'. The comment is by 'Williams, Karen' and contains the text: 'History in person significant – reflection as aiding the letting go?? Structures and systems of entry into the field of HE as multiple and inclusive but...'. Below the comment is a 'Reply' button.

Karen: Okay welcome this is the third kind of stage of the data collection so thank you very much for providing your reflection that was very very interesting

Anne: laughs

Karen: And I think I would like what I'm planning to do is to post this interview is to adopt the similar methodology

Anne: Yep

Karen: So anything you feel that comes to mind after this interview please pop it down and post it forward

Anne: Yep okay

Karen: that would be really interesting so when we met for the first focus group we were looking at our perceptions of our own identity our professional identity and what was a recurrent theme was actually how we were looking back and thinking about how our past experience had an impact on what we felt and how we felt we were so this stage is really an opportunity to continue that story

Anne: Yep

Karen: so in my very sparse email to you which took a remarkable amount of time to put together

Anne: yes

Karen: I'd like us to think about where you are now and where you feel you're moving forward to in terms of your identity and opportunities to develop and yep... where you're going.. your story, part two

Anne: yes I started to reflect when you to to to talk about that reflecting back because obviously I felt a little bit about the fact I felt aggrieved I think but I'd gone through the whole process of actually getting this qualification when I could have fast tracked and done it much quicker and been this place and time in a much quicker time at a quicker stage sort

of thing and then I thought okay that's done and dusted it's gone and you're quite right in respect of where I am now.

Karen: yes

Anne: Now if you'd have asked me when I first came here I'd have said that I felt that I was an impostor here and that I had no idea why they'd employed me at all and I didn't feel as if I was a university lecturer at all now fast tracking forward today I feel very comfortable with that title ...and is I feel very comfortable about the idea of doing a PhD and things like that as well I feel comfortable in being known as an academic... and I think it's because I've been able to prove myself through being doing writing and..and engaging with other professionals in dialogue and so where I've come from isn't as important as where I am now

Karen: right okay

Anne: if that makes sense because in actual fact I don't feel I am any different to anyone else in the team

Karen: okay right okay yeah so that opportunity to write has been really important to you

Anne: yes I think it's what I needed to feel validated it was almost I suppose okay I've written this and you've telling me that this is okay so now maybe I'm not an impostor any more this impostor and now I'm being treated that way

Karen: right okay this is a recent thing or has it kind of come gradually or a specific piece of writing or

Anne: I think it's been over the last two years I think it's after developing modules and courses and having positive feedback from students I think it's about engaging with others in the team and working collaboratively with others and it sort of me starting to realise that actually my ideas are of interest to other people and that's things are positively moving forward

Karen: right okay

Anne: but I also wonder as I start to reflect and things like that and whether or not it is about that personal aspect as well because at the same time I'm feeling much more grounded in my academic life my career I'm feeling much more grounded at home as well so I'm wondering if there's a balance there and I do think it's to do with age that that the process of time rather than my actual age and and my children are now much more settled in different areas and I've come to terms with who I am now as a.. as a woman so to speak... Sounds very Zen -like but it's I think that's what it is I tend to feel much more happier with who I am

Karen: and who you are has has .. It allowed or afforded you that opportunity to see yourself as an academic maybe I don't know or..

Anne: I think it's allowed me to say that this is okay for me to to spend time doing this that this is seen as a **career** (emphasis) it's not just a job it's not just something that I feel I have to spend time doing and then end this is something I can see myself doing for many many years to come and and quite comfortably and and it's very satisfying

Karen: when you think that that moving from a job to a career again is that a sudden shift or is this are you associating that career with actually getting your job in the University

Anne: I think it's because I suddenly felt that I didn't have to prove myself in the place that I was anymoreand I felt like because I didn't.. I was no longer was working so hard to say look look I can do this I can do this but I actually got to the point where I thought no I can do this and you are happy that I can do this, so now what I can do is sort of spread my wings a little more and experiment with things a little bit more creative and that creativity is something I really thrive on and I like challenges and I like the new and the exciting and I

think that was only possible when you get past the.... I keep needing to get to have this validation all the time.

