An exploration of EdD students' experiences of personal transformation during their studies

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# Abstract

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There is a growing recognition in the literature that doctoral study can change people, not only by enhancing academic and research skills, but also in personal and emotional ways. Doctoral students have reported changes in the way they view themselves, their employing institutions and those around them. However, the personal impact of doctoral study is still a relatively small area of research, with few studies exploring the phenomena in depth. Therefore, this study aimed to provide a detailed exploration of the personal transformations experienced by seven part-time online EdD students during their studies. Answers were sought to the following questions:

- What self-identified personal transformations do Liverpool online EdD students experience during their studies?
- How do students describe the manifestations of these transformations?
- What, if any, contextual factors can be identified from the data collected, that may have influenced the personal transformation experiences of these students?

A narrative approach was used to gather and analyse the data required to answer these questions. Participants were asked to create visual representations of their doctoral journey and any moments of transformation they experienced. These visual representations were used as the basis for discussion during subsequent semi-structured interviews, where participants were asked to share their stories of personal transformation. Both the visual representations and interview content were used to undertake a narrative thematic analysis of the data gathered.

Participants' self-reported positive personal transformations included *changes of inner self*; *enhanced educational and mentoring practice;* and *thinking and perceiving differently*. Examples of how these personal transformations manifested included overcoming feelings of inferiority as a result of tutor feedback and good grades, becoming more assertive at home and work as a result of study requirements, and becoming more aware of the needs of other people through reflexive practice.

Factors that influenced personal transformation were also identified. These were: 'validation from others'; 'enhanced knowledge and ability to express ideas to others'; 'unexpected events and outcomes'; 'reflexive practice'; 'becoming a student'; 'critical thinking and reflection skills'; 'culture and different ways of knowing'; 'learning team relationships'; and 'constant challenge and persistence'.

The transformations and factors influencing them are discussed, then analysed using a conceptual framework of transformative learning theory. Participants' experiences of personal transformation during doctoral study were mainly positive, however some identified *negative consequences of personal transformation*, including 'disconnection from others', 'feelings of disillusionment at work' and being a 'perceived nuisance at work'.

The findings from this study contribute new knowledge to the literature on doctoral student experiences of personal transformation during their studies. The conceptual framework of transformative learning theory used is critiqued and revised in light of these findings, providing a new theoretical contribution to the field. Implications for practice, including preparation of EdD students and recommendations for EdD curriculum designers, are also identified.

Keywords: Transformative learning, transformation, doctoral study, EdD student experience

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# Chapter 1- Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to explore in depth the personal transformation experiences of students undertaking a part-time online EdD with the University of Liverpool.

Transformation is a process and/or result of change. The word 'transform' derives from the Latin 'trans' meaning "across, to or on the farther side of, beyond, over" (OED, 2022) and '*formāre'* or 'forma' meaning "shape, configuration" (OED, 2022). When both elements of the word are combined, the meaning is defined as "To change the form of; to change into another shape or form; to metamorphose" (OED, 2022).

Wade (1998) in her concept analysis of personal transformation drew from a variety of disciplines including the behavioural and health sciences, education and philosophy to produce a common definition of the term:

> All disciplines view personal transformation as a non-linear process involving self-reflection and the adoption of new and broader self definitions. As individuals expand their consciousness with each transformative experience, interdimensional awareness is enhanced. Through interdimensional awareness, individuals reach towards the highest level of consciousness (p.714)

Personal transformation as a normal aspect of human development is by no means a new concept. Tennant (1993) reminds us that changes in mindset, behaviour and personality occur over the adult lifespan as a normal result of ageing and maturing. However, transformation can also be triggered by particular events, such as undertaking an educational programme (Cranton, 2016). In this study, online EdD students' experiences of personal transformation during their studies have been explored in order to shine light on this under-researched area in doctoral education (Lee, 2020a).

In the first half of this chapter, I outline the research problem, rationale for the study, background information, and context in which the research takes place. Latterly, I define the research questions, project scope and provide an overview of the structure of this thesis.

## 1.1 The research problem

Research problems are usually identified in one of two ways, through encountering an issue in practice, or by identification of a gap in existing research literature (Creswell, 2013). The idea for this research project came from my own personal experience of doctoral study. Since starting the Liverpool online EdD I have experienced many personal transformations; the majority of which have been positive, empowering and uplifting. However, they were often also associated with upsetting, confusing or difficult feelings or consequences. These transformations, and the feelings and consequences associated with them, were unexpected and I was unprepared for them. Whilst I have embraced the changes such experiences have brought, I believe some prior insight into the possibility of having such experiences would have been useful at the start of the programme. Mezirow (1991a) advocated the need to support students undergoing transformative learning experiences, a position that has been supported by other transformative learning theory authors such as Cranton (2016) and Taylor (2007). I believe such support would have been beneficial to both myself and other online doctoral students during the course of our studies.

This belief ultimately led to the formation of my research topic. I started to speak to fellow students on the online EdD programme, asking them if they had experienced unexpected personal transformations during their studies, and if they thought it a topic worthy of further investigation. My peers were overwhelmingly supportive of the idea. Two fellow students even asked to be a part of the study at that embryonic stage (and did later go on to take part). As a result, I started to review literature related to the impact of doctoral study on students, and transformation experienced by doctoral students. Whilst studies were limited in number, the results typically reported positive outcomes such as improved critical thinking and decision-making skills and career progression (for

examples see Burgess & Wellington, 2010; Kumar, 2014). Where negative impact was reported, this was often related to work/life balance and sacrificing time with family (e.g. Hramiak, 2017; Leonard et al., 2005).

There were hints however, in a few studies, that pointed to unexpected negative consequences. For example, in Stehlik's (2011) study of mid-career PhD students; one student described how the altered perspective she now had, while wonderful, had also caused difficulties for her when encountering friends and family members who retained perspectives she now disagreed with. Discovering examples like this reassured me that my own experience was not unique, but the limited number of studies that conveyed such findings also illustrated that this was an under-researched area.

As a result of my own experience, conversations with my peers, and the initial literature review conducted, I decided to pursue this topic for my doctoral research study. By exploring the personal transformation experiences of other doctoral students on the programme, I raise awareness of this phenomenon, with a view to helping prospective students be prepared for the possibility of personal change as a result of doctoral study.

## 1.2 Rationale

This research contributes to the development of knowledge practically, and by addressing a gap in the current literature. Firstly, from a practical perspective, there is a need for prospective doctoral students to be aware of the potential for personal change as a result of study that may or may not be welcome to the individual or those around them. Whilst many publications exist for prospective doctoral students that outline the PhD, EdD or other Professional Doctorate process, expectations and time commitment (for examples see Wellington et al., 2005; Phillips & Pugh, 2010; Gosling & Noordam, 2011; Fulton et al., 2013), the potential for personal change and transformation does not appear to be addressed as a topic, which I believe is remiss. Informing prospective students of the

potential for personal change, and the difficulties other students have experienced as a result, could help these students in several ways. Firstly, it would enable students to consider the potential personal impact of doctoral study when deciding whether or not to undertake a doctorate.

As a result of this more informed decision making, it is possible that fewer students would go on to drop out of doctoral programmes. This may improve the retention rates of doctoral students which are already low, with between 40 and 50% of students never completing their studies (Gardner, 2009; Golde, 2005). Spronken-Smith et al. (2018) highlight that non-completion rates for those students undertaking doctoral study part-time are higher than those of full-time students, and Terrell et al. (2012) observe that non-completion rates for online courses are also higher than traditional face-to-face courses, estimating that up to 70% of online students do not complete their studies. With non-completion rates potentially so high for part-time, online doctoral students, any information that could lead to a reduction in these rates would be welcome. Additionally, if doctoral programme curriculum designers were aware of the potential for personal transformation as a result of doctoral study, they could put in place mechanisms to support student well-being during these transformations, as advocated by transformative learning theorists such as Mezirow (1991), Cranton (2016), and Taylor (2007).

Secondly, in the transformational learning literature there has been very little attention paid to the transformative learning experiences of doctoral students as a topic for study (Lee, 2019; Stevens-Long et al., 2012; Kroth & Cranton, 2014). Whilst rooted in the study of adult learning, transformative learning theory has paid little attention to this group of learners. Similarly, in research focused on doctoral study, there is little research focused on the impact of doctoral study on students (Kowalczuk et al., 2017; Hramiak, 2017).  Of the research that does exist on the impact of doctoral study on students, the majority of findings reported are relatively crude, such as an "increase in self-confidence" (Hramiak, 2017, p.30). Therefore an in-depth study, reporting in detail

the personal transformations experienced by doctoral students and how these transformations manifest would add to the existing literature.

## 1.3 Personal transformation and transformative learning

I used the term 'personal transformation' throughout this research project as a way to retain focus on my particular unit of analysis, the experiences' of individuals that leave them changed or different in some way afterward. This terminology was important, as using the term 'transformative learning' with participants undertaking an EdD may have influenced their responses. Due to their studies in education, EdD students may well have had prior scholarly knowledge of transformative learning theory. This could have caused them to shape their responses to the project consciously or unconsciously with prior conceptions of transformative learning from the literature. This was particularly relevant with a topic such as transformative learning which has yet to produce an integrated definition of the term (Cranton, 2016). This meant participants could have interpreted transformative learning in a number of very different ways dependent on their reading within the subject. I did not want participants to use pre-defined scholarly definitions when reflecting on their own experiences of personal transformation. I wanted them to identify for themselves what they considered to have been a personal transformation, so that they shared experiences which held meaning for them personally. Therefore I deliberately did not use the term 'transformative learning' in any materials supplied to participants prior to interview, or within the interview itself.

Transformative Learning Theory was first developed by John Mezirow in 1978. Initially his work focused on "perspective transformation" (1978a, p.7) and a ten-stage process of personal perspective transformation. He defined perspective transformation as:

> the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings. (1981, p. 6)

Key to Mezirow's ten-stage process of perspective transformation (1978a) is the underpinning view of perspective transformation as a deliberative cognitive process. Since its conception transformative learning theory has developed further, with Mezirow going on to refine and re-scope his theory over time, and other authors adding their own conceptions of transformative learning theory by exploring what they see as under-developed or omitted perspectives within Mezirow's work. The most recent definition of transformative learning is provided by Cranton (2016), and demonstrates the evolving nature of the term:

> The traditional definition of transformative learning is a process that leads to a deep shift in perspective during which habits of mind become more open, more permeable, more discriminating, and better justified (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2000). To move toward a more integrated definition, the process can be rational (cognitive), extrarational (e.g., intuitive, spiritual, relational, and emotional), and/or focused on social change and social justice. (p.xii).

The second sentence within this definition is important, as it demonstrates the move away from transformative learning as a strictly deliberative, cognitive experience. Authors such as Boyd (1985; 1989) and Dirkx (2000; 2006), who approach transformative learning from a depth psychology approach, believe that transformation is something people experience in an embodied, emotional and psychological way.

Depth psychology, a term originally developed by Eugen Bleuler during his time as Director of the psychiatric university clinic in Zurich between 1898 and 1927, acknowledged for the first time the role of the unconscious and the relationship between conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche in the treatment of mental illness (Scholtz et al., 2022). Since its inception, figures such as Jung, Corbett, Hillman and Moore developed the field of depth psychology further to consider the role of the unconscious in the development of a higher consciousness (Chalquist, 2022). My own

experiences of transformation during doctoral study were experienced in both cognitive and emotional ways, as were some of the other students' experiences uncovered during the initial literature review. For example, Miles (2019) highlighted the affective nature of her own doctoral journey from high school drop out to doctoral candidate, and students in Mowbray and Halse's (2010) research study emphasised the experience of personal growth during doctoral study. The combination of my personal experience, and those of some of the students in the literature, led me to incorporate the depth psychology conception of transformation within this study.

In recent years more focus has been given to the role of relationships as a facilitator of transformative learning, with writers such as Kroth & Cranton (2014) attributing transformational experiences to relationships between educators and students; Gilly (2004) to self-formed relationships with peers during a doctoral programme, and Lassig et al. (2013) to relationships formed within a research writing group. As a result of this increasing emphasis within the transformative learning literature, I also drew on the conception of transformative learning as a result of relationships within this study. Lastly, Schnepfleitner & Ferreira (2021) recently raised the issue of context as facilitating or inhibiting the potential for transformative learning. Therefore I combined Mezirow's (2003) cognitive conception of transformative learning with Boyd & Myers' (1988) psychoanalytical conception, Kroth & Cranton's (2014) relationship-focused perspective and Schnepfleitner & Ferreira's (2021) contextual approach, to create a conceptual framework of transformative learning which I then used within this study.

## 1.4 Narrative research

I chose to use a narrative research methodology utilising both oral and visual methods within this project, in order to address a methodological gap within the literature concerning the impact of doctoral study on students. Whilst narrative approaches using interviews or autoethnographic accounts have been used to study this phenomenon (for examples see Salmon, 1992; Lee et al., 2013; Preston et al.,2014; Bates & Goff, 2012), there is seemingly a lack of those using visual

methods. Narrative research generates thick, rich data (Denzin, 2001) with a lot of detailed description, allowing the researcher to pay attention to the small things that may be overlooked in other research approaches (Reissman, 2008). Narrative research takes many forms but essentially is concerned with individuals' lived experience expressed as story (Creswell, 2013). It can consist of collecting stories and analysing them, or it can be used as a method to present data, or both (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative inquiry refers to a specific methodology whereby stories are seen as snapshots of interaction generated between researcher and participant (Clandinin, 2016). Narrative research is often seen as an emancipatory research method, as the stories shared by participants are self-selected and the interaction between participant and researcher a collaborative search for meaning (Reissman, 2008). Mannay (2015) notes that narrative researchers use a number of methods for data collection including interviews, visual, performative and artistic approaches through which to explore meaning. The use of visual methods in this study provided a different medium through which to communicate meaning than the spoken or written word. Harper (2012) in her work on photovoice, claims that the use of participant-created images in research triggers different parts of the brain than those engaged in speech or the written word, providing opportunities for subconscious thought to be conveyed. Similarly, Mannay (2015) has used visual data collection methods to explore every-day experience in a different way, to "make the familiar strange"(p.32). The use of a visual method, in combination with semi-structured interviews, allowed me to view students' experiences of personal transformation from a new perspective.

Initially, I collected data in the form of stories from participant-created art and semi-structured interviews. I also used "narrative thematic analysis" (Reissman, 2008, p.53) to present the findings in order to retain the data in the participants' own words.

## 1.5 Professional doctorates

Part-time doctorates (professional doctorates or PhDs), and online provision of these has increased both in terms of availability and popularity among students in recent years (Lee, 2020a), with the US, UK and Australia providing the majority of courses (Hawkes & Yerrabati, 2018). Park (2007) attributes the increase in professional doctorate provision in part to the higher education sector response to global drivers, including an increased demand for researchers due to the global knowledge economy and employer demands for doctoral education to provide graduates with the skills and attributes they require. Mellors-Bourne et al. (2016) in their report on the provision of professional doctorates in UK Higher Education Institutions, observe that the increasing diversity of students seeking to undertake doctorates, particularly the growth amongst working professionals completing a doctorate later in life, has led to increasingly flexible and diverse provision to support the needs of these learners.

Professional doctorates differ from traditional PhDs, as the purpose of a professional doctorate is to develop applied knowledge that makes a significant contribution to professional practice through research (Scott et al., 2004). Instead of the student developing into a professional researcher, the student develops as a researching professional (Bourner et al., 2001).  As a result, professional doctorates are generally part-time courses, allowing the student to develop their practice through working and studying. Hawkes & Yerrabati (2018) identified the Doctorate in Education, or EdD, as the most common type of professional doctorate in the UK. Typically, those undertaking EdDs are working professionals undertaking part-time study along with a career, and ranging in age from between 30 and 50 (Jones, 2018). They are often balancing family lives and caring responsibilities either for young children or elderly parents (Wellington & Sikes, 2006; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2016).

### 1.5.1 The structure of EdD programmes

EdDs vary in terms of structure between higher education institutions; however in general an EdD is characterised by a taught component and a research component (Park, 2007). Students work through the taught stage of the programme in a cohort and regularly undertake group work or discussion as well as regular individual assessment assignments (Hoddell, 2002). During the research or thesis stage, the student is provided with supervisors and completes their practitioner research, which is assessed through thesis submission and viva (Park, 2007). Usually students are required to pass the taught stage of the programme in order to progress to the second stage (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2016). In some institutions, students attend weekend residentials or week-long blocks as part of the taught component; however some professional doctorates take place wholly online (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2016). The Liverpool online EdD is one of these.

### 1.5.2 Online EdD provision

An increasing number of EdD students opt to complete their studies in a wholly online environment due to the flexibility and convenience this method of study provides (Lim et al., 2008). Considering the demographic of those undertaking part-time EdDs (working people in their 30s-50s often with family or caring responsibilities) the lack of travel and ability to undertake most work asynchronously when and where it suits them is very attractive (Perreault, 2008; Song et al., 2004). Kung (2017) observes that most online EdD students are very satisfied with their course provision for these reasons. Ward et al. (2010) assert that online doctoral students also believe they experience quality learning and teaching instruction. An additional benefit online EdD students report is the multi-cultural experience of studying with other students in educational settings from around the globe (Lee, 2020a). As with all online learning environments, technical issues are sometimes experienced;

however in general the biggest issue in connection with technology is around students' technical

proficiency at the start of the course (Hendricks and Bailey, 2014).

The most well reported drawback to online EdD education, identified by Braun (2008) and

Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016; 2019), is that of limited faculty and peer interaction and a lack of

social engagement. Much work has been completed in this area in order to try and address these

issues within the taught stage of EdD programmes, such as use of a cohort approach, group work,

communities of practice, online support groups, regular supervision meetings online and mentoring

programmes (Hoddell, 2002; Ames et al.,2018; Lee, 2020; Truluck, 2007). Despite this, online

doctoral programme attrition rates are between 10 and 20% higher than face-to-face courses, which

Terrell et al. (2012) conclude means that attrition rates could be anywhere between 50 and 70%.

One reason for this may relate to the difference in communication and peer support between the

taught and thesis stages, with students reporting feeling more isolated during the thesis phase

(Terrell, 2012). Gilpin (2010) and Terrell (2012) also report that some EdD students feel as though

faculty, advisory and/or supervisory staff do not care about them, or are slow to respond to requests

for help, which can result in added time taken to complete their degree. The student perception

seems to be that it is easier to be forgotten online, and that face-to-face contact (or physical

presence) on the same campus as a supervisor would result in better relationships.

This perception may have been impacted by the global pandemic that took place starting in 2019,

during the course of this research study. During this time travel between countries was either

banned altogether, or significantly restricted for a prolonged period of time. It was necessary for

many countries across the globe to 'lock down' their population for several months, and in some

countries, such as the UK and China, this happened more than once. This meant people had very

restricted lives, and were not allowed to socialise face-to-face with others outside of their

household, including their families, or were permitted to do so only when socially distanced and

outdoors. Some countries did not allow people out of their homes at all for periods of time. In the

UK, adults except key workers were told to work from home for a period of 12 months initially, and children did not attend school for nine out of 12 months during the first lockdown. A second lockdown meant that children were unable to physically attend school for a further two months and adults able to work from home were encouraged to do so again during the same time period. This upheaval meant the vast majority of educational, work-related and social communication took place online, with video calls becoming the new normal. While it is beyond the scope of this project to research, the exponential increase in online interactions driven by the pandemic is likely to impact on negative attitudes toward online interaction, work and education. This may alter the perceived superiority of face-to-face interaction, and positively influence the higher attrition rates associated with online EdD provision, as well as the wider online education market.

## 1.6 Study context

The Liverpool online EdD is a fully online, part-time doctoral programme open to education professionals across the globe. The EdD is delivered in partnership with an international education provider, providing the infrastructure and staff to support large, globally dispersed student cohorts. The programme is split into two stages, the taught stage and the thesis stage. The taught stage of the programme contains nine modules plus a series of nine reflective assignments that students must complete and pass in order to progress to the thesis stage of the programme. Each module (including the post-module reflective assignment) takes place over 12 weeks with the exception of the first module that takes 13 weeks. Each module consists of weekly reading and tasks which either require discussion between participants using online discussion boards or 'learning team' activities where students must work together to complete a task. Modules have two summative assignments that are completed individually. The topics covered in the modules help to prepare the student for the thesis stage. Students are assigned a mentor whom they are required to meet with after completion of each module. Students can complete the modules one after another until all modules

are completed, or can take a break between modules and wait for the module to run again with another cohort, joining that cohort instead.

Once the taught stage is complete if students have successfully passed all requirements they progress to a thesis matching phase, where they provide a rough outline of the topic they are interested in researching and can view profiles of all available primary supervisors. A wide choice of supervisors from around the world with varied research specialisms and expertise are available due to the partnership provision model. Once a student and a supervisor are matched, the student can begin to develop their research proposal with support from their primary supervisor. Students are also allocated a second supervisor, usually from the University of Liverpool. At this point the thesis stage is more reflective of a traditional PhD pathway, whereby the student completes their research, submits their thesis and defends it at a viva. Students and supervisors agree between them how often they wish to meet. Every six months the student and supervisor must complete a progress report to return to the University to ensure sufficient progress is being made by the student and flag up any issues that may need to be addressed.

During the course of this research study the University of Liverpool went through a re-tendering process that resulted in a change of commercial partnership provider. All data included in this study had been collected prior to this change, and as a result any impact that the change of partnership might have had on students' experiences of transformation are not included in this study.

## 1.7 Scope of study

Within this study, the focus was the self-reported personal transformation experiences of doctoral students during the course of their online EdD studies. Identity formation and/or 'becoming' were out-with the scope of this work. Whilst literature concerning doctoral student 'becoming' and/or identity formation are worthy and relevant research studies, these were not pursued partially due to my own view of identity as a moveable, evolving concept, and partially due to the contested concept of what it is to be a 'doctor' or what a 'doctorate' is.

Wellington (2013) searches for the characteristics of a doctorate in his article on the search for 'doctorateness'; which he describes as "the actual interpretation of what a doctorate is, or is deemed to be" (p.1491). He concludes that there are as many meanings of 'doctorateness' as there are doctoral students. Some examples from students he discussed the concept with were the ability to put together and argue an evidence-based case, and the ability to make the reader think about something in a different way (Wellington, 2013). In order to understand the transformations students experience as they 'become' doctors, I would need to first ascertain what the students' concepts of 'doctorateness' were. The focus of this study was students' experiences of personal transformation, as I know from my own experience, and the experiences of other students reported in the literature, that it is possible to experience personal change as a result of doctoral study. Therefore, transformation was the unit of analysis for this research.

Additionally out-with this project were students undertaking the online EdD who had not experienced personal transformations during the duration of their studies. Cranton (2016) believes that transformative learning is a voluntary experience, and that individuals can choose not to change, or be open to change. Therefore, it is entirely possible and maybe probable that not all doctoral students undergo personal transformation during their studies. The purpose of this study was not to establish the percentage of doctoral students who do or do not experience such transformations, merely explore the experiences of those who self-identify as having undergone personal transformation.

Lastly, as stated previously, this study used a narrative approach to data collection, analysis and presentation. Narrative research is contextual, situated and collaboratively interpreted. Therefore, no knowledge claims of generalisability or transferability are made within this research. The results of this study are intended to add knowledge to the existing literature through an in-depth study of students' experiences of personal transformation during doctoral study. Such work generates context-specific knowledge that is relevant to particular disciplines and can result in developments in

research focus. Examining a small number of students' experiences in detail opens up a black box of experience that was previously hidden to us, providing new, unseen knowledge to add to the field (Reissman, 2008).

## 1.8 Research aim and questions

The aim of this research was to explore in-depth the personal transformation experiences of students undertaking a part-time online EdD with the University of Liverpool.

My research questions were:

- What self-identified personal transformations do Liverpool online EdD students experience during their studies?

- How do students describe the manifestations of these transformations?

- What, if any, contextual factors can be identified from the data collected, that may have influenced the personal transformation experiences of these students?

## 1.9 Structure of this thesis

The introduction chapter of this thesis introduced the reader to the aim of this research and the rationale for conducting it. A short introduction to the topic under investigation was provided, along with an overview of the methodology and research methods used. An introduction to the research context contained details of professional doctorates in general and the Liverpool online EdD in particular, to supply the reader with sufficient information to understand the findings and discussion that are addressed later in this thesis. The scope of the study was outlined, and finally the structure of the thesis presented.

Chapter two, the literature review, provides a summary and critique of relevant literature related to the transformation of students as a result of doctoral study, and the impact of doctoral study on students. Factors influencing the transformational experiences of doctoral students are interpreted

from the literature reviewed. The findings from the literature review are considered in light of relevance to this research study. Gaps within the literature are identified, and the contribution of this study to the field is outlined.  Lastly, an overview of the transformative learning theories and conceptual framework used within this study is provided.

The methodology chapter outlines and justifies the methodology and methods used within this study and details the research design and implementation. The approach to data analysis is presented and consideration given to the ethical issues arising from this project. Lastly, steps taken to enhance the validity of the study are addressed.

