An exploration of the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students in Higher Education in the UK –
The perspectives of the students and their coaches:

A heuristic study of their educational journeys

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Contents

Glossary

A Levels - Advanced level qualifications

BAME - Black Asian and Minority Ethnic

BTEC -National Diploma British and Technology Education Council Nationals (specialist work-related qualifications similar standard to A levels)

CMT - College Management Team

FSM - Free School Meals

GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education

HE - Higher Education

HEIs - Higher Education Institutions

OfS - Office for Students

SMT - Senior Management Team

WP - Widening participation

Abstract

Widening participation and ensuring fair access to universities for non-traditional students has been a key policy objective for successive governments in the UK since the late 1990's. In spite of the relative success of policies and strategies to increase and retain the number of non-traditional students accessing and participating at university, the discrepancy in numbers between non-traditional and traditional student groups still exist. What is known about coaching as a supportive developmental relationship suggests that it could make a difference to non-traditional student groups in particular. In order to understand how coaching could be relevant in this case, this study explores the research question of what are the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies using heuristic inquiry, portraying the voices of non-traditional students from the unique perspective of the researcher, who has direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation. The aim of this study is to explore the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their undergraduate studies in the UK.

Four coaches and nine student participants collaborated in this Heuristic Inquiry study. Data was collected over a period of nine months and included focus groups with coaches and semi structured interviews with coaches and student participants. Supplementary data such as reflective diaries and summaries of coaching sessions from student participants, coaches and myself as the researcher. Alternative options of supplementary data such as music, film and art were also offered to participants that wanted to reflect their experiences in a creative way. As the researcher in this inquiry, I also explore my own personal experiences as a non-traditional student and perspectives as a coach as a way of making sense of this experience, for my own personal growth and development as a coach in higher education. The data generated was analysed through repeated and rigorous engagement with the heuristic analytic process of Clarke Moustakas (1990) returning to the data in between times of immersion, incubation and the creation of depictions and the creative synthesis.

The study encompasses three areas that represent the main findings of the study: first the theme, 'The individual student journeys are similar yet different' portrays the individual voices of students without constraints, homogenising and simplifying who they are. Second, 'The coaching experience of non-traditional students' theme explores the students' experience of coaching and role of coaching in supporting them during their undergraduate studies. Third, the theme 'Understanding the experiences of coaching

non-traditional students' explores the coaches experiences to gain a better understanding of the challenges experienced by coaches when coaching non-traditional students. While further studies are still needed, the knowledge from this study can contribute by offering valuable insights into the differing experiences of non-traditional students and the importance of an HE environment that is free from judgements. This study also contributes to practice by addressing the gap of how coaching specifically supports non-traditional students in higher education. The qualitative study also contributes to the theoretical and professional knowledge by adding to the field of coaching in education and self-theories in coaching psychology from the heuristic perspective. Whilst the study provides rich details of the experiences of non-traditional students, by nature it is exploratory with intention not to test specific theories but generate ideas for further research.

Keywords: coaching, non-traditional students, higher education, self-theories

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Prologue

A prologue is perhaps an unusual way to begin a thesis, however it portrays the intricacies of my personal story, something that called to me from within my life, that began many years ago as a student and developed to what I know now to be, my 'internal search' and the beginning of the heuristic journey (Moustakas, 1995). As reflexivity is an essential aspect of this heuristic study, commencing with an initial autobiographical account of my lived experiences seemed an appropriate place to start (Moustakas, 1995).

Aspects of my childhood appeared to be different to those of my peers, that perception was more from my peers than of myself. My parents divorced when I began my secondary education and I was the eldest of two at the time, both myself and my sibling were raised by my father who had sole custody. That was not the perceived difference of my peers, the perception that I always got what I asked of my parents was. I was perceived somehow as better than anyone else, I of course did not consider myself that way, but somehow created that impression and over a period of years continued to struggle with that perception and the pedestal I found myself on, and that has, in some way, stayed with me.

I lived in what was considered to be a deprived area, similar to that of my peers. My parents were categorised as being of low income and of a working-class background, which meant that I qualified for free school meals. Both parents attended college studying vocational subjects, my father on day release as an apprentice to study carpentry, and my mother completed her O' levels. Consequently, education was considered as something that I was required to do however, there was no real emphasis placed on it. I was never challenged to work hard at school, but always encouraged to do my best. I continued my education at my school sixth form and studied a BTEC National Diploma considered to be an A Level equivalent. On completion, I attended university to study an undergraduate degree and was the first in my family to do so. At the end of my first year, I failed a module and chose not to continue with my studies. I returned to university as a part-time, mature student in 2003, and without much prior thought began employment in the higher education (HE) sector shortly after. The duality of working within the HE system whilst studying provided invaluable insights. As a student, I understood the student experience from the perspective of a Black, mature female studying a part-time undergraduate degree, yet not once did I consider myself to be a non-traditional student or under-represented in any way. As an employee I understood the systems, the

processes, the implicit and explicit expectations required of a student. The environment in which I studied and worked represented others like me, or so it seemed. I became pregnant in 2004 and the anomalies during pregnancy meant that my daughter remained in the paediatric intensive care unit for the first six months of life. As a mother and a carer, I took longer to complete my degree than the average part-time student. However, obtaining a First Class Honours degree was a significant personal achievement and a way of counteracting the stereotypical generalisation amongst my societal group. That generalisation being a single parent, lacking aspiration and yet demonstrating a certain 'mentality' associated with economic migrants with an over-riding ambition to better myself and the prospects of my family (Modood, 1993). I re-joined the degree in the second year as a part-time undergraduate student and continued to work full time in HE as a Senior Administrator managing a team and working alongside the Senior Management Team (SMT).

As part of my professional development I was offered coaching in 2009. It was not a term that I was familiar with at the time, but I participated as I was always keen to develop. I recall the impact of the sessions as something that I had not experienced before. There was a sense of empowerment and belief that anything was possible. It was as if my mind had been opened to endless possibilities in such a prevalent way that somehow, I felt permitted to think differently, to perceive my world differently. In 2010, I stepped out of my comfort zone and considered voluntary redundancy as an opportunity to do something different. In the summer of 2011, I enrolled as a full time MSc Coaching Psychology student and returned to the HE sector following the completion of my Masters in 2012. I have continued to work in the HE Sector ever since. Up until that point the term widening participation (WP) had not been as prevalent in my educational or professional journey. I was aware of the attainment gap between groups of students, for instance, White students and Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME), and the stereotypical view of the need to 'raise aspirations' of certain student groups from disadvantaged backgrounds (Harrison and Waller, 2018). I was not aware however, to the extent of it being such a distinct issue, or a stereotypical view of particular groups requiring additional support during their studies. Neither was I aware of the generalisation that was made of all non-white groups, and in particular, Afro-Caribbean and black groups, for 'underachievement' in school examinations and low academic expectations of their teachers (Pit-ten Cate and Glock, 2018; Gillborn et al., 2012; Modood, 1993). Some of my peers at secondary school studied A Levels, I was not encouraged to do so. Furthermore, I was not aware that the equivalent route of a BTEC National Diploma would lead me towards a less academic path making it less likely for me to attend

university (Voigt, 2007) and when the desire to attend university arose, that I was more likely to attend a 'new' HEI considered to be less prestigious (Modood, 2006).

During my employment in the HE sector, I began to question, observe, reflect and reconsider, not only my own educational journey and experiences of HE, but the experience of others of a similar demographic, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic class. Such reflections became central to the positioning of my study determining the research question, methodology, data collection and analysis (Willig, 2008). I consider myself to be an individual having a personal encounter as an atypical student trying to explore the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1990). I also questioned, had I received coaching as a student or a different type of support would it have made a difference in some way, perhaps in the choices I took. I was curious to find out the views and experiences of coaching from other non-traditional students who perhaps followed a similar path to myself.

As such, this study explores the research question 'what are the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies using heuristic inquiry, portraying the voices of non-traditional students from the unique perspective of the researcher, who has direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

Chapter 1 Introduction

In the first section of this chapter, I will provide a contextual overview and explore how my research interest developed over a period of years into a genuine passion. Although overwhelming at times, from a personal and professional perspective, that passion ultimately led to the decision to research this phenomenon. I will then present the aim of the study, and describe the concepts and definitions used and explain what inspired me to explore the area of research from a theoretical perspective. A brief description of the methodology will follow alongside a rationale for the chosen method of researching the problem and finally, a summary of the purpose and intention of the chapters that will occur within the thesis.

1.1 Context and problem

The term widening participation (WP) in the HE sector acquired an important role in readdressing the under-representation of certain groups in universities (Burke, 2016). There has been a strong national and global focus on educational policy in an attempt to address historical struggles for the right to access HE and to increase participation levels traditionally dominated by privileged and powerful social groups (Burnell, 2015; Burke, 2016). A number of policies have shaped the widening participation agenda in Great Britain since the Robbins Report in the 1960s (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) when successful completion of a sixth form course gave no right of access to higher education in England and Wales (Committee on Higher Education, 1963). Easy access was considered to “carry with it high wastage” or prolongation of study beyond the minimum period (Committee on Higher Education, 1963 p. 38). As such a high degree of selection occurred for those accessing universities (Committee on Higher Education, 1963). In 1987, the Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997) reviewed the levels of participation in higher education for different groups. The report acknowledged that participation levels had increased since the Robbins Report, with periods of rapid growth in the late 1960s and from 1988 to 1993, particularly for women participants; part-time mature students; mature students from ethnic minority backgrounds and semi-skilled and unskilled young people from particular socio-economic groups (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997). The Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997) laid the groundwork for a series of policy documents that were to follow and established what came to be known as the “widening participation” agenda (Harrison and Waller, 2018). Although the reports began to address the political agenda in expanding participation to

meet the economic requirements of the labour market and greater social mobility the increasing levels of participation in HE began to highlight the disparities between different socio-economic groups (highest, middle and lowest); their age; ethnicity; disabilities; qualifications and entrance into pre and post 1992 types of universities (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997).

The political aim in the early 2000s however, continued to focus on recruitment and the need to 'raise aspirations' and participation levels amongst disadvantaged young people and their families (Harrison and Waller, 2018). As the HE sector responded to this aim, more places were made available to non-traditional students considered to be under-represented in HE, and whose participation may be limited by structural factors (Younger et al., 2018; Cotton et al., 2017). Under-represented groups include first generation HE students (first in family to participate in HE); mature students; low socio-economic groups; minority ethnic groups; disabilities; women; those living in areas or attending schools with low levels of participation in HE; immigrants and individuals whose first language is not English (Cotton et al., 2017; McLellan, et al., 2016; Wilkins and Burke, 2015; Hatt and Tate, 2015; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003). Despite the development of specialist entry programmes and the implementation of social inclusion polices to address disadvantage nationally, access into HE for certain groups remains a controversial issue (Burke, 2016; Whiteford Shah and Nair, 2013). Retention and the measure of the 'efficiency' of HE, in terms of the economy as a return on investment to individuals, society and the European Union, became an important issue and rising concern for policy-makers at national and European levels (Merrill and Johnson, 2011). In turn, attention was also focused upon the withdrawal and retention of non-traditional students in HE, which saw an increase in the effort to support these student groups considered as at 'particular risk' of withdrawal (Cotton et al., 2017; Merrill and Johnson, 2011).

Students who withdraw from their studies in HE do not necessarily experience more difficulties than others who do not, (Guglielmetti, 2011) but there is evidence that non-traditional students are at greater risk of withdrawal due to a number of influencing factors (Corver, 2005; Merrill and Johnston, 2011). For instance, once at university, the concept of 'social-cultural incongruity' and differential cultural capital are highlighted as key reasons for higher dropout rates amongst those from lower socioeconomic groups (Bourdieu, 1986; Wilkins and Burke, 2015). With HE systems historically designed for educating privileged, young, white, western men, (Hinton-Smith, 2012) engaging non-traditional students into the existing HE framework causes friction with students' and

institutional expectations, asking 'square pegs' to fit 'round holes' (Hinton-Smith, 2012). This indicates that the experiences of non-traditional students differ compared to those of more traditional students, and that non-traditional students may find it difficult to adapt to unfamiliar academic demands and often implicit expectations (Reay Crozier and Clayton, 2010). Equally however, there are individual variables, such as students' entry qualifications and personal backgrounds that are likely to impact on retention, which institutions cannot influence (Wolter et al., 2014; Cotton et al., 2017). Conversely, the widespread view that non-traditional students are a problem for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) needs to be challenged as it diverts attention from the opportunities to understand and adapt their culture and practices (Fragoso et al., 2013).

Despite the evidence that suggests systemic factors can impact access, retention and attainment in educational contexts (Cohen, 2006; Huitt, 2011; Putwain et al., 2013; Cotton et al., 2017) non-traditional students do succeed at university when factors identified as being associated with improved retention and success have been met. Gazeley and Aynsley (2012) argue that the key to retention is understanding the many factors that may cause students to leave a course prior to completion and the complex interplay between them. Thomas (2011) puts student engagement and belonging at the heart of improving student retention and suggests that effective interventions and practices such as; pre-entry interventions, effective inductions, high quality student-centered learning and teaching, friendship and peer support assists to foster a sense of belonging and engagement and in turn enables students to maximise their success. Whilst an array of factors are considered to contribute to the success of non-traditional students, there is little investigation into the difference that confidence, motivation and perseverance can make to an individual's learning or, of the potential changes to a student's learning identity as they transition from one setting to another, one life stage to another (Christie et al., 2008) or across all phases of their education (Thiele et al., 2017). The Sutton Trust (2015) corroborate this, arguing that consideration of individual's educational trajectories is required to fully understand the interconnections between family, background, school academic attainment and success in being admitted into HE.

Studies have identified that individuals do not solely derive a sense of self (personal identity) through the self-evaluation of their experiences, beliefs and characteristics (Thiele et al., 2017; Ellemers et al., 1999). Interrelated factors such as social comparisons and identity-related expectations can also influence how they feel others perceive and react to them (Thiele et al., 2017; Reay et al., 2009; Derks et al., 2007).

Social class, for instance, has been used as a basis to explain prominent social differences between individuals and groups, (Thiele et al., 2017; Surridge; 2007; Turner et al., 1987) level of education, (Stubager, 2009) and hold stereotypes about others based on their perceptions of their education level (Spruyt and Kuppens, 2015). The consensual beliefs and observations about the attributes of people belonging to a social category, develop stereotypes of that group (Koenig and Eagly, 2019; 2014). These "widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing" (p. 1793) are everywhere and are rooted in true differences. As stereotype focus on differences, they can cause belief distortions, particularly when groups are similar (Bordalo, et al., 2016).

In education, stereotypical beliefs of non-traditional students may derive from differential expectations and attitudes towards students from different backgrounds and the education level of their parents which guide behaviours and judgements (Pit-ten Cate and Glock, 2018). For instance, teachers may have negative implicit attitudes, beliefs and judgements about the behaviour and academic achievement of students from different social background, compared to a positive bias and attitude in favour of students with highly educated parents (Pit-ten Cate and Glock, 2018). Or the systematic low expectations that teachers have for Black children, regardless of their social class background (Gillborn et al., 2012) can contribute to the biases, stereotypical expectations, attitudes and decision making, adding to the disadvantage that different student groups experience in the school systems (Peterson et al., 2016; van den Bergh et al., 2010). In HE, students narratives depict the influence of parents and teachers, portraying their awareness of others perceiving them as members of a group that are less likely to do well, less likely to 'fit in' or feel comfortable in their enviroment (Thiele et al., 2017; Burnell, 2015) Students described themselves as feeling misjudged in terms of their effort and academic potential (Macqueen, 2017; Thiele et al., 2017) and as not having the right things compared to others, when expressing their socio-economic background in relation to receiving financial support for instance (Thiele et al., 2017; Benson et al., 2012). Students were reported in other studies as trying to conceal social class and/or other characteristics that could be stigmatising or negatively perceived (Thiele et al., 2017; Aries and Seider, 2005; Granfield, 1991). It is important therefore, to recognise that identity-related constructs can influence the way that students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds evaluate whether to attend HE (Thiele et al., 2017).

It has been argued that attitudes and motivation for change are influenced by the way individuals perceive themselves (Bachkirova, 2004) indicating the role of confidence and self-esteem as fundamental to performance and psychological wellbeing (Brady, 2011). Whilst there are studies that identify the benefits of coaching in HE in terms of confidence, motivation and reducing stress (Grant, 2003; Short et al., 2010; Brady, 2011; van Nieuwerburgh and Tong, 2012; Thomas and Hanson, 2014; Andreanoff, 2016; Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018; van Nieuwerburgh and Barr 2016; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018), little empirical research has been conducted to explore how coaching supports non-traditional students, specifically in the UK. Furthermore, little is known of the coaching experience from the perspectives of the student coachees or an understanding of the experience of coaching non-traditional students from the viewpoint of the coaches.

Although universities provide a range of services to support students at the pre-entry and admission stage of the student cycle, evaluating the impact of university-led WP initiatives is a major challenge (Hayton, 2016). Others argue, that where targeted strategies and positive action have been implemented, little support, or routine monitoring is offered to students as they move through the course (Taylor and House, 2010). Therefore, supporting under-represented groups and evidencing positive outcomes for disadvantaged students is becoming ever more paramount (DBIS, 2016; Raven, 2016). Whilst it is considered problematic to point to causal links between interventions and outcomes, owing to the complex range of factors that may affect each person's experience it is recognised that further research is required in many areas (DBIS, 2014). Therefore, there is still value in gaining an understanding of the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies and the role of coaching in supporting them. I became interested in exploring the experiences of non-traditional students and curious about coaching as an intervention in supporting their higher education. This important topic will be explored in this qualitative study.

1.2. Personal and Professional Context

Personal aspects were introduced in the prologue where I described my formative years and other experiences that have become relevant during the course of my personal and professional career. This section shares how my research interests developed from a professional perspective and ignited a passion to explore, from a personal perspective, the experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate

studies using heuristic inquiry, portraying the voices of non-traditional students from the unique perspective of the researcher, who has direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

The HEI where I am employed are committed to removing barriers to progression and success, and promoting understanding and awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion for all. A number of objectives were set across the HEI for 2015-2018, one of which was to narrow the differentials in participation and continuation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students (UAL, 2015). In the 2013/14 academic year, the institution as a whole saw a 19% gap between White and BAME students awarded a 1st or 2:1 and a differential retention gap of 10% between White and BAME students progressing from year 1 to year 2 of their studies (UAL, 2015). At a local College level within the HEI where the research study took place, the attainment gap between White Students and BAME students widened with 26% of White students being awarded a 1st or a 2:1 and a differential retention gap of 14% between White and BAME students progressing from year 1 to year 2 of their studies in the same academic year, 2013/14 (UAL, 2015).

A number of targeted programmes of action took place in 2014/15 across the HEI aimed at improving the participation, retention and attainment of BAME students. For instance, a WP programme targeted partnerships with 60 schools and 25 colleges to increase the percentage of new home undergraduate entrants from BAME Groups was launched in one institution (UAL, 2015). Part of this programme involved promoting a student voice archive of BAME students sharing their experiences through made or written work and a supportive campaign encouraging staff discussions on the issues of differentials in attainment. At a local College level, within the same institution a number of College Management Team (CMT) projects occurred to develop strategies to raise student attainment and to listen to the voices of students.

The HEI in which the study took place has a university coaching network of employees that coach members of staff within the institution. There was not a coaching provision at the HEI for students. In 2014/15 coaching was trailed for one term, as part of a wider CMT attainment project in an attempt to support student attainment. One day per week over a 9-week period was allocated to coaching, and coaching was offered between the hours of 10am and 4pm. The coaching sessions took place on the university site and students were informed of the room that the session would occur. Students were invited to self-select up to a maximum of three, 30-minute coaching sessions using a Doodle

Poll. The 30-minute coaching sessions were considered by the wider attainment project team as sufficient time for students to engage with the process based on the experiences of staff offering other provision such as pastoral or tutorial support. A total of 27 students signed up for coaching, 23 students were in their first year of studies and four students in their second year of studies. Eighteen of the 23 students attended coaching, of the 18 participants, nine had failed a Term 1 unit. Table 1 shows the year of studies and the number of students that attended each session.

Year of Studies	Number of students Session 1	Number of students Session 2	Number of students Session 3
1	16	2	1
2	2	2	1

Table 1 Year of Studies and the number of students that attended each session

The students that attended one session, felt that they had achieved their desired outcome and did not need further sessions. Reasons provided for non-attendance were: more than one session was booked in advance, the coaching session was on the same day as a resubmission hand-in, illness, they forgot to attend, a session that had booked too close together, they forgot to cancel and reschedule for a later session. I identified four main themes from the feedback received and coaching session notes: issues of time management; self-confidence; the perception of self and the perception of others, and anxieties around experimentation and cost. The issues arising from the coaching caused me to reflect on my own experiences as a student and the perceptions of non-traditional students in HEIs. This enthused my ambition to explore offering coaching to students who typically would not be able to access such support.

Not only was coaching an initiative to support and understand the experiences of non-traditional students in this institution. Other studies have identified the value of coaching in HE (Chaplin, 2007; Grant et al., 2010; Short et al., 2010; Burns and Gillion; 2011; van Nieuwerburgh and Tong, 2013; Thomas and Hanson, 2014; Van Nieuwerburgh and Barr, 2016; Iordanou, 2016; Andreanoff, 2016; Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018). There is research that identifies that systemic factors can impact the student experience, retention and attainment, (Cohen, 2006; Huitt, 2011; Putwain et al., 2013; Cotton et al., 2017) however, I became more intrigued by the internal self-influence factors of the student experience (Honicke and Broadbent, 2016). This ignited the overarching research question, what are the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies using heuristic inquiry, portraying the voices of

non-traditional students from the unique perspective of the researcher, who has direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

The process of the first phase of heuristic inquiry began within me, with a desire to explore a deep-rooted concern that consequently generated a self-dialogue, to the extent that I became aware that my own lived experiences and involvement as a researcher would become the main focus of the research (Moustakas, 1990). At that point, I acknowledged that the research problem would derive from experiences in my personal life as well as incorporating aspects of practice within the workplace (Creswell, 2014). My 'internal search' required openness and honesty with my own lived experiences of the research phenomenon (Moustakas, 1995) which as previously mentioned in my prologue, stemmed from my childhood and inadvertently during my adulthood, formulating into a research study incorporating the concepts of widening participation, self-belief and coaching.

This self-discovery and the self-disclosed dialogue in terms of openness to my own experiences, at times, involved emotional pain (Bach, 2002). I consider myself and the content of my life to be a closed book, therefore opening the book even to myself, periodically caused a level of discomfort. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) emphasise the value of self-disclosure as being at the heart of heuristics. I knew that this self-disclosure had to begin at the point that I decided to commence the research. As I reflected on the challenges that I faced as an undergraduate student at the age of 18, I began to explore my research question and the different possibilities to what might have occurred if I had the courage to seek support at that point. Perhaps, better supportive relationships with my peers and tutors would have encouraged me to complete my studies? My experiences as a part-time, mature student were not dissimilar in terms of the challenges of seclusion. What differed from my first experience? I had never explored or questioned my educational experiences until my first encounter with coaching. The use of open questioning, probing and exploration from a professional development point of view enabled me to expand my way of thinking. I not only began to question my progression in HE as an employee categorised as under-represented in the sector, I also began to question my progression as a non-traditional student within the education system.

'Widening Participation' was not a term that I was familiar with as an undergraduate or postgraduate student. It was not a phrase that I had directly encountered when I began employment in the HE sector in 2003. It was not until I began employment at an Arts

university in 2012 that the term become so prevalent, with the necessity to address the attainment gap of certain under-represented groups of students gaining entry into HE by way of a non-traditional route. As my knowledge and experience grew within the institution so did the passion and desire to understand this sphere that I was somehow part of, without any real prior knowledge of its existence. I wanted the voices of others like myself to be heard and recognised in the context of our own direct experiences, rather than have the voices of others who do not look like me, sound like me or have the same life experiences as me, try to support non-traditional students without understanding what is perceived as supportive or with inappropriate traditionally prescribed methods. As such, this study explores the research question of what are the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to, and during, their undergraduate studies using heuristic inquiry, portraying the voices of non-traditional students from the unique perspective of the researcher, who has direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation. The aim of the research is to explore the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their undergraduate studies.

The following objectives were developed in order to address the aim of this study.

1. Undertake a critical review of literature on widening participation, self-theories and the role of coaching in education, in the context of WP as an approach to facilitating the 'confidence' of non-traditional students.
2. Undertake qualitative research to explore the experiences of coaching from the perspective of student coachees and their coaches as a way of gaining a better understanding of the nuances of coaching non-traditional students.
3. Contribute to the practice of coaching by exploring how coaching supports the confidence and self-understanding of non-traditional student groups.
4. Contribute to theoretical and professional knowledge by adding to the field of coaching in education and experiences of confidence in coaching from the heuristic perspective.

1.3 Definitions and literature

Coaching

There are ongoing discussions and debates about the variations and agreed definition of coaching (van Nieuwerburgh, 2014; Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck, 2014; van Nieuwerburgh and Barr, 2016) as the term 'coaching' is sometimes related to other fields, disciplines and services, such as mentoring, counselling and consulting (Cox,

Bachkirova, and Clutterbuck, 2014) or used interchangeably with words, such as 'mentoring', 'teaching', or 'tutoring' (van Nieuwerburgh and Barr, 2016, p. 5). However, there appears to be a broad agreement that coaching is about helping a person to achieve their goals or improve their performance through structured one-to-one conversations (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). Equally, there are coaching definitions that use the words 'performance' and 'goals' to define coaching (Grant, 2007; de Haan, 2008; Whitmore, 2009; Bresser and Wilson, 2010). However, the following definition has been chosen for its broader description and human approach to coaching which is defined as:

> "Coaching could be seen as a human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the coachee and potentially other stakeholders" (Cox, Bachkirova, and Clutterbuck, 2014, p. 1).

Coaching in education

'Coaching in education' is a relatively distinct area that has grown since the early 2000's and has become recognised internationally as having an enormous effect in education (van Nieuwerburgh 2012; van Nieuwerburgh and Barr, 2016). The term was initially used as a means of increasing student performance, largely through leaders developing their teaching staff and interacting with pupils (Donaldson, 2010; van Nieuwerburgh and Tong, 2013). More recently, coaching has evolved to include initiatives for both learners and educators (van Nieuwerburgh and Barr, 2016) implementing direct coaching around students' needs across various ages and stages of their education (Briggs and van Nieuwerburgh 2010; Passmore and Brown 2009; Short el al., 2010; Fox Eades, 2011; Andreanoff, 2016; Iordanou, 2016) as a means of enhancing performance and overcoming learning difficulties (Grant, et al., 2010; Burns and Gillion, 2011; van Nieuwerburgh and Tong, 2013; Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018). For this study, the coaching literature stems from research studies that support students in higher education. It also draws on coaching literature that supports self-confidence or aspects of the self as being fundamental to performance, motivation and psychological wellbeing (Bachkirova, 2004; Hindermach, 2008; Brady, 2011).

Coaching in education for this study is understood as:

> "a one-to-one conversation focused on the enhancement of learning and development through increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal

responsibility, where the coach facilitates the self-directed learning of the coachee through questioning, active listening, and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate" (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012, p. 17).

Self-theories

For this study, self-concept, self-efficacy and self-esteem will be considered as part of the literature review as a way of understanding the beliefs and the perceptions about the self, that according to Bong and Skaalvik (2003), are heavily rooted in past achievements and reinforcement history.

Self-concept

Although definitions vary, the definition of self-concept that will be used in this study is described by Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton, (1976) as "a person's perception of himself. These perceptions are formed through his experience with his environment … and are influenced especially by environmental reinforcements and significant others" (p. 414). Bong and Skaalvik (2003) suggests that assessing a person's self-concept relies heavily on social comparative information and reflects appraisals from significant others. Whilst this study is not using the concept in a quantitative sense, the definition is still a useful way to decipher the differences between the theoretical concepts of this study.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy, compared to self-concept, deals primarily with cognitively perceived capability of the self. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as "the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes" (p. 79). Self-efficacy is presumed to explain and predict a person's thought, emotion and how much effort they will spend on a task (van Dinther et al., 2011).

Self esteem

The term self-esteem in this introduction typically refers to one's general feeling of self-worth, in which the self is treated as a global entity (Damon and Hart, 1982). The evaluation of the self can be represented by positive or negative self-esteem, which is usually assessed quantitatively at different periods in one's course of development (Damon and Hart, 1982). Similarly, to self-concept, whilst this study is not using the concept in a quantitative nature. The definition is still a useful way to decipher the differences between the theoretical concepts and to explore them in a qualitative nature.

Widening participation

Widening participation sough to increase participation levels and access to universities for participants considered under-represented in HE (Younger et al., 2018; Cotton et al., 2017). The concept "widening participation" is highly contested within and across different national contexts and there is no one agreed definition (Burke 2016, p. 1). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, widening participation will be considered as redressing the under-representation of certain groups connected to a wider social movement for greater educational equality, fair access, diversity and fostering a sense of inclusion, belonging and social difference (Burke, 2016).

The term Widening Participation (WP) is a contested terrain for its differentiating policies and practices, its competing values and its interconnected policies that attempt to readdress national concerns for the right of certain social groups to access higher education (Burke, 2016). The political aim since the early 2000s has been to raise the aspirations of young people and their families (Harrison and Waller, 2018).

The widening participation agenda has been driven by a number of polices such as the Excellence Challenge (DfEE, 2000) which focused on outreach interventions between institutions, further education colleges and schools (Harrison and Waller, 2018). The Excellence Challenge (DfEE, 2000) led to the national intervention programme Aim Higher focusing on collaborations with regional organisations and sub-regional partnerships to reach areas and social groups that had not been previously engaged (Harrison and Waller, 2018). The White Paper, Future of Higher Education (DfES, 2003) solidified the focus on the social gap and fair access to HE particularly for low-income families. Four areas of action were proposed by the government - attainment, aspiration, applications and admissions as well as plans for establishing an Office for Fair Access (DfES, 2003). The National strategy for access and student success in higher education continued to focus on access, retention, and areas, such as student success and progression to further study or employment (DBIS, 2014).

Non-traditional students

The term 'non-traditional' will be used to represent students from any group which has up until recently been under-represented in HE (Macqueen, 2017) and whose participation may be limited by structural factors (Younger et al., 2018; Cotton et al., 2017). Under-represented groups include first generation HE students (first in family to participate in HE); mature students, low socio-economic groups; minority ethnic groups; disabilities; women; those living in areas or attending schools with low levels of

participation in HE (Cotton et al., 2017; McLellan, et al., 2016; Wilkins and Burke, 2015; Hatt and Tate, 2015; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003). The term non-traditional rather than any other definitions such as low socio-economic background, minority ethnic groups or mature students has been used as the participants in this study fit a variety of those categories, and often more than one of them (Macqueen, 2017).

1.4 The research design and focus

The experiences of non-traditional students within the education system in the UK has always been a perplexing issue for me to understand. In my personal and professional journey in HE, the complexities of the supportive needs of non-traditional students was also an area that I wanted to explore and understand further. As I continued to listen to, and attend meetings on, the attainment and retention issues of BAME students and other under-represented groups, the question re-emerged with consideration as to how such students in the UK could be supported through coaching.

I initially chose Action Research as an appropriate methodology as I considered there to be a problem that needed to be understood through purposive action (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000; McNiff and Whitehead, 2010; McNiff, 2013). In addition, I hoped to contribute to theory through the development of a theoretical framework of coaching in education. Through the dialogues that occurred with coaches within the focus groups, it became evident that the phenomenon of under-represented groups needed to be explored further to gain insight into their experiences, whereas Action Research is designed to offer and refine a particular approach for addressing this problem. The coaches in the focus groups were unanimous in highlighting the complexities of students from a WP background in terms of their socio-economic class and prior education. The coaches also identified themselves as coming from a traditional background and were less confident in understanding and supporting the specific needs of non-traditional students. As such, not only was it important to explore how coaching supports non-traditional students, it was considered significant to explore how coaches supports the confidence and self-understanding of non-traditional students.

Heuristic inquiry was chosen as a methodology, mainly, for its uniqueness in allowing me to explore this topic utilising my own direct experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990). I also wanted to understand what supports or hinders the experiences of under-represented groups during their studies and for the voices of the participants to be heard and recognised in the context of our own direct experiences, not

according to prescribed norms dictated by people who write national policies or support the student experience.

As I embarked on the heuristic journey, I feared that I would also have to risk opening up wounds and address passionate concerns to undergo a personal transformation (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14) and as I commenced this journey, I did so with a pause and deepened breath declaring the following words:

> "… our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?... As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." Williamson (1992, p. 190).

As I embarked on this journey, I felt liberated but yet also bound by the constraints of an educational system where there is an awareness of our existence but our existence remains unknown. I continued, and continue even now, to search for meaning to create a greater understanding for myself and others seemingly like me. As I search internally, I do so, so that awareness is brought externally to others, in the hope that the experiences of non-traditional students are acknowledged and understood sufficiently. This was a motivating factor for undertaking the research study.

1.5 Research Methodology

Heuristic inquiry was chosen as the most appropriate methodology to explore the following research questions:

1. What are the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies?
2. How can coaching support non-traditional students?
3. What are the experiences of coaches in the process of supporting non-traditional students?

The uniqueness of heuristic inquiry requires the researcher to have direct experience of the phenomenon, its social and potential universal significance and the importance of

relationship and connection with others (Moustakas, 1990). Such aspects distinguish heuristic inquiry from other phenomenological approaches which encourage detachment from the experiences of those of the researcher and the notion of bracketing one's experience (Denscombe, 2014). In this study, the knowledge created comes from the combined experiences of myself, the student participants and the coaches. Adopting heuristic inquiry as a methodology enables the possibilities of being able to enter into the perceptions, attitudes and values of the participants through self-inquiry and dialogue to find the underlying meanings and importance of our shared experiences (Crotty, 2012; Moustakas, 1990).

Heuristic inquiry draws upon a humanistic, person-centered approach to knowledge (Rogers, 1985; 1965) and a person-centered approach was used in coaching to explore the beliefs and assumptions of the participants (Joseph and Wood, 2010). It was also a way to create an atmosphere of openness and trust for a dialogue to take place where participants can share, explore and express their experiences (Moustakas, 1990). The participants in this study are undergraduate students who categorised themselves as being within an under-represented group and experienced coaches within the HEI in which I am employed. The gathering of data took many forms of dialogue, coaching sessions, reflective diaries, focus groups, and interviews.

Significance of the study

The study can contribute to knowledge by providing the HE sector with a deeper understanding of non-traditional students by giving them a voice, without constraining, homogenising and simplifying who they are (Sabri, 2011). By doing so the study offers valuable insight into the differing experiences of non-traditional students in HE. The study can also contribute to knowledge by identifying how coaching supports non-traditional students during their studies, and if there are any benefits to coaching as an intervention for non-traditional students in HEIs in the UK.

The knowledge obtained from this study can illuminate the lived experiences of under-represented groups and encourage others to share their experiences. The research can be of value to the participants in the study and further enhance their confidence and self-understanding of non-traditional students through the facilitation of coaching. It can also provide knowledge to those who support WP initiatives and undertake coaching practices with non-traditional students in other sectors.

The knowledge obtained from this study can contribute to the field by offering coaches insights into the experiences of non-traditional students journeys leading to and during their undergraduate studies. The context can assist coaches to understanding their HE environment, how students perceive themselves within it, and the importance placed on non-judgement. The study offers insight into the coaching experiences from the perspective of coaches and contributes to knowledge by offering alternative coaching approaches to support non-traditional students in HE in the UK.

The knowledge from this study offers insight into the challenges of coaching non-traditional students and the nuances of non-judgement in coaching practice where there are noticeable or subtle cultural differences. This study shares the challenges of stereotyping and the assumptions made by coaches, the need for support in supervision, and a better understanding of best practice in interculturally-sensitive coaching.

The knowledge obtained from this study can contribute to the theoretical and professional knowledge by adding to the field of coaching in education and self-belief in coaching psychology from the heuristic perspective. The study depicts the experiences of non-traditional students and as such can provide insights, which can guide future studies within the field of coaching.

1.6 Overview of the thesis

Chapter 1 has established the background of the study, it provides an explanation of the research problem to address the aims of the study and my professional interest in it. The definitions used within the research have been provided and the reasons for the research design and for the research focus and subsequent research aims have been outlined. Chapter 2 discusses the literature pertinent to the study covering three areas: widening participation and the experiences of non-traditional students in HE in the UK, self-theories and coaching to support aspects of self and coaching in education. Chapter 3 considers the methodology and covers my underlying beliefs on research philosophy about the nature of reality, truth and knowledge. It discusses and defends the choice of methodological approach in depth and explains the selection of participants and their contexts. The method of data collection and analysis are also considered and issues relating to validity, reflexivity and ethics are also discussed. Chapter 4 reports on the research findings from this study by presenting the experiences (the vignettes) of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies. My own experience as a non-traditional student is explored and the vignettes of students

reflected upon from the unique perspective of the researcher who has a direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Chapter 5 considers the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their undergraduate studies. Chapter 6 presents an understanding of the experiences of coaching non-traditional students and the challenges and nuances faced by coaches and myself as a researcher who has a direct experience of the phenomenon. Chapter 7 discusses the findings in light of the existing literature, identifies overarching themes that come from the exploration of the experiences of non-traditional students, coaches and myself as the researcher and the implications for the HE and coaching practice. Chapter 8 revisits the research aim and how the research questions were addressed. It describes the contributions to knowledge in the HE sector and to coaching practice in HE. It discusses the limitations of the study, suggestions for future research and provides personal reflections on the research process.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is to firstly provide the context to the research problem identified for the study that is to explore the experiences of non-traditional students in HE in the UK. Secondly, it will draw on the existing relevant research and locate it in relation to the debates within related fields, widening participation, disciplines of self-theories and coaching.

The strategy of literature search used for the review was selective, in that it initially derived from literature on access to and participation of certain social groups within the context of HE. The search started with a broad subject review using the following key words: widening participation; under-represented groups and similar phrases such as non-traditional students and adult learners in higher education. The review identified that whilst there is a national focus to readdress the under-representation of certain social groups, external and internal factors can impact their retention and attainment during their studies, even though various support is available. Following on from the review of literature on widening participation in the context of HE, the literature search continued within the field of psychology, to consider intrinsic factors that can impact the experiences of HE and the ways in which coaching supports students whilst at university.

The review involved searching books and journals such as, *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, *Studies in Higher Education*, the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology,* the *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, the *International Coaching Psychology Review*, *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*. Online database searches Eric, Emerald insight, PsycInfo and ScienceDirect. Attendance at Oxford Brookes Annual Coaching and Mentoring Conference was beneficial in highlighting studies across sectors and profession.

In reviewing literature, it became apparent that the subject matter pertaining to widening participation was abundant. It was therefore necessary to ensure that the overarching context of widening participation did not overshadow the area of coaching. As a result of the analysis of literature, the following themes are considered in the literature review.

- Widening participation and the experiences of non-traditional students
- Self-theories and coaching to support aspects of self
- Coaching in education in the UK

2.1 Widening participation and the experiences of non-traditional students in HE in the UK

Widening participation into Higher Education (HE) has acquired an increasingly important role in readdressing the under-representation of certain social groups in universities in the UK (Wilkins and Burke, 2015). Across Europe, schemes have been devised aimed at increasing the number of non-traditional students and enhancing retention through scholarships, bursaries, enhanced monitoring and offering support through the provision of specialist staff teams or peer mentors (Cotton et al., 2017). In other countries such as Australia, the USA, New Zealand and South Africa, governments have set targets for institutions to increase the access and participation of disadvantaged students in HE (Whiteford et al., 2013). Over the last 15 years considerable effort has been made to widen participation in the English HE system introducing initiatives such as Aimhigher, as a way to increase the proportion of young students from under-represented groups progressing to HE (Hayton and Bengry-Howell, 2016). Efforts have been made nationally to increase the participation of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Harrison and Waller, 2018) targeting those from low socio-economic classifications (SEC) groups; low participating neighborhoods; first degree entrants from state schools by location of HE providers; those with disabilities; from minority ethnic groups; women and mature students (HESA, 2018; National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997).

Disadvantaged backgrounds can be understood by different approaches to categorization, geographical area, low income household by Free School Meals (FSM) and entry into higher tariff institutions. Whilst students from disadvantaged backgrounds in the UK are as likely to continue in education after the age of 18 as their counterparts, they are less likely to continue to HE (Younger et al., 2018; DfE, 2016). Young people from advantaged areas are 2.36 times more likely to go to university than those in disadvantaged areas (UCAS, 2018). Table 2 shows, at the age of 18, 20.4% of young people from disadvantaged areas entered HE in 2017/18 compared with 47.1% from advantaged areas (DfE, 2018).

Years 2008/9-2017/18	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18
Disadvantaged areas %	12.9	13.6	14.2	15.1	15.1	16.3	17.8	18.5	19.5	20.4
Advantaged areas %	42.3	42.4	41.8	44.4	41.7	43.0	44.4	44.9	46.3	47.1
Gap percentage points	29.4	28.8	27.6	29.3	26.6	26.7	26.6	26.4	26.8	26.7

Table 2 HE entry at the age of 18 (DfE, 2018)

As shown in Table 3, at the age of 19, 25.6% of those from low-income households by Free School Meal (FSM) status progressed to HE in 2016/17 compared with 43.3% from mid and high income households (DfE, 2018). In addition, students from less advantaged social and economic backgrounds are more likely to attend post 1992 HE institutions rather than more selective research-led institutions (Reay Crozier and Clayton, 2009; Macqueen, 2017; Younger, 2018; Gorad, 2019). Post 1992 HEIs encourage socially diverse applicants with a likelihood of acceptance (Crozier et al., 2008; Leathwood and Connell, 2003) opposed to pre 1992 HEIs that lean towards elitism attracting more middle-class students (Crozier et al., 2008; Rainford, 2016).

Years 2008/9-2017/18	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18
Low household income FSM Meals %	17.4	18.6	19.8	20.3	21.3	22.3	23.5	25.1	25.6	-
Non FSM %	34.9	36.2	37.4	38.3	38.8	39.1	41.2	42.8	43.3	-
Gap percentage points	17.6	17.6	17.7	18.0	17.5	16.8	17.7	17.7	17.7	-

Table 3 Progression by 19 to HE by FSM (DfE, 2018)

While figures for 2017/18 in Table 4 show an increase in the percentage of disadvantaged young people gaining entry into higher tariff institutions. The gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged continues to remain large (DfE, 2018) with the most advantaged pupils being 5.74 more likely to gain entry in to a higher tariff institution that the most disadvantaged pupils (UCAS, 2018). Entry is largely predicted on prior attainment as such, access to HE continues to remain an issue (Gorard, et al., 2019) as less advantaged students' prior qualifications on average, are lower than their more advantaged counterparts (Broecke and Hamed, 2008; Chowdry et al., 2013).

