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'It all just clicked': a longitudinal perspective on transitions within University

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'It all just clicked': a longitudinal perspective on transitions within University

Abstract

This paper explores the transitions that a group of students, admitted from further education colleges as part of broader widening access initiative at a Scottish research–intensive university, made across the lifetime of their degrees. It investigates how they negotiate their learning careers beyond the first year, and how they (re)define their approaches to independent learning as they progress to the later years of their courses. Evidence is drawn from 20 students who were interviewed during each of their three or four years of study to provide a longitudinal account of their experiences of engagement and participation at the university. We draw attention to three ways in which the students made transitions across the course of their degrees: to increased knowledge of the conventions of academic writing; to enhanced critical skills; and to practical strategies to prioritise learning.

Keywords

Introduction

The transitions that students make to university have received considerable attention from researchers. Much of this has concentrated on the first year of university study, and has focused on investigating students' knowledge of, and engagement with, a new learning community. While a diversity of methods and approaches to transitions has been used, a clear consensus has emerged that students need to be better prepared for studying at university level (Price, Handley, and Millar 2011; Reay, Crozier, and Clayton 2010; Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld 2005). They may have little experience of a learning environment in which they have limited formal contact time with teaching staff and where they will have to undertake assessed work without active staff input. Much of the emphasis has been on the difficulties that coalesce around the ability of the students to become independent learners at the point at which they make the transition into first year (Kember 2001; Krause and Coates 2008; Saltmarsh and Saltmarsh 2008). As yet, however, there has been little investigation of how students negotiate and manage their learning careers beyond this first year of study, and of how they (re)define their approaches to independent learning as they progress to the later years of a course.

The paper seeks to address this gap in the literature by providing a longitudinal analysis of the processes through which students become successful independent learners over the lifetime of their degree programme. We look at the knowledge and skills which are necessary to survive, and indeed succeed, from first year through to graduation. Its innovative contribution is thus to track the progress students make beyond their initial entry to the university, and to analyse their experiences over the three or four years of their degrees based on a comparison of their experiences in their first and final years. This dynamic interpretation is an addition to the literature on

how students continually (re)develop their learning; such longitudinal studies are not well-represented in debates about persistence and retention (Evans, Cools, and Charlesworth 2010).

Transition experiences at university

Research literature on student transitions tends to concentrate on the initial year of study with a strong steer towards the induction period (Brooman and Darwent 2013; Devlin 2013; Leese 2010). In part this emphasis on the students' early experiences stems from the neo-liberal policy environment in which universities are located, where poor scores on performance measures, such as student attrition and failure, are damaging to their reputation and financial health. Given the long-standing push to improve retention rates, coupled with the high expectations that students now have given the level of financial responsibility they bear for their courses, it is not surprising that many universities have invested in dedicated training or induction courses on arrival. These initiatives aim to enhance retention and completion rates by easing the transitions the students make to university and by supporting them to become effective learners (Hallet 2012; Palmer, O'Kane, and Owens 2009; Thomas 2011). Despite the emphasis on overall outcomes and measures of performance, there has been little research on the transitional experiences that students continue to make across the lifetime of their degree.

The emphasis on the students' initial experiences of becoming independent learners derives also from research on approaches to learning, and how these change as individuals move between – and within – different learning communities (Evans, Cools and Charlesworth 2010; Hallett 2012). Studies have investigated if, and how, students negotiate, and come to understand, the new teaching and learning environment in which they find themselves (Brockbank and McGill 2007). Attention has focused on key aspects of student learning, including initial experiences of the assessment process, and how these might differ from their previous learning environment (Beaumont, O'Doherty, and Shannon 2011: Macaskill and Denovan 2013), and the role of perceptions of, and attitudes towards, independent learning (Bharuthram and McKenna 2006; Hallett 2012; Kember 2001). Another focus has been on students' identities and how the transition to a new learning environment, with its potential to disrupt a safe and secure learner identity, can be experienced in intensely emotional terms that can affect students' self-belief and feelings of competence (Christie et al. 2006; Cramp et al. 2012).   While these two bodies of research offer a framework for developing a more dynamic interpretation of students' transition processes, this has yet to be fully realized. Indeed Haggis (2009, 389) argues that there is 'little research which attempts to document different types of dynamic interaction and process through time in relation to "learning" situations in higher education'.

