CRACKING THE CODE: FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE ACADEMIC SUCCESS ON THE SOCIAL WORK DEGREE

A NEWLY QUALIFIED BLACK SOCIAL WORKER'S PERSPECTIVE

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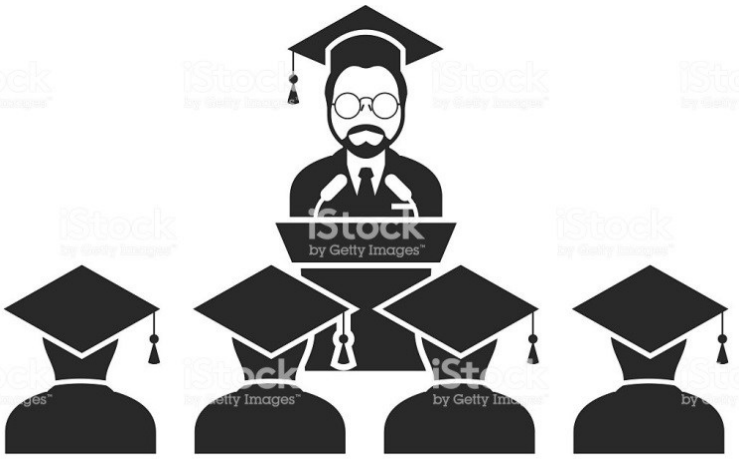
“You have to stay in school. You have to. You have to go to college. You have to get your degree. Because that's the one thing people can't take away from you, is your education. And it is worth the investment” (Obama, 2015). Michelle Obama is the former First Lady of America, and a writer, lawyer and university administrator. Talking to school children in Tower Hamlets Mulberry School, London.



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“My final word of advice to you is educate, agitate, and organize: have faith in yourself” (Ambedkah, no date). Bhimrao Ambedkah, 1891-1956, was a prominent Indian jurist, economist, politician and social reformist.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own independent investigation, except where I have indicated by indebtedness to other sources.

I certify that this thesis has not been accepted in substance for any other award, nor is it being submitted currently for any other award.

Claire Felix-Baptiste

September 2019

Abstract

This is a qualitative study of eleven newly qualified black social workers (NQBSW) and five social work educators. The study was carried out in a post-1992 millennium university in England between 2015 and 2018. The study findings have been skilfully interpreted through the lens of a number of Bourdieu's thinking tools, namely 'Capital', 'Habitus', 'Field' and 'Knowing the Game'. Together, they suggest that black students know how to 'crack the code' and 'Play the Game'. The landscape may be changing for black students who historically have not performed as well as their white counterparts. However, when identities are not in threat, this group appears to perform as well as, if not better, than their white peers.

This ethically approved study aimed to identify factors that influence success on a university social work degree course. The objectives were to examine behavioural factors, differences in understandings and identify types of support embraced by NQBSW participants whilst undertaking the degree.

The voices of black students and their educator's have been documented through semi-structured person-to-person and synchronised interviews. Using interpretive phenomenology and a constructivist approach, reading, self-directed learning groups, determination, the diversity of the student population and participation were found to be influential factors for success on the degree course. Moreover, the study found that ethnicity, social forces, cultural values and the university conditions all had a role to play in the navigation of student success on the degree course.

Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this study to my mother Nethilia, sister, Lidia and brother Danny, who all passed away during my journey to complete this study. I know they would have been proud of me.

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I am very grateful to all who have contributed to the creation of this academic work, including the participating NQBSWs, colleague educators and Ms. Velma Bennett - the educational consultant who reviewed and verified the themes. Appreciation also goes out to Dr. Jessica Urwin for her permission to use her 'Impostor Syndrome' photograph (Figure 4.13) and to the students at the Freud Museum for giving me permission to take and use their photograph (Figure 4.3).

From my wider networks, thanks goes out to my staff team, particularly to Dr. Martyn Higgins, for unintentionally being a mentor, role model and guide.

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List of Abbreviations Commonly Used in the Text

BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
BASW	British Association of Social Workers
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CCSWE	Central Council for Social Work Education
CINAHL	Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature
CRT	Critical Race Theory
GSCC	General Social Care Council
HCPC	Health Care Professional Council
NQBSW(s)	Newly Qualified Black Social Worker(s)
NQSW	Newly Qualified Social Workers
PCF	Professional Capabilities Framework
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency

Glossary of Terms Used

Dyslexia	Dyslexia is a learning disorder that primarily affects the skills involved in organisation. It impairs phonological processing, verbal processing speed and verbal short-term memory.
Hawthorne Effect	A type of reactivity in which individuals modify an aspect of their behaviour in response to their awareness of being observed.
Introjection	The process whereby the subject replicates behaviours, attributes or other fragments of the surrounding world, especially of other subjects.
Impostor Syndrome	A psychological pattern in which an individual doubts their accomplishments and has a persistent internalised fear of being exposed as a 'fraud'.
Modelling	A process in which persons serve as models for others, exhibiting the desirable behaviour to be imitated by those others.
Post 92 University	What is considered to be a 'newer university' or, often, a former polytechnic institute.
Projective	The process whereby in a close relationship, such as between mother and child, lovers, therapist and patient, or students, parts of the self may, in unconscious fantasy, be thought of as being forced into the other person.
Post-traumatic Slave Syndrome	Describes a set of behaviours, beliefs and actions associated with or related to multi-generational trauma experienced by those of African descent that include, but are not limited to, undiagnosed and untreated Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in enslaved Africans and their descendants.

Reasonable Adjustment	A proposed adjustment, to make an allowances to meet the needs of a disabled person; whether the adjustment is affordable or whether being without it it would have a serious effect on the individual.
Reframing	The technique that consists of identifying and then disputing irrational or maladaptive thoughts. Reframing is a way of viewing and experiencing events, ideas, concepts and emotions to find more positive alternatives.
Self-determination	The free choice of one's own acts without external compulsion, an imperative principle of action.
Social Space	The university campus.
Stimulus response	The degree to which a person's perception of the world is compatible with the required action.
Transference	Is a theoretical phenomenon characterised by the unconscious redirection of the feelings a person has about a second person, to feelings the first person has about a third person.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Rationale

This thesis details a small-scale qualitative study of sixteen social work participants.[1] Semi-structured interviews were carried out with five social work educators and eleven Newly Qualified Black Social Workers (NQBSWs) who had recently completed and attained the degree of BA(Hons) in Social Work. From here on the term 'social work degree' will be used. The study was carried out between 2015 and 2018 in a major inner-city post-1992 university located within an urban metropolitan area in England.[2]

The university employs just over two thousand staff who provide professional (44%) and academic (56%) services to approximately 18,000 full and part-time students from around 130 different countries. Eighty percent of the university's student population are considered to be 'mature' students (UCAS, 2017). The university prides itself on its diverse population and has one of the largest Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) student (58%) and staff (31%) populations in England. In fact, in 2015-2016 the university attracted more BME students than all the Russell Group universities combined (Runnymead Trust, 2016). The university is one of the 126 approved social work education providers in England. It is situated in a borough that hosts a population of 312,000, of which 60% are categorised as originating from a BME community (HESA, 2018). The university is one of seven in England whose student population is over 50% BME (Sims, 2007). Overall, the university student outcomes for graduates show the attainment gap between BME

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1 'Cracking the Code' has, over the course of this study, become a commonly used term for this doctoral work, and 'Cracking the Code' has been widely disseminated in poster presentations and similar. As such, it will be used in this thesis on occasion as a term for this particular research study.

2 The name and location of this university has been deliberately kept anonymous. From here on it is referred to simply as the 'university'.

and white students closing at 20% compared to the national average of 26.33% in 2015 (HESA, 2016).

The social work degree under study is located within the School of Health and Social Care, in the Department of Advanced and Integrated Practice. The school is one of seven governed by the university and has been delivering social work education since the inception of the social work degree in 2003. The school offers full-time and part-time (employer sponsored) pathways to the social work degree. The degree was developed to produce practitioners who are better prepared for practice (DoH, 2003). The creation of the degree replaced the two-year Diploma in Social Work as the qualifying award to enter the profession. Alongside this change came a number of reforms that would permanently change the landscape of the social work workforce. These, alongside structural and legal reforms, are addressed later in the literature review (see section 2.9). The reforms include the removal of the original age entrance barrier of twenty three, to ensure that English social work education providers adhered to the European Union's directive on age discrimination. Today, 20% of the social work cohorts are school leavers (UCAS, 2017). The second change was made to the entry requirements, whereby minimum standards were introduced for numeracy and literacy. Thirdly, greater emphasis was placed on practice learning, requiring students to complete a minimum of 30 skills development days and 170 days in placement being assessed in practice. The fourth major change was the protection of the title 'Social Worker' for the General Social Care Council (GSCC) registrants only. Failure to comply carries up to six months imprisonment. Today the role of registration is the responsibility of the Health Care Professional Council (HCPC) and, in April 2019, the responsibility for regulation will move from the HCPC to a new regulator Social Work England.

A national curriculum and two sets of professional standards specifically for social work are provided to support curriculum development and framework delivery. The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) being one (TCSW, undated), and the Knowledge and Skills Statements for Adults or Children and Families the other (DoE, 2016).

Endorsement is by regulators (the HCPC) and delivery is conveyed using a set of professional values, ethics and a Code of Practice developed by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), and it meets the Benchmark Statement for Social Work set by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

The social work profession is made up of 92,365 full and part-time professionals (HCPC, 2018). Social work at the university attracts over 700 applicants annually for an average intake of just forty-two places. During 2015-2018, the average student population was 83% BME and 17% white, which compares to 70% white and 30% BME social work students nationally (MIKE, 2018). Women make up 83% of the social work study population nationally (HCPC, 2018). Twenty-five percent of this university's student population enters via an access pathway (UCAS, 2017).

I am employed as a Senior Lecturer at the university and have been teaching social work theory for the past ten years. It was my insider status role as a social work educator that initiated my interest in the phenomena of academic success. I noticed that black students on the social work degree course were performing equally, if not better, than their white counterparts. The outcomes for this group of students contradicted what has historically been reported in the literature.

I had originally intended to recruit a heterogeneous sample of between fifteen and twenty women, men, black and white Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW) and

their educators for a number of reasons. Firstly, both sets of participants were able to offer retrospective views on their experiences of teaching, learning and assessment, having recently completed or taught on the degree. Secondly, I wanted to better understand and articulate academic success through the lens of those who had experienced it. The decision to research this group was also because the study was time bounded; I knew a great deal about them and had access to them. Disappointingly, I was only able to attract NQBSW participants. However, I was able to attract a diverse group of educator participants. I adapted the study and used both sets of participants to triangulate the findings in the hope of increasing the study's validity. Regardless of the disappointment, I seized the moment and made use of both sets of participants to reveal something positive about black students. I used the opportunity to capture the voices of this group, so that they are heard in the academic success debate.

Throughout the study, where the spoken word requires contextualisation I have intermittently used the term 'student' to describe NQBSWs' responses.

Government policy is seeking to raise standards in higher education (DoH, 2003). I pondered on what my colleagues and I were doing to contribute to the success of these participants. I wanted to identify and endorse practices that influenced success and encourage other educators on professional courses to do more of the same to improve the black student experience.

1.2 Structure of the Social Work Degree

The delivery of social work education has remained unchanged since I first qualified in 1999 and continues to be underpinned by six key principles. These principles are 'Anti-discriminatory Practice', Anti-oppressive Practice', 'Inter-Professional and Partnership Working', 'Empowerment', 'Service User

Involvement' and 'Evidence-based Practice'. The social work degree aims to produce professionals who are critically reflective, analytic and whose proficiency is based on extensive practice experience within social work settings. This is underpinned by a sound base of theoretical knowledge of both the social sciences and social work.

The degree is built on students learning from subjective reflections about understandings, reactions to practice situations and contributions from adult learning theories. Students learn from active involvement in real problematic or risky situations, sometimes life-threatening, that involve supporting the most vulnerable in society. It is delivered through the life-span model which enables students to choose a social work career pathway in one of two practice areas: 'children and families' or 'adults'.

The social work degree has three key progression points, each linked to modular assessments. The course is structured over three years, has an 80% attendance requirement and requires students to achieve a minimum of 40% in individual modules to successfully pass.

Practice placements are the signature pedagogy of social work education (Wayne, 2010) and are mirrored on the spirit of apprenticeships. They are pivotal to student learning and orientate them to perform the role of practitioner. In a sense, it prepares the student for the profession. The practice placements are intended to help students develop their skills and knowledge, and to adhere to professional codes of ethics. Students learn to practise as professionals through weekly reflective supervision and modelling by practice educators who are qualified practitioners from the field. The placement provides support to the student with the provision of workplace supervisors. Placements are set in a diverse range of settings, including hospitals, schools, prisons, statutory services and third sector

providers. Practice educators are either employed directly by the placement agency or are contracted by the university.

In the first year, students are formally prepared and suitability assessed for social work practice. This includes university attendance of three to four days a week studying modules on readiness for practice (inclusive of 20 skills days), sociology, communications, human growth and development, theories for social work and professional values and ethics. Completion of these modules leads to the first progression point.

In the second year, students attend university one day a week to study modules in welfare policy and law, social work methods, advocacy and partnership, plus ten skills days, and also spend four days a week undertaking a 70 day practice placement. The completion of these second year modules leads to the second progression point.

The final year is intended to consolidate learning, with students taking modules in contemporary issues, professional practice and social work research. They also undertake a 100 day practice placement (over four days a week) whilst attending university one day a week. Students must successfully pass all final year modules to progress to 'newly qualified' status. The progression to the final level enables students to register as newly qualified social work practitioners with the regulators (the HCPC). Completion of the degree is by no means the end of learning for students, since NQSWs must then undertake a further twelve months of assessed practice before the HCPC issues a license to use the title 'Social Worker'.

1.3 The Researcher's Position

I would describe myself as an Afri-centric academic because I am a black woman of African-Caribbean descent. I am a product of the Windrush generation, being born and raised in a modest working class two parent family in East London. I am situated as the second of five children, and although I was not the first to attend university, I have so far achieved the highest academic accolade in my family. I grew up with English being the second language, as both my parents were Creole speakers.

I left secondary school in 1981 with five Certificates in Secondary Education (CSEs) and started my career as a street trader, selling ethnically sensitive cosmetics and hair care products in the street markets of East London (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Claire's Cosmetics, 1982, Crisp Street Market

Source: author.

My educational journey has, in many ways, mirrored the journeys of many of the NQBSW participants in this study. Six years later, seeking a more meaningful life, I became involved in civic and political activities. This was followed by a twenty year career working as a mental health practitioner in the third sector.

I have also worked in collaboration with the NHS to develop a national strategy to improve services for BME mental health service users. Whilst in this role I developed a cultural competency tool which has been cited as good practice in the DoH (2005) *Delivering Race Equality* consultation document. Following this, in

2006-2007, I was appointed as BME Mental Health Advisor to Tony Blair's Minister for Mental Health, Rosie Winterton, during his administration.

Like tens of thousands of other African-Caribbeans (Williams, 2018), I have made a significant contribution to the NHS as did my (now deceased) mother before me, who gave the NHS thirty years before sadly passing away. She worked nights in NHS hospitals as a kitchen assistant. I think it is important to mark that I condemn the way the British Home Office has recently treated and returned hundreds of Windrush descendants, because they were not able to provide evidence of their date of arrival in the UK, birth certificates or other forms of identification. Some of these individuals had lived and worked in the UK for decades (Williams, 2018). However, on 17 April 2018 I was thrilled to hear the Prime Minister, Theresa May, apologise to Windrush commonwealth migrants, for the administrative mistakes made following citizenship denial and/or deportation for some. We now wait to see how these citizens will be compensated for such hostile and marginalised treatment in this time of pro-Brexit.

It has been through these political activities that my consciousness was raised to what Helms (1992) calls 'integrative awareness', meaning I believe there is more to me than race and gender. I positively identify with my own racial group, whilst acknowledging others aspects of my identity such as talent and ability. My unique experiences contribute to who I am and my interest in pursuing social justice; in particular, race inequality. I am really proud of what I bring to the university, and I am in a fortunate position to be able to embrace my dual identity, both African-Caribbean and British heritage, and of course my working class roots.

My practice area has been the over-representation of BME communities using the statutory mental health services. I remain a registered practitioner (registration number SW76599) and am eligible to use the title of Social Worker. Today, my

interest lies in the social and economic development of African-Caribbean communities from across the diaspora.

In 1995, I returned to education as a mature student to complete the social work degree. I then went on to complete a master's degree in mental health. Following this, I successfully completed a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (Post Compulsory). I am now writing this thesis in pursuance of a Professional Doctorate. This will consolidate my learning and allow me to reach the pinnacle of my career.

I have a declared disability (dyslexia), which is accommodated through reasonable adjustments. To my surprise, my dyslexia was only uncovered when I re-entered higher education for the fourth time in 2010, by which time I had already gained a master's degree and two postgraduate certificates.

By my own admission, I have been an active not passive agent of social change, as well as in the acquirement of specialist knowledge and events. Even with my humble background, I have been able to reach lecturer status within higher education. I hope that I prove to be a positive role model for the black students completing the social work degree and now infiltrating the social work workforce.

This study's underpinning philosophy is constructivism. Constructivism is an approach to understanding people's perspectives and interactions with the world, stemming from personal construct psychology (Denicolo *et al*., 2016). This approach was chosen because it provides a general approach that elicits particularly rich and deep insights into people's inner experiences. It is also consistent with the nature of constructivism itself, as there is no single best way to undertake constructivist research, no formula or rigidly defined process (*Denicola et al.,2016).* This approach offered me choices regarding what I can and cannot do

in my own forthcoming studies in order for it to be considered good research. It also allowed me to be more versatile and creative in the methods used to explore academic success.

My task was to seek understanding about how participants made sense of their time at university. I was well aware that they may experience teaching at the same time, yet it is experienced entirely differently by individual students. My emphasis in this study was steered towards the personal meanings participants gave to academic success. This was central to the constructivist's philosophy and practice. My approach, unlike similar studies, was designed to make sense of participants' personal meanings and create possibilities of getting to the heart of the phenomena. I was not just interested in what participants did on the course, nor how well they performed, but why they did what they did to succeed. This, in turn, created profound possibilities for maintaining, reinforcing or changing perspectives (in other words - learning) to develop or improve personal experiences and outcomes for teaching, learning and assessment on the social work degree course.

My interest in academic success was first raised in 2014-2015 when I noticed that the achievement gap on the social work degree course was closing. In that year, 17% of the students achieved a good degree - 35% of these students were black and awarded a first or upper second class degree, compared to 65% for white students. I have continued to notice year-on-year improvements in the achievement gap between black and white students, with 25% in 2015-2016 and a further decrease to 9% in 2016-2017 (see also Figure 1.2). The university statistics showed a decrease in the achievement gap, from 45% of black students achieving good degree passes in 2012-2013 to 91% in 2017-2018; this compares to 51% nationally in 2015 (University College Union, 2016). I was intrigued and curious to find out what might be happening.

Figure 1.2: BME Student Records' Data for Degree Awards For the Years of This Study

Source: MIKE, 2018.

Further to this my experience of being a student and teaching social work education has shown me how black students are often problemised, either for their high expectations of their educators, their performance or their level of participation. This study goes some way to explain how African participants, in particular, attribute some of the animosity (social forces) faced by their community to the present hostile post-Brexit migrant-intolerant society. Whilst the African-Caribbean participants felt the current levels of hostility was a result of intergenerational post-traumatic slave syndrome (deGruy, 2012). African-Caribbean's are descendants of slaves and deGruy (2012) makes the point that African-Americans and those of Caribbean descent continue to carry the scars of their descendants which are transmitted inter-generationally through attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours.

1.4 Justification for the Research Question

I was keen to explore how participants constructed academic success, identify behaviours attributed to their success and support participants whilst on the social work degree course. Hence the creation of the research question '*What Factors Influence Success on the Social Work Degree Course?'*. I hypothesised that behaviours like reading, tutor engagement and self-directed learning would be influential factors that might impact on student success on the course.

The area of academic success and the social work degree has also been studied by Hafford-Letchield (2007), Parker (2010), Dillon (2011), Bernard *et al.* (2014) and Tedam (2014), all of whom feature in the literature review (see Chapter 2). In summary, what they found is that black students have a greater propensity to fail and were least likely to be awarded a first or upper second class degree (Hussein, 2009; Bernard, 2012; Stevenson, 2012). This group is more likely to experience higher levels of dissatisfaction (Dillon, 2011), anxiety, stress, emotional or

behavioural disturbances and physical illnesses (Cox *et al*., 2000; John, 2006) than their white counterparts. This group is also more likely than white students to have progression delayed, be deferred, referred or be withdrawn from social work education (Hussein, 2009).

However, the results for my own study ('Cracking the Code') show that the landscape for black social work students may be changing. The NQBSW participants' outcomes and their voices suggest that they had the ability to out-perform their white peers, exercise self-determination and reframe the negative societal messages and social forces portrayed about black communities. This issue (Ogbu, 1993; Ogbu, 2003) is examined further in Chapter 2.

Participants articulated that reading, self-directed learning groups, sheer determination and being action-orientated all influenced their success on the social work degree course.

For the purpose of this study, the term 'black' has been used to describe students who self-define as being from a BME origin. This group includes students of Asian, Black African, Black Caribbean and Black Other origins, and those of mixed ethnicities (ONS, 2010). These categories are of course contested and are not without wide-ranging complexities reflected in internal disparities based on social class, background, pre-educational experience and cultural disposition. Conner *et al*. (2004) note the lack of homogeneity in research studies that use specific ethnic sub-groups. These studies "tend to have a better understanding of diversity" (Conner *et al*., 2004, p.68). From here on the term 'black' will be used as an umbrella term to describe this group, unless discussing a specific ethnic group. A further justification for the research approach adopted was that constructivism offered me the chance to explore individual perspectives, viewpoints and experiences about what contributes to success on the social work degree course.

I have disclosed and made explicit my uncertainties, and allegiances have been made explicit and embodied within the overall study. I hope the reader accepts my subjectivity as I am not ashamed, nor afraid of my position. In fact, I would go as far as to say that this subjectivity has been central to the completion of this thesis.

1.5 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is organised around five key chapters. The first chapter introduces the reader to the study background and rationale, and sets the scene for my research position. It then provides justification for the research question.

The second chapter contains the literature review, which begins with a description of the search strategy used to inform it. The literature review provides a number of definitions and explores the measures used to construct academic success. The chapter also highlights best practice in teaching and learning of undergraduates. Pre-admission ability, and accessing the degree and pathways to becoming a NQSW are also addressed. It then goes on to examine the structural and situational responses designed to improve academic success and the Anglo-Saxon approach to teaching in higher education. Following this, it considers the typical student's identity, self-esteem and motivation to join the profession. The chapter then highlights the theoretical explanations used to understand academic success and, finally, the identified themes are summarised with the use of a conceptual framework to ease understanding.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the methodology and provides a rationale for selecting the approaches used, then considers the merits and potential difficulties faced in the research process. Ethical considerations are also examined in this chapter, along with the theoretical backdrop and study design. The final section focuses on the

instruments used during the study, the recruitment and sampling strategy, and the data collection and analysis techniques used to realise the study objectives.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the findings and discussion. This chapter has been the most interesting to write, as it examines the chosen style and presentation of the data collected, the study context and describes the participants involved. The theoretical influences, identified themes and impact of ethnicity are also addressed. The chapter closes by using the spoken words of participants to identify the factors that influence success on the social work degree course.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, contains the conclusions and recommendations. It provides a summary of the key findings for the study, discusses the study limitations and also highlights the opportunities which have been used so far to transfer the knowledge derived from the study themes. The final part makes recommendations for improving the black experience of teaching, learning and assessment on the social work degree course.

A reflective summary of my research journey, on completion of the writing-up stage, is contained in Appendix 9.

As this introductory chapter comes to a close, I move to the second chapter which provides a review of the literature on academic success, black students and social work education.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction to the Literature Review and Search Strategy

This review outlines my research position in relation to existing scholarship on academic success. My intention was to ensure that this contribution goes some way to complement the existing literature. To enable this study to be evaluated alongside similar studies, the review explores the emerging themes of academic success and the correlating data-gathering methods. This study acknowledges the scholars who have gone before who have studied academic success. It aims to uncover student constructions of academic success in the world of social work education, with a particular focus on black students.

2.2 Search Strategy

This section of the review describes my efforts to identify appropriate literature. The literature review was carried out using a combination of electronic databases, including the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Cochrane Library and EBSCO. A Boolean search was carried out using the key words 'Black African', 'Black Caribbean', 'Black Other', 'Black and Minority Ethnic' ('BME') and 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' ('BAME') students. Other search terms used were 'academic success', 'achievement', 'attainment' and 'progression'. This initial search using the noted key words yielded 145,065 articles. The search was then refined by sifting out articles that had been published prior to 2003, to coincide with the creation of the social work degree in England. This left 9,824 potentially useful articles. The search was further refined for articles published in the English language only and duplicates were sifted out. Following this further refinement, only 1,537 articles remained.

These were hand sifted, by reading the abstracts only, to determine the individual relevance and inclusion using a 'traffic light' system that I had developed. The articles were marked with a red highlighter pen (if they were of no use), yellow (those which could possibly be of use, if I was short of highly relevant articles) or green (those which were deemed highly relevant). Hand sifting resulted in 837 articles dealing directly with the academic success of black and ethnic minority students. However, when using 'social work education' as a limiter, only 37 articles were deemed as being highly relevant to address the research question set out in this thesis.

I was seeking different ways of understanding the changing nature of participants' lived reality. However, I was aware that I could only uncover what was available or accessible at the time of the study. Thus, it was not possible to capture every aspect of academic success; nonetheless, the study was carried out with objectivity, ethical diligence and as much rigor as possible.

English academics have produced very few recent studies that examine the factors which influence academic success or how students construct or understand academic success within social work education. This is supported by Finch and Taylor's (2012) qualitative methodological study of 20 in-depth interviews with social work practice educators from across England. They explored issues that arose in assessing students who were not succeeding academically. They found similar problems in accessing appropriate literature for their study and purport that they experienced limited available texts on their similar subject of exploring the emotional experiences of black social work students who were performing lower than would be expected for a student on a social work degree course. They also found very little guidance available on managing or supporting students who were at risk of failing to succeed. There are clear limitations to this study. First and most notable, it was small scale and qualitative, making

generalisations impossible. Secondly, the interviews took place in the middle of the government's changes to the post-qualifying frameworks introduced in England in 2007. It could now be argued that these changes at that time may have influenced their results. In addition, similar to this current study, Finch and Taylor's work only focused on the practice educator, yet the relationship is a triadic one, between the practice educator, student and tutor. I believe there is a need to explore different perspectives, hence this study will explore the views of former students and their educators.

Given the paucity of evidence available on the factors that influence academic success on the social work degree course, this current study may prove to be useful, given the lack of generalisability from previous research in social work education. This new knowledge could influence admissions criteria and retention efforts by identifying gifted students, those most likely to succeed and those who may be in need of additional support.

The studies that were available were heterogeneous with regard to study design, as well as to the outcomes used to measure academic success. Furthermore, they were mostly carried out in America and Canada (Johnson-Motoyama *et al.*, 2014). An exception to this was the Johnson-Motoyama *et al*. (2014) pilot study aimed at examining the relationship between common admission variables and success among 68 doctoral social work students in England. Disappointingly, the sample size limited the analysis to descriptive statistics only. In addition, their case study design limited the generalisability of their findings to other similar social work programmes. Their study did not use the respondents as human instruments (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). They were not interested in understanding the subjects' rich textured experiences and reflections about undertaking social work education. Rather, they relied upon a set of finite questions to elicit categorised, forced choice responses, with little room for open-ended questions (as quantitative research

often does). Nonetheless, it did open doors to influencing admission criteria and retention efforts by identifying those students most likely to succeed academically and those in most need of support.

Given the lack of social work literature produced in England on academic success regarding the social work degree, it was necessary to make use of comparator professions (such as nursing and occupational therapy) and utilise evidence from the Netherlands, Russia, the United States, Ireland, Canada and Australia, since they also experience similar disparities in social work educational outcomes. Their findings on social work education may well be of use to academics in England.

The literature review will now draw on Critical Race Theory (CRT), which may assist in understanding what influences success on the social work degree course, as it may very well encapsulate a NQBSW participant's experience.

2.3 Critical Race Theory

This review draws on some key Critical Race Theory concepts to make sense of the ways in which some black students negatively experience social work teaching, learning and assessment on the social work degree course. CRT is used as an analytical framework to examine racial stratification within higher education in England. It is used to foreground the unique racialised status of NQBSWs and uses this as a basis for refracting understandings of academic success on the social work degree course. The theory focuses on the role played by race and racism in the perpetuation of racial disparities between dominant white and minority racial groups (Gillborn, 2008).

As a framework, CRT is useful in unearthing patterns of social exclusion within society. The model illuminates some of the ingrained inequalities that serve to

embed and sustain a system of privilege and oppression. The framework argues that racism is deeply entrenched in society and permeates through everyday life, social structures and practices. Theorists like Ogbu (1993; 2003) and Gillborn (2008) argue that race is accepted as a central rather than marginal force that shapes the lives and experiences of black people. When applied to universities, it could be argued that it is endemic and permeates throughout institutional structures. It has become normalised to the extent that it is invisible.

CRT seeks to expose racism in all forms, most of which are subtle and not readily recognised (Gillborn, 2008). Given the insidious nature and subtle ways race and racism operate, it is important that the role of race and racism is clearly acknowledged and critically examined if the negative experiences of NQBSWs are to be fully understood and responded to. Given these sentiments, this study asks participants how their ethnic backgrounds may have impacted upon their learning and success on the social work degree course.

To gain some understanding of how academic success is understood and constructed, the available literature will now be reviewed.

2.4 Understanding Academic Success

This section considers the various ways academic success is understood and constructed, then goes on to consider research that focuses on differences in universities and students. My study includes a focus on the natural emerging language and the meanings NQBSWs assign to academic success, having recently completed their degree in social work. To fully understand academic success, one must consider the students' own perceptions and subjective apprehensions on their experiences.

My study aims to systematically examine academic success, whilst discovering and understanding how social realities arise, operate and impact on the study population. The approach taken is qualitative and thereby considers the participants' 'life-worlds', including emotions, motivations, symbols and their meanings, empathy and other subjective aspects associated with the naturally evolving lives of the participants. The highlighted themes represent student routines, experiences and conditions affecting student success on the social work degree course.

To understand how academic success is understood, it is important to define 'academic success' and explore how it is measured.

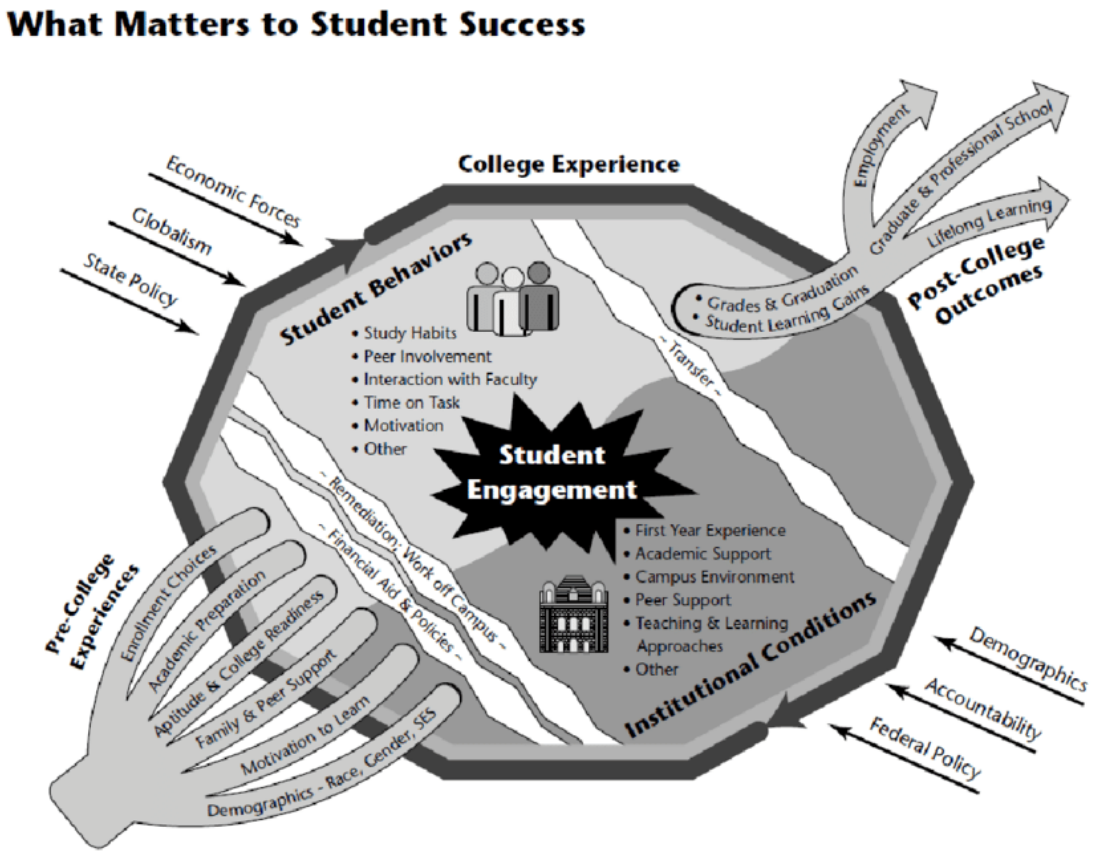
2.5 Defining Academic Success

The term 'academic success' is not without its problems; it is complex and broad, and it is often misused within educational research to encapsulate all generally accepted desired educational outcomes. Academic success is a 'catch-all' term that encompasses many factors; from multiple student outcomes to moral development (York *et al.*, 2015). Academic success has been defined as "the ability for graduates to obtain and advance in occupations within, or related to their degree fields" (York *et al.*, 2015, p.3).

Kuh *et al.* (2006) define academic success as being made up of six key and equally important components (see Figure 2.1). They suggest that:

> "… [the first component is] the engagement in educationally purposeful activities, the second is student satisfaction, the third is the acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competences, the fourth persistence, fifth component is the attainment of educational outcomes and finally the sixth, post school performance" (Kuh *et al.*, 2006, p.5).

Figure 2.1: Model For Academic Success



Source: Kuh *et al*. (2006).

For the purpose of this study, 'academic success' refers specifically to the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills demonstrated through the completion of the social work degree course and attainment of the qualification. A review of the existing literature found that 'academic achievement' and 'academic success' have been used interchangeably. Consequently, these terms will also be used interchangeably in this study to reflect the current debates on the phenomenon.

My study takes a qualitative approach to understanding academic success, since it lends itself to developing knowledge in an area that is poorly understood. We know why some students fail to succeed, so in response we develop interventions

for reducing failure rates. But nothing has been done to explore how NQBSWs understand or construct 'academic success'. This study aims to contribute to bridging this knowledge gap.

The chapter now moves forward to discuss how the phenomenon is measured.

2.6 Measuring Academic Success

There are a number of ways to measure academic success. Evidence suggests it is usually measured using prior academic performance and pre-entry ability. Final year grades are also used to measure and predict academic success (Richardson, 2008). However, final year grades are not always an accurate way to measure academic success. The validity of this measure is imperative for lecturers, not only because of increased public scrutiny around the true value of education, but also because student learning is central to the mission of the university (Richardson, 2008).

Educational research into academic success has tended, in the main, to be quantitative and focused on selected facets of experience such as student satisfaction, the learning environment, instructional design and educational outcomes. These studies have essentially been researched from an institutional perspective (Wiggan, 2014). Additionally Richardson (2008) posits that previous research has focused on differences among institutions and academic subjects, classes of degrees awarded, and on the role of demographic variables such as age, gender and ethnicity as factors that influence academic success. In this respect my study is different, since it aims to uncover the factors that influence success on the social work degree course by using a qualitative methodology in contrast to the many quantitative studies I came across in the literature review. This study aims to make a valid contribution to the current debates on academic

success from the participants' perspectives, by ensuring that their voices are heard.

The use of the term 'voice' in this context does not imply that NQBSWs have a single common voice. They speak from a base of experience, that our society is deeply structured by racism (Gillborn, 2008) and that these structures give their stories commonality. This commonality of experiences of race manifests itself in the various challenges experienced by these NQBSWs when they were students. This is what unites them and what produces divergent narratives that allow for the use of the term 'voice' (Ball, 2006).

To begin to understand student constructs of academic success, we must first consider the students' pre-admission ability, structural and situational responses, the impact of the institutional factors and, of course, the students' dispositional attributes to the debate. A student's dispositional attributes and individual effort plays an important role since a student's racial identity, self-esteem, motivation and participatory efforts to succeed on the social work degree course all play a part in the reconstruction of their understanding of academic success.

This chapter now moves on to explore two models that promote academic success: those of Chickering and Gamson (1999) and Tinto (1993).

2.7 Best Practice for Undergraduates

In developing an understanding of 'academic success', the use of Chickering and Gamson's (1999) seven principles of good undergraduate teaching may be helpful. They consider that universities need a level of contact between student and tutor, reciprocity and cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, an awareness of the time needed to be spent on the task, high

expectations and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. These, they argue, are the ingredients for academic success.

The second model to be examined is Tinto's (1993) theoretical lens, used to understand why some students succeed and others do not, which might help in the analysis of the problem. Tinto argues that the students' personal attributes and background characteristics (for example, pre-entry ability, gender and social class) all produce levels of commitment to course and institution. These intersect with the characteristics of the institution to produce different degrees of integration which, in turn, determine student decisions to withdraw or persist in the successful completion of the course.