Years 2008/9-2017/18	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18
Disadvantaged entry into higher tariff institution %	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.6	2.9	3.2	3.3	3.6	4.0
Advantaged entry into higher tariff institution%	19.6	18.8	18.2	17.9	19.0	19.8	20.5	20.7	21.3	21.7
Gap - Percentage points	17.1	16.4	15.8	15.5	16.4	16.9	17.4	17.4	17.7	17.7

Table 4 Entry rates to higher tariff institution (DfE, 2018)

Social inclusion policies such as the Excellence Challenge (DfEE, 2000 were implemented in the HE sector to ensure that all people irrespective of socioeconomic background have the right of access and the opportunity to participate and succeed (Whiteford et al., 2013). However, the extent to which students benefit from their experiences and successfully attain their educational objectives depends on a series of factors before and after entry (Hatt and Tate, 2015). Social class and family culture continue to influence engagement with education (Allatt, 1996; Marginson, 2016). Depending on the support, preparation and accuracy of information from schools, colleges and parents (Crozier et al., 2008) some students will not know what to expect and be uncertain of what is expected of them (Pascarella et al., 2004; Sanders et al., 2016) particularly in relation to academic behaviours, participation and production of work (Stevenson, 2012). Other students will have expectations that do not align with their actual experience (Smith and Wertlieb, 2005) and often have to adapt to a changed way of learning in order to benefit from their course (Burke et al., 2015). Questions have been asked of the role that HEIs play in supporting the needs of students from non-traditional backgrounds (Christie et al., 2008). The seminal studies focus on the experiences of non-traditional undergraduate students at universities across the UK.

Key empirical studies on the HE experiences of non-traditional undergraduate students in the UK

Christie et. al. (2008) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study with a group of non-traditional students in an elite university in the UK where the proportion of students from a non-traditional pathway was low. The study used theories around the emotional dimensions of learning to broaden the accounts of the learning experiences of non-traditional students entering the elite university. This longitudinal study reported on the initial stages of the research focusing on the interviews of 28 students during their first year at university. The study identified that whilst non-traditional students were initially excited about going to university, making the transition into a new teaching and learning

environment was a bewildering and dislocated experience. The lack of knowledge about university systems, academic standards and expectations saw a loss in the accumulated learning identity secured during their time at further education colleges. The findings also showed that engagement with learning for non-traditional students was a subjective experience, bound up with other life events and experiences and therefore socially situated. For instance, some found learning how to be a university student an emotionally demanding process because the particular pathway taken to enter HE differed from others. Some students struggled with ongoing tensions between contrasting stereotypical imagery of the ideal student life, and what it meant to fully belong to a community of practice within an elite university based on their experiences of gaining a degree through dedication and persistence. Within this study, the emotional feelings of non-traditional students were based upon their differing experiences and a strong desire to engage in social practices of learning that they felt they were only ever partial members of.

Mckendry et al., (2014) conducted a grounded theory study in an urban HEI in Scotland known for widening participation and increasing inclusion of under-represented groups. The study captured in two phases the perspectives of 46 non-traditional nursing and midwifery students in their first year of studies. The findings identified that some students spoke positively about their expectations being met even though there were a number of challenging factors, for instance, initial transitional anxieties around practical issues such as changes to timetables, academic workload and balancing family commitments. Other students that felt their expectations had not been met expressed a slightly more negative assessment of their experiences where the requirements or structure of the course, differed to the reality. The challenges however, did not appear to impact negatively on their studies or their university experiences. On the contrary, the findings identify three major sources of support that emerged as significant contributors to their satisfaction: the first being role models who inspired their original ambition for the profession, or who demonstrated the qualities the students hoped to mirror. The second were staff within the institution and the third were their peers. Whilst students identified a range of support options available to them, they were often referred to as potential sources for others rather than themselves, indicating the possibility of stigmatisation and adverse perceptions of remedial support when accessing services, such as disability support or seeking advice on academic support.

The study of Cotton et al. (2017) discussed the concept of a resilience framework on the basis of the findings of two related research projects on non-traditional students. The

first project used a longitudinal, mixed-method approach to provide insight into the students' experiences on a UK scheme at different points during their educational career. The second large scale project used a qualitative interpretive approach to explore the experiences of care leaver students in HE. The study identified the risk and protective factors across the combined data sets from both projects to illustrate a range of factors which potentially impact on the retention of these students. From the findings a generic resilience framework is provided to help tutors to understand the range of factors which can impact on students' retention and success in HE. Some of the key factors identified were significant adult relationships; supportive and approachable tutors; financial support and management; good network of friends and family; accessing student support; engagement in extra-curricular activities and good attendance. The study suggested that providing appropriate support which acts as a 'protective factor' in developing student resilience can help all students to access transformational learning.

The case study of Jones (2017) examined the incongruence between students' expectations of higher education and their experience whilst at a Russell Group university. It specifically examined if transition gaps might predict undergraduate students' gap outcomes. The study sought to learn more about the expectations and experiences of students from different educational and socio-economic backgrounds by grouping students into four groups: intervention WP students, non-intervention WP students, state school non-WP students and independent school non-WP students. The findings from the study sought to help to develop a richer sense of the student experience from 4 different socio-economic and school-type backgrounds. The study identified that many students reported deep-rooted social, academic and interpersonal anxieties supporting the literature of Burke, (2012) and Reay, Crozier and Clayton, (2010). Interviews also suggested that students from different backgrounds conceptualised university in different ways and positioned themselves differently in relation to academic norms. For instance, non-intervention WP students identified feelings of worry, guilt and under confidence in their academic ability and familiarity with the language of the sector, in comparison to non-WP students from state schools who were more likely to arrive equipped with the resilience needed to adapt to new learning cultures, different assessment styles and new pedagogies (Lehmann, 2009). Students from independent school background referred to being 'primed' for university by school teachers, reporting transition to HE as a smoother less stressful experience and feeling comfortable with their new environment as soon as they arrived. The study acknowledged that both socio-economic status and school type predict incongruences between students' expectations and experiences of university, suggesting that students from different backgrounds vary

in terms of their confidence to develop autonomous learning techniques, their sense of cultural acceptance and engagement with the programme curricula and personnel.

Tett et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study to track the experiences of a cohort of 45 new non-traditional students entering a research-intensive university from further educational colleges as part of a widening participation scheme. The individual students' experiences were mapped at the beginning of the academic year and several more occasions throughout their studies and again a year after graduation. The study captured the experiences of staff-student relationships from the perspectives of the students. The findings echoed the research of Thomas (2002) and showed that positive relationships with staff enabled students to gain self-confidence, motivation and improvement in their work where students felt staff believed in them and cared about the outcomes of their studies. Students in the study that sought support from academic staff were proactive in asking for the support, other students found staff 'scary' (p. 176) due to the distance they perceived to be between them, therefore limiting their ability to get help when it is required.

Table 5 summarises the foci and coverage of studies concerned with the experiences of non-traditional undergraduate students at universities across the UK.

Author	**Focus of the study**	**Strengths**	**Limitations**
Christie et al. (2008)	Emotions of non-traditional students learning to be university students	The intrinsic emotional aspects of non-traditional students	Longitudinal study on the learning and teaching experiences of non-traditional students at an elite university
Mckendry et al. (2014)	Student's voices on the retention strategies of a WP university	Expectations and experiences of participants and the sources of support – role models, staff and peers	Grounded theory and thematic analysis of non-traditional students in nursing and midwifery programmes
Cotton et al. (2017)	Supporting the retention of non-traditional students in	Identification of risk and protective factors to help tutors	Combines two studies that use a mixed method approach and

	HE using a resilience framework	understand the impact retention	qualitative interpretative approach to produce a resilience framework
Jones (2017)	Expectations vs experiences – might transition gaps predict undergraduate students outcome gaps	Experiences and expectations of students from different socio-economic background	Case study of the experiences of students from WP background in a Russell Group university
Tett et al. (2017)	Narratives of care amongst undergraduate students	The experiences of staff-student relationships	Longitudinal study of the experiences of non-traditional mature students at an ancient university in Scotland

Table 5 Published research studies on the HE experiences of non-traditional undergraduate students

Summary

The literature and recent research studies focused on widening participation and the experiences of non-traditional HE students from the perspectives of the students themselves. The literature identified an increase in the number of students from disadvantaged background accessing HEI's since 2008/9. The gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged accessing HE and post 1992 HEI's continues to remain large (DFE, 2018). We know from the literature that considerable effort has been made to increase the number of under-represented and disadvantaged groups entering HE (Harrison and Waller, 2018; Hayton and Bengry-Howell, 2016). However, the experiences of non-traditional students continue to remain varied, with some students having positive learning experiences and relationships with staff and peers (Tett et al., 2017; Mckendry et al., 2014). Whilst others' experiences do not line up with their expectations (Mckendry et al., 2014; Christie et al., 2008; Smith and Wertlieb, 2005), with some students finding HE emotionally demanding, (Christie et al., 2008) identifying feelings of worry, guilt and under confidence in their academic ability (Jones, 2017). The studies infer that students from different backgrounds vary in terms of their confidence to adapt, develop autonomy and feel comfortable in their new HE environment (Jones,

2017). It therefore seems pertinent to consider further what insights self-theories might say about their HE experiences, and how coaching supports aspects of self.

2.2 Self-theories and coaching to support aspects of self

Brief overview of self-theories

Educators have long recognised that students' beliefs about their academic capabilities play an essential role in their motivation to achieve and is considered a highly effective predictor of motivation and learning (Zimmerman, 2000). Over the past couple of decades numerous studies have produced abundant evidence on the influence of self-belief in educational research that the field struggles to decipher the distinguishing characteristics and comparative usefulness of self-beliefs in particular self-concept and self-efficacy (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003).

York and Knight (2004) suggest that little attention has been given to students in HE who bring their self-theories into their learning experience even though it is suggested that the power of self-theories influences the way pupils and students tackle tasks (Dweck, 1999). This brief overview sets as a reminder of some of the concepts referred to as part of this study which and takes place within a UK HEI.

Self-concept

In its broadest term self-concept is a person's perception of themselves formed through environmental experiences that can influence the way an individual can act (Bong and Clark, 1999). More specifically, in educational contexts, academic self-concept is the way in which an individual perceives themselves and their knowledge in terms of their achievements (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003).

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy compared to self-concept deals primarily with an individual's belief and judgement of their capabilities to organise and successfully complete a task (Bandura, 1997). What is most important is the individual's belief that they can successfully accomplish what they are required to do with the skills and abilities that they possess (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003). In an educational context, the stronger the notion of self-efficacy, the greater the effort, perseverance, resilience and elasticity of the student is likely to be (Bandura, 1986).

Self-esteem

Global self-esteem can be defined as the way individuals feel towards themselves (Rosenberg, 1979) and more recently as a favourable opinion towards oneself (Emler, 2001). Individuals can have a negative self-view or can be critical of themselves in a particular domain of their life or the self, such as academic abilities, vocational abilities and physical appearance (Dinos and Palmer, 2015).

Possible selves

Possible selves are considered as representing a person's future-orientated conceptualization of the selves they hope to become, expect to become or wish to avoid becoming (Markus and Nurius,1986). The study of Rossiter (2009) focused on the possible selves of non-traditional adult learners offering useful insights to educators working with non-traditional adult undergraduate students. The paper identified educational helpers as one of four main contributors that influenced undergraduate students' repertoire of possible selves as they moved through the transition process (Rossiter 2009). Students considered the interactions and suggestions provided by teachers, mentors and advisors as a point of origin where a particular possible self or a goal came into being. Such informal interactions suggest that educational relationships strengthened confidence, efficacy beliefs in relation to future selves and assisted with steps towards goals (Rossiter 2009). While this research is not specifically related to coaching, the study identified the importance of not rushing non-traditional students into goal setting and action planning prematurely before they have the opportunity to explore (test and learn) various options. Stevenson (2019) argued that the possible selves concept could 'help illuminate broad patterns of disadvantage across social groups' (p. 4), because it could emphasise how the past influences the present and imagined future. In context of HE the present and future are consequentially linked to advantaged and disadvantaged educational pasts (Henderson et al., 2019). As such access to an imagined future in HE may differ between the privileged and disadvantaged (Stevenson and Clegg, 2010). The possible selves perspectives is considered to offer another lens to gain more of an understanding of the experiences of non-traditional students.

The seminal studies focus on literature concerned with self-theories, mainly self-concept, self-efficacy, self-esteem and possible selves in the UK. The coverage of literature also includes research relating to coaching to support aspects of self.

Key empirical studies on self-theories and coaching to support aspects of self in the UK

Bachkirova (2000) conducted an interpretative hermeneutic case study as a joint inquiry between researchers and students to investigate the self-esteem and self-confidence of 52 adult students seeking employment. Focus groups, group interviews and a self-esteem exercise were used to quantify discrepancies between the ideal self and the actual self at several stages to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena. The findings from the self-esteem exercise provided tangible descriptions of the ideal self and the actual self, producing five models of self-concept used as part of the study. The findings from the study identified that confidence was easier to define and influence based on the task-ability relationship and feelings in reaction to the task. For instance, the feeling of certainty about the ability to deal with a particular task could be gained by practice, continuous learning and appropriate feedback. Influencing the feeling of global self-esteem or self-worth to feel good about oneself however was more difficult. The connection between cause and effect is not straightforward, global self-esteem is global and dependent on too many factors and was not considered sustainable because the elements of self-esteem constantly change. The study concluded highlighting the contributions made by way of increasing participants' self-understanding and confidence. The experience was reported to be intellectually stretching, joyful and meaningful. The findings proposed that the approach used in this study could be successfully applied to the most complicated psychological issues.

Bachkirova (2004) built on the self-concept models of the previous study, Bachkirova (2001) by introducing the Self-Concept & Development Strategies (SCDS) Methods and five models of working within the context of coaching and mentoring. The study proposed a number of questions that coaches and mentors could consider to verify that the strategies and approaches of the client and the coach matched, and the models and development strategies used were appropriate. The findings suggest there was value in applying the SCDC method in various contexts when dealing with issues of confidence and self-esteem. It also proposed that knowledge of the models and followed developmental strategies helped coaches and mentors, to see a 'bigger picture' of their own and their client's intention in relation to their-self-concept and self-development.

The study of Hindermach (2008) used a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of self-doubt of eight participants in organisational settings. The study incorporated the lived-experiences of self-doubt from the perspectives of clients and their coaches to gain insights into the phenomenon from more than one perspective. The key finding suggest that self-doubt was firstly, a work-related phenomenon related to

transitions in some form, for instance, a new role or a new organisational structure. Secondly, self-doubt was an emotional experience that did not always respond to situations in a logical way. For instance, facts could be overlooked and ignored and actions could be based more on beliefs rather than what was objectively true (Bandura, 1997). Thirdly, self-doubt was considered as something that was hidden, and women rather than men were more inclined to discuss and raise issues of self-doubt earlier. Finally, the role of the coach and the relationship between the coach and the client was critical to the success of coaching. Important elements such as empathy, warmth, challenge and positive support from coaches assisted clients to overcome self-doubt. Equally, the objectivity of the coach and the experience of a safe environment was also considered important when dealing with issues of self-doubt.

Maxwell and Bachkirova (2010) in their literature search for theoretical models on self-esteem used Mruk's (1999) two-dimensional self-esteem model to create an adapted model for the purpose of coaching. In this model self-esteem was seen as the product of two factors, 'worthiness' defined as the need for achievement of self/others and 'competence' as the need for achievement and success. The interaction of the two factors produced four different forms of self-esteem: Competence-based self-esteem (CSE); Worthiness-based self-esteem (WSE); Low stable self-esteem and High self-esteem. Although a useful model for coaching clients, Maxwell and Bachkirova (2010) suggest that coaches required diagnostic skills and an awareness of how self-esteem might influence the coaching relationship to use the model effectively. Clients were unlikely to explicitly present self-esteem problems, rather self-esteem would be a mediating factor likely to attend many coaching relationships. According to the theories outlined in their paper, self-esteem has bearing on the function and performance of clients that may enhance positive change or inhibit and limit what is possible in a coaching relationship.

The study of Brady (2011) adopted a phenomenological approach to explore the real-life experiences of 6 executive coaches who had clients with issues of self-esteem. The key findings suggest that self-esteem was rarely discussed in contracting meetings between the client and the coach but was likely to present itself (Maxwell and Bachkirova, 2010). Behaviours that masked self-esteem made it difficult for coaches to work on the real issue of self-esteem itself. Coaches found themselves in between the field of coaching and discipline of therapy when trying to interpret the experiences of their clients and their self-esteem issues. The study suggested that coaches could benefit from specific training in raising the awareness of self-esteem and clarification of the boundaries

between coaching and therapy. In addition, coaching practice could benefit from a tool that addressed issues of self-esteem that can be accessed by coaches.

In their paper Dinos and Palmer (2015) incorporated findings from self-esteem theory and research within cognitive behavioural and rational emotive behavioural frameworks to provide a tool for coaches dealing with low self-esteem issues. The paper provided useful insights into the complexities of self-esteem theories and how they linked with coaching practices using a cognitive behavioural and rational emotive behavioural framework. The main conclusion drawn from this paper was that a cognitive behavioural approach was a useful tool for coaches to deal with low self-esteem issues and lack of self-acceptance issues. The study highlighted that self-esteem issues in one self-domain (for example, work) was likely to be accompanied by self-esteem issues in another self-domain (for instance, a low global sense of self-worth) when trying to identify components that made up success and likeability and so on. As such it was considered important for coaches to explore functioning in different areas of one's life and self.

Harrison (2018) proposed 'possible selves' as an alternative lens for the concepts of 'aspiration raising' which has been the discussion of differential rates of participation in HE for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The paper presented a new conceptual model focused on widening participation and access to HE. A number of implications for practice and interventions were proposed. Intervention two related to engaging with the young person's belief about their ability to exercise control over their future and their ability to succeed at tasks important to them. Harrison (2018) suggests that successful interventions focused on reinforcing the young person's perceived ability to be successful through supported short-term tasks, and a process of reflection for more sustained forms of success. The study advocated for a supportive space for young people to identify their like-to-be or like-to-avoid selves, why they were important and how they might be achieved, 'creating a roadmap connecting the present to the future' (Oyserman et al. 2004, p. 132).This intervention was considered to be less directive than traditional approaches to career guidance encouraging production of action plans and work experience programmes or mentoring as opportunities to engage with adults embodying the like-to-be selves or 'try on' selves.

Table 6 summarises the foci and coverage of literature in the UK concerned with self-theories. The coverage of literature also includes research relating to coaching and aspects of self.

Author	Focus of the study	Strengths	Limitations
Bachkirova (2000)	Confidence versus self-worth in adult learning	5 models of working on self-concepts, definitions of confidence and self-esteem	Interpretative (hermeneutic) study of adult learners
Bachkirova (2004)	Dealing with issues of self-confidence and self-improvement strategies in coaching and mentoring	The use of the SCD Method in the context of coaching and mentoring relationships	Unclear as to the groups of students and individuals who actively used the various models since 2001
Hindermarch (2008)	Exploration of the experiences of self-doubt in coaching - identifying strategies to help clients and coaches overcome self-doubt	Self-doubt is explored from the perspectives of clients and coaches	Phenomenological study within organisational settings
Maxell and Bachkirova (2010)	Applying psychological theories of self-esteem in coaching practice	Descriptions of psychological theories and a self-esteem model	A model for working with client issues in organisational settings
Brady (2011)	Exploring coaches' experience of their clients' issues of self-esteem	Exploration of self-esteem from the perspective of coaches	Phenomenological study within organisational setting
Dinos and Palmer (2015)	Self-esteem within cognitive behavioural coaching	Tools for coaches in dealing with low self-esteem in coaching	Unclear as to whether the tool can be used with non-traditional students
Harrison (2018)	Using the Lens of 'Possible Selves' to Explore HE	Conceptual model for practice policy and research	Coaching is not considered as a less directive approach or 'space' to identify 'like-to-be' selves

Table 6 Published research on self-theories and coaching supporting aspects of self

Summary

The literature of self-theories offered further insight in to aspects of self and how students respond to their educational environment based on individual self-beliefs, perceptions, knowledge and judgements of their academic abilities (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003; Bong and Clarke, 1999).

Key themes and insights from recent studies highlighted that psychology as a discipline, and coaching as a practice, were of value and insightful to clients and coaches using coaching to support aspects of self (Dinos and Palmer, 2015; Brady, 2011; Hindermach, 2008; Bachkirova, 2001). From the studies we know that coaching aspects of self had benefits reporting increased self-understanding, confidence and meaningful experiences for participants (Bachkirova, 2001). The studies also proposed benefits to coaches through the provision of models, strategies, methods and frameworks that helped coaches identify, support and explore aspects of self, such as self-confidence and self-esteem during coaching (Dinos and Palmer, 2015; Maxwell and Bachkirova 2010; Bachkirova, 2004). We know from the studies of Brady (2011) and Hindermach (2008) that identifying self-esteem and self-doubt during coaching can be complexed. The need of specific training and clarification of the boundaries between coaching and therapy (Brady, 2011) were highlighted. As was the importance of maintaining positive supportive relationships to assist clients to overcome self-doubt (Hindermach 2008).

Although useful, there is very little research that specifically explores aspects of self of non-traditional students. Or insight in to how coaching supports non-traditional students specifically with confidence or other aspects of self. WP literature offered insight in to their HE experiences based on self-evaluations, (Thiele et al., 2017; Ellemers et al., 1999) social comparisons and identity related expectations (Thiele et al., 2017; Reay et al., 2009; Derks et al., 2007). Insight into students' confidence and emotional difficulties during their HE experiences were provided (Jones, 2017; Christie et al., 2008) and supportive relationships highlighted as helping to improve student confidence and motivation (Cotton et al., 2017; Tett et al., 2017; Mckendry et al., 2014). It therefore seems prominent to consider further what insights coaching might have in education and how coaching supports students in HE in the UK.

2.3 Coaching in education in the UK

Until recently, the impact of coaching interventions was predominantly examined through the enhancement of teacher performance, the transition of teachers to more senior roles (van Nieuwerburgh and Tong, 2013; Passmore and Brown, 2009) and increased student performance through the coaching of teachers (van Nieuwerburgh and Tong, 2013; Shidler, 2009; Ross, 1992) and further research has begun to explore educational coaching as a tool for developmental learning with students (van Nieuwerburgh and Tong, 2013). Although coaching in education is still a relatively new field, its impact has been recognised internationally in Australia and the US as well as the UK (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012).

There have been a number of studies directed towards investigating the impact of coaching in education. The studies provide evidence that coaching within education is considered a useful intervention providing support to students across various ages and stages of their education (Briggs and van Nieuwerburgh 2010; Passmore and Brown, 2009; Short el al., 2010; Fox Eades, 2011). Within primary education coaching was introduced to children through peer coaching (Briggs and van Nieuwerburgh, 2010) and has supported students to enhance their exam performance in secondary education (Passmore and Brown, 2009). The benefits of student coaches was also explored in secondary education and found that coaching led to improved attitudes to learning (van Nieuwerburgh and Tong, 2013).

In the HE sector, coaching has supported peers to manage stress during the third year of their undergraduate studies (Short et al., 2010). Peer coaching was used as a coaching intervention to support academic attainment (Andreanoff, 2016). More recently coaching was offered to PhD students as a way of supporting thesis completion and employability (Iordanou et al., 2016). A further study examined the value and the lived experiences of PhD participants who received coaching (Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018). The emerging themes of this study highlighted that coaching supported the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills such as motivation, self-confidence and resourcefulness (Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018). Coaching was also reported as positively influencing PhD participants to think, to feel supported and to have someone to talk to (Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018). The seminal studies focus on the experiences of coaching in HE from the perspective of the students across the UK.

Key empirical studies on the experiences of coaching in HE from the perspectives of students across the UK

The study of Thomas and Hanson (2014) provides an account of a coaching initiative that used the GROW model as a conversational method to develop social integration at one HEI, aiming to enhance the resilience, retention and success of under-represented student groups during their first year of study. The study provides insight into the HE experiences of four non-traditional students and the support offered by staff using the GROW model. The evaluation of the study by way of semi-structured interviews suggested that most students considered adjusting to university in the first few weeks as a learning curve. Most students recognised the value of building social relationships for either social or academic purposes, yet none had formed strong social relationships. The study also found that most students experienced doubt about staying on at university and lacked confidence to approach staff for guidance.

Despite finding staff approachable, the students' lack of unfamiliarity with university procedures caused them to experience insecurity and limited of confidence in times of crisis, which inhibited their ability to access staff. The Student Engagement Team (SET) used coaching conversations to provide appropriate support and guidance to students during their transitional turning points and their knowledge of university processes to signposting students to relevant individuals during stressful times. This aspect was identified as invaluable to students who would not have successfully negotiated access to the right sources of guidance without the help of the Student Engagement Team.

The recent longitudinal phenomenological study by Lancer and Eatough (2018) explored the experiences of nine undergraduate students who received coaching. The emergent themes of the study highlighted that coaching facilitated confidence, self-belief, assertiveness and reassurance. The students experienced accelerated development and were able to make problems and tasks more manageable. Interestingly, first year students within the study considered that coaching would benefit first year university students who lacked confidence. Although there is mention that 'the students were highly articulate and academically able' (p. 74), the study does not identify the demographics of the Russell Group university participants. It is therefore difficult to identify whether it was considered that all students, traditional and non-traditional students who lacked confidence would benefit from coaching. Nevertheless, the findings from the students' perspective, identified some benefits to receiving one-to-one coaching during their undergraduate studies.

The study of Lane and De Wilde (2018) took a mixed method approach to explore the impact of coaching doctoral students from a student perspective. The study took place at a HEI that offered a range of workshops and activities in addition to the 'traditional support' offered to support student wellbeing. A total of five students took part in the study. The emergent themes identified that coaching developed professional skills around time management, confidence in writing and the ability to overcome procrastination and perfectionism. Coaching was also reported to provide a "safe" and "non-judgmental" environment to build confidence, develop assertiveness and enhance the self-awareness and personal effectiveness of research students. The study provided useful insights into some of the challenges faced by doctoral students and made a case for coaching as a beneficial method of support. The study identified its own limitations around the participants' profiles and the information that was not collected as part of the interview such as their socio-economic background, prior academic achievement or ethnicity of its participants. It is therefore difficult to identify whether the challenges faced and the way in which coaching helped to address these challenges represented the experience of a range of student groups, for example traditional and non-traditional doctoral students. Nevertheless, this study provided useful insight into the experiences of doctoral students from the perspective of the students themselves.

Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul's (2018) recent study applied a qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to explore the in-depth experiences of six PhD students who received coaching at one HEI. Six themes emerged from the study in relation to the experiences that were explored. The themes – feeling motivated; effect of coaching on self-confidence; made me think; resourcefulness; being supported and having someone to talk to, then led to two broader categories – intrapersonal and interpersonal. Each theme was discussed providing insight into the intrapersonal and interpersonal categories, some of the findings within the first theme – (feeling motivated) identified that some participants experienced a certain level of demotivation. One participant in particular claimed to be more focused and motivated after a session. Within the second theme – (effects of coaching on self-confidence), the finding suggests that participants with relatively high levels of education backgrounds reported that they did not feel very confident in comparison to their experience as a Masters student. The findings acknowledged that building self-confidence is one of the most common issues addressed in coaching (Cox and Bachkirova, 2007). In this study PhD students claimed that coaching played a role in boosting their self-confidence. Coaching was considered overall as a powerful tool that made students more self-consciously aware of certain aspects of themselves and their contexts.

Table 7 summarises the foci and coverage of the studies that focus on the experiences of coaching in HE from the perspectives of students across the UK.

Author and year	Focus of the study	Strengths	Limitations
Thomas and Hanson (2014)	Developing social integration to enhance student retention and success in HE	Evaluation of non-traditional students' experiences of university	Unclear of the methodology used making the study difficult to replicate
Lancer and Eatough (2018)	One-to-one coaching as a catalyst for personal development	The benefits of coaching from are from students' perspectives	Phenomenological study within a Russell Group university
Lane and De Wilde (2018)	The impact of coaching doctoral students at a university in London	The findings and experiences in the study are from students' perspectives	Factors such as socio-economic background, prior academic achievement or ethnicity of participants were not collected
Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul (2018)	Understanding the experiences of PhD students who receive coaching	The intrapersonal and interpersonal categories and the six themes that led to the assembling of the categories	The criteria for selection of participants other than undergoing a PhD

Table 7 Published research on coaching in HE from student perspectives across the UK

Summary

The research studies and literature related to coaching in HE and the experiences of coaching from the perspective of students. The literature and key studies provided useful insights into the benefit of coaching in educational contexts and offered an understanding of how coaching supports individual student needs from the perspective of students. From the studies we know that coaching conversations can help identity support and enable signposting to relevant services (Thomas and Hanson 2014). We also know that coaching helped develop the professional skills of doctoral and PhD students around time management, and overcoming procrastination (Lane and De Wilde, 2018; Lech,

van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul 2018). Coaching was also reported to provide a “safe” and “non-judgmental” environment to build confidence and self-awareness (Lane and De Wilde, 2018). A number of research studies have stopped short of identifying the ways in which coaching can support the specific needs of non-traditional students.

Overall summary of the literature

This section considered the literature and recent research studies relating to widening participation and the experiences of non-traditional students in HE, self-theories and coaching to support aspects of self, and coaching in education in the UK. Key themes and insights from recent studies highlighted areas useful for this research study. The studies and research literature indicate that the experiences of non-traditional students are varied. Student expectations and experiences were reported to have a positive or negative impact on their studies, university experiences, retention and success (Cotton et al., 2017; Tett et al., 2017; Mckendry et al., 2014; Christie et al., 2008). Key studies also identified an emotional dimension to the expectations and learning experiences of non-traditional students that made the transition into a new teaching and learning environment a bewildering and dislocated experience (Christie et al., 2008) with students reporting deep-routed social, academic and interpersonal anxieties (Jones, 2017). The emotional aspect differed when compared to non-widening participation students who were considered more equipped, resilient and adaptive to new learning cultures, assessment styles and pedagogies (Jones, 2017; Lehmann, 2009). Key factors such as significant adult relationships; supportive and approachable tutors; good network of family and friends and accessing student support were reported to provide appropriate support in developing resilience, (Cotton et al., 2017). However, students often referred to the range of support available to them as potential sources for others indicating possible stigmatisation and adverse perceptions of remedial support when accessing services (Mckendry et al., 2014).

The literature pertaining to the self-theories identified key insights into the essential role that students’ beliefs can play in their perceptions of themselves when considering their academic capabilities, knowledge and achievements – self-efficacy, (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003) their perceived environment and how they act towards their experiences – self-concept (Bong and Clark, 1999). We know there is reported value in applying various methods such as self-esteem exercises; self-concept models and self-esteem models in coaching to deal with issues of self-confidence self-esteem and low self-confidence issues (Dinos and Palmer, 2015; Maxwell and Bachkirova, 2010; Bachkirova, 2004; 2001). There is very little research which specifically explores aspects of self from the

perspective of non-traditional students and the experiences of coaches in the process of supporting them during their undergraduate studies within the context of HE in the UK. There is also limited research that explores the emotional aspects of non-traditional students experience as previously mentioned in the WP literature and whether coaching and coaching models can offer support.

The literature and key studies provided useful insights into the benefit of coaching in educational contexts and offered an understanding of how coaching supported individual student needs from the perspective of students. Although coaching is still a relatively new field, (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012) we know that as an intervention, coaching has supported students across various stages of their education ranging from primary education (Briggs and van Nieuwerburgh, 2010) through to HE, supporting doctoral and PhD students (Lane and De Wilde, 2018; Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018; Iordanou et al., 2016). We also know there are reported benefits of coaching from facilitating confidence, self-belief, assertiveness and reassurance of traditional students studying at one Russell Group HEI (Lancer and Eatough, 2018) to staff using coaching conversations to provide appropriate support and guidance to non-traditional students during their transitional turning points and stressful times (Thomas and Hanson, 2014). The study of Thomas and Hanson (2014) offered some insight into how coaching conversations supported non-traditional students however, such literature is scarce. Further studies have emerged, in the United States, Lefdahl-Davies et al. (2018) mixed method study explored life coaching with undergraduate Caucasian, Black and Hispanic students at a small arts university in the Midwestern region of the United States. While the demographics were different to studies that may potentially occur in the UK. The findings suggest that coaching is an effective intervention as a way of increasing the self-confidence and the self-awareness of individual student's values and strengths Lefdahl-Davies et al. (2018),

The recent studies offered areas of insight that were useful for this research study. In particular, the voices of non-traditional students are being heard more directly through longitudinal studies, case studies and combinations of mixed methods and qualitative interpretative approaches. The studies assist to identify factors that can impact the experiences of non-traditional students whilst at university. Although useful, there is very little research on the experiences of non-traditional students from the perspectives of the researcher who has a direct experience of the research that is being investigated. As such, this study explores the research question of what are the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies using heuristic

inquiry, portraying the voices of non-traditional students from the unique perspective of the researcher, who has direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological deliberations and approach taken to explore the research question of what are the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies using heuristic inquiry, portraying the voices of non-traditional students from the unique perspective of the researcher, who has direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation. It begins by identifying the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher. The theoretical perspective of the researcher and how it aligns with the research methodology is discussed. The data collection methods, data analysis process, validity, reflexivity and ethics are also considered as part of the study.

3.2 Theoretical perspective

In planning the research, my theoretical perspective as a researcher as well as the purpose and fascination of the research question, was integral to the choice of design used for the study (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 2012). It was important that consideration was given to several philosophical positions to identify my own philosophical stance and that the research expressed my ontological and epistemological viewpoints. Each philosophical position holds its own assumptions that would have direct implications for the strategies of inquiry used. It also informs the rationale for the research approach in terms of the participants, data collection methods and the data analysis techniques (Mason 2018, Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2003).

As mentioned previously, the research question developed out of a personal challenge and a focus to readdress the under-representation of certain groups accessing and participating in HE. The research question is exploratory and inductive in its approach, therefore from an ontological perspective the reality of ‘what is’ is associated with multiple realities and multiple ways of accessing reality. These multiple ways can be identified through the perspectives, experiences and the accounts of others (Mason, 2018). This worldview corresponds to constructivism that considers that what is real as constructed in the minds of individuals (Guba and Lincoln, 1998; Rodwell, 1998).

My epistemological perspective as a researcher is that knowledge and meaning is constructed by people as they engage with and interpret the world, and that different

people may construct different meanings to the same phenomenon (Crotty, 2012). I concur with the tenets that meaning is constructed, not discovered and adopt the epistemology of constructivism that truth and meaning are created through subjective interactions with the world, rather than exist in an external world that is 'out there' and independent of our knowledge of it (Gray, 2014). In this study, not only are multiple realities embraced, the study intends to comment on the multiple perspectives of participants (Creswell, 2009; 2007) that may lead to contradictory, but equally valid accounts of the world (Gray, 2014). This means that the ontological and epistemological positions of the researcher are merged together, as understanding 'what it means to know' is inseparable from the consideration of 'what is' and meaning comes into existence out of engagement with the world. I concur with the standpoint of Crotty (2012) who states that "ontological issues and epistemological issues tend to emerge together…. To talk of the construction of meaning is to talk of the construction of meaningful reality" (p. 10).

The aim of this study is to explore the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their undergraduate studies. I believe that the data reflects the constructs associated with the multiple realities that exist through the perspective, experiences and accounts of others (Mason, 2018). My interpretation of the data will help understand the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students in HE in the UK.

As part of the journey to understanding my theoretical perspective I had to comprehend what myself and other researchers considered as evidence, knowledge and reality to ensure that my research followed the principled rules (Mason, 2018). This was not an easy task as Crotty (1998) demonstrates. There is an overwhelming array of theoretical perspectives and the terminologies applied to them are often inconsistent (or even contradictory). Nevertheless, after a lot of epistemological and ontological questioning (Mason, 2018), I finally settled on interpretivism as a theoretical perspective.

As an interpretive researcher, I recognise that my epistemology of constructivism was linked to interpretivism on the basis that both encompass a social reality whereby "social actors together negotiate meanings for actions and situations" (Blaikie, 1993). I was therefore comfortable with my worldview as interpretivism as it is at the very heart of the research question for its notion of being able to put myself in the place of others through basic social interaction (Crotty, 2012 p. 96). However, to make the theoretical perspective even more complex for myself as a researcher, I became aware that interpretivism has a number of theoretical notions within itself which began another

challenging journey of making a choice between Symbolic Interactionism, Phenomenology and Hermeneutics (Crotty, 2012). After deliberation, I am content that my theoretical perspective as a researcher is aligned with a Symbolic Interactionism worldview. I concur with the basic interactionist assumption "that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings they have for them" (Blumer, 1969, p. 2; Woods, 1979) and actions result from the continuous process of meaning which is always emerging, in flux and subject to change (Lilienfeld, 1978; Fishman, 1999; Cohen et al., 2007). The next section considers how the chosen methodology sits within the theoretical framework and the research question.

3.3 Methodological approach

Heuristic inquiry drew my attention as it allows the researcher to have a direct experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990) in contrast to many other phenomenological approaches which encourage detachment from the experiences of the researcher (Denscombe, 2014). Heuristic inquiry is an adaptation of phenomenological inquiry that 'explicitly acknowledges the involvement of the researcher' (Hiles, 2001, p. 3) and stresses the importance of relationship and connection with others. Whilst there are similarities with other types of phenomenological research there are also contrasts. Moustakas (1990) moves away from the idea of bracketing one's experience and emphasises connectedness and relationship through the process of timeless immersion. The researcher is able to connect and become alert to all possibilities of meaning by entering fully into the lives of others. This means the researcher connects with anything that associates itself to the research question, including social context, people, places and meetings which can all offer intimate knowledge of the phenomena in relation to the research question. The researcher enters into timeless immersion with the data of each participant. This immersion continues repeatedly with periods of rest until an intimate knowledge of each individual participant is obtained (Moustakas, 1990). Therefore, from an interpretative stance the researcher can put themselves in the place of others and consider language, communication and interrelationships that concur with the interactionist assumption that "meaning… is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows" (Crotty, 2012 p. 72).

It was important to explore a question that has a personal challenge and one that has 'a social and perhaps universal significance' (Moustakas, 1990 p. 15) in exploring the personal and lived experience of participants and how coaching supports them during their undergraduate studies. The personal experience of being within an under-

represented group was integral to the research question. Likewise, developing an understanding of a wider social issue within the HE sector by acknowledging what is 'an unshakable connection between what is out there, in appearance and what is within me in reflective thought, feeling and awareness' (Moustakas, 1990 p. 12) was important. Adopting heuristic inquiry as a methodology enables the possibilities of being able to enter into the perceptions, attitudes and values of the participants through self-inquiry and dialogue to find the underlying meanings and importance of human experiences (Crotty, 2012; Moustakas, 1990).

From this perspective, a heuristic inquiry approach is congruent with my own constructivism because it allows the freedom to explore and accept 'what is' from an inward gaze "creating a story that portrays the qualities, meanings and essences of a universally unique experience" (Moustakas, 1990 p.13). It recognises that knowledge or the initial "data" as described by Moustakas (1990, p. 13) is within us, and as such the experiences of the participants and the researcher is central to the research study, core to production of knowledge and vital in the process of heuristic inquiry.

The process of self-dialogue makes it possible to access the source of a body of scientific knowledge that is useful so that the heuristic process moves from the whole to part and back to whole again (Moustakas, 1990). "From the individual to the general and back again… from the feeling to the word and back to the feeling, from the experience to the concept and back to the experience" (Craig 1978, p. 57). This process can be considered as an intersubjective relationship with the research process generating knowledge through abductive reasoning, moving back and forth between induction and deduction converting observations into theory and assessing the theories through action (Morgan, 2007). Heuristic research is a demanding process that involves self-search, self-dialogue and self-discovery from the beginning and throughout the process and requires the researcher to have a direct and personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1990).

On reflection, I consider that my journey began as early as my secondary education when I recognised that the perception I had of myself differed from the perception of others. I considered myself to be different but never identified what the differences were since my peers shared considerable similarities to myself. My peers considered me to be better than anyone else whilst my teachers considered me as average when compared to my peers. Those conflicting perceptions have stayed with me throughout my educational and professional journeys momentarily pausing and recommencing to

either confirm or contradict the perceptions I have of myself or the perceptions others have of me. I buried some of those experiences several times over the past years, as focusing on myself was never considered easy or necessary for me to do. Throughout my personal and professional experiences and often dejected times, I immersed myself in periods of self-searching connecting social and professional contexts, people, places or even things that had occurred in my life to the perceptions that I had of myself. When I recommenced my undergraduate studies and simultaneously started to work in the HE sector, my focus changed from an inward one of myself to an interest in the educational experiences of non-traditional students which led to the beginning of my research and heuristic journey.

Whilst heuristic inquiry considers interpretation as removing the roots, meaning and essences of experience (Moustakas, 1994), Bridgman (1950) emphasises the importance of subjective validation based on the dependence, validity, judgement and interpretation of the researcher. As such, as part of the heuristic investigation of this study, verification is enhanced by returning to the experience of research participants to seek their assessment for comprehensiveness and accuracy of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990). In addition, through the practice of coaching, the heuristic inquiry as a process will provide insight into the research aim which is to explore the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their undergraduate studies. As practice is considered to be the place in which the research problem arises and the place that must finally be returned to, to validate the knowledge produced to solve the problem (Fishman, 1999; Oquist, 1978). Furthermore, the interpretive experiences through coaching acknowledges that the phenomenon can be embedded within a social, historical, cultural and political context (Creswell, 2014; Hiles, 1999) and as such the study records and interprets the experiences of the researcher and participants keeping in mind the particular context in which the experiences occurred.

Heuristic inquiry as a methodology, was developed by Clark Moustakas who is recognised for his contributions to humanistic psychology and human science research. The development of heuristic inquiry and publications of *Loneliness* (Moustakas, 1961), *Loneliness and* Love (Moustakas, 1972) and The Touch of Loneliness (Moustakas, 1975) were influenced by a range of research. Maslow's (1971; 1966; 1956) research on self-actualizing persons, investigations of self-disclosure (Jourard's 1968; 1971), elucidations of the tacit dimension, indwelling and personal knowledge (Polany's 1969; 1966; 1964;), Buber's (1958; 1961; 1965) exploration of dialogue and mutuality, and Rogers' work on human science (Coulson and Rogers, 1968; Rogers, 1985; 1969).

The word heuristics originated from the Greek work *heuriskein* meaning “to discover or to find” (Moustakas, 1990 p. 9). Heuristic inquiry has been defined as an “internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis” (Moustakas, 1990 p. 9). According to Moustakas (1990), to conduct heuristic research, researchers are required to move through six phases and seven processes of heuristic inquiry. These processes and phases are considered essential to understanding the heuristic model (Bach, 2002) and assist the researcher to reflect on their hunches, thoughts, images, knowledge and meanings related to the phenomenon under investigation (Braud and Anderson, 1998).