Karen: I think what is very interesting is that in your reflection you kind of begin to explore that notion of actually may be it wasn't the fact that... I didn't have what I felt what I needed to come into academia but more that the actually how I'm seeing myself

Anne: Yep Yep that's why I'm wondering if the shift isn't necessarily in anything that I've done per se it's more about how I now feel about me and and when I first came here there was an issue with the role and the pay and that was one of the things really... that I done on my studies for its so that I could get more ...financial stability for the family and so that was a really important part of getting these kinds of jobs and then there was an issue with me not necessarily having had the job pay at the previous employment

Karen: right okay

Anne: and the University have this kind of wider... your your pay matched... so I came in but was doing a role that was far exceeding what was expected and should have been higher grade ...but because I was pay matched there was this huge discrepancy there and so that didn't help because I was already feeling like this impostor and now I'm kind of being treated that way and treated like like less valued I think is the way I felt

Karen: yes Yep

Anne: so for quite a while that really put me out a little bit because it had resonated with me in terms of how I'd waited so long to get into the college and then when I got there realise that I didn't need to have waited that long to have done that I could have done that years and years before and now I've jumped into this new role and now they are saying well actually yes were not paying you enough.. we are not going to pay you that

Karen: yes Yep because I know there were some issues you'd mentioned about the actual title as well

Anne: Yep and now actually thinking about it this sense of satisfaction has come at the same time as I've got this senior lecturer role so I'm not chasing that the more, it's there, it's mine it's ticking over and now I actually feel like you yeah yeah I've been here long enough settled I've I've grown my roots down and now I can get on and....I feel totally different

Karen: that's really interesting isn't it because of the impact that sense of validation wherever it's coming from whether that's personal in a title has really for you been significant

Anne: Yep I think it is that sense of when you belong and that you are I I I I ..respected is an interesting word but basically that people are very comfortable with your ability then I think it gives you the opportunity to then step out of that and experiment and not have any fear of that ...and it's only with those experiments and those challenges that you can really start to grow and that's that's what I'm doing and you probably noticed that an awful lot that suddenly my ideas are shooting out from everywhere and it's because because I'm looking for something I think looking for new challenge am excited about changes and things and that's what I enjoy doing and when that's stifled when I can't do that that's when that's when don't.. I'm not as happy in my role and that's when I kind of then I think I I get quite introverted then and I'll just be very quiet and just do it

so yes in terms of the now looking back I think well it doesn't matter about how I got here it's what I'm doing now I am here, I think is my philosophy

Karen: that's really really interesting and is anything you'd like to say

Anne: no I was just thinking about the future and I think that originally I thought that I

would retire early and I thought oh yeah we've got the opportunity to do that why not retire before I'm 60 that would be easy but now I'm thinking why would I want to retire now that I'm actually starting to not make a name for myself but have an opportunity to enjoy research and kind of really really enjoy this role and I felt this was a kind of role that I could continue to do much and beyond retirement age and I think that keeps you young I think this idea of retirement made me feel old and I don't like that so now I'm considering

Karen: so that label is a hard-won

Yep so I stop thinking so much about my age and thinking more about what possibilities I have for enjoying life and having those challenges and what that might bring a think

Karen: what you think for you is important for you in sustaining this kind of positivity and creativity

Anne: I think it's having that right kind of people in the team and I think it absolutely cos I tend to find that I do work well with others exceptionally well that's when I do my best work I think when I'm with others and I think it's that it's about who you working with in the team I think as well I think in fact that you've got heads of department that are so comfortable with what you're doing they just allow you to kind of run with it and they're not kind of going second-guessing what you're after and all the rest of it so I think as long as that kind of environment can be maintained then I don't see an issue with that but I am pragmatic and I know that things are bound to change and.... But at the moment's things are..... Touch wood.... okay laughs

Karen: very positive how have you found this experience

Anne: the experience about reflecting

Karen: Yep

Anne : very helpful actually because I think it's kind of perhaps revisiting things where you perhaps when I was revisiting looking back about qualifications and things like that I realise that I I'd.... got a bit of a hangup about that... and I thought that may have actually been holding me back from doing things like a PhD and extra study and I think it's because I always feel that I'm not quite good enough because I didn't manage to do something at 16 and I think hang on a minute that its lifelong learning and it's not necessarily about the qualification it's about the journey and I've enjoyed doing the research and bits and I know thats something I enjoy doing