Tinto's model is American and appears somewhat limited, since it fails to clarify what is meant by 'integration'. This, together with its focus on pathologicalising students, has encouraged researchers attempting to use the model to become preoccupied with the manipulation of variables in an attempt to uncover causality. Secondly, the model is arguably of limited use within the English context due to the different cultural and policy contexts within higher education. Moreover, it is also characterised by assumptions about students' conformity and adaptation to the institution which may be culturally specific and thus not easily transferable to the higher educational systems found in England.

Meeuwisse *et al.* (2010), using Tinto's model, identified aspects of the academic environment which could impact on student success, including interaction with faculty, social systems (such as extra-curricular activities) and peer group integration as playing an important role in the student experience. They highlight that the less integrated a student is, the more likely they are to withdraw. Tinto's model has been used rigorously in the past to demonstrate that, on average, black and minority ethnic students have less contact with their fellow students and

teachers and are therefore less socially and academically integrated. However, having noted this observation, this on its own is insufficient to explain the disparities in outcomes for black students. Tinto's model has implications for research into academic success, since it provides fruitful areas for future investigations into differences in students' experiences.

This literature review now progresses to identify what is already known about the phenomena under review and the contributing factors. It considers a number of theoretical explanations, such as deficit models like othering and oppositional identity. In addition, the review points to the importance, nature and quality of tutorial support offered by education providers.

The next section examines the impact of pre-admission ability, the access process and how this may or may not have contributed to the success of the participants.

2.8 Pre-admission Ability & Access to the Social Work Degree Course

This section addresses the impact of pre-admission ability and the process of enrolment. In 2013-2014, English social work educational providers enrolled 4,600 students onto social work degree programmes across their 123 approved education providers (HCPC, 2018). However, this figure has seen a steady decline over recent years (DoH, 2015). During the same period, 5,000 students left with a qualification and were eligible to register for their newly qualified social work status with the HCPC (Skills for Care, 2016). Thirty seven percent of all applicants were under 24 years of age (Skills for Care, 2016.). Two in three social work education graduates were employed as social workers within six months of completing their course (HESA, 2015). However, this was not the case for NQBSWs. Once qualified, these graduates faced a 10% pay deficit at degree level (Morgan, W. 2014). This group is less likely to be in employment six months after graduation

when compared to their white counterparts. These statistics justify the need to study the black social work student experience in greater depth in an attempt to uncover why these discrepancies continue to exist. This also reinforces the need for more research on the post impact of academic success.

2.9 Pathways to Social Work Education

Routes to enter social work education are complex (Dillon, 2011). Hussein (2009) indicates that social work attracts a disproportionate number of black and ethnic minority students (30%) when compared to their presence in the general population (9%). Female students (95%) have slightly higher qualification rates than males (93%), meaning that women are more slightly more likely to complete the course than males. This has been the case for a number of years. What is worrying is that the non-completion rate was around 16.5%, with the majority of the non-completers leaving within the first year (Skills for Care, 2016). Those accepted on social work education programmes of study have lower levels of previous educational attainment (Conner *et al*., 2004; Hafford-Letchfield, 2007; HEA, 2007; GSCC, 2009; Dillon, 2011) when compared to other undergraduate professional programmes (such as teaching, psychology and nursing).

Students who are attracted to social work education enter with different entry pathways and abilities. The Social Work Reform Board (2010) points out that one in three black undergraduate applicants start professional programmes with non-traditional qualifications such as having completed access to higher education courses. Once admitted, these students disproportionately experience progression problems when compared to their white peers. Dillon (2011) reports that one in four entrants access social work via access courses to higher education. Access courses are designed to prepare students for studying at degree level. They were developed to attract those who may have underperformed academically in their

previous experience of education. Access courses also attract those whose education may have been disrupted due to personal circumstances or social disadvantage, and those who need to refresh their academic skills having been out of higher education for some time (QAA, 2010). These programmes have created an academic/vocational divide in social work education applicants, with some students following the traditional 'A' level pathways, whilst others follow vocational pathways such as access to higher education courses.

This chapter now moves on to look at the literature that focuses on the admissions process and success on the degree itself.

2.10 Admissions and Student Success

Dillon's (2011) participatory study was carried out in a university in the South of England. This exploratory and explanatory qualitative study of fifty-five students has been influential in understanding the interplay between the admissions process and student success. Dillon's central objective was to identify any specific access barriers to higher education for BME students and ways in which these could be addressed, in addition to illustrating participants' strengths. She sought ethical approval and found 74% of these access applicants self-defined as deriving from working class backgrounds, while 78% of her sample were women who described themselves as being from a BME origin. Thirty-five percent of the sample described themselves as being African, 30% Black British, 10% Black Caribbean and 5% Black European, with the other 20% made up of Asian, South American, British White, White European and White Other. Dillon's study describes common themes across the experiences of individuals following a social work degree pathway. She highlights the many multifaceted trajectories of BME students, noting how social inequalities translate into structural and situational barriers faced by black students gaining entry to higher education. She suggests

these students start off on an unequal footing, pointing out that access courses do not fully prepare students for the realities of academic life. It is without doubt that this lack of preparation may go some way to explaining why some students succeed, while others exit programmes prematurely.

Of the 37 studies examined for this literature review, the quantitative study by Munro (1995) on the relationship between admissions criteria and success in comprehensive exams was of most interest. It included a sample size of 92 master's degree social work students from across England. Munro considered independent demographic variables (such as student age, gender and ethnicity), applicants' supporting statements, references, academic records, work experience and ratings given after selection interviews. Only previous academic achievement and ratings of personal statements were correlated with comprehensive exam performance. This was a quantitative study (in contrast to my study here presented). Munro's work refers to counts and measures using variables such as demographic data, applicants supporting statements, references, academic records, work experience and ratings given after selection interviews. The quantitative approach taken by Munro is associated with a philosophical paradigm with roots in both empiricism and positivism, and is usually influenced by and designed to reflect positivist objectives. Thus, quantitative research is informed by a particular ontological and epistemological position, which reflects a good deal more than just the presence of numbers.

Also of relevance was the experimental quantitative study of Anastas and Videka (2012), who explored issues that correlate with student success. They used measures such as the length of time students were enrolled as indicators of success, a variable that will be considered in my own study. Anastas and Videka found age to be an indicator of success, as was studying part-time, being on a course that was the student's first choice, having less career advice, being less

satisfied with faculty interactions and being part of a larger student cohort. These were all variables that correlated with length of enrolment and academic success. Such findings may assist educators to identify post-admission practices that can influence academic success.

Anastas and Videka (2012) denote that mastery of discipline, professional productivity and communication skills were the imperative ingredients for academic success. Disappointingly, they do not offer guidance on admission decisions, because only age was identifiable at admission and it would be unethical to privilege younger applicants in the admissions process. Furthermore these findings may only partially explain the disparities in outcomes for black students.

However, it is hoped that my own study may provide improved opportunities for gaining an understanding of those perceptions and experiences of NQBSWs which were less amenable to being measured using the approach adopted in Anastas and Videka's (2012) work.

The next section examines some of the structural and situational responses to improving the disparities in academic success on the social work degree course.

2.11 Structural and Situational Responses to Disparities

This section summarises a number of significant structural and situational events and responses to disparities within higher education in recent years. These responses have gone some way to improving access and the differential outcomes on the social work degree course. Some of the situational and structural responses have led to some diversification within the social work workforce. Policy responses to black attainment, according to Singh (2011), have been somewhat

ad hoc; with few universities having the necessary personnel responsible for implementing and monitoring the impact of policy. Although universities often have 'equality of outcomes' as an organisational objective, they may lack the leadership, commitment or organisational resources to implement such initiatives (Singh, 2011). Gillborn, applying CRT to higher education, asserts that "race inequalities are fundamental and a relatively stable feature of the English education system" (2008, p.37). He notes that "intent is irrelevant, what matters is the effect that changes in policy and practice has for particular minority groups. A focus on outcomes rather than intent is the basic tenet of any serious attempt to understand inequality and this is already well established in relevant social policy" (2008, p.240).

Unfortunately, my own study does not allow for an exploration of the university's policy on equality and academic success due to restrictions on the word count.

This chapter's next section focuses on events that triggered structural intervention to improve the diversity of the social work workforce.

2.11.1 Resistance and Workforce Demands

This section charts how community resistance forced local authorities to engage with black communities. The emergence of anti-racist thought is considered, as is the government's shift in policy and legislative responses to improving the inequalities within British society, including education over the last two decades (Williams, 2018). The presence of black students in social work education and the workforce has only been evident since the 1980s. Prior to this period, social work practice took a 'colour blind' approach, whilst focusing on generic human needs. The term 'colour blind' has commonly been used to describe those who choose to ignore race and ethnicity, and offer a blanket service to all regardless of racial or

ethnic differences. More recently, it was used by Deborah Husbands, a Senior Lecturer at the University of Westminster, in her interview with *The Guardian* newspaper. Senior Lecturer Deborah Husbands used the term colour blind to describe how universities were responding to black students. Primarily, she highlighted that universities were choosing to ignore the significance of race and ethnicity of their students and its impact on their learning and achievement (Husbands, 2019).

The change in approach saw the beginnings of anti-racist schools of thought. These anti-racist approaches were supported by the Central Council for Social Work Education (CCSWE), which was the regulator of the profession at that time. This period saw social work's failure to address issues of structural and institutional racism (Williams, 2018). This resulted in the riots of predominantly black youths in a number of England's key major cities, including London, Bristol, Manchester and Birmingham. These youths indicated their unhappiness with the English government's attempt to ignore the social and economic exclusion of black and Asian communities (Gilroy, 2004). It was at this time the government first recognised that the workforce needed to include black workers to engage their disaffected communities, who by then had become reticent and expressed scepticism towards the offer of help by the very people who had excluded them (Gilroy, 2004). Also by this time, academics were collecting emerging evidence of the over-representation of black people forced to access the statutory and controlling services, like the criminal justice system, accommodated children's services, corporate parenting and in statutory mental health services (Williams, 2018).

Following this period of instability, a national recruitment drive was introduced in response to concerns raised by local authorities, the National Health Service, probation and youth justice services, and other social work employers about the

national shortage of qualified social workers. This resulted in a national and international recruitment drive to encourage more applicants to enter the profession. This drive has been, and continues to be, supported through a National Health Service bursary scheme, which has made professional training to be a social worker a far more attractive career choice when compared to other health and social care professions (for example, nursing or occupational health) which are no longer supported by the National Health Service bursary scheme.

To bridge the gap in the workforce, local authorities, the National Health Service, probation and other social work employers have widened their recruitment strategies and increased the numbers and types of qualifying pathways available for social work education in England, in an attempt to increase the numbers to develop the workforce. Furthermore, complementary measures were introduced which saw social work employers recruit internationally. Recruitment involved international secondments of qualified social workers from other countries, including New Zealand, Australia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, to fill the workforce gaps. The overseas professionals were offered contracts for periods of up to three years (Holmstrom & Taylor, 2008). In addition to international recruitment, two key policies were launched which allowed social work education to capitalise on the lack of diversity in student applications and the workforce.

The first policy response was 'Aim Higher' (DfES, 2003); this was followed by 'Widening Participation' three years later (DfES, 2006), and these are examined in the next section.

Williams (2018) has produced an interesting commentary on the history of the development of race equality and social work charting back to the 1940s and 1950s. During this time there was a problem with 'brown babies' (children of mixed heritage). This was when social workers first identified the lack of suitable

culturally appropriate fostering placements available for ‘brown babies’. The over-representation of babies of mixed heritage grew because white mothers felt that they were unable to keep their ‘brown babies’, some because of the entrenched racism within their families and wider society (Williams, 2018). Further evidence was provided by Stuart Hall as far back as the late 1960s, when he first identified the over-representation of black men in psychiatric institutions and continued to highlight it throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Hall, 1996; Hall, 2000).

2.11.2 Policy Responses

The government’s ‘Aim Higher’ strategy was the first policy response to this problem. It took a double-pronged approach in that it was designed to support the aspirations and attainments of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter higher education, as well as encouraging the greater involvement in higher education of other traditionally marginalised groups (such as BMEs). This initiative raised the aspirations of the young to consider further and higher education as a pathway to assist in their career choices (Williams, 2009).

Widening participation has been another social policy response. Widening participation and improving access to social work education could be argued to be largely a success. DfES (2003, p.20) defines ‘widening participation’ as “a means to help more people from underrepresented groups, particularly low socioeconomic groups, to participate in higher education”.

Since the inception of widening participation, social work education has seen a significant increase in applications from BME students. This increase in applicants, according to Dillon (2011), has been in direct response to the government’s widening participation policy initiatives which have made it easier for applicants from non-traditional backgrounds to access higher education. Despite the increase

in BME communities accessing social work education, the experiences of racism often taints their experience through micro-aggressions (Gillborn, 2008; Tedam, 2016).

2.11.3 Legal Responses

In response to continued claims of social injustice and in recognition of the limitations of the existing Race Relations legislation, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 was established giving public bodies such as universities a legal duty to positively challenge racism, promote equality and nurture good race relations between communities. This prompted a move away from the passive anti-discriminatory approach to one that positively promotes race equality and works towards changing institutional cultures and practices. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 was integrated into the all-encompassing Equalities Act 2010.

Behind this equality legislation is a requirement for all public bodies and service providers, including universities, to identify and eradicate race inequality, and promote race equality. This proactive principle is integrated in the wider Equalities Act 2010. Current equality legislation gives higher educational institutions specific duties and responsibilities to promote race equality and also address inequalities in educational outcomes. This does not just apply to people of colour, but also the legislation requires public bodies and service providers to promote equality for all, between genders, the disabled, and for those from gay and lesbian communities. The proactive approach to equality was noted by the European Human Rights Commission pre-Brexit, who describe the English approach to race equality as socially progressive and notes them as being a post-racial society.

This post-racial discourse has been widely discussed by Gillborn (2008) and also by Wilkins and Boathen (2013), who argue against the way in which the Equalities Act contributes to an underplaying of the significance of institutional racism. These notable policy responses have galvanised the presence of black social workers in the workforce. Black social workers are now well established, particularly in urban

metropolitan areas across England. In the last twenty years, we have seen members of black communities entering social work as a tale of success.

Social work policy responses to the engagement of BME communities have been clearly charted by Williams (2018). This recent paper was drawn up using the National Social Work Networks archive at the University of Edinburgh and King's College London library. The authors offer a snap-shot of the history of race equality and social work, as a contribution to Black History Month, 2018.

The role of the institution and its impact on academic success will now be considered.

2.12 The Institutional Impact

This section highlights the institutional impact on student success. It explores the importance of academic and tutorial support, and consideration is given to the management of students' expectations. The performance of black students on the social work degree course may be due to the quality of support provided by the university. Naylor and Smith (2004) and Parker (2010) argue that poor attainment and progression rates are a result of the lack of academic or institutional support. Institutional support comes in many forms; for example, study and tutorial support, practice teaching, advocacy and representation (through student unionised services), welfare or emotional support. However, the literature review for this thesis only addresses tutor and tutorial support, due to word count limitations.

Some students fail to succeed because of their need for perfection, lack of self-control and a preference for informal help (such as friends or family) (Parker, 2010). Similarly, York (2004) found some students exit programmes early because they have made the wrong choice of course, are unhappy with the learning

environment, or dissatisfied with the university support provision. Black students are more likely to experience high levels of dissatisfaction with their studies, a finding mirrored by Dillon (2011).

The next section examines the impact of facility support, with particular attention focussed on academic and tutorial support.

2.12.1 Academic and Tutorial Support

Academic and tutorial support is fundamental to a student's success (Thomas, 2012). This support is linked to how socially integrated the student is to the institution. Academic and tutorial support allow opportunities for the relationship between the student and their tutor/educator to flourish. The quality and experience of support are thought to encourage learning, decrease attrition rates and contribute to improved academic success. This support is crucial, particularly in the first year of study (Thomas, 2012). Clearly, to be effective, the support is dependent on the student's willingness to participate, engage and seek advice in the first place. This suggests that tutorial support needs to be integrated into the social work degree course.

Black students are more likely to be non-traditional; aged between 25 and 63 years, they make better use of tutorial and welfare services (Keith, 2007). Keith argues that the challenge of adjustment and transition to the university is difficult for most students. This challenge to adjust contributes to social anxiety (Collins *et al.*, 2010), suggesting a need for early intervention by tutors. Moreover, this challenge is magnified when the student enters with vocational qualifications as opposed to traditional qualifications (such as 'A' levels or their equivalent) (Dillon, 2011).

An on-line closed questionnaire study by Cahill (2014) sheds some light on the phenomenon. Following ethical approval, Cahill posted an invitation to 23 undergraduate programmes, including social work, psychology, pharmacy, life sciences and the health emergency professions. Her study aimed to capture changes in the nature, use and effectiveness of academic and tutorial support as students progressed through their programmes. Nine hundred and thirty five responses were yielded and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics to understand whether there was a significant relationship between the different categories of data. The findings revealed emerging differences between BME and white students, and also between male and female undergraduate students with respect to levels of engagement with academic and tutorial support provision in higher education. The study provides useful insights into students' expectations and the effectiveness of academic and tutorial support provision. It needs to be acknowledged that among the professions studied there was a gender and professional bias. However, despite the inherent limitations, the study is useful in highlighting the clear benefits associated with the provision of academic and tutorial support.

Academic and tutorial support is crucial to the development of student success. Tutorial support, particularly one-to-one, must be provided by named tutors who demonstrate expertise and empathy. Tutors need to use the precious tutorial time available to guide students towards realistic goals and expectations (Cahill, 2014). Lowis (2008), in a two year study to identify the factors affecting student progression and achievement, advocates for tutors to find regular time to listen to their students' ups and downs uncritically. This then creates the 'Hawthorne effect' (being grateful that someone is interested in them). This, in turn, increases students' feelings of self-esteem, self-worth and, in return, the students then need to please (stimulus response), so they then are more likely to put increased efforts into their assignments. Yet, sadly, these black students are still the least likely to

undertake independent study and demand more time from lecturers, suggests Thomas (2012). Could this Hawthorne effect be contributing to what students perceive to be academic success? Might this be an important area that has not been addressed in the literature and therefore would benefit from further study?

A comparative study by Severiens and Wolff (2011) of 523 higher education students in the Netherlands showed that tutors working with poorly performing ethnic minority students may have a greater tendency to approach these students on a formal basis. It appears that tutors are more likely to ask ethnic minority students about their poor performance, discuss solutions and remedial strategies with them only within the context of the learning environment. Tutors who see ethnic minority students performing well, on the other hand, are more likely to approach them on an informal basis. This landscape is mirrored in groups of majority students. Tutors with poorly performing majority students seem to leave these students somewhat behind in the classroom, focusing instead on the majority students who perform well. The poorly performing majority students are approached on an informal basis, perhaps because tutors expect informal reasons for their poor performance.

2.12.2 The Anglo Saxon Approach to Teaching

A critical radical approach to student success on the social work degree course might be down to the Anglo Saxon approach to teaching, learning and assessment. The current approach, according to Dominelli (2007), may no longer be applicable to England's new black communities. Controversially, Dominelli (*2007*) reiterates that disproportionality in outcomes for ethnic minority students may be down to the Anglo Saxon approach to learning, teaching and assessment. She argues that, in England, we have developed a repertoire of teaching methods which may no longer be appropriate for students from different educational

pathways, cultures and societies. She goes on to say that the way we teach social work must be reviewed for cultural sensitivity. Furthermore, Dominelli adds that “as educators, we must be prepared to challenge the dominance of Anglo Saxon paradigms” (2007, p.38).

2.12.3 Student Expectations

Another barrier to student success on the social work degree course is the student’s expectations of the role of the lecturer. With students perceiving lecturers to be teachers, not facilitators of learning, they report feelings of social anxiety including stigma and fear of being seen as ‘needy’ (Tedam, 2016). This is often supported by feelings of not being good enough, shame and loss of hope that things will improve (Urwin, 2018). Interestingly, only between 3% and 4% of the student population make use of the one-to-one counselling services offered by universities (Topham, 2011). This assumes that students share their concerns elsewhere. Similar to Topham, Richardson (2008) found that 70% of students found help from family and friends, while only 17% approached tutors. In their study, only 10% of students engaged with centrally provided support services. Conversely, Stanley and Manthrope (2002) suggest that social work students make greater use of student support services compared to other graduates. This may not necessarily indicate greater difficulties, but may reflect a better awareness of the potential benefits of such services.

Cahill (2014) reports that 50% of students found the courses they had undertaken failed to meet their expectations. This high number is concerning and implies the need for an unambiguous communication strategy. This strategy should articulate the efforts to be made and academic demands placed upon and expected of students. This lack of unambiguous communication persists between academic years and has been reported as highest for final year students. This prompts a

need for a clearer expression of the degree's academic and practice demands, which should not only be divulged during the pre-application process but also needs to be communicated as students progress from year to year. When considering the role of the student, we must also consider the student's approach to seeking help in the learning, teaching and assessment process.

If we are to improve the success rate for black students, there needs to be an increase in tutors' efforts to recognise and develop the potential abilities of students who are culturally different from their educators. Fu (2010) highlights that frameworks for supporting students need to be sufficiently robust to operate on a personal level, flexible enough to meet individual learning styles, should vary depending upon the subject studied, and the teaching and learning strategy. In addition to the impact of the institution, we must also take into account what the student brings (dispositional attributes) in the attainment gap, which is summarised in the following section.

2.13 The Self, Race and Psychological Determinants

What the student brings (the dispositional attributes [the 'self']) to learning, teaching and assessment of social work education is also of significance. This section explores the significance of the individual sense of 'self' relating to identity, race and esteem and its impact on social work education. The section highlights how the student's personal situation might impact on their performance during the social work degree course.

Several studies have been carried out over the last 25 years in England that consider the impact of the ethnic minority sense of 'self' (HEFCE, 2014).

Singh's (2011) review of the literature suggests that these studies fall into two categories. Firstly, there are those who take the view that identity is a relatively fixed and stable trait. This category of structural papers succeeds in essentialising ethnic identities, whilst attempting to challenge stereotypes. The justifications appear to be the lack of theorising about the production or performativity of identities. This suggests that there is an unrealistic homogeneity within ethnic groups, or suggests binaries which may create implied ethnic hierarchies or fixed difference between groups (Chadderton, 2013). Such discourses on identity presuppose a fixed essence in each individual, which is frequently linked to race and fixed differences that underpin current racist discourses.

The second category concerns the post-structural theories which take the view that identity is more complex, transformational, multiple and contradictory, which explicitly challenge fixed categories of racial differences (Alexander and Knowles, 2005). Furthermore, post-structural ideas undertheorise the reality of the impact of master narratives on individual lives and identities (Ang-Lygate, 1997, cited in Chadderton, 2013). Nevertheless, identity is theorised in the abstract.

It is clear that there are aspects of student identity that impact on their success in the social work degree. This is further explored within the next section - the impact of race.

2.13.1 The Impact of Race

This section of the review aims to explore how race might impact on black students' performance and contribute to their success in attaining the social work degree. Firstly, we must be reminded that the concept of race is problematic, as there are no races just social constructs of groups of people with similar characteristics (Gilroy, 2004). Gunaratham (2003) adds that 'race' is a contested

term and is conceptualised as an unstable and decentred complex set of social meanings, constantly being transformed by political struggle (Omi and Winnant, 1986, p.68, cited in Wainwright, 2009). Many black students experience racism as a direct result of their race (Tedam, 2016).

Whilst there has been an influx of black people entering the profession (see section 2.9), the structural and situational responses refer to disparities. For many in this group, their experiences of being a student may have been invariably tainted, through individual and institutional racism. The most commonly used definition of racism in England emerged from the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. According to Macpherson who led the inquiry:

> "…racism is the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes, and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping, which disadvantages ethnic minority people" (Macpherson, 1999, section 6.43).

Collins *et al.*, on this issue of social work students and racism in placements attached to the social work degree course, indicate that they were "shocked by the level of racism among practice educators" (2011, p.38). Collins and colleagues also found covert racism in the writing of performance assessments and reports on black students by practice educators (2011, p.32). They say that racism was rife, particularly as racism is rarely mentioned in either student or practice educator reports. They add that:

> "their [practice educators] hearts were in the right place. Many of the white practice educators in her study had no inkling of what to do with black African students so bungled their efforts" (Collins *et al.*, 2011, p.33).

Their study called for a more streamlined approach to evidencing student failure. There appears to be a correlation between practice educator competence and student success while on the social work degree course.

The next section reviews the literature examining student disposition and how this might impact upon student participation and efforts on the social work degree course. The focus is on how pivotal self-esteem is to student performance on these degree courses.

2.13.2 The Role of Self-esteem

Self-esteem plays a crucial role in student performance on the social work degree course (John, 2006). Rosenberg (1979, p.5) defines self-esteem as "the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regards to themselves, it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval". He argues that self-esteem is not a stable trait. Self-esteem changes over time and has the potential to predict future behaviour and risks. Cox *et al*. (2000, p.39) note that "poor self-esteem is a symptom of stress" and implies that "stress is a complex phenomenon that involves a process of interaction between a person and their environment, which is constantly changing" (2000, p.126).

"Self-esteem is one of the most frequently studied variables in psychology and is linked to positive outcomes and occupational success" (Kali *et al*., 2003, p.869). Positive and high self-esteem is linked to healthy relationships (Robinson, 2000), subjective well-being, positive perceptions by peers (Cross, 1978; Robins *et al.*, 2001), persistence in the face of failure, improved coping and self-regulation (Silverstone & Salsal, 2003) and academic achievement (Parker, 2010). In contrast, low self-esteem has been linked to poor mental health, in particular depression, anti-social behaviour and underachievement (Rosenberg, 1979). Cox *et al.* (2000) also remind us that black students experience higher levels of anxiety, stress, emotional or behavioural disturbances and physical illnesses when compared to their white counterparts.

Collins *et al.* (2010), using Goldberg's General Health Questionnaire (GHQ28) (Goldberg, cited in Collins *et al*., 2010), found that 34% of social work students scored 11 or more, showing exceptionally high levels of psychological disturbance. They note that the student social worker appears to be under considerable stress even before they take up the more onerous responsibilities of a qualified social worker. In addition, they go on to cite that social work students have significantly lower self-esteem scores than psychology or teacher training students. Professional education programmes, such as nursing, teaching and social work which combine academic and professional requirements, may well evoke more stress than traditional undergraduate programmes (Dziegliewski *et al.*, 2004).

Overall the quantitative study by Collins *et al.* (2010) has important implications for social work students. In this study, some of the respondents experienced problems with self-esteem and may have a need for more support than their counterparts. Most saw themselves as persons of worth, felt as valuable as others and liked themselves. However 10% did not like themselves - this group regarded themselves as failures and did not feel as valuable as the others. Twenty percent did not think very much of themselves, 25% did not feel proud of the person they were, while nearly 33% did not feel as good as other people. The latter is perhaps understandable, as participants may have interpreted the question as being related to their need to develop knowledge, skills and competence as social workers. Some of their attitudes also might be related to feelings about their pre-academic abilities, or might be due to how they feel about themselves (see earlier, section 2.12).

These results suggest the need for mutual support, alongside support from tutors, to empower such students to develop more confidence and a better self-image. In fact, 42% of the sample showed GHQ28 sample scores of 4 or more. These

responses indicate the need for psychological intervention. This suggests that programmes for social work students should include stress management and resilience as an integral part of the course. It appears that the helper finds it a challenge to admit that they may, indeed, need help themselves. Richardson (2012) reminds us that this problem is not confined to England, since the Netherlands, France and the United States also experience similar disparities in outcomes for black students. Although there has been concern about achievement and black students from academics, we appear to have somehow accepted the *status quo*.

We now move on to explore dispositions, where the focus is on student motivation to succeed on the social work degree course.

2.13.3 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations

Another factor that may inform our understanding of academic success is the role of motivation to join the profession. One such study was carried out in Russia (Stoltzfus, 2015). This cross-sectional study was developed to better understand applicant motivations to join the social work profession. The project was subject to ethical approval and was funded by Fulbright Lecturing Research. Fifty percent of Stoltzfus's sample of 176 students responded with altruistic desires to help others. Careerist motivations also played a strong role in their decision to pursue a career in social work.

Stoltzfus found that gender, family origin, income levels and religious observance were not significantly related to motivation to join the profession. With permission, Stoltzfus used the Grossman and Santangelo instrument, designed to measure student opinions, values and social attitudes, previous employment trajectories, career motivations, personal characteristics and interests (Grossman &

Santangelo, cited in Stoltzfus, 2015). Stoltzfus (2015) reports having to make significant alterations to the instrument to ensure it was fit for purpose. This study, although useful in the insights it offers into the motivations to join the profession, does however have a number of limitations. Firstly, the participants were chosen using convenience sampling, limiting its generalisability. Additionally, the level of modification made to the data collection instrument makes the data difficult to compare and contrast to other similar studies using that tool. Moreover, the instrument was validated in the United States, for postgraduate students. Although Stoltzfus (2015) results should be viewed with caution, they do go some way to demonstrate how Russian social work education is turning a corner and moving towards a better professional identity. The findings also suggest a need for greater awareness of motivation and intrinsic values placed on the university by the student.

In contrast, Wilson and McCrystal (2007) report that 63% of Northern Irish social work students in their study characterised themselves as having strong religious values for joining the profession. Similarly, Hirsbrunner (2012) found over 50% of respondents indicated that a sense of spiritual calling drew them to social work. Furthermore, this group was less likely to report that they pursued a social work career out of a desire for job security.

Further evidence is provided by Balinsky *et al.* (2010) from a survey carried out in England utilising a sample of undergraduate and postgraduate students. They found altruistic and personal fulfilment as the most common reasons associated with motivation for pursuing a social work degree. Their qualitative study found that male respondents were 1.5 times more likely than women to choose careerist motivations for wanting to join the profession. They also report that decisions to join the profession were linked to early childhood experiences, trauma or significant life events.

Abell and McDonell (1990), investigating a masters social work programme, suggested that the versatility of the course influenced the respondents' decisions to join the profession and traditional commitments to work with the disadvantaged. This American cohort also reported that contributing to individuals and society in social work were factors which motivated them to join the profession.

The differences in motivation between black and white students could provide a partial explanation for the apparent differences in attainment, if it results in a lower engagement with social work teaching, learning and assessment. We can, however, gather that although there is a link between extrinsic motivation for participation in higher education and the possible adoption of a surface approach to learning, little evidence was found in support of this link. Moreover, family encouragement and support to attend university and to achieve well is generally considered to have a positive influence on academic success (Cotton *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, these differences warrant further exploration.

Because student motivation is such an important determinant of academic success, this study ('Cracking the Code') seeks to uncover participants' motivations to pursue the social work degree at different levels of the course.

2.14 Self-reports on Failing to Succeed

Black social work students in England have a greater propensity to experience delays in progression and are least likely to be awarded a first or upper second class degree (Hafford-Letchfield, 2007; Hussein, 2009; Bernard, 2011; Stevenson, 2012). This group are also more likely than white social work students to have progression delayed, be deferred, referred or be withdrawn from social work education (Hussein, 2009; Parker, 2010; Bernard, 2012; Tedam, 2014). Students'

explanations for their performance on the social work degree course vary. The individual student's experience is unique. My study, through one-to-one interviews, captures the individual's experiences and themes them into logical summaries.

Students may attribute their difficulties to a combination of events, including the wrong choice of course, financial or personal problems, academic difficulties, unhappiness with the environment, dissatisfaction with the institution and the quality of the student experience (York, 2004). Older black students report that they are more likely to enter pathways to social work education after a period of paid employment in social care or an unrelated career (Hussein, 2009). These employment experiences often give this group an advantage over those who have no employment experience. Yet still their progress and attainment levels fall below that of their white counterparts. The number of undergraduate students in England failing to complete their courses in 2008 was around 17%; this compares to between 12-19% for social work students during the same period (Hussein, 2009).

Similar in some ways to my own doctoral study here reported, a small-scale qualitative study by Hafford-Letchfield (2007) undertaken at a university in South England explored factors affecting the potential success of students following a vocational education programme leading to a degree in social work. The data collection method was a focus group and seven semi-structured interviews with students. Purposive sampling techniques were used to identify participants. The study highlighted a constellation of factors, previously noted in the literature, that potentially impact upon student success in social work education. She found deficiencies in organisational and time management skills, access to quality study skills support, relationships with peers and tutors and the impact of effective factors on the learning process.

Her study proved to be useful for determining early intervention strategies aimed at improving the potential success on the degree course (Hafford-Letchfield, 2007). The study challenges the anticipated outcomes in implementing these strategies for students from diverse non-traditional backgrounds. Hafford-Letchfield recognises the potential influences of being a white female researcher touching on issues of difference and power dynamics between student and educator. Having successfully applied to the university's ethical committee for approval, her study was designed to represent a subjective effort to explore and clarify related topics in partnership with the participants involved. It aimed to expand the understanding of issues from different perspectives, while trying to limit bias as much as possible (Hafford-Letchfield, 2007, p.174). The critical approach taken was warranted because firstly it was emancipatory and highlighted the historical origins and social context of students' lives regardless of the individual or collective forms of embodiment and expression they might take (Fossey *et al*., 2002).

The Hafford-Letchfield (2007) study was thus used by myself as a tool for an ongoing inquiry into the practical transformation of the outcomes for BME students studying the social work degree at the university. The implications for this methodology are to foster self-reflection, mutual learning, participation and empowerment, rather than the acceptance of discoveries.

To provide a balanced critique of the Hafford-Letchfield (2007) study, it was noted that she failed to check the authenticity of the participants' transcripts, which would have added credibility to the findings (Cresswell, 2009). My own study ensures credibility by testing the trustworthiness of the data. Authenticity was carried out by 'member checking' (see section 3.12). Member checking is a way of validating data by returning the transcripts to the respondents to confirm accuracy and approve the use of their verbatim narratives.

Moreover, the Hafford-Letchfield (2007) study implies that insufficient depth of information was gathered to fully describe the factors affecting the retention of learners following the degree in social work. The sample size makes the study difficult to generalise to a wider social work population. The strength of my own study is the transparency of myself as researcher, which made it easy to assess my own intrinsic values and attempt to promote social justice. Unlike the Hafford-Letchfield (2007) data collection method using a focus group, my 'Cracking the Codes' data collection methods were through semi-structured interviews and the use of a vignette for practice educators. These methods of data collection meet both the conventional processes of qualitative research and the constructivist approach taken.

Another study mirroring my own, to an extent, which has contributed to the diverse debates on ethnic differences in social work education is 'Who is Failing to Adjust?', a mixed-method study carried out by Bartoli *et al*. (2008) at the University of Northampton. Their objective was to develop an understanding of black African students' perspectives on their life experiences and the impact on their learning, whilst studying on a social work degree course. Bartoli *et al.* interviewed a sample of fifteen African social work students; they asserted 'curiosity' as their reason for carrying out the study. They also reported being curious to establish why black African students were more likely than white students to fail their social work degree. The team was aiming to identify and diminish discriminatory barriers that contribute to student failure. Bartoli *et al.* (2008) argue that there was a myriad of causes for poor progression among black African social work students, including self-reports of gender role expectations, competing family demands, financial constraints, physical and mental ill-health, homesickness, inadequate knowledge of the English welfare systems, student motivation, preconceived ideas about the

profession and the experience of individual and institutional racism. Many of these themes have already been noted in this review.

“Much good work has been devoted to uncovering the place of inequality in our education system” (Mortimore, 2010, p.12). Bartoli *et al.* (2008) claimed a deep commitment to changing outcomes for black students. Despite these laudable claims, they appear to have adopted a position that treats race equality somewhat superficially. Bartoli *et al.’s* recommendations for change disappointingly did not include a review of policy, nor did they make any attempt to collect the perceptions of educators or practice teachers on African student failure. This would have enabled the triangulation of the findings and thereby strengthened the study’s reliability (Cresswell, 2009).

‘Who is Failing to Adjust?’ does not provide a definition of failing. However, a later study entitled ‘When Things go Wrong! Placement Disruption and Termination: Power and Student Perspectives’ (Parker, 2010) provides a useful working definition of failing in relation to social work practice placements. Parker asserts that these students are “unfit to practise”, “not good enough” or “not ready” for social work practice (2010, p.990). The study aimed to develop and enhance future responses to social work placement disruption from all stakeholders in social work practice learning. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews, but these have limitations. The different lengths of time from experience and possibilities for reflection on it may have constructed particular ways of viewing the experience of being on a social work degree course of study. Similar to my own study ‘Cracking the Code’, a narrative approach allows participants to claim ownership of their stories and experiences, and create and present the meanings they associate with these narratives. Parker was known to the participants in his study (Parker, 2010), so power issues may have permeated the experiences of the participants. Parker states that black African students are

more likely to fail because of differences in their understanding of the social work role, linguistic competence and cultural barriers in practice.

Bartoli *et al*. (2008) make a number of assumptions. The first is drawn from the title of the study, which implies that the black African student is failing to adjust. However, throughout the article they are not explicit about what it is that black African students are failing to adjust to. Some black African students have been shown to perform as well, if not better, than their white counterparts, particularly where they make up the majority of the student population (Conner *et al*., 2004). The Bartoli *et al*. study distinguishes between black African international and black home students, by the strength of the fees they pay. The authors also recognise that the term 'African' has limitations and note that Africa is made up of 53 different countries with individual distinct languages, cultures and traditions.

> "Despite such differences, some cultural norms were identified within the black African focus group, namely gender, family loyalty and experience of racism" (Bartoli *et al.*, 2008, p.54).

Tedam (2016) also found that black African participants reported experiencing individual and institutional racism. However, the writing style of Bartoli *et al*. (2008) assumes that the reader is complicit with the use of language and the article presents the student as, what Gillborn (2008) refers to as 'victims'. The gist of the argument is that the participants' perceptions may have been flawed. They were not victims; rather, they may have simply been overly optimistic about their personal abilities and skills, and blamed external factors for their failing (Heider, 1958). However, the premise of Bartoli *et al.*'s argument is that black African students need specific additional help to assist in their learning, rather than becoming estranged from their studies.