In chapter four, the findings from this study are presented. The seven participants in this study are introduced, and the themes identified within the thematic narrative analysis of the data are shared. Examples from the data are used to illustrate each theme, providing detailed examples of doctoral students' experiences of personal transformation and how these manifested. Factors identified as contributing to transformation are presented and explored. Both the themes and factors are situated in relation to transformative learning theory and/or findings from previous literature where appropriate. Findings that represent a new contribution to knowledge are highlighted.

The discussion chapter explores the research methodology used within this study and three aspects of the findings deemed worthy of further exploration. Firstly, female students' experiences of what Clance and Imes refer to as "imposter phenomenon" (1978, p. 241) and how this was overcome are explored. Secondly, the transformative learning theories used to interpret students' experiences of personal transformation are critiqued in terms of usefulness and a revised conceptual framework of transformative learning is proposed. Lastly, the negative consequences of personal transformation are discussed in terms of the emotional burden experienced by doctoral students.

Chapter six concludes this thesis by summarising this research study and revisiting the research questions in light of the findings. The contribution of this study to knowledge, theory and practice is discussed, and the limitations of the research outlined.  Recommendations for further research are

made that would add knowledge to the fields of transformative learning and the impact of doctoral

study on students. Finally, I reflect on what I have learnt as a practitioner and researcher during the

course of the EdD programme.

# Chapter 2- Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature associated with doctoral students' personal transformations during their studies, and how this literature relates to my own study; in order to contextualise the research problem identified and demonstrate the originality of this research.

As this research focuses on students' experiences of personal transformation during their doctoral studies, literature was sought that related to student transformation through their engagement in learning. This led to the discovery of transformative learning theories (such as Mezirow, 2003; Boyd & Myers, 1988) and associated literature fields.  As transformative learning theories explore the transformations experienced by adults through, or as a result of, the learning process, it provided an epistemologically congruent lens through which to investigate the personal transformations experienced by students during doctoral study.

This literature review chapter is structured in the following way. Firstly, the scope of the literature review on doctoral students' experience of transformation is outlined, detailing and justifying the search terms used, databases searched, and limiters applied. Secondly, the articles, chapters, conference proceedings, theses and additional documents that met the search criteria are reviewed and presented in a number of themes I identified in order to provide structure to this review, and clarity to the reader. The findings from the literature review are analysed, in terms of applicability to the context of this study. Next, information within the literature related to factors influencing doctoral students' experiences of transformation is reported in relation to factors that may apply to students within this study. Following on from this, an overview of transformative learning theory used within this study is offered, and the conceptual framework of transformative learning theory developed is presented.

## 2.1 Scope of literature search

This literature review contains the results of two main keyword searches. The first search utilised the keywords 'transformation AND doctoral students' (and related terms), and the second 'personal impact AND doctoral study' (and related terms). All databases within the University of Liverpool library were searched (see Table 1), from 1923 to 2021. 'Transformative learning' as a term was added as a limiter during the 'transformation AND doctoral students' search. 155 papers were found in the first search. The term 'doctoral students' was added as a limiter during the 'impact of doctoral study AND students' search. 119 papers were identified for further review in this second search. Altogether, 274 papers were reviewed.

Studies related to identity and 'becoming' were excluded, as these subjects are out-with the scope of this study for the reasons identified in the introductory chapter of this thesis.

In addition, studies related to the design of curricula in order to foster transformative learning were also excluded. In this area of research, learning activities, teaching and learning methods and curriculum models are developed and evaluated in light of the extent to which students experience transformed habits of mind or expanded consciousness as a result of engaging with them. This study did not evaluate such initiatives. Instead, this study focused on students' lived experiences. Whilst any factors identified as influencing students' transformative learning experiences could inform such curriculum development, the purpose of this study was to identify *what* transformations students experience and *how* they manifest, in order to deepen understanding of the transformative learning experienced by doctoral students. Therefore, articles related to curriculum design were excluded from this literature review.

The term 'transformation' rather than 'personal transformation' was used in the first search along with the term 'doctoral student' in order to avoid an excessive limitation of search results. Personal transformation within this study was used as a term when communicating with participants deliberately without definition, to enable them to self-identify what that meant to *them* in light of

their own experience, and to limit the influence of potential prior scholarly knowledge of transformative learning theory on participants' responses. As such, transformations which may be categorised by authors within the literature as professional or cognitive (for example) may have been considered personal by the participants within this study, and therefore were deemed useful to include in the literature review. 'Personal impact' was used as a search term in the second literature search alongside 'doctoral study' and 'students' to seek studies where students had encountered personal change, but may not have used the term 'transformation', in order to identify any additional studies that might have contributed to the findings from the first search.

**Table 1**

*Literature type and database search details*

| Literature types included |
| --- |
| Academic Journals |
| Books |
| eBooks |
| Reports |
| Conference Proceedings |
| Magazines |
| Electronic resources |
| News |
| Reviews |
| Dissertations/Theses |
| Trade magazines |
| Videos |
| |
| Databases searched |

| | |
|---|---|
| Academic Search Complete | Supplemental Index |
| Education Search Complete | Books at JSTOR |
| ERIC | APA PsychInfo |
| Complementary Index | Directory of Open Access Journals |
| Gale Academic OneFile | MEDLINE with Full Text |
| Research Starters | Project MUSE |
| Business Source Complete | Teacher Reference Center |
| Science Direct | Open AIRE |
| BrillOnline reference works | CINAHL Plus |
| University of Liverpool Catalogue | Humanities International Complete |
| Gale General OneFile | Communication and Mass Media Complete |
| Scopus | JSTOR Journals |
| Emerald Insight | Computers & Applied Sciences Complete |
| SPORTDiscus with Full Text | Dentistry & Oral Sciences Source |
| Springer Nature eBooks | Springer Nature Journals |
| SAGE Research Methods | NARCIS |
| Elgaronline | PASCAL Archive |
| EconLit | Environment Complete |
| Art & Architecture Complete | University of Liverpool Institutional Repository |
| ACM Full-Text Collection | Europeana |
| ProjectMUSE | SwePub |
| APA PsycTests | Historical Abstracts with Full Text |
| Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts | |

## 2.2 Overview of literature review findings

Stevens-Long et al. (2012) insightfully observe that one of the difficulties encountered when studying transformation associated with learning is that regardless of the conceptual lens used, the term transformation might refer to either the process or outcome of transformation, both process and outcome, or even the pedagogical approach used to foster transformative learning.

This is reflected in the literature concerning doctoral students, which can broadly be split into two distinct areas. The first consists of proposed curriculum frameworks or activities that foster the potential for transformative learning among doctoral students (for examples see: Apte, 2009; Provident, 2015; Lee, 2020b; Fierke & Lepp, 2020). The second consists of papers regarding students' experiences of transformation during their studies, the focus of this research project. These papers are now reviewed in further detail.

Literature concerned with students' experience of transformation during the doctoral journey can be further categorised into autoethnographic, narrative accounts written by the students themselves (for examples see Bates & Goff, 2010; Atabay et al., 2017; Gibson, 2017), and wider methodological approaches taken by faculty academics to explore the phenomenon. Some of these faculty-led approaches include facilitated emancipatory endeavours whereby faculty collaborate with students to enable them to share their stories using a narrative approach (for examples see Salmon, 1992; Ryan, 2013; Lee et al., 2013) and co-authored accounts of mutual transformation during the supervision process (e.g. Xu & Grant, 2017; Pratt & Peat, 2014; Gjotterund & Ahmad, 2018). Other studies use qualitative approaches such as semi-structured interviews and students' reflective accounts to provide information regarding students' experiences of transformation during their studies, or the impact of their studies upon them (some examples include Wang, 2018; Brown & Brown, 2015; Owens et al., 2020).

There are few mixed methods studies within the literature, with the notable exception of Kumar's (2014) survey of the impact of doctoral study which used quantitative questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. In terms of quantitative studies, Guo et al.'s (2018), large scale survey of first year doctoral students' gains and adaptation outcomes at Tsinghua University was the only study yielded by this particular literature search. Guo et al.'s (2018) study utilised a questionnaire approach whereby students responded to survey questions and statements using Likert scales to indicate the extent to which their knowledge and academic skills had developed, to what extent they had integrated into academia, and to what extent their self-assessment skills and confidence had improved over time. Whilst Guo et al.'s (2018) approach might be useful for the institution in terms of identifying where student support could be improved, the purely quantitative nature of the research, and the pre-defined areas of development, did not allow students to self-identify areas in which they may have developed or experienced transformation.

Though all of these papers were reviewed as part of this research study, the qualitative research approaches to doctoral student transformation were of most use in informing this study due to the use of quotes from students in their own words. The papers written by doctoral students themselves provided the most authentic accounts of transformation, due to the authors' own lived experience and personal selection of what they felt as the most important transformations to document.

## 2.3 Transformational experiences reported by doctoral students

In terms of the transformations actually experienced by doctoral students during their studies, some of the literature reports transformation in particular areas; for example changed concept of learning and teaching, or more highly developed cognitive skills. Others report a holistic transformation of self. I have grouped these transformations into three themes I believe encompass the changes described. These are *enhanced teaching, enhanced cognitive skills and changes to inner Self.* When reviewing the literature to identify the transformations reported by doctoral students during their studies I also noted multiple examples of unexpected, uncomfortable consequences of students'

personal transformations. As a result, I developed the additional theme *negative consequences of personal transformation.* These four themes are now explored in detail.

### 2.3.1 Enhanced teaching.

A variety of attitudinal and practical changes with regard to doctoral candidates' teaching practices have been documented as a result of engagement with doctoral study. Students in Hramiak's (2017) study reported an increased empathy and patience with their own students and some observed that they now took more time to support their own students academically and pastorally. Teachers who had undertaken doctoral study in Kowalczuk et al.'s (2017) study described becoming better teachers as a result of their increased knowledge and changed way of thinking. Movement from teacher-centred transmission approaches to student-centred models of teaching and learning were also recounted (Qutoshi, 2016; Christie et al., 2015). An example of a particularly innovative approach to curriculum design as a result of doctoral learning was provided by Demirbag in Atabay et al. (2017), who provided an account of redesigning curricula in Hawaii to include the use of students' situated cultural spiritual beliefs as a framework for learning. Another interesting example of a change to teaching practice as a result of doctoral learning is provided in Davis' (2015) autoethnographic paper, where she describes the experience she had of service-based learning as an educational approach within the doctoral programme she undertook so transformational that she restructured her own curriculum to include service-based learning as an educational method. Atabay et al. (2017) even describe commissioning the building of a school with no interior walls or classrooms to remove class silos and promote teacher collaboration as part of an educational innovation and intervention he and his colleagues developed for a local educational authority during their own doctoral project.

It is unsurprising that students studying for a doctorate in education might change their attitudes and beliefs regarding learning and teaching practice, as so much time is spent reading educational literature and developing the skills of critical thinking and critical reflection. Within the Liverpool

online EdD one of the taught modules examined *how* learners learn and the multiple cognitive, psychological and social factors involved. Another module looked at ontological and epistemological ways of knowing. Therefore I had an expectation that participants in this research study may well identify changes in their learning and teaching practice.

### 2.3.2 Enhanced cognitive skills

Cognitively, students report the acquisition of research and writing skills (see Kumar, 2014; Mowbray & Halse, 2010), and the development of analytical and critical thinking (for example Stehlik, 2011; Scott et al., 2004) as a result of doctoral study. Students in Kumar and Dawson's (2013) study and the authors in Gibson et al.'s (2017) autoethnographic paper also described enhanced problem solving and decision-making abilities. In Burgess and Wellington's (2010) research on the impact of professional doctoral study on students, participants spoke of coming to understand academic language and multiple perspectives, which was also reflected in the findings from Leonard et al.'s, (2005) study on the benefits of doctoral study, and Kowalczuk et al.'s (2017) study of the impact of doctoral study on teachers in Poland and Portugal.

Critical thinking is an extremely important skill that doctoral students need to develop. This is the ability to systematically make decisions based on evidence, the credibility of information sources, and to use deductive logic and reasoning to come to reasonable conclusions (Ennis, 2011). Many doctoral students report the development of this skill as challenging but transformational (for examples see Xu & Grant, 2017; Gatua, 2009). Once students have developed the ability to use their critical thinking skills to critique the work of others, it is important that they can critique their own work in the same way through the process of critical reflection (Cottrell, 2011). One student in Mowbray and Halse's research on the development of doctoral student skills expresses this sentiment clearly:

how do I see my data, how do I structure my epistemology, how do I understand knowing

the truth….that changes the way that you view things around you. That's one of the reasons

I think why doing a PhD leads you to restructure your thinking, changing your life (2010,

p.660).

Mastery of these cognitive skills are part of the doctoral journey, and must be achieved in order for

the student to progress further and complete the programme. Achievement of each intellectual

challenge constitutes what Wisker et al. (2009) refer to as a "conceptual threshold crossing" (p,19).

Based on Meyer and Land's (2003) exploration of threshold concepts (concepts within disciplines

that must be understood in order to gain further mastery of a discipline), "conceptual threshold

crossings" (Wisker et al., 2009, p.19) refer to moments during the course of the doctoral journey

where the student grasps understanding or develops a cognitive skill essential to their development

as a doctoral student. Once this understanding 'clicks' or the student is able to perform the skill they

can progress further through the programme, but importantly the understanding or skill cannot be

lost, it is an irreversible process (Wisker, 2018).

As the development of critical thinking and critical reflection skills are such an important element of

the doctoral journey, I fully expected to hear accounts from the participants in this study of such

skills development. However, I was also interested to see if participants would identify any

unexpected negative consequences of this development as the students in Brookfield's (1994)

research on the development of critical reflection skills had. Brookfield reported that the

development of critical thinking skills is often accompanied by unpleasant side effects, such as

damage to relationships between family, friends and communities that the student may be a part of

as a result of new perspectives and ways of knowing.

My own experience of critical reflection during the doctoral programme led to some significant

changes in my life. For example, in the second year of the EdD programme I undertook an exercise

designed to help identify personal core beliefs and values. I became interested in the area and read

more about it. By critically examining both my underpinning beliefs and values, and the context in which I was working it became apparent to me that the two were not compatible, and eventually I changed my job as I felt 'other' to the environment I was in. As a result of this personal experience, and the experiences reported by students in Brookfield's (1994) research, it was not unreasonable to imagine that other doctoral students on the Liverpool online EdD might also have experienced changes in their life due to critical reflection practices, so examples of this phenomena in the data gathered from my fellow students as part of this research study were not unexpected.

### 2.3.3  Changes to inner Self

The most commonly reported transformation doctoral students experience is an increase in confidence (e.g. Burgess & Wellington, 2010; Stevens-Long, 2012; Preston et al., 2014). Both students in Kumar's (2014) mixed methods study and Atabay et al.'s (2017) autoethnographic study expressed their increased confidence as a feeling of empowerment. Other students described having more self-belief or self-esteem (Mowbray & Halse, 2010; Miles et al., 2019). Some of the students in Burgess and Wellington's (2010) study noted that their discourse had changed as a result of improved confidence, and that they now speak out more when before they would have remained silent. Other students reported feeling as though they were taken more seriously by colleagues as a result of their doctoral study; and that their academic credentials now stood up to scrutiny (Grabowski & Miller, 2015; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2016; Hramiak, 2017). One student in Mowbray and Halse's (2010) study, theorising the skills developed by PhD students, commented on her increased likelihood to take risks despite knowing that they might fail, as a result of the increased confidence and resilience that doctoral study had induced in her.

Authors such as Lassig et al. (2013), Davis et al. (2015) and Qutoshi (2016) reported improved self-awareness among doctoral students, of their own personality traits and behaviours. Whereas students in Brown and Brown's (2015) study of women who had chosen to undertake doctoral study

later in life reflected on the gendered expectations of others and the influence this had exerted on their own beliefs, attitudes and behaviours toward themselves and study.

Whilst some students described particular personal changes experienced as a result of doctoral study, others described a whole person transformation more aligned to the expansion of consciousness and fuller understanding of the inner 'Self' described by Boyd and Myers (1988). These emotional, affective experiences are expressed in powerful terms. For example, one student in Stehlik's (2011) study on students embarking on doctoral study in mid-career and after retirement stated:

> Doctoral studies are a wonderful gift that keeps on giving. I never expected it to be so rewarding and the personal growth and development are beyond my wildest dreams. I have discovered sides of myself that I never knew or suspected and I have developed a deeper understanding of my life and of other people. It has given me a sense of completeness and wholeness. I'm a much better person than I was when I started. (p.164)

Similarly, Lynch (2019) in her autoethnographic reflection of her PhD journey commented: "the journey to a PhD is one of self discovery. I am constantly learning about myself….who I am today, I will not be tomorrow" (Lynch & Kuntz, 2019, p.167).

Whilst these statements asserted life changing transformations of self, they did not go on to explain *how* the student changed in depth, so the reader is left wondering 'what sides of yourself did you discover?' and 'who are you today and how does that compare with who you were before you started doctoral study?' Only a limited number of studies provided more detail about *how* individual students had changed as a result of these transformations of Self. For example, in Wang's (2018) study of the transformative learning of UK students studying in China and Chinese students studying in the UK, a UK student found that living in China and observing the allocentric culture and commitment to family caused her to question and reframe her own values and concept of success. Rather than viewing success as an accumulation of wealth and material possessions she came to

view success as a more empathetic relationship-orientated phenomenon, and became closer to her own family as a result.

Perhaps the most detailed account of personal transformation, and certainly one of the most whole-scale transformations, is provided in Qutoshi's (2016) reflection on his own doctoral journey. As a local teacher based in Pakistan he set out to try and reconceptualise teacher education programmes in Pakistan. What transpired was an incredibly deep process of self-examination that he referred to as 'soulful inquiry' and development of an educational living theory. He realised that in order to change a system he must first look to himself as a product of that system and reflect on his own values, attitudes, beliefs, experiences and behaviour. In so doing he identified several areas where his espoused values were in contradiction to his behaviours. Through reflective writing and dialogue with his supervisor he came to see that his own view of education was a result of his limited personal experience of education as a child in a teacher-centred, didactic environment, and that similarly his view of leadership was one of control and power. He realised he was unwittingly reproducing this approach in his own teaching and leadership style, and that his staff found him unapproachable at best. As a result of this self-examination Qutoshi decided to practice both teaching and leadership in accordance with his personally identified values, stemming from his family, culture and religion. The ensuing new conversational, listening approach he took with staff, students and parents not only transformed Qutoshi as a person, but also his educational and leadership approach at the school and the lives of the staff, students and parents around him. This journey demonstrated not only the possible transformation of Self that doctoral study can promote, but also the emancipatory power that critical reflection undertaken by an individual can have on wider society.

This type of wholescale personal transformation captures the life altering potential of doctoral study for students, and as such constitutes the sort of account that I wish I had been acquainted with at the start of my doctoral studies. Whilst perhaps few students might experience, or take the time to

unpack such a life altering experience, even knowing the *potential* for the personal impact of

doctoral study would have left me better prepared to encounter such an experience. I knew that if I

could uncover even a limited portrayal of the personal transformation experiences shared by

Qutoshi (2016) with the participants in my own study, it would enable me to further raise awareness

of this phenomenon to potential doctoral students and faculty members teaching or supporting

students on doctoral programmes.

## 2.4 Negative consequences of personal transformation

Although the negative consequences of personal transformation are not a transformation

experienced by students, nonetheless there were references to such consequences from students

within the literature that deemed this phenomenon worthy of further attention. Since Brookfield's

(1994) large scale study on the negative side effects experienced by doctoral and graduate students

learning the skills of critical reflection, there has been limited further research in this area. However,

some studies explored the outcomes of what Brookfield (1994) referred to as "cultural suicide"

(p.55), whereby the students' new ways of thinking and changed view or opinions are now different

from those of their family, friends, colleagues or communities of which they are a part.

This can lead to breakdown in relationships or feelings of displacement and 'otherness' on the part

of the student. For example, Gibbs and Maguire (2016) write of the tension between the

development of personal professional values through doctoral study and the need to conform to

espoused values within the organisations and regulatory bodies individuals practice within. Lynch, in

Lynch and Kuntz (2019); details her growing awareness of the contradiction within doctoral

education to create new knowledge, but only within the accepted parameters of what the Academy

deem appropriate and acceptable conceptions of research. Several studies report doctoral students

becoming so dissatisfied with the institutional culture or work practices they reside within that they

leave their current employment (Scott, 2004; Kowalczuk et al., 2017; Fox & Slade, 2014). This reflects my own experience and subsequent change in employment as a result of doctoral study.

Some doctoral students and graduates have reported a mistrust or resentment amongst their colleagues of their doctoral status (Scott et al., 2004; Wellington & Sikes, 2006). Students in Kowalczuk et al.'s (2017) study of school teachers undertaking doctoral study in Poland and Portugal reported that they had experienced bias against them from colleagues, and some were even ostracised. Poppy and Suzie, authors in Gibson et al.'s (2017) autoethnographic account of balancing doctoral study with educational leadership, were both teachers and leaders in UK schools who reported that they deliberately had not discussed their EdD at work for fear of appearing arrogant or boastful.

These accounts demonstrated that the process of doctoral study can become 'othering' to those undertaking such study as they begin to view phenomena and the world around them differently. As a student in Stehlik's research study reported:

> I have achieved more than I ever thought possible, met some amazing people and participated in events that a few short years ago I would have considered off limits to me. At the same time, it can complicate the different events/factors in my daily life, particularly when new ways of thinking and seeing the world clash with my previous thinking and with those around me who are not in any way interested in academic life. (2011, p. 164)

It is perhaps then unsurprising that loneliness is the most widely acknowledged personal issue that doctoral students experience (e.g. Ali & Kohun 2009; Samara 2006; Wisker et al., 2007). Not only are they alone on their individual research journey, but they can become isolated from friends and family due to their changed ways of thinking or questioning of their previously shared beliefs and values.

One female doctoral student in Brown and Brown's (2015) study reflected on whether her transformational experiences had changed the way others saw her, and commented that her parents had told her that she had '"changed from a polite person into somewhat of a bitch" (p.144).

Christie et al. (2015) reported some of the most extreme results of transformational learning experiences among women returning to education who were asked to keep a critical incident file of their learning. The women reported that their changed views, i.e. challenging the stereotype that a 'woman's place is in the home', led to verbal and sometimes physical conflicts with life partners, and even subsequent marital breakdowns if partners were unwilling to accept their changed views.

As can be seen from these findings, the reported negative consequences of transformation due to doctoral study were wide ranging, and sometimes extremely emotionally damaging. It is unlikely that many students starting a doctorate would imagine that their marriage might break down as a result of personal change resulting from such study. However, Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2015; 2017), Brown and Brown (2015), Christie et al. (2015), and Wellington and Sikes (2006) all included reports from participants of relationship breakdowns due to their changed perspectives and/or ways of knowing. Given the impact of such experiences on individuals and families I agree with 'Janet' in Wellington and Sikes' (2006) study exploring the personal and professional impact of professional doctorates on students, that "…all study should carry a family/relationship health warning. You must go into it with eyes wide open" (p.731).

I hoped that none of the participants within this study would have experienced the extreme negative consequences of personal transformation reported by writers such as Christie et al (2015). However, the experiences of 'otherness'  from family, friends and colleagues recounted by students within these studies, and those I experienced myself during the course of my studies, demonstrated that such experiences were not unusual. Therefore, I suspected that such accounts might be shared by the participants in this study when discussing the manifestations of their personal transformations.

## 2.5 Critique of the literature on doctoral students' experience of transformation

From the literature on doctoral students' experiences of transformation during their studies several conclusions can be made. Although the transformations experienced by doctoral students varied between individuals, the most widely reported transformations from across the literature related to cognitive developments and increased confidence. Changes in epistemic belief and teaching practice, attitudes and behaviours were also reported (for examples see Hramiak, 2017; Qutoshi, 2016; Kowalczuk et al., 2017). Within autoethnographic studies, studies such as Stehlik (2011) and Owens et al. (2020) that had utilised students written reflections on their learning and development, and those using semi-structured interviews (e.g. Brown & Brown, 2015; Wang, 2018), the further themes of *changes to self* and the emergent phenomenon *negative consequences of personal transformation* were identified.

However, the depth of students' responses were naturally influenced and limited by the data collection methods used. For example, if there was no opportunity to ask further probing questions of a participant (as would be the case if a researcher used only written student reflections as data), or the researcher simply did not ask these questions (perhaps due to the scope of the work or simply due to the interviewing technique applied), opportunities to add to the understanding of students' experience of transformation could have been missed. Similarly, with autoethnographic accounts, as they were written by the author about their own experience, accounts are limited to the level of reflexivity the author has engaged in, and whether they have been able to deepen that through discussion with others.

Through the use of participant generated visual representations of their doctoral journey and/or moments of personal transformation, combined with semi-structured interviews I have gathered  in-depth accounts of students' personal transformations during doctoral study, and how these transformations manifest. Therefore this study adds detail to the experiences reported in the existing literature.