Karen: because you have started doing your PhD again haven't you

Anne: yes yes and totally different focus and with different support and that's made a whole difference as well

Karen: and again those people perhaps

Anne: Yep I think that one thing I've recognised being surrounded by people that I get on with really well enables me to relax a little so it has to be the right kind of personality kind of ..to get the best from me if that makes sense um.. I find that yes if I don't I find I I withdraw a little bit..... so it's that kind of knowing yourself I think

Karen: Okay I'm just thinking you said about withdrawing before the importance of having people who aren't second-guessing you but allow you to fly ...I think that was the term you used

Anne: yes yes and I think that that's important it's having the right balance in the team and the right kind of.. you go on to your theories and you know your Belbin and all the rest of it.. but it's about I suppose its about having that supportive other, its about making sure that you've got that right personality and when you got that right mentoring and coaching opportunities within the team as much as I know that people come and ask me for the

things I also lean on others as well and I think that's a nice relationship and I think that's where you get the best out of people
 Karen: that's really interesting

Appendix 8 Data Analysis: Level 3

Analysis Level 3 undertaken for each participant

Themes arising informed Chapter 4 Findings, analysis and discussion

Anne			
"what must the speaker assume about the world, take to be typical or normal in order to have spoken this way, to have said these things the way they were said?" and to have assumed that the listener will understand (Gee 2011,p178).			
Data	line	Comment/ Why is this significant?	Theme
Data is addressed chronologically as the teller tells their story			
So basically I did my degree through the Open University, and Open University don't have caps as a standard part of their ceremony Um and I felt that in actual fact in terms of the professional aspect of it and recognition I didn't feel like I had actually graduated and I wasn't actually there, and I think I never truly believe I am there actually, there is always that	28\29	Graduation as a significant in relation to being and becoming a professional, the site of recognition, but this is contested. Imagining herself as a professional with the artefact of the cap is significant it seems to imbue a sense of cultural capital and artefact of significance. She goes on to suggest how buying a cap is significant to her and how she wears it graduation ceremonies as a member of staff Never actually there! May indicate a sense of while this goes part way there is still a sense of not being	Artefacts – Cultural artefact as a mediator part of restoring self, reflecting the standard plot of an academic with a cap
wanted to have photographs with mine because I just didn't feel like it was real it was it was like I'd gone down a route that most people don't normally choose open universities.	41 42 71/73	Recording makes it real for self and real for others perhaps a typical way to state a claim to being or becoming a person within academia. Relational Identity- "relational identity is a public clique performed through perceptible signs people tell each other who they claim to be in society in a myriad of ways" P138	Artefacts/Adressivity -important to record part of addressing self and others being part of the story of being and becoming an academic recording it in a way

<p>I think it's about the fact that I wanted it to be seen that I had done the same as everybody else even though I've done a different route into it and I knew that I was going to have photograph on the wall that would forever show that I hadn't because I hadn't got a cap go with it.</p>			<p>that has significance i.e. graduation photograph</p>
<p>Open University is never necessarily accepted or seen in the same light so then I already started thinking that my degree wasn't as good as everybody else's because I didn't have the University experience and then not only that I had got the gown but not the cap and it was like agh</p>	<p>44 46</p>	<p>Assumption that HE institution's carry different cultural capital, not the normal choice, not the normal experience of university. Othering herself Storing self through the acts recognised as part of her higher education journey the assumption that her experience is, different is not the normal choice or the normal experience- creating a sense of hierarchical distance from the achievement of gaining a degree, a barrier in which this storyline articulated by Anne becomes a barrier to her affiliation to being an academic.</p> <p>A reflection of the systems and structures within the field of higher education</p>	<p>Positional identity – hierarchical distance, social position becoming disposition position as a graduate of a particular university acts to other Anne from what she believes to be a normal University experience</p>
<p>No when I left school and had to retake some of my O-levels to get onto the NNEB the way I wanted I had to be held back a year and then felt like exactly that that I was constantly on the back foot constantly looking for some kind of approval to say that ya because I kind of always felt I kinda I</p>	<p>229 – 232</p>	<p>Held back retake negative language to describe her early educational achievements and achieved O-levels and an NNEB but is storing herself in a position distance to where she feels she could have been. Seeking recognition affirmation Having children assumes that that journey, goal was put on hold or ended. The narrative of being a mother carries certain assumptions that give little option in Anne's story for an alternative. The continuation appears to be less of a choice or decision rather dependent on someone encouraging or suggesting that she continue.</p>	<p>Positional identity gender</p>