Research design and processes of heuristic inquiry

This section describes the six phases and seven processes of inquiry that were followed when undertaking heuristic research. Figure 1 illustrates the links between the phases and processes of heuristic inquiry.

Each distinct phase guides the direction of the investigation and represent the steps taken in designing the research process. The phases include: initial engagement; immersion; incubation; illumination; explication and creative synthesis. Each process of inquiry – identifying the focus of inquiry; self-dialogue; tacit knowing; intuition; indwelling; focusing and internal frame of reference are often linked with one of more of the six phases, each of which are described below.

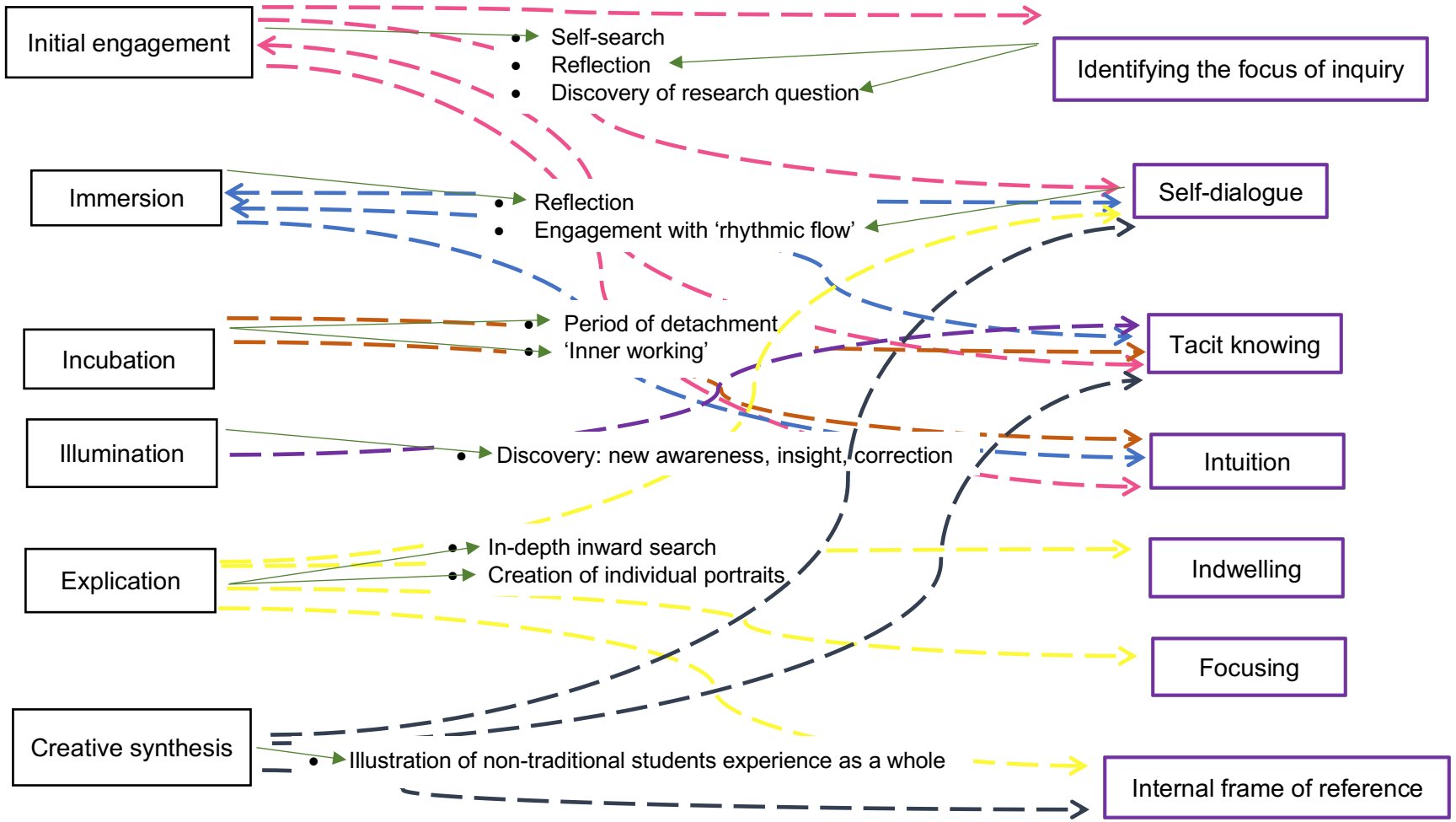


Figure 1 Phases and Processes of Heuristic Inquiry

Heuristic Inquiry Key: ---→
- Links between Phases and Processes
- 6 Phases
- 7 Processes

Initial engagement is the beginning phase of heuristic inquiry (Djuraskovic and Arthur, 2010). This phase begins with a fervent self-inquiry in which the researcher through the processes of self-dialogue, intuition and tacit knowing (Bach, 2002) discovers an intense interest "that holds important social meaning and personal compelling implications" (Moustakas 1990, p. 27). West (2001) describes this phase as one that should not be hurried as it forms the basis of clarifying the research and in turn formulates a research question (Bach, 2002). My initial engagement of my experience commenced as an undergraduate student and continued throughout my personal life and professional experiences within HE. The initial engagement phase concluded with the discovery of a research question of social and perhaps universal significance within the context of higher education (Moustakas, 1990) that came from my own experiences and the data and insights gathered from this study. The initial engagement phase is also linked to the process of identifying the focus of inquiry described below.

Identifying the focus of inquiry is where the process of heuristic inquiry begins with an exploratory open-ended and self-directed search into an experience and immerses the researcher to explore the question (Moustakas, 1990) from an "inverted perspective" to achieve an understanding of it (Salk, 1983). Without the researchers' intense connection with the question, the heuristic process is unlikely to begin (Djuraskovic and Arthur, 2010).

My research question had been within me, albeit dormant before commencing the research study. I sat in a meeting where the attainment and achievement of specific minority ethnic groups were being discussed in relation to their counterparts. I began identifying myself as a student and as a person from that background. Painful thoughts of my self-worth and self-belief engrossed me as I listened to answers from a room of people that did not look like me, sound like me or indeed share any of my experiences, or the experiences of the students that were being discussed. I began to wonder how individual students from a BAME background felt and whether I was experiencing similar experiences in terms of a diminishing self-confidence based on the perception of others. I thought about times when my self-confidence was high and recalled participating in coaching as being a momentous point. I then began to think of the support offered to students within the university in which I work and other HEIs.

I researched the literature relating to the experiences of the particular group of students, which was in abundance in terms of identifying the external systemic and internal factors that can impact retention and attainment in educational contexts. I also researched literature to identify how the HE sector supports students and found very little about supporting students through coaching who have accessed university from a widening participation route, which is largely concerned with readdressing the under-representation of certain social groups in HE. I became immersed in trying to understand the HE experiences of non-traditional students and the role of coaching in supporting them during their undergraduate studies.

Immersion is the second phase of the heuristic inquiry that requires the primary researcher to submerge themselves fully into the topic and question and become one with it (Djuraskovic and Arthur 2010; Bach, 2002). During this phase, the researcher becomes on intimate terms with the question to grow it understand it and live with the question in waking, sleeping or even a dream state (Bach, 2002; West 2001; Moustakas 1990). During the process of immersion, fundamental insight is achieved through the process of indwelling or personal reflection (Moustakas, 1990).

I became rapidly immersed with the question from January 2017 to December 2017 through discussions with coaches on the HE experiences of non-traditional students and how coaching could support them during their undergraduate studies, enabled me to stay close to the question from a practice and theoretical perspective. The reflective diaries received from the participants and coaches from March 2017 to December 2017, the regular writing of my own reflective diary and note taking during the coaching sessions kept me connected with the question and facilitated spontaneous self-dialogue and self-searching processes. The interviews in particular kept me immersed in the research and the creation of the individual depictions and creative synthesis enabled me to draw on hunches and the mystery of other sources of energy and knowledge within the tacit dimension of the heuristic inquiry (Moustakas 1990, p. 28). The immersion phase is also linked to the process of self-dialogue, tacit knowing and intuition described below.

Self-dialogue is a process in which the researcher engages in an open and honest self-dialogue with the phenomenon "allowing the phenomenon to speak directly to one's own experience" (Moustakas 1990, p. 15). The self, the experience and self-knowledge of the researcher is central to the process, facilitating the growth and understanding of direct human experiences engaging in a 'rhythmic flow' until multiple meanings are uncovered

(Moustakas 1990, p. 16). As a self-dialogue process, I chose to enter into a dialogue and become one with the research question commuting to work and capturing my thoughts through the notes and voice memos on my mobile phone. I was able to move back and forth from the experience to the concept and back to the experience again (Craig, 1978) which was an essential part of the heuristic process for me in terms of meaning and validity. The judgement of validity is made primarily from the researcher, as such the self-dialogue along with the other phases were of particular importance. The self-dialogue process continues through the immersion and explication phases of heuristic inquiry.

Tacit Knowing is a process described by Bach (2002) as a hidden dimension of knowledge that plays a primary role in heuristic research and the foundation of heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). Polanyi (1983) describes tacit knowing as when we "know more than we can tell… yet this knowledge cannot be put into words" (p. 4). During the first session of coaching student participants, I became aware of aspects of vagueness and hunches (Douglass and Moustakas 1985, p. 49). During those moments, I sensed there was something more that the students perhaps were not ready to discuss. I tapped into my hunches after the sessions capturing my understanding through reflective diaries so that I would not curtail or limit the possibilities for knowing (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985). The tacit knowing process continued from the initial engagement through phases of immersion, incubation, illumination and the creative synthesis of heuristic inquiry.

Intuition is described by Moustakas (1990) as a "realm of the between" (p. 23) and is considered as a bridge between the implicit and explicit, and tacit and the explicit (Bach, 2002). Intuition involves the tentative awareness and hunches of the researcher to use cues and observable factors to build upon previous knowledge and make immediate knowledge possible without the intervening steps of logic and reason (Moustakas 1990). The researcher is guided through discoveries of enhanced meaning that deepens and extends the knowledge of the research, (Moustakas, 1990) increasing the likelihood of gaining a highly developed perception and understanding of the experiences being explored (Djuraskovic and Arthur, 2010). During this process I listened to participants, acknowledged my own thoughts as the researcher (Moustakas, 1990) and built upon my previous experiences as a non-traditional student to deepened my understanding and knowledge of the research. I also acknowledged the preconceptions that I had during coaching by being sensitive to my observations and hunches. I challenging them thorough reflexivity and raised awareness of the nuances of coaching non-traditional students from the perspective of a coach. This particular phase was insightful when it

came to the notion of non-judgement which is discussed within the findings of Chapter 6 'Understanding the experience of coaching'.

Incubation is the third phase that requires the researcher to move away and detach themselves from the intensity of immersion in the research question (Bach, 2002) to allow for a period of "inner workings of the tacit dimension and intuition to continue to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside the immediate awareness" (Moustakas 1990, p. 29). This incubation period was a welcome break in the latter part of the summer of 2017. The student participants had completed the term and were away from university until September 2017. I was therefore able to put the research aside and focus on activities within my own life (West, 2001). During the summer holiday, I spent time with my daughter and planned recreational and educational activities with friends and their children. In a way tending to my daughter allowed me to remember my own childhood experiences. Not in a sombre way, but an enlightening one, reflecting on my parents, our relationship, their educational paths. I compared myself on that path as a parent to the relationship I have with my daughter, our experiences, our comparable and contrasting educational paths. This discovery would not have ordinarily occurred without deliberate thought and effort (Polanyi, 1964). I began to develop a new perspective and understanding of myself and of the experiences of the student participants. It seemed I had a self-belief within myself that may have been hidden in the everyday immersion of life. This possibly only emerged when I retreated from the intense focus on myself and entered a period of incubation, in which I extend understanding on levels outside my immediate awareness (Moustakas ,1990). The incubation phase is also linked to the tacit knowing and intuition process of heuristic inquiry.

Illumination is the fourth phase of heuristic inquiry that requires the researcher to be open and receptive to naturally discover new dimensions of the experience through tacit knowledge and intuition (Moustakas, 1990). In this phase, moments of illumination occur without the need to strive or concentrate, a degree of reflexivity is required to gain new insight, or correct misunderstood information (Bach 2001; West 2001; Moustakas 1990). During this phase, I reflected upon coaching sessions capturing my thoughts using the reflective diaries, and conversations that I had with coaches and student participants. I also spent time reading the accounts from the semi-structured interviews and began noticing commonalities between our experiences. I made a note of the themes and began to group them together using Nvivo. In doing so, I began to notice that non-traditional students including myself, act towards, or experiences things on the basis of the meaning that we have. As such, what we experience is not always static and

meanings can arise from the social interactions that we have with others. The Illumination phase is also linked to the tacit knowing process of heuristic inquiry.

Explication is the fifth phase in which the complete picture of the phenomenon begins to form through the process of indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure (Moustakas, 1990). The researcher examines all knowledge obtained by the participants to understand its various layers of meaning and refines, corrects, brings together and organises key ingredients of the dominant themes for each individual into a comprehensive depiction (Bach, 2002; Moustakas, 1990). The experiences create an exemplary portrait which illustrates the core meaning of the individual experiences of the phenomenon yet characterising the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1990). The explication phase for myself, as a researcher, links into the processes of self-dialogue, indwelling, focusing and the internal frame of reference as suggested by (Moustakas, 1990). Whilst heuristic inquiry appears to be linear, the phases interact with each other particularly when creating individual depictions and developing the creative synthesis.

Indwelling is the process that encourages the researcher to turn inward to seek a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of the experience. Moustakas (1990) describes it as a "painstaking and deliberate process" (p. 25) that requires unwavering attention and concentration on an aspect of the experience to be able to understand it in its wholeness. During the process of indwelling I purposely focused on my own self-beliefs, the perceptions of self and the perceptions of others to connect with my own experiences and the experiences of the student participants (Moustakas, 1990). This essential part of the process allows me to tap into the tacit mysteries and explicit aspects of the experiences captured through the data collection methods. The in-depth and heavy work of heuristic research is part of the demand of the explication process which gathers detailed life experience related to myself and the student participants as part of the phenomenon being investigated.

Focusing is a phase that enables the researcher to gain insight into the experience through disciplined attentiveness (Bach, 1990). This essential phase assisted in decluttering and clearing an inward space which allowed me as the researcher to capture the thoughts and feelings essential to the research question, and to identify the central themes of the experience (Moustakas, 1990). During this phase, I looked at the data and examined and refined the emergent themes of the research.

Internal frame of reference requires the researcher to acknowledge that nature, meaning and essence of any human experience is with the experiencing person. The internal frame of reference therefore is dependent on the persons who had, is having or will have the experience. It is then dependent on the researcher's ability to create an atmosphere that encourages the person to share the experience so that the experiencing person can look at their own experience and can validly provide portrayals of the phenomenon (Moustakas 1990). For the researcher to know and understand another's experience the research must converse directly with the person. This was particularly important for when it came to coaching and the coaching relationship. In order to encourage and explore the experiences of the student participants and the coaches, an atmosphere of openness and trust was created through coaching and during the semi-structured interviews. Student participants and coaches, including myself as the researcher were able to share their experiences freely in an empathetic and supportive environment (Moustakas, 1990). I consider that strong connections were made through coaching conversations and during interviews, self-disclosure was used when appropriate to validate their depictions and my understanding of their experiences (Moustakas, 1990).

Creative Synthesis is the final phase of the inquiry. During this phase the researcher culminates all the knowledge gained throughout the research creating a creative synthesis that can be presented in the form of a poem, story, a painting or other creative form (Bach, 2002; Moustakas 1990). The creative synthesis goes beyond the distillation of themes and patterns, the researcher is challenged to create 'a new reality… that embodies the essence of the heuristic truth (Douglass and Moustakas 1985, p. 52). This final phase was initially a challenge, developing a creative synthesis that depicts the experiences of the student participants, coaches and myself as a researcher was not an easy task. The challenge of the final phase, enabled me to explore my creative side which I would not ordinarily have tapped into in as much depth, had it not been a part of the final phase of the heuristic inquiry. The creative synthesis phase is also linked to the processes of self-dialogue, tacit knowing, and the internal frame of reference of heuristic inquiry.

Other methodologies considered and rejected

Choosing a research methodology as an approach for this study was not an easy undertaking and has been an emotional journey of incredible ups and downs. Initially, Action Research was chosen for its union of theory and practice and its ability to generate knowledge through action (Fishman, 1999; Oquist, 1978) and a desire to develop a

theoretical framework of coaching to support the self-belief of under-represented student groups. An initial focus group with coaching practitioners was a pivotal turning point. Discussions and debates identified that for experienced practitioners, coaching as a process naturally helped to increase the self-confidence of those whom they coached. How coaching supports non-traditional students was an area however, that could be explored to gain a greater understanding of their experiences, prior to developing a framework that could be used to support that specific student group. The discussion with coaches highlighted that a meaningful framework of coaching to support non-traditional students had to be based on an in-depth understanding of the students' needs and the challenges that they actually experience. It was also important to learn about the experiences of coaches who attempt to provide such support in order to build a framework that is grounded in what they learnt from their experiences. This insight had direct implications on the research methodology and realisation that Action Research was premature for addressing the research questions. I also sensed that my own personal experiences as a non-traditional student and professional experiences as a coach were pivotal aspects that could be utilised in the study.

Grounded theory was not considered for similar reasons to that of Action Research, in terms of being premature for addressing the research questions. The aim of grounded theory is to generate or discover a theory (Urquhart, 2013) and at the time, and given the categorised student participants, I was not confident that I would obtain a large enough sample appropriate for grounded theory. I also wanted to be an active participant in the study, which would not be permitted with a Grounded Theory approach.

Following on from these decisions, a case study approach was considered as the coaches all came from one particular sector and one institution. Therefore, a case study could enable the research to delve into and provide an account that explored the experiences and the key issues affecting under-represented groups in the context of HE. A characteristic of a case study is that the 'case' forms the basis of an investigation into something that normally exists independently from the research of it (Denscombe, 2014). However, the set up for this study had to be created in order to investigate the needs and experiences of students from the under-represented groups.

Phenomenology as a methodology appeared to be a suitable choice in order to explore the experiences of the participants. The more known approach of phenomenology, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in particular was considered. However, as the phenomenon of interest has been a personal challenge and spoke directly to my own

experiences I wanted to be more involved in the study. This led to the decision to identify a methodology that would allow the researcher to be an active participant. The methodology that was eventually chosen was Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas, 1990).

Selection of participants and their context

Purposive and theoretical sampling

In order to address the research aim which sought to explore the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their undergraduate studies. I decided firstly, to interview students to capture their HE experiences leading to and during their undergraduate studies and the experiences of coaching from their perspective. Secondly, a decision was made to interview coaches to gain a better understanding of the experiences of coaching non-traditional students. I selected this mix because as mentioned in the literature review, there are a number of studies in the UK that explore the experiences of coaching in HE from the perspective of the student (Thomas and Hanson, 2014; Lancer and Eatough, 2018; Lane and De Wilde, 2018 and Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018). These studies provide useful insight into the benefits of coaching and how it supports individual student needs from the perspective of students.

I was interested in hearing the experiences of coaching from a specific group of non-traditional students and the coaching experience from the perspective of the coaches'. I interviewed the student participants and coaches after all coaching sessions had taken place that enabled me to begin the first steps in the procedures for the analysis of data in accordance with heuristic inquiry.

In selecting the participants 'purposive sampling' was used (Denscombe, 2017; Creswell, 2009, p. 128) as each had an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon that would contribute to the richness of the inquiry. "The goal of purposive sampling is to sample participants in a strategic way so that those sampled are relevant to the research question posed and understand the social phenomenon under investigation" (Bryman and Bell, 2011 p. 442)

Criteria for selection of participants

Firstly, heuristic research requires the researcher to have a direct experience with the research phenomenon and the experiences of the participants (Djuraskovic and Arthur, 2010; Bach, 2002; Moustakas, 1990).

A total of nine students volunteered to participate in this research study. Pseudonyms were used for all student participants. All students shown in Table 8 were self-selected and identified themselves as being an undergraduate student from an under-represented group categorised as follows:

1. At a disadvantage based on geographical location, occupation, previous education and income either household or individual.
2. Minority ethnic group Black Minority Ethnic (BME).
3. First generation HE student – first within the family to study at university.
4. Mature student.

Student participants	**Age**	**Year of study at the time of coaching**	**Ethnicity**	**Education**
Anastasia	19	1	White British	Foundation course
Anna	29	4	White British	Level 3 Diploma
Ruby	19	2	Black or Black Caribbean	A/AS Level
Ella	19	2	Black or Black British	A/AS Level
Danika	20	3	Black or Black British	A/AS Level
Malcolm	27	2	White British	Level 3 Diploma
Paula	18	1	Mixed Black and White Caribbean	A/AS Level
Octavia	19	1	White British	Foundation course
Tara	23	1	White British	Level 3 Diploma

Table 8 Student participants and demographics

The criteria for coaches was that they were internal coaches within the university, with several years' experience of coaching with a minimum of an ILM Level 5 Certificate in Coaching and Mentoring. The participant coaches shown in Table 9 are referred to using

given pseudonym. As a primary researcher and participant coach, my accounts are also included in the study.

Coaches	Age	Years of experience	Ethnicity	Education
Carolina	46	3 years	White British	First degree, ILM Level 5 certificate
Donna	41	6 years	Black or Black Caribbean	Masters degree, ILM Level 5 certificate
Melanie	45	7+ years	White British	First degree, ILM Level 5 certificate
Phil	51	4+ years	White British	First degree, ILM Level 5 certificate

Table 9 Coaches information

Seven coaches responded and completed the consent form. Four coaches in total withdrew from the study, three of the four coaches withdrew after the recruitment stage because they were leaving the university. One of the four coaches withdrew prior to the commencement of coaching due to work commitments. Three coaches participated in the study: Melanie, Carolina and Phil. As the researcher, I also took part in the study using heuristic inquiry to portray the voices of non-traditional students from the unique perspective of the researcher, who has direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Although Moustakas (1990) contends that it is possible to conduct heuristic research purely with one participant. As literature pertaining to the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their undergraduate studies is scarce, I considered that a small number of participants would be more beneficial providing the opportunity for deeper exploratory insight into meanings, perspectives and interpretations of the participants (Willig, 2008).

Process for selecting the participants

As I was seeking students from a WP background, I thought the best approach to recruit participants would be through support services and schools who I considered to have a closer professional relationship with the students. A recruitment invitation (see appendix 10.1) was sent by email to students from a WP background via the WP Team. A recruitment invitation was also sent to students via an administrator within each school.

Secondly, I wanted to involve internal coaches within the same institution which already has an established coaching network. A recruitment invitation was sent by email to the internal coaching network and the Organisation Development and Learning team (see appendix 10.2). Participants that expressed their interest were invited to contact the principal investigator by email and further information by way of a participant information sheet and a consent form were provided (see appendix 10.3; appendix 10.4 and appendix 10.5).

Recruiting student participants took some time for a number of reasons. Recruiting under-represented groups can be problematic as targeted strategies tend to perpetuate deficit discourse that are flawed with the assumptions that such students lack aspiration, motivation, capability and so forth (Burke, 2016). In addition, coaching in education is relatively distinctive although it has been growing since starting in the early 2000's (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). The term coaching was not a definition familiar to students. In addition, finding a date and time that was mutually convenient for coaches and students proved to be problematic. Incentives of a £10 Amazon voucher were offered to participants as a thank you gesture for participating in the study.

Response rates and characteristics of the participants selected

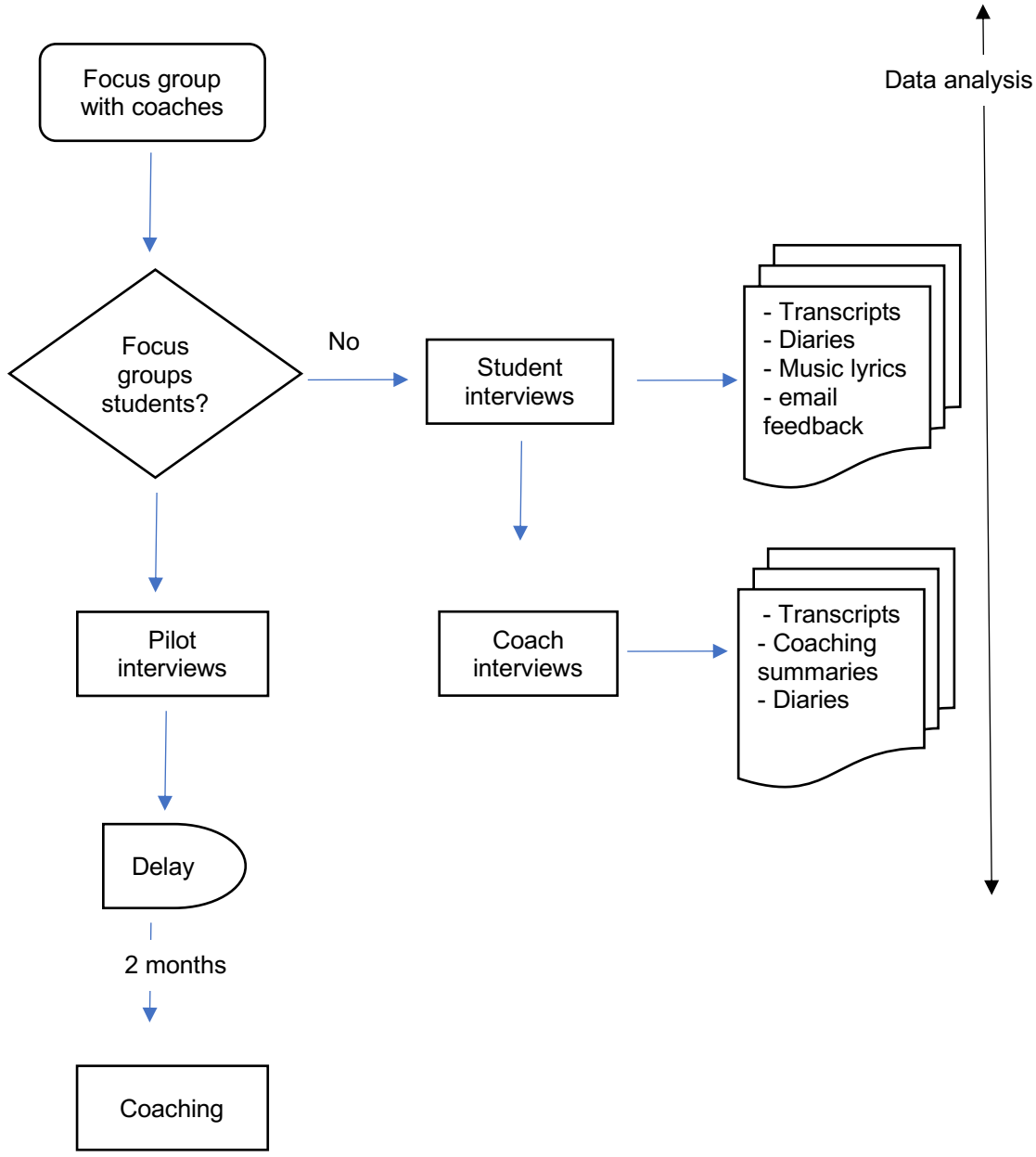
The recruitment invitation emails were sent to over 400 students, the emails generated a total of 18 inquiries from students and seven from coaches. Students were sent participant information sheets and consent forms at this stage (see appendix 10.3). Out of these, nine students and seven coaches responded and completed the consent form. I did not hear back from all students and it is important to recognise that these student groups, such as BAME, first generation going to university, mature and WP students, are considered as groups that could be 'hard to reach' (Marie et al., 2017). Although the emails did not generate a large number or participants the low response was anticipated. A follow up email was sent a week after; no further responses were received and I did not pursue them.

3.4 Data collection methods

Data collection began in January 2017 following receipt of formal agreement and acceptance of the research proposal and Oxford Brookes University Research Ethnics Committee (UREC) approval. The data collection methods used for this study are shown in Figure 2 were focus groups; pilot interviews; semi structured interviews; supplementary data, such as coaches and student reflective diaries; email feedback

received from students and coaches; music lyrics and diagrams received from the students (see appendix 13 and appendix 13); and my own experiences as researcher who has direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

Figure 2 Data collection methods and process



Focus groups

Focus groups were chosen as method to bring together coaches within the HE sector to engage with them in a focused discussion around the research topic (Silverman, 2011). There were two focus groups, one group of three, the other group of four. The dates chosen were based on the coaches' availability. The participant coaches that engaged in the focus groups shown in Table 10 were presented with the initial information about the research topic in the context of widening participation, the self-theories, such as self-efficacy and self-esteem and how coaching could support non-traditional students during their studies. The chosen method was advantageous in that it provided the opportunity for myself as the researcher to facilitate discussions and to observe the nature and extent of consensus or disagreement around the research topic (Cohen et al., 2007; Bell, 2004; Morgan, 1996). How the groups interacted, shared, listened and questioned each other's views was a strength of the focus group as it allowed myself as the researcher to compare experiences and views rather than aggregate separate interview data to identify individual agreements or difference (Cohen et al. 2007; Morgan 1996). The focus group consisted of one male and six females, all coaches were internal within the same HEI with an ILM level 5 certificate in Coaching and Mentoring.

Focus group participants	**Age**	**Years of coaching experience**	**Ethnicity**	**Education**
*Carolina	46	3 years	White British	First degree, ILM Level 5 certificate
Delphine	49	2 years	White British	ILM Level 5 certificate
Felicity	44	4+ years	White British	First degree, ILM Level 5 certificate
Katherine	24	1 year	White British	ILM Level 5 certificate
*Melanie	45	7+ years	White British	First degree, ILM Level 5 certificate
Nikki	34	2 years	White British	ILM Level 5 certificate
* Phil	51	4+ years	White British	First degree, Level 5 certificate

Table 10 Participant coaches that engaged in the focus groups

*Participated in the full study and interviews

The disadvantage of conducting the focus groups was that some members of the group were more vocal than others. At times, it appeared to prevent other members from

sharing their opinions (Silverman, 2011; Cohen et al., 2007). Initially, focus groups were also considered for student participants, However, I decided that the focus groups would not take place as the students had already committed to coaching sessions and completion of reflective diaries. Focus groups would have required more time commitment and it was already proving difficult to arrange convenient dates and times for coaching session to take place for students and their coaches (Cohen et al. 2007; Bell, 2004). The data from the focus groups was fundamental in identifying that Action Research as a methodology was premature for this study. Aspects of the data were also used to begin to formulate the research questions used in this study.

The next stage of the data collection process was the pilot interview with coaches to allow for the process to be trialed and to identify any problems prior to the interviews taking place (Bryman and Bell, 2011). First, I asked a colleague to interview me using the predetermined questions for the student participants. This enabled me to experience whether the questions were difficult to understand and to learn about my own reflexivity, in particular my views about my educational journey and lived experiences as a non-traditional student. I did not include the data from my pilot interview, as I considered my experiences as being reflected throughout the thesis. Second, I asked a coach who had participated in the focus group if she was willing to participate in a pilot interview and provide feedback afterwards. There were advantages in undertaking these pilot interviews. Both pilots provided useful insights that led to revisions of the interview questions. For example, an initial question for student participants was changed to be more open around their decision to apply to university, familiar words were also used to help the respondents feel more relaxed (Lee, 1993). The coaches questions were developed to consider the similarities and differences of their coaching experiences, for example their experiences of coaching staff in HE and their experiences of coaching non-traditional students in HE. The pilots provided me with the experience of managing various aspects of the interview such as testing of the recording equipment, background noise and note-taking. When transcribing parts of the interview, I also became aware of the pace and the need to take pauses in speech. In familiarising myself with these aspects, I became more confident as a researcher in data collection and analysis for the research study.

Semi-structured interviews

The data collection method of interviews provided the opportunity to explore and to gain insight into the experiences of the participants though a two-person conversation (Cohen et al., 2007). Dialogue is at the heart of heuristic inquiry and would ordinarily employ an

informal conversational approach in which both the researcher, participants and coaches enter into the process fully through the sharing of experiences (Schneider, et al., 2015). An informal conversational approach was not the chosen method of interview for this heuristic inquiry. A less structured approach was considered to be problematic when organising and analysing data if comprehensive questions did not emerge naturally from the interviews (Cohen et al., 2007).

The data collection method of semi-structured interviews was chosen for its flexibility and adaptable nature. This enabled me to ask predetermined questions and to adapt the questions based on my perceptions of what was appropriate (see appendix 10.6 and appendix 10.7). For example, it was possible to rephrase the wording, probe responses for complete answers or for clarity, alter the order of questions, omit or add follow up questions (Bell, 2005; Cohen et al., 2007). The flexibility allowed participants and coaches to understand the research questions in the same way, rather than replicating the exact wording, as some respondents may have had difficulty with, or interpreted particular questions very differently (Oppenheim, 1992). The flexibility and freedom to respond to what was required in the interview dialogue is an important aspect of the heuristic inquiry methodology (Moustakas, 1990; Schneider, et al., 2015). The exploratory nature of interviews enabled myself as the researcher, the participants and the coaches to express, talk freely and emotionally about ourselves and our subjective experiences (Oppenheim, 1992) within the perimeters of the predetermined questions (Cohen et al., 2007).

Each coach and student participant were interviewed at the HEI during the period of June 2017 to March 2018 after all their coaching sessions had taken place. Each interview lasted between 90 minutes and two hours and were audio recorded, notes were taken during the interviews. The notes were used to help transcribe and analyse the interviews. The method of interviewing was semi-structured to provide the opportunity to build rapport and to mutually construct meaning of the experiences (Silverman, 2011). Each interview was transcribed and sent to the student participants and coaches to ensure the accuracy of transcripts. There were some disadvantages to conducting semi-structured interviews. Organising, carrying out the interviews, transcribing and then analysing each transcription was more time consuming than I had initially anticipated. An advantage of these activities was I could build trust and rapport with both the student and coach participants. This could also be considered as a disadvantage, as some methodologies require the researcher to remain as neutral as possible and not to influence their responses however, Heuristic Inquiry allows for the researcher to be connected to the

participants through shared experiences (Moustakas, 1990). From the responses, I was confident that participants and coaches were not influenced to only give positive responses and were open and honest about their experiences.

Supplementary data

The supplementary data such as coaches and student reflective diaries; email feedback received from students and coaches; music lyrics and diagrams received from student was collected via email after the interviews had taken place and were used to capture the reflections shortly after their coaching sessions. The data (see appendix 10.12 and appendix 10.13) was cross referenced with the interviews and my experiences as part of the data analysis and were mainly used to assist with the creation of the creative synthesis, the final phase of heuristic inquiry in Chapter 7.

3.5 Data analysis and process

Data analysis was undertaken manually and with the use of the data management software NVivo (see appendix 10.8). I decided to use both methods because whilst the software can code line by line, the coding is dependent upon the information that is put into it. The advantage of coding manually was that I got a detailed understanding of the data and had a clearer idea of the data that I required NVivo to code. The advantage was I was able to cross reference, which is an important aspect of NVivo. The disadvantage of this was the initial comparison between both processes, to check that any data was not missed.

The data analysis processes undertaken was in accordance with heuristic inquiry (see Figure 3). Although I have described each stage separately, the process is iterative because, when conducting heuristic inquiry, you always return to the data in between times of immersion, incubation and the creation of depictions.

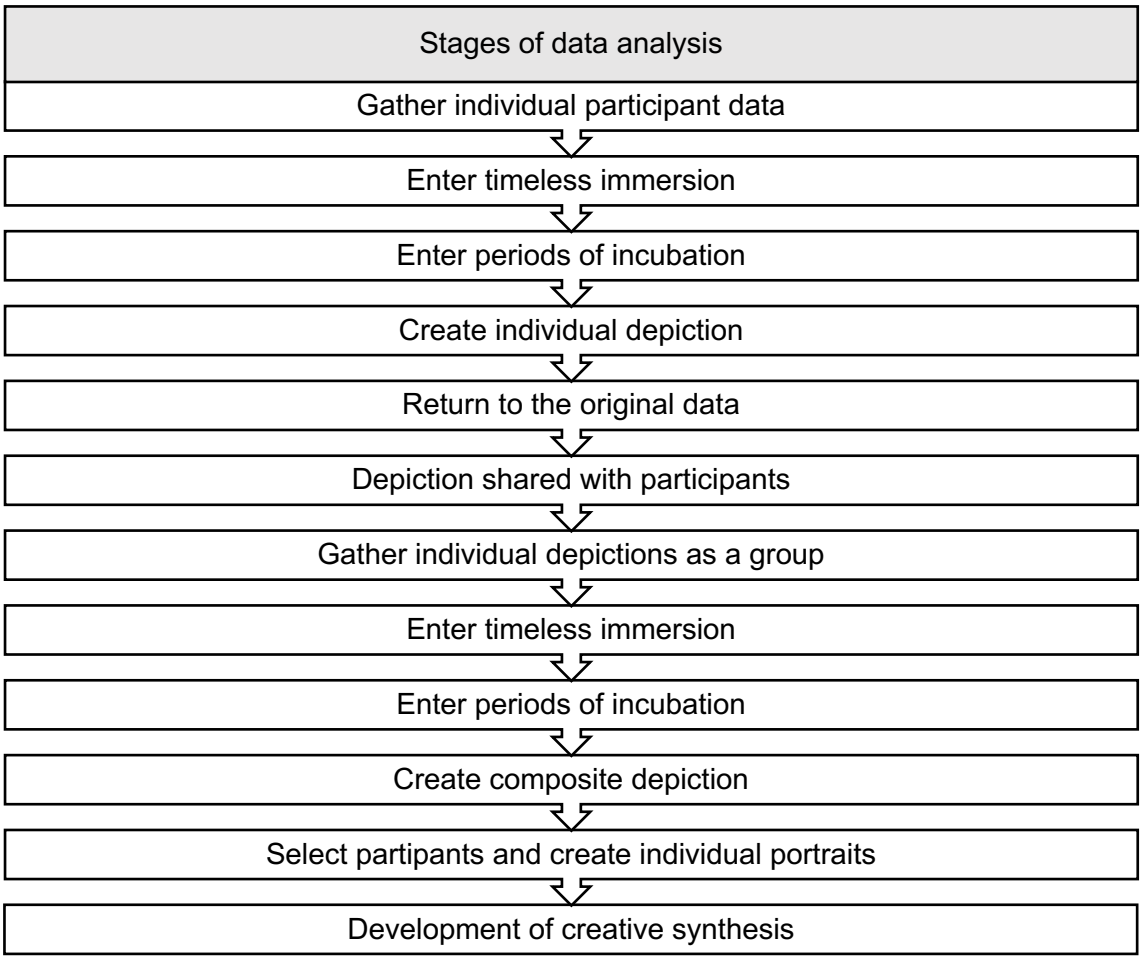


Figure 3 Data collection and analysis process

The data collated from the interviews and supplementary data sent by coaches and students were gathered and all were initially considered as part of the data analysis process (see Table 11). I did not start an in-depth analysis until all interviews were completed and all supplementary data had been gathered. I did not want the supplementary data to distort the data that would be received later in the interviews. The data was transcribed within a week of the interviews taking place and were sent to the students and coaches for verification of the content. I also ensured after the interviews had taken place that the participants had not experienced any discomfort from our conversations, that they thought of anything had been left unsaid, or wanted retracting.

Four student transcripts were analysed in order to elicit the individual experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas 1990, p.51) and four individual depictions (vignettes) were created and shared with the participants to ensure they were an accurate depiction from their perspective. Participants could make alterations as part of the heuristic process

should they wish to do so (Moustakas, 1990) however, no requests were received for any additions or deletions to be made.

Participants Student (s) Coach (c)	Reflective Diaries	Coaches' Summaries	Email Feedback	Musical Lyrics/Diagrams	Interview & Transcripts
Anastasia (s)	2	N/A	0	0	1
Anna (s)	0	N/A	1	2	1
Danika (s)	2	N/A	0	0	1
Ella (s)	3	N/A	0	0	N/A
Malcolm (s)	0	N/A	0	0	N/A
Octavia (s)	2	N/A	0	0	1
Paula (s)	0	N/A	0	0	0
Ruby (s)	2	N/A	0	0	N/A
Tara (s)	0	N/A	0	0	0
Carolina (c)	6	3	0	0	1
Donna (c)	6	6	0	0	N/A
Melanie (c)	3	0	0	0	1
Phil (c)	2	0	1	0	1

Table 11 Data received and initially considered as part of the data analysis

Once the individual depictions (vignettes) had been constructed, the individual interviews of the experiences of coaching were analysed manually and through NVivo. As I immersed myself in the data, I cross-checked the reoccurring experiences that I considered to emerge into themes. At this stage the emergent themes were shared with my supervisory team. It was helpful to discuss their feedback and themes at this point. It assisted with my learning and I felt more confident to immerse myself in the data taking their feedback into consideration.

The data from the student and coaches semi-structured interviews formulated most of the data analysis of the study. More value was given to the data from the student's interviews, as the study focused on the experiences of non-traditional students more that the coaches experience of supporting them. Data from the student reflective diaries, email feedback, diagram and musical lyrics were cross checked and used to support the themes in Chapter 4 'The individual student journeys are similar yet different' and 'The coaching experience of non-traditional students' in Chapter 5.

Equal value was also given to the data and reflections provided from my experiences as a researcher a who has direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation, through my reflective diaries, coaching summaries and notes taken during the interviews. My experiences and reflections as a coach and researcher relate to Chapter 4, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. The data from the coaches semi structured interviews formulated most the data analysis of Chapter 6 'Understanding the experiences of non-traditional students. Data from the coach's reflective diaries and coaches summaries were cross checked and used to support the emergent themes. The combined data from students, coaches and myself were used in the creation of the creative synthesis (see Figure 5 and Figure 6).

3.6 Validity, reflectivity and ethics

Validity

Validity is one associated with meaning that occurs throughout the process of heuristic inquiry, through the extensive self-search, rigour and accurate depictions of the experience that is being explored (Moustakas, 1990). The judgement of validation is made by the primary researcher, who is the only person to undertake the heuristic inquiry from the formulation of the research question through to the completion of the creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). Through the data collection and the analysis of the data shown in figure 1, as the primary researcher, I consider myself to have accurately arrived at the themes through the exploration of my own experience and the experiences of the participants and coaches throughout the phases of heuristic inquiry.

The validity and credibility of the data is increased within the study by checking the consistency and accuracy of what had been said during the interview, comparing and contrasting the student participants' and coaches perspectives, referring to their supplementary data, the diaries and coaches notes from the coaching sessions where applicable. Moustakas (1990) states that "verification is enhanced by returning to the research participants… seeking their assessment for comprehensiveness and accuracy" (p. 33-34). Verification was undertaken after the initial data collection to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts and again to ensure that the individual depictions and synthesis were a reflection on the discussions and experiences.