The Bartoli *et al*. (2008) study has a number of strengths and weaknesses, notwithstanding this it does demonstrate a proactive approach to tackling student

failure, and has provided some practical solutions to addressing failure among black African social work students. Their article exposes their values in wanting to redress the disproportionality in student outcomes. The article has worth in providing some understanding into the specific needs of this student group, who mirror the majority of participants who took part in my own more recent study here reported ('Cracking the Code'). My findings go some way to ensure that the voices of black students are heard in the underachievement debate, in contrast to Bartoli *et al*.'s findings.

Can the Bartoli *et al*. (2008) findings possibly explain why some black students continue to lag behind white students'? On their own, their studies fail to explain why the differences continue to exist. What impact might socialisation have? The vast majority of studies which have focused on retention, early exit and success in social work education originate from the USA and have broadly taken a social integration position, arguing that the key to retention and academic success is the development of a student's sense of belonging and connection with the institution. If the literature is to be believed, students' levels of social bonding, social integration and participation play a key role. These traits will be discussed in the next section.

2.15 Participation and Success

Past literature suggests that social integration is crucial to academic success. Cotton *et al.* (2015) argue that the level of participation can make a difference to the student experience. I will now move on to explore differences in student participation; 'participation' in this sense is defined as "the student's efforts made to fully participate and attach themselves to the institution" *(*Anthony *et al.*, 2016). Participatory attachment (or 'social bonding') is instrumental to the relationship which the student has to an institution. Participation plays a vital role in the

performance and success of students. This is supported by Anthony *et al.* (2016), who highlight how social bonding theory can help us understand the role of socialisation and social learning theory by recognising individual bonds to institutions; for example, the family, friends, religion and educational establishments. This bond affects the way individuals behave. Social bonding theory was originally developed to explain deviant behaviour (Hirschi, 1969). The model was further developed by Wehlage some twenty years later (Wehlage *et al*., 1989) and has been used to explore learning and education.

The review by Singh (2011) of BME students' participation and performance in higher education challenges lecturers' assumptions about BME students and their differential degree attainments. A review entitled the 'Improving Retention and Success Programme' was commissioned by the Higher Education Academy (Thomas *et al*., 2017). This report draws attention to the poor teaching, learning and assessment practices that may be contributing to maintaining the underachievement gap.

In contrast, Stevenson (2012) found problems with segregation, lower teacher expectations, undervaluing or the underchallenging of black students, prejudicial attitudes associated with linguistic competence, discriminatory practices inherent in teaching, learning and assessment strategies and amount of student support all contribute to poorer outcomes for black students. It thus appears that it is not poor teaching and assessment alone that contributes to the disproportionality in outcomes for black students. Academic success requires that students must be prepared to actively participate and engage in university, faculty, departmental and course-specific extra-curricular activities outside of scheduled lectures. The poor outcomes for black students are related to the fact that these students are least likely to partake in extra-curricular activities and this has an impact on attainment (Stuart, 2008). Such extra-curricular activities were based upon their socio-cultural

backgrounds and included time spent with friends, socialising in clubs and bars, and involvement in more university-based activities. Stuart found that black students spent more time with their families and in the library, and were more likely to be involved in solitary activities when compared to their white peers. They also undertook fewer university-based activities than their white peers (2008, p.54). These findings mirror those of Cotton *et al*.'s (2015) study, carried out at the University of Plymouth. This may account for differences in integration into university life and social bonding. Socialisation, integration and participation appear to be instrumental to academic success and might be better understood if one considers critical race theoretical explanations (see section 2.3) for the disparities in outcomes on the social work degree course.

The section now moves on to examine the deficit model, frequently used in research to explain the performance of black students.

2.16 The Deficit Model

The performance of black students in social work education may also be understood in terms of the 'deficit model', as coined by Garcia Coll *et al.* (1996). This model assumes that black students have genetic and/or cultural limitations or deficiencies which may have been cultivated from social learning from their early childhood experiences of education, inter-generationally learning and/or communities. However, this explanation has been discredited on both conceptual and methodological grounds (Barbarin, 1999). In contrast to this explanation, the work of Ogbu (1993; 2003) might also help in the analysis of understanding the recipe to success among black students. Ogbu suggests that the ecological perspective can help to shed some light on the variations in the performance of black students in relation to the cultural context in which they are socialised. Ogbu argues that a student's involuntary incorporation into the host society results in a

caste-like status. This caste-like status, it is argued, has made it difficult for some black students to assimilate into mainstream society. Therefore, this suggests that social stratification mechanisms (such as racial discrimination, prejudice and restricted economic opportunity) may serve to limit or block the achievement and motivation of some black students, making them less likely to perform as well as white students. As a result of these social forces, many BME students believe they will experience limited occupational opportunities. These beliefs prevent them from receiving the rewards and benefits that correspond with their educational success.

Ogbu (1993) argues that although BME students may hold a positive view about success in higher education and may endorse the tenets of achievement ideology, they still do not work to their full potential at university, resulting in a paradox of underachievement, a position reiterated in the work of Merzer (2007). Ogbu (1993) makes the point that because of black students' assumptions about opportunity structure, it is sometimes believed that academic underachievement is an adaptive response to their social and economic opportunities.

2.16.1 Oppositional Social Identity

There have been arguments made by culturists such as Ogbu (1993) that minority populations can develop an oppositional identity to that of the minority high achiever, whom they deem as 'acting white' rather than acting true to one's authentic cultural norms, despite the desire to pursue academic success. Such a model (Ogbu, 1993) proposes that inequalities in education and our social systems can also lead to some students developing an 'oppositional social identity', whereby academic achievement and related help-seeking behaviours are viewed as associated with white dominant culture. This is reinforced by Dominelli (1993), who reports that black students may perceive university as an abstractive process in which they must forfeit or lose some of their collective identity in order

to achieve academic success. However, this explanation has some limitations, since it fails to address the within-group variability in the academic performance of achievement orientations of black students.

It is important to note that the work of Ogbu (1993) was conducted in the United States. Like the United Kingdom, this society is multi-racial and multi-ethnic, and it experiences similar academic disparities among its African American, Latino and other ethnic minority students. With this in mind, Ogbu (1993) may not accurately represent the experiences found in the United Kingdom; however, we can draw upon lessons learned from the American experience.

2.16.2 The 'Othering' of Black Students

Another debate often heard about in social work education is that the quality of language proficiency of newly qualified social workers is poor (Munro, 2011). This contributes towards creating a process of 'othering'. This discourse assumes that black students have lower university standards and implies that some black students have lower levels of English language proficiency. In addition, it also implies that white students do not have difficulty with the English language and it is these deficiencies in English language that contribute to black students failing to progress through their university courses (Parker, 2010). This experience of being 'othered' is not new. Tedam (2016) similarly found students have been othered through their experiences of disrespectful and/or patronising behaviour by practice educators. Tedam also reports covert racism and discrimination, lack of support and over scrutiny which affects their confidence, and their perceptions that social work educators find it easy to fail black students.

2.17 Concluding Summary

To conclude, despite the widely acknowledged disproportionate disparities in social work educational outcomes, evidence for solutions remain relatively sparse. This necessitates the need to study the experiences of academic success in greater depth. It is clear that the reasons for failing to succeed are complex and multifactorial.

Any response to improving academic success in social work education must take into account the student's pre-admission ability, along with their structural, situational, institutional and psychological issues. Moreover, it must also consider the student's level of socialisation.

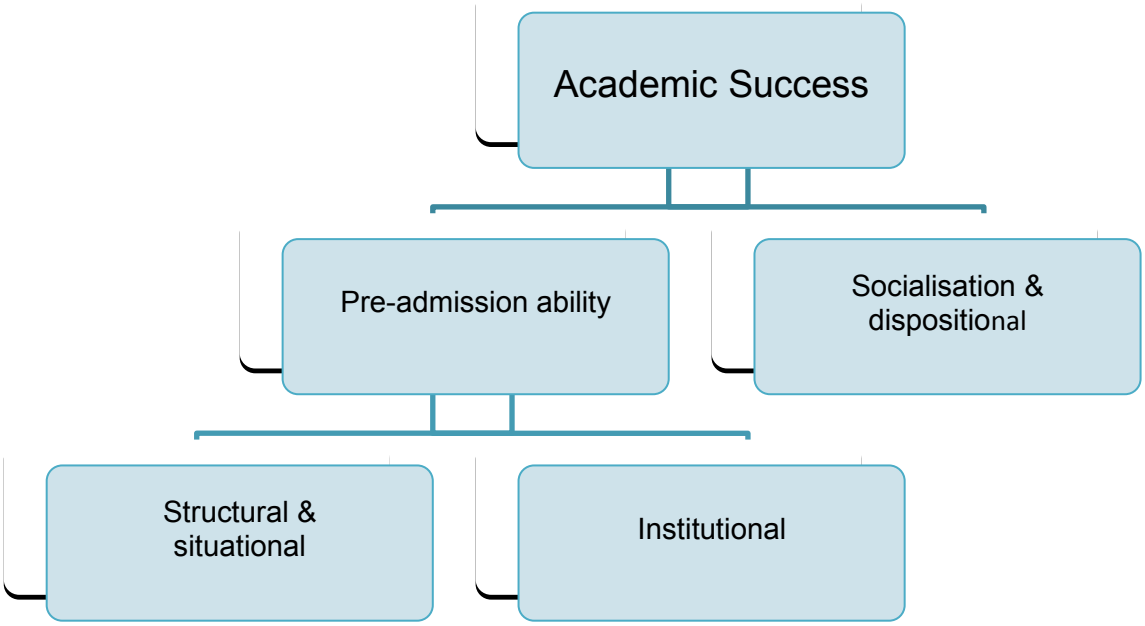
Many of the themes addressed in this literature review chapter (for example, pre-admission abilities, structural and situational issues, the institution, and the level of participatory efforts made by the student), when considered in isolation, may not explain student success when studying for a degree in social work. However, when considered in combination, these themes may go some way towards explaining why some black students succeed academically, but others do not.

Doubts remain about the theoretical ideas propagated by structural race scholars such as Ogbu (1993) and Gillborn (2008), since they often proffer opposing arguments. Race academics argue that racial factors (such as discrimination and stereotyping) explain the structural and situational barriers for groups who realise little or no academic and/or socioeconomic mobility. Class academics, like Melanie Reynolds from Oxford Brooks and Ciaran Burke from University of Derby on the other hand, contend that the socioeconomic background and standing better explain the differences in outcomes between black and white social work students.

My own study will add to the current literature by demonstrating that it is not only the intersection of race and class but also, for those of the black population, structural and situational dispositional group-specific issues which may account for unequal outcomes.

Given the available evidence, in order to aid understanding of academic success, I have developed a conceptual model to propose what influences academic success on the social work degree course. This model provides context and summarises the themes that have emerged from the literature review (see Figure 2.2). It can be ascertained from this diagram that to understand academic success one must consider a student's pre-admission ability, socialisation and dispositional attributes, structural and situational events, and one must also consider the impact of the institution. These interrelating components all have the potential to influence academic success. Indeed, the author would summarise the themes addressed as being the recipe for academic success.

Figure 2.2: Conceptual Model Factors that Influence Academic Success



Source: author.

2.18 Conceptual Framework

The identified five overarching themes have been drawn from the literature. Miles and Hubberman (1994, p.18) state that:

> "…[a] conceptual framework is a visual or written presentation that explains either graphically or in narrative form the main things to be studied for example key facets, factors or ideas, or the researcher presumes there is a relationship among them".

My conceptual framework is not without its difficulties, since it is influenced by the experience and knowledge of my initial bias. Once developed, the conceptual framework influenced my thinking and this resulted in some themes being given prominence and others being ignored, causing on-going bias. Another justification for using this conceptual framework is that it gave me the ability to move beyond descriptions of 'what', 'why' and 'how' (Smith, 2004). The conceptual framework also helped set out a clear explanation which was used to define academic success and created a link between the literature, methodology and findings. It was also used as a filtering tool for selecting the research questions and the data collection methods, used as a reference point for the discussion in the literature review, methodology and findings (Smith, 2004), and it provided boundaries for my study.

In preparing the conceptual framework, I likened the task to pre-planning a holiday. The purpose of pre-planning a holiday is to know how to get to and return from the holiday destination, and to know what activities are available at the destination. I was also guided by my previous experiences, as well as by information provided by colleagues and supervisors. This pre-planning metaphor is applicable to what I do when I arrive at the destination, be better prepared and able to make the most of the holiday.

The model provides context and extends on the themes that emerged from the literature review. From Figure 2.2, one can deduce that to understand academic success one must consider the student's pre-admission ability, socialisation and dispositional attributes, structural and situational events, and one must also consider the impact of the institution. These interrelating components all have the potential to influence academic success whilst on a social work degree course. Indeed, the author summaries the themes addressed as the 'recipe for academic success'.

The literature review now comes to a close. The next chapter describes and justifies the steps I took to realise this study's aims and objectives. The chapter has been written in the first person to reflect my efforts to realise these.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to why, what, from where, when and how the data for this study was collected and analysed. It describes the techniques used to realise the project's aims and justifies the study's design and appropriateness. The chapter demonstrates the rigors used in collecting the data. The methodology builds on other similar studies on academic success and social work education (Hafford-Letchfield, 2007; Bernard *et al.*, 2014).

This chapter describes, in the first person, the actions taken to operationalise the study. It then explains the recruitment and sampling strategies used to recruit the participants, then how the university's 'Code of Practice for Research Involving Human Participants' (UREC, 2011) and professional ethical standards for research were observed and maintained during the study. The chapter then progresses to justify the philosophical backdrop to the project and the rationale for selecting the techniques used in data collection and analysis.

The next section addresses the study's research question.

3.2 The Research Question

The reason I took the decision to investigate academic success was driven by my role as a social work educator. Hence the interest and formulation of the research title: 'Cracking the Code: factors that influence academic success on the social work degree' and sub-title 'A newly qualified black social worker's perspective'. The key words in this are 'academic success' and 'newly qualified black social worker'. I was seeking to examine individual constructs of academic success

borne out of recalled memories of their lived experiences, actions and behaviour over the period the participants were on the social work degree course.

As a social work educator, I was seeking to identify what works to enhance the experience of black students in social work education and encourage other educator practitioners to do more of it. I hoped to identify and systematically record practices that might hinder student success on the social work degree course, to inform any structural adjustments to the social work degree course and to recognise the specific needs of black students. I was seeking to raise standards, whilst attempting to formulate new knowledge. As an educator, I was well aware that the students I was teaching did not fit into the available evidence-based deficit models that explore the experiences and performance of black students. This made me curious about what lessons could be learnt from our practice as social work educators.

Another reason for undertaking the study was that the performance of black students is a contemporary issue that is regularly addressed in the media. This study thus aims to better understand the structured histories, behaviours and institutional practices that NQBSWs and their educators attribute to academic success (Taylor, 1993). I was conscious that participants may not have been aware of the invisible ideology that guided their behaviours, nor fully aware of the forces which were acting on their agency.

Fleming and Morning (1998) make the point that a well-framed question has three or four core elements. To illustrate this point their three point framework measures (P = population, E = intervention/exposure and O = outcomes) are used to illustrate this study's core elements (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Fleming's Three Point Framework (Adapted)

Population	Intervention/Exposure	Outcomes
Newly Qualified Black Social Workers Social Work Educators	Social Work Education	Academic Success

Source: author, based on Fleming and Morning (1998).

This chapter now moves to explore this study's aims and objectives.

3.3 Study Aims and Objectives

This study aims to examine NQBSWs' epistemological beliefs, actions and personal constructs of academic success on the social work degree course. The focus was on the experiences of a specific population set who had lived experiences of studying or teaching social work education at a specific inner city university. The university is unique in that the vast majority of the students on this social work degree course running between 2015 and 2018 were black (83% of the study population).

Having been a black social work student myself, I was curious about the performance of black students currently undertaking such studies. I was keen to carry out the research within a social construct focusing on the lived experiences of NQBSWs. We live in our own little worlds and all view our worlds differently, and it was these views that I was seeking to capture in the participants' responses.

The study's overall aim was to examine the factors that influence academic success on the degree in social work course. The project was supported by a number of key objectives, which were to:

- identify any behavioural factors that may or may not have influenced academic success on the social work degree course;
- examine any differences between NQBSWs' and their educator participants' understandings of academic success;
- identify the support structures embraced whilst undertaking the social work degree course.
- explore participants' lived experiences and understanding of teaching, learning and assessment on the social work degree course; and
- draw conclusions that may support curriculum development opportunities and influence social work educational policy and future teaching practice.

To meet these objectives I took a three-pronged approach to reporting on the factors that influence academic success on the social work degree course. Firstly, I considered the nature of the research question. Thinking like a constructivist, I worked on the assumption that the participants were experts of their own experiences. I was interested in their perceptions of their lived experiences, rather than an objective or factual account of experiences on the social work degree course (Denicolo *et al*., 2016, p.146).

Secondly, I had to consider the best approach to collecting data that would address the question in a meaningful way. I used idiographic methods, so the language used in the study aimed to explore, examine and identify. This provided opportunities to take a hermeneutic viewpoint and required me to acknowledge that my ability to understand another's personal world was tainted by my own conceptions of the university.

In designing the study, I recognised that the research question, aims and objectives were shaped by the choice of methodology, and that the methodology shaped the research questions and design. The methodology was also greatly influenced by personal construct theory. This theory is advocated by Denicolo *et al*. (2016) as being suitable for phenomenological research. Researchers who use personal construct theory are considered as social constructivists, since they are co-constructing new knowledge alongside their participants. Denicolo *et al.* (2016) discuss their participants' responses and call these 'constructs'. They argue that these constructs are the personal creations that allow individuals to interpret or make discriminations between things. They further suggest that a researcher's use of participants' words represent and communicate their constructs, whilst keeping in mind that words are only symbols and mean different things to different people.

The next section describes how I met the professional and ethical standards set for researchers, and how I addressed the ethical issues as they arose in the operationalisation of the study.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

This section addresses the study's ethical considerations and includes a description of how I fulfilled the requirements of the professional codes of practice for research. It also addresses how consent, anonymity and confidentiality were dealt with, and how risks were managed - including protecting the university's reputation. I have also addressed a number of ethical issues that arose whilst carrying out the study, including my concerns over the use of technology.

Whilst operationalising the study, I was mindful of my commitment to meet the standards of practice and professional codes that promote good practice; for

example, the university's 'Code of Practice for Research Involving Human Participants (UREC, 2011), the British Educational Research Association guidelines (BERA, 2014) and the British Association of Social Works 'Code of Ethics' (BASW, 2011). Given that I am a registered social work practitioner my efforts were also guided by the Health Care Professional Council's (HCPC) Codes of Practice for Social Workers.

Throughout the study I remained committed to the BASW Code of Ethics, in particular the section on responsibilities for social workers in a research role. This addresses the importance of integrity whilst carrying out research. It states that:

> "… social work researchers have a duty to deal openly and fairly with every participant in the research process, including participants, service users, colleagues, funders and employers and acknowledge when publishing findings the part played by all and never take credit for the work of others" (BASW, 2011, p.13).

With this in mind, I considered the influence of my own ethnicity and the potential bias this may introduce to the participants' responses. The ethnicity of the researcher could potentially influence a participant's responses to interview questions. For example, some participants may have felt restraint in sharing their true feelings about certain ethnic groups or about their experiences with a certain community of colour, because of the researcher's ethnicity (Jackson, 2010, p.4).

3.4.1 Third Party Permission

I took a number of steps to secure third party permission to carry out the study. I sent the relevant Head of Department a copy of the study proposal and a draft copy of the UREC (2011) application for approval. Third party approval was secured from the Head of Department subject to ethical approval (see Appendix 4). Following a meeting with the Head of Department, an application was made for ethical approval in January 2015, which was granted on 12 February 2015.

Unfortunately, the delay in gaining ethical approval had serious implications for the study timetable, causing a delay in the marketing and recruitment to the study. By November 2015, the target population had already left the university. This made them more geographically dispersed and more of a challenge to engage. The delay in ethical approval was both a Godsend and a great source of frustration for me. The lack of participant volunteers caused me to miss the first window of opportunity to garner sufficient participants. However, the delay did allow time for the recruitment strategy to be repeated twelve months later.

The next section describes how I upheld participants' rights.

3.4.2 Free of Coercion

I ensured that participants entered the study voluntarily and that they clearly understood the nature of the study, the risks and obligations that were involved. This was supported by my decision to use 'gatekeepers' to garner support for the study. Parahoo (2006) notes that the use of gatekeepers in research could be considered unethical, because the use of intermediaries to recruit the sample increases selection bias and may even threaten the validity of the study (Matthews and Ross, 2010).

However, my role as a former educator and a novice researcher may have had an impact on the NQSWs' decisions of whether or not to participate in the study. The dual role of former educator and researcher may also have caused role confusion and acted as an obstacle to participation. I reflected on how the relationships developed with potential participants might have been a deterrent to the recruitment of a more diverse range of participants. On the other hand, the dual role may have influenced an individual participant's decision to volunteer their

involvement. I felt that my role as a former educator may have been perceived as being in a position of power by many of the potential participants.

During the study, I redistributed some of my referent and professional power by attempting to contain myself within the researcher role and remain as unobtrusive as possible. I tried to be my true self and interacted freely within the constraints of what is ethically and socially appropriate for professional research. My use of soft skills (such as empathy and interpersonal skills) became of great value. This approach helped me to form a caring relationship with the participants. It allowed for the unexpected to happen and ensured that I remained alert to the participants' multiple realities (Carter & Little, 2007).

3.4.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality

The next challenge I faced was the need to preserve anonymity and maintain the participants' rights to confidentiality. To uphold these rights, the participants' names were removed from the data collected and replaced with corresponding numbers and letters. These were assembled in numeric order and each interviewee was individually given a code identifier, thus maintaining participants' rights to confidentiality and anonymity.

I was very conscious of the study's potential outcomes and implications for the university when considered alongside the need to construct thick description. Saronkantos (2013) reminds us that the thicker the description, the greater the risk of exposure of individual participants. The contextualisations have been carefully approached, as were the interpretations, in order to protect both student participants' and educator participants' identities, primarily due to the sample size.

In the spirit of Gibbs (1988), I reflected on the way in which the participants' autonomy and privacy may have been compromised, as the method used in this study was intimate and open-ended (Matthews & Ross, 2010). This intimate and open-ended approach may have contributed to the opening up of unintended discoveries, secrets, lies and oppressive relationships, which could induce a conflict of interest (Denicolo *et al*., 2016). A relevant proviso from the BASW 'Code of Practice' relates directly to conflicts of interest, whereby it maintains that:

> "Social workers will be alert to the possibility of any conflict of interest which may affect their ability to exercise discretion or bias their judgment. If such conflict arises, they will declare it and take appropriate action to ensure the professional relationship is not prejudiced"' (BASW, 2011, section 4.1.2).

3.4.4 The Use of Digital Technologies

A number of digital technologies were employed to carry out this study. The Internet was utilised to recruit, access and interview participants. Technologies were also used to transcribe and manage the data. The recruitment and data collection process proved to be an ethical dilemma. Using the Internet to carry out interviews took me out of my comfort zone. Disappointingly, only a small number of participants chose to communicate using this method (4/16) compared with the more traditional person-to-person (face-to-face) interviews (12/16). The Internet interviews were synchronised using Skype.

Skype interviews made it difficult for me to establish a clear sense of trust and rapport. My reflective notes dated 23 August 2017 note "*how difficult it was to obtain the same naturalness of conversation that was produced in the rich and thoughtful commentary as in the person-to-person interviews"*. However, both methods of interview resulted in well-articulated responses from the participants and the narrative has been a helpful by-product generated from the comprehensive transcripts of the participants' individual responses.

Using the Internet to conduct interviews raised another concern for me, since it was loaded with challenges. Firstly, when the data highlighted individual sensitive personal information, confidentiality was at risk. When I was transmitting the data via email to the transcribing service, this also caused me some concern. Once the data was returned from the transcription service, I made the data as invulnerable as possible, by ensuring that the data was encrypted and stored on a password protected USB memory stick. This memory stick, when not in use, was stored in a locked cabinet.

I was very conscious of leaving data content information on the university's computers. This was because a number of administrators had organisational access to the servers. I also hold the common belief that using computers leaves a footprint and nothing is safe on the Internet. This trend was fraught with danger, because of the loss of control it involved for me. Essentially, it placed the participants' data at the whim of the university and their right to confidentiality in jeopardy. Great care was taken to understand the Data Protection Act (1998) and the extent with which the university monitored computer traffic, since these practices had potential consequences for the participants.

My insider knowledge caused me to become distrustful of the university's web and data servers. My insider experience informed me that these are often vulnerable to hacking, and typically subject to a Use Policy. The policy gives the university the right to inspect and manage all information held on servers.

During the interviews I tried to put the participants at ease by asking if they were comfortable and if they wanted to make a beverage before starting. For the Skype interviews, participants were given time to make a beverage in their home, whereas in the case of the person-to-person interviews, water, tea and coffee

were made available. Participants were reminded that they had the right to withdraw at any point and that they had a right to refuse to answer any questions with which they did not feel comfortable.

In the event that a participant became upset as a result of recalling certain experiences, prior to commencing the study I negotiated a self-referral process with the university's well-being service. This enabled those involved with the study who may be in need of support following the interview to be fast-tracked for emotional support if required. All participants were offered a debriefing after the interview.

3.4.5 Incentives for Participants

Following the first round of recruitment, I considered whether or not to offer incentives to the participants. I considered offering a small gift voucher in respect of the participant's time. On reflection I decided against this, because although this has the potential to be a motivator for involvement, it may also be perceived to be a bribe and also has the potential to make participants feel exploited.

This section has clarified the study's aims and objectives, provided a framework for the questions and considered the ethical issues that arose from the study. The next section highlights the ontological and epistemological influences that guided this study.

3.5 Philosophical and Theoretical Backdrop

3.5.1 Phenomenology

The process used in this study lends itself to a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a methodology (Cresswell, 2009). As a

philosophy, it is concerned with how we experience the world rather than ideas and concepts about how the world really is. Implied in this is a concern regarding the meanings we give to the things we experience (Cresswell, 2009). This study seeks to understand the life-world of NQBSWs and their educators. As a methodology, it has been used as a research approach to study career development, employment, health and the experience of learning. Therefore, phenomenology lends itself to a unifying framework for a research agenda and it provides both a philosophical framework as well as a consistent methodology (Newby, 2010).

Phenomenology was chosen because it was congruent with my professional commitments and I was keen to uncover, describe and interpret the lived experiences of undertaking the social work degree course to arrive at a deeper understanding of academic success.

Phenomenological research is a systematic attempt to uncover and describe structures of the life-world or lived experience, so as to arrive at a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of experiences (Husserl, 1970). Phenomenology is a stem of philosophy that originates from the work of Edmund Husserl. At the core of phenomenology are extraneous factors (such as religion, culture and political beliefs). These have the potential to influence how participants understand academic success. These extraneous factors should be put aside, according to Husserl (1970), who believed that what we experience (whether real objects, the world or imaginary objects) are constituted through perceptual and cognitive activity.

A scenario (see Figure 3.1) has been created to endorse a focus on the study environment. This will enable the reader to make connections with the university

and provide a pictorial vision that mirrors the participants' life histories which have been influential in determining the positions reached.

Figure 3.1: Scenario 1

Picture this... It is week 8 and you are in a seminar of three students.

Student 1 always comes into the classroom at least forty minutes early, with slides, note pad, an assortment of pens, and fully powered iPad and a hard copy of the lecture's presentation. This student said she had reviewed the morning's slides and had read three of the core texts prior to the lecture. She was able to share three key things that she learnt from her time reading. The student also had a drafted a template with prepared questions from her reading.

Student 2, who was also early, had her iPad but it was out of charge. She said she had skimmed through aspects of the previous week's reading from the recommended core text, but was unable to recall the topics she had read about. She had a note pad but no pen.

Student 3 was always late arriving, then left the lecture early to collect her children from school. She had forgotten her reading glasses. She admitted not having started any reading this term. She had forgotten her iPad for the 3rd week in a row, and had borrowed a pen and paper from another student.

Consider the scenario from a dispositional perspective. What might each student bring to the seminar? Think about the scenario from a Freudian perspective. How might one interpret the students' behaviours? From a behaviourist or systemic perspective, how might one interpret the students' behaviour?

This analogy speaks for itself; there are multiple ways of viewing the world around us. Notwithstanding this, there are experiences, pedagogies, context and capital that can and do have a measurable impact on student success on the social work degree course.

As you read the remaining pages of this study, keep this scenario at the forefront of your mind.

This cognitive activity occurs below the level of consciousness (Clance & Imes, 1978).

Phenomenology was used to guide how participants saw themselves. Husserl, (1970) highlights that only by operationalising this activity can a true understanding of the world and our place within it be understood. Husserl's ideas were derived from the Cartesian dualist ontology of Realism and Idealism, which assume a mind-body split. He emphasised the essence of ideals, whilst acknowledging that there exists a natural or real world before we are conscious of it (Dowling and Cooney, 2012). Realism maintains that things exist without humans being conscious of them, constituting a world of objects to be discovered and perceived. This suggests that reality precedes appearance and that appearance is not a prerequisite for reality (Dowling and Cooney, 2012). Idealism, in contrast, maintains that the external world is not independent of cognisant observations and mind. Auguste Comte (1798-1857), a positivist thinker, highlights science as not providing just sound knowledge of the world, but also a new world view that can be used to assist in reorganising society.

Given the chosen philosophical approach, it seemed apparent that a qualitative interpretative approach was warranted in order to unlock the potentially complex lived experiences of the NQBSWs. Such an approach was thus chosen to explore this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, I was seeking to create new knowledge and provide a deeper understanding of the factors that influence academic success on the social work degree course whilst untangling these complexities. Secondly, I was keen to find out what the participants' motivations were to successfully complete the social work degree course. Thirdly, as a constructivist, I did not believe that there was a single reality in the debates about how academic success is understood.

Murray (2002) believes that reality is a social construct and that one NQBSW's experience of academic success may be divergent from another's. In fact, there are NQBSWs who subscribe to different views and believe that these views are

their reality and are valid, however different they may appear. Finally, my professional curiosity was seeking insight into how NQBSWs constructed the reality of academic success informed by their lived experiences, rather than by statistical analysis which is required in quantitative studies (Newby, 2010). Dowling and Cooney (2012) testify that the essence is what makes a thing what it is (and thus without it, it would not be what it is).

I had considered using phenomenography as a theoretical framework. Phenomenography initially seemed suitable to use as a theoretical framework for this study because I am a social work educator and I was interested in how the perceptions of the NQBSWs and their educators differed regarding academic success. Phenomenography has been largely developed in education and rooted in the experiences of learning (Shreeve, 2010). It is suitable for practitioner research (Cilesiz, 2011). However, on reflection, I found it to be a second order approach which uses a group's accounts of their experiences rather than individual accounts. The approach lends itself to the belief that there are a limited number of ways to experience a phenomena which are hierarchically related (Shreeve, 2010). I decided against phenomenography and settled on using phenomenology instead, because I was seeking the individual experiential accounts of NQBSWs.

The next section addresses the ontological underpinnings of the study.

3.5.2 Constructionist Approach

This study and resulting theory ('Cracking the Code') is based on constructionist ontology, interpretivist epistemology and guided by the common methods used in small-scale qualitative studies. Constructionism is about relationships and realities (Cowan, 2009). Constructionists focus their beliefs on the fact that there is in

practice neither objective reality nor objective or absolute truths (Bryman, 2010). Reality at least physically exists and is not accessible to human endeavour (Asselin, 2003). For example, the meaning of 'academic success' is not fixed; it is ready to be identified and can be grown out of people's interactions with the world. This suggests that meanings do not exist until the mind captures them (Cowan, 2009). Newby (2010) highlights that constructionists construct reality through their own accounts of the world, whilst gaining footprints based on cultural norms, historical situations and personal experiences (Ormston *et al*., 2013). This suggests that what NQBSWs perceive as reality (academic success) is constructed purely from their experiences and interpretations of these events. It is a fact that interpretations of the same experience of academic success may differ from individual to individual (Cowan, 2009). These reconstructed realities form constructed realities for those who experience them. However, these reconstructed realities should not be considered to be the only source of knowledge about the reality of academic success (Cowan, 2009).

In this study, the reconstruction of academic success has allowed for the identification of new meanings to be assigned to the phenomena (Newby, 2010). These meanings are identified following cultural instructions (for example, socialisation, situational, personal and dispositional contingents). These cultural instructions are exhibited in the conceptual model (see Figure 2.2). These cultural instructions have eased the complexity of understandings of academic success, making it easier to explore. This is because "constructivist approaches place the onus on researchers to strive hard to capture the personal meaning portrayed in the language of participants" (Denicolo *et al*., 2016, p.53). Therefore, when the data was being collected, an interactive and more idiographic approach was taken in which control of the data was shared between the participants and myself. The aim was 'verstehen' or to seek an understanding and illumination of the rich diversity of meaning participants gave in relation to their lived experiences of being

on the social work degree course. Moreover, in line with constructivist research, the participants were given a choice of how, when and where they articulated their responses (see section 3.7).

3.5.3 Interpretive Phenomenology

At the core of this study lies an attempt to describe and better understand academic success through the narratives of NQBSWs. To do this I considered the two approaches most commonly linked to phenomenology - interpretive phenomenology and descriptive phenomenology. Interpretative phenomenology is commonly known as hermeneutics. Descriptive phenomenology aims to describe a phenomenon's general characteristics rather than the individual's experiences to determine the meaning or essence of the phenomenon (Crotty, 1996).

Interpretive phenomenology was chosen as a framework because I wanted to understand the lived experiences of the participants and it emphasised my interpretation of the data as opposed to a description offered by the data (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). I also wanted a perspective that would dovetail the constructivist approach. I was eager to be transparent about my multiple positions (i.e., being an inside researcher, older black woman with a disability, former social work student and former educator to the participants) as I explored their responses pre-reflectively (Husserl, 1970). The approach adopted has proved useful, since I was seeking an in-depth understanding of academic success as it is a complicated, controversial and personal phenomenon.

The bulk of available evidence on academic success has derived mainly from a positivist or nomothetic method, as opposed to idiographic (Smith, 1995). It thus seemed sensible to use the interpretative phenomenological approach which has been further developed by Smith (1995). He was keen to develop innovation within

the model, thus making it highly suitable for this study's constructivist approach. My interest in the approach grew when I became aware that it was suitable for acquiring an insider or lay perspective through an idiographic understanding of the participants' lived experiences (Murray, 2002). In my attempt to redistribute my power, I perceived the participants to be experts of their own lives and in the understanding of academic success.

Heidegger (1970), Husserl's protégé, believed that humans are hermeneutic (interpretive) beings capable of finding significance and meaning in their own lives. Therefore, when we consider what it is like to experience academic success, we must also consider students' lives outside the educating institution and the institution's relationship with real life, since it sets its own criteria and is subject to a wider sociopolitical context. My study has attempted to explore not just the participants' experiences at university, but also considered external factors such as capital, because it has the potential to influence academic success.

To achieve this ontological perspective, I purposefully sampled the participants, examined every single interview (further justification for the small number of homogeneous interviews carried out). However, given that I was triangulating results (comparing perceptions) of educators and student participants, it seemed reasonable to justify a slightly larger sample (Bryman, 2010) than would be usual for an interpretative phenomenological approach. This justifies the slightly higher than usual numbers of participants used in my study.

3.5.4 The Role of Bracketing

Husserl (1970) upholds that, in phenomenological investigations, any suppositions must be suspended, thus he proposed engaging in 'epoche' or 'bracketing', meaning a disciplined, systematic effort to suspend one's natural standpoint and

set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon (academic success). However, Finlay (2008) testifies that it is impossible to fully bracket a researcher's own subjective presuppositions, since the researcher is part of the research. Furthermore, Finlay's model does not dovetail into the Husserlian perspective, for it could be argued that it does not fit with traditional interpretive phenomenology, as it is impossible to set aside all conscious and unconscious thoughts, beliefs and influences. It is understood and generally acknowledged that subjectivity and the role of the consciousness cannot fully be eliminated (Finlay, 2008).

The goal of bracketing is to put aside or render non-influential previous knowledge regarding academic success and the social work degree course, so that it can present itself in its fullness (Heidegger, 1970). Undertaking this study using phenomenology required me to engage in epoche. Epoche helped to bracket my ten years' experience of teaching at the university. Rendering my personal experience of teaching, learning and assessment of the social work degree course meant my insider knowledge had to be put aside. Putting my experiences aside allowed me to better understand the participants' experiences thoroughly and entirely, while attempting to avoid any prejudicial conclusions (Cilesiz, 2011).

The interpretive process is circular, moving back and forth between the whole and its parts and between the researcher's fore-structure of understanding and what is learnt through the study (Heidegger, 1970). This reflexive approach was used to help me to recognise and understand bias and bring it to the forefront of the results. Rather than attempting to hide or deny issues that arose for me, I tackled them and adapted interpretations that would bring a more credible and realistic version of the participants' views (Heidegger, 1970).

The chapter now moves to explore and justify the study design and steps taken to operationalise the study.

3.6 Study Design

3.6.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This study was designed with both inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria included:

- Students who were due to complete their social work degree in the forthcoming three months;
- NQSWs who had completed their social work degree within the previous 36 months;
- NQSWs who had successfully completed their degree within six fixed concurrent semesters; and
- Students who had met the 80% course attendance requirement.

The exclusion criteria included:

- Students who had failed to meet the 80% attendance requirement;
- Students who were in their final year who had experienced an interruption due to extenuating circumstances and had not completed within the expected six fixed concurrent semesters;
- Students who were enrolled on years 1 or 2 of the degree course; and
- Students who were not immediately eligible to register with the HCPC.