Longitudinal experiences of engagement and participation

A parallel theme in the literature focuses on how students engage with their studies, and on what they and their institutions can do to enhance participation and engagement (Zepke and Leach 2010). Here learning is seen as an on-going and

dynamic process which is central to understanding how students negotiate and manage their independent learning throughout their time at university. The emphasis is on how students engage with, and develop, academic literacies and competencies in ways that go beyond the autonomous acquisition of seemingly neutral, technical skills (Hager and Hodkinson 2009; Lea and Street 2006). This process is social, context specific, patterned by power relations, historically situated and, most importantly for this paper, dynamic (Haggis 2009). Learning is not just about how students meet the requirements demanded of them at specific points in their academic career, but is embedded in the totality of their prior learning experiences. This includes not only learning what constitutes knowledge in the discipline, but also how to take intellectual risks in their engagement with 'dominant discourses and official knowledges' (Saltmarsh and Saltmarsh 2008, 622). Skills cannot be de-contextualised and directly transferred to a new learning environment. Rather, as McDonald et al. argue in relation to changing assessment requirements and practices, 'students are not simply responding to the given subject – they carry with them the totality of their experiences of learning and being assessed and this […] extends far beyond concurrent and immediately preceding subjects' (1995, 2).

In addition, changes over time are often implicit in accounts of how students become successful learners. Much of this research draws on Lave and Wenger (1991) and focuses on non-traditional students who do not know or understand the 'rules of the game' when they first enter university (Anderson and McCune 2013; Barton and Tusting 2005; Christie et al. 2008; Crossan et al. 2003). Since education is considered to play a significant role in processes of identity formation (Youdell 2006), then with time and experience, and by participating in socially valued practices within the learning community, students (may) become full participants. In this approach, which draws attention to the importance of longitudinal analysis, the emphasis moves beyond the immediate difficulties at the point of entry to higher education, to recognise the longer transition processes that students must effect if they are to become successful learners. Social practices such as education are seen not as 'embellishments to' or 'accomplishments of' a self whose personal qualities and characteristics are fixed, but rather, education is shaped by educational discourses (of which academic literacy is a central component) and by the relations between 'self, other and text that take place in educational contexts' (Saltmarsh and Saltmarsh 2008, 622).

Drawing attention to engagement and participation in learning has ramifications for understanding the transitions that individuals make throughout their time at university. Again, however, as Haggis (2009) points out, longitudinal studies are not well represented in the research literature. There are exceptions where students' development is traced over a period of time. Thesen (2009, 391), for example, tracks students' engagement across the first year of a lecture course to offer a view of learning as embodied, emergent and contested, rather than as packaged and predictable; whilst Crozier and Reay (2011) examine the impact of university on the construction and reconstruction of identities with an emphasis on the socio-cultural experiences of working class students.

Given the inherently dynamic nature of the transition process, it is surprising that there has been little research that attempts to document if, and how, the process of becoming a successful learner changes as the student progresses through university.

The analysis in this paper therefore offers some insight into, and interpretation of, how students become independent learners over time.

Methodology

This paper is a based on a longitudinal study in which a group of students that had been admitted from further education colleges as part of broader widening access initiative at a prestigious, research–intensive university in Scotland (Cree et al, 2006) were followed over the course of their three or four year undergraduate degree programmes.   The study used standardised questionnaires developed from the Enhancing Teaching–Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses (ETL) Project (www.ed.ac.uk/etl) and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. In this paper we are drawing only on the interviews but information from both sets of data has been reported on elsewhere (Christie et al. 2008; Cree et al. 2009; Hounsell et al. 2008; Tett et al, 2012). The interviews were conducted in the week before academic studies began; at the end of the first semester/beginning of second semester; then again on an annual basis until graduation. They were designed to find out from the students themselves how they had fared over time and so they covered the students' experiences of: teaching and learning environments; the cultural and social environment; support systems; managing the balance between home and university life; and managing pressures such as financial difficulties.

This paper draws on the interview material collected from students in their first year of study, and from the same students in either their third or fourth year, depending on whether they were studying for an Ordinary degree (three years) or an Honours degree (four years).   In these interviews the students were asked, amongst other things, about their prior learning experiences in further education colleges, their expectations about being a university student, their learning trajectory within the university and, in their final interviews, they were invited to reflect on the whole of their learning experiences including their views about the teaching and assessment regimes they experienced.