Reflexivity

As a researcher, reflectivity naturally occurred throughout the six phases of heuristic inquiry, from the initial engagement phase, engaging in the initial research process in

terms of self-reflection, self-discovery and identifying the research question, to the creative synthesis stage, cumulating the knowledge gained from the core themes to depict the experiences of the student participant, coaches and myself in a creative form (see Figure 5 and Figure 6) (Moustakas, 1990). As explained earlier in the methodological approach and demonstrated in Figure 1 and Figure 3, the phases and processes of heuristic inquiry are linked and each phase and process required an in-depth internal search, self-dialogue and reflection. Reflexivity is an essential aspect of heuristic inquiry, and as a researcher I had to be reflective to gain an in-depth account of my own experiences and the experiences of the participants as part of this study. Reflectivity however was more prevalent during the immersion stage. I submerged myself into my research question to stay close to it and to gain a deeper understanding of it. Regular writing of my reflective diaries, note taking during the sessions and the reading the interview transcripts facilitated self-dialogues, questioning and reflexivity which helped with my thought processes and understanding of the nuances of the coaching experiences.

Ethics

Ethics approval was applied for research involving human participants at Oxford Brookes, University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). Additional ethics approval was also required from the university in which the research study took place. A participant information sheet and consent form (see appendix 10.3, appendix 10.4 and appendix 10.5) were sent and signed by each participant prior to the research taking place. They were informed that that confidentiality would be given throughout the research with no individual being identified or identifiable to anyone other than myself. I anticipated that there would be two challenges, the first related to the data collection and storage. All participants were given pseudonyms and the data was stored with access by password only. I have sole access to my computer.

The second challenge would be the potential psychological impact of the interviews on the student participants in particular. These were students within their undergraduate studies discussing topics that may have been of a sensitive or upsetting nature. I understood as a researcher that it was important to gain useful data about their experiences. However, I also understood that while some participants may find the interview a positive experience, others might find the experience upsetting when addressing personal issues (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). I knew that I would be asking question about their experiences that they may find challenging and I would need

to make sure that I minimised the potential harm that could be caused by the research (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012).

As a coach, I am aware of the established standards of ethical practice of various professional coaching bodies such as, the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) and the International Coach Federation (ICF). I felt accountable for the ethical standards of conduct and professional behaviours and wanted to ensure that I was meeting the ethical standards of research and duty of care as a coach by ensuring that I would not harm, or cause needless harm to the participants; that I always promoted their welfare; knew my limits and scope of my competencies and that I respected the interest of the participants and the law at all times (Brennan and Wildflower, 2018). I brought my concerns to the attention of my supervisory team and we discussed that in the event of a coach or student feeling distressed, the interview or coaching session could be stopped at any time without any obligation to continue. At the beginning of the first coaching session and interviews, students were informed that they were free to with withdraw at any time and that the session could be stopped at any point should they feel distressed or no longer want to continue. Students were also provided with contact details of the University Counselling Service and times of their drop-in sessions. They were also informed that the service was available for possible referrals with consent if required. There was one student who cried during a coaching session. The student was asked if she wanted the coaching session to end but chose to continue. The student was reminded of the Counselling Service at the of the session which was declined and was also sent a follow up email over several weeks to ensure that they were okay. The initial email also signposted them to the University Counselling Service.

Summary

This chapter presented the theoretical perspective, methodological approach, data collection methods and the data analysis process of the research. My own philosophical stance as a researcher was considered to address the research question, achieve the research objectives and to inform the chosen methodological approach. The research was undertaken using heuristic inquiry.

The following chapter presents and analyses the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies in an HEI in the UK.

Chapter 4 Findings: The individual student journeys are similar yet different

This chapter presents and analyses the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies. The chapter commences by providing a brief synopsis of the students and insight into the similarities and differences of their educational journeys. Section 4.1 presents the data in accordance with heuristic inquiry providing a selection of individual portraits (vignettes) that provide in-depth insights into individual journeys and experiences related to their education. Each subsection describes a separate student journey to explore the individual uniqueness of their experiences in relation to the research question. My own experiences as an undergraduate student and reflections from the unique perspective of the researcher who has direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation is also included. This approach was taken firstly, to understand the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies. Secondly, developing whole individual portraits of each student's experience adheres to the qualities of heuristic inquiry allowing myself as a researcher to remain as close to the narrative as possible and to retain the essence of the students lived experiences (Moustakas, 1990). An analysis of each journey is provided at the end of each vignette. It is also important to identify that some details have been changed to retain the anonymity of the students. References to literature are also made within the chapter to underpin and elaborate some aspects of the data analysis.

Brief synopsis of students

Octavia, Anastasia, Danika and Paula were all aged between 18 and 19 years of age when they began their university studies, Anna commenced her studies at the age of 25. There are shared similarities as well as noticeable differences between their experiences. Some students entered university through a similar route, whilst others entered via a different pathway. There was a variety of accommodation options used by students and nearly all balanced university with part-time employment. Their journeys include considered and spontaneous choices to apply to university, aspects of excitement and anxieties, foreseen and unforeseen circumstances; and differentiated and anticipated expectations of university life. These vignettes demonstrate how the experiences of under-represented students in this study are similar yet different.

4.1 Vignettes'

4.1.1 Octavia's journey

Octavia grew up with her parents and older sibling and is considered to be at a disadvantage based on her previous education and location of her secondary state school. After leaving school Octavia attended a college which had a low percentage of students that went on to participate in HE. The college was to her dissatisfaction and within a month of attendance she transferred to a college considered to be a *"good"* one and studied a mixture of academic and art subjects at A Level. There was an expectation that students at her college completed their A Levels and applied to 'Oxbridge' however, Octavia did not want to follow *"the exact regime."* She found it difficult to work the *"same as everyone else"* particularly when faced with managing her time and deadlines. In spite of her college teacher's disappointment, Octavia enrolled on a foundation course as a way of helping her to identify her own learning style and to narrow the field of study for an undergraduate degree. She describes her experience of the foundation year as her *"favourite year"* as it was *"less relentless"* because it *"wasn't all about grades."*

Octavia's parents were supportive of her choices and were always advocates for education. She considers them to have *"shaped everything*" and describes her educational path as "*always a kind of skewed thing."* Both parents are teachers of fine art and Octavia was taught by her father at college, which in one way helped her confidence in her art subjects and in another added pressure to work hard to ensure there was *"no bias"* towards her. Octavia was influenced by her parent's knowledge of HEI's and degree courses. Her parents extended their experience as teachers to research prospective universities and attended open days on her behalf. Regardless of their influence, Octavia believes she would have chosen to go to university as she "*enjoys learning"*.

First year

Octavia was not offered a place on her first-choice course but was happy to be accepted at a post 1992 university of her choice. She found leaving her home environment and moving into university accommodation difficult even though she considered herself to be prepared on the basis of her parents' shared experiences and the experiences of her friends that went to university a year before her. In her first term she did not want to leave the *"nice little nest"* that she called home and was worried about cooking for herself and being separated from her parents. She initially found saying goodbye difficult but has learnt to adapt. Octavia did not want to let go of her close relationship with her parents,

or for the dynamics of their relationship to change. But neither did she let her initial sadness overshadow the anticipated excitement of living away from home and being in London. Moving in to university accommodation meant that Octavia found *"a really good group of friends"* that she considers to be *"likeminded"* and as having *"the same vibe"* as her. Octavia believes that she would not have connected with as many people had she lived in private accommodation. In fact, she would have "*hated it*".

So far, Octavia considers the first year to have gone *"well"* and is *"enjoying" her* university experience. Her experience of university is what she anticipated it to be, requiring a level of independence that differed from her college experience. For her university is *"about doing work"* and tutors *"checking that you are on the right track",* rather than constant tutor contact whether in person or by other methods such as email. Even though there is that recognition, Octavia uses her past educational experiences as a benchmark for her new university experience and acknowledges the differences.

> "*Your tutor on Foundation and A Level they know you pretty well. They know how your work is and how you do stuff. At uni it's not like that, quite often they will forget your work and they'll be like oh ok, have I seen this before? I would be like yeah, but that's okay*". (Octavia)

Octavia's way of working is to show her tutors the work when it is complete*. She "frustrates"* tutors when she has not produced work that demonstrates her level of understanding, but she continues to work that way.

> *"I know I can go and ask the tutor... I feel like I genuinely don't need it. I don't need a kind of reaffirming of what I'm doing. I think I've definitely got some friends that work really closely with teachers… The teachers' kind of end up telling them what to do and I hate that, I hate that. I hate the thought of it not being my work. I mean I think that's a big part of it. I'm very much like, I will do it myself. I will do my work and if that's bad then I will improve. As opposed to having someone else's input and then thinking that was someone else's idea or something*". (Octavia)

Octavia is aware of the university services available to her and has chosen not to access them.

> *"I don't even really use those extra services for things like essay writing. I just tend to do it in my own time and I can't always be bothered. I don't always have the work until right at the last minute when it makes sense finally".* (Octavia)

Octavia *"procrastinates"* and *"forfeits"* the chance to access support. But is *"perfectly comfortable"* to work in that way. She spends periods of time working and *"a fair amount of time"* not doing anything. She would stay awake in the final week of submission from 9am to 3am to complete the work.

> *"I had to get it perfect and then I somehow fell asleep (laugh) and woke up after my deadline. It was so horrible and I called my sister I was like really distressed. I was like oh no. What do I do?"* (Octavia)

Octavia accepted the late submission penalty and sanction of a decreased grade increment. She recognises "*the need to be more organised*" and to *"manage*" her time.

Analysing Octavia's journey

Octavia's experience of education seems to be one which is driven by results and skepticism especially whilst studying for her A Levels. She draws parallels with the challenges that she had faced with the academic challenges of her peers that were *"kicked out"* of college after the first year for not achieving the expected A Level standard. There is recognition that her learning style differs from what may be considered as a linear process that follows a logical and transparent method of progression. Octavia is reluctant to adjust to that way of working even though that adjustment may be required of her to demonstrate her level of understanding. There appears to be a tension between demonstrating her abilities and adjusting it to the methods used by tutors to assess standard expectations and levels of progression. It is possible that the tension camouflaged by her outward confident appearance shields her from perceiving herself as different from a negative viewpoint. The trust that she demonstrates within herself however, suggests that she is confident in her own ability to accomplish and to achieve her desired outcome when it matters to her the most. However, the process undertaken to achieve that outcome is kept to herself in fear that her tutors will not understand or provide advice that she considers as hindering her progress.

Octavia by her own account considers her foundation year to be her best year. She had not particularly enjoyed the results driven aspect at college and perhaps attended the foundation year as a method of transitional support, as a way of easing herself in to

university life and her own level of independence. Even though Octavia reemphasised not needing or wanting support, she admits to receiving a lot of support from her parents during her education. Family support, whether it be emotional, practical or financial, is highly important to the success of students from diverse backgrounds Benson et al. (2012). Recognition of that support no longer being there was difficult for Octavia to come to terms with and she was reluctant to access the support offered by her tutors or support provided by the university. For Octavia, support is for students in need of it, or perhaps targeted towards students who could benefit from such support mechanisms. It is likely that she did not want to start her university journey seen in such light. This is not surprising when throughout the education system students who require additional support whether learning or behavioural are identified and segregated from those that do not. Thomas et al. (2002) notes the importance of proactive support for all students, rather than it being perceived as a last resort for students with 'problems'. As such, the influence that prior educational experiences can have on further educational aspirations and accessing support whilst studying can be disadvantageous.

Octavia does not outwardly acknowledge being at a disadvantage neither does she consider herself to be a student from a non-traditional background on the basis of her previous education. However, not being offered her first-choice place at university is something that she still struggles with emotionally. Octavia has built this concept in her mind that it is not all about grades and the support that she receives from her parents solidifies that for her. Perhaps for her that is a support mechanism used to manage disappointments that may lay ahead. Whilst Octavia may have received knowledge about university from her parents as to what is expected, she had to go through that transition and experience herself. It is unfortunate that there are expected standards and ways of working that may not suit non-traditional students and their learning styles or their background. It appears from Octavia's characteristic and determination to work in isolation that fear of judgement or the notion of requiring support is a deterrent to receiving it. Students feel there is a stigma attached to student services which prevents some students from accessing them (Thomas et al., 2002). It is quite easy for students like Octavia who work in isolation and to slip under the radar of tutors until the point of assessment when the grades obtained are to her dissatisfaction.

Octavia suggests that her decision to participate in coaching was because she "*likes all that kind of stuff and enjoys learning".* She described coaching as being similar to conversations that she would with her parents, As such, it is also possible that what led her to coaching was the recognition that once at university, and living away from home,

that the support received from her parents would change. Coaching would have been a subtle way of accessing support she considered comparable, positive and adding value to her university experience.

4.1.2 Anastasia's journey

Anastasia grew up with her mother and her older sibling and knew whilst studying for her GCSE's that she wanted to study arts subjects. Following the completion of her GCSE's she completed her A Levels, despite coming from a low-income working-class family and living in an area within the UK considered to be at a disadvantage based on its geographical location. Anastasia enrolled on a foundation course for a year as an alternative route for prospective students considering a degree in the arts. The gap year in between college and university was said to be one that prepared her for university. She describes the foundation year as as *"a nice year off, but one where you still had to work*." The relaxed and passionate student environment motivated her to generate ideas and produce some of her best work. Anastasia's mother was supportive of her decision to study a foundation degree. The additional year of education at no cost provided reassurance and the opportunity to experiment with a range of art subjects prior to committing to a particular field of study for an undergraduate degree.

First year

Anastasia applied to and was offered a place at a university in London. She anticipated the move from living with her parents to be *"hard"* but found it a lot harder than she thought it would be, requiring her to think of *"all the extra stuff*" she has to do on top of her university work which she was not accustomed to doing. Anastasia *"eased"* herself into *"uni life"* by living in shared accommodation and made friends which was something she "*was anxious*" about. Anastasia enjoys being around people that share the same disciplines and interests which was something that was *"rare"* with her friends in her home town. She also enjoys *"living away from home and being a lot more independent",* although the cost of living in London was more expensive than the cost of living in the North West of England. For her, working part-time is an "*necessity rather than a luxury"* to support living and additional course costs. As such Anastasia is considering applying for bursaries to support her studies.

> *"It would be nice to be able to buy different types of pens that would add to my work. I feel as though I am earning to make money for something I need. Rather than having fun."* (Anastasia)

Anastasia was more excited about *"starting the uni life"* rather than *"starting actual uni"* and has not been motivated to work during her second term. Before starting university, she was anxious about her tutors and whether she would *"like them".* She finds it *"hard" and "annoying"* when tutors do not adapt to her style of learning.

> *"I feel I'm not getting as much out of the lesson… This tutor he does one pattern and then is like… Go and do it now in the lesson. I feel like it's just a waste of time… I can do all that by myself anyway. I don't need their assistance for this stuff that they are sending me away to do in the lesson. I want more hands on like things that I need help on. I think that's just way he teaches."* (Anastasia)

As Anastasia pays fees to attend university, there is an expectation that the cost and *"value for money"* is something tangible and as such expects to receive what she considers to be adequate time and support during her studies.

> *"In foundation you had to be there every day it was like government funded so you had to be there five days a week and you would be there like non-stop so you got lots of work done… But uni is not 9-5, it's more like 9-3 and then work and then 10 to whatever, so like it's trying to fit around things".* (Anastasia)

Anastasia also feels that her tutors are "*not as supportive."* She compares her current tutor relationships to the relationships she had when she attended college.

> *"… For A Level well we were close. Not close but we would have a chat but that doesn't happen with tutors here. Like she was really supportive we still stay in touch. Like when I go home, she always wants me to come in and stuff. But, yeah tutors here I don't feel like I'm with them as much".* (Anastasia)

Anastasia is aware of the range of support services offered by the university but has not accessed them. She feels that she is *"quite strong with essays" and would not benefit from the service.*

> *"I did my essay and in the seminar he looked over mine and only two things were pointed out…. I don't think it would be helpful. I would for referencing or if I was struggling half way through with the order of the essay. Other than that, I might get my mum to read over the essay." (Anastasia)*

Anastasia finds managing her time difficult and was "*up all night"* prior to the submission of her work.

> *"I stayed up until about 8, had half hour sleep and then walked in. Then I went back and slept for the whole day… My work doesn't turn out as good under pressure. All that I would like, got done. But I don't think I got it done to how I wanted it to be. If I had more time or, I don't know spread out my workload a bit better I feel like I would have done it better."*

Anastasia wants *"to do better*" next term. Her grades achieved so far have been at a *"C".* She would like to achieve higher and would be "*happy*" with a "B." For Anastasia an increase in her grades rather than them *"staying the same"* would *"increase"* her *"confidence".*

Analysing Anastasia's journey

Anastasia's educational experiences did not appear to follow the same trajectory as her peers most of which chose to seek employment after college Anastasia chose to continue her education by taking a foundation year prior to attending university. Anastasia perhaps considered university as an opportunity to be different and to experience difference even though she appeared to be apprehensive about being liked by her tutors and establishing friendship groups. Although she appears reclusive, there is a sense of wanting to belong yet wanting to be different at the same time and moving to London would provide her with the opportunity to establish or reinvent herself. It was clear that relocating to London provided insight into opportunities such as placements with large brands that perhaps she would not have been exposed to in her home town. Anastasia was aware that employers were likely to specifically recruit students via internships (Bathmaker et al., 2013), highlighting a sense of privilege that she was not accustomed to and was unlikely to experience unless she could demonstrate an understanding of what the top brands required of her.

Anastasia's main challenge is comparing herself and her experiences to others not only dealing with external factors such as relocation and finances, she is also struggling to manage her emotions and her self confidence amongst her peers. Whilst she came across as being accepting of the difference in terms of her background, there appeared to be an emotional tension between feelings of resentment and contentment. The constant comparison with herself and others perhaps exacerbates her anxiety (Cotton et

al., 2017; Burke 2012; Reay et al., 2010). In one way as she considers everyone else to be better than herself, but in another way, she enjoys the independent social aspect of university life. Whilst social aspects are enjoyable, she struggles to balance her social life with the academic requirements of university. Even though that could be said for most students, fit with culturally implicit norms and pedagogical demands (Wilkins and Burke, 2015).

Anastasia is aware of the support the that the university offers, however she has chosen not to access the services even though she is disappointed with her grades thus far and has acknowledged that she aspires to do better. She considers support as something that is accessed only when it is needed. Perhaps those within her social groups have not accessed the services and for her to do so would possibly confirm her perception that others are indeed better than herself.

Whilst Anastasia suggests that she participated in coaching because of interest, she did attend all sessions, which suggests that it is possible that her attendance was more than just intrigue. She may have considered coaching a way of increasing her self-confidence amongst her peers who she considers to be better equipped, skilled and more financially stable than herself.

4.1.3 Danika's journey

Danika lives in London with her parents and two younger siblings. She is the first in the family to go to university and falls within what is considered to be a minority ethnic group. Danika aspires to do well and to make her family proud. She considers being the first in the family to go to university and having younger siblings as pressure not only to attend but to successfully complete her studies. Danika aspired at a young age to attend the university where she is currently attending. She described it as her *"goal"* one that she knew she had to "*do everything in order to get there*". For her going elsewhere would have meant *"she had to settle"* and she was not prepared to do so. Both parents supported her decision to go to university although her father wanted her to attend university more than her mother. Her mother would have supported any decision that she had made. Danika was supported by her college to access university through a WP programme and was assisted with her application and the interview processes. Danika considers her journey into university to be smoother because of the additional support provided by her college.

First year

Danika continues to live at home with her parents and benefits from the support and the moderate commute to the university site. There are times when she studies at the library rather than at home to avoid distractions and finds her days are optimised more when she attends university. Her experience of university differs to her expectations. She was really excited about "*uni life"* before realising that *"it's not here*."

> *"You hear such good things about it and when you come it doesn't live up to it."* (Danika)

In the first year she lacked motivation and found it difficult to socialise and meet new people even though she attended all of her lectures. Friendship groups and social networks was important to Danika but during her first year were not established. Danika compares attending university to employment "*you come in and do your work and go home"*, for her the social aspect was the *"one thing"* that she had *"missed out"* on, but she has learnt to adapt over the duration of her studies.

Second year

Danika found the course content to be repetitive and describes the second year "as frustrating" as it does not count towards her degree classification. She focused more on her part-time employment working three days a week, attended university less and worked on her assignments a month before the submission. In the second year, she had to face her anxieties around group work which was something she was anxious about before starting university.

> *"I hated group work… I knew I was going to have to interact with people that I didn't necessarily talk to and stuff like that. But it's definitely got better… because there is no way around it.*

Danika is aware that her *"anxiety is still there."* She recognises there is *"still improvement to be made."* and acknowledges that the improvement is down to her and *"not down to the university".* (Danika)

Third year

By the third year Danika did not consider herself to have any close friends on the course. The friends that she *"jelled"* with chose to participate in a placement year at the end of the second year. Another friend that she got *"on really well"* with progressed into their

final year. However, during that year, attendance was less, so for her having close friends didn't *"really matter"*.

Danika enjoys learning and in her third year of university still finds *"independent learning challenging".* She still compares her experience of university to her experience of college.

> *"At uni its kind of you interpret it how you interpret it and you go and do your thing. Which was probably the biggest challenge for me. I doubt myself so much, I like being guided. I tell myself it's not right, it's not right the whole time until I get my grade. I'm use to just being told this is what's expected and this is what you should do in each section… I can be writing my heart away and think it's amazing and then be so shocked when I get my grade… I give myself a hard time… I need to trust my instinct more."* (Danika)

Her perceived lack of guidance led to *"self-doubt*", *"procrastination"* and the *"questioning"* of her "abilities." She had no prior experience of writing 10,000 words or how to structure a dissertation. For her, the requirement for specific feedback and guidance was essential. In comparison, she received comments such as *"it is good"* or *"the area is not broad enough."* Her "*confidence stops"* her from *"speaking out"* especially in her first and second year. Danika recognises that she is *"missing out"* by not discussing her feedback with her tutors, however, she *"does not know how to tackle it"*.

> *"Hardly anything is one to one except for things like study support. Most things are done in groups. I don't like group work."* (Danika)

Danika perceives the relationship with her tutors as *"not being great"* and equates it to being her "*own fault"* for not engaging with them more in the first year. In her opinion tutors treat their roles *"very much like a 9-5 job"* which is in contrast to her expectations. Leading to the assumption that some tutors are approachable but the majority were not.

> *"I don't think it is a 9-5 job… because it's so independent, you are going to get students emailing you. You're going to get people wanting to meet with you… She was like I'm going on holiday from this date so don't email me... It's a bit annoying because it was only her and one other lady marking the work, the other lady she's kind of new… I feel some of them are motivated and dedicated for students to do well some of them just don't seem like they care".* (Danika)

For Danika, the time that tutors spent outside of lectures demonstrates that they care and if required a way for her to actively seek support. She expects to seek support from tutors outside of lectures but perceived them to have an array of responsibilities, including pressures of time, therefore, engaging with her was not a top priority. Danika was more likely to discuss her academic difficulties and seek to resolve them if she felt that her tutors cared (Tett et al., 2017).

The final year has been particularly stressful for Danika to the point where she aware of the services that the university provided but only accessed Academic Support towards the end of year two and during year three. Now that she is in her final year she feels as she should have accessed the service more. Academic support is where she considered "*the most support"* to have been received as opposed to her *"actual lectures".* Danika challenged a grade she received in the second term of her third year because she had accessed Academic Support.

> *"I got some grade… and I was so annoyed because I was like that does not make any sense… I had my dad read it and I went to study support… Nobody indicated to me that it wasn't really that good. So I kind of challenged it. I think I got a D- or a D+ or something then it went up to a B+ so clearly there's something. It's just too opinionated… Because it shouldn't be that different… If I didn't go to study support I would not have challenged it. But I think because I did... That's why I challenged it".* (Danika)

Danika also accessed career mentoring in her third year. She considered it to be *"beneficial"* in assisting her to take that *"first step"* from leaving full time education and going into full time employment.

> *"… For third year students… I think a career mentor is so good. … Obviously my mum and dad didn't go to uni or anything like that. I can ask them for advice to a certain extent and I can go to Google. But it's nice having someone to talk to... I've been applying for things and I've been asking her what she thinks the best thing is to do. Kind of hearing her experience and what she's done has been good*." (Danika)

Danika has achieved B+ grades in her third year and is on *"track"* to graduate with a Lower Upper Class honours degree. Danika attended coaching because she was in her final year and was "*finding everything stressful*."

Analysing Danika's journey

Danika's educational experience prior to university was positive and supportive. To be the first in the family to go university was a big achievement for herself and her aspiring siblings. She welcomed the additional support that was offered when she was considered as someone who could gain access to university. Danika by her own account considered the support to be *"like careers advice*" that focused on applying and gaining access to university. Unbeknownst to her she was part of a selective WP initiative. Good quality information, advice and guidance is considered essential to widen participation and playing an important role in getting the 'best fit' between learners and the opportunities available them (Kennedy, 1997 p. 90). The information and guidance was a good starting point providing Danika with information to make an informed choice about the University she would like to attend. The targeted support on the one hand resulted in an offer to the university of her choice and facilitated a smooth transition in to university. However, it did not prepare Danika for the differing expectations between what was provided by the institution and what was expected by Danika in terms of her overall university experience (Thomas, 2002).

Danika struggled with her conflicting expectations and her actual experience of university throughout the duration of her studies. For her the social aspect of university life was absent and she struggled to build relationships with her peers and rapport with her tutors which is considered fundamental towards attitudes to learning and coping with academic difficulties (Thomas, 2002). Whilst she may have gained a place by her own merit in terms of meeting the necessary entry requirements, it became obvious by her ethnicity alone that she was a minority. Even though that cannot solely account for the disparity in her experiences, it also cannot be discounted. Jury et al (2017) suggests that consideration should also be given to racial or ethnic background and early experiences within the school system as influencing pathways to education. In terms of Danika's experience, it appears that her background did not influence her university choice. Whilst consideration was given in terms of support provision and accessing university, it is unclear as to whether targeted support was ongoing whilst studying her undergraduate degree.

Throughout her studies there were periods of anxiety, procrastination and varying levels of stress (Cotton et al., 2017). Danika's prior educational experience was one that was guided and monitored in terms of progression. As such she never fully grasped the concept of independent learning at university. Danika struggled with making decisions that were not based on direct feedback or direct instruction which made her question and doubt her abilities. Her reluctance to ask questions and to speak in class prevented her from receiving the feedback she considered to be crucial to her work. On the one hand she was fearful of receiving criticism, on the other hand, she recognised that criticism could have a positive impact. She was aware that independent learning was a requirement, however it would appear that she required the support to be able to make that transition. Her continual need of reassurance fueled her internal conflict between her fears and self-confidence. Her ongoing battle particularly in her final year had an impact on her levels of motivation, stress, anxiety and overall university experience.

Danika was unclear as to why she participated in coaching and had a limited understanding of what coaching was. However, she knew that the timing was right for her at that particular moment in her life. It is possible that Danika needed time to identify and understand her emotions and her university experiences. It is possible that she attended coaching as a way of obtaining clarity as to what was required of her during her studies and to gain more self-confidence and self-belief in her own abilities to complete her undergraduate degree.

4.1.4 Anna's journey

Anna lives with her parents near the coast and made the decision as a mature student to apply to university. She is the youngest of four siblings and describes her mum as having her "*late in life".* Anna does not have many positive experiences of education. She struggled throughout her primary and secondary education and was repeatedly bullied. At secondary school, Anna was informed by her teachers that she could not take English Literature as a GCSE because s*he "just couldn't write"* and she could *"barely read".* Her teachers would call her *"dyslexic."* She always thought that she was but was never supported and her dyslexia was undiagnosed.

Anna's relationship with her parents and siblings was strained at an early age. She was thought of as *"the black sheep of the family"* and not considered as intellectual or bright. Her parents used words such as "*dumb"* and *"stupid"* to describe her and would make comments such as *"*you *are not good enough*" or "*you should have been born blond"*

upon receipt of her exam results. Anna received little support from her parents throughout her education. Her parents never attended parents' evening, neither did they *"pick up the phone"* when teachers tried to call. Anna found support outside of her family from a girl who lived next door to her who transpired to be her *"best friend"* and the girl's parents became her *"second family".* Anna's outward conflict with her family manifested in to an inner conflict within herself. She consistently battles with the self-image that has been constructed of her and the ideals that she has of herself.

Anna wanted to apply to university following on from her college education but felt limited in terms of subject choice and GCSE grades which were mostly C's and D's. She wanted to enroll onto a beauty therapy course at college but was not accepted for her first-choice. She was considered to be *"good at art*" and thought to be *"wasting her career"* taking a beauty course. Anna listened to the advice that she was given and enrolled onto a Level 3 course, only to be told, when she commenced her studies that she *"could have studied at a higher level."* Following the completion of her course Anna secured a job in the beauty industry where she spent thirteen years as a beauty therapist. For Anna the decision to apply to university was spontaneous.

> *I basically was at work one day. I had been working for so long in the beauty career and then I decided… I literally had enough… I always liked doing shoes and I used to like custom make shoes. I use to buy the shoe and then stick things on to it to make a different shoe and everyone was like, you should do that as a course or like do it for real. I was like, I would like to, but I never had the money. So, I literally Googled courses and this was the first thing that came up… I then rang the company, well I don't know who it was. She said to come along because I haven't got no Art GCSE's or nothing like that. She said to come along and do a sketchbook. I didn't even know what a sketchbook was."* (Anna)

Anna's parents did not support her decision to attend university as a mature student. They "*didn't understand it*" and for that reason did not complete the form for her student loan. As far as her parents were concerned Anna should "*get a job, settle down, have kids and get married".*

First year

As a mature student Anna *"didn't really know what to expect being out of education for so long*". She was nervous about "*being in that whole controlled situation"* as an adult and was anxious about using a computer and software packages that were not used

during her previous education. The anticipation of the unknown was all *"a bit daunting."* From the onset, Anna felt as though she was "*playing catch up."* In the first term of the first year. Anna relied heavily on the services of Academic Support booking sessions as often as once a week to assist with writing her first essay.

> *"For the first essay she just sat down bit by bit and just explained from the very beginning like what things were. Then I write it… I was quite proud, I had done a piece of writing... Then I would realise what a bibliography was, what this was, what was. How to set a paragraph out (laugh) serious like basic stuff. But if I didn't have that I probably wouldn't have handed anything in because I didn't know what anything looked like. I didn't understand."* (Anna)

Anna continued to submit her work at the same time as all other students until dyslexia and dyspraxia was officially diagnosed. She received an Individual Support Agreement which permitted additional time for her written work.

Anna felt disconnected at times with her friends and peers trying to familiarise herself with a new and unfamiliar environment that she felt she could not compete with. She describes herself as having *"one friend"* who she *"avoids"* as she considers her to be self-absorbed and a distraction. *"*Anna remains living at home with her parents as she could not afford to live in London. Her restricted time on site does not make it easy for her to interact with students outside of her course. Her *'"exhausting"* day typically starts at 4.30am and finishes when she returns home at 9.00pm at night. She finds arranging time to meet her friends difficult as her *"life is consumed with uni work*".

> *"No one wants to get close to me as they keep saying I am 'boring' due to university consuming all my time and life at the moment."* (Anna)

In addition to the challenges Anna had in forming relationships with her peers, or managing the expectations of existing friends, Anna continues to work as a beauty therapist working long shifts for a minimum wage. She considers the amount of money spent on an arts degree as "*crazy".* Not only are there university fees, there are additional costs for materials and 3D printing. In addition, living considerably far from the university Anna buys *"a cheap ticket"* due to financial constraints and the privilege of a fast train into London.

> *"Having to travel and having to try and figure out how to do the work to the best of my ability is extremely tiring. Especially at the moment because I've had to buy cheap tickets it means I have to get a really long train that stops at every stop. So, it's like an hour and forty-five mins or up to two hours because it's always delayed… So I literally lose two hours sat on that train... It was just too much and then work on a Saturday for eight and a half hours, I'm just tiring myself out."* (Anna)

Despite the challenges Anna received a grade A- and B+ in her first term. In her second term she received a grade B and a B+. In her third term she received a grade a C- for a 40-credit unit.

Second year

In her second year, Anna experienced a number of disappointments before finally securing a placement for the third year. When it came to interviews for her placement year or entering and winning competitions she considered herself as "*never getting there"* she would either *"come close"* or witness others win on the basis of their achievement. As such she became distrusting about the processes particularly when she was never commended for her efforts. Anna gains confidence when others have faith, confidence and belief in her which she did not experience during her time at university. As such she felt that there is "*favouritism*" amongst the tutors and that "*favouritism is an unspoken thing".*

> *"If you're not a favourite you don't get the same opportunities if you're equally working as hard. Other students feel the same way about the middle ground people. Tutors will do everything in their power to help. Whereas if you're just a number, they're like just get on with it. Favourites are massive stars.... Even in feedback, always recognising people that are given A's. They should say something to people who went from a D to an A, or B- that would mean the world to them… Everyone should have that chance. It is good for student moral and motivation if you had been recognised."* (Anna)

For Anna her second year was a "*nightmare"* and *"group work frustrated"* her. She considered herself to the "*quite bossy"* trying to lead "*timid people*" to participate. She found the whole experience to be "*stressful".* Particularly when the group received a grade C- for the project. Anna had received A and B grades for the rest of her year two assessments. To receive a grade C- for the project was "*disappointing".*

Third year

Anna was on a work placement for her third year and had to write a placement report which she was *"anxious"* about. She had not written 5,000 words before but received *"study skills"* as part of her "*dyslexia support"* which was to her dissatisfaction.

> *"They did not get my way of working. They don't understand me". (Anna)*

Eventually, with the right help and guidance Anna received a grade of A- for her report. For her the right support made "*a massive difference".* Whilst Anna achieved an A- she continues to doubt her ability and lacks self-confidence based on her past educational experiences. Her report however, achieved one of the highest grades within her cohort and was used as an exemplar.

Fourth year

Anna spent most of her final year working on her project which she considered to be an expression of herself in terms of *"living the project"* and wanting to inspire others of a similar background and experiences. Working on her project however triggered "*psychological effects bringing up a lot of hurt and pain*" that she found particularly difficult to cope with. Anna wants to have the confidence to be able to socialise and to present without being concerned about the opinion of others, but finds public speaking makes her feel vulnerable and anxious. Anna describes her experience presenting for an assessment.

> *"My mind went blank, it felt like I was the only one in the room and no one else was there. I couldn't speak. The teacher didn't know and kept picking and picking and picking. In the end he could not assess me. I just wanted to get out... Afterwards I receive an aggressive email from him and the Head of Year. When they both realised, they suggested mental health counselling.*" (Anna)

Anna had considered meeting *"the mental health people"* but perceived them to be "*really busy"* which deterred her from accessing the support.

"Time is a weird thing if someone hasn't got time and they are clock watching. If they don't have time I don't value what they have to say its robotic. I don't think that anyone can help me mentally, everyone's brain works differently." (Anna)

Anna was signposted to a number of services in the university and was aware of the support services that the university offered, including counselling. She accessed Academic Support in her first year and participated in mentoring. Her experience of mentoring was *"really good"* but for her the issue was time and the process.

> *"I didn't like getting hounded every five seconds do you want mentoring? Do you want mentoring? I've got space then do you want this. I just felt a bit smothered and a bit like it's very time ranked as well. I just felt it was just a bit too much. Not the actual length. The mentoring bit was actually really good. But it was the procedure of being hounded and the alarms on the phones and things like that made me really anxious. I mean I can't be dealing with that."* (Anna)

In her final year, Anna's stress and anxiety continued to increase. She often described herself *"as not knowing whether she was coming or going."* She faced continuous challenges and was reluctant to talk to anyone or access the support available to her. Her perception of crying as *"a sign of weakness"* results in her putting her guard up and shutting everyone out. Although her anxieties are still present. Anna made the decision to access the University Counselling Service solely to support her claim for Extenuating Circumstances.

Analysing Anna's journey

Anna's experience of education seems to have be stricken with challenges and emotional unrest particularly whilst at secondary school. In spite of her adversity, Anna chose to confront her fear of education by making the decision to attend university as a mature student. Whilst the other students were able to make informed choices based on their previous educational experience, Anna was not in the same position to do so. Her access to accurate knowledge of higher education was limited within her social network. Her parents were not supportive of her aspirations to go to university and Anna's *"second family"* had limited knowledge about HE. Anna's experience highlights that students from lower socio-economic groups may have aspirations to go to university but may not have access to accurate knowledge about HE within their social networks (Ball and Vincent, 1998). Her reliance on *"Google"* and contacting the first university listed indicates from the search that she perhaps had not developed the 'navigational capacities' to make informed choices about university (Appadurai 2004). Nevertheless, Anna still managed to make a choice to study on the basis of the information that was available to her.

Anna received little support throughout her education until participating at university. She was aware that she needed support whilst studying her undergraduate degree. In spite of the ridicule she faced during the earlier years of her education, Anna took the necessary action by means of assessment to ensure that adequate support was put in place. Although diagnosed later in life, Anna appears to be accepting of her conditions and does not use it as a deterrent but as a way of acknowledging that she needs to work *"ten times harder"* than her peers and therefore tries to find practical ways to do so (Thiele et al., 2017). Whilst students from a disadvantaged background have a tendency to 'work and work extremely hard' (Reay et al. 2009 p. 109) students from disadvantaged groups also rely on their own personal qualities to succeed (Luzeckyj, et al., 2017). Although this may be the case it is also important to gain an understanding of a student's background and where possible provide individual tailored support which Anna received by way of reasonable adjustment and an Individual Agreement Plan.

Anna's distrust when it came to forming relationships with her peers or her tutors appears to be based on her past experiences. Anna struggles to perceive herself and at times others in a positive light. As such, she continues to battle with her own inner turmoil that at times leads to periods of depression and anxiety. Anna is aware of the support services that the university offers but has only made the choice to access support with her written work. Anna has experienced counselling before but she finds it difficult to share her emotions and only chooses to do so with a selected few.

There was no ambiguity as to why Anna participated in coaching, she was clear that she wanted to increase her confidence. What became a challenge was identifying ways in which she could increase her confidence with the number of challenges that she faced and continued to face during her studies.

4.1.5 My journey

I lived in a deprived area of London with my father and younger sibling and at the age of 18 I was the first in my family to attend university. I do not recall receiving any guidance other than my father suggesting that I study finance in order to seek employment in banking, which at the time was considered a stable industry. I took my father's advice and commenced a Business and Finance degree. I found it difficult to form friendship groups in my first year of studies and I never felt as though I belonged in that HE environment. I found aspects of my studies difficult but I did not seek advice from my

tutors, I never felt that I could. At the end of the first year I failed statistics, a core module and chose not to continue with my studies.

At the age of 24, I returned to university as a self-funding, part-time, mature student. Little thought was given to the decision, I decided one day, whilst at work, that I would return to university to commence a degree that was of interest. I did not consider HEIs far afield from home or beyond my local university. My first-choice university was the one that was most convenient in terms of my commute from home or work to university.

The challenges that I faced in both experiences were not dissimilar to the accounts given by students within the study. Significant relationships were not formed with my peers as a part-time mature student, the ever-growing distance that I felt, grew when I took a year out due to pregnancy and re-joined my studies in the second year. I returned to my second year, however with a different outlook and more determination to succeed as a single mother. I balanced my studies and work commitments with the support of my parents and did not seek additional support from the university as I had little awareness of what they might be.

During my second year, I began employment at the university where I was studying and by the third year, I understood terminologies that I was once oblivious to, such as degree classification. Once I gained an understanding of the grades I required for my dissertation to obtain a First-Class Honours degree, it became a driving factor and motivated me to establish a closer relationship with my tutors, attend tutorials and sign up for additional drop-in session to help me achieve my newly established goal.

Analysing my journey

As a researcher who has direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation, reflecting on my experiences, I lacked knowledge and understanding of what was required of me as a student when I commenced my first degree. If I were to commence that journey again, based on my education trajectory to date, I would not consider it being dissimilar, having left school with a BTEC National Diploma award.

I had no awareness or sense of under-representation of the differences between traditional and non-traditional students. I had little awareness of universities outside of my immediate parameters and would have been limited to the same HEIs. Even though I considered myself as having a choice at the time, choosing a degree that I had a passion for and a university that would enable me to achieve easy travel to and from

work and home. I did not feel as I was at a disadvantage or different to my peers as the university that I attended was diverse and there were mature students similar to myself. The similarities went unnoticed as I blended into my environment and it was not something that I focused on or perceived to be categorised as non-traditional in anyway. Being employed at the university did make a difference to my level of engagement and confidence. I felt as though I had inside information and that the relationships I formed with academic staff grew because I knew they cared and wanted me to achieve. I also transferred the knowledge that I had to support and encourage students about plagiarism and not leaving their work to the last minute. Although as a student I know that was easier said than done.

My colleagues as well as tutors would often encourage me to embark on a Doctorate which at the time I had no intention of doing. I often look back and laugh to myself as a Doctoral student and wonder if they saw something in me that I was unable to see in myself then. Years later, after I left that HEI, I am able to consider my once tutors as trusted colleagues who still offer me words of encouragement as a Doctoral student. I truly believe that I could not have completed my undergraduate and postgraduate studies without their encouragement and support. I therefore understand the support that students sought from their tutors and the impact this had on my own confidence and abilities. I often acknowledge that I could not have achieved this without my tutor, they often argued that I could.

Upon reflection, it is not about where I began my educational journey (although significant), it is about where I finish it. My engagement with coaching was the pivotal point for me, I am certain that it changed the educational trajectory that I started on. I was offered coaching in 2009 as part of my professional development, it did not take place during my studies, it did however, take place within a HE environment. The impact of those sessions made me feel empowered, there was a sense of entitlement that I had not felt before, and a belief that anything was possible. A lightbulb had been switched on, one that I did not want to be turned off. I wanted the enlightening possibilities to continue, it took me away from the limitations I had put on myself and the restrictions I felt others had of me. I had no previous knowledge of coaching prior to my engagement with it. It was offered as a career development opportunity, one that I am glad was taken. The development has extended beyond my career, coaching has become entwined within me, as a way of being, I think and feel differently. So much so, that coaching cannot be separated from the person that I am, the person that I have become, and the person that I continue to be.

Chapter summary

This chapter presented the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies. The vignettes suggest that relationships and the support received from significant others were crucial but not always actively sought by non-traditional students. Regardless of the year of study, all students referred to significant relationships during their previous educational journeys and associated their interactions as either positive or negative experiences. Their prior experiences also appeared to influence the perceptions that students had of themselves and their abilities, as well as the perception they had of others and forming relationships once at university. Most students felt less connected with their university tutors and were reluctant to seek support. They perceived that asking questions would demonstrate a lack of understanding that would lead tutors to make judgements on their academic abilities. Their experiences therefore suggest that the relationships and the perceived support received from significant others during their educational journeys shaped the students' expectations of university and how they interacted with the university environment.