Of the studies identified within this literature search that utilised any form of transformative learning theory, the overwhelming majority used Mezirow's (2003) theory of transformative learning either as a theoretical frame or as both a theoretical frame and a base from which to develop questions for their participants (e.g. Lee, 2020a; Brown & Brown, 2015; Gjotterud & Ahmed, 2018). Four papers were identified that used theoretical variations to Mezirow's transformative learning theory. Gatua (2009) used Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner's (2007) definition of transformative learning in her work on the importance of shared narratives as a tool for emancipatory action among Sub- Saharan African women. Miles et al. (2019) acknowledged Mezirow's (2003) work, but went on to use Dirkx's (2000) psychoanalytical concept of 'soul work' in their autoethnographic account of transformation during doctoral study. Similarly, Qutoshi (2016) briefly reflected on Mezirow's concept of transformative learning (2003), but went on to use the concept of 'soulful inquiry' instead. The remaining paper by Stevens-Long et al. (2012) used a combination of transformative learning theories including Mezirow's rational approach (2003), a psychoanalytical conception of transformative learning theory (Dirkx, 2000), a structural development approach (Daloz, 1999) and the social emancipatory approach based on the work of Freiré (1973) and Morrow & Torres (2002). These results demonstrate that an extremely limited number of papers approach the transformative learning of doctoral students using multiple conceptions of transformative learning theory. Therefore, by developing my own conceptual framework of transformative learning, using the combined work of several different theorists, I have demonstrated a new approach within the literature relating to doctoral student transformation.

## 2.6 Factors influencing students' transformational experiences

A noteworthy proportion of literature related to doctoral students' experiences of transformation during their studies explores the factors that facilitate or trigger such learning experiences. Themes I have identified within the literature relate to *student readiness, curricula content or design* and *interaction with others (especially diverse others).* These will be presented in the next sections.

### 2.6.1 Student readiness

Authors such as Stehlik (2011), and Davis et al. (2015), assert that student 'readiness' for the transformative nature of doctoral learning is a factor influencing whether or not transformative learning occurs. Women in Stehlik's (2011) study on mid to late career doctoral students identified several reasons for choosing not to pursue a doctorate earlier in life, including lack of self-confidence at an earlier age, family commitments, a lack of life experience to reflect upon, and a lack of female role models. However, underpinning these practical reasons is a more fundamental issue of mindset. Cranton (2016) is quick to point out that transformative learning is a voluntary undertaking; whilst certain activities or situations can trigger the *potential* for transformative learning, the individual can choose whether or not to engage in critical self-reflection. The reasons given for 'readiness' referred to by students in Davis et al.'s (2015) and Stehlik's (2011) studies could actually also reflect their mindset, in that they were now willing to be open to potential change within themselves.

### 2.6.2 Curricula content and design

Curricula content, or learning and teaching methods used, can also facilitate transformative learning experiences (Provident et al., 2015). For example, authors such as Kumi-Yeboah and James (2014), Tran (2012) and Ritz (2010) all reported that the difference in teaching and learning approaches between Eastern and Western countries have served as a trigger for transformative learning amongst students. Kelly and Miller (2008) and Atabay et al. (2017) highlighted the pedagogical use of service-based learning as one particularly likely to promote transformative learning experiences due to the experience of working in communities that may be very different to the student's own, causing them to identify and confront bias and prejudice in themselves, as well as generate a sense of responsibility toward contributing to the lives of others as well as oneself. Teaching activities designed to promote potential for transformative learning included asking students to engage in reflective writing (Fierke & Lepp, 2020), reflective writing on the experience of 'distorting dilemmas' (Lee, 2020b) or maintaining a critical incident file (Christie et al., 2015). Swartz and Triscali (2011)

and Preston et al. (2014) described the use of group work assignments on topics that generated considerable variation in opinion or are considered controversial as a method to foster transformative learning experiences. A great deal more literature exists within the area of curriculum design to foster transformative learning, however this was not within the scope of this literature review, and as such any reference to curricula design or content here has been identified only as a result of contributing to students' transformational learning experiences.

### 2.6.3 Relationships with others

By far the most acknowledged facilitator of transformative learning was relationships with others. Peer mentorship was considered an important factor for some students in terms of both academic and emotional support (Preston et al., 2014; Scott & Miller, 2017). Naturally emerging relationships with other students were also cited. For example, Swartz and Triscari (2011) experienced mutual transformation as a result of a chance assignment during their doctoral programme. They attributed this transformation to open communication and acceptance, transparency, mutual respect and a shared desire to seek new knowledge, however, the biggest influence on their transformation they cited as diversity of experience. Similarly, Gilly (2004) commented on her doctoral journey with two other students over a period of two years in a self- formed "living learning group" (p. 235) that together the three group members developed a "collaborative self" (p. 236), whereby the group's knowledge surpassed all their individual knowledge and was a transformational experience for all three members.

More formal Communities of Practice can also be an influential factor in doctoral students' experience of transformation. Students attributed their academic breakthroughs and commitment to completion of the doctorate to group engagement, joint enterprise, academic, social and pastoral support (for examples see: Coffman et al., 2016; Lassig et al., 2013; Kriner et al., 2015). Lynch and Kuntz (2019) and Pratt and Peat (2014) identify supervisory relationships as a trigger for transformative learning experiences, which could prove transformative for both supervisor and

student when each were of different nationalities and from different cultures (Gjotterund & Ahmad, 2018; Xu & Grant, 2017).

## 2.7 Critique of factors influencing doctoral students' experiences of transformation

The overwhelming factor reported as influencing doctoral students' experience of transformation during their studies was relationships with others. Whether this was through formal membership of faculty or externally developed communities of practice (Coffman et al., 2016), informal relationships with peers (Swartz & Triscari, 2011), organised or naturally occurring peer mentorship initiatives (Scott & Miller, 2017) or supervisory relationships (Lynch & Kuntz, 2019); relationships with others were credited for many of the transformations experienced. This lends weight to transformative learning theorists such as Kroth and Cranton (2014) and Taylor and Snyder (2012) who believe that relationships are an important factor in transformative learning, and one underrepresented in Mezirow's (2003) work. Whilst Mezirow (2003) acknowledges that others are involved in the transformative learning process, it is still seen as an individually owned phenomenon, with others acting as adjuncts rather than partners. Findings from many of the papers analysed in this literature search contradict Mezirow's view, with those involved commenting that the relationship *itself* was transformational rather than particular individual experiences (for examples see Pratt & Peat, 2014; Gjotterund & Ahmad, 2018; Gilly, 2004). Relationships are not associated with the cognitive, rational domain but rather with the affective domain. They are based on our need as humans to connect with others and arouse feelings and emotion, which may explain why Mezirow (2003) did not pay too much attention to relationships or collaboration within his development of Transformative Learning Theory.

Learning through relationships with others is a cornerstone of social learning theories. Vygotsky (1978) in his theory of social development asserted that individuals do not construct meaning internally and outside of the world, but through socially mediated constructs, and that therefore society and socialisation are active co-constructors in the development of knowledge and meaning.

Vygotsky (1978) described two zones of development, the actual zone which the learner can achieve independently, and the zone of proximal development, a potential level of development the learner might achieve with the support of more experienced others. He stressed that learning was a collaborative process. Lynch and Kuntz (2019) and Pratt and Peat's (2014) experiences of transformative learning through supervisory support demonstrate the learning that can be achieved within the zone of proximal development between a student and their supervisor.

Lave and Wenger (1991) also highlight the role of others in learning within their situated learning theory and associated communities of practice. In situated learning newcomers learn through their participation in a community of practice (1991). According to Wenger (2000, p.229) a successful community of practice is defined by 3 components, 'joint enterprise' (a shared interest or topic), 'mutuality' (a group of people that interact together) and a 'shared repertoire' (a group of practitioners sharing stories, working together to understand a phenomenon better and creating group knowledge). In their original work on communities of practice Lave & Wenger (1991) and later Wenger (1998) highlighted that membership of these communities was self-selecting, therefore exempt from the hierarchies present in more formal groups organisations. The community itself decides what is important and how it develops, creating new knowledge. This new knowledge is the result of the collaborative learning process, in what Vygotsky (1978) would term as the zone of proximal development.

The examples of transformative learning experienced by individuals within Coffman et al.'s (2016) and Kriner et al's (2015) established communities of practice, and the less formal groups discussed in Scott & Miller (2017) and Gilly's (2004) studies demonstrate how relationships with peers can stimulate transformative learning, not just relationships with more experienced others such as supervisors.

Extensive research has been conducted regarding the role of the supervisory relationship in doctoral student success (see Bastalich, 2017; Gray & Crosta, 2019) and many supervision guides developed

to assist the supervisor in supporting and navigating the student through the complex process that completion of a doctorate entails (e.g. Wisker, 2012; Lee, 2012; Phillips & Johnson, 2022). Askew et al. (2016) and Deuchar (2008) among others believe the supervisory relationship is the most influential factor in doctoral student learning and persistence. However within this literature review focused on personal transformation as a result of doctoral study, supervision as an influencing factor was not cited as often as might have been expected, with more studies referring to peer interaction as a factor. A possible explanation for this may be the demographic profile of the students involved in, or authoring research regarding personal transformation through doctoral study. Many of the studies retrieved in the literature search were written by, or involved participants undertaking part-time doctoral study later in life. Lee (2020a) observes that those working whilst studying part-time online gravitated toward areas of research related to their own practice, and that therefore their research is somewhat removed from that of their supervisor. "Students still seek supervisory support to a minimum level necessary for thesis completion; however, they tend to have an ultimate sense of academic *independence* from their supervisors"(p. 589).

An alternative explanation may relate to the cohort structure of many taught professional doctorates (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2016). This typically involves students working closely together for a prolonged period of time early in their doctoral journey, before starting a thesis stage during which they are matched with, and work alongside, their supervisor. The requirement to interact within a learning community is likely to foster transformative learning at an early stage, perhaps leaving more of an impression on students than experiences later in the programme.

 I deemed it highly likely that the factors identified within this literature review would be represented in the data gathered from Liverpool online EdD students as part of this study. The online EdD uses a cohort approach with a significant amount of group work as part of the teaching and learning approach in the taught element of the programme, as well as providing a personal tutor to each student, who meets with the student towards the end of each taught module. The EdD is

also an international programme with students from all over the world completing it at any one time, therefore it was entirely possible that interaction with others (especially diverse others), curriculum design, and readiness for transformative learning might be identified as factors that contributed to the transformative learning experiences of participants in this study.

## 2.8 Introduction of conceptual framework of transformative learning

In section 2.5 I identified papers within the literature concerning the transformational experiences of doctoral students that had used theoretical conceptions of transformative learning theory. Of the papers identified the majority had used Mezirow's (2003) cognitive theory of transformative learning, however there were some exceptions including Gatua (2009), Miles et al. (2019) and Qutoshi (2016) where other theories were used. The only study that used a combination of multiple conceptions of transformative learning theory from which to approach their research were Stevens-Long et al. (2012) who used Mezirow's (2003) rational approach, Dirkx's (2000) psychoanalytical conception, Daloz's (1999) structural development approach and Morrow and Torres' (2002) social emancipatory approach. By using a conceptual framework within their study they were able to explore multiple facets of transformative learning, providing a more comprehensive picture of the holistic experience of transformation.

 Jabareen (2009) defines a conceptual framework as " a network, or "a plane," of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena" (p.51). Each concept included is considered important and relational in some way to the others included, and the aim of such frameworks is to promote understanding of a phenomenon (Jabareen, 2009).  I identified in the introductory chapter that my own experience of transformation during doctoral study had not just been experienced cognitively, but also emotionally, and that this experience had been reported by other students within the literature (e.g. Miles et al., 2019, Gibson et al., 2017). As a result of this, and the findings from the literature review regarding student

readiness and the role of relationships with others in transformative learning, I decided to develop my own conceptual framework of transformative learning to reflect the facets of personal transformation I had encountered experientially and in my review of the literature . I chose not to include other theories of learning in my conceptual framework such as Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory or Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory (1991) as while these theories could explain the relational aspects of transformative learning identified in the literature review, they could equally be used to explain any type of learning, not transformative learning in particular. In addition by using Kroth and Cranton's (2014) relational conception of transformative learning I hoped to be able to move the transformative learning literature field a step closer to an integrated theory of transformative learning called for by Cranton (2016).

I reviewed the field of transformative learning theory including Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b) founding theory of transformative learning involving deliberative, cognitive perspective transformation, as well as developments including  psychoanalytical (Dirkx, 2000; Boyd & Myers, 1988) , psychodevelopmental (Daloz, 1986; 2012) and social emancipatory conceptions (Freire & Macedo, 1995; Morrow & Torres, 2002; 2023). Daloz (2012) asserts that adults encounter transformative learning experiences when they return to education, as part of the natural life course. He believes that the re- entry into education is driven by a need to understand and/or reposition ourselves in the world. Whilst the work provides many interesting accounts of student transformation from the perspective of the educator or mentor,  he does not justify the assumption that transformative learning occurs as part of natural human development. The possibility that adults may not experience such compulsion, or the reason why some do and others do not, is not explored. Transformative learning as an inevitable part of ageing did not correspond with the literature I had encountered on student 'readiness' for transformative learning (Stehlik, 2011; Davis et al., 2015) or the voluntary nature of the process (Cranton, 2016). Therefore I chose to omit this theory from my conceptual framework.

Social emancipatory conceptions of transformative learning theory (Brookfield, 2012, Morrow & Torres, 2002; 2023) build on the work of Freire (1970) and his seminal work, 'pedagogy of the oppressed'. Whilst Mezirow (1981) acknowledges the influence of Freire on his own theory of transformative learning, in so far as the purpose is to replace unhelpful frames of reference with those that are more "inclusive" (p.6), he does not share the socio-political motivation of Freire. Freire (1970) wished for those in society without power to use education as a way to free themselves from societal constraint and the oppression of the ruling classes, to create social change. As this research explores personal transformation, rather than transformation aimed at creating social change, the social emancipatory perspective of transformative learning was deemed out-with the context of my own conceptual framework.

Conceptions of transformative learning theory I chose to include in my conceptual framework include Mezirow's (2003) cognitive conception, Boyd & Myers' (1988) psychoanalytic conception, Kroth & Cranton's relationship based view of transformative learning and Schnepfleitner & Ferreira's (2021) contextual view of transformative learning. Each conception, with accompanying justification for inclusion, is now explored in further detail.

## 2.9 Overview of transformative learning theory (TLT)

The majority of papers identified within the literature searches that used transformative learning theory as a theoretical framework used Mezirow's conception of transformative learning theory. John Mezirow conceived of transformative learning theory (TLT) in 1978 when he observed his wife Edde's "perspective transformation" (p.7) on her return to education as a mature learner. He later went on to define perspective transformation as:

> the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings. (1981, p. 6)

This perspective transformation became the central component of Mezirow's transformative learning theory and led to the development of his ten-stage process of personal perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1978a; 1978b; as cited in Kitchenham, 2008, p.105).

**Table 2**

*Mezirow's Ten Stages of Transformative Learning*

| | |
|---|---|
| Phase 1 | A disorienting dilemma |
| Phase 2 | A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame |
| Phase 3 | A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions |
| Phase 4 | Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change |
| Phase 5 | Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions |
| Phase 6 | Planning of a course of action |
| Phase 7 | Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans |
| Phase 8 | Provisional trying of new roles |
| Phase 9 | Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships |
| Phase 10 | A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective |

(Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b)

Mezirow (1978a) theorised that a trigger, or what he referred to as a "distorting dilemma" (p.12) was required to initiate the critical reflection process of self-examination and subsequent questioning of our uncritical "frames of reference" (Mezirow, 2003, p.58). According to Mezirow (2003), "frames of reference" (p.58) are based on our context and upbringing, and the subsequent assumptions we make about the world and others. These assumptions influence how we are likely to interpret events, actions and others' behaviours and motivations. They include stereotypes and

biases, and desirable behaviours and attitudes in ourselves and others. Crucially, we believe these frames of reference to be unquestionably 'true' to us until we start the critical reflection process. Once we have started to question the basis of these frames of reference we can engage with others/ other ideas and alternative viewpoints until we decide upon a new frame of reference and subsequent set of behaviours.

In Mezirow's most comprehensive definition, he refers to transformative learning as:

> Learning that transforms problematic frames of reference- sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) - to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change. Such frames of reference are better than others because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (2003, pp.58-59)

Questions have been raised regarding some of the value-laden statements in this definition, such as are all uncritical frames of reference problematic, and who defines what is and what is not problematic? (Cranton, 2016). Similar issues arise when considering the statement 'prove more true', TLT is based upon the constructivist belief that individuals construct knowledge in their own minds in relation to prior knowledge and attitudes, therefore implying that truth is a relative concept, unique to the individuals' own meaning making. However, this statement seems to imply a more positivist position of there being a truth 'out there' in the world that is absolute.

Despite these judgements and inconsistencies, the premise of transformative learning as a *process*, and the potential change to our deeply held beliefs, assumptions and ways of knowing through critical reflection, has struck a chord with many subsequent authors. Due to this, Mezirow's (2003) conception of transformative learning has remained the most well-known and well used transformative learning theory among researchers and educators alike. For this reason I have used Mezirow's (1978a) process of "perspective transformation"(p.7) as part of the conceptual framework I have developed for this study.  The concept of the "disorientating dilemma" (Mezirow,

1978a, p12), and associated process of critically assessing and refining or altering current "frames of reference" (Mezirow, 2003, p.58), is relatable to my own experiences of personal transformation, albeit an incomplete representation. In the literature concerning the transformations experienced by doctoral students during their studies Brown and Brown (2015), Christie et al. (2015) and Lee (2020b) have also found the "disorientating dilemma" (Mezirow, 1978a, p.12) a useful concept through which to explore the transformative learning of doctoral students, with Christie et al. (2015) and Lee (2020b) both using it as a teaching tool to facilitate transformative learning. As such, Mezirow's (2003) cognitive conception of perspective transformation warranted inclusion in the conceptual framework that I have developed for this study.

Despite the positive elements of Mezirow's (2003) theory, criticism has been levelled against his focus on cognitive, rational processes. The premise of Mezirow's (2003) transformative learning is that the process of self-examination and subsequent steps must be consciously undertaken by the individual in a practice of deliberative thinking. Scholars with a psychoanalytical perspective on TLT (such as Boyd, 1989; Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 2000) believe that too much emphasis is given to the cognitive rational process within Mezirow's conception of TLT, and that transformative learning can take place within the unconscious, sub conscious, affective and emotional domains. This belief is certainly reflected in my own experience of personal transformation, and that of other doctoral students within the literature such as Miles et al. (2019), who describes her doctoral journey as "the point of emergence for both my rational interrogation of myself in the world AND my spiritual journey to my authentic self. I grew in cognition, and in soul" (p.608). As a result, I deemed it important to include a psychoanalytical perspective on transformative learning theory into my conceptual framework, which is now  discussed.

### 2.9.1 Psychoanalytical perspectives on TLT

Psychoanalytical perspectives on TLT are rooted in Jungian analytical psychology (Taylor, 2008). Jung developed a theory of the "collective unconscious" (1996, p.3), a universal set of roles and story motifs common to all of humanity that we are destined to fulfil or encounter throughout our lives, irrespective of choice or intent (Jung, 1996). The twelve roles, or characters Jung drew on are known as the archetypes, such as shadow, animus/anima, mother, trickster, hero and sage. Jung was interested in how these archetypes influenced not only our interactions with others, but also how the archetypes present within each of our own psyches interacted and facilitated our greater understanding of Self (as both an individual and collective concept) without interference from Ego. "Individuation"(1996, p.106) was the term Jung used to describe the journey humans undertake during their lives to develop this greater, integrated understanding of Self.

Psychoanalytical TLT writers Boyd and Myers (1988) stress the importance of the difference in conceptions of 'Self' between their work and that of Mezirow. They assert that Mezirow's "perspective transformation" (1978a, p.7) involves deliberative reflection by the Ego to remove constraining, unexamined beliefs. They state that Mezirow's conception of 'Self' refers solely to Ego as "the directive force of personality" (p.265 ). Their own conception of 'Self' is based on Jung's model where the Self is made up of multiple components, including the conscious Ego and Persona, and unconscious Shadow, Anima or Animus and Collective Unconscious. "The Self is viewed as the total personality, and the ego which consciously handles the tasks of daily life and serves as the centre of consciousness is only a part of the Self" (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p.265).

Boyd and Myers (1988) state that the purpose of transformative education is different during the first and second stages of life. In the first stage, consisting of childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, the purpose is to maintain a healthy balance between the influences of the archetypes within the unconscious mind and the Ego, helping the individual to differentiate themselves from others and archetypal stereotypes. In the second half of life, they see the purpose of transformative

education as "helping individuals to develop integration or wholeness in their lives" (p.267). The doctoral students in this study are all within the second half of their life and as such Boyd and Myers (1988) would see their transformative learning experiences as those which would expand consciousness by allowing the individual to integrate the different aspects of the Self, moving the learner closer towards a fuller understanding of themselves as individuals and as part of the human collective, Jung's ultimate aim for the Self in his concept of "individuation" (1996, p.106). Boyd and Myers define the outcome of transformative education in the second half of life as:

> not primarily rational clarity but a commitment to an altered way of being with one's Self in the world. From the sifting through of information stemming from the shadow, anima, animus, the persona and other archetypal figures and forces, a person comes into an expanded consciousness that illuminates directions for actions which best fit the person's deepest yearnings and felt beliefs. The exercise of discernment leads to new configurations of meaning which generate in the person an enthusiasm for new choices and even the courage to pursue them. (1988, p.276)

Boyd & Myers' (1988) concept of "discernment" (p.274) provides an alternative process to Mezirow's ten step model of "perspective transformation" (1978a, p.7). Rather than a rational, deliberative process undertaken by the ego, the discernment process consists of:

> three activities, receptivity, recognition, and grieving, the inseparable dynamic of psycho-spiritual adjustment to loss. We assert that it is discernment, especially occurring within the person's expression of grief, which stands as the primary condition for the possibility of personal growth. (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p.276)

The three activities involved in discernment begin with "receptivity" (p.277), this involves a state of being open to self-examination. Rather than pushing away thoughts that disrupt our status quo or make us (our ego) feel uncomfortable, we begin to question why we are feeling uncomfortable and prepare to examine that further (Boyd & Myers, 1988). "Receptivity" (p.277) appears to have much

in common with Mezirow's concept of the "distorting dilemma" (1978a, p.12), however the difference may be that in receptivity we are not necessarily making conscious, cognitive decisions to further investigate our experience of discomfort. "Recognition" (p. 277) is the process and outcome of realising that our discomfort is caused by something internal to ourselves rather than the experience that triggered the process of discernment (Boyd & Myers, 1988). For Mezirow (2003) this relates to the stage of becoming aware of "problematic frames of reference" (p.58).

"Grieving" (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p. 277)  is the stage during which the individual engages with their "intrapsychic structures"(p.278) (unconscious areas of the psyche) and becomes aware of the assumptions and biases that underpin their personal beliefs, and find these no longer work for them (Boyd & Myers, 1988). It is a time characterised by confusion, discomfort and pain whereby the individual may yearn for an earlier time when they were unaware of the issue and things were simpler for them. Eventually the individual emerges from this phase and begins the process of "restabalisation and reintegration" (p.279), whereby they let go of previous assumptions and biases (or Mezirow's "problematic frames of reference" (2003, p.58) and develop a new way of being as a more developed version of the Self (Boyd & Myers, 1988).

In the process of "discernment", Boyd & Myers (1988, p. 274) identify something that only a few other transformative learning writers have acknowledged (Brookfield, 1994; Dirkx, 2000; Cranton, 2016): that whilst TLT theorists view transformative learning as a positive thing, it does have a personal cost, in that it can be hard and emotional work. The inclusion of a psychoanalytical approach to transformative learning in this study's conceptual framework ensures that the "extrarational" (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p. 274) approach to transformation is captured as well as the deliberative, cognitive process of transformative learning expounded by Mezirow (2003) in the process of critical reflection.

### 2.9.2 The role of relationships in TLT

So far, both theoretical conceptions of transformative learning have been focused on the process of learning within the individuals' internal world. However, one of the most influential factors on transformative learning experiences found in the literature review was that of 'relationships with others'. In their review of transformative learning theory between 2006 and 2010 Taylor & Snyder (2012) noted the increasing recognition of the role that relationships with others play in transformative learning experiences. Similarly, transformative learning theorists Kroth & Cranton (2014) identified the crucial role that relationships with educators can play in the process of transformative learning. The two stories they shared of students' transformed view of themselves as a result of interaction with supportive mentors and educators are powerful. A commonality between the stories was the impact of an educator or mentor's belief in a student's ability to achieve an improved life, even when the student themselves did not necessarily have that belief in their own ability. Additionally, both of the student stories shared by Kroth & Cranton (2014) include a particular moment, recalled clearly by the student, wherein the educator said something that caused the student to change their perspective on their situation, or themselves. A moment of perspective transformation.

Given the findings from the literature review, and the growing recognition by transformative learning theorists of the role relationships play in transformative learning experiences, I included a relational perspective of transformative learning within my conceptual framework. Next, the role of context in transformative learning is considered.