All of the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed and were initially sorted with the NUD·IST software. Our subsequent analysis of the transcripts employed the constant comparative method (Braun and Clarke 2006). This means that each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process; themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set; themes have been independently checked by two researchers to ensure that they are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive. Most of the data utilised in this article was drawn from the section of the interviews on teaching and learning and was analysed by theme and by year of study. In looking at particular themes, the researchers referred to both an entire section and also to the remainder of the transcript to ensure that any extracts used were consistent with views expressed on other topics. This method of analysis has the advantage of giving a holistic picture rather than a fragmented view of individual variables. The quotations selected for this article are those that represented significant constructs that appeared across the range of students. Each student has been allocated an identifying number and this is used to attribute quotes to individuals.

The whole sample was made up of 45 students who came to university with Higher National Certificate and Higher National Diploma qualifications directly from further education colleges. These qualifications are generally regarded as 'non-standard' in the most selective universities but in this case were accepted as part of this university's commitment to widening access. All of the students were studying for degrees in the social sciences or the humanities. Table 1 shows that the majority were mature students and over four fifths were female. None of the students had previous experience of studying at university and very few had come from families where attending universities was a common pathway. In this paper we draw upon data generated in 65 individual interviews. Table 2 breaks down the interviews by year of study. In total interviews were undertaken with 45 students in first year, 20 students in final year (ten completed after three years and ten after four years). As such we are able to offer a longitudinal analysis of the experiences of 20 students. Of the remaining twenty-five students interviewed in the first year, five left the university, nine left the study before we were able to complete all the interviews and the remainder were on interruptions of study. Table 3 shows that the age and sex profile of the students interviewed in third and fourth year was similar to that of the initial sample.

Table 1: Sample of students in first year by age and sex

Age at start of course	Female	Male
17-20	7	3
21-30	7	4
31 or older	24	0
Total	*38*	*7*

Table 2: Sample of students interviewed by year group

Year of study	No of students
1st	45
3rd	10
4th	10

Table 3: Sample of students in third and fourth year by age and sex

Age at start of course	Female	Male
17-20	4	2
21-30	1	1
31 or older	12	0
Total	*17*	*3*

All of the students who participated in the study in their third or fourth years had made a successful transition to university so comparing their learning experiences in first year with their later years of study enabled us to investigate the importance of time in developing their academic literacies. Interestingly, there was little difference in the accounts given by the third years and the fourth years: the major transitions were in place for the final two years of study. In the next section we examine the

respondents' experiences of learning as they moved through university, and highlight how these changed. We emphasis the importance they placed on becoming independent learners, and how they articulated this in their accounts of becoming critical and reflective thinkers.

Moving through university

What was clear in the accounts of all of the 20 students who were interviewed again in their third or fourth year of study was that by their final years they had all come to know and understand how to operate effectively within the university's teaching and learning environment. They felt they had become independent learners and were conscious of the transitions they had undertaken in order to reach a position that felt relatively secure compared to the position they occupied in first year. In the main, they acknowledged the greater standard and depth of work expected in the later years. Many found third and fourth year more 'intensive' and 'demanding' but noted, in addition, that they had become '100 per cent dedicated' to completing their degrees. Here we draw attention to three key ways in which the students effected this transition: their increased knowledge about, and understanding of, the conventions of academic writing; their enhanced critical skills; and their practical strategies to prioritise learning.

In documenting the importance of time in the processes through which the students became members of the university community many referred to a gradual process of accumulating knowledge and skills about how to be a university student. These comments tended to centre on the development of academic writing skills. This was because the students in the cohort had had time to learn about, reflect on, and engage with the practices of good academic writing. They had developed new academic literacies (see also Lea and Street 2006) that had not been known to them in the first year. Their accounts reveal how this was a learned process and the confidence with which students tackled essays in the later years of study stands in contrast to their struggles in first year.

For example, Student 2 in an interview undertaken in his first year, reflected on the difficulties of writing essays, which centred on not knowing how to find information and on being unsure of the conventions of academic writing:

> The essay was quite difficult because I guess it was just the first time doing such a big essay and it was finding the relevant information and referencing, that was quite difficult as well (Student 2, first year interview).

By fourth year, however, he felt confident about the process of writing an essay:

> The long essay was [...] basically just what it says – like a long essay. But it took a lot longer than it had done before. It wasn't anything new, because like I'd done that. So it just kind of took a lot of hard work to get it done (Student 2, fourth year interview).