What is clear from the individual vignettes is while non-traditional students may appear to have similarities in terms of their experiences, each individual student journey is unique to the student that experiences it. As such it is important to recognise that whilst students in this study are categorised as being within an under-represented group, each student has a level of individuality that should be recognised when offering or providing support to students of a similar background. From the excepts is it also important to acknowledge that students may not consider themselves as requiring support, although like myself, they are likely to need some level of support or guidance whilst studying in order to successfully achieve their undergraduate degree.

It can be seen through the portraits that most students did not overtly identify themselves as non-traditional students or necessarily relate their challenges to their class, ethnicity, disability or geographical location in terms of their prior education. What makes Octavia's journey unique in this study is her ability to navigate herself between being perceived as traditional and her ability to conceal the non-traditional aspect that categorises her as such. Her efforts to hide her differences however are not dissimilar to others who try to conceal their social class, and or other characteristics that could be stigmatising or negatively perceived (Thiele et al., 2017; Aries and Seider, 2005; Granfield, 1991). Octavia is considered to be at a disadvantage on the basis of her previous education and location of her secondary state school. As such the non-traditional aspect of her

educational experience could be considered contextual and implicit, rather than explicit and stereotypical view of someone who could be perceived as less likely to do well or less likely to fit in to her university environment (Macqueen, 2017; Thiele et al., 2017; Bathmaker et al., 2013). For instance, from her outward appearance, her demeanour, her race and perhaps the insight from her parents of the education system, Octavia could be misinterpreted as a traditional student which demonstrates that disadvantage is not always as explicit as one would perceive it to be.

This is in contrast to Danika whose uniqueness is more explicit in terms of the under-representation of her ethnicity followed by being the first in her family to go to university. Although that may be the case in terms of categorisation, Danika does not base her challenges on such descriptors even though they may be contributing factors to her educational experiences and her educational journey. In her mind the issues that she is susceptible to are based on the expectations of the tutor, the course and the university as a whole, rather than her background and her experiences and how they interact with a university environment.

Similar to Danika, Anna's non-traditional aspect and how she could be defined is more explicit in terms of accessing university as a mature student and her disability. What makes Anna's journey unique is her determination to succeed based upon her own definition of success that did not fit within the limited parameters that she found herself placed within. As a mature student who did not acquire the initial grades to attend university and as a student who received a disability diagnosis at a later stage of her life. For Anna attending university and obtaining a first-class honours degree was an obsession and she was not willing to settle for anything less. It would give her the reassurance and self-worth that she required to prove to herself that not only could she be as good as everyone else, she could also be better.

Anastasia was similar in terms of her ability to defy the odds by not following the trajectory of her peers who came from a similar working-class background for whom HE was not a taken-for-granted stage in a trajectory to adulthood (Quinn et al., 2015). Out of the four students and their experiences during their studies, Anastasia appears to be the only student who perceives herself to be at a disadvantage and uses it as a barrier to her abilities and to achieving her desired outcomes which supports the notion that background, financial, personal and institutional factors can influence the educational outcomes for non-traditional students (Harvey and Szalkowicz, 2017; Willcoxson, Cotter and Joy, 2011, Crozier et al., 2008) as well as shape an individual's 'ability' and lead to

social and academic barriers (Ball, 2010). This, however was not the case for Anna who perhaps faced more challenges than the other students in terms of experience and journey into university.

Similar to Danika, my uniqueness is explicit in terms of under-representation by ethnicity in HE. I also did not consider the challenges faced to be based on categorisation even though it may have been a contributing factor. Similar to others, forming significant relationships at university as a student leaving sixth form was challenging. I was also conscious of asking tutors for support as I did not want to be perceived as someone in need of help, even though I required the support.

In spite of the challenges or barriers that any of the non-traditional students experienced what is evident from the portraits is a need to understand students so that they are in a better position to engage in their chosen subjects and enabled to learn (Lyons, 2006). Rather than there being an onus for students to adjust their behaviour and learn to fit within culturally implicit norms and pedagogical demands (Burke et al., 2015) or for the requirement to understand and master the terminology of the institution (Lawrence, 2005) in order for them to succeed.

The subsequent Chapter 5 explores the coaching experience of non-traditional student and the role of coaching in supporting them during their studies. Chapter 6 ‘Understanding the experiences of coaching non-traditional students’ presents and analyses the experiences of coaches to gain a better understanding of the nuances of coaching non-traditional students.

Chapter 5 Findings: The coaching experience of non-traditional students

This chapter and its subsequent sub-sections explores the students' experiences of coaching and role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their undergraduate studies. In spite of the individual uniqueness of their journeys, on the whole there were more comparable themes rather than contrasting accounts of their coaching experiences. As such, each individual experience was analysed and led to a collective account of the students' experiences of coaching described as a '*composite depiction'* (Moustakas, 1990 p. 50). The chapter commences by providing excerpts of how students defined coaching, it then provides collective accounts of those experiences in three aggregated themes.

1. A space for open impartial dialogue
2. When I talk, I feel and I think differently
3. My confidence is not the same as others

In addition to the accounts of the students that were introduced in Section 4.1, Ruby's and Paula's experiences of coaching are also incorporated in this section. Ruby is in the second year of her undergraduate degree, she is considered an under-represented student based on her ethnicity and previous education. Paula is in her first year of her undergraduate degree and is also categorised as under-represented student based on her ethnicity, which is considered to be a minority in HE. The accounts of both students are less descriptive as these students took part in the coaching sessions but did not participate in the interviews.

5.1 A space for open impartial dialogue

This section considers the students' accounts of coaching and my reflections as a coach and as a researcher as to the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their undergraduate studies.

By way of context and student accounts, the excerpts identify that the term coaching was not a term that that students found easy to define or to distinguish from fields such as *"mentoring"* and *"counselling*" (Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck; 2014; 2018; van

Nieuwerburgh, 2014; van Nieuwerburgh and Barr, 2016). Danika considered the terms coaching and mentoring to overlap so closely that she could not distinguish between the two.

> *"I remember going to a session about this and I just feel they all overlap so closely… But then I forgot the main differences to be honest but we did discuss... Mentoring and Coaching."* (Danika)

Danika also used the term *"counselling"* interchangeably at least once when explaining her coaching experience.

> *"With counselling nobody tells you this is what you should do. It's kinda like you end up figuring it out for yourself which is good as well. For me it definitely helped give me that motivational push I needed at the beginning of the year."* Danika

The students lack of knowledge and understanding of coaching did not appear to prevent them from engaging with the process. All students inadvertently described core aspects of coaching through the use of words such as "*non-judgement", "talk", "conversation*" and *"comfortable"* to describe their coaching experience.

By way of their accounts, most students were comfortable talking to someone disconnected from their course. The non-partisan approach was something that was welcomed by all students. The coach's disconnection with their tutor and their course was a consistent theme that students commented on. The excerpt from Ruby's reflective diary describes how she felt following on from a coaching session.

> *"I spoke about my current project brief and conflict amongst my Course Leader, Industry Designer and students... My coach allowed me to be as open as I wanted to be. I felt comfortable talking to her although she did not know much about my actual course." (Ruby – diary entry)*

Anastasia was able to have a dialogue about her progress that she felt would not ordinarily have taken place as an undergraduate student.

> *I wouldn't say, what I was telling you. I wouldn't bring it up in conversation you know with someone else, so it was good to find that out, otherwise I wouldn't know."* (Anastasia)

Octavia compared the coaching conversation to conversations that she would have with her parents. She welcomed the relaxed environment and opportunity to have her own objective viewpoint.

> *"Just that kind of relaxed dynamic that this has means that you are honest. You can say something and be like oh actually I didn't think about that before… I always talk with my parents about how I work and everything. Umm but it was nice to talk... With someone that I didn't know umm and didn't know why I would do certain things… It's been helpful to just vocalise that and have your own objective view I think."* (*Octavia)*

For Anna, the sense of impartiality meant she could express herself freely without judgement.

> *"I would say they are really handy to have someone to talk to and to realise what you are doing and to bring on your work. For me because I have no body to talk to its nice to have someone just to talk to. Because I have no one at home really and no one here. It's nice… and because it's not judgemental, I don't have to think oh my God if I say this your gonna like mark me down or hold that against me. So, it's nice to have someone impartial to talk to but not like a therapist, that is scary.*" (Anna)

Octavia's account echoed the same notion, for her, coaching created a sense of comfort enabling her to talk freely and without judgement.

> *"…it's really comfortable to just kind of talk about things... It's more about how you work and why that is, as opposed to some judgy thing with a tutor, that's got some reason behind it. Like we are having this meeting because you haven't done the work. It's not like that, it's not, there's no judgement …There's no judgement as to why I didn't do this... Or oh that's because you're like that… There are no assumptions as to why I am acting like this".* (Octavia)

From the excerpt it possible that both Anna and Octavia did not feel that they could freely confide in her tutors without negative repercussions which is in contrast to the notion of students turning to those that they see often for care and support. According to the study of Tett et al., (2017) students consider tutors to be their first point of contact for support

and to have a deep understanding of the student experience. As such, students were less likely to seek support from staff within support services offered by the university as they were perceived as 'remote and unconnected with them and their learning' (Tett, Cree Mullins and Christie 2017, p. 169). Students in this study were less likely to contact their tutor for support, which differed from the study of (Tett et. al., 2017) portraying that the experiences and the relationships that are built are not the same for all non-traditional students.

In the case of Anna and her experiences of education, coaching provided her with the opportunity to reflect and talk openly and freely with a person outside of her course as she felt unable to talk with her tutor. In the case of Octavia, she took comfort in having a conversation free from judgement about her work, which differed from the experience of her A Level education. She arrived at coaching with no connotations or prior experiences that she could draw from. To some extent her lack of knowledge and exposure enabled her to express herself without any inhibitions. This perhaps may have been different had she experienced a coaching approach that focused on students' needs pertaining to performance or focused on overcoming learning difficulties (Grant et al., 2010; Passmore and Brown, 2009; Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018).

Danika did not consider there to be much support for her during her studies. She perceived coaching provided an opportunity for her to *"go to someone that is away from the course*". She described other students being competitive and having similar *"stresses"* to herself and felt that it was good to talk to someone that could "*look at it from a different perspective when they are talking to you*".

Anastasia appeared initially apprehensive about coaching and found the time allocated to focus on herself to be unnerving. Undergraduate students are usually taught collectively in lectures or seminars with other students rather than spoken to individually unless during tutorials. Therefore, allocated time to focus on themselves without an agenda was not something students who participated in coaching were familiar with.

> *"At first I felt this was a bit strange. I find it hard to talk like for an hour about myself. After a while it was alright I got used to it".* (Anastasia)

Not all students appeared to be receptive to coaching or seemed to have an open or honest dialogue with their coach. Paula described herself during the coaching session as *"shy, nervous and reserved person who does not open up"*. She had brought her

assumptions and her judgements of her past educational experiences with her in the coaching session.

> *"There were assumptions and judgements even in school. I was always second to my friend. She is not my closest friend anymore. She would always put me and another friend at the time down, the other friend more so than me. She would do little things and perhaps the judgement stems from that… I have always had negative thoughts as a teenager but it has got worse because I worry about what people think."* (Paula)

Despite how she felt, Paula indicated that "*being open had been good,"* she expressed that talking to someone that she did not know about her feelings was a positive experience. She struggled with negative emotions and did not know how to challenge the thought of *"not being good enough."* Paula spent the majority of the session crying. Despite being asked whether the session should end, she chose to continue describing coaching as a *"being able to see things from a different perspective"* as a good outcome of the session. Despite the declaration within the session of *"feeling good", "content", "happy"* and "*comfortable,"* Paula did not continue with further coaching sessions despite responding to emails to apologise for being late or feeling unwell.

As a coach reflecting on the students' experiences of coaching and the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their studies. I felt that the ambiguity around their perception of coaching was of a benefit to them. Not knowing or having any preconceptions meant that there was no agenda and students were free to discuss any topic or matter that they considered would be beneficial to them at the time. For some students this meant that they did not have a specific goal in mind when embarking on a coaching conversation. However, for students in this study, a coaching conversation and the key skills of their coach such as active listening, questioning and clarifying (Bresser and Wilson, 2010) enabled them to listen to their own responses, reflect, be objective and consider what their next steps were.

It is possible that in order for students to feel comfortable to engage in a coaching conversation that a number of 'active ingredients' would have to be in place (de Haan, 2008 p.37). In therapeutic terms for instance, Rogers (2007) suggests that the therapeutic relationship and the non-verbal aspects of that relationship, for example the regularity of the meetings, the dedicated time given to client issues and the possibility of solutions, progress or change could constitute common factors in every therapeutic

situation. In regard to this study 'active ingredients' common to most students could be the perception of non-judgement of their coach and being in a comfortable and relaxed environment for their coaching conversations to occur. From a coaching perspective it could be argued that the coaches' non-judgemental stance created the conditions in which most students could be open, honest and encouraged to share their thoughts more freely (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). The role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students in this study was to recognise the importance of adopting a non-judgemental stance as not doing so could have been detrimental to the coaching relationship and likely to have disrupted any sense of safety that may have been created (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019).

From the students' perspective an active ingredient could be the need to create a comfortable and relaxed environment for a coaching conversation to occur. The role of coach in supporting non-traditional students therefore was to consider the mechanics of coaching and that the physical coaching environment where the sessions took place (Starr, 2011). For instance, ensuring that the date and time was mutually agreed by both the coach and the student. The coaching sessions also took place on university premises within an environment familiar to students and at a time that was self-directed and convenient for themselves and for the coach. This approach appeared different to the environment they were accustomed to, for instance timetables and teaching are established and students are expected to organise their time and to attend lectures and seminars that are fixed and less flexible. Coaching was perceived as the opposite. Not only in terms of a mutual agreement, coaching was driven by their topic of conversation and solutions or reasonable steps towards change were taken by most students' as a way to overcome their challenges.

From the unique perspective of the researcher who has direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Adopting a non-judgemental stance and maintaining a neutral and impartial perspective as a coach was fundamental to non-traditional students and their coaching relationship. It is acknowledged there is a risk that a coach can appear distant and uncaring if they appear to be completely impartial (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019) and that positive relationships with academic staff, for instance can enable students to gain self-confidence if they believe that staff care about them and about the outcome of their studies (Thomas 2002; Tett et al., 2017). It is also important to recognise that coaching relationships develop over time and once rapport, openness and trust has been established (Starr, 2011). Therefore, creating an encouraging and positive conversation from the onset without first establishing a

relationship could be perceived as pretentious by non-traditional students especially if the coaching relationship is short-term and the purpose and understanding of coaching is not a clear.

Summary

This subsection explored the students' experience of coaching. From these accounts it would appear that coaching, for most students that took part in the study, created a space for an open and impartial dialogue. Their ability to have an open dialogue with their coach that was free from judgement was one of the key aspects in the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their studies. From the excerpts, it was evident that students were comfortable to talk to someone from outside of their course. From their perspective knowledge of their course, their prior educational experiences, their relationships with family and peers or prior insight of their background as students was not required to engage in a one-to-one conversation. Most students positively identified that they felt comfortable with the disconnection with their course and the impartiality of their coach, which could suggest, that for students, created a perception of a situation that was free of judgement.

The second key aspect of the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their studies was the notion of a comfortable and relaxed environment identified by students. Most students felt they were able to engage in an open and honest dialogue with their coach and in doing so were able them express themselves without any inhibition or limitations. The comfortable and relaxed environment appeared to support their specific need as they identified it at the time. For one student it was having the opportunity to talk to someone, for another student it was the ability converse and become aware of matters they may not have otherwise identified. For a further student it was the ability to vocalise and have their own objective viewpoint.

In Paula's case whilst it may appear that her coaching conversation was challenging, the experiences of other coaches suggests that coaching should be more than 'a comfortable conversation' (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019 p. 23). It can therefore be argued that the role of a coaching for non-traditional students can be one of challenge, especially when providing challenge is considered an important aspect of coaching (van Nieuwerburgh, 2017; Rogers, 2016; Blakey and Day, 2012). It is also important however, that there is an appropriate balance of support and challenge for coaching to be effective (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). Rogers (2007) suggests in therapeutic terms that it is necessary for certain conditions to exist and to continue over time for any

constructive change to occur. It is therefore possible that for non-traditional students, creating a comfortable environment could be a minimum condition that must exist for an open and impartial dialogue be formed and for some, a condition that should possibly continue over a period of time to make a perceived difference.

For Paula however, it would appear that her experience of coaching differed to the other students, as she only participated in one session and did not return. It is therefore possible for her that that minimal condition was not met. It is also possible that coaching built an awareness of some of the issues and anxieties that she perhaps was not ready to face or to take responsibility for. Or perhaps Paula did not have that feeling of acceptance and unconditional positive regard within the coaching session (Rogers, 2007 p. 243). In therapeutic terms this is the notion of a therapist demonstrating their ability to display that there are no conditions to acceptance even though the client may express negative feelings within a session. Whilst coaching differs from therapy in practice, it does draw from related disciplines such as counselling. It is therefore important to identify and acknowledge that all students may not be in the place of readiness in terms of identifying challenges and taking responsibility for what to change. Paula was signposted to other University services such as counselling which she appeared to welcome. It is not known if Paula accessed this service.

5.2 When I talk I feel and I think differently

This section provides accounts of the feelings and thoughts of students during coaching. Excerpts are included from students who participated in the interview and students that participated solely in coaching but provided feedback through their reflective diaries. What was consistent with all students who participated was how they felt talking assisted them to think or to feel differently.

Most students in this study struggled with procrastination or lacked motivation at some point during their studies. Anastasia and Octavia as first year students shared similar experiences of how talking to their coach motivated them to take action.

> *"I think in the first one I talked about motivation and afterwards I felt more like motivated. I was like I am going to start. I had the feeling to do more, I was more into it." (*Anastasia)

Both Anastasia and Octavia found living away from home difficult and the concept of independent learning challenging. Coaching conversations opened a dialogue to discuss the issues that they faced in adapting to their first year of studies. Coaching sessions improved balancing her social life, work commitments and studies, for example Anastasia *"planned out"* what she had to do to get the work done.

> *"We spoke about time management in one of the sessions and I was asked how many weeks I had left. I was like oh my God so, we like planned out what I had to do. I had to get all that stuff done. So, I think if I had not thought about all that stuff then I wouldn't have got it done in time. And just kind of making me more aware of the things that I need to work on and know that I'm kind of weak in them."* (Anastasia)

Anastasia became responsible once she became aware of the areas she needed to work on. During the coaching session she formed a timetable working backward from the submission date and completed it with all the activities she had such as university, work social life. It can therefore be argued that in order for students to be able to take responsibility, there first has to be a level of awareness which would support the essence of coaching (Whitmore, 2009).

For Octavia, hearing her words aloud assisted her in organising and making sense of what she had to do. This motivated her to study rather than spend time engaging in non-academic related activities.

> *"I think afterwards I feel more motivated to do work definitely. If I haven't done the work and if I have just spoken about not doing the work. I think, okay, I'll must go and do the work I have just spoken about"*. (Octavia)

Danika described coaching as something that motivated her to take action and to *"tackle"* her *"procrastination."* She struggled to motivate herself throughout her studies and in particular her final year. She describes coaching as giving her the "*push"* that she needed to start her research.

> *"For me personally when I used to finish a session I would feel so much more motivated especially in the beginning of the third year… Before, I was just like I cannot do this… I would come out of a session and think right I need to do this, I*

need to do that, whereas before I would be like, I just couldn't be bothered to do anything." (Danika)

Danika continues to use similar method to self-coach herself as a way of thinking of her own solutions.

"When I came out of the session, even like throughout this final year, I would sit there and ask myself those kinds of questions as well. So, it's like, I think that's the best way for me to kind of, I don't know like get everything out… Even after coaching I kind of picked up on the whole writing stuff down and started picking up a weekly planner… I started writing stuff down that I wanted to be done and I think should be done and that really helps." (Danika)

Danika did not just arrive at the position that she is in now. Initially coaching for her was a way to declutter her thoughts in order to identity ways to move forward.

"I just had a lot on my mind it was cluttered with so much thoughts about what I was going to do. How I was going to do it and I think within the session it's like I don't know how to explain it. When you talk about something it's just all in your head and its overwhelming it's too much and then when you get it all out. It's almost like it is leaving your mind as soon as you say it kind of thing." (Danika)

Research studies show that perceived raised level of motivation is not unique to non-traditional students. Feeling motivated was important for PhD students that felt despondent and confused about their studies or challenged by balancing their personal life, academic work (Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018) and levels of procrastination (Lane and De Wilde, 2018). Coaching was also found to have potential positive effects on lowering procrastination and increasing the productivity of undergraduate students (Lefdahl-Davies et al., Dyson and Torbrand, 2015; Sims, 2014).

Whilst some students were reluctant to access support that was on offer at the university, coaching however was welcomed and considered to be beneficial. Most students did not identify specific needs that could be supported through the facilitation of coaching. During the process of coaching however, all students were able to identify challenges and most were able to reflect on realistic solutions to solve them particularly when it came to time management, procrastination and identifying negative thought processes or emotions such as stress and anxiety (Lancer and Eatough, 2018; Short et al. 2010).

Throughout the coaching process some students became more aware of their reduced stress and anxiety through a non-directive yet facilitated structured process of coaching (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). Listening and providing students with the space and opportunity to talk freely, reflect and consider possible solutions was fundamental to the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their studies. As was the dynamics between the coach and the student in terms energy, body language, levels of engagement and rapport (van Nieuwerburgh, 2014).

Anna and Danika as final year students shared similar experiences of how talking to their coach brought a sense of relief and helped them to think of ways to perform specific tasks or overcome challenges.

> *"I felt at times relief just to get it out… because I had no one to talk to. I don't have a boyfriend or anything. I literally have to boil it inside and that's when it goes bad because I suppress my emotions really badly. I shouldn't do it but I do and it just boils and constantly boils and then one day it will literally come out in pure rage, because literally I have kept everything inside."* (Anna)

Danika expressed how talking enabled her to feel at ease, think, prioritise and feel less stressed. She expressed how coaching came at the *"right time"* for her, had she not had so much to contend with she would have found it difficult to engage with coaching.

> *"I feel at ease and not stressed…It's almost like a complete opposite after you come out because you just talk through everything and at the end of it you kind of start thinking of solutions. You start thinking okay I've got x amount of weeks to do this, let me prioritise and do that. I think it just made me realise that although this is a stressful time there is a way to go about it to make you not as stressed."* (Danika)

Not dissimilar to other studies, coaching is perceived to support the stress management of undergraduate and postgraduate students (Short et al., 2010; Grant, 2003) and was reported to positively influence PhD participants to think, feel supported and to have someone to talk to (Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018). Undergraduate students have also experienced feeling of "relief" and "release" in the process of coaching (Lancer and Eatough, 2018) and similarly, new insights and perspectives on their world and their thinking (p. 79).

An enormous achievement for Anna was acknowledging that over a number of sessions she had begun to think differently. Although she did not achieve the grade that she wanted, Anna turned something that she perceived to be negative into something more positive. She was driven by obtaining a First-Class Honours degree. Any experiences that were not congruent with her ambitions derailed her.

> *"From the session I have more of a realisation about myself. I say things, the coach listens to the things I say and pick up on things. I then think actually maybe I do this or maybe I shouldn't be like this and it changes my way of thinking. So instead of me thinking now because I've got a C for my essay I'm going to fail that's it I'm a failure. I actually flip it round. Whereas before I would have been very, very negative and like really upset about it. Whereas now I see it as it's probably a good thing to push myself".*" (Anna)

This excerpt from Danika's reflective diary describes what she considered to most useful about one of her coaching sessions, echoing the similar thoughts and feelings to other students in the study.

> *"The most helpful thing was the use of reflective thinking and self-assessing my abilities. I left the session feeling positive about what I needed to do next and also on what my learning drawbacks were in the previous years... I feel more enthusiastic and motivated towards tackling the third year. I think the session helped me to reevaluate where I am right now and where I would like to progress to in terms of my academic work."* (Danika)

In a reflective diary, Ruby acknowledged that coaching did not offer her any further insight into what she had already identified herself.

> *"My coach was a good listener. However, because I had I already identified what I needed to do and had come up with my own method to overcome it. There wasn't much she could advise."* (Ruby – diary entry)

She did however acknowledge that coaching was a useful way to assist her to openly discuss her thoughts with others.

During a coaching session, Paula expressed that she felt *"good", "happy"* and *"content"* despite crying during her session. Although she was able to talk momentarily within the

coaching session, the emotion that she was perceived to display was one of sadness, the opposite to what was being spoken of. It is recognised that a coaching conversation can bring with it both positive and negative emotions from an unconscious to a conscious mind (Moore and Jackson, 2018). It is therefore possible that through the process of enquiry, exploration and challenge, that coaching stimulated an increased awareness of what Paula may have thought or felt about a particular situation at the time (Starr, 2011). The role of coaching in supporting Paula was to be aware of her emotions, to listen, empathise and to relate to her, in her own terms, to gain more of an understanding of her world (Starr, 2011).

Summary

It is apparent that coaching supports students at various ages and stages of their education (Briggs and van Nieuwerburgh, 2010; Passmore and Brown, 2009; Short el al. 2010; Fox Eades, 2011). Existing research offers positive findings that suggest coaching in HE offers benefits to students, from reducing stress and procrastination (Lefdahl-Davies et al., Dyson and Torbrand, 2015; Sims, 2014; Short et al., 2010; Grant, 2003) to helping students to think, feel supported, to have someone to talk to and to provide them with new insight. (Lancer and Eatough, 2018; Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018). This study also supports such findings through the accounts of non-traditional students who participated in the coaching. Their experiences suggest that the role that coaching plays in offering support is not too dissimilar to students that may not be categorised as such, by way of encouraging students to think and feel differently during their studies (Lancer and Eatough, 2018; Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018). The slight nuance for students that participated in this study appears to be that coaching was not used as an intervention to address specific needs such as enhancing student performance or overcoming learning difficulties (Grant et al., 2010). The coaching dialogue mainly occurred without students necessarily having a specific goal in mind. The benefits of coaching for non-traditional students however, were not dissimilar to the benefits experienced by other students in the studies previously mentioned.

What is less apparent is the extent in which coaching does not benefit students and the potential value and insight such accounts could provide to the field of coaching. For instance, Ruby identified that coaching reinforced what she already knew. Apart from raising her awareness to that fact, there was nothing in her reflective diary, or the reflective diary of her coach, to indicate there had been little or no benefit to coaching.

In Paula's case a number of assumptions could be made about her emotions and the role of coaching in supporting her through a difficult situation or challenging coaching conversation. Providing challenge is considered an important aspect of coaching (Blakey and Day, 2012; Rogers, 2016; van Nieuwerburgh, 2017) however, it is unclear if a level of maturity is required to deal with the challenge of coaching. Or if certain conditions are required to exist over time prior to coaching, for any constructive change to occur (Rogers, 2007). What is also unclear is if non-traditional students find it difficult to think or feel differently while reflecting on, or still going through adverse experiences. Whilst the essence of coaching is to unlock "people's potential to maximize their own performance", (Gallwey, 1986; Whitmore, 2009 p.10) unlocking potential when potential is difficult to identify could be problematic in terms of exacerbating that awareness. An assumption could be made that the 'readiness' or timing to engage in coaching rests with the student. However, it must not be overlooked that coaching like other support mechanisms such as mentoring and counselling, may not have been the right method of support.

What was apparent from the excepts however was, coaching supported most students to think and to feel differently, although not all demonstrated the desire to commence the process of change through coaching. For Paula in particular, the role of coaching was to be aware of her emotions, to listen, empathise and to relate to her, in her own terms (Starr, 2011). It was also to signpost and to make her aware of the University's Counselling Team. It is important to recognise that coaches may have a different viewpoint when dealing with challenging situations. However, what is essential is that coaches have an enhanced awareness of this, as emotions can help or hinder a student's progress (Cox and Bachkirova, 2007)

5.3 My confidence in not the same as others

This section explores how students expressed their confidence during coaching and how they perceived their confidence when carrying out aspects of their studies, or their level of confidence when comparing themselves to others. Confidence was an area of discussion that emerged either explicitly or implicitly during coaching and/or the interviews. The challenge for this study was identifying common themes that depict students' experiencing confidence or portraying it in the same way. These students similar to the study of Tett et al., (2017) are considered to be non-traditional and whilst it might be anticipated that they would have shared experiences, in practice the accounts they shared were multilayered and varied. Confidence nonetheless was considered an

important aspect of this study, as all students either recognised it as something that they had, others had more of, or something that they sought in order to be able to achieve a desired outcome.

Anastasia has confidence in tasks that she is familiar with, for instance essay writing. As mentioned in her earlier vignette, she considered herself to be "*quite strong"* and therefore confident when it came to writing essays. Accessing services such as Academic Support was not a requirement based on her perceived confidence in her ability to carry out that particular task (Bandura, 1997), and the feedback provided by her tutor during a seminar.

Similarly, Octavia's perceived confidence was in her ability to complete her essays at the last minute without receiving any prior feedback from her tutors or accessing services such as Academic support.

> *"I don't like asking for help (laugh)… I'd rather kind of figure it out on my own, I am more confident that way… I'd rather show them the finish article and then correct that and say okay you need to change this and do that for the final thing… Or I'll do that on the next project. It kind of worries teachers I think. I'd be like don't worry, I know what I'm doing. In my head I know I am confident, but they don't always trust me."* Octavia

Octavia's confidence in her ability to write her essay was based on her previous experience of obtaining A Level English at college. For her, that accomplishment contributed to her confidence in her ability to submit her essay without prior feedback, even though she ran the risk of having to change aspects of it at a later date. Similar to Anastasia and Octavia, when non-traditional students in the study of Christie et al. (2008) developed a sense of competence in their abilities as learners or received good feedback, the validation received was significant to their sense of self-confidence.

Essay writing was not something that Danika was familiar with, she was less confident in her ability to carry out her work independently. She described essay writing as *"stressful"* and sought assistance from Academic Support in her final year. Danika still has moments of self-doubt but now perceives herself as being more confident in her ability to communicate with others.

> *"I do doubt myself a lot but then when I see the grades and the feedback that I get then I don't need to doubt myself as much as I am… In terms of communication with people, in the beginning I would literally avoid it as much as I could… I wouldn't say nothing… But now I will put myself out there… Even away from uni scenarios … I can see myself talking more and like engaging in more conversation, than just sitting there… That's just the main way I think my confidence has changed."* Danika

Anna also spoke of her lack of confidence when it came to essay writing. Writing had been a challenged throughout her school life, and she was less familiar with essay writing at university. Her perceived limitations and prior educational experiences had a negative impact on her confidence at university. The considerable gap that she had between school and university also had an impact on the perception of her academic ability (Crozier et al., 2008). As mentioned in her vignette, Anna gained confidence when she perceived others to have faith and belief in her and her academic ability. This was something that was sought, but not perceived to be received from her family, teachers at school or tutors during her time at university. Her confidence however varied depending on how familiar she was with a particular task. Anna considers her confidence to be "*a mixture"* and something she constantly battles with.

> *"I'm very shy, like really shy but then other times I'm not, one minute I will be that person and the other minute I will be the other person. These two people fight constantly so that's why sometimes I will be really happy… But then the other half is fighting with negative Nancy. I just constantly battle with myself like sometimes I annoy myself because the horrible half will come out and I'm like why."* (Anna)

As a student Anna was less confident in her ability to partake in new tasks such as essay writing. As a Beauty Therapist with over thirteen years' experience however, Anna considers herself to be *"confident as an individual*" describing herself as being *"good at managerial roles, instructing, delegating and getting people talking".*

Paula explicitly mentioned in a coaching session that she was not confident when it came to group work or presentations. Her nervous demeanor when presenting to an audience did not show the best of her abilities.

"I am not confident as a person and at university. I do not participate in group work. I have been like this since school. I hate talking to people in fact I dread it and am relieved when it is over as I am no longer the focus of attention." (Paula)

Not only does Paula's perceived confidence impact her at university, it prevents her from seeking guidance at work. She recognises the need to ask for help when required but by her own recognition "*would have to struggle in silence"* rather than ask for the support.

"I do not like to ask for help I am embarrassed that it would be considered as being weak." (Paula)

Paula worries about people's opinion, about her reputation and the impression that she gives. She describes herself as wanting to have her "*own opinion"* as she tends to ask for the opinion of others before making decisions. Paula sought the opinion of others before demonstrating her interest in coaching and after the first session made the decision not to return.

Some students in the study made comparisons with themselves and others within the coaching sessions and interviews. Students were less confident in areas they perceived their peers to have more experience in or in areas they perceived their peers to have more of an advantage (Schunk, 1987). Anastasia compared herself to her peers particularly around pressure points such as assessment deadlines when comparing herself to others, she felt like she wasn't getting as much done.

"I've got this friend who does loads of work I mean absolute loads and being around him sometimes just stresses me out. He makes me feel like I haven't done that much I then lose confidence. Like I'll be doing something first, but then he would be doing the thing that I should be doing second. Then I'll be really stressed." (Anastasia)

Anna felt "*belittled"* when a peer secured the placement that she desired during her studies. It took Anna several interviews to secure a placement and not one of her choice.

"I would like to be confident that I am good enough or just as good enough than everyone else…I find it hard being around her sometimes…I don't gloat as I know how I feel and I don't want someone else to feel how I feel…. My confidence is ok but I never tell people what grade I get. My work got used as an example of

good work and now people are watching me and I just want them to back off." (Anna)

Anastasia is aware that she is only in the first term of the first year. However, her perception that her peers have more experience is the driving force behind her application for an internship. A successful application would make her "*more confident"* in her abilities.

"I would like to be confident in my skills so when I leave I can definitely get a job. I'm really good at pattern cutting, I want to do an internship in the summer. I don't actually think I'm good enough compared to other people. I feel like coming here and seeing how good everyone else is… most times in internships they want someone like sewing or pattern cutting and umm well sewing on industrial machine." (Anastasia)

Anastasia's grades also influenced her confidence. Her desire for higher grades would give her the recognition and confidence that she considers is required for the practical aspects of her course (Christie et al., 2008).

"I want to do better this term… So far my grades… Well this one was a C and the last one was a C and I don't want to be at a C I want to be higher. Even with a B I will be happy with I would be confident I would be getting better rather than just staying the same. I wouldn't be overly confident but I would think I'm improving. If they had given me an A then I would think it must have been a good pattern but then if I knew I could do better then, I would not be as confident in it if I knew it could be so much better." (Anastasia)

Summary

Confidence was an area of discussion either implicitly or explicitly during coaching for most non-traditional students. Where their confidence was placed was determined by where the students' perceived themselves to be, based on previous experiences and knowledge in terms of their achievements (Bong and Clark, 1999; Bong and Skaalvik, 2003). Anastasia and Octavia as individuals were confident to complete their essays based on the belief that they could successfully accomplish what they were required to do (Bandura, 1997) and had the skills and ability to carry out the task (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003). Anna and Danika were less confident, both had limited experience of essay writing and found it difficult to engage in their academic writing. According to Bandura

(1993) students who have a low sense of self-efficacy shy away from tasks and dwell on their personal difficulties or obstacles that they encounter. Whilst that notion may be considered to be true, most students wanted to overcome their challenges, rather than shy away from them and identify practical ways for them to overcome their barriers.

Some students in the study made comparisons with themselves and were less confident in areas they perceived their peers to have more experience of or have more of an advantage over themselves (Schunk, 1987). For some students those comparisons made them desire to be more confident in their abilities or develop themselves further to prepare for future careers representing an 'ideal self', belief, characteristics or aspirations of the person they would ideally like to be (Sebastian et al., 2008).

Confidence was an area that was discussed at some point during coaching and appeared to be a particular issue for non-traditional students in this study. Was is clear is that coaching facilitates conversations where the issue of confidence can be discussed. What is not evident from the accounts is the role that coaching had in supporting them with their confidence when the topic arose either implicitly or explicitly during a coaching conversation.

Chapter summary

This chapter presented the coaching experiences of non-traditional students during their undergraduate studies. For most student's there was a sense of non-judgement during coaching, creating a space in which open and honest dialogues could occur without preconceived reasons for their attendance during coaching. Students across most accounts were positive about their coaching experiences and could identify ways that coaching supported them to think and feel differently. For other students, the support received through coaching was not as easily identified or, appeared to be a less positive coaching experience. Coaching did however, facilitate conversations where confidence could be discussed. Some students were explicit of their desire to be more confidence, others described themselves as being less confident in aspects of their studies.

The following Chapter 6 'Understanding the experiences of coaching non-traditional students' presents and analyses the experiences of coaches to gain a better understanding of the nuances of coaching non-traditional students. It also incorporates my own experience and insight of supporting non-traditional students through coaching. It makes references to literature in order to elaborate some aspects of the data analysis.

Chapter 6 Findings: Understanding the experiences of coaching non-traditional students

This chapter presents and analyses the experiences of coaches to gain a better understanding of the nuances of coaching non-traditional students. The chapter commences by providing a brief synopsis of the four coaches and their experiences of coaching in HE. It then provides a collective account of those experience in three aggregated themes:

1. The challenges of the intervention of coaching
2. Perceived need to be more directive
3. The ambiguity of identifying and facilitating confidence through coaching

A summary and discussion of the findings include relevant literature to elaborate some aspects of the emergent themes.

All coaches are employed at the same HEI and coach staff as part of the University's Coaching Network in addition to their full-time role. Melanie has over seven years' experience as a coach and works within a professional service department supporting senior colleagues. Carolina has three years' experience as a coach and works within a professional service department. Phil has over four years' experience as a coach and held a number of teaching and professional support positions. I have six years' experience as a coach and work within a professional service department.

6.1 The challenges of the intervention of coaching

This theme expresses the challenges experienced by coaches when coaching non-traditional students. My own experience as a coach is explored in parallel with the coaches' and comparisons are made identifying commonalties and nuances across all experiences. These challenges are shown in Figure 4.

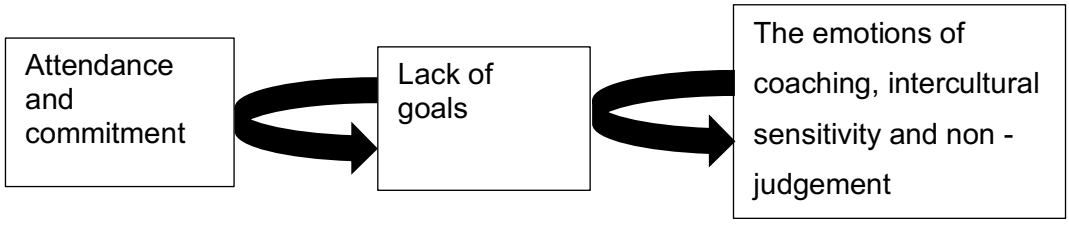


Figure 4 Coaches challenges

Attendance and commitment

The coaches that participated in the study all experienced difficulties with student attendance and their commitment to coaching. Most coaches commonly considered 'contracting' by way of a coaching agreement between themselves and the students to be an appropriate method to communicate the ethical nature and conditions of coaching (Association for Coaching 2018; International Coaching Federation 2018; Bresser and Wilson, 2010). Not all however followed this tradition, Carolina took a formal business-like approach to 'contracting' using a quarter of the first session to outline the nature and conditions of coaching such as its purpose, boundaries, confidentiality, logistical arrangements, commitment and duration of sessions. I adopted a flexible approach to 'contracting' we discussed the student's understanding of coaching, I then explained the differences between coaching, mentoring and counselling. Melanie did not want to emphasise what the student "*should or shouldn't do*" she wanted to make her student "*feel comfortable*" in the first session.

> "*I wanted to be approachable, friendly as a priority, very quickly I had to build that trust and rapport so that was my priority. I probably rushed through the contracting bit because I thought this is going to be so boring for them and I wanted to get on to stuff that would be useful for them."* (Melanie)

Almost all students required at least one session to be rescheduled at short notice, informing the coach of their non-attendance the morning of the session, within a few hours of the session commencing, or not at all. Carolina expressed her *"disappointment"* when a student failed to attend a coaching session, and Melanie had limited scope to reschedule coaching due to prior work commitments.

> *"I suppose my biggest expectations would be that they would turn up because I know how pressured they are but also it's not that easy for me to keep rescheduling. She just kept cancelling at the last minute and communication was a bit difficult."* (Melanie)

Phil experienced difficulties with his students attending coaching and tried a more flexible approach by changing the session to another university site. This appeared to have worked in terms of attendance, but not in terms of level of engagement.

> "*We changed location from where we were originally going to meet and she cancelled it. So, we rearranged and met at the re-scheduled location and she came late with no explanation when she arrived."* (Phil)

Despite Phil adopting a more flexible approach, the student did not attend further coaching sessions. He made several attempts to contact her afterwards and, in some ways, hoped that he *"didn't intimidate her".*

> *"We agreed on a plan and we agreed on a timeframe and I said I would be in touch to arrange another session and despite repeat prompts... There was no contact with her which was a shame, I mean it was and it wasn't because this student was seriously challenging."*

My own experiences of coaching students echoed some of the accounts that were experienced by the coaches in terms of cancellations and rescheduling of sessions but there was also a subtle difference. Coaching students required a more flexible approach and coaches', including myself initially expected students to work within the parameters given in terms of the set availability of the coaches. The reverse however was more effective, allowing students to choose dates and times that were convenient to them, for instance, on a day they were already attending university worked better. Or spontaneously respond to an email to meet on the same day to fit around part-time work commitments. Understandably, that level of flexibility was not always viable and whilst it did not completely eliminate the requests made to reschedule sessions, it did improve the overall student attendance.

The second challenge for coaches that participated in the study, was the slight nuances in understanding students' commitment to coaching and other commitments which might impact their ability to attend coaching sessions. For instance, Melanie linked her understanding of commitment to the parallels that had been drawn from the experiences of coaching staff in terms of attendance and engagement. As such, she considered attendance and punctuality as a way of her student demonstrating their commitment to coaching. Melanie described her student as being "*motivated, organised, and engaged*" particularly when she became aware that the student was *"juggling a lot of things."*

> *"I was lucky with my student, once she realised this would be helpful for her she was keen to keep doing it. If you've got someone who is motivated and*

reasonably organised they are more likely to turn up. Or maybe it's the ones who are not that motivated who I don't know might struggle." (Melanie)

Melanie's account perhaps suggests that positive inferences of a student's level of commitment can be made on the basis of their attendance and motivation at a coaching session. Whereas a student's non-attendance, or perceived lack of motivation can have the opposite outcome, and can be considered as disorganised, or demotivated when the student could have conflicting commitments that a coach may not be aware of at the time.

Phil identified his student's commitment to coaching by their attendance and level of engagement, drawing comparisons between them.