### 2.9.3 The role of context in TLT

Schnepfleitner and Ferreira (2021) advocate for the inclusion of context in transformative learning theory, an area they believe is underdeveloped in Mezirow's work. To support their claim they proffer Clark and Wilson's (1991) critique of Mezirow's (1978a) initial research on women returning to education, whereby the lack of contextual information regarding who these women were and

their sociocultural context limits what we can understand regarding their experiences.

Schnepfleitner and Ferreira (2021) went on to identify a number of other contextual factors, such as time, space, and mindset that could influence the extent to which transformative learning is possible.

Within the literature review I conducted for this study, it was possible to identify some contextual elements that seemed to foster transformative learning experiences. For example, in Wang's (2018) study of international doctoral student experiences, being in a different country and culture acted as a catalyst for transformative learning experiences among students. Similarly, in the studies reporting transformation of both students and supervisors during the doctoral process, Xu and Grant (2017) and Gjotterund and Ahmad (2018) all reported that being from different geographical locations and cultures to the student they were supervising, or to their supervisor, acted as a catalyst for the transformative learning that took place. This led me to question whether it is not only the students' *own* context that plays a role in the potential for transformative learning to occur, but also whether the experience of being *out* of context, or encountering the context of others could also act an influencing factor when it comes to the likelihood of transformative learning taking place. Authors such as Swartz and Triscari (2011), who attributed their own transformational learning experiences to the diversity of experience between them, would indicate that this might be the case. Therefore I extended my conceptual framework to include contextual influences.

## 2.9.4 Conceptual framework justification

The diagram below provides a visual depiction of the full conceptual framework I developed to

analyse participants' experiences of personal transformation in this study.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual framework of transformative learning*



Key:

Psychological theories of transformative learning including process of learning

Transformative learning theories based on social constructivist view of learning
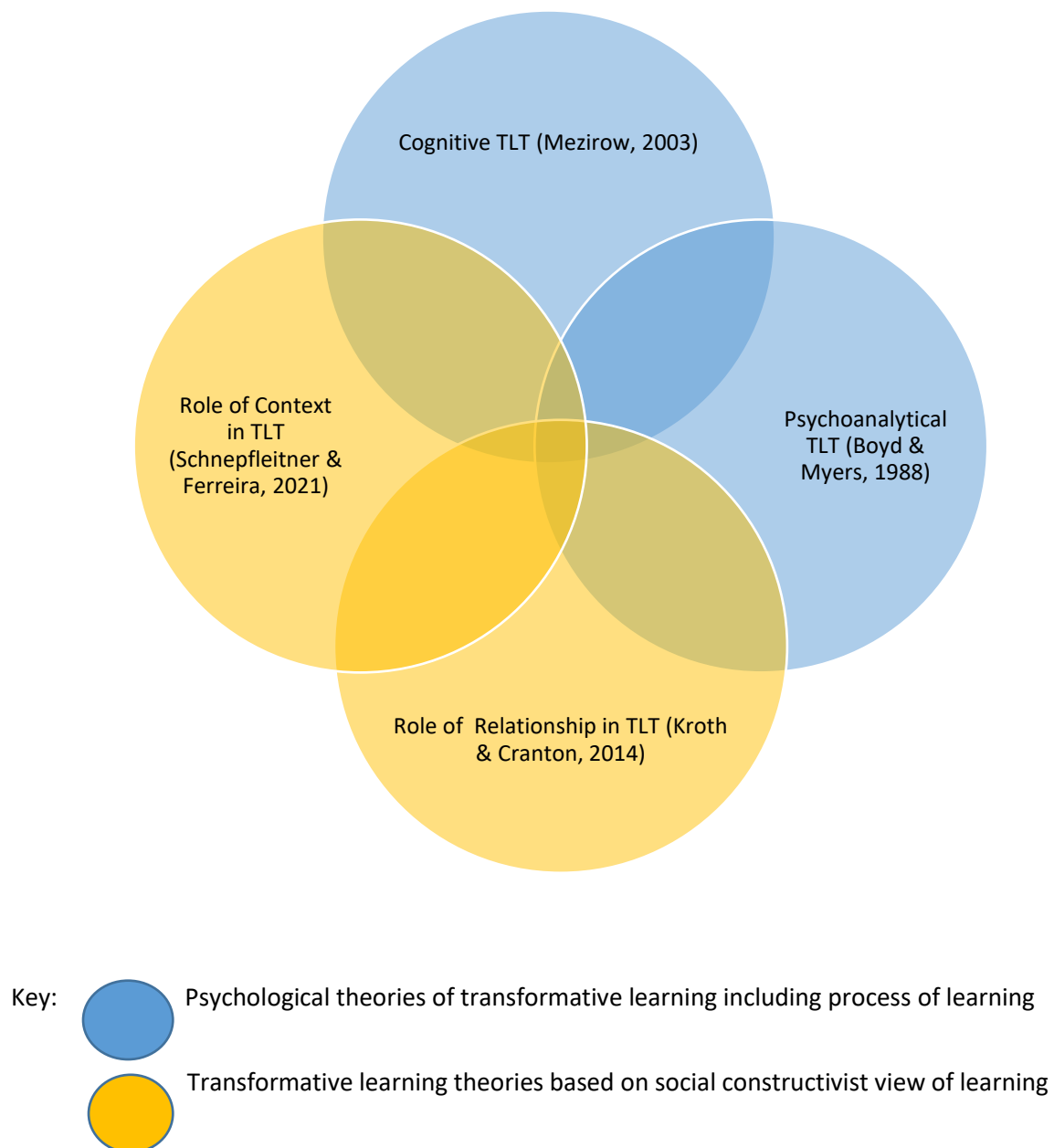
Together these conceptions of transformative learning theory provide a holistic representation of the findings regarding personal transformation garnered from the literature review. Individually each theory can explain some, but not all, of the experiences of personal transformation brought to light through the review. Mezirow's process of 'perspective transformation' ( 1978a, 1978b, p. 7) can be used to explain some of the changes to teaching practice reported as a result of engaging in doctoral study (Hramiak, 2017; Kowalczuk et al., 2017; Christie et al., 2015) as well as some of the changes to inner self reported (Mowbray & Halse, 2010; Burgess and Wellington, 2010; Lassig et al., 2013). However, authors such as Miles (2019), Qutoshi (2016) and Stevens-Long, 2012) find this explanation somehow lacking in depth, and unable to adequately express the entirety of experience. These writers have turned to "extrarational" perspectives (Cranton, 2016, p.39) such as psychoanalytical and spiritual conceptions of transformative learning theory as a means by which to convey their experiences. Although such concepts succeed in conveying the role of the affective, imagination, psyche or "soul work"(Dirkx, 2006, p.125) in transformative learning within the individual, even combined with Mezirow's cognitive approach they do not represent the entirety of the transformative learning experience conveyed within the literature. Both theories are rooted in the psychological perspective, and focus on the constructivist approach to learning within the inner world of the individual. The influence of the outer world, whilst acknowledged, is not explored.

This leaves a whole body of literature on transformative learning unrepresented, and accordingly an incomplete representation of the phenomena. The prevalence of the role of others, in particular the importance of relationships identified by writers within the literature such as Gilly (2004), Swartz and Triscari (2011) and Scott & Miller (2017) highlights the importance of the social in transformative learning. The descriptions of mutual transformation through interaction highlight the need to include a conception of transformative learning that stems from a social constructivist view of learning. This collaborative view of learning is represented within the transformative learning literature through writers such as Taylor (2012) and Kroth & Cranton (2014) who have focused on the role that relationships play in the experience of transformation.

Whilst the cognitive, psychoanalytical and relational conceptions of transformative learning included

in the framework so far represent the majority of findings from the literature review into students'

experience of personal transformation, one aspect still remains unaccounted for. This is the idea of

student 'readiness' to experience transformative learning (Stehlik, 2011; Davis et al., 2015). Cranton

claims that "people have the choice of being critically self-reflective or not" (2016, p.6). However

also acknowledges that particularly oppressed individuals may not have the ability to enter into such

a process. Mezirow (2000) acknowledged that those in extreme conditions, such as poverty, hunger

and war are unlikely to enter into the critical reflection required for transformative learning.

However, students in Stehlik's (2011) study of those undertaking doctoral studies in later life gave

less extreme reasons for not being ready to undertake study earlier, such as not having enough

confidence or life experience when younger, or just not having time mainly due to raising children.

These less dramatic reasons for not being able to engage in the critical reflection necessary for

transformative learning to occur are echoed by Schnepfleitner and Ferreira (2021) in their contextual

view of transformative learning (2021). They highlight the important role mind-set, geographical and

cultural context, space, and physical, financial and emotional circumstances play in the likelihood of

transformative learning taking place. For example, a lack of time due to the fulfilment of multiple

responsibilities and roles is a very practical barrier to the likelihood of transformative learning taking

place (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). In addition, Nairn et al. (2012) highlight the constraints professional

and institutional practices may place on the ability of the individual situated within them to critically

reflect upon them, asserting that transformative learning may not always be feasible in particular

contexts. The inclusion of Schnepfleitner and Ferreira (2021) contextual conception of

transformative learning into my conceptual framework affords me the ability to represent the

'student readiness' theme within the transformative learning literature. It also incorporates

transformative learning experiences such as those reported by students in Wang's study (2018), who

reported experiencing and living in another culture as the most transformative learning experience

they had during their PhD or Masters studies abroad.

In combining the four conceptions of transformative learning outlined, I have been able to build a framework that represents all of the aspects of personal transformation and the factors influencing the likelihood thereof, that I found in my initial literature review. These four lenses should therefore provide a basis for an explanatory conceptual framework for the findings from my own study. The framework is different to Stevens-Long et al.'s (2012) transformative learning framework as I have not chosen to include the emancipatory or psychodevelopmental perspectives on transformative learning, replacing them with perspectives aligned to social constructivist models of learning. The framework therefore represents a new contribution to transformative learning theory.

## 2.10 Summary

In this chapter I provided an overview and critique of the literature related to doctoral students' experiences of transformation and the impact of doctoral study on students, and how this related to my own study. I identified from the literature factors that are deemed to influence transformative learning experiences and considered if these would apply to students undertaking the Liverpool online EdD programme. As a result of the literature review, my own experiences, and an analysis of transformative learning theories, I established the need for the use of multiple conceptions of transformative learning theory to adequately capture the experience of transformative learning. Thus, I presented my own conceptual framework of transformative learning theory bringing together elements from a number of authors. In the next chapter, I will outline my methodology and the research approach taken to achieve the aim of this study, and the research questions posed.

# Chapter 3- Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology and research methods used to explore the personal transformations experienced by online EdD students within this study. Initially the research aim and questions are reiterated to contextualise the methodological approach taken within the study. Following this, the ontological and epistemological perspective of the researcher is outlined, and an account of the positionality of the researcher, as an inside researcher and an individual who has encountered personal transformation as a result of doctoral study, is provided. The research approach is then discussed, followed by details of the sampling criteria and data collection methods used.  Following on from this, the approach taken to data analysis is explained and critiqued. Lastly, ethical considerations and issues related to the validity of this project are also explored.

## 3.1 Research aim and questions

The aim of this research was to explore in depth the personal transformation experiences' of students undertaking the Liverpool online EdD programme. In order to complement the current literature in relation to both transformative learning and doctoral students, a need was identified for studies exploring in depth *what* personal transformations doctoral students experience, *how* these transformations manifest, and what contextual factors may influence these transformations.

Participants within this study were self-selecting, and therefore only students who felt they had experienced some degree of personal transformation responded to the invitation to take part in the project. The purpose of this research was not to claim that all doctoral students experience personal transformation, rather to explore the experiences of those students who do.  The questions this research sought to address were:

- What self-identified personal transformations do online Liverpool online EdD students experience during their studies?
- How do students describe the manifestations of these transformations?

- What, if any, contextual factors identified from the data, may have influenced the personal transformation experiences of these students?

## 3.2 Ontological and epistemological position of researcher

Crotty (2003) describes ontology as "the study of being. It is concerned with 'what is', with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality" (p.10). Broadly speaking there are two main ontological positions. Objectivist or positivist perspectives assert that reality exists outside of human interpretation, and that therefore phenomena has a 'true' singular meaning of its own (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Interpretivists or constructionists believe that reality is interpreted through human consciousness and that therefore humans attribute meaning to phenomena, which allows for the development of multiple realities (Creswell, 2013). As an interpretivist, I am interested in how humans make meaning of the world and their experiences of it. Within that context, I believe that a singular reality of the world does not exist. Human beings across the world experience different realities, some of which are shared, whilst others may be specific to an individual. As such, multiple realities co-exist alongside each other, all of which 'count' as reality to the individuals, groups and societies who construct and share them. In this way reality can be seen as contextual, consisting of a complex combination of geographical and cultural location, socioeconomic factors, values, beliefs and attitudes, religious orientation and societal norms.

Epistemology as a concept is concerned with "what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified" (Creswell, 2013, p.20). As I have established, I view reality as contextual, and a result of multiple factors. I align to the social constructivist paradigm. Social constructivists believe that knowledge and meaning are not only constructed in the mind of the individual, but as a result of their interaction with the world around them, and the social structures, institutions, norms and values in which they are or have been situated during their lifespan (Crotty, 2003). Therefore, to social constructivists what counts as knowledge are the experiences, enacted values, beliefs and lived realities of individuals and the meaning they attribute to them, shaped by the social contexts in

which they are, or have been situated. In this study, participants were asked to reflect upon their own experiences of personal transformation and select experiences that held particular meaning for them to represent in visual form and discuss during spoken interaction. This approach has developed further knowledge of doctoral students' experience of personal transformation in line with the social constructivist view of knowledge.

## 3.3 Researcher positionality

As a part-time doctoral student myself, researching other doctoral students on the same programme of study, there were a number of considerations I needed to address that would not have been the case had I studied a different topic in a different setting. Firstly, as Reissman (2008) asserts, it is important for the sake of transparency to the reader and the qualitative validity of the research that researchers state their own experiences and interest with the topic under investigation. This is also a common practice in phenomenological studies, known as "bracketing" (Tufford & Newman, 2012). In descriptive or transcendental phenomenology the process of bracketing involves the researcher identifying their own beliefs, thoughts, feelings and experiences of a particular phenomenon, and then purposefully setting these aside to see the phenomenon anew, without impressing their own position on to the interpretation of the data (Chan et al., 2013). In hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology, researchers do not believe that it is possible to set aside their own experiences and become objective toward the data, as our understandings result from our interpretations (Reiners, 2012).

I subscribe to the view of interpretive phenomenologists that we cannot separate ourselves from our own attitudes, beliefs and experiences. However, by engaging in the reflexive practice required by bracketing to identify my own relationship with the phenomenon under investigation, I became more consciously aware of my beliefs, attitudes and experiences, which helped me to question my interpretation of the data gathered in a more robust manner than if I had not engaged in bracketing. Additionally, it provides the reader with more information, allowing them to draw their own

conclusions regarding the impact of the researcher on the study design and analysis. Therefore, I have provided some contextual detail about myself in relation to the EdD and my own experience of personal transformation during my studies. Secondly, it was necessary that I attended to the advantages, disadvantages and implications that my position as an insider researcher presented.

### 3.3.1 Personal doctoral journey

I started the online EdD programme in 2015 in my mid-thirties. I had a full-time permanent job as a lecturer at that time, and a son completing the latter stages of primary school. The experience of completing the online EdD programme at the same time as working full-time and having a family was intense. During the taught stage of the programme in particular due to the various assignments and deadlines it was difficult to find the 20-25 hours a week typically required to complete the workload. I did have to sacrifice time with my family, and my partner took to taking our son out for a full day each weekend in order to provide me with the time and space needed to complete my work. It had an impact on those around me as well as myself. I did feel guilty a lot of the time about not being a good enough mother or partner and for being selfish with my time.

I have found the thesis stage to be a very different experience, with the lack of structure more accommodating in terms of balancing family and study commitments, but also at times problematic due to the self-discipline required to keep on track, which I have struggled with from time to time. There have been times I have found it lonely, in terms of the intellectual challenges experienced, and the lack of camaraderie from other students. There have been moments of joy and exhilaration in intellectual discovery and breakthrough, as well as those of despair at just how long everything takes.

In terms of the personal transformations I have experienced there have been several. As I have mentioned previously, engaging in the self-examination and critical thinking required by the doctorate regarding values, beliefs, motivations and enacted practices I realised that I was not enacting my own values in my job at that time, and that I felt the decision making in the context in

which I was working was not in line with espoused departmental values. This made me extremely uncomfortable for a time and also very disillusioned with my employment. It also caused some tension between myself and colleagues if I questioned the rationale behind a decision. The only reasonable action for me to take was to move on to a new role in a new environment more aligned to my personal values and motivations, which I did. Another personal transformation involved me coming to understand different ways of knowing, how ontology and epistemology shape what is seen as knowledge or what might constitute 'truth,'. This has caused me to experience some dissonance when communicating with my positivist science-teaching partner. Our very different views of 'facts' can cause tension unless I refrain from comment, which can be quite 'othering'.

From a more positive perspective I have become more confident in myself. Others around me have observed my increased confidence, which has also been perceived by some as arrogance. Overall, I have found the shift in perspective regarding ontology and epistemology, combined with the reflexive practice of critical reflection, to have positively and radically changed the way I see the world and myself within it. It has been a truly transformational experience.

### 3.3.2 The complexities of insider research

Greene (2014) defines insider research as "that which is conducted within a social group, organization or culture of which the researcher is also a member" (p. 1). From a positivist perspective, insider research is considered problematic, as being part of a group whilst also studying it renders the researcher in a position of potential bias, influencing the research results and rendering them invalid. However, as I identified in section 3.2, my interpretivist ontology means that the aim of this research was not to present an absolute 'truth' of students' experiences of personal transformation during their studies, as I acknowledge multiple realities. Each individuals' experience of personal transformation is subjective in itself. In terms of insider research, qualitative researchers such as Chavez (2008) and Naples (2003) have argued that the insider/ outsider research division is

largely flawed, as all researchers bring themselves, their various identities, beliefs and values to the research process.

Within insider research Chavez (2008) differentiates between total insiders and partial insiders:

> insider scholars have been characterized as total insiders, where researchers share multiple identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, class) or profound experiences (e.g., wars, family membership); and partial insiders, who share a single identity (or a few identities) with a degree of distance or detachment from the community. (p.475)

From this definition, my own position within this research study was one of a total insider, as I have shared the experience of doctoral study on the same doctoral programme as my research participants. This position brought with it advantages and disadvantages. From a positive perspective, as a member of the community, access to research participants was easy to arrange. I also found Greene's (2014) observation that due to shared experiences, participants are more likely to want to take part in insider research, to be true. I had no problem in recruiting research participants. Merriam et al. (2001) note that prior knowledge and experience of the context helps insider researchers to ask meaningful questions and Chavez (2008) asserts that the inside researcher is more likely to have a fuller understanding of the cognitive and emotional experiences of participants.

However, there are also a number of drawbacks to insider research. As previously noted, potential bias in research design and data analysis is possible, whereby the researchers' own experiences influence their approach to research design and can be projected on to interpretation of participants' data (Greene, 2014). Inside researchers can also make assumptions regarding participant responses, failing to ask follow up questions as they think they already understand the participants' meaning due to their own experiences or familiarity with the context (DeLyser, 2001). These drawbacks, if not addressed, can impact on the validity of a research study. Measures taken to

mitigate the drawbacks of insider research in this research study are addressed within the validity section of this chapter.

## 3.4 Narrative research

In order to obtain authentic participant accounts of personal transformation, it was important that participants were free to self-identify experiences that held meaning for them and express these in natural a way as possible. Personal accounts are often shared in the form of stories, as Connelly and Clandinin (2006) assert:

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. (p. 479)

Therefore, in order to facilitate participants to share their self-selected experiences in a natural and participant led manner, a narrative research approach was adopted as an appropriate methodology for this research.

There are multiple interpretations of narrative research. Narrative research can refer to the use of stories as data to be studied (Polkinghorne, 2007), as a methodology in itself (see the works of Clandinin and Connelly and their development of Narrative Inquiry as a methodological approach between 1990 and 2016) and an analysis method (Reissman, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1995; Smith & Sparkes, 2012).

In this study, I asked participants to share their stories of personal transformation during doctoral study through visual representations and semi-structured interviews, collecting those participants' stories to use as data. This approach within narrative research is concerned with the *content* of stories, what is told by the participant is analysed by the researcher and presented as an analysis *of*

the story or stories. This approach to narrative research has been variously termed "categorical-content analysis" (Leiblich et al., 1998, p.13); "paradigmatic analysis" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.5) or "thematic narrative analysis" (Reissman, 2008, p.53). I have used the term "thematic narrative analysis" (Reissman, 2008, p.53) in this study. Smith (2015), categorised this approach to narrative research as that of a "story analyst" (p.207), rather than a "story teller" (p.207); although went on to stress that narrative researchers can combine both roles dependent on the unit of analysis under observation and how findings are presented. I have provided an analysis of the stories I gathered during the data collection phase in the findings chapter of this thesis, thus fulfilling the role of "story analyst" (Smith, 2015, p. 207). However, where possible I have tried to keep elements of individuals' stories in-tact through the use of detailed quotations taken directly from the data and/or summaries of their experiences. Therefore, there is an aspect of Smith's "story telling" (2015, p.207) in the way I have presented my findings.

A number of other approaches to narrative analysis are practiced as well as thematic narrative analysis, including structural, visual and dialogical or performance-based analysis (Reissman, 2008). Within structural analysis emphasis is placed on *how* stories are told, the narrative arc, words chosen, pauses and silences (Smith & Sparkes, 2012). In visual analysis pictures or artefacts can be used to tell stories or stories can be told about them. Visual prompts can be provided by researchers or created by participants (Mannay, 2016). In dialogical or performance-based analysis *how* an orally recounted story is told and performed by the teller (emphasis, gestures, body language), and for who (the audience/ researcher) is considered (Reissman, 2008). The aim of this research study however, was to explore doctoral students' experiences of personal transformation, and as such the *content* of the participants' stories was the unit of analysis. For this reason, a "thematic narrative analysis" (Reissman, 2008, p.53) approach was taken rather than other forms of narrative analysis.

## 3.5 Sampling criteria

In order to answer the research questions in this study it was necessary to recruit students undertaking the Liverpool online EdD who felt they had experienced some degree of personal transformation during their studies and were willing to discuss their experiences. Volunteers were sought to take part in the study from the Liverpool online EdD student community, and were recruited on a first come, first served basis up to a maximum of ten. A larger number of participants would have made the project unmanageable for a single researcher and the aim of a narrative approach is to generate rich data rather than a breadth of data (Reissman, 2008). In a narrative inquiry project, sample size is driven more by *who* to sample rather than how many people to sample (Creswell, 2013). Sample size varies from a single individual or small group of individuals to much larger groups, for example in Medicine narrative approaches to understanding illness and the effects thereof can focus on a few (3) patients experiences of pregnancy after liver transplantation (Donzelli et al., 2015) to 234 cancer patients experiences of pain (Cepeda et al., 2008). Essentially the number of participants sought in narrative studies depends on the purpose of the research.

In this study, in order to maximise the number of potential participants for the study, participants were required to meet only two criteria; they must feel as though they had experienced some kind of personal transformation during their studies, and be in the thesis stage of the programme. The student experience of the taught and thesis stages of the Liverpool online EdD programme is appreciably different. In order to holistically explore students' experiences of personal transformation during their doctoral studies, some experience of both aspects of the programme was required, as moving from one phase of the programme to another is a transformative experience in and of itself. Therefore, I deemed a more comprehensive experience of transformation would be generated by students with experience of both stages.

## 3.6 Data collection methods

Following receipt of ethical approval and permission from the Liverpool online EdD programme lead at that time, an initial email was distributed to all students who met the inclusion criteria asking for expressions of interest. A shortened version of the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) was included in this initial email invitation, and students were informed that expressing an interest in the project did not commit them to taking part. The rationale for this was to keep the initial invite short enough to encourage potential participants to read the outline information. Once expressions of interest were received, a full PIS was sent to the potential participants to read before making an informed decision regarding whether or not to participate.

Eleven expressions of interest from students who met the criteria were received, and these students were sent the participant information sheet, consent form and demographic questionnaire. Seven students returned the consent form and completed questionnaire, and went on to complete the project. Six of the seven students were in the writing up stage of their thesis, having completed their data collection. The seventh had just completed her thesis when interviewed. Of the four who did not return their forms, one emailed to say they were too busy to take part, whilst the other three did not respond to a follow up email.

The data collection methods used in this study consisted of a three-stage process:

1. *Completion of a short demographic questionnaire*

2. *Completion of a visual representation task*

3. Participation in a *60-90 minute semi-structured interview*

Each stage of data collection, and the methods used, are now outlined and justified.