Applicants who did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded from the study. Exclusions relate to those who experienced delays in completion of their degree. This group of students completed the degree in more than the six semesters but within the six years set by the regulators (QAA, 2016). Delayed completion may indicate a student's shift in priorities. This may have been the result of personal change (such as in family circumstances or a significant life event). Extended

delay and attrition constitutes lost time and wasted resources in an effort to prepare the next workforce (Munro, 2011).

The next section describes the challenges posed, conditions faced and the steps taken to recruit sufficient numbers of participants. The section justifies the sampling techniques used. It then testifies to the processes undertaken to design and test the instruments used to collect the data. Finally, the section addresses the processes used to transcribe, validate and give the data meaning.

3.6.2 Recruitment of Participants

This section discusses the steps taken to recruit volunteer participants, confirming the challenges posed and conditions faced in the recruitment process. The recruitment of participants was a two-stage process and not a one-off activity. The first stage involved the creation of a marketing A4 flyer (see Appendix 2) for the study. Secondly, in spring 2016, this A4 flyer was circulated widely across the university. It was posted in the communal lifts, rest rooms, lecture rooms and social spaces used by the social work population. This was done to capture the attention of the 30 students who had completed the programme of study but who were yet to graduate at the time of carrying out the study.

In the first attempt to recruit, no participants came forward to partake in the study. This was disappointing. I suspect that this was due to the delay in the ethical application (UREC, 2011) approval. This delay in securing appropriate numbers of participants from the third year cohort (2015-2016) caused me to miss the window of opportunity for that academic year. This group of students had, by September 2015, completed the social work degree course and had progressed onto their placements, making them geographically dispersed and a near impossibility to follow-up.

A number of students from years 1 and year 2 did express an interest in the study - however, they were not eligible because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. These students said they were keen to support me to pursue my own award. I assume from the work of Abell and McDonells (1990) (see section 2.13.3) they were probably wanting to give something back and expressing elements of counter-transference of their own aspirations to succeed.

Three months into the plan for recruitment, it became clear that my initial strategy was totally unsuccessful. A more direct approach had to be taken if the aims and objectives were to be realised. Over the next six months I promoted the study at every opportunity, including placing an advert in the university's Department of Social Work's E-newsletter. In addition, using the student records, I emailed the 'Cracking the Code' A4 flyer directly to the 38 final year students enrolled on the 2016-2017 cohort. On this occasion my attempts to recruit participants proved to be more fruitful, as three potential student volunteers came forward.

To bring about the anticipated participant numbers required, the process was repeated, again using the student records for the 2017-2018 cohort, targeting the 31 final year students. This action resulted in the recruitment of a further nine potential students, plus four potential educator participants coming forward. This also brought the total sampling frame to 99 potential student participants over the three cohorts.

Whilst later carrying out the data analysis process, following a discussion with my supervisor, I decided to interview two further participants to test whether data saturation had been reached. Two suitable further participants (one educator and three NQBSW students - two students subsequently did not progress to interview - see section 3.6.3) came forward to test for this, which brought the final total

number of interviews to 18 (being 16 initial interviews, plus 2 to test for data saturation). However, the first two student interviews conducted proved to be unusable, due to technical problems with the recording apparatus. Thus, a final total of 11 student interviews and 5 educator interviews were utilised in this study (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2). This is addressed further in section 3.6.3. On analysis, these two final additional transcripts (student number 11 and educator 5) yielded no new themes, suggesting I had indeed reached saturation.

The next section examines the sampling strategy used to identify factors which may influence success on the social work degree course.

3.6.3 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to capture the lived experiences of the participants. This approach was used because it allowed me to home in on a group of people who I believed would be critical to the study and would serve the purpose of a qualitative study rather than be statistically representative of the university's social work population (Bryman, 2010).

The sampling strategy was designed to maximise representation from a range of perspectives on academic success. The participants were chosen because they were the best people to ask about academic success. The study population was inevitably different since they were from two different groups of people who had lived experiences of academic success, either as a student or as a social work educator. Other commonalities the participants shared were that they had similar educational trajectories and they had all undertaken a social work qualification to practise as a qualified Social Worker. They also had concrete lived experiences of learning, teaching and assessment on the social work degree course and were or

had aspirations of registering with the HCPC as qualified practitioners. This was fundamental to the study's aims.

The techniques used to recruit participants generated 20 suitable participants over the three year period (15 student participants and 5 educator participants); however, only 16 usable interviews arose, due to problems with the first two interviews not recording (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2). Two potential student participants failed to arrive on two prearranged occasions. Satisfied with my participant numbers, I decided not to pursue these two students. I decided they were probably experiencing participant fatigue or were suspicious of my endeavour. I respected their choice and freedom to withdraw, even though they had not directly communicated this to me. I took inference based on their unresponsiveness to follow-up communications about rescheduling interview dates.

I will now focus on my decision to enlist support from colleagues in the recruitment process (the 'educator participants').

3.6.4 Gatekeeping

I considered the context of the study and the nature of existing relationships developed during the previous three years. With this in mind, I decided to garner support and relied on the goodwill of my fellow teaching colleagues.

During a team meeting (April 2017), I briefed colleagues on the study's aims and objectives, and provided them with a copy of the study's information pack. I gave them an opportunity to ask questions about the study and garner their involvement in the recruitment process. The briefing enabled my teaching colleagues to explore the conversation guide and educator vignette validity (see Appendix 3) prior to

their use in the study. The briefing ensured that the team were committed to the study's objectives and that they would endorse my professionalism and trustworthiness. The conversation guide and vignette were amended for the second time in response to the feedback. The first amendments took place in the months following the pilot study in 2015. This pre-test aimed to strengthen the validity of the study.

A total of four suitable educator participants teaching on the 2017-2018 cohort came forward from this presentation.

I will now move to the next section which describes the interview logistics.

3.7 Interview Logistics

Those responding to the flyer were directed to contact me by email or telephone. Once contact was made, I emailed an information pack which included a study information sheet, conversation guide, personal information sheet and a consent form. The information pack also included instructions for the participants to download Skype onto their electronic devices (see Appendix 1).

Participants were asked to complete the data information sheet in advance of their interview. This outlined the personal characteristics and background information for each participant. This data helped to better understand the demographics of the study population.

The participants were offered a choice of having their interview either person-to-person at the university, or at a place of their choice using an online device. All interviews were recorded with participant permission for accuracy - this is explored later on (see section 3.8). At the start of each interview I informed the participant

as to how long the interview was likely to take. I respected their contributions and did not try to hide any feelings that I may have held towards any of them. No notes were taken during the interviews. This enabled me to concentrate on the words of the participants (Murray, 2002).

The interviews were designed to be as non-threatening and non-stressful as possible. Interviews were scheduled in advance at a pre-designated time and place. A private room was booked in advance for the 14 person-to-person interviews at the university. Four synchronised interviews by Skype took place during the evening, using my home computer. Newby (2010) highlights that some people find it easier to discuss personal or sensitive issues online as opposed to in person face-to-face. All appointments were made with student participants after the Examination Board had released student progression data.

The conversation guide was sent to participants in advance of the interview, so that they were familiar with the questions. I had hoped that this would redistribute some of my power and empower the participants to take control of the dialogue. This approach ensured that the questions were of no surprise to the participants and allowed them to retain some element of agency over the interviews.

This section has examined the steps taken to recruit and sample the study population. The next section explores many of the methodological decisions made to realise the study's aims and objectives.

3.8 Interview Type

The decision to use interviews as a method to collect data seemed a 'common sense' justification, as it is one of the most widely used data collection methods currently used in research (Bryman, 2010). Secondly, interviews appeared to be

the best way to explore the lived experiences of NQBSWs and their educators. I chose interviews because they have an affinity to conversation and I felt this would be the best way to tap into the life-worlds of the participants.

I had considered focus group interviews as a method. However, I chose not to use this method because of the sensitive nature of the study and the possibility for group think. Focus groups are distinguished from the broader category of group interviews by the explicit use of group interaction. The method was considered because it gives priority to participants' hierarchy of importance, their language, concepts and their frameworks for understanding the world (Kitzinger, 1994).

After much deliberation, I decided to use semi-structured person-to-person interviews for both the NQBSWs and educators. However, I complemented the educator interviews with a case study. This is described later (see section 3.8.2).

3.8.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because I was seeking to generate rich sources of data. A conversation guide was developed to help pre-structure the interaction between myself and the participants. This approach allowed me to use open-ended questions to create a dialogue with the participants and facilitate rather than dominate the interview process (Murray, 2002). The nature of the interviews allowed me to predetermine the agenda, probe, provide opportunities to seek clarification and elicit additional information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Semi-structured interviews gave me the freedom to slightly digress (Fairweather *et al*., 2012). This approach enabled participants to answer the questions from their own frame of reference, informed by their lived experiences, by speaking freely and expressing their opinions.

This incorporates the benefits of both structured and unstructured approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Another reason for the choice was that it allowed me to readily compare different responses to the same questions, while remaining open to important but unforeseen information or points of discussion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). This was of particular importance to the second objective, which was to examine the differences between student and educator understandings of academic success.

Only participants who had returned and signed the consent form and completed the personal information sheet were invited for an interview. I did however reluctantly accept electronic signatures on the consent forms. However, I only accepted these where they were sent directly from the participant's personal email address.

The methodology now moves to the next section where the use of synchronised interviews is explored.

3.8.2 Synchronised Skype Interviews

'Synchronised interviews' was the second instrument used. The justification for using synchronised interviews (via Skype) was that it was cost effective and, once transcribed, the data could easily be imported into NVivo (Sarankantos, 2013). Although this was as originally planned, I decided against using NVivo to assist in generating the themes, because NVivo would not help with decisions about how to code or interpret findings and, given the small dataset, it was not worth the time and trouble navigating through the software. I think it is important to state that I had undergone two courses of NVivo training in preparation for the analysis.

The synchronised interviews enhanced the accessibility of the participants and helped me to reach participants who may have been hard to reach or geographically dispersed. The chosen method enabled me to engage with participants who may not have had the financial means to attend a person-to-person interview. On the other hand, this method does have the potential to reduce levels of empathy when compared to actual 'live' person-to-person interviews (Sarankantos, 2013).

I noticed that my reflective notes lacked non-verbal and social cues when compared to the person-to-person interviews. This method also made it more difficult to monitor how participants were responding to questions when compared to the person-to-person interviews. I assumed that all potential participants had computer literacy skills and online facilities. On reflection, students without online facilities or the financial means to attend the university site had probably already been excluded from the study.

The next section explores the instruments used to carry out the study.

3.9 Research Instruments

The choice of instruments used for assessing the lived experiences of academic success was a semi-structured conversation guide for students. A vignette was used to collect educator-specific data and complement Questions 1 and 2 of the conversation guide. Educators were given an additional probe concerning what advice they might offer to the student in the case study.

Justifications for these methods were that the vast majority of studies on academic success have used questionnaires or group interviews as a method to collect data (Bartoli *et al*., 2008, Fletcher *et al*., 2012, Bernard *et al*., 2014). During the review

of the literature on academic success and social work education, I failed to identify any other studies on academic success that used a vignette to collect data, making this study fairly unique. The use of a vignette, according to Denicolo *et al*. (2016) is typical for the constructivist approach adopted.

3.9.1 Conversation Guide

A conversation guide was developed to reflect the study's aims (see Appendix 1). This was designed to enable me to answer the research question and was amended following feedback from the pilot study participants, colleagues and supervisor. When developing the conversation guide, I was keen to generate results from my own analysis of thought on what constitutes academic success, informed by my background and knowledge of the social work degree course.

The conversation guide included six key questions that mirrored the study's aims; I ensured that the questions were sufficiently robust to enable me to meet the study's objectives. The questions focused on identifying the factors that influence academic success on the social work degree course. When linked together, the questions created a near complete examination of academic success using facets and dimensions of participants' descriptions of their lived experiences. The questions were designed to say something about the factors that influence academic success. These were designed to be empathic, flexible, open-ended and were intended to throw light on the phenomenon.

The next section examines the use of the vignette to collect data from social work educators to complement the open-ended questions.

3.9.2 The Vignette

"Vignettes are simulations of real life events depicting hypothetical situations" (Wilks, 2004, p.74). Denicolo *et al.* (2016) state that vignettes are a suitable tool to collect data on attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and norms within science. The vignette is seen as having the potential to aid the project in the event of difficult or sensitive topics of enquiry. As a data elicitation tool, it is thought to be non-personal and therefore less threatening (Wilks, 2004).

The educators, like the NQBSWs, were asked about their understanding of academic success and the vignette was used for educators to ascertain educator practices, guidance and behaviours that might legitimately help or hinder academic success on the social work degree course. The vignette allowed for opportunities to probe emergent themes as the study developed. The use of a vignette has contributed to the multi-method design of this study and has added to its uniqueness.

3.9.3 The Tape Recorder

The final instrument used was a digital tape recorder. I used this to capture the participants' spoken words and to ensure the dialogue was accurate. This gave me a tremendous advantage in all that digital technologies offer in the data gathering process (Palys and Atchison, 2012). It enabled me to free up time, increasing comfort, efficiency and minimising errors. The recorder gave me time to observe each participant's non-verbal cues, since I was not only interested in 'what' the participants were saying but also 'how' they said it. Listening back to the recordings, I was able to identify inconsistencies in participants' responses and immerse myself in the data.

The next section addresses the steps taken to collect and manage the data.

3.10 Data Collection and Management

I began each interview by clarifying the purpose of the interview, reminding participants that they had the right to withdraw at any time and of the confidentiality clause. An indication of the likely amount of time the interview would take was given. Participants were reassured that there were no right or wrong answers to questions. Participants were reminded they had the right to ask for clarification at any point and that the data collected would be disposed of six months after the study's completion. I encouraged participants to speak freely about their understanding, behaviours, beliefs, opinions and lived experience of being on the social work degree course.

I made a concerted effort to understand the world of academic success from the eyes of the participants. During interactions, I tried to be contained and as unobtrusive as possible (Matthews & Ross, 2010). I was aware that I had been present at some of the experiences uttered by participants, although I remembered some of these experiences somewhat differently. I did not see the participants as untruthful or untrustworthy; rather, I considered that theses participants may have been experiencing cognitive conflict. I considered that the participants' constructed meanings could be different at different times and contexts; however, the narrative was their reality. During the data extraction process I attempted to facilitate the interviews in a non-leading and depersonalised manner.

The section now moves on to explore the data collection method used for educator participants.

3.10.1 Data Collection: Educators

Five educator interviews were undertaken in total. They were asked to explain their understanding of academic success. They were also asked about their experiences of teaching and assessment on the social work degree course and any specific strategies that they could identify to support black students. Finally, they were then given the vignette and five minutes to collect their thoughts on what advice they might offer the student in the prepared case study. I was seeking clarification on specific teaching, learning and assessment support practices that had the potential to influence academic success.

3.10.2 Data Collection: NQBSWs

A total of eleven NQBSW interviews were undertaken. This figure allowed for a 10% dropout rate. I had originally planned to re-interview between 5 and 7 black participants following invitations to a follow-up interview. The follow-up interviews were intended to ask participants specific questions about the impact of ethnicity on learning, teaching and assessment. However, given the unexpected diversity in the sample, I chose to seize the moment and the NQBSW participants were asked about the impact of their ethnicity at their first and only interview. This was due in part to challenges brought about during the initial recruitment process. Thus, no additional follow-up interviews were necessary.

The challenges experienced in yielding such a small number of participants had not been anticipated. By my own admission, I may have been over-optimistic about the numbers of interviews that could be undertaken within the window of opportunity.

The data collected focused on a number of key facets, including the participants' understanding of academic success, experience of teaching, learning and assessment on the social work degree course. The questions used to address the facets were unambiguous, single-staged, non-leading, culturally sensitive and ethically informed (Newby, 2010). The study also sought to elicit where and what types of support the participants embraced, and how connected they felt to the university whilst on the social work degree course.

The methodology now explores the steps taken to transcribe, analyse and code the interview data.

3.11 Transcription

I listened to each interview recording repeatedly. The purpose of repeated listening was to become familiar with the themes within the individual narratives. I then anonymised these individual transcripts by creating a list of the participants' names and issuing them with individualised corresponding reference numbers. The list was password protected and stored in a locked cabinet when not in use. The anonymised recordings were then copied onto the university's computers, then emailed to a local transcription service to be transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft word file. The processes used are typified by Davidson (2009) in her study of imperatives for qualitative research.

Once the transcripts had been electronically returned from the transcribers, I became overwhelmed by the sheer number of transcribed pages that were produced for each interview. Some of the transcripts consisted of six double-sided A4 typed pages. My reflective notes interestingly highlight how "…*after listening to a recording I felt somewhat distant from the participant, even though I was present at the interview* (reflective notes, 6 June 2017: interview 4). Locating the 'self' in

the work, instead of pretending we are not there, helps readers evaluate the situational knowledge we produce (Reissman, 1994 cited in Nash, 2002).

The next section describes the steps taken to ensure reliability of the data.

3.12 Member Checking

Once the interviews had been transcribed, I returned the relevant transcript by email to each participant to member check their own transcript (to confirm that the transcript was the participant's own words) (Asselin, 2003). Participants were given three weeks to verify and amend transcripts (if relevant), or they had the choice to withdraw consent if they wished during this period. No participants came forward with any requests for changes to their transcripts, nor withdrew their interview data. This ensured that each participant's views were privileged in the analysis and interpretations. My decision to use a member checking technique was in line with the promotion of good research practice (Asselin, 2003).

How the data was analysed is discussed in the next section.

3.13 Data Analysis

The data collected was analysed using the method described by Braun and Clarke (2010) in their theory building techniques. This method was chosen because of its flexibility and ability to provide rich and detailed, yet complex accounts of data (Braun and Clarke, 2010). The use of this method required me to strip away the layers shaping the lived experiences of the NQBSWs in order to arrive at the essence of academic success. The process was not unlike what van Manen describes as "protocol writing" (van Manen, 1990, p.63), where a researcher asks selected individuals to write down their experiences. Braun and Clarke's (2010)

approach has been defined as a suitable method of enquiry; it includes six key stages of data analysis. This model was chosen because it allowed for the development and lifting of emerging themes directly from transcripts.

Whilst analysing the data, I treated each question separately, as this approach accommodated segmentation and a clear coding system (Berg, 2009). It was a progressive process of classifying, comparing, grouping and refining the text segments to create and then clarify categories or themes within the data. At this stage, reading and listening resulted in me becoming familiar with the depth and breadth of the contents of each interview.

Stage 1 - Data Familiarisation

The first stage of Braun and Clarke's model involved listening repeatedly to the recorded interviews. Because I undertook the interviews in person through interactive means, I was able to approach the analysis with some prior thought and ideas. Nevertheless, it was vital that I immersed myself in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2010). Whilst listening to the interview recordings, I read the word processed transcripts and, using different coloured pens, highlighted any interesting words, latent quotes of interest or theoretically driven narratives, in response to key research questions. This enabled me to identify patterns, meanings, repetitive words and phrases using different colours, raising opportunities to group emerging patterns and thoughts.

The first stage involved categorising the participants' responses and linking them to key themes which were aligned to the theoretical framework developed in the literature review (see Figure 2.1). For example, participants' understandings, behavioural factors and support structures embodied impact of ethnicity and participants' experiences of teaching, learning and assessment.

Stage 2 - Coding

Stage 2 of the process required the data to be coded and reduced. Coding in this sense means labelling segments of data to identify themes or common processes (Murray & Beglar, 2009). This technique is central to effective data retrieval. Coding allows for the location and bringing together of similarly labelled data for closer examination. The purpose is to identify major themes that derive from the data. The model used was open coding and was utilised to make the connections between texts to conceptualise the data, looking for conceptual patterns that may be central to labelling (Davies & Hughes, 2014). This led to the emergence of concepts that eventually become the basis of a theoretical model (Davies & Hughes, 2014). These newly developed concepts were tested within the data to see whether they had the explanatory power they were supposed to have. Finally, the set concepts were compared against each other, offering opportunities to create variations of their aspects. Using this process allowed the prioritisation of themes that required further analysis, as well as to make the decision on which ones would be dropped.

Stage 3 - Data Reduction

Stage 3 of the process allowed for data retrieval to more than one label when considering patterns, connections or distinctions between labels (Blaxter *et al*, 2011). To ease the systematic process of analysis, I developed and made use of a matrix (see Appendix 5). The matrix is a form of data presentation that, to a large extent, resembles a table made in Microsoft Word (Blaxter *et al*., 2011). The matrix has been used as a form of summary table that contains verbal information, participants' quotes and standardised responses drawn from the transcripts.

The data was interpreted to understand the conceptual level processes while exploring the meanings, patterns and connections among the data. This involved the use of thoughts, reflections and knowledge of the university. These are

presented verbatim and interpretations of situations, events and relationships are presented as perceived by social work students in general.

Stage 4 - Reviewing Data

The labels on the matrix were used as units of meaning and were utilised as a springboard through the use of colours to identify minor and major themes. I engaged an educational consultant to scrutinise the matrix and review the themes. This ensured that all the themes that could be identified were identified, as well as to check for consistency within the themes.

This process helped me to create a holistic definition of academic success drawing on the participants' lived experiences. It enabled me to identify and make sense of common themes and categories, and interpret the data as it relates to a certain point of the study (Sarankantos, 2013).

Stage 5 - Naming Themes

Stage 5 of the process began when I named and defined themes using the matrix. Further refinements were made to establish significant themes that reflected the responses to each question. The five significant themes created were 'Capital', 'Habitus', 'Field', 'Knowing the Game' and 'Impostor Syndrome'. The five minor themes were 'diversity', 'ethnicity', 'participation', 'self-directed group work' and 'determination'. These themes were then linked to consistent accounts from the spoken words of the participants in an attempt to determine the essence of and factors that influence academic success on the social work degree course.

The construction and deconstruction of the transcripts was part of an analytical mechanism that is closely linked to interpretivism (Davies and Hughes, 2014).

In order to achieve a deeper understanding of academic success, it was necessary to separate myself from the everyday occurrences, explanations and typicalities that had occurred at the university. By using this process, I was forced to go beyond the 'known'. In this sense, the capacity of interpretation was widened. I was also able to avoid hasty identifications of what influenced academic success on the social work degree course (Reflections, 12 April 2018). In summary, the process required me to cut the transcripts into their smallest denominations and de-contextualise them, to the extent that the original text could no longer be recognised. In this way, texts were converted into small units of meaning, free from previous meaningful connections and free of general assumption (Braun & Clarke, 2010).

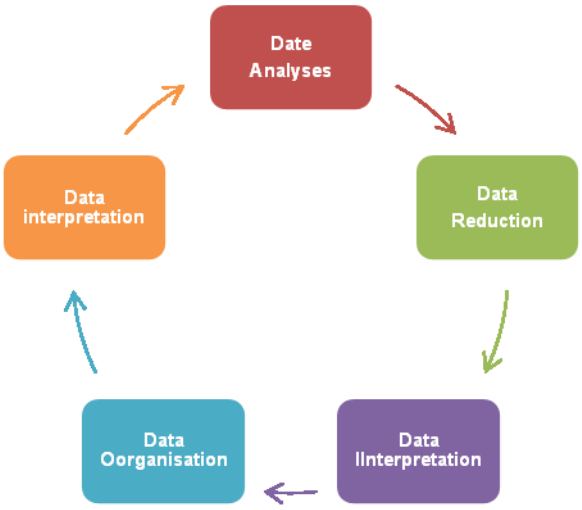
Stage 6 - Production of the Findings

The final stage and most important part of the process was the production of the findings and discussion and, of course, the concluding chapter in preparation for the end of this study report. My objective was to write a report that would to tell a complex story, in a simple and meaningful way, that convinces the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis.

The findings chapter is loaded with vivid examples of participants' responses which capture the essence of each identifiable theme created. Each theme illustrates a story about the question asked. The narrative goes beyond description; it attempts to explain why students did what they did in relation to achieving academic success on the social work degree course.

In summary, data analysis took the form of a systematic spiral that goes from data analysis and reduction to interpretation of the data and data organisation, then back to data collection, organisation and interpretation. This process continued until saturation occurred.

Figure 3.2: Data Analysis Process



Source: author.

This chapter has presented a detailed description of the methods used to conduct the study. The chapter justifies my reasoning, adequacy and the appropriateness of the chosen methods.

We now move to the penultimate chapter, Findings and Discussion.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Having completed the literature review and methodology, and carried out a detailed analysis of the transcripts, the focus now moves to the penultimate chapter, the findings and discussion. This is where the presentation of the findings is addressed. This study had aimed to examine NQBSWs' epistemological beliefs, actions and personal constructs on what influences academic success on the degree in social work course. The study was guided by the following objectives:

- Identify any behavioural factors that may or may not have influenced academic success.
- Examine any differences between NQSWs and their educators.
- Gain an understanding of academic success.
- Identify any support structures participants embraced whilst undertaking the degree in social work.
- Explore participants' lived experiences and understanding of teaching, learning and assessment on the degree in social work course.
- Draw conclusions that may support curriculum development opportunities, influence social work educational policy and future teaching practice.

The main components of the chapter include a short explanation of the chosen style and presentation, the context of the study and justification for the chosen sample. The discussion follows the structure of the conversation guide and has been written in the first person to reflect my efforts in realising the study's aims.

I developed the conversation guide to be conversational, rather than extractive or confrontational, to ensure that the results were authentic. This study's approach and choice of design has been guided by social constructionist ontology (Denicolo

et al., 2016). Social constructionist ontology builds on personal construct psychology. The approach is open to understanding people's perspectives and interactions with the world. To demonstrate the power and versatility of the approach, this chapter has been written to alert the reader to both practical considerations and caveats about its use (Denicolo *et al*., 2016, p.4).

The chapter now discusses style and presentation.

4.2 Style and Presentation

These findings and the discussion have been written to symbolise my journey to realise this study's aims and objectives. The actual findings have been integrated into the discussion, written in a descriptive mixed genre style that includes my personal evaluations, images and metaphors, creating new knowledge. The creation of new knowledge and the adoption of a constructivist approach required me to be creative in all aspects of the study design. The use of a vignette as a data collection tool is highly recommended for seeking meaning according to constructionists such as Denicolo *et al.* (2016), particularly since the study was designed to be theory neutral in line with the Braun and Clarke (2010) model.

This chapter now moves on to explain the context of the study.

4.3 Context

Whilst undertaking the data analysis I used a social work educator consultant to review and verify the identified labels described on the matrix. This was to certify that all possible labels had been highlighted and to ensure the trustworthiness of the themes. Supervisors were also consulted at this stage of the process.

The chapter now moves on to explore the ethical issues that arose from the study.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

This study was guided by ethical considerations from BERA, BASW, HCPC and the UREC (2011). Anonymity and confidentiality were observed (e.g., names for in-text quotations have been changed and the key informants' and gatekeepers' identities have been protected by replacing their names with numbers). Those who were involved in shaping this study have been acknowledged. Finally, the report has been written to ensure that it does not harm the reputation or interests of the host university or the participants. These issues have been addressed earlier (see section 3.2).

The NQBSW and educator participants were chosen because I had access to and was familiar with the study population, and given the timescale available for the study completion, it would not have been possible to have interviewed the whole social work course population (of around 100 students). Finally, I was curious to see how my own participants performed when compared to the discourses that infiltrate the literature. Specifically, I was seeking to reveal something interesting and positive about black participants and academic success to help move the discourse away from the deficit models being perpetrated into the literature. This chapter now moves on to describe the participants' characteristics.

4.5 Participants' Characteristics

Sixteen participants were recruited and utilised in the study (n = 16) out of a total sampling frame of 109 (99 students and 10 educators). This was made up of 30 students from the 2015-16 cohort, 38 from the 2016-17 cohort and 31 from the 2017-18 cohort (confidential student records, November 2018). The selected

sample was made up of eleven (11/99) NQBSW participants and five (5/10) social work educator participants (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2). The participants are listed in the order they were interviewed.

Table 4.1: NQBSW Participants' Information

Participant number assigned	Gender *	PDS **	Interview Method ***	Ethnicity ****	Age in yrs	Class of Award	Interview Time
1	F	Y	P2P	BA	34	1st	23.52
2	F	N	OL	BA	41	1st	25.26
3	F	N	P2P	BB	24	1st	36.09
4	F	Y	P2P	BB	37	1st	45.06
5	F	N	OL	AB	53	2.1	23.06
6	F	Y	P2P	BC	24	2.1	34.06
7	F	N	P2P	BA	47	1st	32.47
8	F	Y	P2P	BA	28	1st	33.09
9	M	Y	OL	BA	34	2.1	31.22
10	M	Y	OL	BB	37	3rd	33.09
11	F	Y	P2P	BA	34	1st	44.43

* F = female, M = male.

** PDS = Participant disability status. Y = yes, N = no (see section 4.5.2).

*** P2P = person-to-person 'traditional' interview. OL = online interview, person-to-person but utilising Skype via a computer at each location.

**** Ethnicity: BA = Black African, BB = Black British, AB = African British, BC = Black Caribbean.

4.5.1 NQBSW Participant Gender

Seven female (9/11) NQBSW participants and two male (2/11) participants were interviewed. This gender imbalance reflects the social work student population, both locally and nationally. Social work is a gendered profession, with 88% of the workforce being made up of women (HCPC, 2018). The attraction to women may be that they possess superior softer skills when compared to men (e.g., empathy and interpersonal skills). This makes them more attractive to the profession's caring domain and, of course, because caring is seen as a 'woman's activity'. Furthermore, the perception of the role of a social worker often fits gendered stereotypes (Holmstrom & Taylor, 2008). Incidentally, both of the male NQBSWs interviewed shared that they had experienced difficulties in placements, or at home in their personal lives.

Cahill (2014) reveals emerging differences between male and female undergraduate participants with respect to levels of engagement with academic and tutorial support provision in higher education. Similarly, Balinski *et al.* (2010) report that male respondents were 1.5 times more likely than women to choose careerist motivations for wanting to join the profession. Both these studies have been explored earlier (see section 2.10.1).

4.5.2 NQBSW Participant Disability Status

Seven (7/11) of the NQBSW participants interviewed expressed that they had been assessed by the university's disability service, with all seven being registered as having dyslexia (two male and five female participants). Dyslexia is a learning disorder that primarily affects the skills involved in organisation, giving impairments in phonological processing, verbal processing speed and verbal short-term memory. Dyslexia is not an intelligence issue (de Beer *et al.*, 2014). My

experience over the years has informed me that university support for these participants has increased with the aid of assisted technology (such as TextHELP, Dragon and Mind Manager). These participants were eligible for reasonable adjustments in teaching, learning and assessment under the Disability Discrimination Act which has been encompassed within the Equalities Act 2010. De Beer *et al*. (2014) postulate that participants with dyslexia show a dependence on social support from peers and family members. The reasonable adjustments took the form of extra time in assessments, recorded lectures, coloured paper, electronic text books and larger fonts for printed learning materials. The number of participants with dyslexia appears to be higher than the general population figure of 11% (HESA, 2018), with over 60% of the participants reporting to have this specific educational need. Despite such challenges, these participants were able to cope and adapt to overcome their difficulties during the course and successfully pass the social work degree.

4.5.3 NQBSW Participants' Ethnic Origin

Six (6/11) of the student participants described themselves as being Black African (BA). One student participant described herself as Black Caribbean (BC) and another African British (AB). Three described themselves as Black British (BB). It should be noted that the initial call for participants was open to all participants regardless of ethnicity; however, only former students from the black community expressed an interest in participating in the study. I spent a lot of time pondering on this finding and wondered if projective identification was at play. Did participants want me to succeed because we shared the same ethnic identity? I also considered the ethnic make-up of the study sample population (87% BME in the sample). I thought about the conversation guide and how this might have influenced participants' responses about their ethnic identity and learning. I laboured on my own ethnicity and how it may have made the participants feel

restrained when sharing true feelings about their experiences. I deliberated on the trust participants had put in me, since I had taught them over the previous three years. I came to the conclusion that students perceived me as having a deeper understanding of their experiences and were willing to share this and contribute to the creation of new knowledge (Murray, 2002). Given that the university has so few educators from BME backgrounds, in the spirit of Gibbs (1988) I reflected and speculated that students may have seen me like themselves, marginalised by being in a minority community within the university or maybe just wanted to give something back and promote social justice - a core social work value (BASW Code of Ethics, 2011). This is addressed earlier in the literature review (see section 2.13.3) through the work of Abell and McDonells (1990), who found the versatility and traditional commitments to working with the disadvantaged and the need to promote social justice as drivers to succeed in social work.

4.5.4 NQBSW Participant Age

The NQBSW participants' ages ranged from 24 years to 53 years. The average age was 36. Greater age has been a predictor of success, with younger participants more likely to be withdrawn from social work education (Hussein, 2009; Fletcher *et al*., 2012). The age range for the NQBSWs is higher than would be expected (UCU, 2017). I suggest this might be to due to these participants starting the degree in social work after a period in employment. This is supported by the literature review and explored in the work of Hussein (2009) and Fletcher *et al*. (2012).

4.5.5 NQBSW Participants' Class of Award

Of the eleven participants who volunteered their involvement, one (1/11) was awarded a third class degree, three (3/11) were awarded an upper second and

seven (7/11) were awarded a first class degree. One of the eleven NQBSW participants completed their degree via a part-time employer-sponsored route, whilst the remaining ten completed via the full-time graduate pathway.

4.5.6 NQBSW Participants' Interview Modes and Timings

The participants were offered a choice of either a traditional person-to-person or a Skype synchronised interview via the Internet. Seven (7/11) participants chose person-to-person and four (4/11) participants chose synchronised interviews. The NQBSW participants' interviews took between 23 minutes 6 seconds and 45 minutes 6 seconds to complete, with the average interview being 33 minutes in duration. The Skype synchronised interviews took significantly less time than the traditional person-to-person interviews, with the shortest being 23 minutes 6 seconds and longest being 33 minutes 9 seconds (average being 14 minutes 38 seconds).

4.6 Educator Participant Age, Gender and Ethnicity

The educator participants' ages ranged from 39 to 63 years, with the average age being 47 years (see Table 4.2). Four female and one male educator participants were interviewed. These participants described themselves as follows: one (1/5) as Black African, two (2/5) Black Caribbean and two (2/5) White Other. It was noted that the social work educator participants were significantly older than the student participants. I would argue that this represents their years in practice prior to entering higher education.

Table 4.2: Educator Participant Information

Educator Participant No.	Interview Mode	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Interview Time
1	F2F	48	F	BC	28.26
2	F2F	42	F	BC	29.10
3	F2F	63	M	WO	50.46
4	F2F	41	F	WO	44.07
5	F2F	39	F	BA	33.45

* F2F = face-to-face, person-to-person 'traditional' interview.

** Ethnicity: BA = Black African, BC = Black Caribbean, WO = White Other.

Interestingly, the educator participants had a total number of 48 social work educating years between them, with the average being 9.6 years, as noted on their completed participant information sheet.

4.7 Educator Participants' Interview Mode and Timings

All the social work educator participant interviews took place between January 2017 and August 2018. All were held at the university and were traditional person-to-person interviews, with the longest interview taking 50 minutes 46 seconds and the shortest 28 minutes 26 seconds. The average interview took 38 minutes 6 seconds.

This chapter has so far described the characteristics of the participants and the interview logistics have been explained. The next section presents the major and minor themes that emerged from the data analysis process.

4.8 Introduction to the Themes

This section is an introduction to the themes that arose from the lived experiences of the NQBSW participants and their educators. The findings are linked to a number of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual tools, namely 'Capital', 'Habitus', 'Field' and 'Knowing the Game'. These conceptual tools have been chosen because Bourdieu (1990) believes, as do I, that structures play a leading role in practice today and that there are multiple possible acceptable actions and behaviours available to those operating within the university. Moreover, Bourdieu's work is popular with other promoters of structuralist ideology, such as Giddens (2009) and Denicolo *et al.* (2016). The other interesting theme that arose and is explored is 'impostor syndrome' (Urwin, 2018).

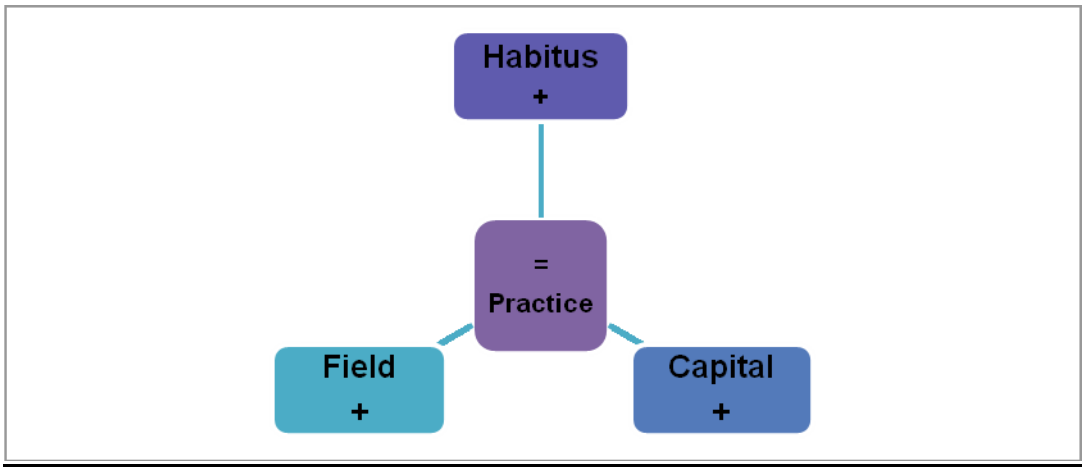
The emerging themes have been woven into the discussion to create a new understanding of academic success. The decision to weave the theoretical ideas into the presentation of the findings was to create a social constructivist study (Denicolo *et al*., 2016). My position as a social constructionist and its congruence with phenomenology influenced my decision to adopt the social constructivist approach. Furthermore, I was aware that people view the world and their experiences of it in different ways, so that no two individuals' sense of reality is exactly the same.