"He is lot more motivated and a lot more organised but he is more mature. Whereas the other young woman is clearly much younger and much more immature in general. She wasn't very articulate… if you like, to be able to express herself more freely." (Phil)

Phil acknowledged the challenges that students may have in terms of commitment when comparing his experiences of coaching staff members. He considered both to have *"similar anxieties but different sources of anxieties"* in terms of issues of time management and performance (Thomas, 2010). Staff were anxious about work commitments whilst students were anxious about their studies.

I was particularly challenged when a student arrived late for a session and had to leave to attend a lecture. I was only informed when the student was ready to leave. The session lasted 35 minutes and no clear goals had been set. I assumed the student had to leave to attend a lecture, however a part of me also presumed that she lacked commitment and that her time could be better utilised elsewhere.

These excerpts may appear to be disconnected to the notion of coaches' understanding differing commitments. However, as a coach, being aware of the differentiating commitments that non-traditional students have could reduce the assumptions that are made when ascertaining commitment. It could also reduce the elongated time that some coaches experienced in rescheduling coaching sessions, challenging the notion that non-traditional students are difficult to reach and find it difficult to engage (Marie, MacKenzie and Wright, 2017). Striking the balance however, in my experience can be

difficult, in terms of being aware and adjusting your own work commitments to accommodate the students' commitments. Equally, overcompensating to allow for such differences can be a challenge in terms of accepting behaviours that can be perceived as unprofessional within the ethical parameters of professionalism and standards that are expected of a coach. This was a challenge for all participating coaches.

Lack of goals

A common theme for most coaches was the lack of goal setting by the student coachees. Coaches were familiar with coaching staff members who had a clearer idea of the topics they were going to discuss during coaching that would lead to specific goals. However, students were vague about their goals and generally required more time to identify them during coaching.

From previous experiences, Melanie identified that it could take at least one session to identify specific goals. When coaching staff, she tried to get them to decide their goals in advance of the session. Melanie suggested that the same approach applied to staff could have been be reinforced with students, but she decided to use a different approach with the student coachees.

> *"I think a relaxed pace is useful too and when you just have 3 sessions it is important to be realistic about those goals."* (Melanie)

Melanie used a "balance wheel" to help her student identity the options that were available to her during coaching. Carolina used the familiar 'GROW model' (Whitmore, 2009) as a structure whilst coaching and continued to use that method without the student having a clear goal in mind.

> *"My experience of coaching students is they do not come to the session with a goal or aim. In the first session I had to ask a lot of questions to find out what they wanted to focus on. Or even to find out why they were here".* (Carolina)

Phil described the first two sessions that he had with his students as *"difficult."* One student had not identified a specific goal by the end of the first session, the other Phil described as like *"wading through treacle*" and *"like getting blood out of a stone."*

> *"She was incredibly passive… and trying to get her to even reflect or even to think… You know big silence, you know tumble weed."* (Phil)

The other student, did not find a specific goal until the end of the second session.

> "*The first session… we talked for two hours... Then a few weeks later we actually came to a similar vain… we'd been talking for an hour and a half or something and he stumbled on this thing and then it all just came flooding out and so after over 3 hours of going around in circles all of a sudden in the last half an hour it was all laid out and he left really enthusiastic."* (Phil).

Phil adopted a more flexible approach by extending the timeframe of coaching to assist his student to achieve a goal by the end of the second session. This flexible approach led the coaching sessions to continue over a longer period than anticipated.

> *"The timescale had been elongated because… it wasn't until the end of the second session that we got to the root of the problem and then a plan emerged…. He had this plan for the summer based on that so I thought it was pointless us meeting together in a month so we waited until after the summer*." (Phil)

The excerpts suggest that non-traditional students are likely to require more time to identify goals than the traditional coaching sessions of an hour, to an hour and a half would permit. It also suggests that coaching may occur less frequently than every 4-6 weeks for instance, to accommodate for when students are not attending university. The flexibility in terms of the *"elongated"* time and number of sessions provided by Phil could have supported the student to identify for himself, the topics that he wanted to discuss. As such the additional time provided by Phil could support the importance of not rushing non-traditional students into goal setting and action planning prematurely before they have the opportunity to explore 'test and learn' various options (Rossiter, 2009) that work for them.

Conversely, my experience of coaching students as part of the University's attainment project in the academic year 2014/15 differed to that of the coaches. Most students were able to identity their goal and expected outcomes within a coaching session of a thirty-minute timeframe as opposed to the duration of an hour to an hour and a half allocated as part of this study. The thirty-minute sessions were intense from my perspective as a coach as it required extreme focus, structure and being completely present in the coaching session. From a student's perspective however, the short-focused sessions perhaps gave students the flexibility to attend without interfering with other commitments that they had. It also perhaps reduced the apprehension that some students experienced

when they initially attended coaching and had to participate in a one-to-one conversation for a longer period of time which some were perhaps not accustomed to. Timing and the term in which coaching took place could also have been a contributing factor to establishing goals. Issues of time management, self-confidence, the perception of self and others were all reoccurring themes around assessment submissions. It is therefore possible that working through those challenges in a structured way using the GROW model assisted with identifying goals and ways in which to move forward.

My experience of coaching non-traditional students as part of this study was not dissimilar to the experiences that I had of coaching students as part of the coaching trial in 2014/15, by way of topics of discussion - issues of time management and self-confidence. The nuances were supporting the facilitation of coaching for students who identified specific goals such as, wanting to increase their confidence but could not identify ways to do so. Those sessions were particularly challenging and I did not always feel equipped or confident to be able to facilitate ways forward for the student.

The emotions of coaching, inter-cultural sensitivity and non-judgement

Another challenge faced by coaches was the emotions that were felt and the notion of non-judgement during coaching. What was common across all accounts was that all coaches experienced emotions that they were not accustomed to when faced with challenges or new experiences with no prior knowledge to draw from. Phil *"agonised"* after the first session with one student and expressed his frustration with another. He considered building rapport as a way of establishing trust (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012; Starr, 2011; Tolhurst, 2010) in the same way that he did coaching staff members. This was the first time that he felt that he could not build rapport during coaching.

> *"The other student it was just impossible. It was like talking to a brick wall honestly… I mean you can lead a horse to water and all that…."* (Phil)

Phil questioned the dynamics of his coaching relationship during a supervision session he received some reassurance from his group supervision but was accustomed to receiving positive feedback when coaching staff members. To receive otherwise was a new experience, and as such it was difficult for Phil not to make judgements about himself and the student when he did not obtain the outcome that he expected.

> *"It was immensely frustrating. I didn't get angry with her I felt a bit sorry for her… I'm sure she will get a job just on the shop floor somewhere but she's not going*

> *to be running a major fashion house. But for me, it was really difficult and I had never really encountered that before. I had talked to other people about it, you know what happened and if they had been in that situation. They said you know you don't win them all but I got used to winning them all. (laugh). I just got lucky really."* (Phil)

The notion of responsibility can be considered as the "end game" for most coaches trained in Westernised coaching processes (Plaister-Ten, 2016). It is therefore possible that Phil may have perceived himself as having done his job as a coach, had the student taken responsibility and acted accordingly, (Plaister-Ten, 2016). He made several attempts to contact the student following on from the session, however the student failed to respond and did not participate in further coaching sessions. Whilst there could have been a number of reasons as to why the student chose not to participate in further coaching sessions, Phil assumed that different backgrounds and gender were contributing factors.

> *"It may be that she just need someone different to talk to her... I can't remember what her background was… I think she seems umm I don't know possibly Middle Eastern you know Turkish or something... I don't know but it may have been that she would feel more comfortable talking to a woman. Paired up with a woman coach, I don't know, but she wasn't talking to me that's for sure (laugh).*

Phil acknowledged that like himself, most of the staff at the University are White middle-class and male. This might make the environment intimidating for some non-traditional students where there are social and cultural differences. His self-awareness could be considered as 'the essence of good coaching' (Whitmore, 2002 p.23) and acknowledging different cultures as crucial to his coaching relationship (Baron and Azizollah, 2019). 'Raising culturally-bound' awareness and building 'culturally-appropriate' responsibility is considered the essence of good intercultural coaching, and important because cultural beliefs, preferences and mandates can otherwise be neglected (Plaister-Ten, 2016; 2013). To ignore a central fact of the student in terms of colour or gender could be considered as being 'colour-blind' or 'gender-blind' and denying an essential part of the student's identity (Baron and Azizollah, 2019). Being culturally sensitive and acknowledging difference was not exclusive to Phil, it was also a consistent theme for all coaches particularly when it came to acknowledging their own dissimilarities between background, ethnicity, age and gender.

Carolina questioned whether she was the *"right coach"* for her student during coaching. She experienced moments of self-doubt on the basis of not fully understanding the student's needs during the session.

> *"There were times when I didn't understand what she meant and I didn't know what to say for the best. So, I didn't. I just listened and asked a few questions which I think helped. But it made me wonder if I was the right coach for her. That perhaps she would have benefitted more being paired with someone else."* (Carolina)

The disparities that coaches faced with non-traditional students either prior to or during a coaching, were not the focal point when coaching staff. It is possible that there was a tendency to create a non-judgemental environment for non-traditional students if coaches perceived there to be an imbalance in terms of equality (Starr, 2011).

Melanie was concerned about how her student would perceive her even though there was nothing explicit in the session or in the student's reflective dairy to validate her suppositions. She expressed feeling anxious prior to meeting her student, she feared that she would be judged because of her different ethnicity.

> *"I was nervous that she would see me as the face of a white person. You know traditional status quo attitude and therefore likely to be prejudiced. That was my anxiety that she would think that of me, but I didn't feel that was actually the case. That was just my fear… In counselling it's something you talk about but in coaching I'm not sure that it's something you talk about. (Melanie)*

Melanie had observed prejudice towards herself from *"older people"* and acknowledged that she would *"try not to worry about such things"* going forward. It is possible that Melanie's experience of difference and prejudice impacted and shaped her interactions and viewpoints of her world and how confident or competent she then felt about how she would be perceived by a student of a different background (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). During coaching she was particularly conscious about creating an environment that was a "*safe space"* for her student to engage in a coaching conversation. Melanie incorporated her knowledge of the university environment and how she considered the student to relate to that environment into her coaching practice and tried to create the opposite atmosphere. In practice for Melanie, creating her notion of non-judgement was to recreate a sense of reassurance to enable the student to be comfortable enough to

begin and engage in a coaching conversation. She considered her student to be *"more reserved"* as early as the first session and made the assumption that her reserved characteristic was a result of the student being shy. As such her way of creating a *"safe space"* was to acknowledge that *"the student required a bit more coaxing."* Melanie unpacked the nature of confidentiality as a way of facilitating her method of *"coaxing"* by reassuring the student that what was discussed would not be relayed to the student's tutor.

> *"Once she got to know me she was talking a lot more but she wouldn't just come in on the first session and talk her way through it."* (Melanie)

From the above accounts it is clear that the challenges and the emotions experienced by coaches were very different, Phil expressed feelings of frustration, Carolina faced moments of self-doubt and Melanie conveyed anxiety and fear of how she would be perceived. The accounts also suggest that inter-cultural sensitivity and the way in which non-judgement exhibited itself appeared to be multifaceted and relatively new territory for coaches. It raises further questions about the notion of non-judgement and how it manifests itself in practice where noticeable or even subtle differences are present. If the notion of non-judgement can be discarded once the disparities have been acknowledged by the coach during coaching. Or if it should be acknowledged that the intention to be non-judgemental is practically impossible to achieve since coaches need to make judgements throughout a coaching conversation, for instance, managing a conversation, introducing techniques, when it is appropriate to move from on stage to another or whether it is culturally appropriate to provide feedback and so on (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019).

Not only was the notion of non-judgement difficult when it came to differences. In my case as a coach non-judgement was difficult when similarities were acknowledged in terms of my own background and ethnicity. As the only non-white coach I was also aware of my preconceptions particularly when coaching non-white students. My judgement of Danika within the first five minutes of arriving late for the first session was *"she's not interested"* especially when she periodically glanced at the messages on her mobile and informed me that she had to leave after thirty minutes because *"she didn't realise"* that she had a class. I was also aware that Felicity was Danika's initial coach and that Felicity made several attempts to rearrange the sessions with Danika to no avail. With all of the different thought processes I found it difficult not to categorise Danika as fitting within the stereotypes of being a 'difficult to reach student,' (Marie, MacKenzie & Wright, 2017) a

stereotype that I have particularly fought hard not to fall into. The excerpts from my coaching diary capture some of my post session reflections.

> *"I was slightly frustrated after the session as it appeared to me that Danika was being distracted by her mobile phone and therefore was not as present in the conversation as she could have been. Although she was present in terms of her ability to answer the questions presented. She left the session early so, I felt that the student's needs were not met or as beneficial as it could have been. I think this is what frustrated me the most. Knowing how beneficial coaching can be and that perhaps the benefits did not come across to the student in the same way. That is a challenge for me". (Diary excerpt)*

As a coach I was aware of the desire of wanting to assist students of a similar background. I was disappointed when the outcome achieved was not the outcome that was expected in terms of the value and engagement of Danika as a black student rather than Danika as a non-traditional student which encompasses so much more than ethnicity. My thought process during coaching and reflections after the session made me question myself as a coach, my level of transparency and my ability to be impartial during a coaching session. As a researcher, I deliberated as to whether I should include the excerpt of my initial session with Danika, partly because my preconceptions changed and partly because as a coach, a black coach at that, I felt as though I should not have those preconceptions to begin with. I was drawing social comparisons in terms demographics, gender and attitudes (Cunningham 2005), and defining Danika by the social identities that I had formed (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). I was torn between myself as a coach for a having particular viewpoint and being fully aware of the notion of non-judgement and the internal conflict that I had as a person who was able to relate and connect to the experiences of the student (Wilson and Leaper, 2016). I knew that I wanted to impart more support towards Danika as a black student but not necessarily impart less support to any other student. The conflict that was experienced during and after coaching and the desire to impart more support whilst coaching Danika was something that I had not experienced before. Although the session did not achieve the expected outcome and I anticipated Danika's non-return, Danika did return and over the period of coaching sessions, I began to understand her as a person and the challenges she faced in terms of time management, self-confidence, self-doubt and anxiety. I became more aware of the support that she required and became more flexible in my approach scheduling coaching around her university and work commitments which often meant rescheduling sessions. I understood the support that was required and I adapted

my approach to fit in with Danika's requirements. From there on, I saw her potential and watched her grow in her abilities and confidence as a student.

Whilst no inferences are made to suggest that sharing similarities as a coach in terms of experiences or background could lead to a more desired outcome for non-traditional students. It is perhaps important to recognise that the individual self could become intertwined with the professional self of a coach. As such this may make it possible to connect on a personal level with students in terms of life experiences, current worldviews and personal learning journey, creating a sense of trustworthiness that could be beneficial to the coaching relationship (Bachkirova, 2016). It is also possible that the opposite could occur if there is a disconnect between the individual self, the professional self of a coach and the experiences and current worldviews of the student. While differences can relate to both positive and negative outcomes, the key is to minimise disadvantages, whilst realising the benefits that it can bring (Cunningham, 2005).

Summary

This theme explored the experiences of the coaches and the nuances of coaching non-traditional students. Most coaches experienced difficulties with student attendance and their commitment to coaching. What was evident from the excerpts was that most coaches attempted or were willing to reschedule at least one coaching session if their student could not attend. Phil demonstrated his flexibility for one student by meeting her at another university location that differed to his own and for the other student by coaching beyond what he may have been taught in terms of managing coaching conversations in an agreed time (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). The flexibility demonstrated by coaches was distinctive to their experiences of coaching non-traditional students and perhaps uniquely used when students did not have a clear goal in mind which was another distinctive challenge for coaches.

Another distinct challenge was the emotions coaches experienced during coaching. The emotions of frustration, anxiety and fear appeared to occur when coaches were confronted with challenges or new experiences and no prior knowledge to draw from. Phil discussed how he felt during supervision as he felt ill equipped to manage the frustration that he had never felt before during coaching (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). The self-doubt that I felt was also discussed with my supervisors as a way of self-reflection. Other coaches, like Melanie considered her own self-awareness to be an important aspect prior to and after coaching in terms of creating an effective coaching environment. From the experiences it would appear that we were not sufficiently

prepared or equipped as coaches to deal with the challenges that we faced during coaching.

All coaches that participated in the study became sensitive to cultural differences. Awareness of the cultural differences for Melanie caused anxiety and fear. She was concerned about how her student perceived her coming from a traditional background. For Carolina it caused moments of self-doubt and questioning as to whether she was *"the right coach"*. Phil was conscious of being *a "white middle-class man"* and tried to make coaching *"less intimidating"* for students that he considered dissimilar to himself in terms of age, race, class and gender. All coaches in their interviews were able to relate to experiences of judgement and gave an account of either experiencing past prejudice towards themselves or being prejudice towards others at some point in their lives. Although I may not have experienced the same challenges coaching non-traditional students who differed from myself in terms of age, ethnicity, class, disability or gender. The previous accounts of coaches as well as my own, made it possible to recognise that challenges existed when coaching others that appeared to be similar or different to ourselves.

The notion of non-judgement and the importance of it to coaches however was common across most accounts. There were however nuances in how the term was perceived by coaches and the way in which non-judgement exhibited itself in practice appeared to be multifaceted and complex. Most coaches included myself became more aware of the differences or similarities, in terms of background, age, gender, class and ethnicity. In practice some coaches at times appeared to overcompensate to accommodate their perceived similarities or differences during coaching for instance, by contracting differently, being conscious about creating a safe space, or going beyond the allocated time for coaching. When faced with challenges or new experiences, the notion of non-judgement appeared to be problematic and coaches made a number of judgements for instances, how committed students were to coaching, the lack of goals during a session and whether they were engaged or ready to take the necessary steps to move forward after a session. Coaches also made a judgement about their own skills and ability to coach students that appeared to be different from themselves.

Emotions, cultural sensitivity and non-judgement was not a factor anticipated as part of the data analysis. Neither was it an area of concern or a topic raised by the coaches prior to the interviews. As such it is important to highlight, that had an open dialogue not have occurred during the interviews with coaches, such important aspects of emotions, inter-

cultural sensitivity and non-judgement when coaching non-traditional students may have been overlooked.

6.2 The perceived need to be more directive

This theme explores the approaches used to coach non-traditional students. As highlighted in the previous section, the lack of goals during coaching proved to be a challenge for coaches. This section therefore considers the accounts of coaches, the approaches used and their perceived need to use a more directive approach when coaching non-traditional students.

Most coaches, including myself were taught to use the most well-known framework for coaching, the GROW model (Bresser and Wilson, 2010 p. 15) as a structure to facilitate coaching and were familiar with using a nondirective approach when coaching staff. The same approach proved challenging when students did not appear to have a goal in mind. Models such as GROW (Whitmore, 2009) suggest that a goal or at least the idea of an end goal is something that is arrived at before the session, or at the very least considered as a focal point during the first. Only one out of seven students that participated in coaching was explicit about the topic of discussion from the onset.

Carolina used GROW to facilitate the first session. She minimised the requirement to establish a goal from the onset by adopting her approach to establish an equal relationship (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019; Starr, 2011; Bresser and Wilson, 2010). In the first session Carolina did *"A lot of listening, paraphrasing and probing"* when she *"felt that it was okay to do so".* From her perspective, this "*human"* approach created a *"laughing," "comfortable environment,"* her intuition, body language and noticing the emotions of her student was fundamental to coaching (van Nieuwerburgh, 2014; Starr, 2011; Tolhurst 2010). Carolina's approach gave her student *"permission to take control, make decisions, express her feelings"* and demonstrate to the student "*that there is another human being in the room".* Her balanced inquiry and advocacy 'dialogic' approach was one that positioned her student as an equal partner and a key decision maker enabling her student to choose the appropriate strategies to suit her own learning needs (van Nieuwerburgh, Knight and Campbell, 2019, p. 412).

Melanie described her adaptive method as a *"slightly more suggestive*" approach when coaching students, which perhaps in coaching terms could be perceived as a more directive approach with an emphasis on instruction, such as telling and providing solutions in terms of advice or direction (Tolhurst, 2010; Bachkirova and Cox, 2008).

From her perspective students arrived at the session nervous and uncertain of what to expect when experiencing coaching for the first time. When comparing her experiences to staff, she considered them to be more strategic in terms of identifying topics of discussion for the session. Students did not arrive to the session in the same way. As such, Melanie perceived herself to be more directive with students than she would have been when coaching staff.

> *"Students might need a slightly more suggestive approach when it comes to detangling what they are looking at, what their goals are. It might just need a bit more input from the coach than you would usually give to a member of staff, because they may not have fully planned what needs to happen and when."* (Melanie)

Melanie also *"encouraged"* and "*coaxed"* her student as a way of getting them to commit to actions (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). In addition, she offered her student library resources that she considered would be useful during her studies (van Nieuwerburgh, Knight and Campbell, 2019). Similar to Carolina, Melanie used a more dialogic approach with the student to consider what might be useful for her to focus on during the session.

Phil acknowledged that maintaining a nondirective coaching approach was easier when coaching staff than it was when coaching non-traditional students. He shared this insight even though he was aware that typically the coachee is responsible for setting the agenda and identifying a goal (van Nieuwerburgh, 2014).

> *"Coaching staff would be easier actually in some ways. You are able to retain your role as a coach in the way that you've been trained. Whereas, with students there is a temptation to teach, there is that kind of gravitational pull with students as you slip into a bit more teaching or mentoring if you like".* (Phil)

Phil adapted his methods of coaching by applying the experience and knowledge gained from his professional practice as a teacher into his coaching practice. He considered one student to require a more *"telling"* approach and was of the opinion that the student could not *"generate ideas for herself"* and expected to be told what to do.

> *"She still thought basically it was like school. The difficulty for her was actually learning to be self-sufficient, so, I did a lot actually. I know, as a coach you are not really supposed to do this, but I did give her lots and lots of suggestions about how she could generate ideas and move forward."* (Phil)

Coaching has been explicitly defined as 'helping [people] to learn, rather than teaching them' (Whitmore 2009, p. 10), the appropriate models or techniques to help non-traditional students to learn however, should perhaps be directed by the coach for coaching to be effective. It is possible that a nondirective approach was not as effective for some students in the same way that perhaps it was for staff. However, coaches appeared to be reluctant to adopt a more directive approach as though adopting such an approach would be considered as an inappropriate method. It could be argued that Phil's adopted directive approach of *"telling"* rather than *"asking and focusing"* (Allison and Harbour, 2009, p. 2; Bachkirova and Cox, 2008) placed himself within the role of a mentor enabling him to incorporate his experiences of the *"education system"* whilst coaching. Mentoring is considered to have more of a power relationship, with one person having subject specific knowledge or expertise (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012; Passmore, 2010) supporting someone less experienced (van Nieuwerburgh, Knight and Campbell, 2019). On the one hand, this approach by way of guidance knowledge and advice can foster a nurturing relationship with students (van Nieuwerburgh and Barr, 2017) over a longer time period, often years (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). On the other hand, dependency can be a problem (Garvey, 2018) and the certainty that any dyadic relationship may end can be a powerful influence on relationships bringing the pair closer together (Simmel, 1950). Phil was aware that the number of coaching sessions for this study was three, however, he expressed that he was happy to continue work with the student until he graduated.

> *"We've agreed to meet again… We initially were only meant to do 3 whatever it is. I said I'm perfectly happy to kind of work with you until you graduate if you want as it's only a couple of hours so it's no skin off my nose really. And so, I kind of have a you know a vested interested you know I kind of would like to see it through to the end."* (Phil)

My approach as a coach in some sessions was a dialogic one, similar to that of Carolina and Melanie. I considered students to be equal partners, even though they were not always clear about the topic of conversation or had a clear goal in mind. The use of questioning, listening and pausing to allow for moments of reflection and challenge created the opportunity for students to think and feel differently based on the information they had gathered from a coaching dialogue. In some cases, after the first session, I felt comfortable enough to contribute to the coaching conversation by sharing my ideas and knowledge of working within the University, such as University procedures and the

support services available to students. In other sessions, I perceived students to have the knowledge and understanding required to be able to think and identify solutions for themselves. I therefore used a more" facilitative" approach creating a safe space for them to do so (van Nieuwerburgh, Knight and Campbell, 2019). The account from my diary captures my reflections after a coaching session.

> "*One size does not fit all. Different points of the session required less talking and more listening to gain insight into the unspoken, or more probing to gain clarity. I learnt to be open and transparent too. I allowed myself to be me during that session. Perhaps I experienced that sense of congruence and necessary ingredients described by Rogers. There was no hierarchy, no them and us, no ulterior motive. How did we get here? Time was made, something that students require. That flexibility that they need as they navigate their way and try to balance their lives which cannot be separated. I am not sure about this uni life. Their lives are just incorporated into an environment of newness and uncertainty added to the complexity that already exists."* (Diary excerpt)

Based on our experiences and the training we received as coaches, we could have perceived this approach to be more of a directive one. It could be argued however that coaches found themselves practicing along a 'coaching-mentoring continuum' deploying the use of directive or nondirective interventions (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012 p. 16) without being aware that this type of approach existed, therefore, perceiving a deviation from the taught nondirective approach of the GROW model to be directive. As such, it is suggested that the majority of coaches found themselves during their coaching sessions using different approaches along a coaching-mentoring continuum (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). Such a mentoring, (directive) approach at one end and a more "dialogic" or "facilitative" (nondirective) approach at the other end. All coaches used the approach considered to be the most appropriate at the time and in the best interest of the student.

Summary

This section explored the approaches used to coach non-traditional students and the perceived need for coaches to use a more directive approach during coaching. All coaches were taught to use the GROW model which has an emphasis on coaching for performance and a more nondirective approach of 'helping' those being coach to learn, rather than 'teaching' them to learn (Whitmore, 2009). For most coaches, this taught approach had been used throughout their experience of coaching staff and were therefore accustomed to a more structured goal orientated approach.

Using existing models and techniques without some flexibility however may not be as effective when coaching non-traditional students, particularly if there are no clear goals from the onset. For instance, if determining a goal for the session drives the GROW model (Whitmore, 2009), consideration may need to be given as to whether a model such as GROW is the right technique to use with students in the first session, if they are not in a position to identify what it is that they would like to achieve.

When coaching non-traditional students, all coaches appeared to deviate from what they considered to be a nondirective approach to a more directive one. Coaches described their approaches as being more *"suggestive", "telling*," "teaching" or "mentoring" and appeared to be reluctant to adopt what they perceived to be a more directive approach. Other approaches such as coaching along a coaching-mentoring continuum (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012) for instance, could suggest that there are more nondirective approaches than coaches are aware of. It could therefore be argued that coaches need to be aware, trained and have the ability to work across a coaching-mentoring continuum (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012), or a directive, nondirective spectrum (van Nieuwerburgh, Knight and Campbell, 2019; Downey, 2003) to be able to adapt their coaching approach as required during coaching.

6.3 The ambiguity of identifying and facilitating confidence through coaching

This theme explores how coaches identified issues of confidence and how explicit or implicit it was to facilitate confidence through the process of coaching. My own experience as a coach is also explored in parallel with the coaches' experiences and comparisons are made identifying commonalties and noticeable differences across all experiences and the coaching methods used to identify and facilitate issues of confidence during coaching. Whilst this section mainly focuses on the experiences of the coaches, it should be noted that references are also made to students to underpin some aspects of findings.

The majority of coaches considered confidence to be an area that students required support with during coaching even though the students did not explicitly identify themselves as having issues with their confidence. What varied was how explicit or implicit it was for coaches to identify confidence and the methods used to assist students with their perceived levels of self-confidence. Coaches commonly considered students

to be less confident based on their outward appearance such as body language, communication, expression, tone, their overall demeanor towards their studies and the relationships students had with their tutors, peers and family. Melanie for instance, at first considered her student's eloquent speech to signify a high level of self-confidence, but subsequently, her perception changed during coaching following the disclosure of dyslexia. As such, she perceived her student to be more confident in her practical work and less confident with her written work.

> *"I think it was obvious when it came to talking about her written work that it was something that really concerned her. I'm not sure that she said that she was lacking confidence, but she also did say that she felt that she wasn't pushing herself forward for the things she wanted to do." (Melanie)*

Phil considered both his students to lack confidence and also based his perceptions on their ability to articulate themselves during coaching, as well as their ability to familiarise themselves with their environment and interact with their tutor and peers.

> *"They are scared of being seen as ill-educated or stupid. I don't think there's that many students that come here that are so confident in their ability, most of them are intimidated by everybody else."* (Phil)

Carolina also considered the university environment and the relationship her student had with her peers and tutors to impact her student's confidence. From Carolina's perspective the transition from further education, *"an environment of being told what to do"* to higher education *"an environment of independent learning"* was a challenge and for that reason she considered different facets to come into the equation when identifying her students' self-confidence.

> "*There's so many aspects isn't there, there's confidence in whether you are going to fit in to this strange environment, there's confidence in people skills to communicate what their needs are, there's just so many strands to it."* (Carolina)

The above excerpts demonstrate that whilst students did not explicitly identify issues with their confidence, coaches appeared to be able to identify the role that confidence played in the student's wider disposition in terms of their transition from one education setting to another, and their ability to adapt to an unfamiliar learning environment (Christie, et al. 2008). They therefore considered themselves to be in a position to support students

with their confidence. Whilst that may have been the case, it is also possible that the students' perceived lack of confidence was aligned to the coaches' general beliefs of where they considered students to be in comparison to their own self-concept or self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000; Bandura, 1997). For instance, Melanie recalls her own confidence to be one of her *"biggest barriers"*. She considered herself as recognising the issue that the student had with her confidence and felt equipped to coach her.

> *"When I was in the education system I think one of my biggest barriers to learning was confidence and one of the biggest barriers I still have, but I am aware of it. I've had to overcome that quite a lot of times in different things and it's not easy particularly if you didn't grow up being given responsibility and confidence, you've got to find it yourself."* (Melanie)

Phil recalled his first experience as an art college student as *"intimidating"* when he considered others to be more *"flamboyant and knowledgeable"* than himself. Carolina compared her confidence as a prior undergraduate student to the students whom she coached and considered herself confident in her ability to ask tutors for support when she felt it was required to do so. As such, she perceived students who did not ask for support from their tutors or peers to lack confidence.

Melanie considered the way in which she identified confidence and then focused on the student's strengths to assist with building her student's confidence.

> *"We looked at previous comments and positive feedback that she had received and discussed them. I also got her to look at what her strengths were and then used that to help her build her confidence."* (*Melanie)*

Phil identified where the student wanted to be in terms of a future career and supported him to identify the steps required to envision himself in that future position, which in turn assisted with his confidence.

> *"He was lacking in self-confidence, he felt he needed have a client base, to have people buy his work, or have a job… Basically, he needed to do all of those things before he felt confident to call himself a designer."* (Phil)

Carolina used a similar method to Phil in terms of identifying where the student was and where the student aspired to be, and as such considered that method of facilitation to assist with her student's confidence.

> *"I encouraged the student to speak and feel confident about her skills, aims and identity which helped her verbalise her aspirations and how she saw herself."* (Carolina).

Whilst the coaches' self-concept may not have a detrimental impact in their ability to support students with their confidence. It is possible that the social comparative norms that the students were compared to, or the social inferences that were drawn (Gilbert, 1998) were first, not comparative to begin with because of the cultural differences between the coach and the student coachee (Plaisten-Ten,2016). Second, the coaches concepts may not have been comparative to the students' beliefs in terms of their own self-concept and self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000; Bandura, 1997; Bandura, 1992). For instance, the students could be more confident than the coaches perceived them to be. At the same time, from the accounts, coaches appeared confident in their ability to coach students where the issue of confidence had not explicitly presented itself in coaching and when issues of confidence where comparative to their own self-concepts or experiences.

My experiences of a student were not dissimilar to the other coaches in terms of ambiguity in identifying student's confidence whilst coaching. With two students in particular confidence was either the focal point from the onset or became the topic of discussion during coaching. The accounts that are to follow are based on my experiences of coaching two students Anna and Paula. The excerpts from my reflective diary form part of the data analysis.

Anna declared from the onset that she wanted coaching to assist her with her self-confidence and self-esteem. If she had not, I would have perceived Anna to be confident on the basis of her outward appearance in terms of her body language and her ability to communicate clearly and articulately. Anna sought affirmation from her parents, peers and teachers at an early age and found it very difficult to identity a time where she felt confident. Her self-doubt and questioning of her abilities was something that stemmed from her early educational experiences and the relationship she had with her immediate family. Anna attended coaching to find ways to become more self-confident and to recognise that her talents and abilities were just as prevalent as her peers and colleagues with whom she worked. Similarly, to Anna, Paula revealed during coaching

that she had issues with her self-confidence. Equally her self-confidence stemmed from the relationships she had with her peers during her early educational experiences, which led her to believe that she was not good enough. What was challenging for me as a coach was identifying relevant coaching interventions, when both students found it difficult to provide examples of being confident or satisfied with their achievements. The diary excerpts demonstrate my thoughts at the time.

> *"I felt equipped in my ability to listen to Anna but not necessarily to address the direct needs of self-confidence .... I felt slightly out of my depth and questioned how I could support her on what appeared to be straight forward in terms of identifying what she wanted the outcome to be and yet challenging in terms of identifying ways the outcome could be achieved."* (Diary excerpt)

Not only did coaching lead to moments of self-doubt in terms of my ability to support both students, it also made me question the methods used and my own confidence in being able to discern the appropriate level of challenge that could be used. This was particularly apparent around topics such as perception of self and the perception of others. I would have liked to have felt equipped or at least reassured that the issues of self whether it was self-confidence, self-worth or self-esteem were adequately supported through the facilitation of coaching (Bachkirova, 2004; Maxwell and Bachkirova, 2010). However, I continued to use coaching methods that I considered to be beneficial to the student at the time such as building a rapport and providing a coaching environment in which both students felt comfortable enough to openly discuss what appeared to be painful experiences. I listened, explored their beliefs, paused and worked in silence to allow space for moments of reflection. Whilst I did my utmost to create a comfortable environment for the students what was noticeable about myself was my own discomfort, for instance, when I felt challenged to identify ways to support both students. I also found it difficult to manage my emotions either during coaching or after coaching and to identify whether the experienced emotions were mine as an individual, mine as a coach or whether I was experiencing the emotions of the student.

> *"As coach I felt out of my comfort zone when coaching Paula. I struggled to separate myself as a coach and myself as a person during the session. I was keen to explore Paula's perception of herself but at the same time I felt connected to her as a person. Somehow the connection that I felt made me feel empowered to tackle the negative perceptions about herself. I could resonate with some of the accounts that were made, the assumptions and judgements made... I saw*

aspects of myself in Paula and was perhaps also challenging my own perceptions at the same time." (Diary excerpt).

I had never doubted myself or my abilities as a coach prior to coaching Paula. However, with this student coachee I felt as though I was coaching two different people, an 'actual' self being Paula who lacked self-confidence and an 'ideal' self, a Paula who began to consider and see herself from a different perspective (Sebastian, et al. 2008). It could be said that as coaches, we coach possible selves in terms of identifying where a person is and where they would possibly like to be (Henderson, et al. 2019; Cross and Markus, 1991; Markus and Nurius, 1986). Although Paula appeared to say the right things in terms of her possible selves, her emotions demonstrated the opposite and whilst I recognised that a shift had been made, it was difficult to identify whether that shift was of benefit to Paula.

I cannot tell the last time that I was content or truly happy inside. Now I am thinking why shouldn't I feel like this, I deserve to feel like this and should. Being open has been good, it has been good to talk to someone that I do not know about it." (Paula)

The initial experience that I had coaching Paula made me question whether coaching was a suitable method of support, whether I was a suitable coach to support her and whether the coaching session should have discontinued at the time. Whilst Paula was offered the option for the session to discontinue, I respected the fact that she wanted to continue. I was clear about my parameters as a coach, but I found it difficult to draw comparable experiences in terms of the emotions that I experienced during coaching. My experience with Anna was not dissimilar in terms of the connection and emotion either during or after a coaching session. However, what was noticeably different was my heightened emotion during the session which caught me by surprise.

"I still feel quite tearful. Less embarrassed that I shed a tear in the session but still tearful and thoughtful about what drives Anna to continue against the odds.... I feel quite sad inside, the sadness is difficult to describe, perhaps because it is not mine... If I could help her I really would… I need to shake this sadness as I know it is not mine." (Diary excerpt)

What was poignant during and after the session was the shared emotional connection which I had not experienced as a coach prior to coaching Paula. Although the emotional

aspect with Paula compared to Anna appeared to be different, it was still there. I recognised where I could and could not support both students and was able to continue to coach within coaching parameters. I also recognised the support required, which I sought by way of discussion with my supervisor and I felt reassured at the time. Upon further reflection I am less reassured in terms of how I could support a student and myself if a similar experience were to reoccur.

Similarly, as mentioned in the previous section, when coaches were also faced with new experiences with no prior knowledge to draw from, they also experienced moments of self-doubt, unexpected emotions and a reduced level of confidence. Interestingly, during those moments most coaches became aware of the different position they adopted either in the session or became aware of the possibility of adopting a differing position and refrained from doing so. For instance, in an earlier example Phil identified himself as slipping into "*teacher mode."* He also compared coaching students to parenting and raising children to become adults by *"giving them* wings" and *"off they "fly".* Melanie considered her coaching relationship with her students to be equal and adopted and *"adult to adult"* position, however she also found herself wanting to go into *"rescue mode"* by becoming a "helper" (Bachkirova and Cox, 2008). Similarly, I also became aware of perhaps adopting the parent-child position, particularly when combined with emotional experience whilst coaching.

Prior to coaching Anna and Paula, if asked, I could have confidently provided accounts where I had successfully supported staff with their self-confidence and similarly to the coaches, perhaps identified how coaching played a role in affecting students' self-confidence (Lech, van Nieuwerburgh & Jalloul, 2018).

Summary

This subsection identified that the majority of coaches considered confidence to be an area that students required support with during coaching even though students did not explicitly identify this themselves.

From the excerpts it is clear that coaches were confident in their ability to identify and support students with their confidence when they were able to draw upon their own experiences or concepts whilst coaching. Although coaches considered themselves to have supported students with their confidence, it was not possible to substantiate the extent beyond the coaches' accounts and the student interpretations of their confidence after coaching had taken place. Thus, it could be said that not only was confidence

difficult to identify and define, it also appeared to be multifaceted, situational and dependent upon how confidence was perceived in relation to their own self-concept or self-efficacy. Not only did the complexities of supporting confidence occur when the issue of confidence was explicit and past experiences for students were difficult to obtain, the complexities also appeared when coaches experienced moments of self-doubt or reduced confidence, when faced with a new experiences or emotions whilst supporting students. Coaches adopted different positions such as "*teacher"* or 'helper' mode during coaching, sought support by way of supervision, or self-support by researching other disciplines such as counselling and psychology to identify ways to deal with the challenges that they faced.

This chapter presented and analysed the experiences of four coaches supporting non-traditional students during their study. The collective aggregated themes identified the similarities and nuances between the expectations and experiences of coaching non-traditional students in comparison to staff. The notion of non-judgement was explored in terms of how coaches sought to create an environment of non-judgement whilst coaching non-traditional students. Finally, the notion of confidence was considered and the methods in which coaches identified to facilitate non-traditional students with their confidence.

The following chapters present the discussions and the conclusion of the study within which the creative synthesis that emerged from the findings is presented.

Chapter 7: Discussions

The previous three chapters have described the findings from the study – the individual student journeys are similar, yet different; the coaching experiences of non-traditional students themselves, and HEI coaches' understanding of the non-traditional students' coaching experiences. This chapter commences by discussing the overarching themes that emerged from the research in Chapter 4, to gain a deeper understanding of the individual journeys and experiences of non-traditional students. It then provides further insights into the nuances of the coaching experiences of non-traditional students presented in Chapter 5. This chapter also extends the main themes that emerged from Chapter 6 to further understand the nuances of coaching non-traditional students in HE in the UK. Finally, this chapter also draws on the literature presented in Chapter 2 and additional literature that has become pertinent following on from the findings of this study.

A deeper understanding of the individual journeys and experiences of non-traditional students in the UK

Chapter 4, identified prior education, demographic location and socio-economic class were important factors that influenced and contributed to the decisions made to apply and gain access to university. The study supports literature that acknowledges that such external factors can impact the student journey and experience (Gorad, et al., 2019; UCAS, 2018; Younger, 2018; Macqueen, 2017; Reay et al., 2009). The findings also revealed that internal factors contributed to the student experiences. Most students were initially apprehensive about their transition to university (Mckendry et al., 2014; Christie et al., 2008). Individual concerns of relocating to London and perceived academic expectations were identified. Anxieties of forming new relationships with peers or tutors were highlighted and aspects of confidence were commonly shared across most accounts. The findings suggest that prior educational experiences, past or present relationships and opinions of significant others, such as parents, teachers and peers appeared to account for the apprehension and the doubts about not fitting in to their new HE environment (Thiele et al., 2017; Christie et al., 2008). The initial concerns of creating friendships were met by some students within weeks of attending university, social activities such as Fresher's Week or living in student accommodation. Matters such as the sense of self, interrelated social comparisons, identity related expectations and how they felt others perceived them (Thiele et al., 2017; Reay et al., 2009; Derks et al., 2007) reoccurred across different timeframes of their journeys and remained with even the final year students, throughout the duration of their studies.

This chapter proposes that the complexities of the HE experiences of non-traditional students in this study were twofold. Students had different self-constructs about themselves and what they could achieve (Thiele et al., 2017) and frequently reflected on their own capabilities. Some described feelings of anxiety, stress and self-doubt in their own attainment (Jones, 2017) particularly when faced with new tasks or when engaging with tasks requiring others, such as presentations or group work (Bandura, 1997). Other participants judged their capabilities to successfully accomplish familiar tasks such as essay writing with the skills and abilities they possessed (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003; Bandura 1986) supporting that the beliefs and perceptions that students had of themselves were heavily rooted in past achievements (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003).

Most students in their accounts did not overtly identify themselves as non-traditional students or necessarily relate their challenges to their social class, ethnicity, disability or geographical location in terms of their prior education. Chapter 4 highlighted that efforts were to made to hide positive stereotypes, for instance the perceived bias of Octavia being taught by her father in college. Efforts were also made to circumvent perceived negative stereotypes. Students were hesitant to seek support or clarification from tutors and were reluctant to access university services because of the remedial connotations associated with them. The findings were not dissimilar to other studies of non-traditional students, who try to conceal their social class, and or other characteristics that could be stigmatising or negatively perceived (Thiele et al., 2017; Aries and Seider, 2005; Granfield, 1991).

Students did acknowledge difference when they considered it was a requirement to do so. All self-categorised themselves as at a disadvantage to participate in the study based on their geographical location; occupation; previous education and income either household or individual. Additionally, some students identified themselves as minority ethnic group; disabled, a mature student or the first in the family to attend university (DFE, 2018; HESA, 2018; National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997). It could be argued that conforming to self-categorization and self-stereotyping instils social and academic differences throughout the education system (Gillborn et al., 2012) reinforcing the distinction and disadvantage between students from different backgrounds.