### 3.6.1 Demographic data collection

Once participants had consented to take part in the study by signing and returning the consent form, they were sent a short demographic questionnaire to complete. These details were sought in order to examine any potential relationships between participant characteristics and experiences of personal transformation. Analysis of the literature concerning doctoral students' experiences of personal transformation indicated that there were similarities within the experiences of doctoral study for women, and also for international students. Women report difficulty in managing work, home-life, and study due to the guilt of pursuing study whilst maintaining the gendered roles of care-giver, mother and/or wife (for examples see Brown & Brown, 2015; Christie et al., 2015; Gibson et al., 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). Within the international student community, Chinese and other Asian students studying in the West report being dissatisfied and/or confused by their supervision experience due to the expectation of criticality in thinking (Li, 2016; Wang, 2018; Xu & Grant, 2017) and UK students in China report the need for them to be more independent due to the educational culture in China, where the onus is on the student to make sense of what the teacher says or tells them to do (Wang, 2018). This cultural difference between Eastern and Western education systems has been reported by Kumi-Yeboah and James, (2014), Tran (2012) and Ritz (2010) as an influential factor in transformative learning experiences.

As a result of encountering these characteristic-driven, shared experiences within the literature, I decided to collect some demographic data in case any relationships between these characteristics and students' experience of personal transformation could be identified. The data collected consisted of age, gender, country or birth, country of residence, and first language of participants within this study.

### 3.6.2 Visual representation data collection

Following completion of the demographic questionnaire participants were asked to create a visual representation of their doctoral journey and/or experience of personal transformation to date, and send it to me via email. The visual representation, and students' explanations of them, formed the initial discussion within the subsequent semi-structured interview.

As noted in the introductory chapter of this thesis, visual methods such as photo-elicitation, where researchers use found images to stimulate discussion in interviews (Harper, 2002), or photo-voice where participants create or source their own images to discuss with a researcher at interview (e.g. Lomax, 2011; Belin, 2005) can elicit different, and potentially more thoughtful and emotional responses to those using either written or oral accounts (Harper, 2012). In his conception of psychoanalytical transformation, Dirkx (1998) champions the role of imagination and images in the development of "self knowing" (para.2). As the findings of this study were analysed using a conceptual framework of transformative learning theory that included the psychoanalytical approach, a visual data collection method was considered an appropriate means by which to attempt to capture aspects of students' experiences of personal transformation that they may not be cognitively aware of, or able to articulate in words.

By asking participants to create a 'visual representation' of their doctoral journey and/or experiences of personal transformation, the choice of 'method' was given to the participants, providing them with the power to choose a suitable medium for communication themselves. Whilst the first participant I recruited had no questions regarding the visual representation and produced a piece of art readily, subsequent participants began to ask for guidance regarding what they should produce. I had deliberately tried to avoid influencing participants' artwork in this way, but there seemed to be a concern from many about their artistic skills. Lyon & Carabelli (2016) encountered this concern in their collaborative art-based research project with young people. They reported difficulty in recruitment, citing the artwork as potentially off-putting to put people unless they

identified as artistic. Similarly, Mannay (2016) in her research on the relationships between mothers and daughters, experienced delays from some participants in submission of the participant created drawings she had requested due to a lack of confidence in artistic ability. She went on to note that participants' artistic ability also influenced what they drew, with one participant discussing at interview what she would like to have drawn but could not. Mannay (2016) goes on to suggest alternative visual methods that can be used to avoid this issue, such as the production of collages using found images, participant produced photographs, or the use of visual metaphor to communicate meaning through the use of found images and photos (2016).

As a result of my participant concerns, I drew upon Mannay's (2016) proffered alternatives and produced a short explanatory guide to producing the visual representation. The guide sought to reassure participants that it was not a test of artistic ability, and that they could produce any kind of visual representation. It did not have to be hand drawn, could take the form of a mind map or a flowchart, make use of found images or any other format they wished. This guidance was well received by participants and seemed to allay their concerns, as I did not receive further queries regarding the visual representation.

**Table 3**

*Wording of visual representation guidance*

You can create the visual representation of your doctoral journey and experiences of personal transformation in any format of your choice. You can choose to draw it yourself (don't worry if you are not an artist, stick people and simple representations are perfectly acceptable) or you could create something using existing images, a flowchart, a mind map; or any other method of your choice. The idea is not how good at art you are but that visualising your journey so far gives us a different way to understand it.

You may also find this reminder of the structure of the Taught stage of the EdD programme useful.

Happy creating!

Ceri

EdD Structure- Taught Component

Becoming a Doctoral Practitioner (11 Weeks)

Learners and Learning (10 Weeks)

Learning: Environments, Infrastructures and Organisations (10 Weeks)

Ways of Knowing: Perspectives on Educational Research and Practice

Values in Educational Research and Practice (10 Weeks)

Leadership, Policy and Institutional Change (10 Weeks)

Educational Research Methods (10 Weeks)

Action Research for Educational Leadership (10 Weeks)

Internationalisation and the Impact of Global Trends (10 Weeks)

Read more at:

https://www.online.liverpool.ac.uk/programmes/doctorofeducation/structure#4kLvWTbPmjITlUyu.99

Three participants hand drew images, whilst two others used diagrams and two made PowerPoint slides using found images that they felt illustrated their feelings and meanings. The time participants spent developing these visual representations varied considerably, with two participants who hand-drew their visual representations stating during interview they had produced them fairly quickly without 'over thinking' them, and two others speaking at length about the thought that had gone in to producing the visual representation, with one participant trying out several approaches before settling on a final diagram.

Whilst the main purpose of the visual representation was to attempt to explore sub conscious or hard to explain aspects of personal transformation in a format other than the spoken word, this approach also allowed both the participant and researcher to approach the experience of undertaking the EdD in a new way. As both participant and researcher were situated EdD students there was potential for tacit shared understandings of both the programme and the doctoral experience to result in a lack of questioning on the part of the researcher and lead to a lack of depth in the data gathered (DeLyser, 2001). By using a different method of data collection to "make the familiar strange"(Mannay, 2016, p.32), an opportunity to pursue different types of meaning making was created (Gauntlett, 2007).

From a practical view-point, asking the participant to produce the visual representation prior to the interview ensured that participants had considered their doctoral journey and experiences of personal transformation, allowing for a more reflective and nuanced conversation than might otherwise have taken place had participants not completed the task.

### 3.6.3 Interviewing data collection

Following receipt of the participants' visual representation, interviews were scheduled between the participant and myself. These interviews were conducted online using participants' choice of platform (Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom etc.) Three interviews took place on Skype, three on Zoom and

one on WhatsApp due to software restrictions in the participant's country of residence. All interviews were audio recorded. Interviews were arranged to suit the availability of participants in their own time zones and so interviews took place at a variety of UK times from 8am to 7pm. Interviews varied in length from between 55 minutes to 90 minutes dependent on the verboseness of the participant and time taken to explore their personal transformations.

Interviews are perhaps the most common method used in narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008). However, the traditional structured interview approach (where the interviewer asks the participant a list of pre-developed questions that the participant then answers) is of limited use in narrative inquiry where the focus is on the self-selected stories of the participants. A more emancipatory approach is required whereby the power of the interviewer as the 'director of the event' is lessened and participants have more agency within the encounter. Semi-structured interviewing can provide participants with this increased agency as the format encourages reciprocity and rapport between the  participant and interviewer (Galletta 2013). Magaldi and Berler (2020) describe semi-structured interviews as "a platform for a collaborative exchange" (p.4829). Whilst the researcher has developed some pre-defined interview questions or topics to discuss, the aim of the interview is to understand the experience of the participant. Therefore interviewers conducting semi-structured interviews are open to improvising questions and pursuing additional, related lines of enquiry as they arise in the conversation. They remain open to discovery.

Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) also note that the flow of discourse in a semi-structured interview is important, and that researchers may ask  pre-defined questions in a different order in order to maintain flow, or abandon questions altogether if they have already been answered through previous discussion. Whilst the topic of the interview is chosen by the researcher, and as such overall power remains with the interviewer, the power dynamic within the interview itself is a shared one between interviewer and participant, as the direction of the interview develops collaboratively through the exchanges between interviewer and participant (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

The flexible nature of semi-structured interviewing and the freedom to pursue participant identified data as it arose provided an appropriate approach to data collection in this study. Therefore, semi-structured interviewing was used as a main method of data collection. The pre-defined questions or topics for use in a semi-structured interview are often referred to as the interview guide, as it provides a loose structure for the interview rather than a strict protocol to be followed (Dearnley, 2005). In this research study I developed an interview guide with an initial broad question that I started each interview with, and some follow up questions that included topics I wanted to ensure were covered either in natural conversation with the participant, or as a result of a specific question if the opportunity to discuss the topic did not arise naturally. The content of the interview guide can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Interview Guide*

| Initial question: |
|---|
| Thank you for sending me your visual representation. Would you like to talk me through it? |
| Additional Prompt Questions if required: |
| How are you different now from when you started the EdD? |
| Have you experienced any particular "moments" where you realised you had changed? |
| Possibly implicit or asked as a probing question- how has your context influenced your personal transformation/ doctoral journey? |

Initially two interviews per participant were planned in order to provide an opportunity to follow up any questions. However, after the first interview of the project took place this plan was reviewed for two reasons. Firstly, the amount of data generated during the first interview was vast, providing

considerable data for analysis that needed careful examination to identify what was related and relevant to the topic of personal transformation. Secondly the questions requiring clarification after the interview were mainly factual (for example; how long did you live in X?). These questions were less time consuming for the participants to clarify via email. Due to this experience, the initially planned follow up interviews were withdrawn for all participants, reducing the amount of data to be analysed and the time burden on participants. Several participants were contacted for additional information or clarification following the interview encounter via email, and it proved a practical and efficient way to glean small missing details discovered when formulating participants' stories.

Interviewing participants online brings opportunities and challenges. Deakin and Wakefield (2014) hail the opportunity to access research participants globally, and found the use of Skype rather than physical face to face interviewing made little difference to rapport building. De Villiers et al. (2021) highlight the savings in terms of cost and travel provided by online research interviews, as well as their necessity in times of war, environmental disaster and global pandemics. Irani (2019) extols the benefit to participants and researchers of increased flexibility in scheduling interviews, as well as the potential for participants to be more comfortable within their own home or chosen environment. However, Farooq and De Villiers (2017) and Tucker and Parker (2019) both note that interviewee experience and comfort with the use of online communication tools can impact upon the quality of interaction between interviewer and interviewee. Technical concerns or problems such as a time delay can impact on rapport building and distract from the interview itself (Irani, 2019). The participants in this study were all completing an online EdD programme, and as such had considerable experience of communicating online as well as using collaborative online tools to complete group tasks with their peers. As such, the level of confidence and skill in the use of online communication was high and did not impact negatively on the interview process. In addition, my position as an insider researcher and previous contact with participants regarding their visual representations helped to develop trust and rapport quickly.

### 3.6.4 Rationale for use of multiple data collection methods

Mathison (1988) advocates the use of multiple data collection methods in research in order to increase the validity of research through triangulation. Validity is explored in more detail in section 3.10, however the term is used to refer to the credibility of a knowledge claim (Polkinghorne, 2007). Triangulation "is used to refer to the observation of the research issue from (at least) two different points"(Flick, 2004, p.178). Denzin (1978) asserted that within data triangulation, each method of data collection had strengths and weaknesses, and by using multiple methods the weaknesses associated with each are considered to be somewhat mitigated, thus increasing the validity of the findings (Denzin, 1978). More recently criticism has been levelled against this claim, as each method explores phenomena in a different way. Therefore triangulation is now seen to deepen understanding of a phenomenon rather than necessarily improving the validity of findings.

Each method of data collection used in this study has been used to add depth to the findings. Gathering the demographic data outlined allowed the findings from this study to be considered in light of those from previous studies in the literature. By combining a visual method with semi-structured interviewing I was able to explore students' personal transformation from two different perspectives. The visual representation task provided a method that allowed participants to use image and metaphor to convey their experience, with the added potential to express unconscious thoughts through visual means, a technique widely used by Jung in his exploration of the psyche. The use of semi-structured interviews ensured that participants could explain their visual representations, and allowed me to ask questions relevant to the topic of the study, pursuing additional lines of enquiry as they arose. The techniques complemented each other, providing the opportunity to deepen understanding of each participants' experience of personal transformation.

## 3.7 Data analysis

Three data collection methods were used per participant in this study, a demographic questionnaire, participant creation visual representation, and semi-structured interview. The analysis approach used for each method is outlined below.

### 3.7.1 Demographic data analysis

Initially participants' demographic data was collated in a spreadsheet. Whilst I had initially considered that there may be some patterns identifiable between particular characteristics and experiences of personal transformation, on comparison of students' data and their demographic profiles this proved not to be the case, with one exception. The exception was in relation to female students, and is presented in the findings chapter. Therefore, demographic data (combined with other contextual information gathered during the interview) was instead used to provide information regarding each participant to the reader by way of an introductory pen portrait.

### 3.7.2 Initial visual representation review

Each participants' visual representation of their journey and/or moments of transformation was received prior to interview. I deliberately did not subject these to analysis prior to interview as I did not wish to attribute my own meaning to participants' visual representations. As Mannay (2016), cautions "There is often a juxtaposition between the audience's reading and interpretation and the internal narrative if images, as intended by their creator" (p.64). As such, had I undertaken my own analysis of the visual representations I would have imposed my own meaning on the visual representations, influenced by my own experiences of doctoral study and my own cultural, contextual and situated perspective. Therefore the meaning of each participants' visual representation would be communicated by the participant themselves during the semi-structured interview.

I did however examine the visual representations carefully and noted any elements that I did not understand for potential further discussion during the interview. For example, one participant had used a symbol that I did not understand (this was later explained to me as the Greek symbol for death). Another had used an image of a porcupine to represent the start of their EdD journey, and another had included an image of blurred lights. It was important to ensure these choices of imagery were discussed so that I could understand why they had been chosen and what they represented.

### 3.7.3 Interview data and visual representation analysis

Following each interview the data was transcribed. Azevedo et al. (2017) outline different approaches to transcription dependent on the aim and purpose of the research. Most researchers' approach to transcription is somewhere on a continuum between what Azevedo et al. refer to as "naturalized *versus* denaturalized" (2017, p.162). In naturalized transcription (more commonly referred to as verbatim transcription) the transcriber seeks to record everything from umms, errs, interruptions such as outside noises, pauses, laughter, sighs etc. Denaturalized transcription has removed such elements, including false starts and provides a cleaner version of the data from which to work. I chose to err toward a naturalized approach to transcription, but did make some omissions in what was recorded, so the transcription is not quite verbatim. I included punctuation to represent the flow and pauses in speech as advocated by McLellan et al. (2003) and made notes of laughter or exclamations. As the aim of this research was to explore students' experiences of personal transformation, the *content* of what was said was of primary interest and therefore I omitted ums and errs, background noise and distractions in order to make the text more readable. Whilst the transcripts of each interview were used for much of the analysis, I did also go back and listen to sequences of interview content when I felt as though I needed to hear the tone or expression with which the written words had been spoken.

In addition to transcribing the data from the interviews, I also made notes before and after each interview. Qu & Dumay (2011) in their paper on qualitative research interviews emphasised the

situated and contextual nature of interviewing, and the need for researchers to be reflexive of their own impact on the encounter. Prior to interview I noted whether I had any prior knowledge of participants, what stage they were at in their EdD journey, and my general impression of the participant from the contact I had with them. I named these notes 'scene setting' and set them to one side in case they proved to be of use at any point during analysis. Following each interview, I reflected on the interview experience and any impressions that the encounter left me with and noted these down too. An example of these notes can be seen in Appendix B, as I initially included these notes in the development of what Clandinin (2016) refers to as "interim research texts" (p47). I discuss these texts later in the chapter.

Once transcription and note taking had been completed, I used the research questions from this study to identify relevant data for analysis. I identified and highlighted exchanges or speech within each individual interview transcript that referred to personal transformation or change, and examples participants gave of how such change had manifested. I then cut and pasted these sections into a separate word document for each participant. The content of these documents would be used for further analysis. A great deal of rich data was generated per interview, and whilst the focus of this research was specifically on stories of transformation, these were only a few of the stories that could have been told from the content of each interview. For example, some participants shared stories of being an outsider in a different culture, and the affordances and barriers that creates. Others shared stories of their family, of death and illness. These stories were intertwined with their stories of doctoral study, but were not directly related to the topic of personal transformation and were therefore omitted from further analysis.

Next, I reviewed each interview transcript again, and highlighted data that either referred explicitly to factors that had influenced the participants' experience of transformation (i.e. those identified by the participant themselves) or that I could infer from their discourse and contextual situation. For example, one participant commented on how hearing from other students on the programme about

their approaches to teaching had influenced and changed her own practice. I inferred from this that interacting with diverse others was a factor in this individuals' personal transformation. The data highlighted during this activity was also cut and pasted and added into each individual participants' word file. By separating out the data related to the research questions in this study from the whole data set I identified the data that related to the unit of analysis, personal transformation and the factors influencing such transformation.

Next I began the "thematic narrative analysis" (Reissman, 2008, p.53) of the data. Within thematic narrative analysis there is no set 'method' of analysis, and methods vary considerably between researchers depend on the data sources analysed and the disciplinary culture within which the researcher resides (Reissman, 2008). I have used a combination of approaches from various narrative and qualitative researchers that served to achieve the aim of this research study and answer the research questions posed. This approach is outlined below.

Once the content related to transformation for each participant had been identified, the next step taken in the analysis was what Ollerenshaw & Creswell (2002) refer to as the  process of "restorying" (p.330). This involves the development of a coherent, emplotted story for each participant. Polkinghorne (1995) characterises such a story as one having a temporal aspect consisting of a beginning, middle and an end, where events are organised into some kind of order that advances the story toward a conclusion, whereby the meaning of the story is shared. Participants do not always share their stories in a structured and linear way, often remembering to add something that they feel was important late on in their tale, or getting distracted and moving on to tangential points before returning to the main story (James, 2018). Therefore, Ollerenshaw & Creswell (2002) suggest that a re-storying process can help to clarify and simplify a story by placing it in a chronological order and including additional information regarding the participant, context and place. In the re-storying process I kept as much of the original interaction between the participant and myself as possible, just adding in a few lines here and there to link the interactions into a story format. I included the

notes I had made prior to, and post interview to set the scene for the interaction and reflect on it.

The resultant document was an example of what Clandinin (2016) refers to as "interim research

texts" (p.47). Interim research texts are a narrative researcher's first attempt to shape data from

multiple sources (such as interviews, researcher notes, observations etc.), or what Clandinin (2016)

refers to as "field texts"(p.46), into a coherent narrative for re-telling. These texts are enhanced and

redeveloped over time until they become the final research text, which is to be publicly shared. An

example of one of these interim research texts is available in Appendix B.

Following the development of each of the seven individual stories as interim research texts it was

clear that presenting each individual story within this thesis, even in a heavily edited form, and then

completing a "thematic narrative analysis" (Reissman, 2008, p.53) across the stories would not be

possible due to space limitations. Therefore, a compromise was made. I would introduce each

participant in a short pen portrait to provide the reader with an overview of each individual  and

then present as much of the participants' speech and interview interaction as possible within the

thematic narrative analysis to retain the participants' experiences in their own words, and

demonstrate to the reader any impact of the researcher on the participants' account. Polkinghorne

(2007) and Reissman (2008) both emphasise the importance in narrative research of sharing detailed

quotes from participants or examples of conversational interactions in as close a manner to the raw

data as possible to enhance the validity of narrative research studies.

In order to complete the "thematic narrative analysis" (Reissman, 2008, p.53) within and across the

seven stories I gathered together each participants' interim research text, original transcript and

visual representation. I reviewed all the data together, looking for what Smith (2015) refers to as

"narrative themes and thematic relationships" (p.216). Smith (2015) identifies a narrative theme as

"a pattern that runs through a story or set of stories" (p.216). In order to identify these patterns,

Smith advises the researcher to look for the common themes in each story, and across stories,

highlighting key words and phrases that relate to each theme and making notes in the margins

regarding apparent and potentially inferred meaning. He warns against over-coding data to avoid losing the story present within each theme, preferring to refer to the process of analysis as theming rather than coding.

Using Smith's (2015) approach I identified and noted a number of themes related to participants' experience of personal transformation and those identified as factors influencing participants' experience of transformation. These were then examined to ascertain if there were any relationships between particular factors and experiences of personal transformation. Resultant relationships were identified and visual representations of these relationships created (see Tables 6a & 6b and Figure 2 in the findings chapter).

Themes related to participants' experience of personal transformation and factors influencing participants' experiences of personal transformation that had been identified from the data were then written, using appropriate quotes from participants to evidence and illustrate the themes and factors.

Lastly, the themes and factors presented were subject to analysis using the conceptual framework of transformative learning developed in chapter two. Each theme and factor was considered in light of the four conceptions of transformative learning theory to ascertain which, if any, conception the theme or factor might be aligned with. Themes and factors were 'mapped' to the conceptions of transformative learning they aligned to, and the results incorporated into the findings and represented in Tables 6a, 6b and figure 2. The usefulness of the framework is then critiqued in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

**Table 5**

*Example of narrative thematic analysis process- Changes of Inner Self theme*

| Step | Analysis undertaken | Example |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Read transcript, reviewed visual representation, read demographic data for each participant. | |
| 2 | For each individual participant extracted text/ images related to research questions i.e. what has changed about them (behaviours/skills/attitudes/view of self), how did that manifest?<br><br>Extracted text/ observation of pictures related to factors influencing transformation.<br><br>Placed extracted text and observation of images in to a document. | Extracts from Elizabeth's interview:<br>I was feeling, 'Can I do this? Am I good enough?' Then I got a phone-call from our first DDP tutor, and he said to me, 'We've noticed you, you're going to be one of our top students,' and I thought, 'He can't mean it, with all these problems I'm having.'<br><br>In the first module, which I found extremely stimulating, we had the learning team. I had the sense that I was a great team player, and I thought I was a part of the team, and then to have that experience with XXXX like I did, that was an insight into my own behaviour, and it made me stop and really look at myself.<br><br>I was thinking of dropping out. You know, there was an initial struggle, but I think in the end it was a positive experience, and I've learnt a lot about myself, and how to work in a team.<br><br>I'm really very, very pleased with myself and very happy. That's supposed to be an aeroplane, so I don't know where it was going to take me, frankly. It doesn't really matter because I've done it for personal reasons, not professional ones. So, for me, it's going to be the personal transformation, and sense of achievement. Although, of course, there's the professional investment as well. So, by the time I get it, I'll probably retire in two years' time. I invested a lot of my learning from the modules into my job. I can see papers I've written in the programmes, in supervision, all over.<br><br>I've been a bit of a squeaky wheel at work already. And nobody takes any notice of me at all.<br><br>Maybe I might make a very small difference. |

| | | When I look back at the two presentations, I thought they were part of my transformational experience, but neither has been as transformational as the learning team. That connection was transformational. |
|---|---|---|
| | | Visual Representation: Image highlights small, sad Head of School on left, under a cloud, odd one out, in a small confined space. On right larger self image, sunshine, smiling, heart, flying learning team in picture  |
| 3 | Analysed extracted text and images to identify manifestations of personal transformation experienced<br><br>Analysed extracted text and images to identify any factors that influenced participants' transformation | Extracts from Elizabeth's data<br>*Manifestation: Increased confidence:*<br>Interview: So that turned me around, and made me think I could do it.<br><br>Visual representation: Small sad drawing of self to large smiling version of self.<br><br>*Manifestation: Improved self-awareness:*<br>Interview: that was an insight into my own behaviour, and it made me stop and really look at myself.<br><br>*Manifestation: Perceived nuisance at work*<br>Interview: I've been a bit of a squeaky wheel at work already. And nobody takes any notice of me at all.<br><br>*Factor: Validation from others*<br>Interview: I was feeling, 'Can I do this? Am I good enough?' Then I got a phone-call from our first DDP tutor, and he said to me, 'We've noticed you, you're going to be one of our top students.'<br><br>*Factor: unexpected events and outcomes*<br>Interview: I had the sense that I was a great team player, and I thought I was a part of the team, and then to have that experience with |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | XXXX like I did, that was an insight into my own behaviour. *Factor: Learning Team Relationships* Interview: neither has been as transformational as the learning team. That connection was transformational. Visual representation: three smiling faces linked in a circle with different flags with a heart in the middle labelled learning team |
| 4 | Process of "Restorying" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p.330) undertaken: Reviewed individual participant's demographic data and full original interview transcript for information that could be used to situate story of transformation in context. Relevant information extracted and placed in document identified in step 2. Added personal transformation manifestations and factors influencing transformation identified in step 3 to document. Reviewed research notes. Added researcher feelings and thoughts pre and post interview to document in case this information might have been of use during later analysis. | Generation of "interim research text" (Clandinin, 2016, p.47) See Appendix B for full example. |
| 5 | Steps 1 to 4 repeated for each participant | |
| 6 | Manifestations of personal transformation and factors influencing personal transformation compared across all 7 "interim research texts" (Clandinin, 2016, p.47) looking for similarities and differences. | *Example-Manifestation of Increased Confidence* David interview: It made me realise the changes in the way I viewed myself, because if I had been told in 2012 when I came here that I wasn't an expert, I'd probably have agreed, but there was definitely a change in how I viewed myself as an expert and as an academic. David visual representation: Confidence changes from moderate at pre-enrolment to high or very high in thesis stage. |

| | | Suzanne interview: I won't let people pressure me in to reacting, in to writing, or saying, or doing something before I am ready to.<br><br>Michael interview: My posture got better. I'm more upright. Physically, I'm very small, but my stature has increased.<br><br>Hiba interview: Personally, I changed a lot. I became more assertive… I became more vocal…<br><br>Hiba visual representation: sad image of self with frowning face when getting bad grades (note says 'will quit'), to smiling image of self with note (good grades, I am still smart).<br><br>Caitlyn interview: if I start with the first picture, the font of 'me' is very tiny, and the font of 'super-smart people' is big, and that's how it felt. I felt I'd come along to the doctorate like, 'I don't think I'll be able to do it; I don't think I'm smart enough.'…The next picture, the 'me' font is slightly bigger, and the 'super-smart' people the font is slightly smaller, and at that point I realised, 'Okay, there are some super-smart people, but they're not all like that.' There are some people who are like me… By the middle to the end of module one, I was thinking, 'Okay, I can do this.'<br><br>Caitlyn visual representation: Distance between box containing 'me' and 'super-smart people' is initially large, but by the end the boxes overlap. Similarly text that says 'me' is initially tiny, and 'super-smart people' is large. By the end both sets of text are the same size.<br><br>Grace interview: the first picture I have is a porcupine. Initially I was not an eager student of the doctoral programme. In fact this is my second round of trying to get a PhD…after we paid for everything, I was "I don't want to take this anymore."…It was quite ridiculous. I knew I was overreacting. I was just getting very anxious…I was not sure I could do this all over again… But later, when I got the programme, it was very enriching, because I felt that it had so much relevance to my teaching. I thought, 'wow, I'm learning a lot of things for my teaching', because it was based on experience, but now I have that knowledge to talk about it. I have |

| | | experience and research to back up what I thought was a gut feeling.<br><br>Elizabeth manifestation of confidence- see step 3 |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | All manifestations examined for similarities and differences and developed into 3 overall themes.<br><br>Factors influencing particular manifestations placed within relevant theme. | Manifestations of:<br>• Increased confidence<br>• Improved self-awareness<br>• Other<br>Grouped together under overall theme 'Changes of Inner Self'<br>Factors associated with this theme identified as:<br>• Validation from others<br>• Enhanced knowledge and the ability to express ideas to others<br>• Unexpected events and outcomes<br>• Reflexive practice |
| 8 | Each overall theme and factor mapped (where appropriate) to conceptual framework of transformative learning theory identified in chapter 2. | Example- 'Changes of Inner Self' theme mapped to following conceptions of transformative learning theory:<br>• Psychoanalytic<br>• Cognitive<br>• Relationships with others<br><br>Factors associated with this theme mapped as follows:<br>• Validation from others- Relationships with others<br>• Enhanced knowledge and the ability to express ideas to others- N/A<br>• Unexpected events and outcomes- Cognitive, Psychoanalytic<br>• Reflexive practice- Cognitive, Psychoanalytic |

## 3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Liverpool Online Programmes EdD. Virtual

Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) on the November 21st, 2018. In terms of harm to

participants this was considered a low-risk study, so was given expedited approval. A copy of the

letter of approval is available in Appendix A.