This section is explained through the lens of Bourdieu (1987). Bourdieu created a number of useful thinking tools, three of which he called the 'Habitus', 'Capital' and 'Field'. These tools have been widely adopted by educationalists to explain the impact of social class (Bourdieu, 1987; Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Bourdieu's primary interest was bridging the gap between agency and

structure (Waller, 2017). The tools have also been expressed as Habitus + Capital = Field (Bourdieu, 1987).

Bourdieu calculated that Habitus + Capital + Field = Practice, making these tools highly relevant to social workers in the making; since they are preparing to be professional practitioners. In addition, participants are more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds (Singh, 2011). In fact, I would go so far as to say that the experiences of people from BME backgrounds mirror the working class trajectory, thus making Bourdieu a highly suitable lens.

Figure 4.1: Bourdieu's Thinking Tools



Source: author, based on Bourdieu (1987).

4.8.1 Capital

Bourdieu's 'Capital' incorporates a number of typologies; these include 'cultural capital', 'social capital', 'economic capital', 'symbolic capital', 'institutional capital', 'emotional capital' and 'experiential capital' (see Figure 4.2). Unfortunately, due to word count restrictions within this thesis, 'emotional capital' and 'experiential

capital' are not addressed. However, one can draw assumptions and inferences from the overarching terms and their common use.

Cultural capital occurs in three forms: the first is institutionalised (e.g., educational qualifications). It is also objectified in the materials we possess, such as cultural goods like books, a room to study, office at home or even the car we drive. It is an embodied form of habitus and is a long-lasting disposition of the mind and body (Bourdieu, 1997).

Figure 4.2: Capital Themes Derived from the Voices of Participants

Source: author.

Participants enter university with forms of capital - either educational capital or cultural capital (or sometimes both). Prior to entering onto the social work degree course, participants undertook a range of different pre-entry programmes in preparation for the degree course, including pre-access courses, access courses, Higher National Diplomas and National Vocational Qualifications up to level 5.

> *"I wanted to have a career because I could feel the confidence in myself, but I never had a formal education, so I decided to go to what is called a pre-access course"* (Participant 10).

Three (3/11) of the participants already possessed higher education degrees when they started the social work degree course.

> *"I did education in my first degree so it exposed me to presentation skills, so I really enjoyed that"* (Participant 2).

> *"My first year was quite challenging because when I did my Law degree it was not on the computer, it was more writing on paper in Africa, so when I came to this country I had to learn to use the computer and also to be checking my emails every time and being able to respond on time"* (Participant 5).

These participants were eligible to undertake the masters degree in social work. However, due to their lack of self-confidence, these participants expressed the need to return to undergraduate studies to develop their academic and language skills.

> *"I had too many languages in my head. I didn't want to do the MA. I wanted to get back to basics. The foundation is really important because once it's solid, once it's there, I can go everywhere I want, so that's why I wanted to do the BA"* (Participant 5).

The second form of capital is social capital. Social capital consists of someone's networks or connections which can be institutionalised as a 'title of nobility'. It is about 'who you know' and your ability to utilise this for personal gain. Participants expressed how they used their social capital to succeed.

> *"Even when I was looking for a job, I messaged my tutor and my placement supervisor because I still keep in contact with him, so I*

message him if I'm going for an interview and ask if he has any pointers" (Participant 3).

Some participants talked about extending their social networks of support by attending social work conferences and networking events outside of the university. These participants exposed themselves to potential social work employers who may employ them in the future. At these events, participants get the opportunity to circulate their Curriculum Vitae and network with potential employers, building their social capital. Others built their social capital by subscribing to professional networks (such as Communitycare.com and www.BASW.com).

The third form of capital is economic capital. This involves financial resources and may be institutionalised in the form of property (for example, property rights). In essence it is what one owns, earns or inherits, and it can be used to buy or trade other forms of capital. For example, if you can afford it (economical) you might drive a Mercedes, if you can't you might buy a second-hand Ford. If one thinks about the impact on status driving a new top-of-the-range car, then surely it is not the same as driving a cheaper brand second-hand car?

Symbolic capital is another form of currency. Bourdieu extends the use of this term to address what he defines as 'symbolic violence'. To put it tersely, and as simply as possible, it is violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity (Bourdieu, 1987). Bourdieu argues that symbolic violence is the self-interest capacity to ensure that the arbitrariness of the social order is either ignored, or argued as natural, often recognised as 'this is just the way things are' and thereby justifying the legitimacy of existing social structures.

Symbolic violence can influence future attitudes, education and career pathways. Reay *et al*. (2005) suggest that symbolic violence even influences the choice of university and study pathway that students choose.

The findings indicate trends in the NQBSW participants expecting to experience racism in employment.

> *"It made me think because in most of the settings I've gone, there is more black people working in it, but then there is not in management"* (Participant 5).

Their fears may be warranted if we consider the words below of their educator participant who has had recent direct experience of practice at a senior level. Furthermore, evidence is provided by *The Guardian* newspaper report that NQBSWs face a 10% deficit in pay once employed. NQBSW participants are less likely to be in employment six months after graduation when compared to their white peers (Andrews, 2018).

> *"…what you see is that a lot of the frontline workers are black ethnic minorities and a lot of the managers are white. So there's been a shift. So often there is a fear of, oh my gosh, I may not even get a job because I'm black, I know I won't be promoted because I'm black, so I'm happy and content to just be a front line practitioner until I retire. So there's a lack of ambition, driven from fear. It's not that they're not ambitious, they want to get to those places but the fear is that, well it's not going to happen for me anyway because I'm a minority"* (Educator Participant 5).

Yet, participants still pursue graduate status to join the profession. The participants maintain the drive to join the profession with the knowledge of 'this is just the way things are'. I would argue that this could be considered to be an act of symbolic violence. Typically, symbolic violence acts on the dominated group (working class) to the advantage of the dominating group (middle class). In its application, I hypothesise that those leading the profession (hypothesised as being white middle class professionals) to be the dominant group and the black newly qualified

professionals as the working class. The marginalisation of NQBSW participants is supported by the assertion and equally valid convictions such as “this is just the way things are”. This can be damaging to members of the dominant group in the right conditions (Burke, 2015).

I now move on to explore the second theoretical tool advocated by Bourdieu, Habitus.

4.8.2 Habitus

Habitus has a number of arms, one being ‘educational habitus’. Nash (2002) implies that ‘educated habitus’ is characterised by a positive orientation to schooling, high aspirations, a positive academic self-concept, and a desire to identify and be identified as educated. Educated habitus can also be class specific, based on a class view of education and its value (informing dispositions towards it) and could be considered a manifestation of cultural capital (Waller, 2017).

The term ‘habitus’, as it sounds, refers to a habit or disposition. It relates to our ways of being, or self-regulation, acting, thinking, and is the route to becoming a productive citizen. Habitus can be defined as:

> “…a system of dispositions, that is of permanent manners of being, seeing, acting, thinking or a system of long lasting (rather than permanent) schemes of schemata or structures of perception, conception and action” (Bourdieu, 2002, p.27).

Imagining a student as a vessel, then habitus is the cargo that fills the vessel. Habitus includes tastes, practices and dispositions; it is also about language and how we carry ourselves. Bourdieu (2002) suggests that habitus involves ways of standing, speaking, walking and thereby feeling and thinking. These are the

habitus that students bring when entering the university. Habitus is regularly linked to higher education and other social concepts (Giddens, 2009).

Bourdieu's (1987) work looks at 'institutional habitus'. Understanding institutional habitus can help in understanding academic success. Universities have a distinct feel and character in terms of social class, ethnicity and gender, hierarchical pecking orders, pedagogy, teaching styles, curriculum construction and processes.

University buildings are designed to be liberal social spaces for students. Building structures are designed to be eye-catching, market-driven brands to attract investors. In the process, students have become customers whose experience is paramount. While the student experience is presented as being one of the main rationales for the building design, they are rarely involved in the actual design themselves (Neary & Beetham, 2015).

Price (2011) consciously fronts university buildings design and compares them to 'Fordist' factories, including the assembly line. Another critique of university social space is Neary and Beetham (2015), who argue that university buildings are supposed to create a sense of community, applicable to life in a modern democracy, sharing intellectual and emotional experiences with lecturers, administrators, cleaners and porters, all who have their own space.

Bourdieu (1987) argues that institutions interact with individual habitus: for example, how well does someone fit or feel at home at the university? This sense of belonging can be aligned to being a 'fish out of water' (Reay *et al*., 2009). Institutional habitus was thus an area that was investigated in my own study.

> *"But thinking back to that first year's mentality because I never thought that I could go to Uni. I saw only rich, white people as*

being university participants. I didn't see myself as a university student" (Participant 4).

The participants were given prompts around how connected they felt to the university. Some participants felt connected to the university, whilst others did not.

> *"No. I wasn't connected at all to the university. The only thing I was connected in was voting my lecturers and voting presidents, but I did that online. I think I concentrated so much on the academic side that I forgot my social life, which is a bit dangerous"* (Participant 3).

> *"I felt rather connected to the uni. I felt that I could talk to people"* (Participant 4).

An example can be seen in the spoken words of participant 7.

> *"I felt a connection with the school, with my colleagues when I started here. As a mother, I feel a connection. I feel a connection being black as well. I feel connected as well because the school as well helps you put things together that supports your understanding. With the service users, some of them, I feel a connection with them because you have family members that are going through similar issues. You see some people sharing their experience so you feel a connection with them. As well, you feel a connection with the lecturer as well because, although sometimes they will share a bit of their background, not just academically as a lecturer"* (Participant 7).

Six (6/11) of the participants articulated feelings of inferiority and were uncomfortable within the university environment, while five participants (5/11) signalled that the university environment was a good place to study. These participants described the university as 'home from home' and experienced a sense of belonging.

> *"I felt myself being at home. You understand? Accepted here!"* (Participant 10).

Some participants maintained a connection by participating in online activities.

Burke (2015) shows that habitus can change through an 'out of environment' experience. An example from my practice might be taking a group of students on a field trip (see Figure 4.3) to complement face-to-face traditional teaching on psychodynamic theory and to further their understanding of rather challenging abstract concepts. The aim was to deepen their learning. The trip was a cultural experience, for many their first to a museum. They felt an affinity to the museum, questioning how just one man was able to collect thousands of African pieces of art. They were able to think outside the box and culturally connect with the experience.

Figure 4.3: Group Visit to the Freud Museum

Source: Author, used with permission. See acknowledgements.

Educational habitus has been interpreted as being class-specific, grounded on a classed view of education based on its value (informing dispositions towards it) and could be considered a manifestation of cultural capital.

Friedman *et al*. (2017) built upon Bourdieu's work to consider what occurs when the habitus splits over two fields - they refer to this as the 'habitus cleft'. Here they consider the relationship between old and new habitus and the consequences on the individual. This was evidenced in the reports from the final year participants, who had abandoned their original habitus and overwritten them with new ones.

By the time the participants had reached the third year of the course they had managed to develop a professional identity and pass as practitioners. However, Friedman *et al*. (2015) argue that even though they may have overwritten their old habitus, they may remain a stranger in their natural communities. The new habitus may not fit in as well as they had prior to being educated. The conditions which form the new habitus are rejected by the original habitus to be reaffirmed. This process can result in social reproduction and symbolic violence. When the habitus recognises, accepts and navigates two fields, this can have a positive effect on the individual. This is what Friedman *et al*. (2015) call 'reconciled habitus'. Finally, Bourdieu (2002) talks of the destabilising habitus. He suggests this is when two fields pull the habitus in two directions and the habitus is unable to balance the demands. For example, study versus other personal commitments. This is when participants are at their most vulnerable and most likely to withdraw or be withdrawn from the social work degree course. Parker (2010) signals that these students are unfit for practice, not good enough, or just not ready for the journey into the profession. This has been further explored earlier in section 2.12.

In his explanation about how habitus is embodied, Bourdieu (2002) discusses the term ‘trajectory effect’. This is where the majority of a social group are likely to follow a certain trajectory, similar to each other and previous generations. A small percentage of this group, dominant or dominated, will follow contrasting paths to the previous generation, as implied in the response from participant 7.

> *“Yes, I’m the first in my generation to go to university. Hopefully my brother goes as well”* (Participant 7).

We are reminded that habitus is durable but not eternal. Bourdieu (1987) reminds us that the habitus can change through a significant change of influence.

The chapter now provides a discussion of Bourdieu’s third tool, ‘field’.

4.8.3 Field

The third tool is ‘field’, as it is commonly known. Think about a football match on a field. Bourdieu compares his field to a battlefield which inevitably will have rules, winners and losers. A field therefore, is a structured system of social positions occupied either by individuals or institutions, with the nature of the field being determined by the situation for their occupants Jenkins (1992 p.85). The dynamic nature of field is illustrated in the process of hysteresis. Hysteresis is the structural lag between opportunities and dispositions. Failure to grasp these can then lead to missed opportunities (Bourdieu, 1997). He goes on to say that fields have rules, inner logic or common sense, what he terms ‘doxa’. Fields have rules and are located within the field of power. The hysteresis effect means that holders of devalued degrees, in a sense, become accomplices in their own mystification. This typical effect is called ‘allodoxia’. They bestow a value on devalued degrees which is not objectively acknowledged (Bourdieu, 1987).

Given my adoption of a constructivist approach, I found myself constructing a critical understanding of the lived experiences of the NQBSW participants. I remained conscious that the participants individually held very different views of their world. The approach taken in this study has assumed that knowledge does not exist independently; rather, we as individuals are constructions of our own world daily through experiences. In fact, it could be argued that the more untidy the environment, the more views of world beliefs there will be to be captured.

These constructs have been linked together in a complex, idiosyncratic network of construct system poles (Denicolo *et al.*, 2016). Bryman (2010) considers that these networks are crucial to students and have helped them to survive relatively effectively thus far from the core. The more the core becomes a construct, the more difficult it is to change. The analysis process has been helpful in seeking out the contrasting poles, as well as the elicited poles of constructs (Denicolo *et al*., 2016). The emerging themes constructed were created by seeking out contrasts, elaborations and preferences. These themes have been woven throughout the findings and are embedded in the remaining findings and discussion within this chapter.

The next section addresses the participants' constructions of academic success.

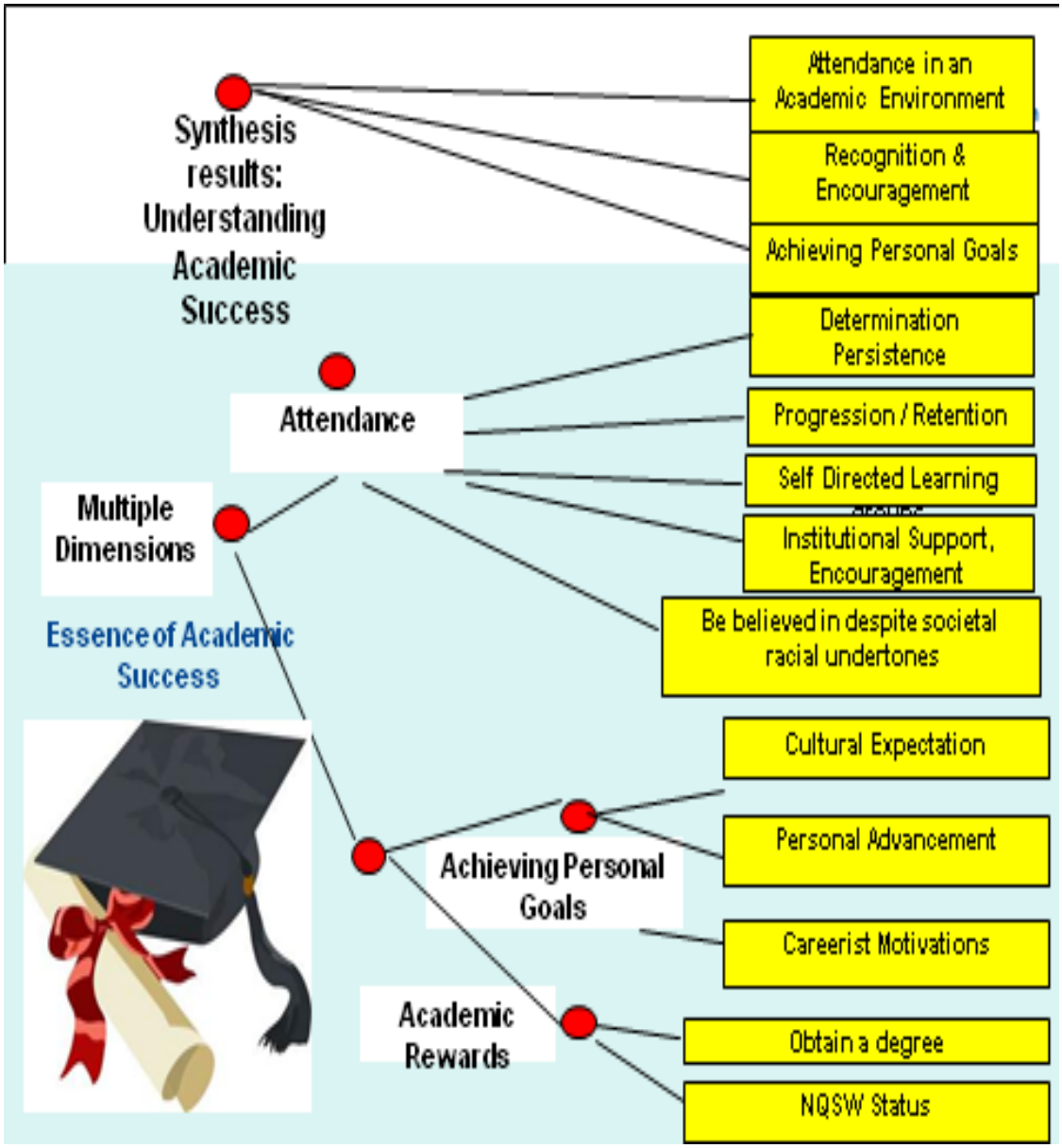
4.9 Re-defining Academic Success

The term 'academic success' is a catchall term frequently used in education to describe student progression and outcomes. It is intended to limit the term's application to attainment specific to educational experiences.

> *"Academic success is going through the process of being in an academic environment, being supported and being encouraged to attend your course"* (Participant 1).

Participants understood academic success to be a multi-factorial concept which was made up of a number of key elements, as demonstrated in the concept map below (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4: Participants' Understandings of Academic Success



Source: author.

> *"Academic success for me personally was about raising my level of literacy"* (Participant 4).

These elements were construed by the participants as being in attendance in an academic environment (7/11), personal growth (6/11), progression (5/11) and quality indicators (7/11).

> *"My understanding of academic success is, for me, having the ability to sometimes go beyond what the classroom expects you, what the teacher expects you, to have. Doing the research, to be able to meet, if I can say, a certain level, for achievement in your education"* (Participant 8).

When prompted, the participants indicated that a quality degree was a first class or upper second class degree. This finding is in line with Kuh *et al*. (2006) in their understanding of what would be considered a good degree. These classes of awards are often used as a measure of quality, as indicated earlier (see section 2.4).

> *"So for me, if I could achieve a 2:1 I'd be very happy to walk away with a 2:1"* (Participant 6).

> *"For me personally, academic achievement is where you've actually achieved a good class degree. To me, that's a sign of success. You've completed the course, and at the end of the course you've got something to show for it, as well as your experience. I think a good degree nowadays, they're expecting first, second class, at least upper"* (Participant 5).

The words of the participants were grouped into units of meanings to portray the essence of academic success, which I can now myself define as being 'the attendance of an institution where one is supported to meet personal goals for

rewards'. This new definition fits snugly alongside another definition of academic success, being:

> "…the engagement in educationally purposeful activities, student satisfaction, the acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competences, persistence, attainment of educational outcomes and post school performance'" (Kuh *et al.,* 2006, p.5).

Whilst creating a new definition of academic success, I recognise that the participants did not enter the university as empty vessels. Rather, some participants had more cultural capital than others. This larger cultural capital makes them better prepared for the academic journey than others who may not have had as much cultural capital. The reader is reminded of Scenario 1 (see Figure 3.1). It is cultural capital that helps students navigate their behaviour and attitude towards learning, which leads to success on the social work degree course and attainment of the degree itself. However, Bourdieu (1997) argues that cultural capital has developed in opposition to economic capital. Moreover, conflict between those who mostly hold cultural capital and those who mostly hold economic capital find expression in the opposed social fields of art and business.

4.10 Educator Participants' Spoken Words

The themes common to the educator participants are their lived experiences of teaching on the social work degree course. However, educator participant interviews were dominated by discussions about policy (2/5), regulatory constraints (2/5), workloads (1/5), institutional cultures (1/5), quality assurance (1/5) and league tables (2/5). These posed as challenges encountered by educators at the university. The educator participants talked about the pressures to meet these administrative demands, as well as meeting the students' expectations and needs.

> *"We do have to ensure that students achieve success through meeting those deadlines and guidelines and fulfilling whatever's in the framework. That cannot be ignored, unfortunately"* (Educator Participant 5).

These issues appear to be situational, as they relate to the university's managerial operations. These have, of course, caused some tension between the participants' and educators' expectations. The language and terms used by the educator participants equate to high levels of unhappiness with the managerial entities and approaches used to drive higher education.

> *"I would say there just seems to be so many changes. At times, you are not sure what you are supposed to be doing, in terms of the role and to match up with management"* (Educator Participant 2).

About NQBSWs' determination, two educator participants (2/5) alluded to a 'sub-culture' that was driving the student participants' desire to obtain their degrees. The language used by the educator participants may go some way to explain the levels of self-determination, persistence and tenacity to obtain the degree and its true value to the newly qualified participants.

> *"Determination came from the fact that I'd already done two years, I hadn't got that far to go. But saying that, I was exhausted so it was about finding that strength within yourself, and I think a lot of that comes with the want to do well, that feeling inside that you really want to do well, that's what takes you through. I felt that with the work that I had, I would have to find a determination to push myself further, so really it's about that internal part of you that pushes you through"* (Participant 7).

Educator participants were asked what advice they would offer the student in the Scenario 1 case study. Three (3/5) educator participants said that this student

should have presented earlier. Early intervention appears to be an influence on success on the degree.

> *"It's a real shame that she didn't access our support earlier"* (Educator Participant 2).

Five (5/5) educator participants voiced they would help the student to identify the multiple demands faced and what could realistically be done within the timescale. Two (2/5) said they would have adopted a strengths approach to help the student identify useful strategies to remove or reduce the barriers. Equally, two (2/5) said they would meet the student regularly to monitor progress.

> *"I would want to talk to her really about what is impacting on her studies. I notice that she's a single mum and this is her final year. I would suggest that she either looks for additional support at home to ensure that she has the confidence to spend the time doing the work that she has to do, or maybe taking a little break from studies until she has it all organised properly and then coming back to it if that's a possibility. Because there's a lot at stake to her passing and she's managed to pass everything, just, but she's probably not getting a lot out of it. My advice would be that she dropped out and just get herself organised and then come back when she's in a better state"* (Educator Participant 4).

Two (2/5) questioned whether this was the right time for the student to be completing a degree, given the student's recent performance and personal commitments, while three (3/5) voiced they would not give up hope on the student and said they would offer reassurance.

> *"It's often during the first meeting you clarify issues for them, tell the student it's not the end, there's still a chance there and sometimes that reassurance is all that's needed in order to kick start things"* (Educator Participant 2).

This section has explored participants' constructs and understanding of academic success and has provided a new understanding as voiced by the participants themselves. The chapter now moves on to explore the divergent and overlapping themes among the participants' responses.

4.11 Overlapping Themes

The educator participants described 'academic success' as the acquisition of graduate-specific knowledge and skills demonstrated through completion of courses with the aim of advancing into a profession.

> *"It's setting a goal, a learning goal and then realising it when you get there. For me, it is to aim as high as possible and to endure the learning journey, really"* (Educator Participant 3).
>
> *"Academic achievement basically means that you are fulfilling your life's plan"* (Educator Participant 5).
>
> *"Academic success is when you've gone through your degree course from year 1 to year 3 and you come out with flying colours. What I mean by flying colours is getting a first upper class result, maybe 2:1 or 2:2"* (NQBSW - Participant 2).

Both students' and educators' definitions vary in conception and meaning. However, they are equally valid within the current amorphous construction of academic success and its application of the term.

Given the words used by the participants to describe academic success, I would then personally typify academic success as being attributable to three key components: (1) the attendance at an educational institution where one is encouraged to (2) meet personal goals in return for (3) recognition and personal rewards (see Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5: Re-defining Academic Success

Source: author.

This newly-created definition of academic success aims to be inclusive of the multi-dimensional nuanced definitions presented. Disappointingly, it fails to meet the Kuh *et al.* (2006) assertion that student outcomes should include an additional three key components, those of 'demographic characteristics', 'family background' and 'pre-entry experience' (a participant's cultural capital).

The analysis also uncovered a number of overlapping themes. 'Retention' was an overlapping theme among four (4/5) educator participants who voiced the importance of attendance, whilst three (3/5) were concerned about meeting faculty targets on retention. Retention also refers to an institution's ability to retain participants during the academic journey. Also common among both groups of participants was the issue of 'progression'. Progression refers to completion of key stages of the social work degree course. The analysis included persistence over attendance, because persistence was linked to participants' continued progression and determination to complete the social work degree course and attain their degree.

This chapter will now move to focus on the NQBSW participants' experiences of submitting assessments.

4.12 Experiences of Submitting Assignments and Assessments

The NQBSW participants' experiences of submitting assignments were varied. Some participants voiced the first experience as being daunting, whilst others struggled with Moodle (the electronic submission service).

> *"Some people had a bad experience but I didn't for some reason. Because I gave myself time, if an assignment was due in, say, at 12, I was already done days or weeks before"* (Participant 7).

The most popular methods of assessment were group and individual presentations. These were followed by role play and the twenty reflective skills days. Incidentally, these are assessed on a student's ability to critically assess their own learning and own development plans.

The least popular method of assessment was by means of examinations, which occur in year 2, although two (2/11) participants liked the final year's professional practice exam, which is assessed in the form of a viva and is the last module to be completed in the final year. The module aims to consolidate student learning in preparation for 'Newly Qualified Social Worker' registration and status.

Five (5/11) participants discussed being assessed whilst on placement, and talked about the application of theory to practice.

> *"My practical assessor said I came out with flying colours. She said you are able to make use of your theories and talk about your theories like the back of your hand. I said it was because the person who taught me about theories taught me in a language I understood"* (Participant 1).

Participants valued the opportunity to choose their assignment theme from the range of topics taught on the modules over the semester.

> *"For me, it was all about assignments. I loved the assignments. I look at assignments as coursework, and I think that really works well, especially if you're a person that doesn't manage examinations well. If you suffer from nerves and retaining the information, to me assignments are what provide that pathway to success"* (Participant 4).

This allowed them to focus on topics they had an interest in, were confident in or familiar with. As human beings we tend to take the path of least resistance.

> *"I remember once one of them came* (an assignment result) *while I was on night duty at work. I worried about my results throughout the shift, waiting for the results. But, when you do good, sometimes you really do feel confident, so it increases your confidence"* (Participant 3).

Participants reported feeling anxious whilst awaiting assignment results and an increase in confidence once they had received them and passed.

Participants who were unsuccessful in assignments inferred that this was the result of a lack of effort on their part. In essence, they accepted responsibility for their failure and blamed their performance.

> *"The majority of those who failed were black participants. I felt really sad because I felt really disappointed in myself because I think I'm someone that puts a lot of, because I'm really determined, I put a lot of pressure on myself to excel and I've never failed an exam before, and when I saw that I failed contemporary issues. I was not happy at all. I wasn't happy. I felt like, I personally felt like I didn't put enough effort into it and that's why I failed"* (Participant 11).

On the issue of assessment, one Educator Participant responded:

> *"I realised there was a mismatch between my values and my feelings about the students and these very generic standards that were set. I found that I did struggle in the first year and a half I'd say, because I was being very subjective in my marking and my assessment of students and that, as a social worker, that's where my values are. But I realised I had to set that hat aside and really think as a teacher and standardise my assessment, as well as my teaching, and so that was a revelation when I found that out"* (Educator Participant 5).

Another participant supplied advice to future students:

> *"My experience of submitting assessments was good. Sometimes I left things to last minute and I would advise anyone coming onto the social work course not to copy that; that's a bad habit and it cost me a good degree. I left things to the last minute sometimes and I rushed to hand in assignments. It's good to do assignments at least one week before hand-in date so that you have time to proof read it and check all the mistakes and references"* (Participant 10).

This section has explored participants' experiences of submitting assignments and heard from those who mark them. It has also highlighted a range of associated emotions and the impact of failing assignments and/or assessments. The chapter now moves on to focus on the experiences of teaching, learning and assessment.

4.13 Teaching and Learning

The focus now moves to the NQBSW participants' lived experiences of teaching and learning whilst on the social work degree course. The section evidences the unit of meanings created, using the words of participants and giving them a voice in the academic success discourse. The participants' words have been used as symbols and may mean different things to different people.

> *"Participants were trying to make sense of their world, whilst I was trying to make sense of the world of participants, trying to make sense of their world"* (Reflective notes, 21 July 2017).

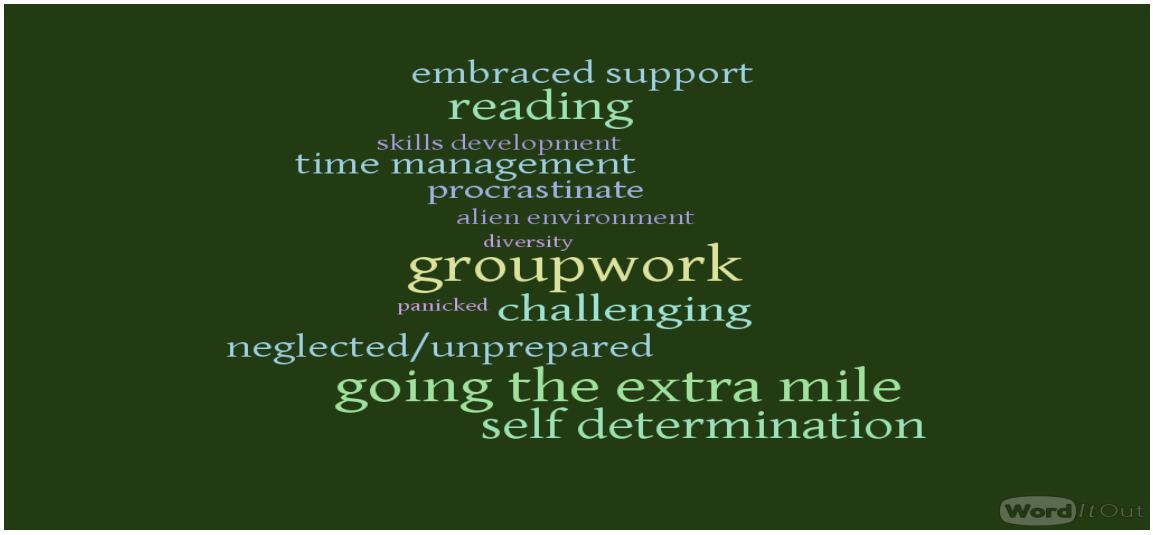
The conclusion has been presented using three key stages to correspond with the key progression points on the social work degree course. The participants were given prompts around experiences, behaviours and actions in year 1, then specific to year 2 and experiences in the final year. Word clouds have been created for each year to summarise the spoken words. The responses were in conversational form and this is reflected in the discourse.

4.13.1 NQBSW Participants' Spoken Words - Year 1

Seven (7/11) participants articulated this stage of the course as being particularly challenging, with some participants finding it difficult to manage their time, whilst others procrastinated.

> *"So year 1 was a learning curve"* (Participant 1).

Figure 4.6: NQBSW Participants' Spoken Words, Year 1



Source: author.

> *"I think the first year was quite a bit difficult. It was intense, there was a lot of information; really, a lot of information and it was quite difficult for me to break it down"* (Participant 9).

Four (4/11) reported that they were given too much information during the early weeks of the first year.

> *"I found that in the first year I was just about scraping through in terms of, I tended to leave it until the last minute"* (Participant 8).

Four (4/11) participants reported being unfamiliar with the academic standards required by the university. However, very few of these participants turned to the lecturers for support. Instead, they actively sought out people in their class or in other years to provide the support they needed.

> *"People were scared because they didn't want their tutor to know where they were at or they didn't want to sound like they were struggling"* (Participant 4).

Six (6/11) of the participants talked about not being prepared for the academic journeys they were about to embark on.

> *"The first year was really, really hard because that leap… come to think of it, I wish they could give me those essays again because I think I would get 100. It was hard because I didn't know what lecturers wanted, how to even write a university essay so all these feelings"* (Participant 3).

Eight (8/11) participants reported that they felt overwhelmed in year 1, while two (2/11) panicked.

> *"I'm going to start at the beginning of the first year which I was quite in panic, because I didn't know what was expected of me to do as a student. I wanted to achieve but I didn't know how to do it, to be able to reach that level which I've got now, the first class"* (Participant 8).

Seven (7/11) participants reported that they had a positive experience; this was indicated in the words used by Participant 8:

> *"I found that the university was very supportive and I felt at home here and that really contributed to my experience. I really enjoyed the course and felt supported by tutors and faculty staff"* (Participant 8).

Four (4/11) participants valued the expert professional knowledge of lecturers.

> *"We were able to get from different lecturers a different point of view. Some of them were coming from probation, some of them from mental health, some from child protection, so we got different perspectives. So, put together, we were able to understand a different way of working"* (Participant 7).

One (1/11) participant attended the same themed lecture repeated times. She expressed that this was her going the extra mile.

> *"I went to four different classes just to see what the difference was. I realised, for example, when I went to one tutor's presentation, she was more onto rapport building and theories of communication and then when I went to another, it was theories, when I went to another tutor's it was the service user, so it depended on their expertise"* (Participant 6).

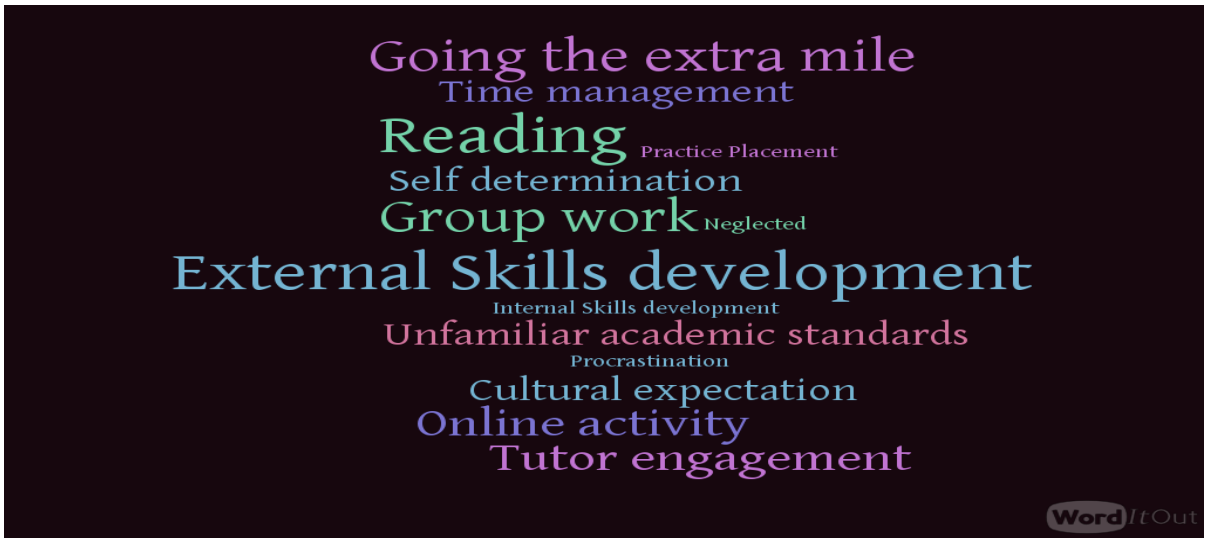
Year 1 proved to be challenging for most participants, who expressed fear, being overwhelmed and unprepared, as they lacked the understanding of the academic standards required. The participants also voiced that they valued their educators' professional knowledge.

This section now moves to take a closer look at the experiences of the NQBSW participants in the second year of their social work degree course.

4.13.2 NQBSW Participants Spoken Words - Year 2

In the second year, the participants needed to be more strategic. Participants reported at this stage of their studies 'having to move up a gear'.

Figure 4.7: Spoken Words, Year 2



Source: author.

Participants had to make clear lifestyle changes and admit that they were not superhuman.

> *"But at the same time I ended up putting aside some of the things that I thought were less important so that I could concentrate on my studies"* (Participant 4).

This involved improving their time management and goal setting, and created opportunities to establish a work-life balance.

> *"My lifestyle definitely helped because I could do over and beyond. Literally, I could stay here until 11 o'clock. I didn't have to go home. Sometimes I'd come in at 7 o'clock in the morning. I had to do that bit extra because I knew I had to get to grips with things"* (Participant 4).

In year 2, seven (7/11) of the participants attended academic skills development courses at an external university. This programme has been invaluable to the participants. This is evidence of black participants going the extra mile to accumulate capital.