<p>knew I had more in me but then I ended up going and having children and and then it wasn't until somebody said why don't you go and have a go at and then suddenly it went from therebut I was always looking for recognition</p>			
Stage 2 data analysis text writing reflection Anne			
<p>was about where I was now and not a judgement of where I came from. My artefact was my mortar board and having shared this with the group I realise that I saw this as a validation of my intellect... that whilst I was not 'clever' at school I was to an extent intelligent enough to now have a degree. Strange though it seems I still felt insecure about this as my degree was with Open University.</p>	<p>403-406</p>	<p>An assumption that by talking about her past others may judge her in a negative way -Indication here of a sense of resistance to a storyline shaped by her early educational experiences to re-author herself as "intelligent enough" validation during early educational experience casts a shadow.</p> <p>Restoring self by use of an artefact, the act of buying using her mortar board is part of how she is positioning herself what she is allowed to do however that action or activity is still perhaps an uncomfortable one at this point</p>	<p>Artefact-restoring self by use of an artefact</p>
<p>Open University is never necessarily accepted or seen in the same light so then I already started thinking that my degree wasn't as good as everybody else's because I didn't have the University experience</p>	<p>44 46</p>	<p>Assumption that HE institution's carry different cultural capital, not the normal choice, not the normal experience of university. Othering herself Storing self through the acts recognised as part of her higher education journey the assumption that her experience is, different is not the normal choice or the normal experience- creating a sense of hierarchical distance from the achievement of gaining a</p>	<p>Positional identity – hierarchical distance, social position becoming disposition position as a graduate of a particular university acts to other Anne from what she</p>

and then not only that I had got the gown but not the cap and it was like agh		degree, a barrier in which this storyline articulated by Anne becomes a barrier to her affiliation to being an academic. A reflection of the systems and structures within the field of higher education	believes to be a normal University experience
work and study at the same time and I think that puts you in a different mind-set and that's maybe what you bring to the students that understanding of that balance between two yes it is the tales to tell it makes you unique doesn't it	347 351 384 389	A response to the discussion in the focus group about, what makes you a good lecturer Resonance between the plots and storylines of students and that of being a lecturer. Somehow that social position as a lecturer having gone through the process or a recognised story as that of some of the students is significant Position becoming disposition – your positional identity becoming a significant attribute that you bring to your role part of you that is important to self and others. You have walked the walk now it gives you the right to talk the talk Tales to tell....highlighting academic connections to practice connectivity as significant	Positional identity
was about where I was now and not a judgement of where I came from. My artefact was my mortar board and having shared this with the group I realise that I saw this as a validation of my intellect... that whilst I was not 'clever' at school I was to an extent intelligent enough to now have a degree. Strange though it seems I still felt insecure about this as my degree was with Open University.	403-406	An assumption that by talking about her past others may judge her in a negative way -Indication here of a sense of resistance to a storyline shaped by her early educational experiences to re-author herself as "intelligent enough", validation during early educational experience casts a shadow. Re-storying self by use of an artefact, the act of buying using her mortar board is part of how she is positioning herself what she is allowed to do however, that action or activity is still perhaps an uncomfortable one at this point	Artefact-restoring self by use of an artefact