One of the main ethical considerations in this project was participant confidentiality. Whilst all participants were allocated pseudo names in an attempt to protect their identities in any written documents resulting from the research project, the small size of the doctoral programme in terms of faculty staff meant that even with the use of pseudonyms staff might be able to identify students through the contextual data provided to situate the participants' stories. As such, careful consideration had to be given to how much data to include, and the level of detail provided in the participant pen portraits. A balance had to be achieved between providing the reader with enough information to contextualise participants' stories and comments, without being too specific. For example, I might consider it relevant to include the fact that the participant is living in a completely different country and culture to the one in which they grew up. If confidentiality were less important I could name the country where the participant was born and where they now reside. However, to do so might make the individual identifiable to faculty members or other students. To combat this, I used "crude reporting categories" (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992, p.117) when providing information about participants. Crude reporting categories involve the use of generalised rather than accurate information (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992). For example, stating a participant was born in a rural area of England rather than naming an area, or that they have children rather than a son and daughter retains the essence of the narrative, whilst at the same time making it harder to identify the participant.

As well as allocating pseudo names to participants and utilising crude reporting categories in written documents resulting from the project, further steps were taken to ensure participants' data was maintained confidentiality during the project. No data was shared prior to allocating pseudonyms to participants. In addition, all data was stored on a password protected computer. When printing hard copies of transcribed interviews for analysis purposes all personal identifiers were removed prior to printing, and the documents stored in a locked drawer. These documents, and original electronic

data sources will be destroyed a maximum of five years after publication, or ten years from the end of the study, whichever is the longer in line with university policy.

Another ethical concern was the potential for participants to become distressed during an interview if they made a disclosure that they found upsetting, or to regret making a particular disclosure following the interview itself.  This was managed by allowing participants to select the information they shared themselves. At the start of the interview, all participants were informed that they need not share anything in the interview that made them feel uncomfortable and if asked a question they did not want to answer that they need not do so. Participants were additionally informed that if they shared anything in the interview that they then wished to retract after the event that they could do so, up until the point at which data was anonymised for data analysis purposes. All participants were informed during the consent process and at interview that should they change their mind about taking part in the study they had the right to withdraw their consent and their data up until the anonymisation of data. Participants were also made aware of University of Liverpool support and counselling services available to them within the Participant Information Sheet, and were reminded of these services again at interview.

## 3.9 Validity

Essentially, validity as a concept refers to the extent to which a piece of work provides a credible argument for the knowledge claim presented (Polkinghorne, 2007). Qualitative researchers within the social sciences tend to align to a social constructivist or constructivist ontology whereby truth is considered a relative and contextual concept, subject to personal and/or cultural, geographical and social factors (Crotty, 2003). Therefore, the traditional, positivist measures of validity and reliability (a credible, objective method by which to establish a single truth, correct answer or causal relationship) require re-imagining for the social sciences. (Creswell, 2013).

Polkinghorne (2007) addresses the validity of narrative research in two ways. Firstly, the extent to which the participants' story conveys the meaning of their experience. Secondly, how closely the researcher represents the meaning of the participant in their interpretation of the story (Polkinghorne, 2007).

I will address how I have attended to these two measures in turn. Firstly, by using semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection, participants had freedom within the interview context to express themselves, their stories, what was important to them, and the meanings they wished to convey of their experiences.  In addition, the requirement to complete a pre-interview task related to their doctoral journey ensured that participants had given some thought to the subject of the interview prior to its commencement. This allowed participants time to reflect on their experience of doctoral study and consider the stories of transformation they wished to share before meeting with the researcher, giving them more time to consider how to convey the meaning of their experience.

By asking participants to create a visual representation of their doctoral journey and/or moments of personal transformation prior to interview, a further opportunity for participants to identify and express their stories using an alternative medium to speech was provided, allowing participants to draw on image, metaphor and subconscious strata, thus, mitigating some of the limiting factors of the spoken word to convey experience. In addition, by providing the participant the opportunity to communicate the intended meaning behind their visual representation during the interview, further opportunities to discuss meaning were offered.

Through the use of two methods of data collection I have tried to ensure that participants can convey the meaning of their experiences through their stories.

Polkinghorne's (2007) second measure of validity is how closely the researcher represents the meaning of the participant in their interpretation of the story. There are a number of ways a researcher can try to ensure their interpretations of participants' data are as close to the participants original meaning as possible.

Firstly, the researcher can engage in a reflexive process regarding their own experience of, or attitude towards, the phenomenon being studied. Darawsheh (2014) refers to reflexivity as "the continuous process of self-reflection that researchers engage in to generate awareness about their actions, feelings and perceptions" (p.561). By identifying their own experiences, attitudes and feelings toward a subject, a researcher becomes more aware of these and how they might influence the design of a research project, and the data collection and analysis stages. The researcher can then be mindful of projecting their own view point on to participants during these stages and continually review their influence and interpretation on the data. In narrative research there is an acceptance that telling stories, or re-telling participant stories is a relational act, so the researchers' perspectives do influence the data collected and represented (Clandinin, 2016). Therefore, specifically stating the researchers' own experiences and feelings regarding the phenomena being studied when presenting narrative research can be useful, as it provides transparency to the reader, allowing them to draw their own conclusions regarding the extent to which the researchers' views influence the participant stories told and presented (Reissman, 2008).

I employed reflexive practice within this research study, through completion of my own visual representation of my research journey and moments of transformation, as well as writing stories of transformational experiences I had during the programme. In addition to this I kept notes of my thoughts and feelings, particularly during the data collection and analysis phase. By identifying specific incidences where I was moved, troubled or felt like a participant's experience was particularly close to an experience of my own, I was able to examine my relationship with the participants and their stories, and how these thoughts and feelings might influence my interpretation of the data. For example, one participant talked about the guilt she felt at not spending time with her family due to her study commitments, which resonated particularly with me as it aligned with my own experience. It would have been easy to over-represent this theme within my findings as it mirrored my own experience, but other participants did not have that experience and so I was able to reflect a more accurate portrayal of the data due to having identified my own

experiences prior to data collection and analysis, and knowing that I could overly influence data interpretation if I did not account for them.

In addition to reflexive practice, Reissman (2008) proposes an additional, pragmatic approach to Polkinghorne's (2007) second measure of validity regarding how closely the researcher represents the meaning of the participant in their interpretation of the story. She highlights the need for transparency in research. Reissman's commitment to transparency is underpinned by the view that by demonstrating to the reader *how* they came to the conclusions they did will allow the reader to critique the researcher's interpretation of the data and come to their own conclusions, which may differ from that of the researcher. The researcher's work is presented as 'an' interpretation of the data, not the 'only' interpretation, and as such acknowledges the active role of the reader within the process of knowledge interpretation. In this way, narrative research shares more in common with literary criticism than more traditional forms of social science research (Polkinghorne, 2007).

In this research study I have attempted to be as transparent as possible. I have situated this research study as a response to my own experience of doctoral study, sharing my position as an inside researcher and my own story of personal transformation. I have explained how I have made decisions regarding my chosen methodology, data analysis methods, and presentation of my findings. In doing so I aim to have provided enough information for the reader to be able to make their own judgements regarding the extent of my influence on the data collection and interpretation.

In conclusion, the validity of this research has been enhanced by using visual as well as spoken methods of data collection, semi-structured interviews and reflexive practice. Additionally, by positioning this research as narrative, interpretive, insider research and specifically conveying the purpose, limitations and scope of the project, clarity is provided regarding the knowledge claims made, and not made. Lastly, by outlining how research decisions were made, and data analysed and

presented, the transparency advocated by Reissman (2008) as a method by which to enhance the validity of the work is demonstrated.

## 3.10 Summary

In this chapter I have positioned myself as a researcher, exploring my own ontological and epistemological position as well as situating myself as an inside researcher. I have reflected upon my own experiences of personal transformation during doctoral study, and shared them with the reader to ensure transparency within the research process and allow them to consider the influence of my own experiences within the data collection, analysis, and presentation phases. I have then explained and defended the methodology for the study, research methods selected and approach taken to data analysis. Next, I outlined the ethical issues within the study and steps taken to mitigate these considerations, and lastly discussed mechanisms I have taken to enhance the validity of this research. In the next chapter, I will outline the findings from this study.

# Chapter 4- Findings

In this chapter, findings that relate to the aim of this research study and subsequent research questions are conveyed, and compared with findings from the current literature on doctoral student transformation. All themes and findings have been analysed in relation to the conceptual framework of transformative learning identified in chapter two to ascertain which, if any, conceptions of transformative learning the transformations and factors found in this study relate to.

Firstly, in order to contextualise the findings, an introduction to each participant is provided. Each introduction contains some demographic and biographical information, along with the participants' self-declared motivations for undertaking the online EdD programme, and a picture of their visual representation of their doctoral journey and/or moments of personal transformation. Participants have been allocated pseudo names for the purpose of anonymity.

## 4.1 The participants

Hiba

Hiba is a teacher residing within the Southern Arabian Peninsula. She is in her forties and lives with her husband and two children. Hiba was born in  Northeast Africa and has lived in several different countries. Arabic is her first language. Her motivation to pursue the online EdD came from a lack of intellectual challenge in her day-to-day work. This, combined with moving to a new country, and a feeling that she was 'lagging behind' new colleagues, spurred Hiba on to register for a doctorate.
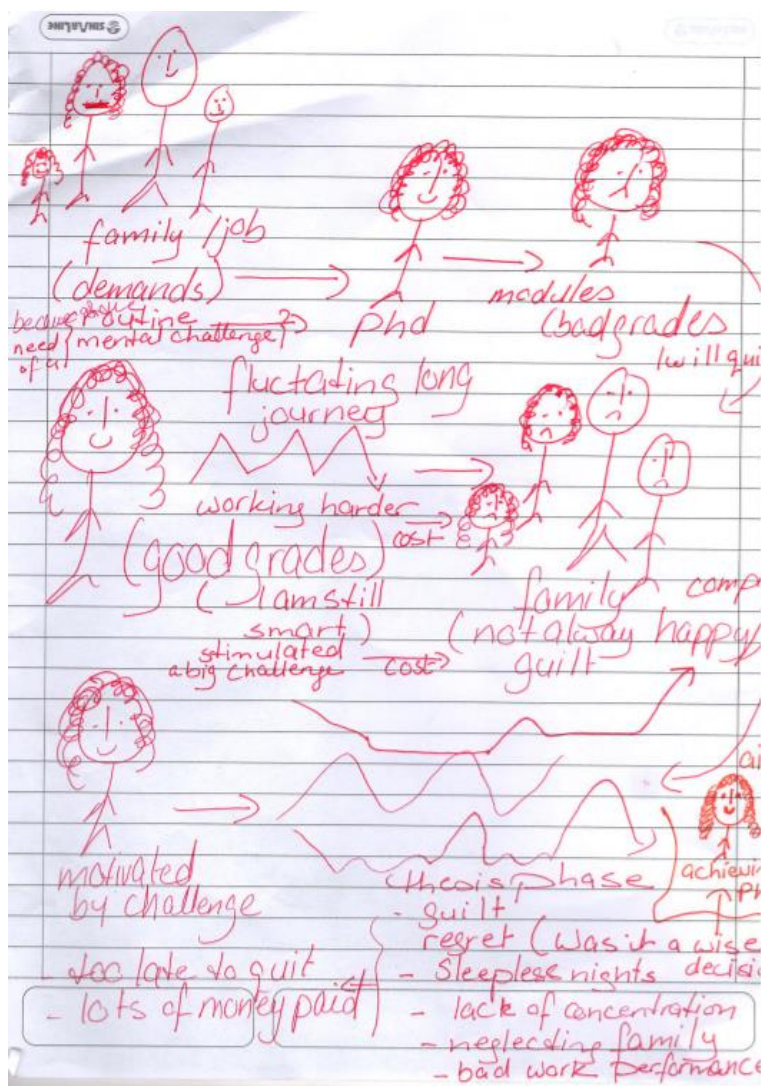
*Hiba's visual representation*

Suzanne

Suzanne is a part-time English Tutor at a university in Europe. She is in her fifties, lives with her husband, and they have no dependents living with them. Suzanne was born in America and has travelled widely, living in a variety of different countries. She speaks several languages. She was initially invited to undertake a PhD in the nineteen-nineties following completion of a Masters degree, but chose to go on to employment instead. She decided to pursue the online EdD in 2015 due to the combination of securing a long-term contract of employment, her age (feeling as though if she didn't do it now she never would) and a recent inheritance following the death of her mother.

These provided Suzanne with the means and motivation to undertake a doctorate; she wanted to make her mother proud.
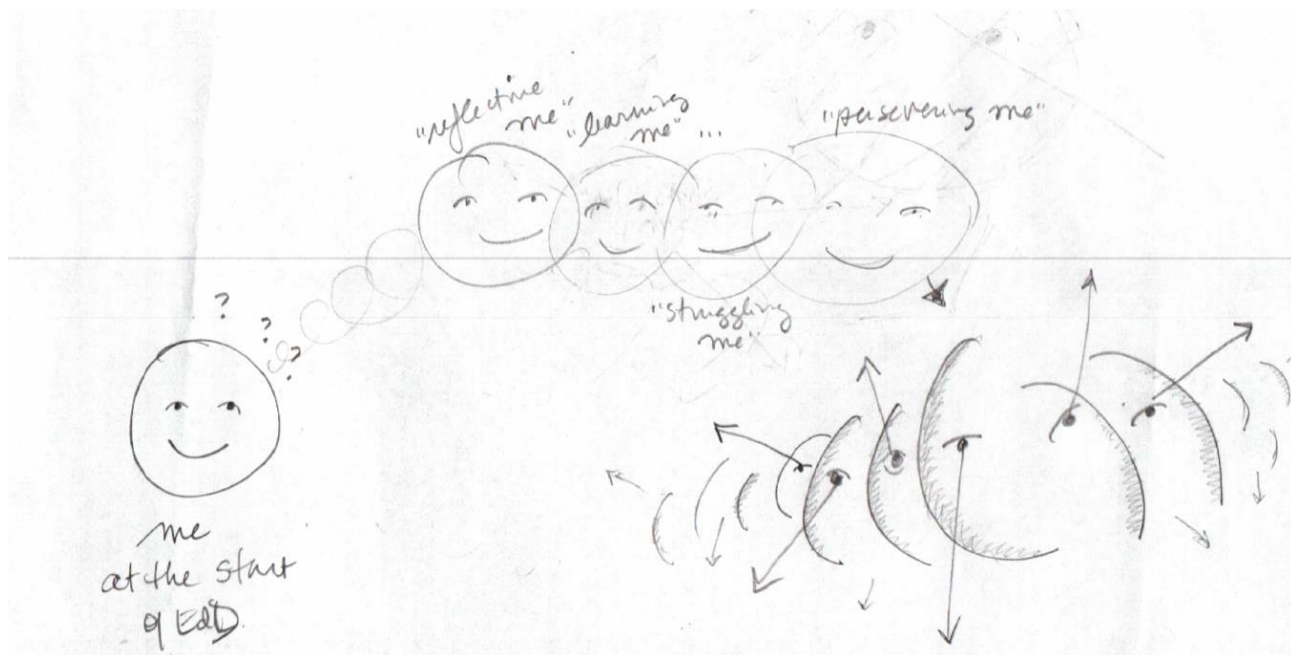


*Suzanne's visual representation*

David

David is responsible for the design and delivery of the English programme at a university in Northeast Asia. He is in his thirties, lives alone and has no dependents. David was born in the UK. He initially taught English in Northeast Asia following completion of his undergraduate degree due to a desire to travel. Following completion of a Masters degree in Language teaching in the UK, a job opportunity again arose teaching in Northeast Asia, and David eagerly returned to the country. His motivation for completing a doctorate is two-fold; he enjoys learning in general but also wants to lay some ghosts to rest from his educational history. He did not achieve the high grade standards he set for himself during his compulsory, undergraduate or postgraduate education, and felt that completing the doctorate would finally settle that frustration for him.
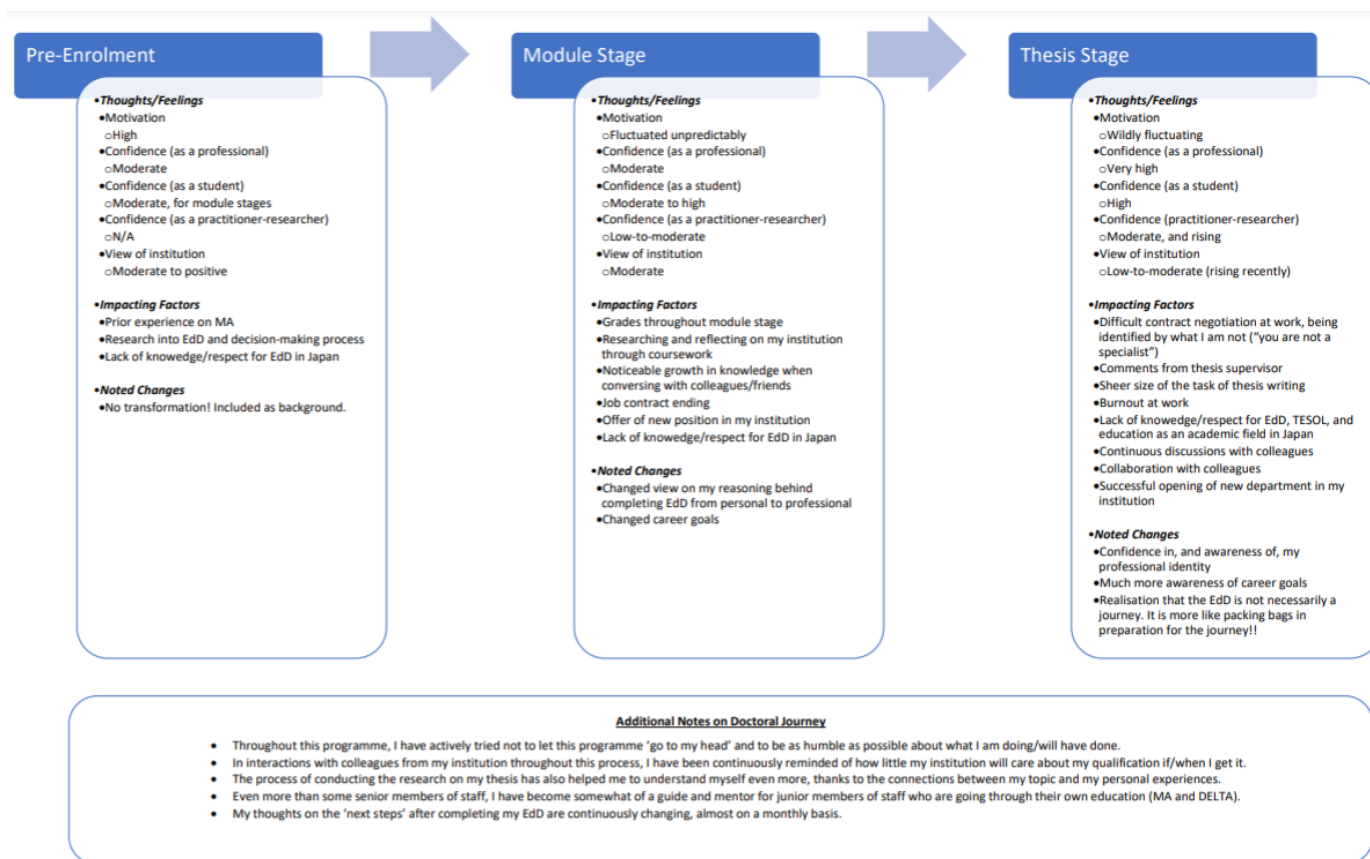
*David's visual representation*

Caitlyn

Caitlyn is a Co-ordinator at a university in the Eastern Arabian Peninsula (EAP). She is in her forties and lives with her husband and two children. Caitlyn was born in Western Europe and travelled to the EAP following completion of her undergraduate degree, to be with her father. Whilst in the EAP she met her husband, who is English and they married and settled in the country. Caitlyn decided to undertake a doctorate after a new Vice-Chancellor joined her university and communicated his intention to make cuts in pursuit of his vision for the University, which made Caitlyn feel that she needed to 'up her game' to be more secure in her job.
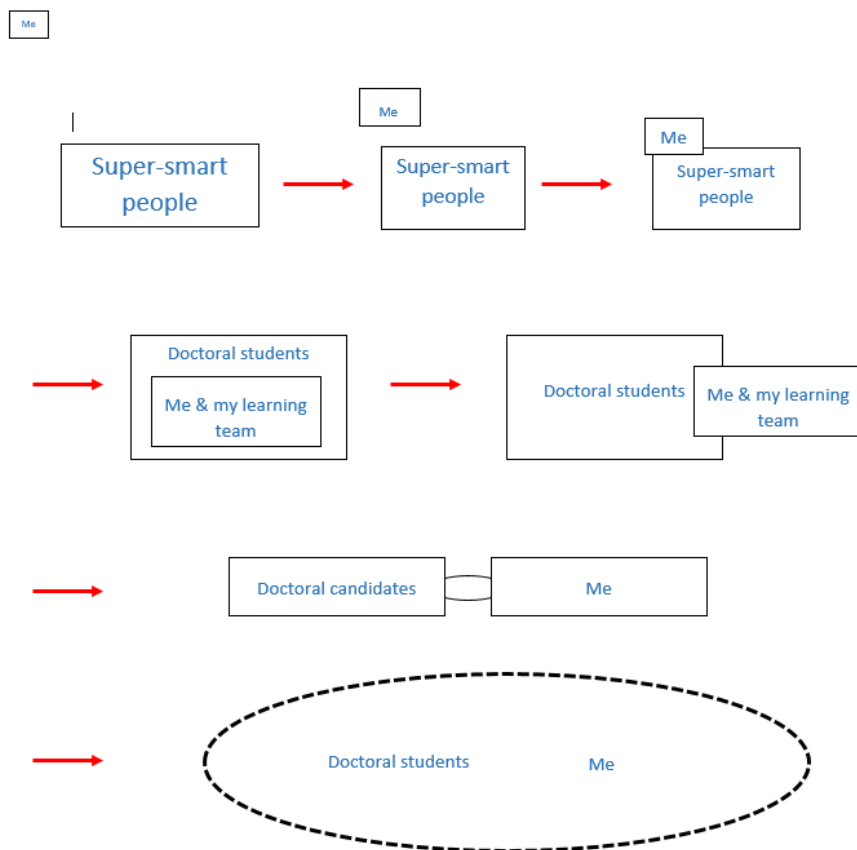
*Caitlyn's visual representation*