Although putting together the content was always challenging, and rightly so, by

fourth year the process of essay writing was known and familiar to him precisely because he had participated in these practices over the lifetime of the programme.

Similarly, Student 13 spoke about the real difficulties she had with writing essays in first year, especially in relation to the gap between what was expected of her at university and what she had experienced at college. In line with McDonald et al's (1995) work, her comments reveal the importance of the students' prior learning experiences to understanding the dynamic transitions that they make to, and within, university:

> It's so hard going from college where you've been in quite a small class and getting so much help, like getting a sort of essay plan of what's expected […] and getting a book list that you've basically to use all the books (from) […] it's not that extensive and all the information is in these books or these websites that they […] give you. […] Whereas at uni there's so many people, and you get this *huge* book list. Half the books I went to look for don't even have half a chapter on anything near what I was writing my essay on. So I wasted my time on doing that (Student 13, fourth year interview, emphasis added).

But interestingly, this recognition and awareness of the difficulties with academic skills sometimes only manifested itself retrospectively, usually after students had received feedback on their work. In her first year interview, Student 13 above, had been quite relaxed about the process of essay writing particularly because she had fewer essays to write at university than at college:

> Compared to college last year when I had an essay every second week, coming out of my ears, millions of talks to do. I mean I feel like I've had a wee holiday so I've been quite happy so far (laughs) (Student 13, first year interview).

Taken together, the students' comments highlight that academic learning is valued for its potential to challenge, sustain, and think anew (Saltmarsh and Saltmarsh 2008). They also demonstrate the importance of time to engage with the learning community, which enabled the students to move towards more secure learning identities in their third and fourth years of study. This was an important aspect of the process of 'becoming' students and of feeling they had gained membership of the university (see also Thomas and Quinn 2006).

A second way in which the students effected successful transitions through time lay in the development of their critical thinking skills, and this was a key component of how they negotiated and came to understand the 'new rules of the game'. By third and fourth year they were thinking critically across the course: they saw the 'bigger picture' in which individual courses were situated, and recognised the value of the 'grounding' they had been given in years one and two. This was often in marked contrast to the situation in first year when they had struggled with seeing courses in isolation from one another and which, for some, was experienced as puzzling and frustrating. Enhanced critical thinking was a consequence of making the transition to a higher level of learning in the later years of study. Student 25, for example, found her three first year courses so disparate in terms of content that she:

> Really dipped in the first term […] the feeling of am I on the right course? But again, having spoken to different people, that seems to be a very common thing. But I sort of came back in term two with a […] renewed determination that, yeah, ultimately this is what I want to do and some bits you just have to work through and you might not particularly like, be your favourite subject, but you've got to achieve it and that's it, kind of thing (Student 25, first year interview).

By the time of her interview in third year, Student 25 was able to reflect on how her understanding of the basic principles of the subjects she studied had been constructed and deconstructed in an endless cycle. As the quote below indicates this was, in part, a frustrating process, but it was one that ultimately had transformative effects because she had begun to think in relational terms:

> That was really […] really hard I think even for the most able of students it was a really hard thing to get your head around but I did eventually […]. There are hundreds of different levels and whatever, but it did bring it together as a way of understanding society, of which […] I just wouldn't really have thought about (in first year), to be honest […]. By the end of it you've got whatever labels and then you come back this year and you realise, oh guess what, there are more shades of grey… (Student 25, third year interview).

Similarly, Student 21 reflected on how the subjects she studied in first and second year suddenly came together and made sense in a third year class. She too was making connections between her courses and had become a relational thinker. Although a Social Work student, she had taken Law courses in the earlier years as an 'outside student'. She described how the syllabus made sense to her in third year in a way that had not been accessible to her in the earlier years. With hindsight, these 'outside subjects' can come to be meaningful in their own right, and the degree had begun to make sense as a whole learning experience. She had taken the 'intellectual risks' that Saltmarsh and Saltmarsh (2008) indicate are important to students' learning processes:

> I think the Law teaching was really useful because we'd all been a bit iffy about the Law because we're Social Work (students). Because, as I say, in third year you're focusing all on Social Work, not on different courses like Philosophy or Anthropology. […] *So everything was coming together* and your head was full of legislation from community care, children and families, criminal justice and […] I went along with that (Student 21, third year interview, emphasis added).