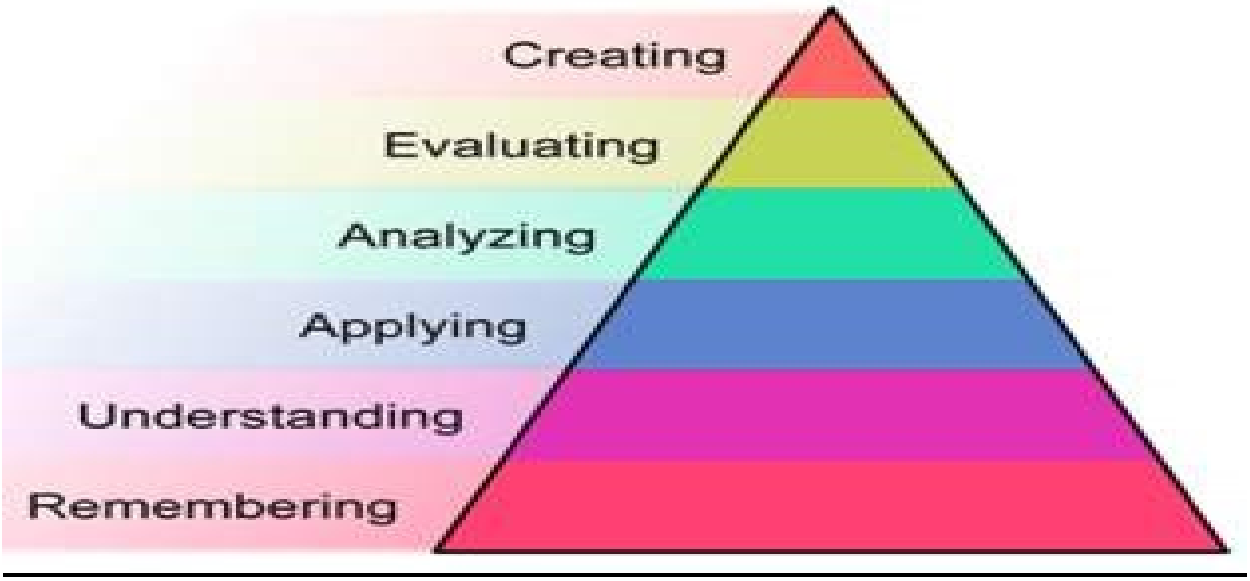
In the second year, the participants became proficient at submitting assignments and reported diarising assessment dates and improving time management. In addition, they reported introducing a diverse range of planning techniques, sharing essay plans and producing early assignment drafts for tutor feedback. Two (2/11) were able to submit sometimes as early as a month in advance.

> *"When it came to essays, I had a fixed time. I didn't have a study timetable, but I had a fixed time, so by the end of this week I should have had 500 words written and by the end of next week I should have had 1000 words"* (Participant 5).

Year 2 proved to be more challenging than year 1, with students appearing to be somewhat in a transitional stage of development. The transition participants experienced can be aligned to Blooms' (1956) taxonomy. Bloom identified six levels of cognitive development from simple recall of facts at the lowest order, through to increasingly more complex and abstract mental levels, to the highest order which he classified at evaluation. Figure 4.8 presents a visual representation of the orders.

This is what I would personally expect, since participant behaviours mirrored Vygotsky's (1934, reissued 1987) lower order skills. Lower order skills are described as knowledge retention, comprehension and application.

Figure 4.8: Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy



Source: www.Googleimages.com

The NQBSW participants were beginning to develop knowledge, skills and comprehension, adjusting their behaviour in the manner that would be expected for those driven to succeed on the social work degree course.

This section now moves on to examine the experiences of the NQBSW participants in their final year.

4.13.3 NQBSW Participants' Spoken Words - Year 3

In the final year of the social work degree course, participants voiced feelings that the pressure was on. Three (3/11) participants disclosed feeling close to burnout and adjusted their pattern of help-seeking, making valuable use of tutoring sessions.

> *"Yes, I did something different for me to have a better grade than what I had in year 2. Firstly, I discussed with my personal tutor any assignments that I'd been given and research I was doing and collate everything together and speaking to my personal tutor, this is how I've done it, is it the right way for me to do it?"* (Participant 2).

Four (4/11) participants developed a collective identity, actively sought out peers and created self-directed learning opportunities wherever and whenever they could. In year 3, all eleven (11/11), through their voices, attributed reading to their success, with many suggesting it was instrumental to their success on the degree course. This is the advice from one former student to a new entrant.

> *"Advice I would give them is for them to open up all the time. Not to keep to themselves. Anything they don't understand they should be free to talk to their colleagues and to their lecturers, so to be will set them free and improve them and improve their way of learning. Especially when they've got an assignment and they didn't do very well in previous assignments, they should go to a student who did very well, whether they're white or black and say 'this is what I've got, what did you get?' If they are more brilliant than you, let them explain to you. So you shouldn't be shy to go to your student colleagues or lecturers to explain your problem"* (Participant 2).

Figure 4.9: Spoken Words, Year 3

Source: author.

> *"I had a colleague on placement and we would meet several times a week, whether in the car or anywhere when we were going home, we could discuss just anything"* (Participant 1).

Moreover, participants formed allegiances with participants who shared similar characteristics or backgrounds and who shared the same drive to succeed.

> *"My ethnicity has a lot as a black within groups like black girls together, mothers together, learning together"* (Participant 5).

Two (2/11) participants echoed experiencing difficulties contacting their tutor outside lectures. Two (2/11) participants voiced feeling neglected, excluded and vulnerable.

> *"I felt neglected and felt my needs were not recognised. There was a time when I emailed my practice tutor and copied my personal tutor, as well as the head of department and I did not get a response for over two weeks until I had to go through my course rep who took it up and we got a response"* (Participant 2).

4.14 Valuing Diversity

Common across all three years was participants sharing that they really valued the diversity of the student population and staff on the degree.

> *"What made it good was the diversity of participants, the diversity of the lecturers as well, the teaching staff. The constructive feedback that the lecturers gave, they gave honest feedback. They criticised when criticism was due and gave praise when praise was due. As well as that, they were able to balance the mature participants and participants that were quite young, so we were able to have that mix together. The male and the female, all together, it was really good"* (Participant 10).

The participants also commented on the diversity of assessments offered on the degree.

> *"When I came to the university at the entry level, they had three assessment processes: the written, the oral and the discussion. I thought this was good because if you didn't do well in a particular area, you were able to move on in another area because in my opinion, exams are not the true test of knowledge so I thought that was very good"* (Participant 1).

Six (6/11) NQBSW participants echoed that they chose the university because of its reputation of attracting BME students and its central location. None of the participants lived on campus. The same six held the belief that the university's diversity was good and they chose it because they felt they would blend in. This clearly has a snowball effect on the numbers applying to the university from BME communities year on year, as has been the case. This strongly suggests that the diversity of the social work degree course brought added value to the participants' experiences.

This chapter now looks at the drivers to succeed on the social work degree course.

4.15 Self-determination

Common across all three years was the theme of self-determination. The concept of 'self-determination' means different things to different people. Self-determination can be understood through the visualisation of a triangle. The first side (the left) is freedom and autonomy; this freedom is deemed to be negative freedom and relates to the freedom of a person from coercion by others. Coercion is defined by Berlin as the deliberate interference of other human beings within the area in which one could act (1969, p.122, cited by Spicker, 1990). The second side (the right) is positive freedom, or the power to act. If people are not free, it is not necessarily because they are being prevented or directed by someone else; it may be because they lack the power to do it (Spicker, 1990). What links the triangle and relates to both of these is psychological freedom, which operates as an overarching relevance to both sides. Psychological freedom indicates that people are free only if the option is one which they are able to choose - which means, for example, that a student may not be free because he or she is unable to exercise a choice of action unrestricted by social conditions (such as having to work to keep a roof over their head) instead of creating time for self-directed learning.

Eight participants (8/11) were driven by sheer self-determination:

> *"The first year when I joined, I thought about how I'm going to do my assignments and how I'm going to cope. Eventually I was able to make it and now I'm so happy to make it although at first I had a lot of 40s and I think that I'm going to make it, I'm not going to drop off of this course and I've worked so hard to make it"* (Participant 2).

Interestingly, four (4/11) participants were driven by cultural values and voiced that obtaining a degree was a cultural expectation. Obtaining a degree for some African communities is a cultural imperative. Nash (2002) talks of an educational habitus, which involves characteristics such as positive orientation towards the school's environment, high aspirations, a positive self-concept, and a desire to

identify and be identified as educated, as clearly expressed by Educator Participant 5.

> *"So, coming from an African background, academic achievement is… you don't have a choice in not being academic. You don't have a choice in terms of your education, so it's something that's very important. It's definitely embedded in the culture. It's embedded in generations of my family who have all been academics and had high jobs and things like that. So, it's never been an option. You are to be educated and you are to be educated in a professional job. So whatever that is, it has to be a professional qualification"* (Educator Participant 5).

> *"Knowing that this was my first degree as a person, as a whole. So it was massive to me and my family that I am going to get a degree. This degree is not just for me, it's for my family"* (Participant 11).

This brings to mind the accumulation of capital. The accumulation of capital is an area that was of most interest to me and I took inference from Bourdieu (1987) who argues that participants have a range of capitals; these are by implication illustrated in Figure 4.2.

4.16 Reading as a Factor

'Reading' was reflected in the participants' spoken words and was a core activity across all three years. In year 1, participants shared they had underestimated how much reading would be required for a social work degree. In year 2, participants voiced about having to intensify their reading. All eleven participants in the final year talked about their experiences of reading for at least an hour and a half per day, with some others reading for up to seven hours a day.

> *"In my first year, the library had to write to me that it was too much and the lecturers were worried that I was going to burn out because I was reading too much and, on average a day, I spent seven hours of personal learning, without lectures"* (Participant 5).

Participants made use of the core readers and selected texts as recommended by their tutors. Some participants talked about securing a second reader, from either their work-based supervisors or practice educators. The participants' spoken words suggest that they had learnt to read with a purpose, employing selective reading and diversifying their reading materials to journals and specialist websites.

> *"What helped me was I realised that I had to put in more reading time. I found that, if I didn't read enough, it would reflect in my marks. So, I found that it was important to read more, read widely, not just restrictive reading to books, but also extend to journals, online reading, try and look at it as a great big jigsaw puzzle and I found that it all actually contributes to a holistic learning. So, for me, the most important thing I could do was read more and read widely"* (Participant 3).

Participants voiced that reading to understand, skim reading, using glossaries and speed reading all contributed to their success.

> *"As well, sometimes I tried to read books from cover to cover and it never worked. It was just getting those study strategies right. How to pick out, how to skim read"* (Participant 4).

The participants' utterances suggest they found learning to evaluate, analyse and synthesise the materials they were reading a challenge, but valuable skills that added to their experience. However, by the time they reached the final year they were proficient in a number of reading techniques.

> *"The difference was that I could now understand, for me, was reflection, synthesis, analyses and the critical thinking. Not just my point of view, that's where I was getting the critical understanding wrong because it was not just the way I understand things, but other people. So that's where I could say, ok, that's what's expected of me. It's not just the way I see things, but how others see things"* (Participant 2).

It is of no surprise that reading was an influential factor on the social work degree course. Reading is a skill that enabled participants to deepen meaning, recognise written words and develop understanding. The activity of reading enables learners to often grasp quite complex information from texts. Reading is a complex activity that involves both perception and thought. It is imperative for tutors to be aware of the progress that students are making at the key progression points of the social work degree course. They must adjust instructions in reading lists to the changing abilities of their students. This might include being specific about chapters to read in core texts, as opposed to just listing book titles. It is important to remember that the purpose of reading is to understand the text and to be able to learn, and then transfer the learning to practice.

Reading was a skill that empowered participants. They were able to benefit from storing knowledge from printed materials and ultimately making connections between complex concepts and practice (in real life events) (Alnahdi, 2015).

This chapter now moves on to explore the support embraced by the participants.

4.17 The Value of Group Work

Across all three years, the participants embraced a range of support. Nine (9/11) participants voiced that they participated in self-directed group work to garner support. This form of support was formed and sustained for a time-limited period. Two (2/11) participants engendered study buddies. Proximity of group members and limitations on time were acknowledged by eight (8/11), as was spending time socialising and personal time. This was particularly evident in the final year.

> *"We formed a group of about seven people, so we used to take assignments and would dissect it and ask for research from all of us and shared information and work on our individual works. In year 2 most of my marks were 70, 70, 70"* (Participant 1).

> *"But then that's how me and my study buddy bounced off each other, because I'd do it early and then we'd exchange so we'd help each other like that"* (Participant 6).

Self-directed group work was valued by participants because it gave the opportunity to negotiate understandings, share ideas, collaborate on shared goals and set authentic tasks for the benefit of group members. More importantly, the self-directed groups offered participants a third modality for learning, whereby participation in the social space enabled success. They valued the social space and interaction between lectures, and used the groups to continue to discuss concepts and extend knowledge beyond the lecture rooms.

The participants formed self-selected communities of learners (see Figure 4.10). Wenger argues that "…our participation in social settings not only shapes what we

do" but "…also who we are and how we interpret what we do" (2009, p.212). Wenger's notion of communities of learners encompasses "identity, meaning, practice and community" (2009, p.211). He defines it as the development of learners' identity, shared meanings, creativity and a sense of belonging that grows through regular activity and relationships within "these communities with support of professional learning" (2009, p.214). Participants who shared in self-directed learning groups found that they gave them a sense of community within a community.

Figure 4.10: Community of Learners

Source: www.googleimages.com

Two (2/11) participants confirmed that they did not like group work, preferring to work alone. Interestingly, both these participants talked of engaging a study buddy. A group can be defined as "a collection of people who spend some time together, who see themselves as members and who are identified by outsiders as members of a group" (Preston-Shoot, 2007, p.46).

Tuckman (1965) strongly suggests that a group develops over five key stages group formation, storming, norming performing and informing/mourning. Formation occurs when the group members first comes together, conflict is seldom voiced, if voiced, is mainly personal and definitely destructive. These members tend to defer to a large extent to those who emerge as leaders. Storming the second stage usually occurs when the group first comes together. This is when fractions form, personalities clash, and little communication occurs because no-one is listening (Preston-Shoot, 2007). Norming the third stage is when the group begins to recognise the merits of working together and the in-fighting subsides. Co-operation is evident, at this stage, members listen to each other, establish collaborative working methods and recognise the group as a whole (Jacques, 2000). In performance terms, the group start at a level slightly below the sum of the individual levels and then performance drops abruptly to its nadir, until it climbs during 'norming' to a new level of performing. Tuchman's fourth stage is performing. This is where the group has settled on a system that allows for free and frank exchange of views. Members provide a high degree of support for each other and decisions are made (Lindsay and Orton, 2008). It is this elevated level of performance that is the main justification for using the group process (Jacques, 2000). The fifth and final stage is the informing/mourning is when they start to communicate with the outside world in terms of furthering its work. Members may experience a sense of loss of support, and opportunities for personal development. This evokes euphoria about what has been achieved (or that the process is over). Mourning is the formal group termination process and the group naturally disbands because it has come to an end (Tuckman, 1965).

The impact of self-directed learning groups is built on three psychological determinants: compliance, identification and internalisation (Tuckman, 1965). Compliance occurs when a group member behaves in a manner they believe is

acceptable or desired by the group. It can be minor and short-lived, and often occurs if one group member has more control or influence over another. Individuals initially are compliant to the leader's wishes (Jacques, 2000). The second determinant is identification. Identification occurs when one group member is attracted to another. The second member adopts the behaviour and attitudes of the first, in order to sustain a positive relationship. This process is commonly known as transference (Freud, 1924). There are obvious risks, such as if the attractive person displays unprofessional, anti-social or criminal behaviour. Internalisation is the final psychological process and is the most important element to group learning (Tuckman, 1965). Group members make positive changes, through observing the behaviour of someone 'attractive' to them; the behaviour subsequently works for them in their own situation ('modelling') (Erikson, 1965). The participants talked about checking understandings as a benefit and motivator. They discussed a number of processes associated with Tuckman's group development process.

Although useful, Tuckman's (1965) model has a number of constraints. Firstly, his process is systemic so, as with all systems, they have the tendency to change criteria, social processes, context and developmental dynamics, thereby changing the nature of the group. Secondly, Tuckman's hierarchical model follows a clear five-stage process. The groups are led by humans, but as with human nature needs and priorities change. If change occurs within the group, a particular group stage may not be reached. Tuckman, (1965) offers a framework for understanding the participants' lure towards group work the stages can be mirrored against the utterances of the NQBSWs about their experiences and behaviour in years 1 and 2 of the degree course.

On a positive note, the NQBSW participants used group activities to bridge gaps in their understanding and knowledge, and the process helped expand expertise and

decision-making within the group. Although the participants articulated that group work was a major contributor to their success, the impact of self-directed groups on learners of similar or different abilities is unknown. However, this may be an area for future investigation. Neither do we know about the interdependent relationship between teaching, learning and assessment, and self-directed groups. Groupwork is sensitive to choice and selection, and offers a third choice of learning modality that was consistent with the participants' life experiences, cultures, values and aspirations. It offered the participants the opportunity to ask insightful questions, incisive analyses, interpretations and, of course, greater cultural understanding, making learning more meaningful, insightful and culturally sensitive. The group interaction created interdependency among members.

Seven (7/11) embraced support from within the university. This included the Library, Student Advice Centre, Disability Service, Wellbeing Service, Student Union and Skills for Learning Support. Having a named librarian as the key point of contact was said to be useful. Over the duration of the social work degree course, the participants exercised a greater understanding of the benefits of using the university's support mechanisms. This finding is directly linked to the Cahill (2014) study (see section 2.10), previously discussed.

The participants in my study experienced low levels of educational expectations and had a poor understanding of how to navigate their social space (the university). This lack of navigation resulted in participants not experiencing the university's environment as liberating, as it was intended to be (Neary and Beetham, 2015). Notwithstanding this, when they did have a significant encounter, whether that be with a librarian, tutor or educator, the engagement experience increased their levels of expectation. None of the participants were found to have a strong understanding of the university's environment - their social space.

Nine (9/11) participants attended a six week evening course on developing academic skills at another university. This was after attending the home university's 'Skills for Learning' in-service development sessions. This provides more evidence of the NQBSWs going the extra mile.

> *"Yes, that was my aim but I did have doubts. I did think because my written skills were quite poor so I knew I needed to put in the extra. So I did. I did extra lessons at an external university"* (Participant 6).

> *"I think for me it's going that extra mile, putting in above average attendance, above average commitment. I think my behaviour all-in-all was about coming in early, staying late, coming in on Saturdays, in the holidays, coming in on specific days!"* (Participant 3).

This strongly suggests that this group of participants were prepared to go the extra mile to succeed on their course and attain their degree

Four (4/11) participants talked about understanding their own limitations and this being a barrier to their success.

> *"Also to accept my flaws and, I think in my personal life, I was doing the same kind of thing. Looking at myself and trying to make changes so I was able to accept my flaws, my limitations so just as much as in this course. I think being able to accept feedback, knowing that I don't know it all and just being open all the time to new understandings and new ways of seeing things and doing things"* (Participant 6).

Self-directed learning groups clearly made a difference to the students' learning. The function of group work is also supported by Chickering and Gamson (1999), who argue that reciprocity, cooperation and time spent on tasks all contribute to

student success. Their best practice model has been discussed earlier (see section 2.5).

4.18 Participation Matters

Participation appeared to be a common theme across all three years. Six (6/11) participants in year 1 rising to nine (9/11) in year 3 reported on the usefulness of engaging in self-directed learning opportunities. The self-directed groups were, by the end of the second year, winding down. However, a number of group members remained close friends and have maintained contact even after completing their degrees. It appears that, in the second year, participation in some self-directed learning group activities floundered due to the participants being on placement four days a week. Meanwhile, other self-directed learning groups thrived, with participants benefiting from the shared responsibilities and focused activities for the benefit of members. By the second year of the course, students participated in and valued the one-to-one tutorials with tutors. Five participants (5/11) shared having participated in the use of electronic devices to maintain the self-directed learning activities. This is echoed in the words of Participant 5.

> *"Yes, so we were sharing information and we got a WhatsApp group together where we were able to share information"* (Participant 5).

Five (5/11) participants reported having made great improvements in how they managed their time outside of university. Four (4/11) participants participated in meetings with tutors to discuss feedback and were determined to improve their mark whether it was below 40% or above 70%.

> *"I was disappointed on my last practice study, because I had spoken with my tutor and I knew he marked my essay before and*

I said to him, 'how can I move from a 72% to a 90%?'" (Participant 3).

This group of participants had high expectations of their own abilities and held a desire for a better future. This is supported by Ogbu (1993), Merzer (2007) and Gillborn (2008) and was summarised earlier in section 2.14. Further support is provided by Boxer *et al.*'s (2011) large-scale national study, which found that disadvantaged groups (including black and working class students) had considerably higher aspirations than would be expected. The process of forming expectations must therefore be cognitively distinct from forming aspirations. Expectations then may be a better indicator for success. This suggests that perhaps policy should focus on expectations rather than aspirations.

One likely factor in expectation formation was the influence of cultural values, the desire for personal advancement and careerist motivations. High expectations among NQBSW participants appeared to be the key agency that influenced academic success on this degree course. Unlike aspirations, expectations included a complex set of internal and external judgments about the future. This was echoed in the following responses:

"I did not believe I had the potential for university" (Participant 6).

"I questioned whether or not I was good enough to be here" (Participant 9).

The participants' responses not only reflected their desire to succeed, but also how likely they thought that their ethnic backgrounds would allow them to do so. This was influenced by media and societal forces that regularly report that black students are more likely to underperform, would not do well in higher education, and should expect to earn less than their white counterparts who had similar if not equal qualifications. The high expectations of black students have historically been

seen as a problem (Gillborn, 2008). This problem is embedded in the deficit discourse and has been critiqued by Archer (2018), who argues that the deficit model fails to locate educational choices within longstanding social structures and absolves universities from any responsibility to change.

The results from my own study indicate that NQBSW participants have 'Cracked the Code' and they have both the drive and desire to succeed and achieve their degrees. This drive stems from a belief in the participants' own agency, help-seeking behaviours and their aspirations to join the profession. Aspirations were rooted in a desirable future. These aspirations, tempered with the desire for a better future, engender elements of 'achievability' and the development of an '*I can do this'* attitude. This is both internalised ('*I can achieve this'*) and externalised ('*will I be allowed to achieve this?*') (Harrison & Waller, 2018).

Three (3/11) participants, having completed their degrees, held the belief that their poor start had meant they were always playing 'catch-up' and, as a result, they had missed an opportunity to fully engage in university life.

The participants' voices suggest that the nine key factors which influenced academic success on this degree course were (1) reading, (2) the diversity of the degree, (3) self-directed groupwork, (4) cultural values, (5) attendance, (6) personal advancement, (7) participation, (8) social forces and (9) going the extra mile (see Figure 5.1). I believe that the participants' accounts unequivocally speak for themselves; academic success for them was driven by participation, low expectations and high aspirations. More importantly, these participants had a clear sense and understanding that hard work and going the extra mile at university would bring about future rewards.

4.19 Impact of Ethnicity

There were mixed feelings about the impact of ethnicity. Four (4/11) participants thought that it was an advantage due to the large black student population, whilst five (5/11) felt their ethnic origin put them at a disadvantage.

> *"The advantage was there was so many people from my ethnicity in my class, so it was not as bad. But then still it was bad in a way that I found that when I had lecturers that were black or whatever, there was a different kind of vibe in a sense that they would push you and it was like you can do this, they believed in you. But other lecturers, there was not that vibe"* (Participant 6).

> *"I think my ethnicity maybe had an impact on my level of self-doubt going along my life. I think when I was at school, not getting much support, it seemed to be the black kids. Sometimes we did present with quite challenging behaviour in this society, per se, and the teachers that were trying to teach us were not used to that behaviour. That probably impacted a great deal on me and growing up, as I said before, I didn't see myself as a student"* (Participant 1).

Four (4/11) of the NQBSW participants' experiences were tainted by micro-racial aggressions.

> *"Being Black African, it was really difficult sometimes, especially on placement, because most of the time, the clients would be given that my first name is* [name] *which is English, but when they see you, they see a black person. So sometimes it's so hard for the service users to receive you in their houses because they are really thinking, "Oh, what are you bringing?" But, sometimes when you work with them and the way you speak to them, they are really willing to work with you"* (Participant 8).

Three (3/11) of the participants expressed feelings of unease and perceptions about their accents and how this may be perceived by peers and service users of social services. Participants consciously held fears of being laughed at because of the way they spoke. This operated as a hindrance to student confidence and their ability to communicate and engage.

> *"There were times when maybe a particular talk was going on and talking about Africa, the response I got from others, even other ethnic minorities was very negative. Also, I felt a result of my ethnicity complicated how I communicate because others have been brought up in their own culture. I noticed that in my colleagues and at times I felt very discouraged and not confident about myself and that affected the way that I was communicating in the class because, even if I knew the answer to a question, I would think, do I want to make people laugh by saying this, or do I want to put the lecturer off by talking in class, it was a dilemma for me"* (Participant 1).

Five (5/11) participants valued having lecturers who had similar characteristics to themselves. They alluded to black lecturers having a deeper understanding of them as a group and felt that they brought a good vibe into the classroom. Participants found black lecturers to be aspirational.

> *"Having black lecturers was very important because I felt that they could understand and identify with me. With the black tutors, which I don't understand why there are very few at universities, especially in* [name of city] *that is very diverse, it's easier to talk to them because they understand, even if they have been born here, they have parents, they have families so they are able to understand what we don't understand. They are able to understand the way we think, they are able to understand our thought processes"* (Participant 11).

The issue of numbers of black academics is currently trending in the media, with University College London campaigns like “Why Isn’t My Professor black? (The Morgan, 2016) and “Why Is My Curriculum White?” (Hussain, 2015). On the subject of diversity, one Educator Participant voiced that:

> *“We must not forget the Importance of a role model and same race teaching. It is good for self- esteem and for raising the personal aspirations of students”* (Educator Participant 3).

Out of the 185,000 professors in the UK, only 85 define themselves as black (HESA, 2018). Both campaigns were initiated by students at University College London in response to the #RhodesMustFall campaign initiated at Oxford University. Oxford University students of colour demanded exposure to a wider cross-section of non-European thinkers on their courses. Their actions improved historical awareness of the context in which the materials they were reading had been created.

Six (6/11) participants alluded to not feeling good about themselves.

> *“I didn’t see myself as being a productive member of society. I just thought I’d get any job just to pay my bills. I’m sure my ethnicity had an impact on the way I thought about myself, definitely, big time. For me, this is a lot to do with mind-set”* (Participant 4).

This is supported by Collins *et al.* (2010) who infer that those with lower self-esteem may require more support than their counterparts. Participants’ perceptions suggest that white students were doing academically better than blacks. However, this was the result of negative societal forces that are often perpetrated by the media and wider society, for example that black students are less likely to obtain a quality degree, more likely to withdraw, and earn less when in employment than their white counterparts (Andrews, 2018). Black participants

had internalised negative societal messages about themselves and their community, causing negative unconscious conflict (Helms, 1984) (termed 'internalised racism'). This manifested in participants not feeling good about themselves, or not expecting to do well. Over the degree course, these NQBSW participants were able to see beyond the racist mantra and stereotypes, and perform equally, if not better, than their white counterparts.

Ethnic identity was used as a motivator to establish themselves as students, but also acted as a barrier to learning, with participants articulating that they felt a sense of invisibility and/or inadequacy. Talking about why they felt inadequate, one participant stated:

> *"I'm sure my ethnicity had an impact on the way I thought about myself, definitely, big time. For me this is a lot to do with mind-set. The messages I've heard along my life put me in a position where I was just one way thinking and didn't see myself outside of that box"* (Participant 4).

Participants were at different levels of understanding about how ethnic identity might have shaped their experiences of university. On a personal level, the participants believed that the university knew better than they did themselves about what was best for them. Secondly, on an interpersonal level, the participants anticipated racial marginalisation in the workforce even before they had experienced it. Structural societal oppressions reward black people who are submissive and abide by society's stereotypes and isolates or rejects those who do not (Bivens, 1995). The university's structures made it difficult for participants to fully engage in university life, as it failed to create a sense of belonging among some of the participants. In addition, the participants themselves created self-imposed barriers to learning which made it difficult for them to access support from the internal support mechanisms.

I believe the university has a duty to recognise the unique support needs of black students by creating an environment that facilitates acceptance, where they are actively visible, and where the environment promotes a sense of belonging. This approach should aim to help students develop a positive sense of self and reverse the internalisation of stereotypes and conformity within the participant group.

Black students need to be empowered to believe that the oppression and problems they encounter are not all self-imposed (Fontaine, 2016). Rather, they are the product of a toxic and hostile environment that is set up to recreate social inequalities. This approach would of course benefit all students, not just black ones.

Having explored the impact of ethnicity, we will now move to the penultimate major theme, impostor syndrome (Urwin, 2018).

4.20 Impostor Syndrome

Eight (8/11) NQBSW participants expressed self-doubt, panic, feelings of guilt and struggled to recognise their own efforts. These participants alluded to having strong desires to succeed; seven (7/11) participants, even after graduating, still could not believe that they had been awarded a first class degree.

> *"I'm going to start at the beginning of the first year which I was quite in panic, because I didn't know what was expected of me as a student. I wanted to achieve but I didn't know how to do it, to be able to reach that level which I've got now, the first class"* (Participant 8).

These participants had internalised the negative societal messages about black people and where other students had gained entrance to the degree via an access course, these issues resulted in these participants lacking in confidence and self-

worth. Four (4/11) alluded to the fact that they did not expect to do well and this was based on societal stereotypes of black people having inferior intellectual skills, typically drawn from British society. This group of participants harboured high expectations and their behaviour can be attributed to a concept termed 'impostor syndrome' (Urwin, 2018). They saw success as normal, and not excellence (Urwin 2018).

Impostor syndrome is a theme that was embodied by most of the NQBSW participants. "Impostor syndrome is referred to as impostor phenomena. It is defined as 'the persistent unwarranted feelings of inadequacy and fraudulence relating to one's own ability or performance'" (Clance, 1985, p.34), an example of beliefs about why black participants do not do as well as whites.

> *"I think it goes way back, because books were taken away from us and we were told not to study. I've heard people say a few times that if you want to hide something from a black person, put it in a book. Again, it's a reoccurring theme"* (Participant 4).

The term 'way back' infers a reference to the days when African people were enslaved pre-colonialism and banned from reading. In those days, it was believed that if a black person could read or was 'learned' they should be considered as being dangerous to his or her owner.

Although impostor syndrome has been widely researched in educational settings (Kuliesis, 2016), the research has been mainly conducted on academics and practitioners. Notwithstanding, this, Kuliesis (2016) and Urwin (2018) have approached it from a social work perspective. Urwin's recent quantitative study of practising social workers found that impostor syndrome was frequently experienced. Her sample included social workers and managers, of which 59% reported impostorism. Urwin's findings suggest that these two groups regularly

experience the syndrome whilst in practice. Social workers are not alone, since this finding is supported by Collins *et al.* (2010) and Dziegliewski *et al.* (2004), who both imply that even before participants start (referring to professional programmes such as social work, occupational health and nursing) the profession, they endure stress before they take on the erroneous task of being a professional.

> *"You have to put the work in. I'm still in shock and think, wow, I've got a first degree. It feels funny."* (Participant 4)

The symptoms of impostor syndrome may persist even after achieving goals objectively being perceived as successful (Clance, 1985). This is evident from the following extracts.

> *"In terms of my academic work, especially when I failed at this subject, I thought it was black participants only. My question was, why only black participants? Does it mean maybe the white participants are better than us because also we are doing better than them in other subjects? So, it raised a question mark for me"* (Participant 3).

Figure 4.11: Student Perceptions of Being Disadvantaged

Source: Googleimages.com

> *"I had only one fail and that one fail was, actually two fails. One was social policy. I struggled. We all struggled. Not the whole class, those of us who were born overseas struggled with social policy. The majority of us failed the social policy the first time around. I didn't fail, I barely passed. I got 40 something which for me was like a fail. I was disappointed as my lowest mark. It was my lowest mark in year 2 because I've always been on 60s and 70s. It was quite interesting because, especially the older white participants, they scored really high. They were on 80s and we couldn't believe it"* (Participant 11).

As a result of their effort, a student may do well in the task. However, the student fails to recognise their effort and input into the task. The second way impostorism manifests is through procrastination. This is where the task appears so enormous or complicated that the student becomes overwhelmed and avoids the task, or delays starting it because they do not feel they are fully equipped to complete it (Urwin, 2018).

> *"I felt overwhelmed, we all felt overwhelmed and I didn't know what my expectation was and I didn't know what to expect. There was a lot of 'why's' and there was a lot of fear and worry if I was going to be able to complete the course"* (Participant 11).

They procrastinate and delay not starting until the deadline looms, then put themselves under unnecessary pressure to meet the deadline. This does not guarantee that the outcomes for these students will be any different. In the long-term neither of these strategies are sustainable and they are likely to exacerbate unnecessary stress on the student. This will result in issues of progression and retention, whereby these participants often felt unsupported by the institution, leading them to believe they were not good enough (McDowell *et al*., 2015).

Clance (1985) advocates that impostor syndrome stems from childhood and is more likely to be found in families where there is highly expressed emotion. This has been particularly evident in intelligence and personal goal setting. The development of impostor syndrome may emerge from a childhood experience similar to that in scenario 2 (Figure 4.12).

Figure 4.12: Scenario 2

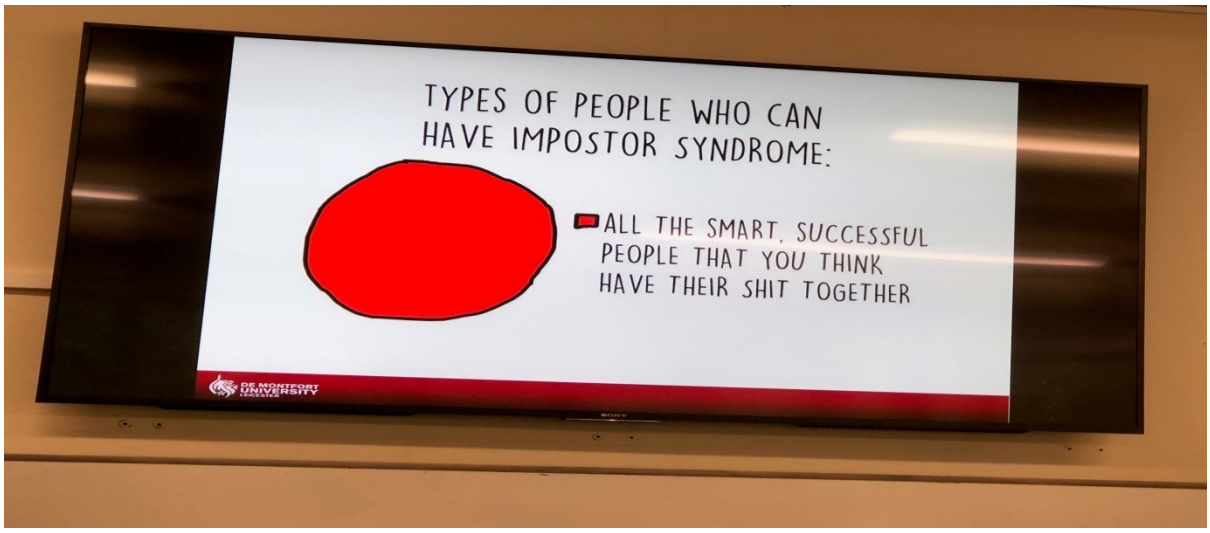
Think about the student who comes home excited because she/he got 3 Bs and two Cs. The student shares these with a parent. The parent looks over at the grade sheet and responds by saying “Ok, but where are your As?”.

It is clear that the student and parent in the second scenario have different ideas of what success is. The student begins to internalise the lack of praise and develops negative feelings about their performance. This then creates the Hawthorne effect, where the student wants to succeed and receive praise (stimulus response). This, I believe, is about self-preservation and the use of one’s defence mechanism as described by Freud (1924). It is unclear whether the syndrome is a cause or result of these factors, or whether they are commonly co-occurring (Urwin, 2018). Given the paucity of evidence available on impostor syndrome and the impact on black students, I would recommend it be highlighted for future investigation.

Impostor syndrome is more likely to occur in high achievers and causes them to dismiss or overlook their success. Those who experience impostor syndrome are more likely to have done well at school and have high expectations of themselves. Nonetheless, they often attribute their success to external sources.

"I don't believe, and probably I'm being a bit hard on myself, but I don't believe I would have done as well without a study buddy" (Participant 6).

Figure 4.13: Impostor Syndrome



Source: Milton Keynes Social Work Educator Conference, 11-12 September 2018; permission granted.

Alternately, academic success can be diminished by individuals, suggesting that the course was easy or that anyone would be able to achieve similar results (Clance, 1985). This signals that black participants who experience poor self-esteem may be exposing their vulnerability, inexperience or inability.

"As a result of a lack of self-affirmation, this type of student does not approach tasks with confidence. Rather, they approach the tasks with anxiety and trepidation" (Urwin, 2018, p.1433). Is it possible that these participants approach tasks with greater emotional impact and thus use their attribution errors in a negative way? This may imply that black participants have greater exposure to impostor syndrome than their white counterparts.

This chapter now moves to the final theme, playing the game.

4.21 Playing the Game

The final year represents mastery of the subject, with participants moving from being passive student learners (Vygotsky, 1987) to developing the professional identity of a newly qualified professional. This transition can be aligned to Vygotsky's 'Zone of Proximity' (1987). Mastery of the discipline has been explored in the literature review through the work of Anastas and Videka (2012) (see section 2.10).

Participants made good use of their time outside of university.

> *"I had a visual timetable and I needed to have that with me at all times travelling to my placements. Whenever I found I was on my own, I always had my visual timetable, I was reading, I used every little space in the day to add to support myself in my learning"* (Participant 8).