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a Head of School for a university located in Southwest Polynesia. Born in Southern Africa,

she is in her sixties and lived with her husband for most of the duration of the doctoral programme,

they had no dependents living at home. Elizabeth had been considering doctoral education for about

ten years prior to registering for the online EdD programme, but had not taken it further as she was

not sure what her topic would be and she was worried that she would not be 'clever enough' to

complete doctoral study. She did not want to undertake a doctorate at her own institution as she

felt it would make her vulnerable. A chance encounter with a member of staff from Liverpool

introduced Elizabeth to the online EdD programme, which she felt would be perfect for her.
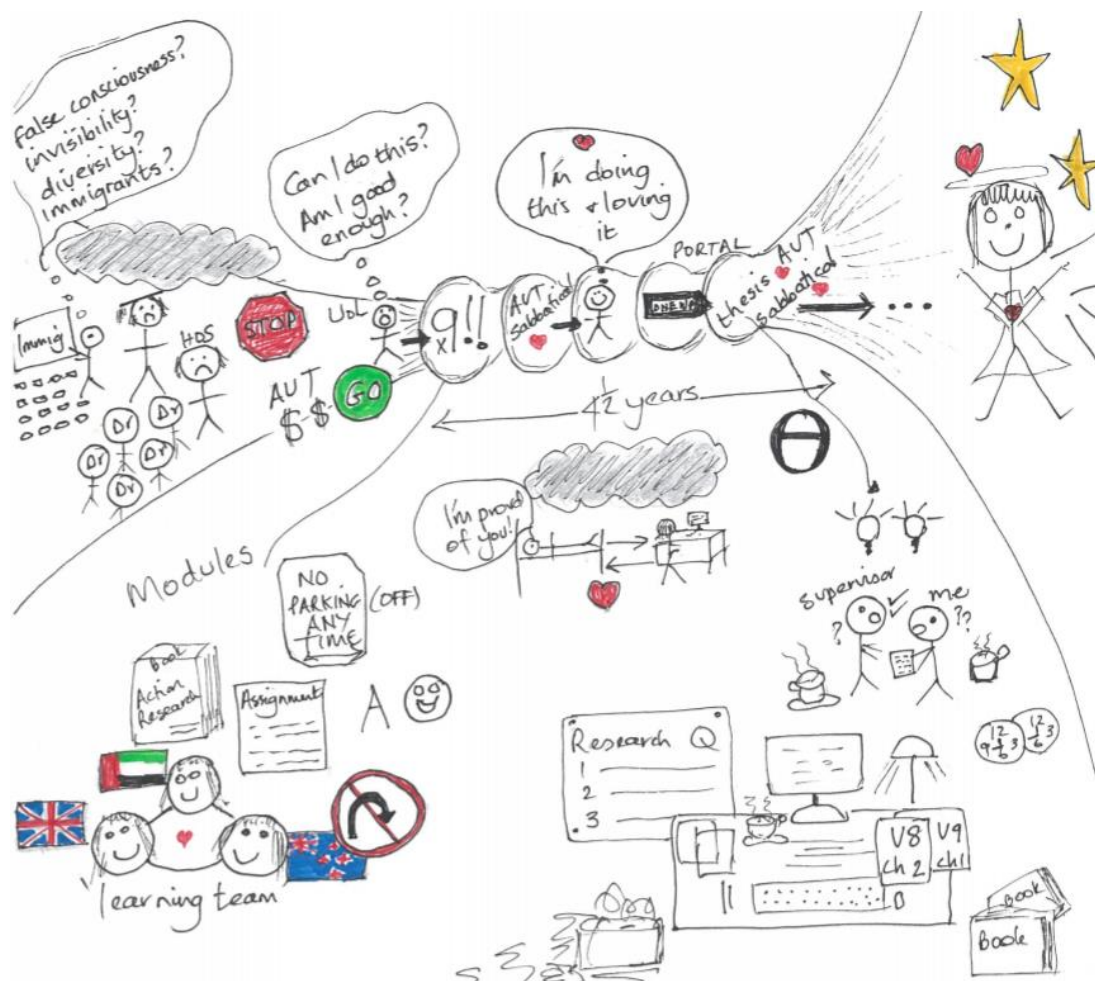
*Elizabeth's visual representation*

Michael

Michael is a lecturer at a university in Northeast Asia. He is in his forties and lives with his wife and

two children. Michael was born in the UK and became a gifted musician. He intended to undertake a

PhD in the UK, but circumstances changed and he found himself unable to pursue this ambition.

Frustrated, Michael decided to take a break from the UK and travelled to Northeast Asia. Once there

Michael found out that his Masters degree enabled him to teach English, so he began work as a

teacher and ultimately ended up staying in the country as he met his wife and developed his career.

In his own words Michael decided to pursue the doctorate "for no good reason except my own

hubris or pride", but he also wanted to become a more helpful member of society and felt the

doctorate would help him move towards that goal.
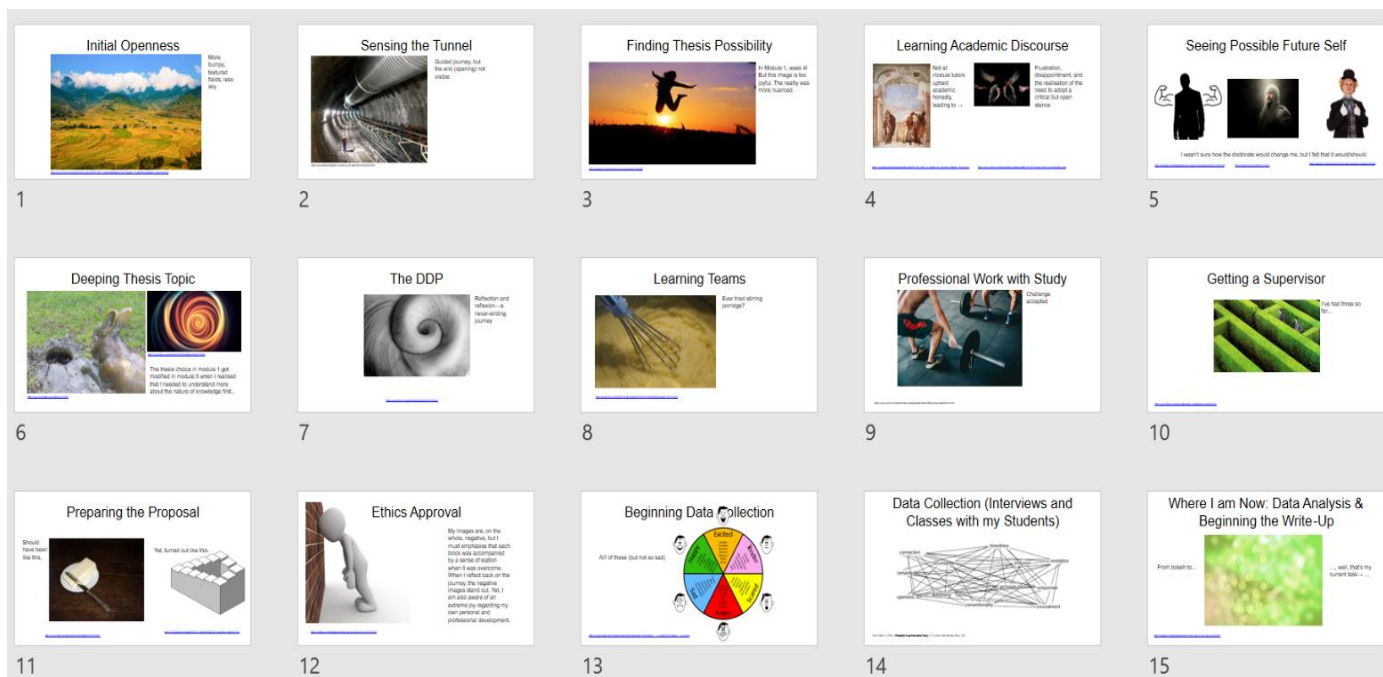
*Michael's visual representation*

Grace

Grace teaches young adults at a college on the Malay Peninsula. Born on the Malay Peninsula, she is

in her forties and lives with her husband. They do not have children, but Grace provides care to

elderly relatives who are in need of increasing support. Grace's husband has recently been

diagnosed with a health condition which has changed his outlook on life, resulting in a calmer, more

relaxed approach. Grace was reluctant to undertake the EdD, having had a previous bad experience

of PhD study which saw her ultimately drop out. At that time her husband was the person who had

pushed and encouraged her to try the EdD, and whose support and encouragement had kept her

going. His more relaxed attitude, combined with the isolation of the thesis stage and lack of

deadlines, has resulted in a drop in motivation and productivity for Grace. At the time of the

interview encounter Grace is fighting the urge to quit every day, desperate to keep going but also

tired and lost in her data analysis.
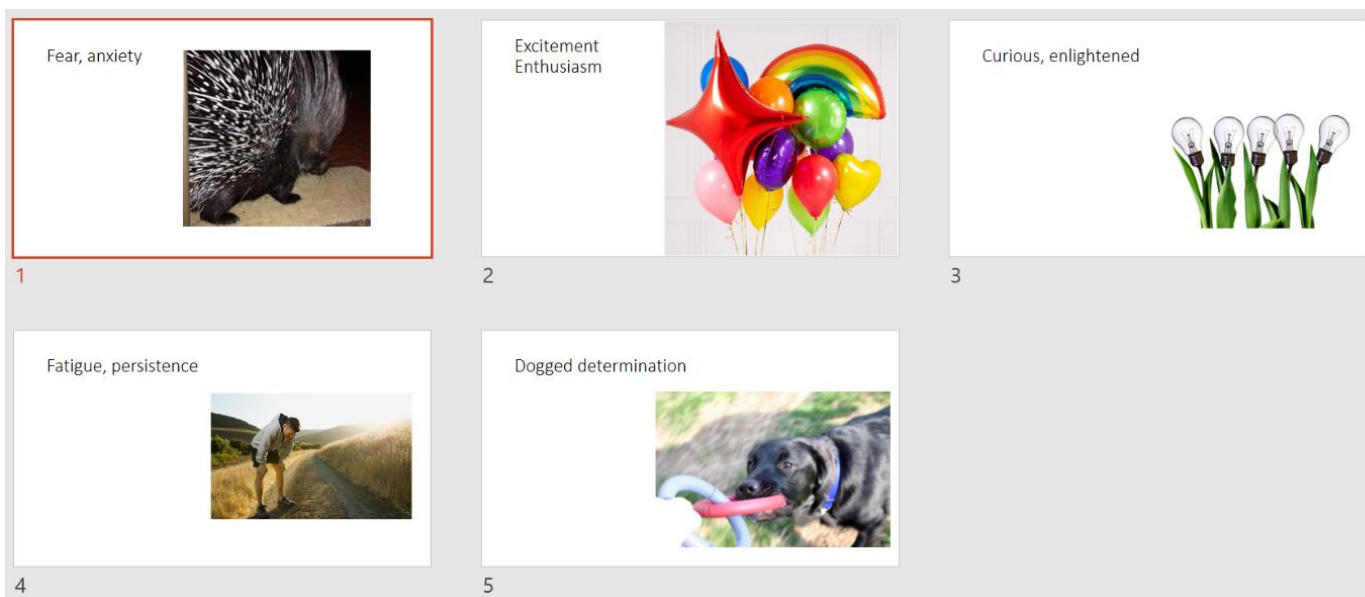
*Grace's Visual Representation*

## 4.2 Overview of findings

The seven participants in this study are reflective of the typical demographic profile of part-time EdD

students, in so far as the majority are between 30 and 50 (six out of seven participants), have either

children or caring responsibilities (five out of seven participants) and are all working in professional

roles (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2016). Additionally, all participants chose the online EdD programme for

pragmatic reasons, echoing the increasing demand for online doctoral course provision that offers

convenience and flexibility to students (Lim, 2008). The online nature of the programme allowed

them to continue working, did not require them to travel or move (thus accommodating their family

commitments), and was taught in English. Six of the seven participants were native English speakers,

and three of them specifically identified English as a Medium of Instruction as being an important

factor in their decision to undertake the programme, feeling that their language skills in their

country of residence may not be sufficient to undertake doctoral study in that language. Other than

in relation to their reasons for joining the online EdD programme, participants did not refer to the

online nature of the programme impacting on their learning or experiences, other than in terms of

encountering diverse others. The mode of delivery itself did not provoke discussion. This may be due to the totality of the online experience; as participants had no hybrid or face to face doctoral programme to compare the online programme to. Alternatively, as all participants specifically chose to complete an online EdD it could simply be due to the expectations with which they entered the programme. Whatever the reason, participants did not seem to consider the online delivery of the taught aspect of the programme, or subsequent online supervision during the thesis stage to be relevant to their experiences of personal transformation.   Of interest is that only one of the seven participants still reside in their country of birth. This implies that the majority of participants in the study have experience of cultural and geographical diversity, having lived within different contexts. This previous experience may have had an influence on what  Cranton & Taylor (2012) refer to as their "willingness" (p. 40) to engage in transformative learning, as they have already demonstrated that they are open to alternative cultures and ways of knowing through their prior relocation to different countries.

Through the thematic narrative data analysis process undertaken, overarching themes of positive personal transformation experienced during doctoral study were identified within the data. These included *changes of inner Self*, *enhanced educational and mentoring practice,* and *thinking and perceiving differently*. Additionally, there was a perception amongst the participants of negative experiences, which they viewed as consequences of their personal transformations. Therefore a fourth theme was identified, *negative consequences of personal transformation.* Within these overarching themes, a number of manifestations of these transformations were identified that were each common to several of the participants. The nature of these manifestations are outlined in Tables 5a and 5b below, and are explored in detail in relation to each relevant overarching theme. Factors influencing the personal transformations experienced by participants are also identified within the tables in relation to each theme. Tables 5a and 5b provide a visual overview of the identified overarching themes, manifestations of each theme, and the factors influencing the transformation experienced. In brackets, the conception/s of transformative learning theory each

overall theme or factor relate to (if any) has been highlighted. The relationship between themes,

factors and conceptions of transformative learning from within the conceptual framework of

transformative learning presented in chapter two, are illustrated visually within Figure 2, and

discussed within each theme as appropriate.

**Table 6a**

*Positive transformation themes, manifestations and influencing factors identified*

| | Positive Transformations | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Overarching Themes | *Changes of inner Self*<br><br>(psychoanalytic, cognitive, relationships with others) | *Enhanced educational and mentoring practice*<br>(cognitive, psychoanalytic, contextual) | *Thinking and perceiving differently*<br>(cognitive, relationships with others, contextual) |
| Manifestations associated with theme | Increased confidence<br>-speaking out<br>-speaking less<br>-improved posture<br><br>Improved self-awareness<br><br>Other | Enhanced educational practice<br><br>Enhanced mentoring practice | Type Two thinking<br><br>Seeing multiple perspectives |
| Factors contributing to change (overarching themes) | Validation from others (relationships with others)<br><br>Enhanced knowledge and the ability to express ideas to others<br><br>Unexpected events and outcomes (cognitive, psychoanalytic)<br><br>Reflexive practice (cognitive and psychoanalytic) | Enhanced Knowledge and the ability to express ideas to others<br><br>Becoming a student (cognitive, contextual) | Critical thinking and reflection skills<br><br>Culture and different ways of knowing (cognitive, relationships with others, contextual)<br><br>Learning team relationships (relationships with others)<br><br>Constant challenge and persistence |

**Table 6b**

*Negative theme related to transformation, manifestations, and influencing factors identified*

| | Negative consequences of personal transformation |
|---|---|
| Manifestations associated with theme | Disillusionment at work<br><br>Disconnection with others<br><br>Perceived nuisance at work |
| Factors contributing to change from within themes *thinking and perceiving differently* and *changes of inner Self* | Critical thinking and reflection skills<br><br>Enhanced knowledge and the ability to express ideas to others (leading to manifestation of increased confidence)<br><br>Seeing multiple perspectives<br><br>Culture and different ways of knowing |

**Figure 2**

*Relationships between themes and factors*



Factor influencing personal transformation

Positive personal transformation theme

Negative consequences of personal transformation

Arrow demonstrating a Factor influencing a particular theme
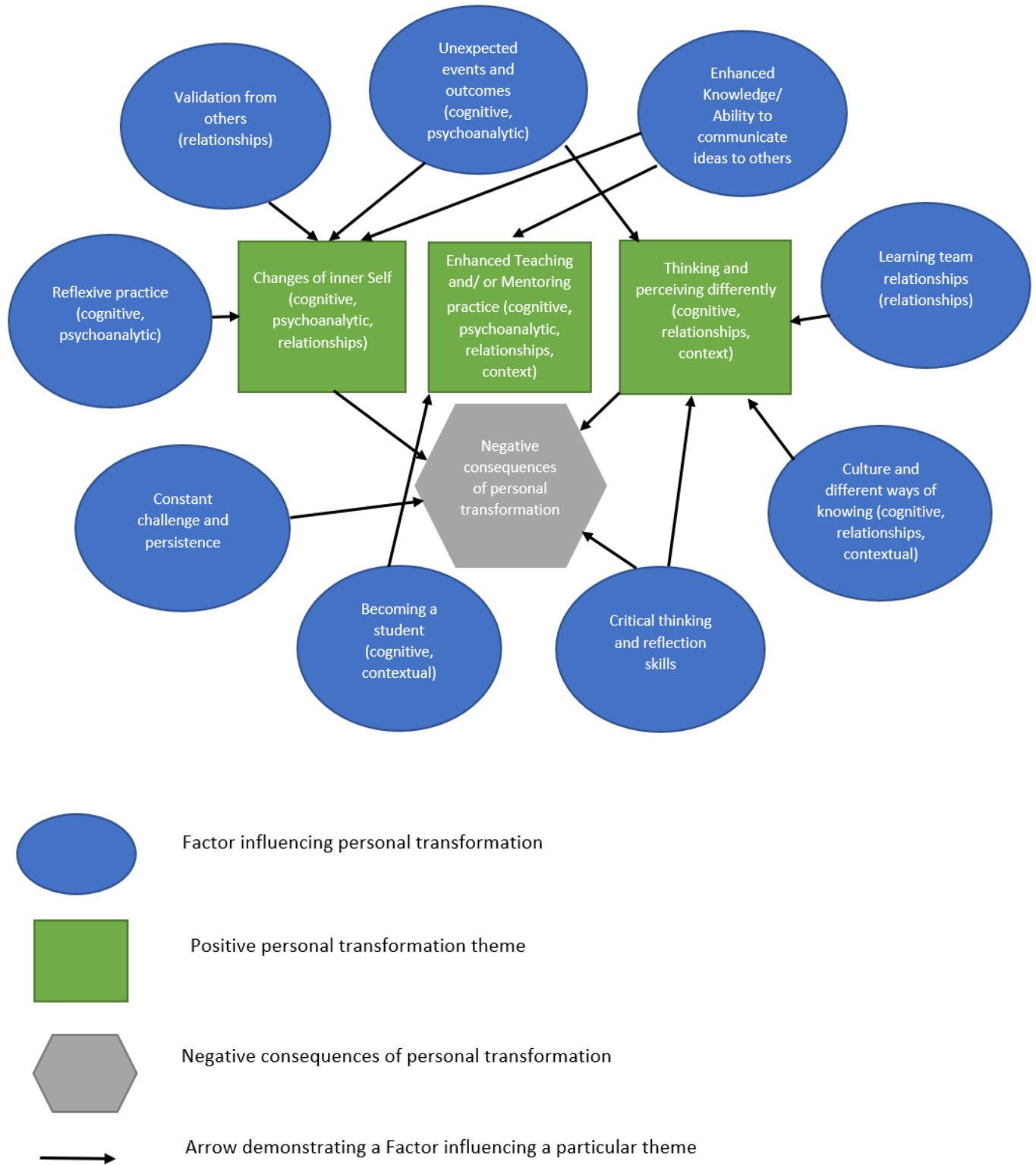
## 4.3 Theme One- Changes of inner Self

The manifestations of *changes of inner Self* described by participants within this theme closely align with the psychoanalytical conception of transformative learning. As Boyd & Myers state in their psychoanalytical conception of transformative education "The outcome of transformative education is not primarily rational clarity but a commitment to an altered way of being with one's Self in the world"(1988, p. 276). Boyd & Myers (1988) see this altered 'way of being' as a result of the integration of intrapsychic structures within the psyche, culminating in personal growth and "expanded consciousness" (p.276). Noteworthy changes in Self were reported by doctoral students within the transformative learning literature (see Stehlik, 2011 and Wang, 2018 for examples), but it was unusual to see details regarding *how* they had changed. A number of manifestations that constitute "an altered way of being with one's Self" (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p.276) or what I have termed *changes of inner Self* were reported by participants in this study. In the manifestation of *Changes of inner Self- increased self-awareness*, in addition to the psychoanalytic conception of transformative learning as an appropriate lens through which to view the transformations experienced, Mezirow's (2003) cognitive conception of transformative learning theory is also evident. Therefore I have classified *changes of inner Self* as both a psychoanalytical and cognitive experience of transformation. Manifestations are now explored in detail.

### *4.3.1 Manifestations of Changes of inner Self- Increased Confidence*

All seven participants referred to an increase in confidence as a result of their experience of doctoral study. This is in keeping with the findings from the literature review, in which an increase in confidence amongst doctoral students was widely reported (see Burgess & Wellington, 2010; Stevens-Long, 2012; Gibson et al., 2017; Preston et al., 2014 for examples). Participants in this study discussed the manifestation of their increased confidence in a number of different ways.

### 4.3.1a Speaking out.

David provides an example of speaking out when asked by his institution to take on a new role. As there were significantly more responsibilities involved he asked for a contract re-negotiation and a pay rise, an absolute taboo in his country of residence. The Dean of the department did not respond well to this request, and when questioned by David as to why, responded by telling him he wasn't an expert as language teaching is not considered an academic field. Eventually David did secure a small pay rise and a promotion, however the encounter made David realise something about himself:

> …when I was confronted and told I wasn't an expert, I thought, 'You know what, actually I think I am'. I'm putting in a lot of hours into my education. I read a lot, I work a lot, I am an expert and this is a real discipline…it made me realise the changes in the way I viewed myself, because if I had been told in 2012 when I came here that I wasn't an expert, I'd probably have agreed, but there was definitely a change in how I viewed myself as an expert and as an academic. (David)

In addition to David's story, Hiba also gave an example of an occasion when she had spoken out about something that previously she would not have done. She asked for help at home with housework and childcare due to the time pressure she was under in order to complete her thesis. These experiences reflect those of students in Burgess and Wellington's (2010) study examining the impact of professional doctoral study on personal and professional practice, who also observed that they found themselves speaking out more often as a result of increased confidence.

### 4.3.1b Speaking less.

Conversely, Suzanne and Caitlyn have found themselves speaking less in meetings. Suzanne as she spends more time thinking and reflecting, and Caitlyn as she doesn't feel the need to speak unless something is worth saying.

I think I've become a lot more reserved, a lot less quick to speak, but more time thinking. I think about it and consider exactly what I want to say. I'm not 'off the cuff' at all. I won't let people pressure me in to reacting, in to writing, or saying, or doing something before I am ready to. (Suzanne)

I don't say things unless they are worthwhile saying…After a while of only contributing when it's something relevant, then people start listening. (Caitlyn)

Speaking less as a result of increased confidence has not previously been reported as a result of doctoral study within the relevant literature. Suzanne's reason for speaking less appears to stem from a desire to carefully consider her contribution and responses, whereas Caitlyn appears not to feel the need to fill silence with unnecessary or meaningless comment. Both behaviours demonstrate confidence in not being swayed by the social expectation of others, or to engage in behaviours often used by employees to gain more senior colleagues attention. As such, this is a new finding that deepens understanding of how transformations due to doctoral study manifest in students' attitudes and behaviours.

### 4.3.1c Improved Posture.

Michael has seen his increase in confidence manifest physically as well as mentally and behaviourally:

My posture got better. I'm more upright. Physically, I'm very small, but my stature has increased. (Michael)

Similarly to 'Speaking less', 'improved posture' also has not been previously reported as an impact of doctoral study. Seemingly personal transformation of the inner Self can be expressed externally through body language and bearing. Therefore, both of these manifestations of increased confidence advance current understanding of *how* students experience personal transformation due to doctoral study.