<p>I feel at times I want to be recognised by peers as an equal yet this feeling of imposter seems to follow me. Indeed I went on to gain 2 masters yet still feel the same at times</p>	<p>406-407</p>	<p>Imposter syndrome-unequal to peers, that storyline of not being clever at school whilst gaining two masters is significant to Anne in how she positions herself in relation to others</p>	<p>Relational identity</p>
<p>What was not said.....</p>		<p>Reference to practice- an assumption here perhaps that this is not a significant aspect of being and becoming an academic</p>	
<p>I agreed with the discussion around life experience and empathy for students. I felt it was very important in enabling students to reach their potential. I recognise that I often enjoy and engage well with the more mature students (those that perhaps like me thought that Higher Education was not ever going to be an option). I consider this to be a benefit of my experience as a lecturer, though</p>	<p>408-411</p>	<p>Significant aspect around that shared history with students Position / disposition Annes life story becomes an artefact through which she positions herself relative to those students she feels she understands.</p> <p>An assumption here that potential is relative to academic achievement in higher education Practice/experience?</p>	<p>Relational identity identifying her position relative to others similarity of experience</p>
<p>I still feel that there is an element of snobbery related to such students. There has been much debate over what is a traditional HE student but so often lecturers coming from academic 'A' level and more prestigious universities (or even those with QTS)</p>	<p>411-413</p>	<p>Signs that evoke storylines or plots among generic characters, social position becoming disposition that assumption that there are traditional students to which mature students do not fit that those who do not have that sense of empathy or shared narrative perceives such students in negative ways</p>	<p>Figurative identity</p>

<p>see students like this as devaluing or lowering standards in HE</p>			
<p>I think unlike one of the participants in the group for me academics is about gaining a professional identity ...there are time when I need the institution to be highly about professional recognition... for example in my first job in FE I realised how naive I had been in assuming you required a degree to gain employment. I had taken years of study to gain the job yet when I arrived I was the most qualified and the least paid. Others had many years of vocational experience and had been employed with L3 qualifications not degrees. I hindsight I understand this was important to teach students in terms of the service industry they wished to enter. However for me the sense of achievement over my degree had now been overshadowed by the realisation I could have done the job</p>	<p>414-419</p>	<p>Unable/ unwilling to make this point in the focus group Methodologically interesting point here regarding the power dynamics within FG's</p> <p>A sense here of disenfranchisement, the significance she places on her educational journey was juxtaposed to the reality she found in the field of further education. The questioning of these assumptions served to disrupt Anne's sister view of the identity she was striving for. As Anne did not stay within further education one may assume this led to a rejection of the story being offered.</p> <p>The systems and structures within the field of education are imbued with the assumptions we hold which may or may not be correct.</p> <p>Systems and structures -Considering the need for her current HE institution to work to recognise professional skill may indicate that there is a sense of unfinished unrecognised undervalued recognition still work to do. How one positions oneself in relation to others the deference and entitlement or distance</p>	<p>??</p>

years earlier without the education journey...			
This was certainly reinforced by a request last year (by email), of all staff who held QTS. Yet again I felt I needed to justify my experience as good enough..	421-422	Considering experience, potential vocational skills as valued differently to other markers in this case, qualified teacher status (QTS) led to a need for justification that her experience is sufficient to claim a position as a lecturer	Addressivity and positional identity
<u>My final reflection of this process is very much the realisation that it is my insecurities that can hold me back.. not the qualifications. Unfortunately this insecurities can be triggered when there is discussion about school quals and place of study is bought up in conversation.</u>	427-428	A recognition here perhaps of social position equates to disposition, how that history in person is being recognised and a sense of resistance emerging to remediate her position. Positioned by the discourse of education as an achiever or non-achiever clever not clever has become part of how and considers herself her disposition as not clever. Realisation indicates a new understanding, drawing on Vygotsky's central tenant of se-miotic mediation as significant to Holland et al's (1994) ideas they consider the way we understand or come to understand the world around us, thought and language inextricably linked has this process indicated a site of rupture for Anne?	Positional identity space to think, space to articulate a shift in understanding but does this lead to action/agency
Stage 3 data analysis individual interview Anne			
"I was apprehensive about the meeting until I started to consider it was about where I was now and not a judgement of where I came from"	403	Assumption that her own story somehow positions her were others may judge. Connotation of her own route being of less value	History in person relational identity
Now if you'd have asked me when I first came here I'd have said that I felt that I was an impostor here and that I had no idea why they'd employed me at all and I didn't feel as if I was a university	450 – 454	Story unfolding storying self is not entitled to the position offered a shift how she is associating with that identity as a university lecturer	Positional identity community of practice brokering