Perhaps most importantly, students grappled with the social construction of knowledge and came to realise that there are always competing versions of the truth. Often this insight was experienced as a profound revelation, and is strongly indicative of the longitudinal transitions that the students made across their degree courses. Student 30, in a discussion of an essay topic, described the transformative potential of understanding how knowledge is socially constructed, which she had grasped by third year. She reflected on the difference between how she handled essay questions in first year and third year. In first year, she saw essay writing primarily in terms of acquiring information:

I had to do everything on my own, I had to go and find websites and books and just start from scratch […]. We had some core books and that, and then some other readings, so you knew where to go, but like other things you just had to find them (Student 30, first year interview).

Whereas by third year she was grappling with the complexities of the question and the nature of knowledge construction:

It was one of the questions that you could go anywhere with […] where there is no clear answer. […] Now (I know) it's more to do with how you perceive the question and with what you thought (Student 30, third year interview).

She went on to describe how she came to a point where she realised she was going to have to make her own meanings from the course material, to reconstitute knowledge for her own ends. She had become what Brockbank and McGill (2007) term a critically reflective learner. She described this transformation:

At a point it all just clicked and I decided I am actually going to have to sit and read […] Whereas maybe before (in first year) I would just read something and go 'oh well, that's too hard, I'll leave it to later'. [Now] I try to make myself read it and then read it again and try to see what the author was saying instead of taking everything at face value. I was quite bad for just believing everything … so I think that helped (Student 30, third year interview).

Realising the need to 'be critical of the information you are finding' and not to 'take everything at face value' were major breakthroughs for most students. One commented:

I think the course really prepared people to go out and not just take in what they've been told. If you believe in something then you go and get the knowledge behind it, get facts and figures and things like that (Student 15, fourth year interview).

A third element of the transitions that students made centred on the practical strategies through which they developed more secure learning identities. These identities tended to centre on coming to feel like an established and accepted member of the university. There was evidence across the interviews of how small differences in the management and organisation of their learning practices contributed to a much stronger sense of their student identities. Again, students in third and fourth year were able to look back to the earlier years and identify moments around which their learning identities shifted. What emerged across the whole group was a recognition of the need, by third year, to prioritise university study, which centred on moving closer to the model of the independent learner. A key issue here was that students were strongly motivated to engage with the learning community (Zepke and Leach 2010). Taking on an identity as a university student variously involved taking responsibility for managing their own learning, including finding their own learning materials as well as being proactive in creating time and space in which to study. Student 37, for example, explained how the identity of the university student as an independent and autonomous learner was something that initially posed very real and

practical difficulties for her. In first year she struggled because of what she described as being 'naive' about the amount of work required to be a university student. She commented:

> It is a different way of working again. It was supposed be just basically you go off and you do the work […] but I didn't really realise that from the start. […] So I suppose that is, it's all on the student to learn and make it their responsibility to know what you're doing. I didn't realise until the end (of the semester) what it was I was supposed to be doing. It wasn't until we started writing the assignment that I realised that all of this other stuff from all the classes was you know, all the reading and preparation for the assignment, it sounds naïve but just wasn't kind of prepared but now I've got my eyes open and I know exactly what… I suppose it was uncertainty, for the first term (Student 37, first year interview).

In fourth year, by contrast, she realised just how much independent study was required and took responsibility for freeing up time and space to study consistently. She had successfully taken on the identity of the autonomous learner:

> It's just kind of having a quiet moment at home, reading through it all and finding out how it all fits together and where it all lies and just taking responsibility for doing it yourself, really (Student 37, fourth year interview).

Taking responsibility for their learning was an important issue for the students and difficulties with disciplining themselves to study were fairly common across their first years of study. In part, as Student 37 above shows, this stemmed from a lack of awareness of just how much independent study they would need to undertake in preparation for the assessment for each course. But it also stemmed from the need to be autonomous learners, something that had not been a feature of their prior learning experiences in college where their work had been carefully managed and scrutinised by staff on a regular basis. Often these shifts towards a more independent learning style centred on practical issues such as prioritising times and finding spaces in which to study. Student 2 commented on how by third year he had learnt to prioritise spending time studying at the university and how this contributed to a much stronger learning identity:

> The more time you spend, 9 to 5, the more you feel part of it. So […] in second year when I was just […] going to lectures, and then going elsewhere, I probably felt a bit less a part of it. But in third year you're […] around uni for at least six hours a day and […] I think you feel a lot more because you're just doing more work and it matters more to you. I really think […] little things like the library matter a lot more to you because you're spending so much more time there. […] So in third year I felt a lot more part of it (Student 2, third year interview).