Secondly, students' self-constructs were not solely derived through self-evaluation of themselves. The findings highlight that collective constructs, for instance the perceptions or expectations of significant others such as parents, teachers and peers positively or

negatively influenced the belief in their ability to form relationships once at university. The vignettes of Octavia and Anastasia present positive accounts of parental expectations congruent to their own by way of their academic achievements at college, and their college tutors' beliefs in their ability to attend university upon completion of their foundation course. Acknowledgement and personalised knowledge of their work improved the quality of engagement with their tutors and their studies during college. The findings concur with and build on the work of Tett et al. (2017) who propose that positive relationships with staff enables students to improve their work when they perceived others believe in them and care about the outcome of their studies.

The less positive accounts occurred when students did not fit in their HE environment. Anna was challenged by the stereotypes that she was associated with. For instance, she was considered not intellectually bright by her parents, teachers and tutors, neither was she expected to attend university. According to WP literature, HE was historically designed for educating privileged, young, white, western men (Hinton-Smith, 2012). Such groups represented group memberships, context specific group norms and behaviours (Turner, 1991) considered distinct, striving to be better and demonstrating solidarity and trust (Hogg, et al., 2004). Conformity and prescribed membership-behaviour influenced and established polarized context-specific social categorizations of in-group prototypes and out-group stereotypes (Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg and Turner 1987; Turner, 1982). The findings of the study suggest it is possible that inferences and decisions of what non-traditional students can achieve and the universities accessible to them, could be based on historic distinctiveness and prescribed behaviours of ingroups, perpetuating outgroup differences (Hogg, et al., 2004). The experiences of non-traditional students in this study corroborates that social class and family background or culture can continue to influence engagement with education (Marginson, 2016; Allatt, 1996) and supports that interrelated factors such as social comparisons and identity-related expectations can influence how students feel others perceive and react to them (Thiele et al., 2017; Reay et al., 2009; Derks et al., 2007).

The findings also inferred that relationships and the support of significant others during their educational journeys were crucial but not always actively sought or received due to lack of trust, or perceived inferences that could be drawn upon (Mckendry et al., 2014). Students that did engage in support did so selectively, and as a last resort. The findings of this study propose that non-traditional students are able to access support at various times during their HE journeys rather than when universities might expect support to be accessed, such as during the transition year into university. These results are, in

agreement with a proposition by Macqueen (2017) about the need for a more flexible approach to accommodate the timing of support required by non-traditional students. This should be considered by the HE sector, as the journey through HE for non-traditional students is highly individual and not predictable (Macqueen, 2017). The timeliness of support was a key factor for engagement with coaching. Had the support been offered at another point during the academic year, Danika, as identified in Chapter 5, would have found it difficult to engage and therefore, less likely to participate. It therefore cannot be presumed that students will access support at prescribed times during the academic year or journey. As such there is a need for HEI's to be more agile with their support offering to meet the specific requirements of non-traditional students.

How support is perceived is still a controversial issue (Mckendry et al., 2014; Whiteford Shah & Nair, 2013) for non-traditional students, as targeting of specific groups tends to construct those groups as homogenous, with a shared set of needs and interests (Burke, 2016). The findings of the study does not agree with homogenous targeted approaches to support for non-traditional students. The vignettes presented in Chapter 4 portray the similarities and the unique differences pertaining to individual students' experiences and their journeys into HE. The findings of Chapter 5 identified that coaching without a prescribed goal was uniquely suited to provide individual tailored support to meet the specific needs of students at that time. Offering support without understanding the similarities as well as the individual differences of non-traditional students fails to acknowledge the personal and social identities of those student groups and the multiple differences that are shaped by deeply embedded structural, economic and cultural inequalities (Burke, 2013).

Creative synthesis

The creative synthesis in Figure 5 visually portrays the external and internal factors that contribute, influence and shape the experiences of non-traditional students across their educational journeys. The external description outside the diagram represents the external factors such as collective constructs, social categorizations, social comparisons and identity related expectations that impact the experiences of non-traditional students. The diagram depicts the multiple layers accumulated over a substantial number of years and across the educational trajectories.

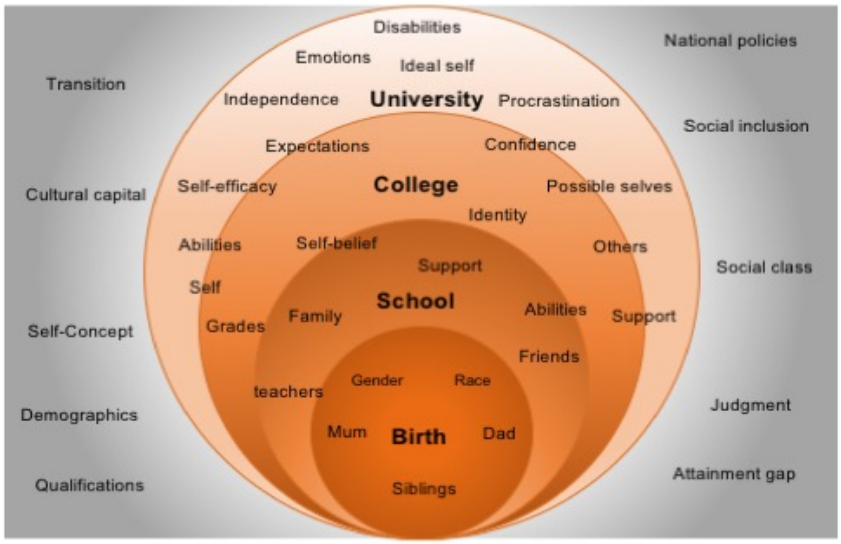


Figure 5 Creative synthesis, the experiences of non-traditional students

The top outer layer symbolises the most recent university experiences as undergraduate students. This complex layer represents internal influences that all students were willing to openly share. The layer beneath represent internal factors experienced at college. This deeper layer influences and shapes the internal factors and perceptions that cross over and are built upon during their university experiences. This more in-depth layer represents an internal state and one that is not openly shared with others. The layer below represents school experiences. This intrinsic layer sets the foundation that begins to form internal factors around abilities, self-belief and support. The internal factors of self-belief and abilities cross over and were built upon during their college experiences. These factors were not openly shared. The centre-piece is the inner core that represents the students' background, aspects of which are shared by most students.

The creative synthesis in Figure 6 visually represents the key findings of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 portraying the accumulative experiences of coaching. The diagram illustrates that students and coaches were at equal starting points at the beginning the coaching relationship. During the coaching journey students reached a "low point", the point of awareness i.e. apprehension or challenge. For some students the coaching journey ended here. Students that continued with the coaching process began to think and feel

differently. Their thought processes changed and began to increase, peaking at the point of responsibility. At that point a decision was made by students to take responsibility for the steps identified, enabling them to make either small or significant changes.

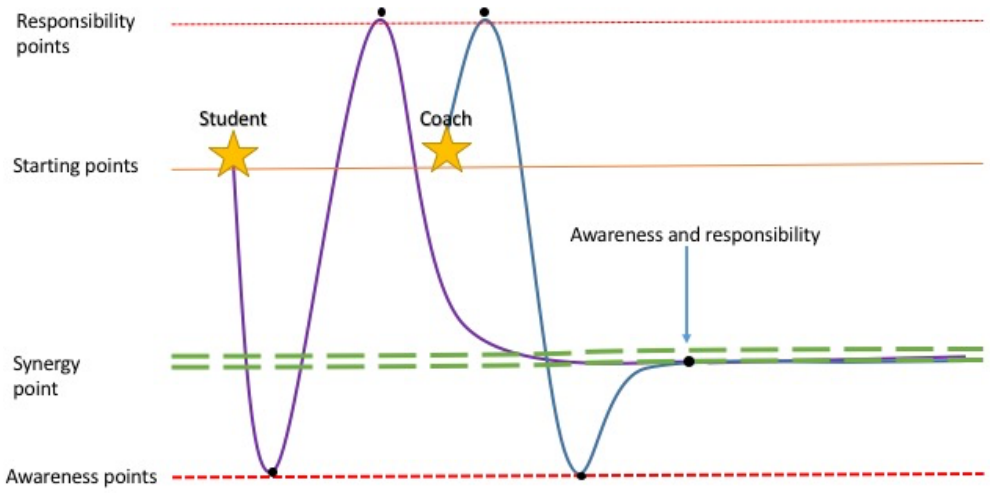


Figure 6 Coaching experiences of non-traditional students

Coaches however commenced their journey and reached the point of responsibility earlier, i.e. duty of care, competence and confidence in their ability to coach non-traditional students. During the process of coaching, coaches reached a "lower point", the point of awareness emotions i.e. fear, anxiety self-doubt about their abilities or techniques used. Coaches at this point self-reflected or sought supervisory support. The synergy point is the ideal point reached where both students and coaches were in an awareness and responsibility position. The synergy point is the place of non-judgement in which both students' and coaches are comfortable in their coaching environment.

Implications for HEIs in the UK

Many institutions with successful practices in supporting student progression have found it helpful to enhance the support of students by understanding their learners better and more holistically (Mountford-Zimdars, et al., 2017). The findings propose that HEIs may want to take into account the unique differences between non-traditional students and the importance of the timeliness of support. It may explain why some homogenous targeted HEI interventions do not attract the group considered as requiring support.

HEIs may also want to consider a more agile and less prescribed approach by way of coaching to support the specific needs of non-traditional students, as students considered as 'hard to reach' (Marie et al., 2017) may have chosen not to identify with stereotypes, or intentionally disengage with widely-known targeted support associated with negative connotations. Careful consideration would need to be given to how coaching is portrayed to non-traditional students to increase the likelihood of engagement.

Implication for the HEI where the research took place

The institution where the research took place is committed to removing barriers to progression and success, and promoting awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion for all (UAL, 2015). The findings propose that students did not overtly identify themselves as non-traditional or necessarily relate their challenges to their class ethnicity, disability or geographical location in terms of their prior education. Efforts were made to conceal social class and or other characteristics that could be stigmatising or negatively perceived (Thiele et al., 2017; Aries and Seider, 2005; Granfield, 1991). The HEI where the research took place may want to consider whether self-categorization and self-stereotyping removes barriers, or if it instils social and academic differences (Gilborn et al., 2012) reinforcing distinction and disadvantage between student backgrounds.

Implication for lecturers in HE in the UK

The findings in Chapter 4 depicts the self-constructs and the collective constructs that may underpin differences in students' perceptions of their ability to form relationships once at university. These constructs either positively enabled students to strengthen their confidence and improve their academic ability (Rossiter 2009; Thomas, 2002) or negatively influenced student engagement with their lecturers, due to stereotyping and low expectations of significant others. These findings have important implications for lecturers as students' lack of engagement could be misconstrued by academic staff and concur with the perceived beliefs that students consider lecturers to hold of them and their academic abilities (Cotton et al., 2017). If relationships are not established students may continue to form social comparisons and self-evaluations based on their previous experiences and beliefs which could create a barrier to learning in their HE environment.

Implications for the wider HE sector and Vice-Chancellors'

The findings of this study and literature suggests that targeted support can be problematic as it tends to perpetuate a deficit discourse (Burke, 2016) proposing that students require additional help to complete what is required of them and in turn can be

perceived as reluctant to engage and 'hard to reach' (Marie et al., 2017). Vice-Chancellors' that are committed to improving differential gaps that exist or are widening, may want to consider taking ownership and responsibility for their own discourse to ensure that their Strategy and Access and Participation Plan reflects an enhancement model that recognises and celebrates the skills and knowledge that non-traditional students bring to their community rather than promote a deficit model that perpetuates lack and remedial action. The proposed enhancement model provides a different lens that acknowledges that the issue of social-cultural incongruity and differential cultural capital highlighted as key reasons for higher dropout rates amongst those from lower socioeconomic groups (Bourdieu, 1986; Wilkins and Burke, 2015) does not derive from the student alone. It acknowledges that historical HE system designed for educated privileged, young, white western men (Hinton-Smith, 2012) still exist and further action to counteract systemic stereotyping and generalisations need to be addressed.

The nuances of the coaching experiences of non-traditional students in the UK

Chapter 5 and its subsequent sections explored the students' experiences of coaching and the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their undergraduate studies. The study identified that students were initially apprehensive about coaching for two reasons. First, coaching was not a term that students found easy to define, or to distinguish from other fields such as mentoring (Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck; 2018; 2014; van Nieuwerburgh and Barr, 2016; van Nieuwerburgh, 2014) and therefore they did not know what to expect. However, their lack of knowledge and understanding of coaching did not appear to prevent them from engaging in the process. The findings of this study identified that coaching supported non-traditional students to think and feel differently during their studies, building on the work of Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul (2018). The slight nuance for students in this study was coaching was not used as an intervention to address specific needs, such as enhancing student performance or overcoming learning difficulties (Grant et al., 2010). Coaching dialogues mainly occurred without students having a specific goal in mind. Even with ambiguous goals, the benefits of coaching for non-traditional students did not appear dissimilar to the benefits experienced by students in previous studies (Lancer and Eatough, 2018; Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018).

Second, students were initially apprehensive about coaching and found the time allocated to focus on themselves, unnerving. Apprehension and skepticism are concerns featured in coaching relationships (de Haan and Gannon, 2016; Ianiro et al., 2013; Gregory and Levy, 2010 Gyllensten and Palmer, 2007; Blunkert, 2005) and not solely

attributed to non-traditional students. However, it is worth acknowledging that non-traditional students with limited experience of coaching may require longer than perhaps anticipated by coaches to alleviate their apprehension, establish relationships and identify topics of discussion within their coaching sessions (Rossiter, 2009). As identified in the findings of Chapter 4, forming new relationships was a particular concern for non-traditional students entering HE. The vignettes highlighted that relationships of all kinds throughout their journeys presented challenges to non-traditional students. Coaching helped them identify that a positive relationship in coaching could mean they were able to form positive relationships elsewhere as part of their studies.

Despite the apprehension, most students appeared to be receptive of coaching and felt comfortable talking to someone disconnected to themselves and their course. The sense of impartiality created a space for open and honest dialogues to occur considered to be free of judgment and of negative repercussions (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). The notion of non-judgment was a key finding of Chapter 5. Students used coaching conversations to discuss topics they may have otherwise discussed with significant others such as their parents. However, mostly they discussed matters they were reluctant to discuss with their tutor, peers or staff within other university services. The notion of non-judgement created an honest, comfortable and relaxed environment that led to an impartial conversation. A key aspect in the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students was to recognise the importance of adopting a non-judgemental stance, as not doing so could have been detrimental to the coaching relationship and likely to have disrupted any sense of safety that may have been created (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). The important findings of adopting a non-judgemental stance in Chapter 5, connects with the findings of Chapter 4 which identified that non-traditional students may require support but do not always actively seeking it due to lack of trust, or perceived stereotypes that could be drawn upon. HEI coaches would benefit from training in understanding the implications that perceived judgements could have on establishing coaching relationships with non-traditional students in the context of HE in the UK.

It could be argued that the ‘active ingredients’ (de Haan, 2008) of non-judgement, honesty and a comfortable, relaxed environment created the conditions in which most students could be open, honest and encouraged to share their thoughts more freely (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). Where coaching was not receptive it is likely that the ‘active ingredients’ pertaining to this study, or the non-judgemental stance created by coaches were not met for the relationship to be established. It is clear from the findings

in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, that establishing relationships for non-traditional students can be complex and socially contextual. Therefore, this chapter acknowledges that there is unlikely to be a homogenous shared set of reasons for students' non-engagement with coaching. As such, this study builds upon a number of suggestions from a variety of sources. First, coaches could have appeared distant and uncaring if they completely adopted an impartial stance during coaching, therefore making them less receptive to coaching. As such coaches may want to focus on 'objectivity' rather than 'impartiality' as an alternative way to support students to demonstrate that they were working in the student's best interest (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). Second, students may require longer than perhaps anticipated during coaching sessions to alleviate apprehension, establish relationships and identify topics of discussion (Rossiter, 2009). Third, establishing rapport, openness and trust in a coaching relationship develops over time (Starr, 2011), findings in Chapter 6 identified that coaching non-traditional students can go beyond the anticipated coaching timeframe.

Chapter 5 identified that some students found coaching an enjoyable experience and others found coaching upsetting when addressing personal issues. The duty of care as coaches in avoiding potential harm to students caused by coaching in this study was paramount (Brennan and Wildflower, 2018). As seen in Chapter 6, coaches did their utmost to ensure that the environment was comfortable, free from judgement and safe for students to embark on a coaching conversation. However, a number of assumptions could be made about the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students through difficult situations or challenging coaching conversations. First, the findings in Chapter 5 suggest that identifying non-traditional students 'readiness' for coaching could be problematic in terms of exacerbating emotions and discomfort during coaching. Challenge is considered an important aspect of coaching (Nieuwerburgh, 2017; Rogers, 2016), it is important however, that there is an appropriate balance of support and challenge for coaching to be effective (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). Second, incorrect judgements based on stereotypical gender-biased cultures (Cox and Bachkirova, 2007), or cultural misunderstanding and stereotyping could occur (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016) as highlighted in Chapter 6. Third, incorrect judgements could be made about a student's level of maturity when partaking in coaching. Further insight is needed as to whether a certain level of maturity is required to deal with challenging conversations, or if certain conditions are required to exist over a period of time for any constructive change to occur (Rogers, 2007).

Second, the readiness of coaches' in Chapter 6, links to the findings of the readiness of students in Chapter 5, as coaches in this study were also challenged when emotions presented themselves during coaching. This study builds on the findings of Cox and Bachkirova, (2007) who suggest that coaches have different viewpoints in relation to dealing with challenging emotional situations. Each coach in this study dealt with the emotions of their students and their own differently.

Chapter 5 of the study suggests that coaching supported most students to think and to feel differently. Not all however, demonstrated the desire to commence the process of change through coaching. Further consideration would need to be given to identify whether coaching could have been more effective over a period of time with the right support and challenge (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). Additional consideration could also be given to explore how effective coaching is for non-traditional students who may find it difficult to think or to feel differently when reflecting or going through adverse experiences. Coaching is considered as unlocking potential, (Gallwey, 1986; Whitmore, 2009) identifying potential may present challenges for some non-traditional students if positive experiences or previous achievements are difficult to identify.

Confidence appeared to be a particular issue for non-traditional students in this study and coaching appeared to facilitate conversations where confidence could be discussed (Lancer and Eatough; 2018; Lane and De Wilde, 2018; Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul 2018). In accordance with the literature, students were confident in areas of familiarity, previous knowledge, achievements and accomplishment of tasks (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003; Bong and Clark, 1999; Bandura, 1997). Unsurprisingly, students were less confident in their academic abilities in areas of unfamiliarity (Bandura, 1993) and when comparing themselves to their peers (Schunk, 1987). When comparisons were made with others, some students desired to become more confident in securing a placement, for instance. Others wanted to develop confidence of their practical skills in preparation for future careers, representing the aspirations and beliefs of the 'ideal self' that they ideally would like to be (Sebastian, Burnett & Blackmore 2008). What was clear from the data is that coaching provided a non-judgemental environment that enabled conversations about confidence to occur (Lancer and Eatough; 2018; Lane and De Wilde, 2018; Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2018). What was less clear was how coaching facilitated confidence beyond a coaching conversation when the topic arose. This could indicate that addressing confidence in coaching is complex yet a common issue that needs to be addressed (Cox and Bachkirova, 2007).

Implications for HEIs and support services in the UK

If the Office for Students (OFS) are committed to ensuring that students, from all backgrounds (particularly the most disadvantaged), can access, succeed in, and progress from HE (OfS, 2018) they will need to consider alternative methods to support an increasingly diverse student body. The study proposes that coaching could effectively enhance the support already offered by institutions, which is more typically in the form of counselling and mentoring. Careful consideration would also need to be given in terms of how coaching is portrayed to non-traditional students. Counselling for students in this study had negative connotations, and students would only consider access as a last resort. The HEIs could work with practitioners in the field of coaching to define and highlight the differences between counselling, mentoring and coaching in education. Students would need to be informed that coaching encourages forward thinking in a comfortable, judgement free environment, that students can access freely to discuss matters pertaining to themselves, at their own convenience.

Practical implications for coaches and staff supporting non-traditional students in the UK

Consideration should be given to the variety of 'active ingredients' required to embark on an impartial conversation. The same approach for all non-traditional students should be treated with caution, as 'active ingredients' may vary from student to student. The commonality for coaches is to adopt a non-judgmental approach which is important and good practice when coaching any coachee. The findings in this chapter and more explicitly in Chapter 6, identified that adopting a single approach may not be beneficial when establishing relationships or supporting non-traditional students. For instance, where non-traditional students can be homogenously categorised as disadvantaged. As identified in Chapter 4, students can differ in many ways and should not be stereotyped, neither should assumptions be made that one approach could be applied across all non-traditional students. Coaching as an intervention is perfectly suited to meet the diversified needs of students and can be uniquely tailored to support individual differences when required by students.

Practical implications for coaching practice in HE when supporting non-traditional students in the UK

Coaches could benefit from specific training, techniques and supervision in raising awareness of difficult situations or challenging coaching conversation (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019; Cox and Bachkirova, 2007). This would support coaches' awareness of difficult situations and the emotions that can derive from challenging coaching conversations. There is a tendency to want to refer students to counselling,

however coaching can also be effective with the right support and challenge (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). As such, with training and supervision, coaches can be aware of their own responses, biases and limitations. This would help develop coaching practice in supporting students in difficult coaching situations.

An implication for coaching practice when supporting non-traditional students is to recognise that coaching may not benefit all students that participate. Coaches may want to consider obtaining feedback from students, capturing reflections or discuss challenges within supervision to inform practice. Capturing such accounts could offer insight, inform practice and be of potential value to the field of coaching by being more adaptive to the individual's needs.

Additionally, coaching practice may want to further consider how coaching supports non-traditional students when issues of confidence are presented, either explicitly or implicitly within a coaching conversation. Findings in Chapter 5 suggests that coaching dialogues appeared to be an avenue where the matter of confidence could be discussed, and an area that some students explicitly wanted to focus on.

Understanding the nuances of coaching non-traditional students in HE in the UK

Chapter 6 and its subsequent sections expressed the challenges experienced by coaches when coaching non-traditional students. All coaches experienced difficulties with student attendance and their perceived commitment to coaching. Inferences for non-attendance were drawn across most accounts and despite expressed frustration most coaches rescheduled sessions to accommodate students. It could be argued that the varied, flexible approach to contracting to suit the needs of students could have attributed to non-attendance and expectations not being met. Adopting a more formal approach however, could have been too restrictive and reduced rapport building in the first instance. The flexibility demonstrated by coaches was distinctive to their experiences of coaching non-traditional students and perhaps uniquely used when students did not have a clear goal in mind which was another distinctive challenge for coaches.

It could also be argued that the ambiguity of coaching attributed to the lack of goal setting by the student coachees. However, there could be a number of probable reasons for their lack of goal setting. Chapter 5 identified that students were apprehensive about coaching and found the time allocated to focus on themselves unnerving. Their limited experience of coaching could have contributed to the lack of goal setting and the

additional time required to establish their goals. Equally, as identified in the findings of Chapter 4, forming new relationships was a particular concern for students coachees in this study. Trust in addition was also an issue for some students, as such it could be argued that 'active ingredients' (de Haan, 2008) were also a requirement to create conditions for students to feel encouraged to share their thoughts more freely (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019), particularly if the goals were of a personal nature to the student.

Another distinct challenge was the emotions coaches experienced during coaching. Emotions of frustration, anxiety, fear and self-doubt appeared to occur when coaches were confronted with cultural challenges, and new experiences with no prior knowledge to draw from. Awareness of the cultural differences caused anxiety, fear, moments of self-doubt and questioning of their coaching abilities (Pelham, 2016). Coaches discussed challenges during supervision where they felt ill equipped to manage them (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). Other coaches identified emotions through their own self-awareness and considered it important to do so prior to, and after, coaching to create an effective coaching environment. It could be argued that self-awareness is important in any relationship aimed at change (Baron and Azizollah, 2019). For coaches' an awareness of their own cultural assumptions, biases and stereotypes was crucial when coaching non-traditional students (Plaister-Ten, 2013) particularly when considered to be on the 'right side' of power gradients and the side that is socially sanctioned as 'good' (Pelham, 2016). Being a member of the majority culture, it is easy to assume that one's own cultural assumptions and attitudes are more universal than is actually the case (Baron and Azizollah, 2019; Pelham, 2016). The challenges and emotions were not solely by difference. Similarities by way of culture and identity also attributed to the conflicting emotions and the potential personal matters of unconscious bias or prejudices that coaches may have faced (Pelham. 2016). There is value therefore in training, development and supervision for coaches related to supporting non-traditional students in an HEI coaching initiative.

The notion of non-judgement was also important to coaches. There were nuances in how the term was perceived and how it exhibited itself in practice which appeared to be multifaceted, complex and a relatively new territory for coaches. Coaches were interculturally-sensitive to the role that culture played during coaching, and at times overcompensated for perceived differences by contracting differently, accommodating non-attendance, or being flexible with the allocated time for coaching. By wanting to create a right environment for students, coaches may have inadvertently delivered a

'less-than-optimal' coaching experiences for them in an attempt to create a 'cultural fit' during coaching (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016 p. 449). Non-judgement also appeared to be problematic when coaches faced new challenges or new experiences. Coaches made judgements on how committed students were to coaching, their lack of goals, engagement, readiness and their confidence during coaching. Assumptions were also made about students' cultural groups, which is a behaviour that should be avoided to avert risk of any cultural misunderstandings and stereotyping (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016). It raises further questions about the notion of non-judgement and how it manifests itself in practice where noticeable or even subtle differences are present. Coaches comments were captured during the interviews, this may mean that these judgements were not manifested as part of the actual coaching sessions themselves, only derived from the interviews. Nonetheless, the findings support the need for coaches to understand best practice in interculturally-sensitive coaching.

The lack of goals proved to be a challenge for coaches. The study identified that coaches were reluctant to deviate from taught practices considered to be part of a non-directive approach. Coaches considered their adaptive approach by way of "suggestion" or 'telling" to be more directive. However, applying customary goal orientated approaches such as the GROW model (Whitmore, 2009) proved challenging when students did not have any clear goals. The findings identified that coaches use of existing models and techniques with limited flexibility, may not be as effective for non-traditional students, particularly when there are no specific goals from the outset. It is important to recognise that one coaching approach may not suit all non-traditional students. Coaches should feel able and be able to adapt their approach to meet the needs of the student at the time. This study advocates the use of more flexible approaches by way of working across a coaching-mentoring continuum, (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012) or across a directive, non-directive spectrum (van Nieuwerburgh, Knight and Campbell, 2019; Downey, 2003). Depending on the situation and the desired known or unknown outcome, a "facilitative", "dialogic" "directive" approach by being more or less directive might be more beneficial in supporting the individual diverse requirements of non-traditional students (van Nieuwerburgh, Knight and Campbell, 2019).

Coaches appeared confident in their ability to identify and support students with their confidence issues when they were able to draw upon their own experiences or concepts whilst coaching. Although coaches considered themselves to have supported students with their confidence it was not possible to substantiate the extent of this beyond the coaches' accounts and the student interpretations of their confidence after coaching had

taken place. Thus, it could be said that not only was confidence difficult to identify and define, it also appeared to be multifaceted, situational and dependent upon how confidence was perceived in relation to their own self-concept or self-efficacy. Therefore, some caution may need to be taken when identifying issues of confidence.

Practical implications for coaches supporting non-traditional students in HEIs in the UK

Coaches need to be more aware of the complexities and the challenges of non-judgement and how it can manifest itself in interculturally-sensitive coaching practice where noticeable or even subtle differences are present. Coaches would benefit from discussing the important issues of stereotyping and cultural judgements that arise from coaching in supervision. Further consideration should be given to explore if the notion of non-judgement can be discarded once the disparities have been acknowledged by the coach. Or alternatively, acknowledge that non-judgement is practically impossible to achieve since coaches need to make a number of professional judgements throughout a coaching conversation (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). Coaches would benefit from further supervisory guidance, interculturally-sensitive coaching training and support to diversify their approaches and develop their coaching competencies more widely.

Accredited training providers and universities that offer coaching courses should expand the range of models delivered to coaches beyond customary goal orientated approaches such as the GROW model (Whitmore, 2009). This would ensure that coaches have the ability to adapt their approaches to meet the needs of a diverse student body. Alternative approaches that offer the flexibility to work across a directive, non-directive (facilitative", "dialogic" "directive") spectrum, (van Nieuwerburgh, Knight and Campbell, 2019; Downey, 2003) or a coaching-mentoring continuum (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012), is highly recommended. Coaches within this study inadvertently used similar approaches but, could have benefitted more from a flexible approach as part of this study had they been aware of alternative approaches available to them.

Confidence appeared to be a particular issue for non-traditional students in this study. Coaches should be aware that identifying confidence in coaching can be multifaceted, situational and not always easily identified. As such, identifying confidence in coaching for non-traditional students should be treated with caution, to avert the risk of cultural misunderstandings and stereotyping (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016). Coaches should therefore, consider what 'active ingredients' could assist in creating the appropriate environment for students to embark a coaching conversation, and familiarise themselves with the suggested behaviours that demonstrate intercultural sensitivity. For instance,

appropriate curiosity about the student coachee might invite them to raise issues of confidence during coaching. Coaches would have a clearer understanding of the individual needs conveyed by the students themselves. Further supervisory guidance or training should be provided to support coaches should they feel ill equipped to manage particular confidence issues in coaching.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the overarching themes that emerged from the research in Chapter 4, to gain a deeper understanding of the individual journeys and experiences of non-traditional students. It then provided further insight into the nuances of the coaching experiences of non-traditional students presented in Chapter 5. The chapter extended the main themes that emerged from Chapter 6 to further understand the nuances of coaching non-traditional students in HE in the UK. The implications of the findings were discussed at the end of each overarching theme. The following chapter present the conclusions of this study.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This chapter revisits the research aim and objectives and draws together the main findings of the study that address the research question. It summarises the contributions that this study makes to knowledge and coaching practice in HE. The limitations of the study and additional areas for further research are presented. The chapter concludes with some personal reflections on my own learning from the research process.

8.1 Research aim and objectives

The research was undertaken with the aim of exploring the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their undergraduate studies of the study and had four objectives. The first objective was to undertake a critical review of literature on widening participation, self-theories and the role of coaching in education, in the context of WP as an approach to facilitating the 'confidence' of non-traditional students. The second, was to undertake qualitative research to explore the experiences of coaching from the perspective of student coachees and their coaches as a way of gaining a better understanding of the nuances of coaching non-traditional students. The third, was to contribute to the practice of coaching by exploring how coaching supports the confidence and self-understanding of non-traditional student groups. The fourth objective was to contribute to theoretical and professional knowledge by adding to the field of coaching in education and experiences of confidence in coaching from the heuristic perspective.

8.2 Research questions

In order to address the overarching research question, what are the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies using heuristic inquiry, portraying the voices of non-traditional students from the unique perspective of the researcher, who has direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation. The following research questions were set out in order to address the overarching research question:

1. What are the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies?
2. How can coaching support non-traditional students?
3. What are the experiences of coaches in the process of supporting non-traditional students?

The research began by undertaking a critical review of the literature on widening participation, self-theories and coaching in education to address the research questions. The overarching research question was addressed though the process of heuristic inquiry, purposive sampling and the self-selection of the student participants who identified themselves as under-represented in one or more of the defined categories of the research study. Nine students and four coaches including myself participated in the study. Four students and three coaches were interviewed, and their experiences informed the data analysis and the themes. My own experiences also informed part of the data analysis and the themes of the study. My direct experience of the phenomena, as a researcher enabled me to connect, and fully explore the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies (Moustakas, 1990). The voices of the students were portrayed from the unique perspective of the researcher throughout the thesis but mainly in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

In analysing the data, the findings identified three overarching themes, 'The individual student journeys are similar yet different' (Chapter 4), 'The coaching experience of non-traditional students' (Chapter 5) and 'Understanding the experiences of coaching non-traditional students' (Chapter 6).

The overarching theme, 'The individual student journeys are similar yet different' addressed the first research question by exploring the HE experiences of non-traditional students leading to and during their undergraduate studies. The introduction provided an historic overview of the HE sector (Committee on Higher Education, 1963; National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997) and the national attempts made to readdress under-representation of particular socio-economic groups by widening access to HE (Harrison and Waller, 2018; Burke, 2016). The vignettes in Chapter 4 draws on the experiences of students categorised as under-represented in HEIs. The term 'non-traditional' was used in this study, as the participants fitted into more than one under-represented group. The main conclusions to be drawn are first, the HE experiences of non-traditional students are heterogeneous, the vignettes showed similarities and differences across all experiences and link into the second conclusion that explored those differences. Second, students' self-constructs and the collective constructs of significant others, positively or negatively influenced the belief in their ability to form relationships once at university. Less positive accounts occurred when expectations of others were low or perceived as stereotypical which influenced how students felt others perceived and reacted to them (Thiele et al., 2017; Reay et al., 2009). Third, non-

traditional students were likely to access support at various points across the duration of their studies, rather than at prescriptive points (Macqueen, 2017). The timeliness of support was a key factor for engagement with coaching.

The overarching theme 'The coaching experience of non-traditional students' addressed the second question by offering coaching to students as part of this study, to explore how coaching supported them during their studies. Student interviews informed the data analysis and the subsequent theme of Chapter 5. The main conclusions to be drawn from Chapter 5 are first, coaching supported non-traditional students to think and feel differently about themselves (Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul 2018). Students reported feeling motivated, a sense of relief and reduction of stress levels. Second, the notion of non-judgement created a space where open and honest conversation occurred, repercussion free. Students discussed topics that ordinarily would not have been be shared for instance, confidence. Third, a variety of 'active ingredients' (de Haan, 2008), enabled students to share their thoughts more freely (van Nieuwerburgh and Love, 2019). It likely that the 'active ingredients' (de Haan, 2008) pertaining to this study were not met where coaching was not positively received. Fourth, identifying students 'readiness' is problematic for various reasons identified in Chapter 5 and discussed further in Chapter 7, such as exacerbation of emotions, cultural misunderstanding and stereotyping, and judgement of a students' level of maturity to participate in coaching.

The overarching theme, 'Understanding the experiences of coaching of non-traditional students' addressed the third research question through coaches' interviews, which informed the data analysis and the subsequent theme of Chapter 6. The main conclusions to be drawn from Chapter 6 are first, the lack of goal settings during coaching was a particular feature of non-traditional student coachees. Chapter 7 discussed possible contributing factors such as apprehension (de Haan and Gannon, 2016), lack of trust and awareness of coaching, identified in Chapter 5, and difficulties in forming new relationships, highlighted in Chapter 4. Second, the emotions experienced during coaching were an additional nuance for coaches. Awareness of cultural differences caused anxiety, fear, self-doubt and questioning of their abilities. Chapter 7 discussed the need for training, development and supervision for coaches supporting WP students. Third, the notion of non-judgement is multifaceted and complex. Coaches were committed to creating a safe space where students would not be judged for their (explicit or self-defined) characteristics. Chapter 7 discussed the challenges of overcompensating to create a 'cultural fit' and the potential risk of cultural misunderstanding and stereotyping (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016) that can occur in

coaching. The need for supervisory guidance and interculturally-sensitive coaching training for coaches was also highlighted.

Contribution to knowledge in the HE sector in the UK

Whilst this study is exploratory in nature and does not seek to make substantive claims. The results of study contribute to knowledge by first, giving students a voice, without constraining, homogenising and simplifying who they are (Sabri, 2011) and by doing so offers valuable insights into the differing experiences of non-traditional student in HE. The findings identify the importance of significant relationships and an HE environment that is free from judgements. The study indicates the value of coaching and the significance of the coaching relationship in creating that safe and non-judgemental space but also acknowledges the difficulty in securing and sustaining that space for non-traditional students in a context imbued with historic stereotypes of who can access and achieve success in HE. HEIs should firstly invest in coaching for all students as a way of identifying and enhancing significant relationships. The study indicates that non-traditional students are less likely to engage with targeted interventions. If HEIs want to achieve the WP agenda training by way of coaching should be provided to equip staff to understand, support and sustain a non-judgmental environment within HE.

The second contribution to knowledge is making HEIs aware that support, and how it is perceived, is still a controversial issue for non-traditional students (Mckendry et al., 2014; Whiteford Shah & Nair, 2013). The timeliness of support was a key factor for engagement with coaching, building on the work of Macqueen (2017) who indicates that the journey through HE for non-traditional students is highly individual and not predictable. This study echoes that notion and suggests that students are more likely to access support at various points across the duration of their studies. As such there is a need for HEI's to be more agile with their support offering to meet the specific needs of non-traditional students. This study recommends HEIs move away from targeted homogenous approaches in a bid to support them and offer individual coaching as a tailored approach to meet their specific requirements.

Contributions to coaching practice in HE in the UK

The findings from this study contributes knowledge to the field by offering coaches insights into the experiences of non-traditional students' journeys leading to and during their undergraduate studies. The context provides an understanding of their HE environment, how students perceive themselves within it, and the importance placed on non-judgement. The study identifies nuances in the coaching experiences for students

and coaches, and proposes that 'active ingredients' (da Haan, 2008) such as, non-judgement and honesty create conditions for students to embark on a coaching conversation. Adopting the same 'active ingredients' approach to all students may lead to challenges for coaches, such as assumptions and stereotyping. Coaches in HEIs would need to tailor their coaching environment to meet the specific requirements of the student coachee. A better understanding of best practice in interculturally-sensitive coaching could assist with this approach.

The second contribution to the coaching practice in HE, brings to the forefront the complexities and challenges of non-judgement during coaching and how it can present itself in practice when noticeable or subtle differences are present. Coaches in this study were concerned about the judgements they made about their student coachees and whether they were supporting them sufficiently well through coaching. It is important that coaches do not overcompensate for perceived differences, doing so could inadvertently deliver a less than optimal coaching experience for non-traditional students (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016). Building on the work of (van Nieuwerburgh, Knight and Campbell, 2019), it may be more appropriate to introduce alternative conversational approaches such as a "facilitative" approach, that works on the assumption that coachees have the resources to improve. Or a "dialogic" approach, where coaches can support coachees by sharing possible strategies to assist their needs, keeping coachees as the ultimate decision makers (van Nieuwerburgh, Knight and Campbell, 2019). Such alternative methods would assist with avoiding cultural misunderstandings and stereotyping (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016) and create and further maintain safe spaces where non-traditional students would not be judged for their (explicit or self-defined) characteristics. Training should be provided to equip HEI coaches to be able to use alternative coaching approaches, that can be individually tailored to support students in HE.

The third contribution to coaching practice in HE highlights that coaching facilitates conversations where confidence can be discussed. It also identifies that confidence in coaching can be multifaceted, situational and not always easily identified. The study builds on the work of Brady (2011) and Hindermach (2008) who recognise the complexities of identifying aspects of self, such as self-esteem and self-doubt during coaching. A number of studies have proposed that the provision of models, strategies, methods and frameworks has helped coaches identify, support and explore aspects of self, such as self-confidence and self-esteem during coaching (Dinos and Palmer, 2015; Maxwell and Bachkirova 2010; Bachkirova, 2004). Models, strategies and frameworks

could be developed further to enhance the confidence of non-traditional students during their studies.

The final contribution to practice offers insight into the emotional aspect of coaching and the need to ensure that coaches are adequately supported and equipped to manage cultural differences or similarities that may be of equal challenge. Coaches need a supportive space by way of supervision to openly discuss conflicting emotions that can occur through unconscious or conscious bias, and to reflect on practices that may implicitly favour one culture over another, or explicitly favour certain characteristics or behaviours over others. This study builds on cross-cultural coaching and interculturally-sensitive coaching literature that advocates intercultural sensitivity (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016), culturally-bound awareness and culturally appropriate responsibility as the essence of good inter-cultural coaching practice (Plaister-Ten, 2016; 2013). The findings suggest that there is room for improvement in this area requiring further training, support and guidance during supervision for coaches to gain a more in-depth understanding of the diversity of non-traditional students and recognition of their own limitations in working with them.

8.3 Limitations of the study and potential areas for further research

Heuristic inquiry was chosen because it allowed myself, as the researcher to have a direct experience of the phenomenon being investigated and to portray the voices of non-traditional students as part of the study (Moustakas, 1990). The research provides rich details of their coaching experience, and their journeys leading to and during their undergraduate studies through the vignettes, moving away from the idea of bracketing their experiences like other types of phenomenological approaches (Denscombe, 2014). While heuristic inquiry provides a deeper, richer exploration of the experiences of the participants, this methodological approach may make the study difficult to replicate. A different approach would be needed to ascertain the generalisability of such exploratory findings. Further studies could be undertaken using different methodologies such as a case study, action research or a mixed methodology and to be conducted by different groups of researchers (Worth, 2012).

Given the focus of the research and the purposive sampling recruiting self-declared under-represented students to participate in the study was a challenge. Targeted support can be problematic as it tends to perpetuate deficit discourse (Burke, 2016) suggesting students require additional help to complete what is required of them, as such students

are reluctant to engage. This could have attributed to fewer students participating than hoped, although small numbers were anticipated, as non-traditional students can be considered 'hard to reach' (Marie et al., 2017) because they find it difficult to engage with aspects of university life. However, self-selection was an important aspect in recruiting students who considered themselves as likely to benefit from coaching and would most likely, follow through with coaching commitments (van Nieuwerburgh and Tong, 2013). Due to the limitations a pragmatic approach was taken to use supplementary data (see appendices 10.9) for instance, reflective diaries to capture the essence of their experiences in as many ways as possible. A number of strategies were also undertaken to contact students that declared their interest but did not participate in the study, none of which responded.

This study was limited to one arts university and therefore the findings are not representative of all non-traditional students in other universities across the HEI (Lefdahl-Davis, 2018). It would be valuable for further research to add to this study, by conducting larger scale studies to include universities in the UK and overseas widening the range of under-represented student groups (Macqueen, 2017) to further explore the role of coaching in supporting non-traditional students during their undergraduate studies.

Finally, it could be argued that coaches could be have been better prepared for this research. However, unlike Action Research, this study was explorative in which sufficiently experienced coaches agreed to participate. It is through exploring their experiences and difficulties, as well as my own, that content for such training can be developed. As a researcher of this study, I acknowledge that I was not an expert who could have anticipated the nature of the coaching process and the additional skills required. I was therefore in a similar position as the coaches who participated in this study. An action research study could be a next step to follow on from this study.

There has been very limited research on how coaching supports non-traditional students in HEIs in the UK, as such there are a number of potential areas for further research. It would be valuable to carry out further research to identify the most effective way of supporting non-traditional students through coaching. For example, it would be useful to explore if interculturally-sensitive coaching or cross-cultural coaching can be embedded in staff training in a HEI, and if doing so creates safe and non-judgemental spaces across the institution for non-traditional students. It would be of value to the HE sector to ascertain if those safe spaces can be sustained over time and if coaching enhances significant relationships.