The participants' mobilised capital, participated in self-directed learning groups and engaged with tutors' attempts to scaffold and mentor. In the final year, the participants were able to better manage the degree's multiple demands with support from educators and other university support staff, including the library, Dyslexia Support Unit and the Skills For Learning Unit,

> *"I had a different understanding. When I started, I thought academic success was actually succeeding and getting a first, but now that I've got to the third year I realised that it wasn't just getting a first, it was everything that came with it. It wasn't just learning in school, but actually putting it in practice"* (Participant 7).

More importantly at this stage, participants had 'Cracked the Code' or were 'playing the game', and this feeds nicely into the final emerging theme adopted from Bourdieu. 'Playing the game', according to Bourdieu (2002), is the stage where participants mobilise capital in both active and internalised ways to position themselves advantageously (for a future in social work in this case). Talking about such students:

> *"They're always there Monday morning and don't leave until they need to and they're fully involved in all the discussions, the activities, they've done the reading. And I'm monitoring some of them on Moodle and I know when they're looking at the Moodle site. It might be the wee hours of the morning but they've found the time to do it"* (Educator Participant 4).

Some participants had a greater awareness about acquiring and mobilising their capital than others. Regardless of the degree of perceived agency or internalised action, participants still operated within the rules of the game to secure an advantage.

Many middle-class students have an internalised understanding of 'the game' and play it well without actively considering the mechanisms of their own operations, whilst others operate in a more intentional way (Waller, 2017). These ideas can be suitably applied to the NQBSW participants' journeys to join the profession.

4.22 Conclusion

The chapter has provided an integrated summary of the spoken words of the participants. It has elaborated upon the progress made by the participants at key stages of their journey to attain their degree and become a social work professional.

Bourdieu's work has been readily accepted in the field of higher education (Urwin, 2018) and has been a useful lens to help in better understanding the participants' constructions of academic success. In summary, Bourdieu (2002) has enabled us to apply key thinking regarding tools, habitus, capital, field and playing the game. He is, however, open to a number of critiques. Firstly, Bourdieu is French; his most influential work was carried out back in 1977 on first the Algerian community and later works the French population who have a very different prevailing culture, environment and context. His work in Algiers explored the impact of culture not and not ethnicity even though his subjects were Kabyles, Sharvia and the Mozabites the indigenous Algerian African and European communities, who were warring at the time of his ethnographic study. Disappointingly, in his more recent works also failed to explore ethnicity and how it might interact with societal structures. The translation of his work to English was problematic because of the difficulty of his expression of thought. Also perhaps because of the uses to which the esoteric writing about a particular species of French intellectual can be put in the accumulation of capitals, in certain areas of academic life claims Jenkins, (1992). Bourdieu models address process and history are described rather than understood according to Jenkins, (1992). Social change for example may be the by-product of the determination of changed circumstances. This suggests a charge of determinism is justified. Meaning, social structure and history produce habitus. This in turn, generates practices which serve, in the absence of external forces, to reproduce social structure. As a consequence history replicates its self. Any substantial deviance from imperatives of the habitus is so inconceivable that he does not even consider it (Jenkins, 1992). He does not consider why individual circumstances a change. His original work is full of French intellectual narcissisms, but of significant importance to sociology. His model of social structures is not particularly new, sociologists like Weber, Durkheim and Marx have provided similar models and understandings of society and its inter relationships. This would not be a problem if he had not persistently presented his findings as new

and radical ways of thinking. His understanding of a field does little to explain how the field came about being or how fields can be identified, their boundaries, finally his work fails to acknowledge the differences between people and institutions. Bourdieu's ideas about how individuals collude with their own domination while overstated and deterministic, resonates with a complex and substantial plausibility. Control, censorship and conformism are never more effective than when they are self-imposed Jenkins (1992). Nonetheless, he is, however, considered to be the last author working within the late modern era (Waller, 2017) and has demonstrated how we achieve social competence. I felt his work focused too much on structure and, if the truth be told, did not consider the role of agency primarily through the absence of reflexivity.

This findings and discussion chapter has examined the impact of ethnicity, diversity, as well as the students' experiences of their teaching, learning and assessment. Impostor syndrome was also identified and discussed. These themes were reflected in the experiences of the participants throughout the three years of their social work degree course.

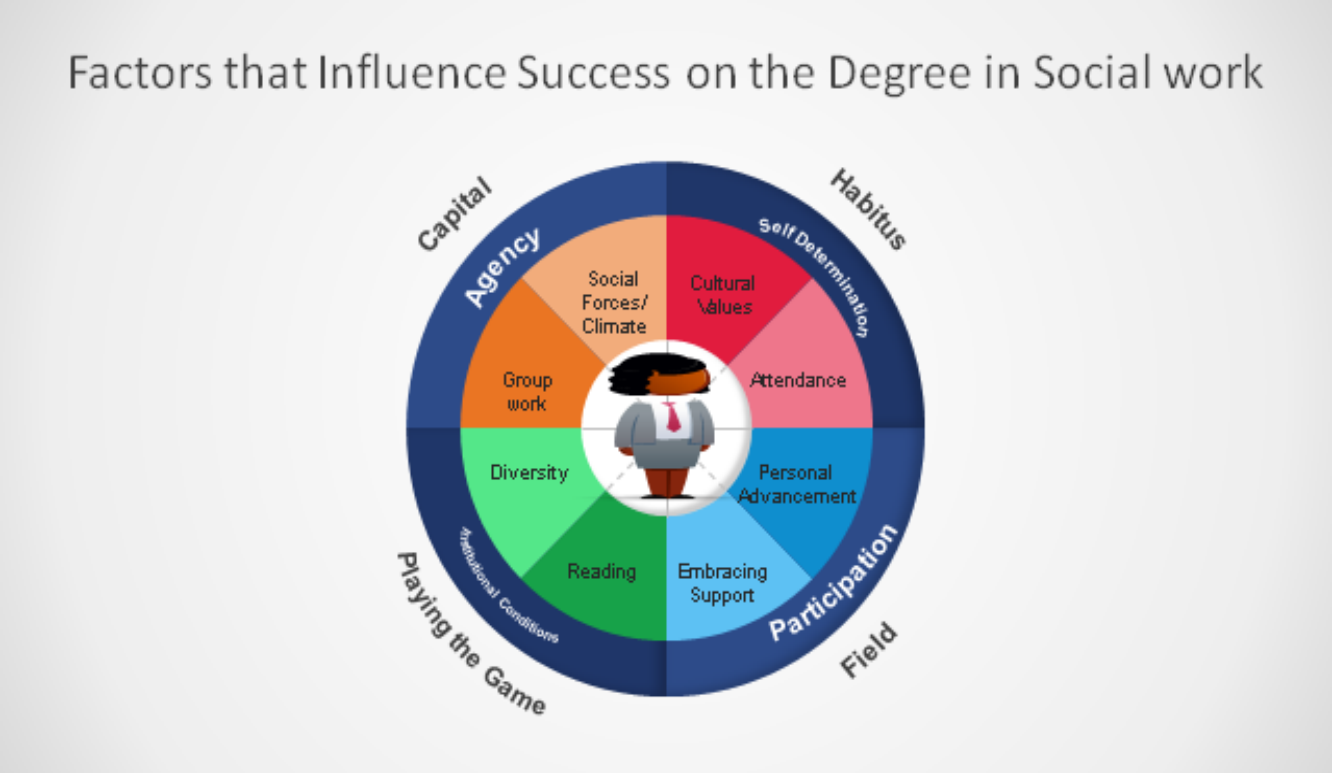
The study now moves to the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 General Conclusion

This study has aimed to explore and understand the human experience, perceptions, motivations and behaviours of NQBSWs and their educators. In summary, firstly, the factors that influence 'academic success', as voiced by NQBSWs and their educators, can be understood through the theoretical lens of Bourdieu's thinking tools (Habitus, Field, Capital and Playing the Game).

Figure 5.1: Factors that Influence Academic Success



Source: author.

Secondly, the spoken words of the NQBSWs suggest that the factors which influence success are university conditions, individual motivations, self-directed learning and sheer self-determination. Added to these factors, I have identified

four key skills used by participants to succeed. These were organisational, reading, participation and the ability to function in groups (see section 4.18). All these factors contributed to the participants' success on their social work degree course (see Figure 4.5).

The subject of academic success is poorly understood and a complex area of education. Conceptually, it captures only student performance and does not fully cover student learning. In plain language, it captures the student's ability to meet the performance criteria. This suggests that grades are used to measure the student's learning or knowledge. This then denotes that they are proxy measurements, intended to capture the attainment of learning, the acquisition of skills and competences (Kuh *et al*., 2006).

With this in mind, re-defining 'academic success' might comprise of the attendance at an educational institution, where one is supported to meet personal goals and rewarded for one's efforts (see Figure 5.1). The participants' understanding of academic success has been used to encapsulate the generally accepted desired student outcomes. There was incongruence in the literature between how academic success is defined and measured.

From here on, this chapter is structured into two key sections (individual factors and institutional factors) that appear to influence academic success on this degree course. The chapter then describes the study recommendations, limitations and reporting outlets.

5.2 Individual Factors

Overwhelmingly, the participants' voices alluded to obtaining the degree of BA(Hons) in Social Work as the ultimate goal of their educational journey, whilst

others articulated wanting to gain access to the profession as their final destination.

Some of the NQBSW participants shared that it was the right time in their life, having raised their children, whilst others were motivated to improve their social status.

Over the three years of this social work degree course, the participants had navigated their capital to gain advantage. This was particularly evident at the key progression points. The spoken words of the participants identified 'determination' to be a key factor in the successful completion of their degree course. Other factors included personal values, aspirations, family expectations, personal performance, completion of assignments, and use of time outside of lectures.

Other links were associated with collaborative relationships with faculty tutors and other staff. Of most interest was the finding that the NQBSWs were driven by culturally-based aspirations of obtaining a degree which was recognised to be a symbol of their 'rite of passage'. This message came through the values and aspirations of the NQBSW participants and educators, particularly for their families. Raising the aspirations of BME students has been a key government goal over the last 30 years. 'Aspiration' has been defined as "the desire to enter higher education and realise personal potential through gaining a higher qualification" (DfES, 2018, p.5). This goal is also supported by the publications *Aim Higher* (DfES, 2003) and *Widening Participation* (DfES, 2006) policies and, then more recently, the *National Strategy for Access and Success in Higher Education* (DfES, 2018).

In social work, it is assumed that those entering programmes have basic skills in communication, problem-solving and reflection. It is also assumed that new

entrants are adept in academic writing, observation, empathy, organisational skills and are expected to be goal-oriented; these are all considered to be 'student capital'. When a student believes they do not possess these 'capitals' they identify as being fraudulent or an 'impostor'. They perceive that they do not have the prerequisite skills required to successfully pass their degree. The NQBSW participants' voices suggest that many of them experienced such impostor syndrome. These feelings were also linked to self-loathing, emanating from the current toxic social forces infiltrating British society. This manifested in participants experiencing feelings of low self-esteem and low self-worth, with a number also experiencing self-loathing.

Impostor syndrome was manifested in two extremes, with these students either over-preparing or procrastinating. The NQBSW participants in the study experienced both ends of the spectrum. The participants who over-prepared believed that they had to do more or 'go the extra mile' to meet the required standards. An example of going over and above or going the extra mile (as coined by the participants) as what would be expected is given below.

> *"When it was close to submitting one of the assignments I had to do a lot of research. It was interesting that about 8 of us spent the night in the library, we worked through the night. And it was really fun. It didn't feel like night time. We went to Tesco, we bought so much food.* [Name] *bought so many snacks and we were all just in the library and working together, all of us that stayed in the library overnight all had 60s and 70s"* (Participant 11).

On this issue of ethnicity, this group is purported to be problematic and hard to reach (Hamid & Walker, 1995). However, this was not the case for my study participants, fourteen of whom (14/16) were from ethnic minorities and who volunteered involvement free of coercion.

Ethnicity played a large part in these participants' success. Firstly, both the NQBSW participants and the course educators had been exposed to social forces and powerful negative stereotypical messages about their communities. These messages had been embodied from an early age and had embedded themselves into the participants' unconsciousness, acting as a barrier to learning.

Vygotsky (1987) may help in the analysis of the processes at work. He strongly suggests that, through the process of internalisation, negative stereotypes become reliant on commutative language. This language operates like an inner speech and extends verbal thinking. The development of the mind of a student is then both individual and social, and it has the ability to drive student success.

The recorded words of the participants speak volumes about how resilient they are, how they coped on the course with the adversity, whilst still being able to play the game. The participants adapted to the environment, reframed their blackness and developed a 'can do' mindset which contributed to their success on the degree course. Making sense of this finding, utilising the theory of Ogbu (1993), I strongly suggest that black students, when they are in a majority population, can be their 'authentic self', 'true to their cultural norms', and develop a collective identity which is not threatened. They are the host community and not involuntarily incorporated. This resulted in an increase in confidence and self-worth. Somehow the race felt fairer. These confidence and esteem issues may impact upon and drive this group's success. I suggest the performance outcomes for those involved in my study were particularly good because their student identities were not under threat, as they constituted the majority of the population. This finding is supported by Conner *et al.* (2004), whose study also found that black African students perform as well, if not better, than their white counterparts, particularly where they make up the majority population (see section 2.12).

My study will contribute to the growing body of evidence that supports debates which confer that black students are not necessarily the problem and that, if appropriately supported, BME students can perform equally, if not better, than their white counterparts. It appears that when black students make up the majority population, the landscape can change and is changing. Furthermore, the participants expected to achieve markedly lower outcomes than they desired. We can make sense of this by using the suggestion of Markus and Nurius (1986) that there is frequent misalignment between 'like to be' and 'probable selves'. I would argue that the participants used self-directed learning activities as a third modality of learning to further understand and complement lectures. This group interaction played a useful role and appears to be instrumental to student success. This, I would argue strongly, suggests that the participants established their lives as graduate 'like to be' and held strong beliefs that they would one day be competent professionals, 'probable future selves', worthy of joining the profession.

Another overwhelming contributor to success, according to the participants, was the formation and interaction of self-directed groups. These were organised along race, gender and faith lines and were seen as going the extra mile by both sets of participants. My experience tells me that these self-directed groups could possibly be conceived as a threat when positioned beside others. There is clear evidence that black students face additional hurdles even before entering university. This suggests that they may start at a disadvantage and feel there is a need to go the extra mile to succeed.

5.3 Institutional Factors

The university has a role to play in the performance of black students. My experience tells me that this institution has not quite grasped the rostrum to create an inclusive platform that recognises the uniqueness and benefits of a majority

BME population. It might consider looking to the USA for best practice, since they have had the pleasure of BME majority college populations for over 60 years, going back to the days of racial desegregation.

The university under study here has continued to ignore and trivialise the ethnic make-up of its study population in favour of blissful ignorance and normativity, as has been alluded to in the literature on education and BME students in England (Gillborn, 2008; Singh, 2011).

The findings reveal that when considering academic success, one should not only consider the students' habitus but also consider the study institution's environment, the role that the university's faculty staff play (including lecturers, practice educators, library staff, student services and administrators), since they all have an impact on academic success. This is supported by Chickering and Gamson (1999) as noted earlier (see section 2.7). However, they are careful to interject that any kind of change to the university, institutionally or structurally, is highly unlikely because 'this is just the way things are'.

Universities have a duty to promote and foster an inclusive environment for all their students and should not rely solely on student engagement and motivation. Students make a conscious choice to attend, which is often based on the university's reputation and location. Universities need to accept that there is a problem with race inequality; the first step is to encourage an open dialogue on white privilege and how it manifests and is detrimental to its student population. Not that the reader needs reminding, black students are more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds, so in financial terms 'come with a premium'.

The NQBSW participants welcomed the support they had received from their educators and tutors, and they valued being believed in and having their efforts

recognised. The educator participants shared the challenges of having to balance administrative responsibilities and their pastoral roles. However, if we are to build on our success as social work educators, we must ensure that the needs of the student remain paramount. The university needs to recognise the structural and cultural changes shaping their institution and how the multiple demands placed on educators may impact on the time available for quality tutorial support. However, whilst educators try to keep these multiple balls all up in the air at the same time, the student experience must remain as priority.

In an effort to undertake 'best practice', the study university's social work department has introduced the student/educator tutorial contract to enhance the quality and focus of tutorials. The contract aims to identify areas for academic improvement and encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and development. The social work team have also developed a feedback pledge in collaboration with their students. This pledge sets minimum standards for student assessment feedback and ensures that such feedback is balanced, individualised and fair. Tutors are committed to meet with students twice a semester and offer advanced feedback on assignment plans of up to 500 words.

The NQBSW participants shared that they would have welcomed better preparation for university life, experiencing the university's induction as 'information overload'.

The university must own the population characteristics of their workforce and the strategies to redress the imbalance (or the lack of them). The diversity of the teaching staff mattered and had an aspirational impact on the participants. The BME educators were perceived as having a deeper understanding of the specific needs of the participants.

Given the numbers of BME postgraduates available each year from academia, the study university could consider actively growing its own academic staff by recruiting from their own pool of postgraduates. Less than one percent of all UK professors are black (UCU, 2017), suggesting a need for more creative ways to attract these communities to higher education.

Universities have been quick to jump on the international market to promote their products and opportunities to transfer knowledge and position themselves as being inclusive. Maybe it is time to 'clean our own back gardens', although this may make uncomfortable reading for some. If we to fail to make race equality a priority at all levels, we will continue to maintain the *status quo*. Universities were set up to be liberal and tolerant social spaces, but this may no longer be the case for some who feel marginalised and uncomfortable within their university environment.

Ultimately, the university should be working towards developing a workforce that better reflects the communities it is serving. This might require moving away from the colonialist regime of teaching in higher education. Is it time to decolonialise the academy, since it was never set up for the diversity in student populations that we experience today? This may indicate that it may no longer be 'fit for purpose', as inferred by Dominelli (2007). There is a necessity to 'think outside the box', look to different pedagogies and approaches to teaching and knowledge exchange for the next generation of disadvantaged students now pursuing graduate status. The old 'one size fits all' approach is no longer viable, since the 'old hat no longer fits'. Professor Deborah Husbands, a Senior Lecturer at the University of Westminster, signals that "it is time to do something different" (Husbands, 2019).

The university's response to race has been somewhat based upon rhetoric, with outputs like 'unconscious bias' training for staff, assessment blind marking and

celebrating annual Black History month. It is noted that they facilitate a race equality forum for staff and are fully in pursuance of the race equality charter. However, given that students now pay for their education, it can be considered a service provider and has a specific duty under the Equality Act 2010 to provide equality in outcomes for all its students. The black pound is now the university's 'bread and butter', making up nearly 60% of income from such students. Is it not time to invest in our customers before they turn away?

5.4 Key Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The study university may want to rethink its induction and orientation processes. It needs to reconsider the time spent on orientation and the amount of information shared during the induction week. Could more of the induction be delivered through virtual technology, over a longer period, or structured differently, to allow the student population more time to navigate and benefit from the university's social spaces?

Recommendation 2: More must be done to recruit and create systems to retain existing BME staff, in particular, academic BME staff, as has already been done to redress the gender imbalance in higher education. Would it be possible to map race equality to the gender equality agenda? The study university might want to consider growing their own BME expertise from among its existing graduates and staff, as has been done in other countries such as the USA, which has been grappling with race equality far longer the English university system.

Recommendation 3: The study university could embed race equality targets into structural university processes, making race equality a key performance indicator. This sends the message to all staff that the university is serious about changing the *status quo*. It needs to open up a dialogue with both their staff and students,

monitor performance and develop local action plans for change. Otherwise, we may still be talking about race inequality twenty years from now and, collectively, universities will continue to operate to maintain privilege.

Recommendation 4: The study university should consider professional development opportunities for staff to enable them to recognise and challenge stereotypes in the development of curricula. Another key area is to develop educator skills or provide a resource in cultural sensitivities, so that we are better able to identify, support and appreciate the diverse range of help-seeking techniques embraced by our community of learners.

Recommendation 5: the study university could do more to ensure its décor is more welcoming to black students. It needs to exploit, brand and promote its unique population. One idea might be the inclusion of positive portrayals of aspirational leaders from the majority population. This would reinforce how serious the university is about race inequality and such actions may help to raise the expectations of BME students.

This chapter now moves on to highlight the study's limitations.

5.5 Study Bias, Risks and Limitations

The final section of the conclusion highlights the steps taken to minimise bias and risks, and acknowledges the limitations of the study.

I reflected on questions about the complex relationship between reports of behaviours and the behaviours themselves. I was well aware that there was no guarantee that the responses given by the educators in response to the vignette in some way mirrored the actual behaviours of educators in professional practice.

The gatekeeping role taken by colleagues is a traditional method of recruiting eligible participants within education (Bryman, 2010). Gatekeeping, however, has a number of flaws. The process has the possibility of screening out eligible potential participants, as the gatekeepers may not have always shared the inclusion or exclusion criteria with the students. This may have resulted in bias in the selection of participants. For example, gatekeeping may have affected the autonomy in my decision-making and selection of potential participants. Thus, the gatekeeping approach taken may have posed a risk to the overall study.

Throughout the research journey, I took time to manage any bias through exercising reflexivity. Reflexivity, in this sense, refers to the engagement by the researcher in continuous self-critique and self-appraisal (Gibbs, 1988). This process helped to provide an explanation of how my experience did or did not influence the stages of the research process (Husserl, 1970). A reflective journal was used to record pre-understandings, feelings, thoughts and experiences in an attempt to avoid bias (bracketing) (Husserl, 1970). Reflexive reporting helped to add authenticity to the views of the NQBSWs and their educators. The process helped to distinguish the participants' voices from those of their educators who also participated in the study. The issue of bracketing is fundamental to the philosophical approach adopted (Crotty, 1996). Crotty views bracketing as a core feature of the phenomenological tradition. The bracketing process assists in understanding how a researcher's assumptions may have impacted on the data collection process (Crotty, 1996).

I aimed to be transparent about my own subjectivity to enable readers of this study to make a fair judgement about its worth. I believe that the voices of the participants provide access to their internal states of mind on academic success. I

also experienced assessing the NQBSWs' attitudes, motivations and beliefs as a non-static measurable entity (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

The process elucidating the essence of the experiences of NQBSWs on this social work degree course enabled me to determine the participants' beliefs about academic success. I reflected upon how the participants brought issues and problems to life by talking about them or acting around them. I ordered and studied their interactions in a dynamic way, since I was tasked to understand the reality of academic success in a way that was as generalisable as possible. It is hoped and anticipated that these results can be approximated and replicated in identical or similar settings.

This study was designed with an interpretive paradigm in mind and it is sensitive to individual meaning, which can become buried within broader generalisations (Murray, 2002).

The approaches used in the study cannot be judged using the same criteria as the scientific paradigm, however. 'Reality' is subjective and it differs from person to person, so therefore the study participants cannot be expected to arrive at exactly the same interpretation as the researcher (Cowan, 2009). The researcher strengthened the validity of the project by adding criteria such as triangulation and member checking. These are both effective measures, as they assume an underlying objective reality can be converged upon (Cowan, 2009).

The knowledge produced to understand academic success may unfortunately have limited or little transferability, as it is fragmented and not unified into a coherent body. The participants self-selected their own involvement, so those who volunteered may not be representative of the whole cohort. Research only reflects the experiences of those selected (Murray, 2002). The NQBSWs who did not

volunteer their involvement may not have felt able to share their experiences due to shame and/or stigma related to their experiences or performance on completion of the programme.

The process of recruitment was problematic since it had implications for the trustworthiness and dependability of the data, and consequently the findings. The problem in recruitment was not mirrored in the pilot study. The pilot study was undertaken in the beginning of semester one with final year students, when the academic demands on students were far lighter. However, the main study was carried out during the students' final weeks of the social work degree course. This may have had an impact on the difficulties encountered reaching a suitable sample size.

I have also considered the fact that Skype and person-to-person interviews differ on factors relating to the social conventions inherent in their means of communication. For example, person-to-person communication for gathering information is a relatively routine activity for social workers, considering the large amount of time they are likely to spend talking to external agencies or their employers and clients. In contrast, although computers are used increasingly nowadays for information gathering, it could be argued that their use is less routine for the average person, particularly for the older participants. None of the online participants were under 34 years of age, and thus they may not have been over-familiar with this form of interview method, which could have affected their answers *per se* or the fullness of their answers.

This chapter has highlighted the factors that influence success for black students undertaking the social work degree course. The identified factors have been categorised into two sections: the individual and institutional factors. This thesis

has made a number of key recommendations for the university and then has highlighted the study's potential bias, risks and limitations.

The next section reports on the opportunities available to disseminate the findings.

5.6 Reporting Outlets

This doctoral study (locally known as 'Cracking the Code') will be of interest to the study university, social work educator population, employers, education policy-makers and social workers in training.

The study will also be of interest to other educators who teach on professional programmes (such as nursing, psychology and occupational health) because their educational programmes are so similar. Nursing, psychology and occupational health student practitioners follow a similar practice pathway to that required for social work. They are required to adopt a set of professional standards, undertake a practice placement and have the support of a practice educator. They are assessed in practice, required to develop a reflective portfolio and there is an academic component to their training; these processes mirror the social work degree course.

'Cracking the Code' was first presented in seminar at the 2015 National Joint Social Work Educator Conference in Milton Keynes, where I briefed the social work academic community of my plans to carry out the study. I was then recalled by the same educator community to share the preliminary findings through a poster presentation at the 2018 annual Joint Social Work Educator Conference in September 2018.

Figure 5.2: JSWEC Poster Presentation in 2018

I have also recently been invited to present 'Cracking the Code' to the audience at the 14th World Congress Nursing Education and Research, due to be held in Montreal, Canada, 10-11 April 2019.

The study university will soon have access to this report, which might assist in the development of a student-sensitive social work curriculum and also aid in identifying students who may be in need of additional support.

The number of universities in England with majority BME populations is rising (UCU, 2016). These universities need to invest in ways to listen to the unique experiences of these BME students, because the current evidence is slim. This

would give rise for opportunities for open dialogue about race, ethnicity and ways that these universities as institutions could benefit from this unique and diverse opportunity.

5.7 Concluding Summary

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to this study. Chapter 2 was a review of the available pertinent literature on academic success, BME students and social work education. Methodology, the third chapter, explored the research question, the study's aims and objectives, theoretical foundations, recruitment, sampling and ethical considerations. In addition, Chapter 3 described the methods used to collect, analyse and interpret the data collected whilst conducting the study. The findings, Chapter 4, demonstrated how I have been able to apply some of Bourdieu's thinking tools to the experiences of participants, reconstructed a new definition of 'academic success' and, through my interpretations of the participants' spoken words, I was able to shed light onto the factors which influence academic success on the social work degree course. The conclusion (Chapter 5) enabled me to promote best practice and make recommendations for future developments in social work education.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION PACK

Cracking the Code

Participant Information Sheet

About the Researcher:

The researcher is Claire Felix-Baptiste. I am senior lecturer within the University name/department I am undertaking this study in pursuance of a professional doctorate.

Study title:

Cracking the Code.

Research Question:

What factors influence success on the social work degree.

Aim of the study

The project aims to explore the factors that influenced success on the social work degree. The objectives are to:

- Identify any behavioural factors that may or may not have influenced academic success on the social work degree
- Examine and differences in participant understandings of the phenomena
- Identify the support structures embraced whilst undertaking the social work degree
- Explore participants lived experience of undertaking or teaching on the social work degree

What the study involves

I hope to facilitate between 15 and 20 one to one face and computer mediated interviews with former graduates of the university. Interviews will be tape recorded in enable me to yield as much information as possible and will allow me to focus my attention and actively listen to you the participant.

The information required

I am interested in hearing about your experience of being a student and what you understand by academic success. I would also like to hear your views on the programmes teaching, assessment strategies and your learning. I realise this is might be a sensitive area. I appreciate that discussing certain topics will be a personal experience.

A number of participants will be invited to attend a follow interview to discuss how their ethnicity might have impacted on their learning and achievement. In addition, please feel assured that you will be able to decline answering any questions at any time. In addition you will be free to ask me to rephrase any of the questions asked.

What will happen to the information?

The interview tapes will be stored in a locked box when not in use, to maintain confidentiality. The identity of each participant (you) will remain anonymous throughout the study. The data will be destroyed 6 months after the study completion.

A number will be assigned to your data and it will be stored in a locked storage facility. From then on you will only be known by your number. This will prevent anyone else from knowing your results. Therefore, all data will be anonymous. In addition, all answers will be kept confidential. That is, once the data is processed, it will be electronically stored. The results will be aggregated (i.e. stored as

averages), and if the study is publicly disseminated it will not be possible to identify you or anyone else who participated in the study.

Confidentiality

All participants will remain confidential. Participants will be asked to sign a consent form which is consistent and compliant with HCPC's Social Work Codes of Practice, BASW Social Work Ethics (British Association of Social Work), both underpinned by social work values.

Not sure about participating?

If you do not want to participate, that is okay, you have the right not to. You can withdraw your involvement at any time.

Your valued input

Your views are important, your experiences unique, this might be the last opportunity that you have as a student to discuss issues in relating to studying your social work degree. Your input will help towards creating a better student understanding of academic success and what helps and hinders student learning.

Contact the researcher

I hope the above information is helpful to you and gives you a better understanding and insight into the study. Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have any questions.

Thank you for your interest and support. If you would like to participate in the research please complete and return the consent form either by hand, by email or in the stamped addressed envelope provided if required.

Claire Felix-Baptiste

Researcher

Work address, telephone numbers and email supplied here

CRACKING THE CODE
CONSENT FORM

Title of study: Cracking the Code:

Name of Participant:

- I have read the attached information sheet on the research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information.
- The Researcher has explained the nature and purpose of the research and I believe that I understand what is being proposed.
- I understand that my personal involvement and my particular data from this study will remain strictly confidential. Only researchers involved in the study will have access.
- I have been informed about what the data collected will be used for, to whom it may be disclosed, and how long it will be retained.
- I have received satisfactory answers to all of my questions
- I hereby fully and freely consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason for withdrawing.

Participant's Name: (Block Capitals) .....

Participant's Name: Signature .....

As the Researcher responsible for this study I confirm that I have explained to the participant named above the nature and purpose of the research to be undertaken.

Researcher's Name: Claire Felix Baptiste

Researcher's Signature: Signature supplied

PARTICIPANT DATA RECORD

ID

1. How would you describe your ethnic origin?

_____

2. What is your gender?

a Female b. Male

3. Have you ever been assessed as having a specific need that may impact on your studies?

a Yes

b. No

If yes please specify

_____

4. What is your age?

5. What graduate pathway did you complete?

a Full time

b Part time (employment route)

6. In what year did you start the degree in social work?

7. In what year did you complete the degree in social work?

8. What was your final classifying award if known?

_____

9. If you are an Educator how long have you been teaching social work?

INSTRUCTIONS FOR DOWNLOADING SKYPE

Skype is the biggest Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) service in the world, and it's probably the easiest way to talk to your friends for free over the internet – through text, voice (just like a phone call) or even video. Downloading and installing Skype on to your computer can be a little complicated, but these instructions will take you through it step by step. You'll need a computer, lap top, Ipad or mobile phone with a broadband internet connection (a dial-up connection is too slow for Skype).

Where possible speakers and a microphone. Many electronic devices will have these built in (especially laptops), and many webcams (see below) also have microphones built in. You can also use a headphones-and-microphone and a webcam. This is a small camera that connects to your devise through a USB port, if it isn't already built into your screen. A webcam isn't compulsory, but video calls are a key function of Skype, and you can't make them without one.

Our guide is specifically for Windows computers, but Skype is also available for Apple Macs. Follow these step-by-step instructions to download Skype now

Step 1: Go to the Skype.com home page.

- See more at: http://digitalunite.com/guides/email-skype/skype/how-download-skype#sthash.rk1jKtD8.dpuf

Step 2: Click on Download Skype on the page.

Step 3: A page will appear where you can either sign in (if you've registered already) or input your information to create an account.

You can skip the registration if you sign in using a Microsoft Account (Messenger, Hotmail or outlook.com) or a Facebook account. If not, there are also a number of boxes to fill in to create an account:

To begin, fill in your first name and last name and your email address (and repeat it). These are all required. No one will be able to see your email address. Create a skype account

Profile information. All this will be available for anyone to see on Skype, except for your mobile number, which will be restricted to your own contacts. However, you do not have to fill in all the boxes with personal information, only those with a star next to them.

Skype profile information

Step 4: You can choose to tell Skype how you intend to use its service by clicking one of the options in the drop-down menu.

'Skype Name' - Enter the name that you want your Skype friends to see and which you'll use to log in to Skype. Whether you use your real name is up to you. None of the 650 million users of Skype can have the same Skype name, so if your own name is a common one, you might want to change it a little – for instance, by adding your year of birth. The system will automatically check to see if your name has been claimed by anyone else and, if it has, will suggest alternatives. Don't worry if your name isn't available – you can easily modify it until you come up with a unique moniker.

'Password' - Enter (and repeat) the password you'd like to use. It must consist of six to 20 characters and contain both letters and numbers. If you don't want promotional emails from Skype, untick the two boxes towards the bottom. The 'captcha' box: This is designed to make sure that you are you and not a naughty computer. Look at the text in the first box and then type it into the box below – in this case. If you can't read the text, click the Refresh button and you'll be given another bit of text to copy. Finally click on I agree – Continue.

Skype name

Step 5: You'll be taken to a page headed 'Your account is ready'. Click on Download Skype for Windows. If you have a different version of Windows or if you have Linux, click on 'download a different version'.

Step 6: Another box will open up asking you to Run or Save to your computer. Click Run. Another window will open saying that there isn't far to go now. Tick Run Skype when the computer starts to enable Skype whenever you turn your computer on. It will also ask which language you wish to proceed in. Click I agree – next.

Step 7: When the next window appears it will ask whether you want to have Skype Click to call which enables you to call instant numbers shown on websites. Tick Install Skype Click to call. Click on Continue. Skype click to call. You may also get another window pop up asking if you wish to make MSN your homepage. Tick or untick as you wish. Click Continue.

Step 8: A new window will open. This contains a progress bar that will fill up while the Skype program downloads and installs. Once it's done, Skype will automatically start. Skype downloading in progress.

Step 9: Skype will now open up and you will be able to find contacts and start making calls. Done

- See visuals instructions at: **http://digitalunite.com/guides/email-skype/skype/how-download-skype#sthash.pTj837ra.dpuf**

Claire Felix-Baptiste the researcher can be found in your UK contacts at *Identifier removed* **Send me an invite via Skype in preparation for your interview.**

APPENDIX 2: A4 MARKETING FLYER

Call for Participants
Cracking the Code

- Are You:
- ue to complete your social work course this year, or a recent graduate
- Newl Qualified Socic Worker (NQSW), or educator?
- want to hear about your experience o teaching learning and assessment on the social work degree.
- I am carrying out a study into NQSW understandings of academic success as it relates to the social work degree. Your views are important and may help in future curriculum developments and guide future students on the course.
- Interviews will be carried out after the next Progression Board.
- Want to be involved? To find out more about the study?

Contact Claire Feli Baptiste Identifier removed or call on Identifier removed 730 for more information

APPENDIX 3: CASE STUDY VIGNETTE FOR EDUCATORS

Case Study for Educators

This is a case study of Monica a student on the programme. This is the student's last opportunity to resubmit and retrieve assessments before being withdrawn from the programme.

Situational factors;

The student owns her own home and is forced to work 3 nights a week to supplement her student loan and bursary. She is lone parent with 3 children under 11 years who are looked after by a neighbour when she is at work. She reports she feels as if she is always playing catching up with the other students, and is thinking of withdrawing. She is a strong practitioner however struggles with the academic side of the degree. Her academic profile is shown in the table below. She has come to for a tutorial looking for advice on what to do. What advice would you give to this student?

Subject	Mark	Retrieved	Outstanding	
Year 1				
Communications	56%			
Readiness 4 Direct Practice	Fail	pass		
Sociology	44%			
Human Growth Development	37%	47/40		
Social Work theory	32%	40%		
Social Problems	36%	40%		
Values and Ethics	33%	52/40%		
Year 2				
Practice study/placement	43% P			
Welfare Policy and Law	38%	56/40%		
Social work Methods	37%	50/40%		
Advocacy & Partnership	45%			
Year 3				
Professional routes	35%	pending		
Social Research Proposal	43%			
Ethical Dilemma's & Decision Making	38%	pending		
Practice Study / Placement	Pending	late	Submission date agreed	

APPENDIX 4: LETTER OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Identifier removed

University

Central Research Support
Research Degrees Administration

Identifiers removed

12 February 2015

Ms C Felix

Identifier removed

Dear Claire

Registration of your Research Proposal

The revised application to register your research proposal was reviewed by ESR sub-committee at its meeting on 9 February 2015 and was approved.

There were some spelling issues in your application; the Committee recommended that you investigate your entitlement to proof reading support.

Identifier removed in the department of Psychology in the School of Applied Sciences is undertaking a similar study, and the Committee recommended linking up with *Identifier removed*

The next forms due for submission is either the RES 3B 1st Progress Report (or the RES 4 Annual Report) this will be submitted to the School of Social Science and Law for review.