<p>lecturer at all now fast tracking forward today I feel very comfortable with that title ...and is I feel very comfortable about the idea of doing a PhD and things like that as well I feel comfortable in being known as an academic... and I think it's because I've been able to prove myself through being doing writing and..and engaging with other professionals in dialogue and so where I've come from isn't as important as where I am now if that makes sense because in actual fact I don't feel I am any different to anyone else in the team</p>		<p>a sense of comfort, social affiliation and entitlement her acts of engagement with the world of academia doing her PhD undertaking writing and engaging with other professionals as significant in helping her re-story herself as part of and similar to others, part of a community of practice. Marking where that history in person is becoming of less significance in legitimising ones place</p>	
<p>I needed to feel validated it was almost I suppose okay I've written this and you've telling me that this is okay so now maybe I'm not an impostor any more this impostor and now I'm being treated that way</p>	<p>458 – 459</p>	<p>Validation being addressed and addressing the assumed expectations of others underpinning a shift in how Anne is storing herself as a university lecturer</p>	<p>Addressivity</p>
<p>but I also wonder as I I start to reflect and things like that and whether or not it is</p>	<p>465 – 469</p>	<p>Intertwined nature of identity cutting across figured worlds the importance of personal as well as career stability. Heteroglossia the orchestration of how Anne rec-</p>	<p>Positional identity – gender Heteroglossia</p>

<p>about that personal aspect as well because at the same time I'm feeling much more grounded in my academic life my career I'm feeling much more grounded at home at as well so I'm wondering if there's a balance there and I do think it's to do with age that that the process of time rather than my actual age and and my children are now much more settled in different areas and I've come to terms with who I am now as a.. as a woman so to speak... Sounds very Zen-like but it's I think that's what it is I tend to feel much more happier with who I am</p>		<p>ognises the interconnectivity and negotiation of her identity as a female as a mother and academic.</p> <p>Balance being of significance. The rejection of this in relation to maturity or age but more perhaps to do with time within the field (see comment below close re-growing roots).</p> <p>Gender mentioned explicitly for the first time here in relation to the importance of ensuring children are settled, indicating that maternal role is also settled- as significant to creating that balance.</p>	
<p>I think it's allowed me to say that this is okay for me to spend time doing this that this is seen as a career (emphasis) it's not just a job it's not just something that I feel I have to spend time doing and then end this is something I can see myself doing for many many years to come and</p>	<p>471 – 473</p>	<p>Positional identity what she feels she is now allowed to do</p> <p>Grander narratives of gender now child rearing has taken a back seat she can legitimately name this as a career. A choice rather than a job which she now can legitimately claim</p> <p>My question following this comment and the response is below, indicating that this sense of comfort as to who she is as resulted in a shift or space for agency</p> <p><i>Karen: and who you are has has .. It allowed or afforded you that opportunity to see</i></p>	<p>Positional identity gender</p>

and quite comfortably and and it's very satisfying		<i>yourself as an academic maybe I don't know or..</i>	
because I suddenly felt that I didn't have to prove myself in the place that I was anymore ...and I felt like because I didn't.. I was no longer was working so hard to say look look I can do this I can do this but I actually got to the point where I thought no I can do this and you are happy that I can do this, so now what I can do is sort of spread my wings a little more and experiment with things a little bit more creative and that creativity is something I really thrive on and I like challenges and I like the new and the exciting and I think that was only possible when you get past the.... I I keep needing to get to have this validation all the time.	476 – 480	<p>A shift</p> <p>Anne is storing herself as relative to the socially identifiable others, identifying self as part of that world of an academic as university lecturer, no longer having to prove herself.</p> <p>Addressivity still significant in relation to affirmation however, this is more retrospective than an ongoing important aspect of how Anne is storing herself. The validation has afforded new opportunities to be creative experimental and spread her wings</p> <p>Creativity does this encapsulate agency? – an ability to take on challenges /experiment indicates self-chosen challenges improvisation</p>	Positional identity Addressivity Agency improvisation
Yep Yep that's why I'm wondering if the shift isn't necessarily in anything that I've done per se it's more about how I now feel about me	483	<p>Initially attributing her sense of affiliation to her own feelings rather than her skills and attributes.</p> <p>Recognition for her own work efforts is lacking within this narrative. Is this perhaps indicative of gender?</p>	Positional identity gender