This study identified that confidence appeared to be a particular issue for non-traditional students. It would be valuable to use the findings to extend the study to develop a framework that can be used to support non-traditional students. Action Research was initially considered for this study for the purpose of developing a framework. However, it was important to base it on an in-depth understanding of the students' needs, the challenges they experienced and to learn about the experiences of coaches who supported them, building a framework grounded in what was learnt from their experiences.

It would be of value to extend this study to explore how coaching supports non-traditional students using more flexible alternative approaches, such as working across a coaching-mentoring continuum, (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012) or across a directive, non-directive spectrum (van Nieuwerburgh, Knight and Campbell, 2019; Downey, 2003). The additional studies would develop coaches to work with students who may be new to coaching, struggle to identify goals and be engaged with the coaching process.

Finally, this study identified that coaches felt ill equipped to manage their emotions and the nuances of non-judgement during coaching. How HEI coaches are supported to highlight and address the challenges from coaching in supervision could warrant further research in HE contexts. These studies would add to the body of knowledge of emotions in coaching, the nuances of non-judgement and the impact of coaching supervision in these areas.

8.4 Personal reflection on my learning from the research process

My research study has concluded similarly to how it began as a self-disclosed dialogue and a journey of self-discovery (Moustakas, 1990). The difference this time, was that I did not embark on my research journey alone. I welcomed the support of my two academic supervisors who facilitated my learning and reassured me that my frantic and overwhelming outbursts, that I perceived as my own atypical ways were "perfectly normal". I cannot vouch for that, but what I do know is that my supervisors meant well and the support received throughout my doctoral journey was inconceivable.

During my journey, however, there were moments of emotional pain (Bach, 2002). I experienced aspects of incongruity, even though prior to commencing a doctorate, I considered myself relatively prepared to know what to expect as a previous

undergraduate and postgraduate student. I was also confident as an employee who has over 15 years' experience and insight into a number of universities to understand the implicit and explicit expectations and structural systems. However, surprisingly, I still had parallel experiences to that of the research participants feeling as though I was a 'square peg' trying to fit into a 'round hole' (Hinton-Smith, 2012). That was not to do with lack of ambition, lack of aspiration (Harrison, 2018) or procrastination, but by experiencing a number of internal factors that research studies have identified as contributing to the student experiences (Cotton et al., 2017; Rossiter 2009; Thomas, 2002).

I experienced moments of low self-esteem, self-belief and self-confidence in my abilities to complete my professional doctorate and considered withdrawing or deferring my studies several times. My supervisor and I, had an open, frank and considerably emotional conversation (on my part) which for me, was a significant turning point in our relationship in which we both reached a common understanding of each other and my needs as a student.

Heuristic inquiry was challenging in relation to it being an extremely demanding process (Moustakas, 1990). The incubation phase was a phase that required me to move away and detach myself from the intensity of the research (Bach, 2002, Moustakas, 1990). Although it was difficult to do at times, it was essential, as it enabled me to step back when I became overwhelmed. The incubation phase allowed the tacit knowing and intuition within the heuristic phases to flow and uncover unconscious thoughts and meaning that would not have been captured had I not engaged with the periods of detachment.

I also learnt that heuristic inquiry of Moustakas (1990) is not as linear and sequential as the phases would suggest which was a challenge during overwhelming periods when I required a set structure and parameters to work within. However, undertaking heuristic inquiry enabled me to think in a more creative way, as part of individual depicits and the creative synthesis, which created a balance in terms of my daily sequential and organised way of working. I was also able to represent my learning from the research process creatively through the lyrics of Whitney Houston's song *'I didn't know my own strength'*:

Song lyrics have been removed from this version of the thesis due to copyright restrictions

I have discovered that adopting a heuristic inquiry approach enabled me to provide deeper interpretations of the findings from a person who has shared similar experiences as the participants of this study. It has also given me the voice and the platform that I consider necessary to be heard and to contribute to the debates of targeted regimes for non-traditional students accessing higher education and the support offered once at university.

More importantly, I have discovered that had I not embarked on this journey, that my research question - in what way coaching can support non-traditional students? would remain unanswered. I have learnt that coaching supports non-traditional students in a number of ways that can only truly be identified by the students themselves as they embark on and complete their own coaching journey.

My reflective learning draws parallels with students in their final year, Danika and Anna, whose parents had no prior experiences of higher education or expectations of them attending university. Danika graduated with an Upper Second-Class Honours degree and Anna graduated with a First-Class Honours degree in spite of the challenges that

they faced as undergraduate students. Whilst coaching cannot solely contribute to their achievements, both students acknowledge that their obtained classifications could not have been achieved without coaching.

Similarly, my parents had no prior experiences of higher education, neither were there expectations of me to attend university, but I also graduated with a First Class Honours degree. However, my concluding reflections refer back to the question that I asked myself about my own educational journey and experience of higher education at the end of my prologue "had I received coaching or a different type of support, would it have made a difference in some way, perhaps in the choices that had been made. I was curious to find out from other non-traditional students who perhaps followed a similar path to myself" (p.8). The curiosity and questioning became central to the research study, my doctoral journey and my learning from the research process.

As part of the heuristic inquiry, I have discovered that had I not received coaching as an under-represented employee within the HE sector, it is unlikely that I would have encountered such life changing experiences or have begun my coaching journey, as an individual receiving coaching for the first time, as a student obtaining an MSc in Coaching Psychology, as a professional coach within the HE sector and now an individual on the verge of obtaining a doctorate in coaching and mentoring. My experiences a doctoral student has been the most life changing experience yet. I continue to grow from strength to strength and insight to endless possibilities, as such in October 2018, I was appointed as the Head of a professional service in another HEI. Following confinement of my award, I intend to disseminate my work by presenting at the Oxford Brookes Annual Coaching and Mentoring Conference. I shall share my findings with the HEI in which the study took place and in journals such the *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring, Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice.*

One coaching experience can make a big difference to the lives of non-traditional students. I am emotional and ecstatic about all that I have achieved and can now say to those that I represent and who represent me. Experiences are a matter of perspective and if we change our perspectives through coaching, we can possibly change what we experience in the future.

I conclude this part of my heuristic journey, almost in the same way as embarked with open wound and a passion, but I have undertaken a worthwhile personal transformation

(Moustakas, 1990). Therefore, for non-traditional students who choose to do the same, pause, take a deepened breath and declare the following words:

> "… our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?... As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." (Williamson, 1992, p.190).

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10: Appendices

10.1 Email invitation to student coachees

Email invitation to student coachees

Coaching 'the self': Developing a model of coaching to support under-represented student groups studying within Higher Education (HE)

As an undergraduate student, you are being invited to take part in this doctoral research study. The purpose of this study is to explore how coaching can be used to support under-represented groups in their first year of their undergraduate study. There are a range of pre and post support options offered to students in the first year of their studies, such as peer mentoring schemes, first year induction, Fresher's week and study skill workshops. Whilst such support collectively plays an important role in enhancing the students' first year experience, it is designed to help everyone in the same way.

The purpose of this study is to explore how individually focused coaching can help first year students meet their specific needs, for example gain more confidence and support their perception of self.

You will be asked to participate in 3 coaching session's each of approximately 1½ hours in length, ideally once every two months between January and December 2017. You will also be asked to keep a reflective diary. You will also be asked to participate in a student interview or focus group for approximately 2 hours in December 2017 and will receive a £10 Amazon voucher as a thank you for participating in the interview or focus group.

I have attached the Participant Information Sheet that provides more details about the research and what it entails. If you would like to participate in the study, please respond to 15058087@brookes.ac.uk indicating that you would like to participate. I will send you a consent form which you will need to complete, sign and return to me should you decide to take part.

For further details or to return the Consent Form, please contact Dionne Spencer on 15058087@brookes.ac.uk
Thank you for your time and consideration.
Regards
Dionne

10.2 Email invitation to coaches

Email invitation to Coaches

Would you like to contribute to the understanding of how coaching can help meet the specific needs of first year undergraduate students in Higher Education?

Providing coaching to support under-represented student groups is the subject of a research project, the aim of which is to explore how individual focused coaching can help first year undergraduate students meet their specific needs, for example gain more confidence and support their perception of self.

You are invited to contribute to this research by taking part in 1:1 coaching sessions, completing a short diary record after the coaching process and to take part in reflective workshops.

I have attached the Information Sheet that gives more details about the research and what it entails plus a Consent Form which you will need to complete and return to me should you decide to take part.

For further details or to send the Consent Form please contact Dionne Spencer on 15058087@brookes.ac.uk

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Regards
Dionne

10.3 Student coachee participation sheet

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

Participant Information

Study Title
Coaching 'the self': Developing a coaching model to support under-represented students groups studying in Higher Education (HE)

Dear Student

As a first year undergraduate student, you are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how coaching can be used to support under-represented groups in their first year of their undergraduate study. There are a range of pre and post support offered to student in the first year of studies such as peer mentoring schemes, first year induction, Freshers' week and study skill workshops. Whilst such support collectively plays an important role in enhancing the student first year experience, it is designed to help everyone in the same way.

The purpose of this study is to explore how individually focused coaching can help first year students meet their specific needs, for example gain more confidence and support their perception of self.

Why have I been invited to participate?

HE institutions are trying to provide more support to under-represented student groups in HE, as a student who has declared themselves to be from an under-represented group (i.e. low socio-economic group, minority ethnic group, first generation HE student) you have been invited to participate in this study and to receive coaching as a tool to support you in terms of your specific needs during your first year of studies of an undergraduate course.

The research will consist of 1:1 coaching sessions with a coach. At the end of the coaching you will be asked to participate in a student focus group. Ten students will be invited to take part in this research on a 'first response' basis.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to participate in 3 coaching session's approximately 1½ hours in length ideally once every two month between February and June 2017 and to keep reflective notes. You will also be asked to participate in a student focus group for approximately 1½ hours in June 2017. With your permission the session will be audio recorded.

Your anonymity will be preserved: no names, or quotes which disclose a participant's identity, will be used in the final thesis.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This study aims to increase knowledge in a currently limited field, of how coaching can be used to support students whilst studying within HE. By participating in this study you are supporting the furthering of knowledge in this area.

As a participant you benefit from free coaching sessions and have the opportunity to reflect on your experience through coaching and to consider what you may like to change, improve or focus more on, during the remainder of your study.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected about participants within this research (and people that they speak about during the interview) will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations). Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material.

Coding will be used in data analysis to ensure that names are removed from this process. Any quotes used to illustrate themes will not contain names or information that could clearly pinpoint an individual.

The data generated in the course of the research be retained in accordance with the University's policy of Academic Integrity and must be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of a research project.
www.brookes.ac.uk/Documents/Research/Policies-and-codes-of-practice/academic_integrity.

Participants will have the option to withdraw from the study at any point, either during or after coaching and or the focus groups and up until the point the thesis is submitted.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you would like to take part in the study, please respond to 15058087@brookes.ac.uk indicating that you would like to take part. I will then contact you to sign a consent form and to arrange your initial coaching session. At the end of coaching I will inform you of the location where the student focus group will take place.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Research from this study will form part of my Doctor of Coaching and Mentoring thesis. It will be submitted to Oxford Brookes University in the autumn of 2018. A copy of the thesis will be available in Oxford Brookes University Library. If requested, you can be provided with a summary of the findings. You can also request an electronic copy from me if you wish to do so. Results of this research study if requested can be provided to the University.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am conducting this research as a student at Oxford Brookes University Business School. This research is being fully funded by myself.

This research is being supervised by Professor Tatiana Bachkirova Co-Director of the International Centre for Coaching and Mentoring, Oxford Brookes University tbachkirova@brookes.ac.uk and Dr Judie Gannon, Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Business jmgannon@brookes.ac.uk.

Please note: The researcher is both a Doctoral Student at Oxford Brookes University and an employee at the University of the Arts London (UAL), where she is the Student Complaints, Appeals and Extenuating Circumstances Officer. Participation or withdrawal in the research will not affect your studies are experience at your University.

Who has reviewed the study?

Prior to approaching you to commence this research, the research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.

Contact for Further Information
Dionne Spencer
15058087@brookes.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project that they can contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee at Oxford Brookes University ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

16/12/16

10.4 Coach participation sheet

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

Participant Information

Study Title
Coaching 'the self': Developing a coaching model to support under-represented students groups studying in Higher Education (HE)

Dear Coach

You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how coaching can be used to support under-represented groups in their first year of their undergraduate study. There are a range of pre and post support offered to student in the first year of studies such as peer mentoring schemes, first year induction, Freshers' week and study skill workshops. Whilst such support collectively plays an important role in enhancing the student first year experience, it is designed to help everyone in the same way.

The purpose of the study is to explore how individually focused coaching can help first year student meet their specific needs, for example gain more confidence and support their perception of self.

Why have I been invited to participate?

As a coach you have been invited to participate in this study and to use coaching as a tool to support students in terms of their specific needs during the first year of their undergraduate studies.

The research will consist of 1:1 coaching sessions with two coachees. At the end of the coaching you will be asked to participate in a reflective workshop. Five coaches will be invited to take part in this research on a 'first response' basis.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to participate in an initial session where specific guidelines and consideration of supporting under-represented student groups will be discussed and will form part of the initial training model. Following on from the initial session you will be asked to participate in 6 coaching sessions approximately 1½ hours in length ideally once every two months between February and June 2017. You will also be asked to participate in a reflective workshop once every two months approximately 3 hours in length and be required to keep a reflective diary of your practice which will be shared with the researcher. The data will inform the reflective workshops which will develop and improve the coaching model.

Your anonymity will be preserved: no names, or quotes which disclose a participant's identity, will be used in the final thesis.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This study aims to increase knowledge in a currently limited field, of how coaching can be used to support students whilst studying within HE. By participating in this study you are supporting the furthering of knowledge in this area.

As a coach you will have the opportunity to reflect on your experience through coaching and consider what you may like to change, improve or focus more on in your own coaching practice.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected about participants within this research (and people that they speak about during the interview) will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations). Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material.

Coding will be used in data analysis to ensure that names are removed from this process. Any quotes used to illustrate themes will not contain names or information that could clearly pinpoint an individual.

The data generated in the course of the research be retained in accordance with the University's policy of Academic Integrity and must be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of a research project.
www.brookes.ac.uk/Documents/Research/Policies-and-codes-of-practice/academic_integrity.

Participants will have the option to withdraw from the study at any point, either during or after coaching and or the focus groups and up until the point the thesis is submitted.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you would like to take part in the study, please respond to 15058087@brookes.ac.uk indicating that you would like to take part. I will then contact you to sign a consent form and to arrange your initial coaching session. I will also inform you of the location where the reflective workshops will take place.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Research from this study will form part of my Doctor of Coaching and Mentoring thesis. It will be submitted to Oxford Brookes University in the autumn of 2018. A copy of the thesis will be available in Oxford Brookes University Library. If requested, you can be provided with a summary of the findings. You can also request an electronic copy from me if you wish to do so. Results of this research study if requested can be provided to the University.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am conducting this research as a student at Oxford Brookes University Business School. This research is being fully funded by myself.

This research is being supervised by Professor Tatiana Bachkirova Co-Director of the International Centre for Coaching and Mentoring, Oxford Brookes University tbachkirova@brookes.ac.uk and Dr Judie Gannon, Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Business jmgannon@brookes.ac.uk.

Please note: The researcher is both a Doctoral Student at Oxford Brookes University and an employee at the University of the Arts London (UAL), where she is the Student Complaints, Appeals and Extenuating Circumstances Officer. Participation or withdrawal in the research will not affect your studies are experience at your University.

Who has reviewed the study?

Prior to approaching you to commence this research, the research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.

Contact for Further Information
Dionne Spencer 15058087@brookes.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project that they can contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee at Oxford Brookes University ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

16/12/16

10.5 Consent Form

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM

Full title of Project: Coaching 'the self': Developing a coaching model to support under-represented student groups studying within Higher Education (HE)

Name, position and contact address of Researcher:

Dionne Spencer, Principal Investigation (Researcher)

	Please initial box
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.	☐
3. I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

	Please initial box	
	Yes	No
4. I agree to the focus group being audio recorded	☐	☐
I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications	☐	☐
I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and may be used for future research.	☐	☐

10.6 Student coachee interview questions

Thank you for attending the interview participating in coaching.

It is really valuable to hear and understand your experiences what you may consider small things.

As a thank you gesture you will receive an £10 Amazon voucher.

- PROMPT Throughout the interview I may ask you for *examples*.

1. Tell me about your journey prior to University. How did you come to the decision to apply to University?

The following questions may or may not be asked, depending on whether they have been covered by the participant's initial response.

2. How does your experience compare to the expectations you had before starting university?
    a. Could you give an example of one thing that you felt scared/anxious about?
    b. What was the most exciting thing that you were imagining?
    c. What one thing that has changed most dramatically since then?

3. What aspects of university are you enjoying?
    a. What is happening in your life now that would not be possible if you didn't start your study here?

4. What aspects of university are you finding challenging?
    a. Could you give an example of a challenge that stretches you and feels useful and one challenge that feels impossible?

5. As you know there are various University support services that are designed to help students to deal with challenges.

    a. Have you used any of these support services?
    b. If no why?
    c. If yes, which and how did it support you?

6. In what way do you feel you have changed being a student?

    a. How did this change happened during your studies?
    b. Which changes are you happy with and which are you not happy with?
    c. Are these changes noticeable for others?
    d. In what way do you see yourself as different from others?
    e. How would you describe your confidence as an undergraduate student?
    f. Has your confidence changed during your studies? If yes in what way?
    g. If no why?

7. Could you tell me about the coaching that you had?

    a. How would you describe it?
    b. How did you feel during and after the sessions?
    c. Could you give me an example of the most useful thing that you took away from these sessions?
    d. Was anything in these sessions that didn't sit well with you?
    e. What else would you wish has happened in these sessions?
    f. How could you use them better if you had them again?

8. Are there any other comments you would like to make about your experience at university?

    a. If you had a chance to start this journey all over again what would you do differently?
    b. What advice would you give under-represented student groups who are about to embark on an undergraduate degree?

    c. What could the university do better to support under-represented student groups?

10.7 Coaches interview questions

Thank you for attending the interview and coaching students.

It is really valuable to hear and understand your experiences what you may consider small things.

As a thank you gesture you will receive an £10 Amazon voucher.

- PROMPT Throughout the interview I may ask you for *examples*.

9. Could you tell me more about your reasons for becoming a coach? What is most important for you in this role?

10. What clients' groups do you find most satisfying to work with?

11. How does your experience of coaching staff compare to your experience of coaching under-represented student groups?

    The following questions may or may not be asked, depending on whether they have been covered by the participant's initial response.

12. What expectations did you have before you started coaching under-represented student groups?

13. What were your main concerns at that stage? Did they materialise?

14. How would you describe the experiences that under-represented student groups have at university? What do you feel about it?

15. How did you approach the coaching process with these students? For example, what coaching style or technique did you use? What did you see as working and not so well?

16. What aspects of coaching did you enjoy? Why? Could you give an example?

17. What aspects of coaching did you find challenging? Why? Could you give an example?

18. What did you learn about yourself whilst coaching these students?

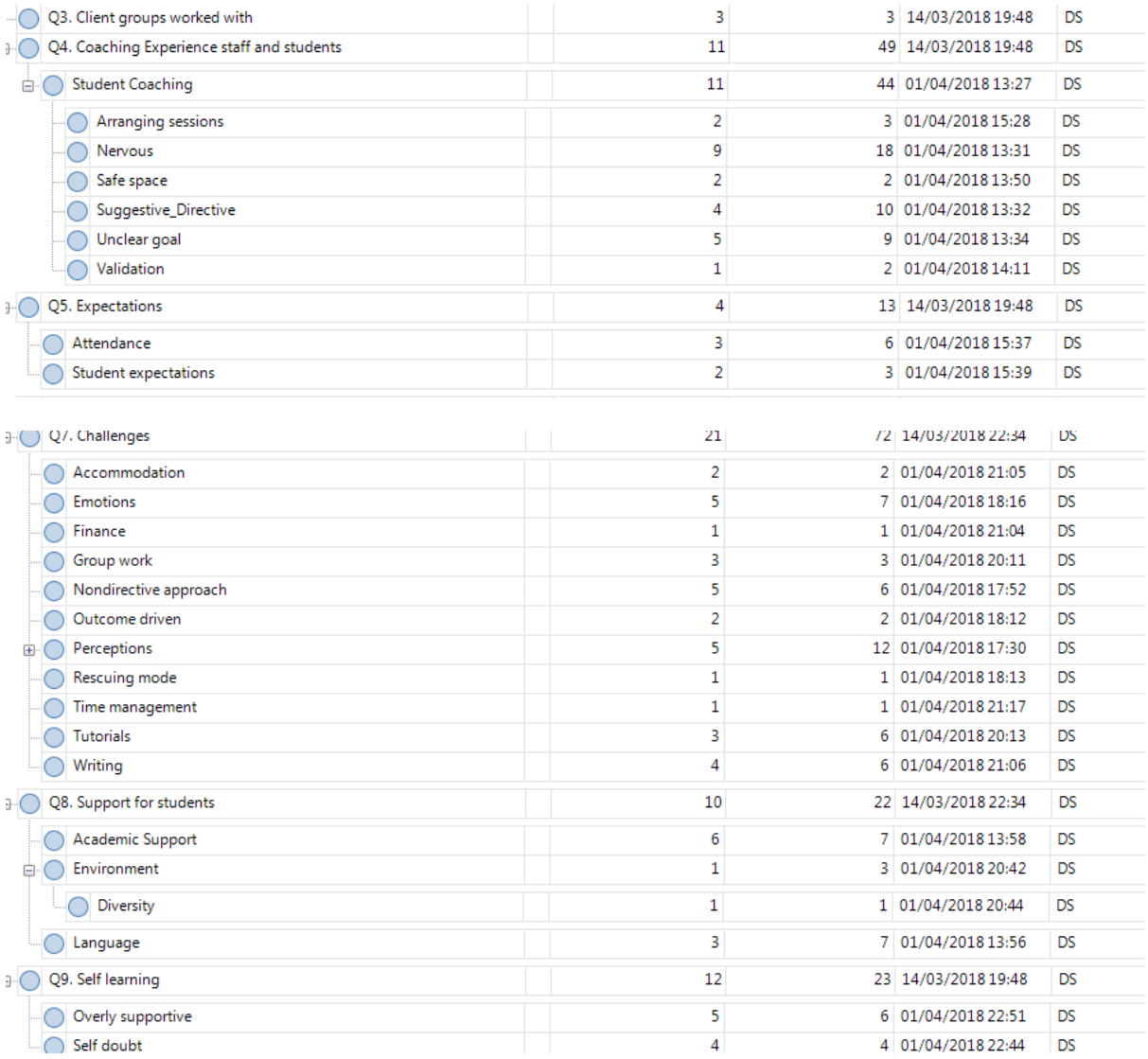
19. What would you do differently if you had a chance to coach these kind of students again?

20. Are there any other comments you would like to make about your experience of coaching under-represented student groups?

    a. What advice would you give to other coaches who are about to embark on coaching under-represented student groups?

    b. What could the university do better to support student from under-represented groups?

10.8 Nvivo coding



Q3. Client groups worked with	3	3	14/03/2018 19:48	DS
Q4. Coaching Experience staff and students	11	49	14/03/2018 19:48	DS
Student Coaching	11	44	01/04/2018 13:27	DS
Arranging sessions	2	3	01/04/2018 15:28	DS
Nervous	9	18	01/04/2018 13:31	DS
Safe space	2	2	01/04/2018 13:50	DS
Suggestive_Directive	4	10	01/04/2018 13:32	DS
Unclear goal	5	9	01/04/2018 13:34	DS
Validation	1	2	01/04/2018 14:11	DS
Q5. Expectations	4	13	14/03/2018 19:48	DS
Attendance	3	6	01/04/2018 15:37	DS
Student expectations	2	3	01/04/2018 15:39	DS
Q7. Challenges	21	72	14/03/2018 22:34	DS
Accommodation	2	2	01/04/2018 21:05	DS
Emotions	5	7	01/04/2018 18:16	DS
Finance	1	1	01/04/2018 21:04	DS
Group work	3	3	01/04/2018 20:11	DS
Nondirective approach	5	6	01/04/2018 17:52	DS
Outcome driven	2	2	01/04/2018 18:12	DS
Perceptions	5	12	01/04/2018 17:30	DS
Rescuing mode	1	1	01/04/2018 18:13	DS
Time management	1	1	01/04/2018 21:17	DS
Tutorials	3	6	01/04/2018 20:13	DS
Writing	4	6	01/04/2018 21:06	DS
Q8. Support for students	10	22	14/03/2018 22:34	DS
Academic Support	6	7	01/04/2018 13:58	DS
Environment	1	3	01/04/2018 20:42	DS
Diversity	1	1	01/04/2018 20:44	DS
Language	3	7	01/04/2018 13:56	DS
Q9. Self learning	12	23	14/03/2018 19:48	DS
Overly supportive	5	6	01/04/2018 22:51	DS
Self doubt	4	4	01/04/2018 22:44	DS

10.9 Student coachee reflective diary

DIARY REVIEW FORM

Confidentiality - this document will be used solely for research purposes and will only be seen by the Principal Researcher. Please use an alias for the coachee's name to preserve anonymity.

Coach name:	
Coachee name (alias):	
Date of session:	Length of session:
What topics were discussed during the session? What was identified as your specific need(s) at this stage?	
In what way was coaching supporting your specific needs? (What was most helpful? What do you see as challenges?)	
What did you learn about yourself?	
What did the coach do to enable this learning to happen?	
What could the coach have focused more or less on?	
If you arrived at specific outcomes or action points could you name them?	
How did you feel as the result of the session?	
In what way was coaching helping you to enhance yourself or your studies as an undergraduate student?	
If there was one more thing that you wished was discussed at this session what would it be?	

10.10 Coaches reflective diary

DIARY REVIEW FORM

Confidentiality - this document will be used solely for research purposes and will only be seen by the Principal Researcher. Please use an alias for the coachee's name to preserve anonymity.

Coach name:	
Coachee name (alias):	
Date of session:	Length of session:
What topics were discussed during the session? What did you see as the specific needs of this student at this stage?	
What kind of coaching interventions seemed most useful to you in this session? Were there challenges?	
What did I learn about my student coachee?	
What do you think the student coachee learnt about themselves?	
How equipped did you feel in addressing the needs of the student coachee during coaching session? What did you feel after reflecting on this after the session?	
What did I learn about myself and my coaching from this session?	
What do you feel about the results of the session? If the student has arrived at specific outcomes or action points could you name them?	
Is there anything that you would do the same or differently at the next coaching session?	

10.11 Student coachee transcript

1. Tell me about your journey prior to University. How did you come to the decision to apply to University?

Student: Umm well at GCSE I kind of knew I wanted to do fashion so I did textile design at A Level and then did foundation because I knew I wanted to come to this one or a couple of others that did foundation. So, it's like a foundation diploma I did mine at XXX, but back at home and it was umm just a year making a portfolio and trying different types of art and stuff.

It was like a good year it was nice it was a year off but you are still working you get me. I think the first part is Level 3, then it went to Level 4 in the second part. So it prepared you so you were ready for university.

2 How does your experience compare to the expectations you had before starting university?

Student: Like I knew it was going to be hard. But I think it's a lot harder than I thought it would be. Umm I think more of it was just easing into living by myself and then also all the extra stuff that you have to do that you didn't realise. Then you're doing all the work on top of it. It was difficult but I think I'm getting used to it now.

I think time management and just the work load, the amount of work that's like what, that's what I'm still struggling with but working through. The volume and just making sure everything is done so I'm not rushing at the last minute to do loads of things, and I know I have to do things by certain points in order to have it all done.

The accommodation, making sure I've got the food in like making lunches instead of wasting loads of money on just like eating out. I always go to Subway and spend like £7.00 I shouldn't be spending £7.00 on lunch when I don't have that money. So, I need to start making lunches. It was like every day Subway, it was like I'll treat myself (laugh). But I can't do that every day because it's not a treat.

2a Could you give an example of anything you were scared/anxious about?

Student: I think it was more like social, making friends and stuff and then umm I don't know tutors and things and whether I'd like them. I like some of them, so it's not that bad. It's not like that I hate them. It's just that some I don't like that much but I deal with it. Umm I just don't like the way you know they teach. It's just not the way I'm learning so I find it a bit harder and it's a bit annoying because I feel I'm not getting as much out of the lesson.

What would make a good teacher for you then?

Student: Umm, I don't know someone who is more. We had someone last term and she was more, she err, she would say right so we're doing this and she would have like a plan and then umm. She would go through it all, she would teach you it and then you would go away afterwards and then do it all yourself. Like you would have to do all of the patterns. So, she would tell you how to do it, and you would go away and do it.

This tutor now he does one pattern and then is like, oh umm, like go and do it now in the lesson, do you know what I mean. I feel like it's just a waste of time do you know what I mean. When he could be showing us like 10 instead of 5 in a lesson, like she was you get me. So, I feel like I'm not getting as much like done. It's like, I can do all that by myself anyway. It's like I don't need their assistance for this stuff that they are sending me away to do in the lesson, and they're there. I want more hands on like things that I need help on. I think that's just way he teaches.

In foundation you had to be there every day it was like government funded so you had to be there ummm and you would be there 5 days a week and you would be there like non-stop so you got lots of work done. But in uni it's more, I find it more difficult this because you don't. You get in for certain times but you have to do the work outside the times. But then it's like, how do I fit that in my time because like, I have work at a certain time and it's like well, I can't do that afterwards do you know what I mean. But it's not 9-5, it's more like 9-3 and then work and then 10 to whatever do you know what I mean, so like it's trying to fit around things.

Is there anything you would do differently in year 2 and potentially year 3?

Student: Umm I think I would make sure like I plan my week so like on Monday I need to be in I know I need to be in for like a lecture at XXX. I'll spend the rest of the day in the library, or you know, so like I've got it planned and I would stick to it. Sometimes if you don't like make a plan it will come to Monday and you'll just be like, oh I will just go in for the lecture and then I'll have the day off. Not have the day off, but you know I wouldn't do as much as I would usually do. So, I think I'm going to do that this term as well.

2b. What was the most exciting thing that you were imagining about uni?
Student: Kinda like the industrial side, like more umm, so like this term, we are doing a collaboration with XXX so that's quite exciting. So, we are doing it with actual industry instead of like back in foundation it would be like this is a brief and then it was a hypothetical one. There's a lot of on the Instagram, I signed up for a designer show for XXX because they advertised it so I thought I might as well. The XXX thing was just on the Instagram page and the XXX thing is in our umm brief this time, yeah.

3. What aspects of university are you enjoying?
Student: I guess like living away from home and being a lot more independent. Well I go out a lot more (laugh) but I feel I need to stop that. Stop going out as much but I think as well like people like back at home. Like friends who were doing foundation wanted to do graphics they didn't want to do this particular thing. Now I'm with people who are more focused on like design, or like if it's not design, it's kind of fine art or things that are kind of like similar. So, and then friends, like going out to museums, not museums like art

galleries. Whereas at home, it would be the rare friends that would go with me so yeah. It would be like dragging them out.

4. What aspects of university are you finding challenging?
Student: Like I said before you know, time management, stress. I get I think I'm quite stress prone and kind of like calming down at times is a bit difficult. Just feeling like I'm not going to get everything done in time and then I've got this friend who does loads of work. I mean absolute loads and being around him sometimes just stresses me out coz I'm like, I haven't done that much but I know I'm on track because I will be doing something differently. Like I'll be doing something first, but then he would be doing the thing that I should be doing second. Then I'll be really stressed.

I was up all night until our hand in was at 9. I stayed up until about 8, had half hour sleep and then walked in, then I went back and slept for the whole day it was so yeah. I think my work doesn't turn out as good under pressure. So, all that work I would have like got it done but I don't think I got it done to how I wanted it to be. If I had more time or I don't know spread out my workload a bit better umm I feel like I would have done it better.

5. As you know there are various University support services that are designed to help students to deal with challenges. Have you used any of these services?

Student: No, I haven't used academic support before because I did my essay and then in the seminar not many people turned up so he looked over mine. I feel like I'm quite strong with essays so I'm not worried about academic support for that, but I'm looking to go to the CV and the cover letter help sessions. I will be going to that because I am trying to apply for an internship in the summer so I will need to get that sorted.

6. In what way do you feel you have changed being a student?
Student: No, well tutors maybe umm I had her for A Level as well we were close, not close but we would have a chat but that doesn't happen with tutors here. You can have a bit of a chat but I feel that they are not as supportive, like she was really supportive, we still stay in touch. Like when I go home she always wants me to come in and stuff but, yeah tutors here I don't feel like there's, I'm not with them as much.

I think we only have them about 4 hours a week so we have the same one for pattern cutting, well sample class and then we have the same one for design class. I think I'm close with the design class tutor because we get an hour each and its with 4 other people. You get to chat with the design tutor or the sample tutor, you see them for like 4 hours but there's the whole class there so you don't get to talk to them as much. It's quite a big class, it's not that big, but it's not that personal.

7. Could you tell me about the coaching that you had?
Student: It's good to like umm kind of evaluate what I thought. You know what I mean like think about it more and think about how I was progressing you get me. So, I think otherwise you'd say things and then not realised that's what I thought. Like I wouldn't bring it up in conversation you know with someone else, so it was good to find that out, otherwise I wouldn't know.

We spoke about time management in one of the sessions and I was asked how many weeks I had left. I was like oh my God so we like planned out what I had to do. I had to get all that stuff done. So, I think if I had not thought about all that stuff then I wouldn't have got it done in time. And just kind of making me more aware of the things that I need to work on and know that I'm kind of weak in them.

7.b How did you feel during and after the sessions?
Umm do you mean just like, I don't know at first I felt this was a bit strange I find it hard to talk like for an hour about myself (laugh) after a while it was alright I got used to it. I felt like I was annoying (laugh) just like telling them everything and they wouldn't say anything.

Interviewer: No that's fine, that's what coaching is. You are having a discussion and hearing what you are saying. It's your time and sometimes we just don't get that time to think about things. I'm sure you weren't annoying them and it was fine.

7.c Could you give me an example about the most useful thing you took away?
Student: Umm just like when I was warned about the weeks I think and I had to think, how long will it that thing take. I think I had so many things to do and you said how long will that thing take. I said that would take me a day then I didn't realise I only had so many days so that made me think more about it.

I think I was exaggerating when I said that sample would take me a day. But it felt like a day when I was doing it so. I feel as though sometimes I overestimate how long something will take me. I feel like it will just make me more prepared. It will give me more time you know afterwards to finish it off. For the last week and a half, I was up for like most nights until about at least 3 and then well I would have to get to uni before like 8.30 otherwise the machines are gone and then on the last night I just stayed up all night. And I got a C for that one.

Interviewer: Was you happy with that?

Student: No not really, no but when like some of the samples I was looking at them. Like sometimes you know when you look at your work you can think this is really good. Like my portfolio, but then with some of my samples I was like no. I really didn't want to hand it in but it got to the point where I had to because I didn't have the time to redo them or anything. But I think it was just like if I'd got to the point where there's no going back now. For like this project, I really don't like jersey and it had to be jersey based and it's my least favourite fabric so I don't think I did too bad considering I hated it. I hated the fabric when I was working on it, it was horrible.

Is there anything you think is transferrable that you think you might do?
Student: I'm definitely going to plan, like I've got this project that I'm going to do now. I'm going to print the handbook and get a book out and plan when everything is going to be done by so for me I think it's going to go well.

When you get to year 3 what it is that you would have like to achieved?

Student: I think I would like to be confident in my skills so when I leave I can definitely get a job because I'm really good at pattern cutting. I want to do an internship in the summer I don't actually think I'm good enough compared to other people. But I'm looking at XXX. My mum's friend works there and I'm also going to look at smaller brands just like if I'm in London it would be useful even if it's a couple of days a week it would be fine.

I feel like coming here and seeing how good everyone else is and it's not umm coz most times in internships they want someone like sewing or pattern cutting and umm well sewing on industrial machines. I only started in September but I feel like lots of people have been doing it for ages. There's probably a lot of people applying that are seamstresses or something and I just don't feel that I can do that as good as they could.

Interviewer: Do you think that is the reality of it, or are you just thinking that?

Student:I think I'm just thinking that coz I feel like I guess like, interns, half of it is like learning anyway you'll be doing stuff you hadn't done before. They'd be like well this is how it needs doing and just do loads of it and then you learn how to do it perfectly. But umm yeah, I'm probably over reacting I should just apply and get over it. If I don't get it it's not the end of the world, I mean because it's only the 1st year. I do an internship anyway, but I just like to get at least get a little one so next year I'm a bit more confident with it.

What are some of the things you are going to do to get that confidence up?
Student: Umm work hard and try, I want to do better this term. This term is the same project, not the same project as last term but the making side and so far my grades on that, well this one was a C and the last one was a C and I don't want to be at a C. I want to be higher, even with a B I will be happy with I would be confident I would be getting better rather than just staying the same.

Imagine the work was a B would your confidence be different?
Student: I wouldn't be overly confident but I would think I'm improving. If they had given me an A then I would think it must have been a good pattern. But then if I knew I could do better then, I would not be as confident in it if I knew it could be so much better.

At the moment I feel that I could definitely do better. I think it's practice and making sure I am spending the time to be neat and that line is perfect instead of just or just a little off do you know what I mean. Instead of just rushing it because I think that I have been and thinking well that's not the important bit. The important bit is making a T-shirt.

8b What advice would you give to student embarking on an undergraduate degree?

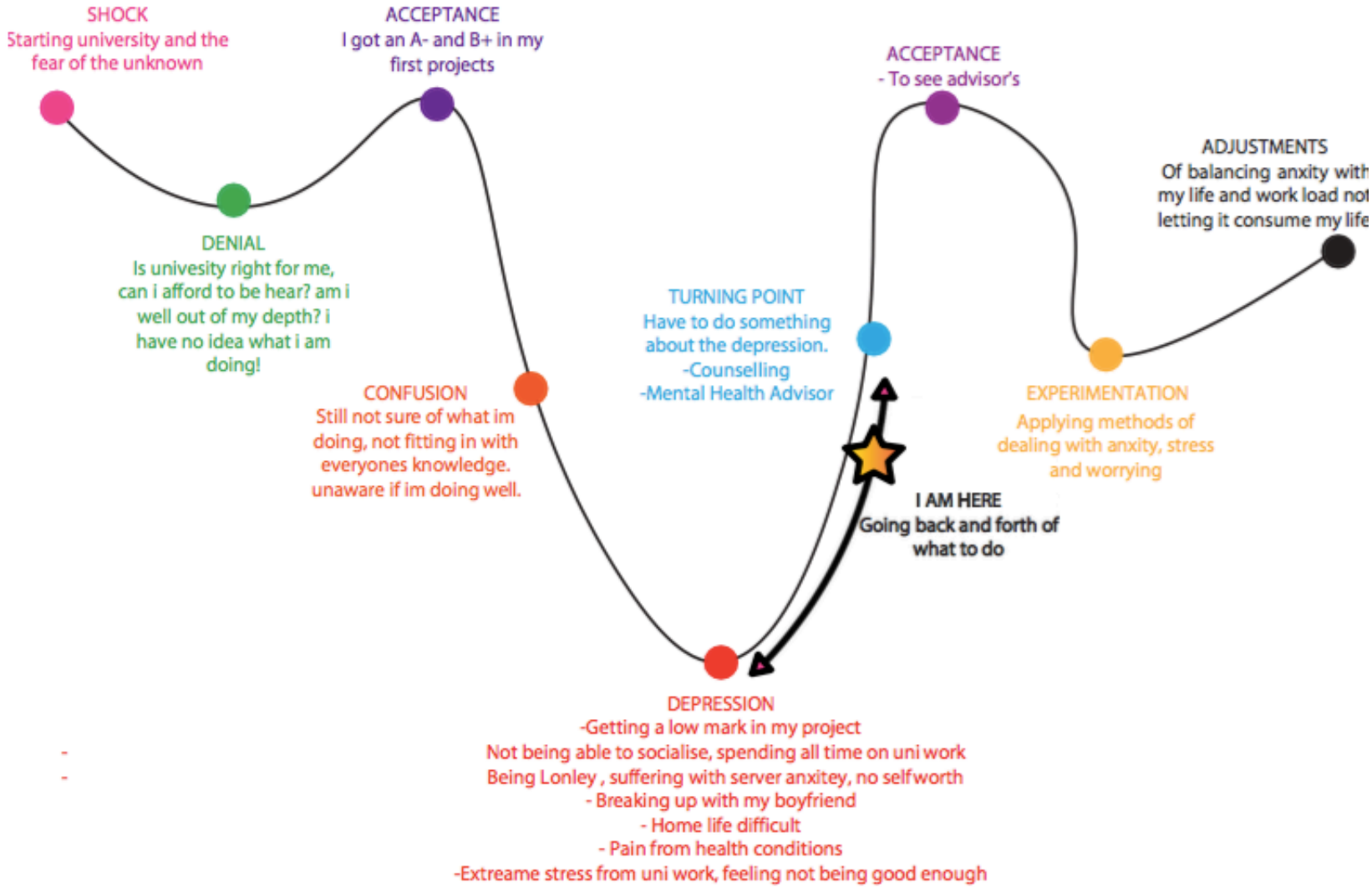
Student: Well in the first term making sure you are balancing the social and the living and then the uni work so that. I think before uni started, and for those 3 weeks I just out because we kind of started it was a casual start. We kind of still went out and I feel that maybe spent I should spend more time at lecturers or I don't know maybe be more excited about starting actual uni, instead of just the starting of uni life you get me. And

then making sure the rest was balanced like I knew Freshers was over and then like next week take it seriously and think I'm only going to go out on Saturday rather than all week.

You do Fresher's in year 2, you still go out a bit even if you don't do Freshers' coz some of my friends they are in their 2nd year because they did Maths or something of the kind I'm pretty sure they still went out. I think that's when everyone goes out it's really busy.

Get the balance right and get a cleaning rota in the kitchen I still haven't done that so I don't think I can give advice on that. We've got a fly infestation No one has done anything about it and it's just a mess it smells of smoke and curry. I don't even go in there it's disgusting it's so vile and the floor, I'm pretty sure there's glass on the floor, and I've been in there and been accidently stabbed like twice already so. I've tidied up so many times I'm not doing it anymore. It's like I'm tidying up the whole flat and its' wasting my day. I could be doing something else and it's not my mess. I am moving but have not looked yet but think I should, but I don't know how soon is too soon.

10.12 Student coachee supplementary data – visual diagram of HE experiences



10.13 Student supplementary data – musical lyrics

The lyrics to 'The Climb' by Miley Cyrus and an image have been removed from this version of the thesis due to copyright restrictions