In first year, by contrast, his identity as a student centred on the connections he was making by getting to know the people on his course:

> You really have to learn what it's like, it isn't like this big like amazing time […]. I definitely feel a part of first year community. I mean, there is no like close knit community I don't think. I guess Social Policy is much smaller and it's much more closely knit. It's like, it's the smallest subject I have […]. There's more of a

community there than say Politics or Sociology because it's such a big massive subject (Student 2, first year interview).

All of the students had complicated lives and freeing up a time and place to study involved juggling family commitments, paid employment and so on. In first year this was often difficult. Student 14's experiences were fairly typical. In her case, she recounted in her first year interview how the pressure of working out how best to manage competing demands 'totally knocked her confidence' in her academic ability. While varying pressures on the students' time remained, by the later years of the course they had developed strategies to help them succeed. By fourth year, Student 14, above, had decided to 'give up shift work', had 'passed [declined] on lots of social things' and was 'very disciplined'. These practical strategies, developed over the lifetime of the degree, helped the students to make sense of the university's practices in ways they had been unable to imagine, or engage with, in first year.

Conclusion

As we pointed out at the beginning of the paper much of the focus on student transitions to university has been driven by the requirement to prevent student attrition and thus has sought to improve retention and progression rates. This managerial focus has resulted in a great deal of research on how to better support students during their first weeks and months at university. In contrast, our research has shown the complexity of the transitions students continue to make beyond their entry point to the university by offering a longitudinal analysis of the connections between learning, participation in practice and identity across the lifetime of a student's degree programme.

What emerges most powerfully from the analysis presented here is that students coming into the university from a background in further education colleges had to work hard to make sense of their new academic community; over time they came to know and understand how it worked. Using Lave and Wenger's (1991) work we showed how participating in learning practices was an important part of their successful transition through university, and that the learning of these practices occurred primarily though engagement with the academic life of the university. While students struggled in first year to become independent learners, they grappled in third and fourth years with becoming critical thinkers. This continued development and redevelopment of the students' learning identities echoes Hirst et al's argument that 'learning is always an ontological matter. Learners, whatever else they may be doing, are inevitably being constituted by, and are reconstructing, certain positions in the socially privileged practices of the community' (2004, 73). By their third and fourth years of study the students had developed learning identities that had not been accessible to them in first year. They moved into these identities by two methods: first, by engaging in the practices of academic literacy that enabled them to become full members of the university community; and secondly by participating in the process of critical reflection. This involved them identifying and critiquing premises that they had previously taken for granted and so developing the capacity to move towards a more critical being, which involved developing different ways of knowing.

Our findings indicate that students have to learn, unlearn and relearn the practices and conventions of the different learning communities they move through. As Hager and Hodkinson (2009) point out, there is a tendency to bracket off what has happened in previous locations, or what might happen in the future, at the expense of understanding learning as a dynamic, and incomplete, process. The person arriving at a university is not a blank sheet and the way that they (re)construct themselves is influenced by the person 'they had already become when the course started' (Hager and Hodkinson 2009, 633). Our findings have shown that learning is a process of on-going change that takes place in interaction between the student and the environment because learning is always connected to the surrounding world in an evolving way. This means that learning is not a series of acquisition events but rather is a dynamic process through which the practices surrounding education, and the learning identities of the students, are mutually constitutive.

We have also demonstrated that learning is about more than developing a set of cognitive skills that can simply be transferred from one learning environment to another. Rather, learning is a social and relational process, where people bring a cluster of beliefs about the nature of knowledge, a conception of learning and a belief about how teaching should take place that are reconceptualised over their learning journeys through engaging in valued educational practices. From this perspective, becoming an independent learner is a dynamic process that occurs within a pedagogical relationship that actively works (or not) to foster the dispositions and qualities that allow the student to engage meaningfully with the curriculum. As Barnett (2009, 439) points out 'through one's knowing efforts, one's being may be enhanced' and the students dispositions and qualities both constitute, and are constituted, by their university experiences.

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