<p>Yep and now actually thinking about it this sense of satisfaction has come at the same time as I've got this senior lecturer role so I'm not chasing that any more, it's there, it's mine it's ticking over and now I actually feel like yeah yeah I've been here long enough settled I've I've grown my roots down and now I can get on and.....I feel totally different</p>	<p>498 – 500</p>	<p>I asked about her job role and title. verification in the guise of the job role has impacted on how she is storing herself SL as a goal where she wanted to be That sense that there is a position shift here that she can “get on”, space that she felt she was not previously afforded</p>	<p>Addressivity positional identity</p>
<p>Yep I think it is that sense of <u>when you belong</u> and that you are...respected is an interesting word but basically that <u>people are very comfortable with your ability</u> then I think it gives you the opportunity to then step out of that and experiment and not have any fear of that ...and it's only with those experiments and those challenges that you can really start to grow and that's that's what I'm doing and you probably noticed that an awful lot that suddenly my ideas are shooting out from everywhere and it's because because I'm</p>	<p>503 – 509</p>	<p>The importance of being respected by one's peers. That others are comfortable with your abilities provides a sense of entitlement to be and act differently this is taking the place of a previous fear of not gaining approval.</p> <p>Life on the boundary of academia is insufficient for agency that feeling stifled (communities of practice) needing to prove herself an identity where others respect and feel comfortable with you ... leads to an ability to “Step out of that and Experiment” indicating Anne feels this is her space for agency This has afforded a sense of agency to seek out challenges, put forward her ideas.</p> <p>Holland et al (137 – 138) “the development of social position into positional identity into disposition to voice opinions or to silence oneself, to enter into activities or to refrain and self-censor, depending on the social situation comes over the long term in the course of social interaction” The course of social interaction is undoubtedly important as Anne works with other professionals however, it is this notion she feels of approval and being respected that</p>	<p>Addressivity authoring and agency Improvisation</p>

<p>looking for something I think looking for new challenge am excited about changes and things and that's what I enjoy doing and when that's stifled when I can't do that that's when that's when ...don't.. I'm not as happy in my role and that's when I kind of then I think I I get quite introverted then and I'll just be very quiet and just do it</p>		<p>is perhaps a key factor in providing space that she takes to re-author herself and her role. This approval is couched in feeling comfortable with how others address her .</p>	
<p>I think it's having that right kind of people in the team and I think it absolutely cos I tend to find that I do work well with others exceptionally well that's when I do my best work I think when I'm with others and I think it's that it's about who you working with in the team I think as well I think in fact that you've got heads of department that are so comfortable with what you're doing they just allow you to kind of run with it and they're not kind of going second-guessing what you're after and all the rest of it so I think as long as that kind of environment can be</p>	<p>523 – 528</p>	<p>Communities of practice, the significance of teamwork and the importance of validation Autonomy supported by those in power but an acknowledgement that this is temporal and rather than part of the larger university system this is more personality locally located</p>	<p>Community of practice autonomy Systems and structures within HE</p>

<p>maintained then I don't see an issue with that but I am pragmatic and I know that things are bound to change and.... But at the moment's things are..... Touch wood.... okay laughs</p>			
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Anne's story:
 Annes educational journey is one of significance.
 An assumption of not being clever arising from what she feels is under achievement in gaining qualifications in her teens runs through her narrative.
 The importance of cultural artefacts in demonstrating her educational achievements is of significance.
 The structure of her undergraduate degree and the lack of mortar board or cap at her graduation ceremony as a markers or validation of her achievement played a significant role in how she was positioning herself
 The assumption of what is, and is not, a typical route into higher education and a typical and non-typical institution have also presented a challenge for how Anne authors herself, creating a status she feels is less valued than others.
 The figurative identity what an academic may or may not be, appeared to be some distance to how and perceives her own identity.
 The significance of validation from others and the support from management.
 The assumption that having children and pursuing her career were incompatible. Implicit rather than explicit, assuming that I understand position becoming disposition.
 The importance of balancing her life, considering both personal and professional dimensions.
 The importance of her children being settled as initiating a time in her life where she can pursue a career. Gender not explored beyond perhaps an assumption that as a woman I understand this narrative of the need for children to be settled prior to now seeing her role as more than a job but as a career and one that she might do for a number of years to come.
 Self-awareness through reflection
 Focus on the narrative of her educational journey, how coming from a practice background is part of this story is unclear.
 Positional identity in those big categories of gender, the elephant in the room!!