Best wishes

Identifiers removed

Economics and Social Research Sub-Committee

Identifiers removed

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APPENDIX 5: CODING MATRIX EXAMPLES

Question 1: Understanding of academic success themes and codes

Multiple dimensions	Academic environment	Encouragement	Attendance	Cognitive development	Success	Progression	Benchmarks	Personal growth needs	Quality indicators First or 2.1
x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
		x	x		x	x		x	x
x	x	support						x	x
	x							x	
x		support	x						x
x		support		x		x		Skills Development	x
x			x		x				x
			x					Intellectual	
	x					x			x
						x		x	x
	x							X	

Question 2: Experience of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Tutor	Practice educator	HEI	Inclusion Power	Curriculum Development	Time Management	Behaviour	Cooperative Learning	Experience	Identity	Challenges	Emotions
x	x	x	x	x	x	Procastination	Competition	Challenge	x	reflection	Self pity
x	x	x	x	x	x	City lit xx	Participation xxxx	Right time of life	x	Time management	Self-determination xx
x					xx	Reading widely xxx	x	Hidden curriculum	x	Cultural	Belonging xxxxx
x					xx	Planning x	x	Lack of confidence low self esteem	x	Self limitations xxxx	Resilience
xxx diversity	x				Organisational skills xx	Review feedback	x			Recognise personal flaws	Determination xx
x						Action learning x	Self select peers xxxx			Family commitments	Empowered x
						Index of reading				Integration theory and practice	Doing for self Self-improvement xx

						Listening x				Poor time management	Motivation xxxx
						journals				Exams	Ownership responsibility
						Arrange tutorial					Anxiety
						Weekends xxx					
						After lectures xxxx					
						Student homes xxx					
						Attend library xxx					
						Late at night					
						Procrastination					
						Telephone calls					

Question 3: Share any behaviours specific to year 1

Meet Tutor	Network	Increase in confidence	Cognitive development	Language	Cultural Differences	Skill Accumulation	Time Management	Organisational Skills	Group Development	Identity
x		Pre admission xx					poor	poor	Seek select peers	x
x	Meeting year 2 and 3 student	Curiosity xx			Self disclosure	Use lsbu support	x	xx	x	x
x						City lit		Going the extra mile xxx	xx	
x					Impact of societal messages xxx	x				x
x					Self doubt	Reading to understand				x
x			Set Limitations	Determination xxx						Fear xxxx
				Self doubt						
					driven	Making use of exempla xxx				
				Perseverance	Social mobility xx	listening				

APPENDIX 6: ANALYSIS FORMS COMPLETED

Question	4 Interview:	Researcher Thoughts	Code	Theme
	Understanding of Accademic Success			
Q1	Academic success for me personally was about achieving, raising my level of literacy.	Journey of discovery Raising literacy levels	Essence Personal achievement	Success
	I think for me it's going that extra mile, putting in above average attendance, above average commitment. I think my behaviour all-in-all was about coming in early, staying late, coming in on Saturdays, in the holidays, coming in on specific days. Myself and my other colleague we came in on odd days in the holidays or Christmas holidays. When it was open, we were here. The odd day we wouldn't come in because of other commitments but, just going above and beyond really.	Effort made to succed going extra mile self-determination and having an internal drive of wanting to succeed Effective use of the HEI's facilities Weekends and evenings	Behavoural Self efficacy Determination Action	Behaviours Cultural capital Collaboration
Q2	Yes, that was my aim but I did have doubts. I did think because my written skills were quite poor so I knew I needed to put in the extra. So I did. I did extra lessons at City Lit, I did a City Lit course and I did really focus on my written work skills, how I presented my work, because I can waffle a lot, so how I made my work more succinct. I'm still working on it as I go along into professional practice.	In response to whether or not the student was intentionally working towards a first class degree Showing some level of understanding of her limitations	Action City lit Recognised personal limitations	**High Self Esteem** self awareness action orientated
	Also to accept my flaws and, I think in my personal life, I was doing the same kind of thing. Looking at myself and trying to make changes so I was able to accept my flaws, my limitations so just as much as in this course. I think, being able to accept feedback, knowing that I don't know it all and just being open all the time to new understandings and new ways of seeing things and doing things.	Ongoing self reflection Accept faults do something about them Limitations Accept feeback and I do no know it Open to learning empty/vessell	Recognition of personal flaws	Critical self awareness

Q3 **Q4**	I learnt maybe to be more strategic and plan because obviously I'd never done a degree alongside my personal life. I had to plan properly. Y1 In the first year I didn't plan anything, did everything ad hoc, trying to do a lot of things. I didn't read a lot. I think, for me, that thing of I knew what I needed to know and I didn't need to know anything else. That was my barrier. All I did was have one or two books, didn't really read wider but I didn't really know and I found it difficult to access and difficult to understand it. Now I look at journals, it's easier to read. I can look for journals now. I can research. Before, that was a barrier for me. Research, that sounded so big, it sounded beyond me. I'd never researched. That sounded like someone else Now, in hindsight. But thinking back to that first year's mentality because I never thought that I could go to Uni. I saw only rich, White people as being University students. I didn't see myself as a University student. You have to put the work in. I'm still in shock and think, wow, I've got a first degree. It feels funny.	The students is beginning to understand that what was expected Planning Reading widely Planning and multi tasking Reading journals Personal growth Increased confidence The development of key skills research Detatchment sounded like someone else Impact of subliminal refrming blackness Subliminal societal messages Maslows hieirachy of need and the need to self actualise	Process Action Action Sense of achievement Disbelief Doubt Identity Action	Behaviour Changed Behavioural Sense of belonging **Overcame own limitation and barriers** **Longitudital learning** Identity socialisation
Q5	I think by the time I got to the second year I had a list, what I needed to do with their dates beside them and I prioritised my tasks in the second year, came in when I needed to. Obviously, my life is a lot different to other people. My son's 19 and I had that space which I was glad of, to be able to come in. I kind of adopted a plan. I always planned.	To do lists The essence of success appears to be planning Prioritise FamilyPlanning Go over and beyond	Action Action	 Behavioural planning Situational

	My lifestyle definitely helped because I could do over and beyond. Literally, I could stay here until 11 o'clock. I didn't have to go home. Sometimes I'd come in at 7 o'clock in the morning. I had to do that bit extra because I knew I had to get to grips with things. As I said, research, reading. As well, sometimes I tried to read books from cover to cover and it never worked. It was just getting those study strategies right. How to pick out, how to skim read.	Example of putting in the extra effort Being at the right time of students life minimum personal responibilites Selective reading Developing research skills Skim reading	Action	**Lifestyle** **Going the extra mile** Behavioural
	I wasn't disappointed but I wanted to get better, to do better. I wasn't disappointed, I was happy that I was even in Uni. just being able to do it. I just focused more and more on my writing skills, academic writing, how I was presenting my work because that was the kind of feedback I was getting from my tutors on my presentation and it was a bit wordy. My punctuation was always my feedback. Even towards the end, although it was much better. I know I had improved definitely from the first year in my punctuation. I always loved English when I was at school, but my school wasn't that great so I didn't have a chance to develop. I think I could do well, I think I could have done better if I'd gone to a better school but the school, most of the population was Black and the teachers didn't care. They didn't really care. I knew I could do better. It was always in me.	Re the first year results Recognition that more effort was needed Writing skills Addresses the impotance of feedback Impact of previous school experience on confidence Make effective use of feedback Psychodynamic implications - how childhood expereince can shape us in adult hood	Action Pre admissin experience Self awareness	Behavioural **Action focused**

	Yes, definitely, because I knew I could do better. But I thought, I can't do this. Once I pushed myself. Obviously, I was older and I knew that when I was 19, 20, my confidence was on the floor. I didn't try.	Recogniton personal opportunities for improvement	Self doubt	Determination to suceed
	Yes, for specific modules, on the day that I had the lecture that would be when I focused on that particular module. What I realised was that, before I was trying to do too many tasks at once so I would only do one in each day. But as placement got a little bit more demanding, it got more like a full time job. It was a little bit more difficult but the idea was when I had my hour lunch, was to spend half an hour reading and trying to catch up. But I think I did most of the hard work in the second year. In the third year, it was a little bit easier.	Student realises that it is easier to link indepenant learning to set days to coincide with lectures Reading at lunch time	Planning action Realisation Action Success	Organisational skills **Forward Planning** Behavioural **Time Management**
	People were scared because they didn't want their tutor to know where they were at or they didn't want to sound like they were struggling. I said, that's what the tutor's there for and we're paying for, it's not free, it's not a favour, you're paying for it. Even when I was looking for a job, I messaged you and Anna and my placement supervisor because I still keep in contact with him so I message him if I'm going for an interview and ask if he has any pointers. I always ask questions so I will always say, always ask questions. Discuss things, even with your colleagues.	This is concerning that students feel unable to ask for help I can see the development of Curiosity and not being afraid Fear may be from the power lectures hold need to be more approachable	Help seeking Curiosity Fear Power	Disposition **Tutor & Placemnet support**

Q6	Wicked. Just being about to bounce ideas off each other and discuss. I found in the beginning that people didn't want to…I'm a people person and I can't do this isolation business, it doesn't work for me. I didn't work when I tried to work alone. Her name was Sheila and we were together from college and worked together and we found that we bounced off each other quite well. Even just now, we were helping each other with our personal statements. We really complimented each other in terms of that. I also say that to people. Don't work in isolation. But then that's how me and my study buddy bounced off each other, because I'd do it early and then we'd exchange so we'd help each other like that.	The importance of a study buddy Do not work in isolation Bounce ideas Reluctant peers The importance of cross fertilising ideas. Peer support	Action Group work Success Success	Coporative learning **Buddy/Peer Support**

Q7	I think my ethnicity maybe had an impact on my level of self-doubt going along my life. I think when I was at school, not getting much support, it seemed to be the Black kids. Sometimes we did present with quite challenging behaviour in this society, per se, and the teachers that were trying to teach us were not used to that behaviour. That probably impacted a great deal on me and growing up, as I said before, I didn't see myself as a student. I didn't see myself as being a productive member of society. I just thought I'd get any job just to pay my bills. I'm sure my ethnicity had an impact on the way I thought about myself, definitely, big time. For me this is a lot to do with mind-set. The messages I've heard along my life put me in a position where I was just one way thinking and didn't see myself outside of that box. But coming here, it's quite multicultural, so seeing yourself in that position, that did help. You move up in the time that you're doing your degree so it's nice to see and it showed me, probably more subconsciously but now you've asked me, made me think, yes, I can do it.	The impact of earlier schoolng Confidence anssense of belongng Acknolwkledge that degree would help with social mobility Low expectations of the self There needs to be a recoditioning of the sub conscious mind change of mind set	Self doubt Identity Mind set Perseverance	Identity Pre admission ability **Self fullfilling Prophercy** **Positive Role Model** Resillience

	I saw an article and it said that Princess Beatrice and the other one got a 2:1. I thought if they can get a 2:1 so can I so I'm matching myself with them because I'm thinking ok, they got a 2:1 but I didn't think I could get a first. I still feel a little hard to believe.	Setting personal goals Making comparisions with others Not beliving in the self denial defence mechanism Freud	Competition	Determination
Q8	I felt rather connected to the Uni. I felt that I could talk to people, that things, our feedback mattered.	Tutor student feedback Students want the opportunity to contribute to developmeant of the curriculumn	action	Participation
Q9	It's nothing to do with academic, it's about changing our mind-set. I'm going out of that jurisdiction a bit, but changing your mindset of what you think you can do, working on yourself.	Self development	Mindset Critical self awareness	Self efficacy
	I think it goes way back because books were taken away from us and we were told not to study. I've heard people say a few times, that if you want to hide something from a Black person, put it in a book. Again, it's a reoccurring theme;	Reference to post slavery syndrome	Negative societal messages	Determination

APPENDIX 7: TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW - PARTICIPANT 4

What is your understanding of academic success?

Academic success for me personally was about achieving, raising my level of literacy.

What would you expect as an academic? You got a first.

I would expect that definitely for a first.

Any other grades you would consider a success?

Yes, a 2:1. They are all a success because it shows that you completed it. We all have different levels of knowledge and understanding and things so, maybe what we put forward isn't what the lecturers expected but it is still a success that you still managed to get to that level, still managed to complete the assignments so, it's all success.

I'm really pleased for you as a student because you got a first. Can you share any behaviours that contributed to your academic success?

I think for me it's going that extra mile, putting in above average attendance, above average commitment. I think my behaviour all-in-all was about coming in early, staying late, coming in on Saturdays, in the holidays, coming in on specific days. Myself and my other colleague we came in on odd days in the holidays or Christmas holidays. When it was open, we were here. The odd day we wouldn't come in because of other commitments but, just going above and beyond really. I had to personally because of my levels.

When you came here, were you aiming for a first?

Yes, that was my aim but I did have doubts. I did think because my written skills were quite poor so I knew I needed to put in the extra. So I did. I did extra lessons at City Lit, I did a City Lit course and I did really focus on my written work skills, how I presented my work, because I can waffle a lot, so how I made my work more succinct. I'm still working on it as I go along into professional practice. As I said, just putting in extra work and doing whatever it took, getting people to help me, other teachers, other professionals outside, other people that were also doing degrees and doing other higher forms of education to look through my work, give me some pointers, accepting feedback, that really helped me. I'm not a person that takes feedback badly, it obviously depends on how it's delivered. Also to accept my flaws and, I think in my personal life, I was doing the same kind of thing. Looking at myself and trying to make changes so I was able to accept my flaws, my limitations so just as much as in this course. I think, being able to accept feedback, knowing that I don't know it all and just being open all the time to new understandings and new ways of seeing things and doing things.

Tell me about your experience of studying for the degree in social work in general. Was it a good experience or was it a poor experience?

Overall, it was really positive. As I said, for me personally it fell in line with what I was doing in my personal life. I loved it; I loved every aspect of it. There was a lot of challenges. However, it helped me to open my mind, to reflect. I loved reflective stuff; I loved that. I didn't have a clue what it was when I first came. I never knew about values, I didn't know about anything like that and it helped me personally to look at what makes me tick. Why do I do the things I do and how can I make myself better, how can I improve? I learnt in this course that nothing is just one way. You can learn so many different ways and different perspectives of looking at things and nothing's right and wrong. I love that because it just opens up your mind. It makes me excited actually at times. So I had a really good experience. Like I said, there were challenges. There were times when I was upset and I didn't understand and I felt doubt, but I just think those are normal parts of life, and it helped me to grow. If I didn't go through that, I wouldn't have grown.

What was your first year like? What hindered your success in the first year?

I think for me the workload. Obviously in hindsight, once I did the second and third year it was a breeze, but at the time it was difficult as there were so many things to do and I think I had the same situation in the second year. I learnt maybe to be more strategic and plan because obviously I'd never done a degree alongside my personal life. I had to plan properly. So in the first year I didn't plan anything, did everything ad hoc, trying to do a lot of things. I didn't read a lot. I think, for me, that thing of I knew what I needed to know and I didn't need to know anything else. That was my barrier. All I did was have one or two books, didn't really read wider but I didn't really know and I found it difficult to access and difficult to understand it. Now I look at journals, it's easier to read. I can look for journals now. I can research. Before, that was a barrier for me. Research, that sounded so big, it sounded beyond me. I'd never researched. That sounded like someone else.

Why not you?

Now, in hindsight. But thinking back to that first year's mentality because I never thought that I could go to Uni. I saw only rich, White people as being University students. I didn't see myself as a University student. So, it was pretty much I was just bored and I didn't know what else to do with my life. I've always done care work anyway and I knew that I wanted to work with people so I just went and done the access course and then I ended up doing really well. I shocked myself so from that point I started to see that I could. I had a lot of doubt in myself. So even though I wanted a first, I think most people want a first and, as I started to realise that if you don't put the work in, obviously depending on your academic levels, if you don't put the work in you won't even get that, you won't get anywhere near it. You have to put the work in. I'm still in shock and think, wow, I've got a first degree. It feels funny.

Don't feel like you're not worthy, you're very worthy and you've worked very hard for it.

Everyone had said that to me, you know. Even the colleagues in my class, they've messaged me. Not that we didn't get on, I get on with everyone, but we didn't click as much. They've sent me messages out of the blue to say you really deserve it, you worked hard and I did. I said that if I want this, I have to put in the work.

Tell me about some of your study routines. Did you adopt any routines in the first year? You said that you worked ad hoc.

I worked ad hoc because I tried to do things all over the place. I think by the time I got to the second year I had a list, what I needed to do with their dates beside them and I prioritised my tasks in the second year, came in when I needed to. Obviously, my life is a lot different to other people. My son's 19 and I had that space which I was glad of, to be able to come in. I kind of adopted a plan. I always planned.

Was there something there about being in the right place in your life to do the course?

Yes, definitely. For me, personally, and I take my hat off to all those who have got young kids, I do. I probably could do it, but it would affect my stress levels. I can be quite stressed. I don't like to be stressed so that's why I have to plan and know what I'm doing. Obviously, if I had little kids I'd have to do the same. I'd have to plan it, I'd have to make sure. I know a lot of the young ladies that did have kids, did have a partner so that does make a difference. But I don't know if I would have chosen to come to Uni. having young kids. Maybe if they were a bit older and they could come home and cook and do little things. My lifestyle definitely helped because I could do over and beyond. Literally, I could stay here until 11 o'clock. I didn't have to go home. Sometimes I'd come in at 7 o'clock in the morning. I had to do that bit extra because I knew I had to get to grips with things. As I said, research, reading. As well, sometimes I tried to read books from cover to cover and it never worked. It was just getting those study strategies right. How to pick out, how to skim read.

Tell me a bit about that. You're talking about skim reading and not reading whole books, but reading particular parts, the relevant parts. Tell me about some of those other routines. This is what I want to share with other students.

I've been asked by the first year and second year students at some stage, what do you do, what advice would you give. I would say read, consistently read wide. Don't just read one book because I started off with one book that I was given to practise and I was stuck to it. I do love that book. It's good to look deeper, wider and understand different perspectives. The journals helped a lot, but it took me time to be able to just skim something. At first, I just used to try and read it from the top to the bottom. I didn't understand anything that it was saying, so I'd start again. Now I know I don't need to go into all of it, unless I feel that I need to. If I read the methodology, or the overview then I can say, yes I need to read this more. I might just be interested in it because that has happened to me a few times, where I've read certain documents and I felt I liked this. Eileen Monroe documents, I always like her style of writing, it's an easy read. Those ones I always read over and over again. I found myself just reading for my own enjoyment.

Get the Kindle app on your phone and you can buy books for pence. If you buy a kindle, you don't have to read, you can listen to books.

I may do that as I want to stay current.

Or register with community care to get regular emails.

I've registered with them and I've got Kings Trust Health as well because I want to go into mental health so I've got Kings Fund. I want to stay current so at least one hour a week, that's all it takes just to keep up to date because you can easily go rusty.

Thinking about your study routines in your first year, what did you do different in your second year. I noticed you got 70s in year 2. Were you disappointed at the end of the first year and said you were going to do things different?

I wasn't disappointed but I wanted to get better, to do better. I wasn't disappointed, I was happy that I was even in Uni. just being able to do it. I just focussed more and more on my writing skills, academic writing, how I was presenting my work because that was the kind of feedback I was getting from my tutors on my presentation and it was a bit wordy. My punctuation was always my feedback. Even towards the end, although it was much better. There was a bit, maybe I didn't read it through properly, where it was a bit chunky. I know I had improved definitely from the first year in my punctuation. I always loved English when I was at school, but my school wasn't that great so I didn't have a chance to develop.

This is your second chance.

Yes. So basically, I went to school, had a big gap, then I came to University. I went to college first, then came to University.

Were your results at school disappointing?

Yes, definitely.

That's presumably where your confidence went and your fear of entering higher education.

Yes, definitely, because I knew I could do better. But I thought, I can't do this. Once I pushed myself. Obviously, I was older and I knew that when I was 19, 20, my confidence was on the floor. I didn't try. As time went on, my confidence came. I was helping other people to do their letters and stuff, because I'm always one of those people where if something's wrong, I really want to say something. A bailiff came to my house and the way he conducted himself, so I wrote a letter and I did this years ago. I've always been the sort of person to help my friends do their stuff so I knew I could do it, but it was just getting it more succinct and my punctuation more academic.

Tell me about that. Tell me about what gave you that burst in year 3. If you were going to advise a student how much reading to do on top of a lecture, say per day or week, what would you advise?

I would say every day, literally every day. Like I said, it depends on your academic levels but never take anything for granted.

Would they be short bursts of reading?

Yes, short bursts so maybe an hour or two. I used to stay every day after lectures, and then when I finished placement I would, not every single day, but most days I would spend at least an hour and a half reading, or just practising my writing skills, looking at academic work, looking at stuff. But not always reading as much towards the end. I read but not as much as the second year. The second year I read quite a lot, but my advice would be to read. I've seen them around and they've spoken to me and I've said, read widely, don't just read one book. Just read because you don't know what you're talking about and it extends your knowledge and helps you to understand what it is you're talking about.

So, reading was one thing. Did you have a timetable of some sort?

Yes, I have a diary anyway, I'm old school. I don't do things on the phone. So a diary and I marked in all the tasks.

Per module? Did you have specific time for a specific module? Because, I imagine, research is a lot of time.

Yes, for specific modules, on the day that I had the lecture that would be when I focused on that particular module. What I realised was that, before I was trying to do too many tasks at once so I would only do one in each day. But as placement got a little bit more demanding, it got more like a full time job. It was a little bit more difficult but the idea was when I had my hour lunch, was to spend half an hour reading and trying to catch up. But I think I did most of the hard work in the second year. In the third year, it was a little bit easier.

Because you'd already set yourself up, you had a structure, a routine.

Yes. One thing what I would say is start early. Do not leave things until the last minute. On the same day we'd get the thing, I'd start, even if it was just writing one thing on a piece of paper. Every time I'd put a little bit more and a little bit more.

What role did you tutor play?

She was helpful; she was always really helpful for me, even at times when I was feeling really down about personal stuff. She was always there to give a little bit of advice. Like with reflection, I didn't really understand what that was so I just messaged her and asked her to explain it and she explained it and gave me some examples. That really helped pull it out of me because it wasn't hard, but it's just knowing what questions to address. We all had that issue and one thing I noticed, I'm not going to pick anyone out, is that people are scared to ask questions. I always used to say, speak to your tutor. Don't just be, I don't know. I would speak to someone and say this is my understanding, but I don't know everything. Maybe sometimes I come across really like I know, maybe it's just the way I am, but I don't know everything. People were scared because they didn't want their tutor to know where they were at or they didn't want to sound like they were struggling. I said, that's what the tutor's there for and we're paying for, it's not free, it's not a favour, you're paying for it. Even when I was looking for a job, I messaged you and Anna and my placement supervisor because I still keep in contact with him so I message him if I'm going for an interview and ask if he has any pointers. I always ask questions so I will always say, always ask questions. Discuss things, even with your colleagues.

How important was your study buddy?

Wicked. Just being about to bounce ideas off each other and discuss. I found in the beginning that people didn't want to…I'm a people person and I can't do this isolation business, it doesn't work for me. I didn't work when I tried to work alone. Her name was Sheila and we were together from college and worked together and we found that we bounced off each other quite well. Even just now, we were

helping each other with our personal statements. We really complimented each other in terms of that. I also say that to people. Don't work in isolation.

Tell me about your experience of submitting assessments. What was that like for you?

Sometimes it was really challenging because there was little bits of confusion. There was different information. In some lectures we were told this date then another date, then we were told different times. It was a little bit confusing. I understand that can happen sometimes because obviously, one lecturer may have a different understanding of it. There were times when it was really challenging and it caused a bit of undue stress, but it wasn't all the time, it was only on about two occasions. Apart from that, it was ok. For me, I never left anything to the last minute. Even with Turnitin, once I'd done the majority I just did it. Some people did it an hour before, and I said, why are you waiting till now? But then that's how me and my study buddy bounced off each other, because I'd do it early and then we'd exchange so we'd help each other like that. Because she would also take long to get started. She'd start but she'd take long to get it on paper and then be stressed towards the end. I would say, get it down, then towards the end all you're doing is checking. I don't want to be doing any writing the night before. I don't want to be doing anything but reading it and maybe highlighting. When I did that though, I missed things because I'd read it so many times I missed things.

Are you dyslexic?

I haven't had a test. I wanted to get one but I kept saving it and leaving it. I'd love to get a test to find out or not, because sometimes it takes me a while to grasp things.

It sounds like a dyslexic trait. Maybe when you go back into education, get them to do it?

I don't know if I want to go back into education.

94% of first class students return to education at some point in their life. It wasn't distressing for you, you had a good outcome. You know you can do it now.

I love it but I just want a rest of it.

Also, those of us who learn more, earn more.

Yes, that's true. I want to do my amp training if I get into mental health, that's my plan.

You need to be going towards the NHS.

I have applied for a job and I got an interview but I didn't get it because I haven't got enough experience, but they really liked me and gave me such good feedback. They said they're going to create a role for me so I'm waiting to hear back from them. It's NHS in a mental health team in (Slam). I'm applying for one in Camden and that's for newly qualified. What happened is, I went to an open day, met the team. I was a bit put off because they were all asking for nurses and I'm not a nurse. They said "don't worry, we're all social workers" so the woman said she'd love to have me on her team and asked me to apply. I applied for it but it was a Band 6 post so I wouldn't have been able to do it, I wouldn't have been ready to do it. I did role play which went really well, I got amazing feedback all the way through so they really liked me but they understood that I'd probably need more training and support for working in the community mental health team. But they need someone who can get on with it. I probably could to a degree, but I'd probably still need a lot of support. I hope to hear back from them.

What are your views on the assessment strategies used? When you think back over the three years you've had presentations, role plays, exams, assessments or essays, you've had group presentations and individual presentations.

I think they've been great.

Are they a good enough range for you because if you can't express yourself in one, you must be able to express yourself in the other.

Definitely, there was a good enough range for me. I shouldn't say I'm not good, but I don't do well in exams. I'm glad there weren't loads of exams. But yes, there was a lovely range. We go to do group work, which was really good. It helps people, group work. People prefer to go off on their own and do their own thing and group work takes people out of their comfort zones. I think more group work would be good. You do lone working but you still have to do a lot of teamwork. People always want to work on their own or with their friends and that really annoys me because I'm not that kind of person. If you put me with someone and said, work with that person today, I would just be able to work with them. I wouldn't worry that I don't know them, that's not me. Even when I did the role-play, the interview, we just gelled. We didn't have time to think about what to do, we just got on with it and gave each other space. I think there was a good range of assessments.

How do you think your ethnicity impacted on your learning and achievement?

Wow, that's a big question. I think within this university it's quite diverse, so I wouldn't say it affected me in terms of, within this establishment. But, I think my ethnicity maybe had an impact on my level of self-doubt going along my life. I think when I was at school, not getting much support, it seemed to be the Black kids. Sometimes we did present with quite challenging behaviour in this society, per se, and the teachers that were trying to teach us were not used to that behaviour. That probably impacted a great deal on me and growing up, as I said before, I didn't see myself as a student. I didn't see myself as being a productive member of society. I just thought I'd get any job just to pay my bills. I'm sure my ethnicity had an impact on the way I thought about myself, definitely, big time. For me this is a lot to do with mind-set. The messages I've heard along my life put me in a position where I was just one way thinking and didn't see myself outside of that box. But coming here, it's quite multicultural, so seeing yourself in that position, that did help. You move up in the time that you're doing your degree so it's nice to see and it showed me, probably more subconsciously but now you've asked me, made me think, yes, I can do it. You're still educating yourself, even when I read the stuff

and I'm still trying to better myself as a Black woman. You don't really see a lot of Black males, you see mostly Black women.

That's because of the care. It's the nature of the work. Women are attracted to it.

I mean in professional roles, I don't see that many Black men. You see Black women, but not that many Black men.

And the area you're going to work in, you'll see even less.

That's what I was thinking. When I went for the interview, the consultant psychiatrist that I was there with was a Black woman and that was nice to see. A lady I met on my placement as well, she was a social worker and she was really good and she's a Black woman as well. When she came there and saw me, she was so happy to see another Black woman. Even my practice educator is a middle-class White man, and we discussed this quite a lot within supervision and he was saying you have to recognise the impact that a Black person will have in a community team like that. It's good because a lot of their client-base is Black.

There's a shared understanding.

Even though I wasn't permanent, he liked the fact that I was there and what I could bring to that team as a Black woman. I think ethnicity did have an impact on me trying to achieve, because how I see myself is how I see myself every day and what I see within people that educate themselves. But now I don't think so much like that because I saw an article and it said that Princess Beatrice and the other one got a 2:1. I thought if they can get a 2:1 so can I so I'm matching myself with them because I'm thinking ok, they got a 2:1 but I didn't think I could get a first. I still feel a little hard to believe.

Why is it hard to believe that you could get a first class?

I don't know. I think that's something personal about me, because when people say nice things to me or they say "I'm really proud of you", my Auntie is so proud of me, even my son whose 19 says "I'm proud of you", I just feel weird.

You're a role model for him. You'll get used to it. But it's also the first time that you've done well academically, because you didn't do well at school, you didn't believe that you could do well at school and it's the labelling theory. If someone keeps saying to you "you're not going to be good", you start believing it.

I think I could do well, I think I could have done better if I'd gone to a better school but the school, most of the population was Black and the teachers didn't care. They didn't really care. I knew I could do better. It was always in me.

I know you said you had a study buddy. How connected or disconnected did you feel with the University, socially? You were a student representative for a while and that's quite a lot of responsibility and you're representing the University. You didn't just come here for lectures and then went home. You spent a lot of time in and around the University, you were the rep.

I was connected. There were times when I was a bit disconnected, but this was for various reasons, because when I was the rep I felt like everyone wanted to just throw their weight on my shoulders. I felt like I was doing everyone's degree for them, well not everyone, but a good percentage of the class. I was doing their degree for them.

Remember that you can put that in your application forms for jobs because it shows leadership skills.

I did put it down, it's on my CV. It was an important role and it helped me learn a little bit about myself, a little bit about having boundaries because I didn't have any boundaries and I think people kind of grabbed hold of that. Not in a horrible way, I don't think there was any malicious intent but they kind of seeked me out, because I was like yeah, yeah I'll do it and then it just got too much. But I felt rather connected to the Uni. I felt that I could talk to people, that things, our feedback mattered. What we said, and I always try to explain back to our class that things can't change because one person said it. People moaned a lot. They were never happy, never happy with things, but they'd just moan to themselves. So when I'd say "does anyone have anything they want to say", people wouldn't really say much. I remember a particular time when I said something in a meeting and then

people were like “no, I didn’t say that”, but everyone was saying it. So I got a little bit disheartened. That’s when I got a bit disconnected because I felt like, what is it I’m really supposed to be doing here and I felt disconnected from the role of being the rep. I didn’t want to continue it anymore, I didn’t feel it was effective or I was doing much.

Can you share any strategies that you used while a student here that could be helpful to other students?

It’s nothing to do with academic, it’s about changing our mind-set. I’m going out of that jurisdiction a bit, but changing your mindset of what you think you can do, working on yourself.

Removing the limitations, you set for yourself.

Definitely. Sometimes they’re all subconscious. People don’t realise, just in the way they conduct themselves, things they do.

What you’re saying now I’m going connect it to my Literature review, because I looked at the negative perspective of Black students that we’re not good, we’re never going to get As, we don’t have the capacity to get As, does that make sense? If you’re being told that constantly, the media is telling that negatively, you start believing that.

All the time. I think it goes way back because books were taken away from us and we were told not to study. I’ve heard people say a few times, that if you want to hide something from a Black person, put it in a book. Again, it’s a reoccurring theme; read. I think a lot of times my race of people that I know, anyway, they just think they know it all. They think they know everything and you actually don’t know anything. I think your mind-set, I changed my mind-set to I don’t know anything. Learning, it’s like being reborn, being a baby again. I would say read, and learn more. Don’t be closed to learning, open your mind to learning. Read, basically.

Is there anything you would like to add around teaching, learning, assessments that might help students in the future. Things that they must do.

I think I've said everything, but just read, do extra work, don't leave things till the last minute, have a study buddy, don't work in isolation. Personally, you are bringing yourself to this course, you personally, so it's about yourself. It's about doing a bit of soul searching, not thinking you know everything, come outside of your box and maybe go to different places. I think with Black people, they like to go where they feel comfortable. Come out of your comfort zone. We all do, it's not just Black people. Meet new people.

APPENDIX 8: EDUCATOR ANALYSIS FORM

Educator Interview	Researche
Understanding of accademic sucess	
1. So, coming from an African background, academic achievement is…you don't have a choice in not being academic. You don't have a choice in terms of your education so it's something that's very important. It's definitely embedded in the culture. It's embedded in generations of my family who have all been academics and had high jobs and things like that. So, it's never been an option. You are to be educated and you are to be educated in a professional job. So whatever that is, it has to be a professional qualification. Academic achievement basically means that you are fulfilling your life's plan.	Embeded in

2 Given that she's got a lot going on, if she is committed to wanting to become a social worker then I would encourage her and advise her to try and stay on the course. However, to look at the factors that are having an impact on her ability to study. I think I would probably re-visit that with her and I'd get her to think about how perhaps she could manage some of her personal situations. If she's a strong practitioner, we need to support her to get her there. However, she does have to take responsibility so there's no point in me advising her to do X, Y and Z if she's not then going to do it and keep coming back and saying that she's struggling. I'd probably ask her to access some student support to see if there's anything that can be done, see if there's anything that can be done with childcare. But I think that the working three nights a week as well is probably what's causing her to play catch-up. Of the students that I have, the ones that I think are successful are the ones that are highly organised. The ones that don't allow, don't make excuses, the ones that take responsibility, the ones that come to see you as soon as an issue arises rather than leaving it to the very last minute and then come in crying and you're thinking, I can't do anything now because you didn't come to me with this earlier. The ones that also form a peer group so having a number of other students that they can rely on and come together when they're struggling. They could revise, they could look at assignments, and they could share books and things like that. I find those are the ones that tend to be successful.	Encouragem Commitmen Review over perforfance Identify supp Referral to L Centre Don't make Take respon Early interve Peer suppor
3 presentations, we do assignments, formative assessments and assignments, reflective essays and obviously practice portfolio in terms of practice. The reflective element of things, I don't think students quite understand the usefulness of being assessed using that particular method and I don't know if that's something about the way in which the course is but I don't think there's an understanding of being a reflective practitioner and thinking about your experiences, thinking about your practice, thinking about how you come across and how you present yourself. It's not that it it's not a good way to assess, I think it's a valuable way to assess but I don't think it's embedded, students don't understand it, the number of reflective essays I've seen have been very descriptive and I just think, what is it about that that students are struggling with.	Presentation Formative a Summative Reflection Practice por
4. I think there is a perception of White privilege, there's a perception of Whites being more academic, that it's easy for them, learning is easy and comes a lot easier for them, there are not as many outside factors that affect them. Family life for a lot of the ethnic minority students, it's something that's important to them, something they feel they've got a responsibility to and therefore they end up juggling family life and university. I think often there are struggles around language barriers. A lot of our students speak a second language – English	Perceptions Family Life a balance Language B

isn't necessarily their first language. That is then translated into the way they write that has an impact on their ability to pass modules and to engage in some of the social work discourse that they should be having, those conversations regularly, challenging their thinking.	
I know when I certainly got into social work practice that there were a lot of Black managers and that was really important for me to see. Although academically I didn't see any Black educators, but when I got into the work place I saw a lot of Black managers and thought actually, I can get to there.	Perceptions disadvantag workplace Fear
However, that's changed now and what you see is that a lot of the frontline workers are Black ethnic minorities and a lot of the managers are White. So there's been a shift. So often there is a fear of, oh my gosh, I may not even get a job because I'm Black, I know I won't be promoted because I'm Black so I'm happy and content to just be a front line practitioner until I retire, so there's a lack of ambition, driven from fear. It's not that they're not ambitious, they want to get to those places but the fear is that, well it's not going to happen for me anyway because I'm a minority.	inadequate p role modelin
In terms of placements that students are given that are often not adequate. It doesn't equip them for the next stage of the course. It prepares them to be fantastic support workers but that's not what they're studying, they're supposed to be social workers	Inadequate p
I think even in the representation of the academic staff, no. There are two ethnic minority educators**.** Yes. I think that students probably look and say, "oh, if they can do it, I can too." I think there's definitely something about seeing somebody that you relate to that then makes something achievable at least.	

5 I think first of all, you have to want to do social work. You can't just do it because you feel there's no other option, that's not acceptable. You have to be committed. You have to be engaged in the process of learning. I said this to an MA group recently. I said, you have to be committed to the process of learning. I said, when you're here, you have to engage in the process, you have to do self-directed learning. You can't just wing it, you can't just rely on others to do it for you. You can't just rely on your lecturers and your educators to do it for you. Yes, they are a part of the process but you have to take some responsibility for your own learning.	Commitmen Engaged in process Self directed
I think that you have to be resilient, you have to be able to overcome challenges. Challenges will come. None of us sail through our social work education and get qualified. So you have to be resilient. You have to be able to jump back quickly and just get on with it and also think, actually, this is going to benefit somebody else in the long run. I need to be the best of who I can be, ensure I've gained all of the knowledge and skills to be the best and then go out there and be the best. Don't be lackadaisical. You know, how you are as a student reflects on how you're going to be as a practitioner. If you're not going to be committed to this process, you're not going to be committed to employment. So I think, from my experience, what's going to contribute to your success.	Reseilience Commitmen

I think that, it's easy to sit here and say it would be good if we were all integrated and students share their experience and there wasn't this disparity in terms of social status and upbringing and things like that. I think that's an ideal to say that actually, let's integrate, let's mix the students. But I think sometimes, as ethnic minority students, we deliberately separate ourselves because we've got an inferiority complex. We think we're not good enough, we think we can't have all of those conversations with our White peers and go in and challenge or not be scared to say, actually, I don't agree with you. I think there is a lot of inferiority complex that we perhaps face that makes us think that we're not good enough. We are creatures of habit, creatures of familiarity, and creatures of comfort. So it's easy for me to associate with what looks familiar to me. However, from my experience I learnt from engaging with lots of different students. However, I went to a university where the Blacks were the minority on the social work course so it forced me to have to engage with other people and it was really mind-blowing to hear other people's perspective, to hear other people's experiences but not to make me feel as if I'm not good enough.	Inequality Integratratio Challenge Not good e
Group work was really, really useful and mixing people up, getting people out of their comfort zone.	Groupwork