### 4.3.2 Manifestations of Changes of inner Self- Improved self-awareness.

In his visual representation, David wrote that "the process of conducting the research on my thesis has also helped me to understand myself even more, thanks to the connection between my topic and my personal experiences." This sense of improved self- awareness was also commented on by Michael and Elizabeth, who both gave very honest reflections on how the learning and experiences they had encountered during their doctoral studies caused them to question some of their deeply held beliefs about themselves, and change their views and behaviours.

Elizabeth had an experience that caused her to question her view of herself during the first module of the programme. During the first 'learning team' task she had noted that a member of the learning team's writing and referencing was not very good, and had raised this issue with the team leader, expecting that she would deal with the issue. As the team leader was another student on the programme she did not feel that this was her responsibility to deal with, and did not react well to being tasked with resolving the issue. Elizabeth, upset by the interaction, then contacted faculty staff at Liverpool who asked her to help the student in question.

> that was an insight into my own behaviour, and it made me stop and really look at myself. I almost gave up at that stage, it was almost too hard. I was really knocked down by that experience... then to be asked by Liverpool to support her and her writing, was like, 'well that's interesting to come out of this'. So I did help her with her referencing...and she and I became very close. It made me really look at what it meant to be a team member.
>
> (Elizabeth)

This challenge to Elizabeth's self-concept of herself as a great team player had a profound effect on her view of herself, but also made her consider what a team player really does, and how they behave.

Michael also experienced real insight into his own character and behaviours as a result of the reflective practice required of participants during doctoral study.

> I was a diva, and in a diva's mind, they are so utterly selfish. Everything is all about you and you want the limelight…I couldn't cast off this diva-ness very well. Through reflection, I've been able to… tone it down a little bit and even learn to listen to other people. Isn't it amazing?...I didn't really have that before this course. I wasn't interested in other people; I wasn't giving them time. I even had this strange idea, I asked my wife many times, "when do babies become human?" I remember asking that question six or seven times when my children were young. I didn't see them as people, because they couldn't respond to me, they couldn't give me a conversation that was worth it for me. That's how selfish I was. Through the reflection I have realised that a baby is human, of course it is, and because I'm a fifty year old man, I've got to respond to the baby in a way the baby needs, they can't respond to my need, that's just stupid. That's how stupid I was. (Michael)

This honest and compelling reflection on his attitude toward others, his view of himself, and his behaviour has resulted in a change not just in Michael and his view of others; but also in their view of him:

> my friends in [location]…have noticed a change, and have said to me that I seem more thoughtful, more considerate, more aware. (Michael)

Within the previous literature, students within Lassig et al.'s (2013) and Stehlik's (2011) research studies also reported becoming more self-aware during their doctoral studies; but the details of the experience were not reported. Qutoshi (2016) detailed his own experience of becoming self-aware in his autoethnographic account of transformative learning; relating his realisation that his informative approach to pedagogy was not supporting his students and not in line with his values, "[the] intention of doing good for others, humility for humanity, care of self and others with ecological consciousness, love and peace" (p.64). Elizabeth and Michael's detailed descriptions of

becoming more self-aware are illuminating, demonstrating some of the potential personal transformations encountered during doctoral study. However, they also demonstrate that not all personal realisations are comfortable ones, and they can be difficult to process.

### 4.3.3 Manifestations of Changes of inner Self- Other.

Suzanne, Caitlyn, Michael and Hiba also reported change in themselves as a result of doctoral study that did not fit into the categories above.

Suzanne commented when discussing her experiences of transformation that she has become more thoughtful as a result:

> I think I'm a little more serious, and I don't mean in the sense of not having a laugh. I think I have less tolerance for something that's not important or relevant. You know, 'who cares? why waste my time?'. (Suzanne)

While Michael has become more like the person he felt he should and could be:

> the journey… it's made me happier. I've become much more relaxed, much more happy with who I am. (Michael)

In contrast to Michael's more relaxed outlook Hiba has become more outspoken and assured; her research topic on developing students' critical thinking skills significantly contributing to her own transformation:

> Originally I am from [location], and I think one of the reasons for the situation [there] is that kids aren't taught to think critically, or to be assertive, and that's part of critical thinking. I became more assertive, I started to speak out…I found my self-esteem. I'm doing all of these things and I'm managing them. I started to have more respect for myself. (Hiba)

When Hiba refers to 'doing all of these things' she is referring to studying, managing a family, raising her children, and working full time. Being able to fulfil all of those roles physically and mentally was

an enormous boost to Hiba's self-esteem.  Caitlyn also reports becoming more self-assured and comfortable in her own skin:

> Caitlyn: it's a sense of belonging in any situation…So if I'm sitting in a meeting, and I'm surrounded by people with doctorates…I feel like I'm very respectful that they have them…but I'm not intimidated by them. I feel like what I have to contribute is just as worthy as what anyone else has to contribute…I don't feel the need to prove anything…Small things would rattle me before, and now they just don't. That was by the end of module one... Even my husband said to me, 'It's the greatest thing you've ever done, this doctorate'. I'm just calmer, so probably everyone's benefitting from it. (Caitlyn)

The changes of inner Self reported here are similar to those reported by doctoral students in Stevens-Long et al.'s (2012) research on doctoral students' experiences of transformative learning. Students in that study reported a number of changes such as feeling calmer, more optimistic, joyful, appreciative of life, tolerant and confident as a result of doctoral study. Michael's feelings of being happier with who he is and more relaxed, Caitlyn's calmer personality and feelings of self-assurance, and Hiba's assertiveness are similar in nature to those reported by the students in Stevens-Long et al.'s (2012) study whereas Suzanne's comment regarding being more serious and less patient with things she considers to be unimportant is slightly different to findings from previous studies. Later in our conversation Suzanne spoke to me of her frustration with her place of work resulting from  her enhanced thinking and perception skills, and the lack of support she had experienced from friends with whom she was no longer able to spend much time; so perhaps the frustration she describes here regarding things she considers to be unimportant are reflective of those experiences.

### 4.3.4  Factors influencing Changes of inner Self- Validation from Others

Elizabeth, Grace, Hiba, and Caitlyn all started the programme feeling doubtful of their ability to complete a doctorate. For Elizabeth, her feelings of inferiority stemmed from her belief that she was not intelligent enough to undertake a doctorate, and were reinforced by the pomp and ritual of

graduation ceremonies where she would be wearing a mortarboard and was surrounded by people wearing doctoral caps (see Elizabeth's visual representation). For Hiba, her concerns regarding her intellectual ability to complete a doctorate were solidified when she received a low grade on her first assignment. Grace was concerned that having dropped out of a PhD programme earlier on in her life that the same thing would happen with the EdD, that she wouldn't be able to do it.

Student concerns regarding whether or not they have the intellectual ability to undertake a doctorate are not uncommon, and were mentioned by Suzie in Gibson et al.'s (2017) autoethnographic account of 3 women combining professional doctoral study with motherhood, Lee's (2020) phenomenological study of online doctoral student experiences, and Jenny Miles' (Miles et al., 2019) autoethnographic exploration of her own doctoral transformation.

The women in this study were able to overcome their feelings of inferiority with the help of 'validation from others'. They all identified the grades they received from tutors during the taught stage of the programme as an important positive influence on their self-esteem. One example of the impact of grades can be seen in Hiba's account:

> On the next assignment I got a 'C', and I felt so happy that I'd achieved something on my
> own. At the same time, things were going fine at home, the kids were growing, so I kept my
> expectation to a C and thought if I got that I would be happy. Then the next assignment I got
> a B, and thought, "Oh I'm so smart"…the people around me started to be proud of me, and I
> was proud of myself. (Hiba)

Caitlyn additionally identified peer benchmarking as helpful in developing her confidence:

> The next picture the 'me' font is slightly bigger and the 'super-smart' people, the font is
> slightly smaller, and at that point I realised, "Ok, there are some super-smart people, but
> they're not all like that…By the middle to the end of module one I was thinking, "Ok, I can do
> this." (Caitlyn)

Later in the programme, Caitlyn also found her ability to help others and give advice in the programme's informal WhatsApp group a further confidence boost:

> That community has made a huge difference…at any moment, you feel you can ask for something, and when I can help someone else, it gives me a lift, like "Yeah you can do it, because you knew that, and you could help them with that." (Caitlyn)

Students in Wang's (2018) study of Chinese and UK doctoral and graduate students studying abroad reported encouragement and support from educators, relatives and friends as important to their own transformational learning experiences. Less formally, many students attribute interactions with their peers in communities of practice as validation of their ideas (Coffman et al., 2016; Lassig et al., 2013) and a boost to their confidence (Kriner et al., 2015; Atabay et al., 2019). The importance attributed to the factor of 'validation from others' by Elizabeth, Caitlyn, Grace and Hiba in their personal transformations of becoming more confident, corroborates the focus of authors such as Kroth & Cranton (2014) on the role of relationships within transformative learning theory. Without such interaction with others it is possible that some of the participants within this study would not have overcome their feelings of inferiority, or that it may have taken significantly longer for them to do so. In Hiba's case without intervention from the student support function of the EdD programme she would have dropped out of the course.

### 4.3.5 Factors influencing Changes of inner Self- Enhanced knowledge and the ability to express ideas to others.

All the participants commented on their increased knowledge as a result of doctoral study. In this example from Grace we see how her increased knowledge impacted on her practice:

> When I got [on] the programme, it was very enriching, because it had so much relevance to my teaching. I thought, "wow, I'm learning lots of things for my teaching", because it [my teaching] was based on experience, but now I had the knowledge to talk about it. (Grace)

David noted becoming aware of his increased knowledge through conversation with a colleague:

> We were talking about something related to this university, and I threw out a factoid of
> something I'd read in an article somewhere, and he was like 'wow, I can see your studies are
> having an effect on you.' So I guess I noticed it when my discourse had changed *(David)*

An increased ability to communicate their knowledge and ideas to others in ways they could not have done prior to doctoral study was also noted by Michael and Suzanne, who commented on a change in their discourse. Suzanne noted that she supports her communication at work with an increased emphasis on rigour and frameworks, whilst Michael's comment below demonstrates this change in discourse neatly:

> I often used to think 'I know more than that guy, but I can't verbalise what I know'…of
> course, I've now got the vocabulary, and the knowledge base. (Michael)

Increases in knowledge (Guo et al., 2018, Stehlik, 2011, Christie et al., 2015), and an improved ability to express ideas to others (Stevens-Long et al., 2012, Miles et al., 2019) are common transformations experienced by doctoral students. Burgess and Wellington (2010) specifically explored the impact of doctoral study on discourse among professional doctoral students and found that all eight of their participants commented on changes in their discourse, ranging from the ability to build a more coherent evidence-based argument, to an ability to change their discourse dependent on the audience they were with at the time. Whilst the findings in this study are therefore unsurprising, David's description of becoming aware of his changed discourse, through the observation of his colleague, provides a concrete example of how students become aware of the manifestations of their transformations.

Increases in knowledge and the ability to express ideas to others represent cognitive developments, and as such it is tempting to categorise these transformations within Mezirow's (2003) cognitive conception of transformative learning. However, in reality the process of "perspective

transformation" (Mezirow, 1978a, p. 7) still lies at the heart of Mezirow's theory, and actual increases in knowledge and communication skills do not align with this process. An increase in knowledge does not necessarily occur as a result of a "disorientating dilemma" (Mezirow, 1978a, p. 12), and may not result in a change within internal "frames of reference" (Mezirow, 2003, p.58). As such, 'increased knowledge and the ability to express ideas to others' is less in line with any of the conceptions of transformative learning theory explored in this study, and more in line with Wisker et al.'s theory of "conceptual threshold crossings" (2009, p. 19) in their study regarding the cognitive developments experienced by doctoral students.

## 4.3.6 Factors influencing changes of inner Self- unexpected events and outcomes

In Elizabeth's example of becoming more self-aware, her experience is triggered by an unexpected event, and the outcome of that event. She has a surprising and uncomfortable experience within the learning team task that is reflective of Mezirow's (1978a) "distorting dilemma" (p.12) and subsequent 10 stage process of perspective transformation. She finds herself in an unexpected situation that leads her to challenge her belief that she is a good team player. She completes a self-examination and finds that her espoused view of herself and the reality she is experiencing are at odds. She critiques her belief about what a good team player should be, and with suggestions from others tries out alternative approaches to working within a team, incorporating these new actions into her new conception of what it is to be a good team player and how she can fulfil this new conception. Whilst Mezirow's (2003) conception of transformative learning and how it occurs is recognisable within this experience of becoming more self-aware, it also misses an important aspect of the experience; the emotional, affective and painful elements associated with such an experience that Elizabeth conveys when she says "it was almost too hard".

Boyd & Myers' process of "discernment" (1988, p.274) captures this clearly. Elizabeth is *receptive* to the idea and process of self-examination. She *recognises* that her discomfort with the situation is something internal to herself rather than the external stimulus. She then starts the *grieving* process

whereby she engages with her "intrapsychic structures" (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p.275) or what

Mezirow (2003) refers to as "frames of reference" (p.58), to understand why she is experiencing

discomfort. Boyd & Myers (1988) see this self-examination and reframing process as an "adjustment

to loss" (p. 276) and grieving "as the primary condition for the possibility of personal growth"

(p.276). When used in conjunction, Mezirow's (2003) and Boyd & Myers' (1988) theories provide a

more fulsome exploration of the process of transformative learning that Elizabeth has experienced;

the cognitive, conscious elements are blended with the more emotional, unconscious aspects that

constitute human experience.

### 4.3.7 Factors influencing changes of inner Self- Reflexive practice

Michael's experience of becoming more self-aware is different to Elizabeth's. Through his regular

reflexive practice as part of the doctoral programme, Michael begins a process of self-examination

that leads him to realise that he is not recognising the needs of others as much as he could, that he

is seeing others only in relation to himself, not as individuals in their own right with their own needs.

Instead of the suddenly experienced "disorientating dilemma"(Mezirow, 1978a, p.12 ) as a trigger

for transformative learning, his transformation is more incremental in nature and takes place over

time. Mezirow acknowledges in his later writings that whilst many transformative learning

experiences are what he refers to as "epochal" (Dirkx et al., 2006, p.125), i.e. experienced suddenly

in the moment, some take place slowly, with the learner gradually becoming aware of an unhelpful

frame of reference that is no longer working for them. When Michael describes his experience of

becoming more self-aware, his wording and tone of voice appear self-deprecating. His repeated use

of the word 'stupid', in relation to himself, seems to imply that he is not proud of his previous

attitude toward others. However, he does not acknowledge explicitly that the experience of

becoming more self-aware was an emotional one, so it is not easy to directly relate his experience of

transformation to Boyd & Myers' (1988) process of "discernment" (p.274). His reaction to the

realisation that he has been somewhat 'selfish' in his own words, is to adjust his view of others and

himself. He develops a more considerate frame of reference, and then alters his behaviours, becoming more competent in his ability to see and recognise others' needs until these are integrated into his new perspective. This process is reflective of the stages within Mezirow's "perspective transformation" (1978a, p.7).

From this description it would be reasonable to conclude that Michael's experience of becoming more self-aware was a predominantly cognitive, rational transformation. However, the fact that the self- examination and subsequent change in view and behaviour has seemingly taken place internally; without an external stimulus or interaction to trigger the process, does leave the possibility that this experience was psychoanalytical in nature, resulting from integration of "intrapsychic structures" (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p.275). For example, by engaging in reflexive practice Michael could have brought forth a subconscious thought into a conscious one. He may have realised that his attitude towards others was in need of revision from experiences within his subconscious, that were brought to the conscious part of his mind through that process of self-examination. Additionally, Michael's repeated use of the word 'stupid' to describe himself does imply he feels somewhat embarrassed about his previous view of others, and that therefore it is likely that this transformation did indeed have emotional implications associated with Boyd & Myers' (1988) process of "discernment" (p.274).

## 4.4 Theme Two- Enhanced educational and mentoring practice

Dependent on the participants' position in their institution, changes to teaching practice, or their understanding of education, manifested in different ways. Increased opportunities to share newly acquired knowledge, or apply new ways of thinking with colleagues are widely reported as a positive impact of doctoral study (Scott, 2004, Fox & Slade, 2014). This can be through provision of CPD activity for other educators (Kumar, 2014), involvement in new curriculum design (Atabay et al., 2017), opportunities to join new committees (Burgess & Wellington, 2010) or promotion to more influential educational roles (Wellington & Sikes, 2006). In this study, participants reported

enhanced educational and mentoring practices. Manifestations of these enhanced educational and mentoring practice are now presented.

### 4.4.1 Manifestations of enhanced educational practice

Through the taught stage of the EdD programme, Grace found that the educational concepts and practices she encountered as a result of her studies widened and enhanced her educational practice:

> I was learning a lot of new ways of doing things with my teaching, my students, my marking, so it enriched a lot (*Grace*)

In turn, Michael found that his choice of research topic for doctoral study led to the development of an entirely new area of subject expertise:

> I gained a lot of knowledge in cognitive psychology and I can teach courses in that now. I feel students are coming to me with genuine educational needs and I'm satisfying them in ways I couldn't three or four years ago (*Michael*)

Whilst Elizabeth, as a Head of School, has been able to apply the learning from the EdD across her department, influencing curriculum content and educational practices:

> I invested a lot of my learning from the modules into my job. I can see papers [content] I've written in the programmes, in supervision, all over…I'm now supervising a student who is doing a research doctoral project, and I would never have been able to do that [before] (*Elizabeth*)

Teachers undertaking a doctorate in Kowalczuk-Walędziak et al.'s (2017) study, also observed an increase in unique knowledge as a result of their studies, and being able to provide improved teaching in the classroom. Similarly, a student in Hramiak's (2017) study commented that her enhanced knowledge had improved her Masters students' projects due to her wider knowledge of

methodologies. Enhanced educational practice is a widely experienced impact of doctoral study (see for example Davis, 2015; Atabay et al., 2017; Qutoshi, 2016).

### 4.4.2 Manifestations of Enhanced mentoring practice.

Suzanne, David and Caitlyn noted their enhanced ability to support staff through formal and informal mentoring. David included in the additional notes of his visual representation that he had become "somewhat of a guide and mentor to more junior staff who are going through their own education (MA, DELTA)", whilst Suzanne commented on her enhanced ability to communicate with supervisees:

> I can talk about my teaching practice. Teachers that I supervise, I can talk to them about it in ways that I could not before. (Suzanne)

Caitlyn has become an advocate for doctoral or postgraduate study, and many staff now approach her for advice and guidance:

> I've put myself in a position of supporting people who are doing a similar thing, or even a Masters. If anyone comes to me and say's "I'm thinking of doing a Masters, what do you think?" I say, "fantastic, do it". Someone came to me this morning and said they were thinking of doing a Masters, and asked what did I think of my doctorate, and had it been awful, and I said, "No, it's been great, it's been transformative, it's been such a positive experience." She said, "really?, I didn't think you were going to say that". I said, "why wouldn't I say that? Everyone should do one if they can find the time". She said, "Do you think I could do one?" and I said, "anyone can do a doctorate, you just have to start and move through the steps. Just be committed to not stopping and having that stamina to keep going". (Caitlyn)

Improved mentorship skills did not seem to feature explicitly within the results of the literature review, although this is perhaps implied when students report improved educational practice

(Kowalczuk et al., 2017), or progressing to more influential institutional roles (Kumar, 2014). Caitlyn's self-developed position as an educational advocate for other staff is interesting, as it demonstrates a desire to share the transformational experience of doctoral study with others and indicates her own positive experience. David, Suzanne and Caitlyn's manifestations of enhanced mentoring practice show the 'ripple effect' of doctoral study, whereby those who undertake it not only experience change themselves; but also influence others around them to change.

### 4.4.3 Factors influencing enhanced education and mentoring practice- becoming a student

Reflecting on her own educational experience, Grace observes how her own student journey has helped her to see things from the student perspective and become more understanding in her own educational practice:

> I think when I was doing my Masters I thought as a student, and I struggled because I had terrible grief…and so I became a more compassionate teacher. Then when I took up the doctorate, I thought about different ways and different approaches. It made me more aware, and I think, patient…sometimes less judgemental. When I listen to my colleagues and they talk about their students and get very angry sometimes, you have to see it from their perspective. Sometimes they don't get things right now, because they need that time. So that has helped me become a positive educator. (Grace)

Grace is not alone in becoming more patient with students she teaches as a result of her own studies. One third of the 18 doctoral students in Hramiak's (2017) study on the impact of doctoral study on students' personal and professional lives reported increased empathy with their students and a better understanding of their needs. This was also reflected in Burgess and Wellington's (2010) impact study, where one of their participants spoke of their changed, more patient attitude to learners. Becoming a student constitutes a primarily contextual conception of transformative learning (Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021), in that without actually returning to a formal study context, it is unlikely the participant will experience what it is like to be a student again. It could also

be argued that becoming a student is an example of a cognitive transformation, as the individuals' "frame of reference" (Mezirow, 2003, p.58) with regard to students may be challenged by the process of becoming a student themselves. The perspective that participants on an EdD programme may hold as educators regarding students' behaviour and understandings may be disrupted when the educator additionally takes on the role of student, potentially making them more patient and empathetic as illustrated by Grace's comment.

### 4.4.4 Factors influencing enhanced education and mentoring practice- enhanced knowledge and the ability to express ideas to other

In addition to the factor 'becoming a student', the previously identified factor 'enhanced knowledge and the ability to express ideas to others' in section 4.3.5 was also found to be influential in the personal transformation theme of enhanced education and mentoring practice. This cognitive development provides the individual with the ability to communicate new knowledge using appropriate educational terms, frameworks and theory, which can be considered a pre-requisite to sharing that new knowledge with others.

## 4.5 Theme three- Thinking and perceiving differently

Changes in thinking and perceiving are perhaps the most widely reported impact of doctoral study on students within the literature (for examples see Mowbray & Halse, 2010; Leonard et al., 2005; Kowalczuk et al., 2017). This is likely because both are necessary cognitive developments for students in order to complete a doctorate (Kiley & Wisker, 2009). Some experiences of *thinking and perceiving differently* can also be categorised within Mezirow's (2003) cognitive conception of transformative learning theory, as the theme refers to a *change* in thinking and perception rather than an increase in knowledge or skills, which may refer to a change in "frames of reference" (p.58). Other factors influencing the personal transformation of *thinking and perceiving differently* can be categorised as psychoanalytical, contextual or as a result of relationships with others. The conceptions of transformative learning theory that are relevant to the factors identified as

influencing *thinking and perceiving differently* will be discussed within each section as appropriate. In the next two examples, Michael and Suzanne describe their own experiences of the manifestation of thinking and perceiving differently.

### 4.5.1 Manifestations of thinking and perceiving differently - Type Two Thinking

For Michael, his changed thinking pattern has manifested in an increased amount of what he refers to as 'Type Two thinking' (Kahneman, 2011). This type of thinking is part of dual-system theory whereby Type One thinking is fast and intuitive and Type Two refers to slower, more deliberative thought requiring increased cognitive effort (Kannengiesser & Gero, 2019).

> I don't think I was thinking very well until maybe three years ago. I was reacting to life. Things would happen, and I would find a solution, and I'd work on it. I wouldn't really think things through very much. I wouldn't really go through the process of pausing time. Now I'm doing that a lot…you know the famous Kahneman's idea of System One and System Two, System One is automatic thinking, System Two is slowed down, I could never do any of that System Two stuff very well. Now I still can't do it very well…but I'm willing to engage with System Two. (*Michael)*

Ennis (2011) identifies analytical, considered and systematic reasoning as elements of critical thinking, which appears to mirror that of the Type Two thinking portrayed here. Therefore, in this quote Michael is describing his journey of becoming a critical thinker. As with the factor 'enhanced knowledge and the ability to express ideas to others' in section 4.3.5, this could be described as a cognitive development, serving as a pre-cursor to transformative learning. Alternatively, it could also be classified within Mezirow's (2003) cognitive conception of transformative learning as Michael observes he is engaging more with Type Two thinking, which implies a change in his attitude toward thinking processes and an altered "frame of reference"(p.58) whereby he considers such thought processes desirable.

### 4.5.2  Manifestations of thinking and perceiving differently- seeing multiple perspectives

For Suzanne her change in thinking involves seeing things from different ontological, epistemological and/ or contextualised viewpoints, which she illustrated in her visual representation:

> Well, what I was trying to convey and what I have experienced as the most profound transformation of doctoral becoming, is the ability to take different perspectives, and the ability to view things critically in different ways. To step aside, if you will, and step away from things, or above them, and turn them, and evaluate them. (Suzanne)

Mowbray & Halse (2010) consider doctoral students' ability to understand and recognise multiple perspectives as an important element of successful doctoral study. Similarly to Michael's manifestation of *thinking and perceiving differently*, I think this experience could be categorised as either a cognitive development, or Mezirow's (2003) cognitive conception of transformative learning. From Suzanne's quote it is clear that she sees it as a transformation, as it constitutes a change in her thinking, implying a changed "frame of reference" (Mezirow, 2003, p.58). In reality, Suzanne herself is the most appropriate person to judge whether her experience of seeing multiple perspectives is an enhancement to her cognitive skills or a transformation, therefore it seems appropriated to classify this manifestation of *thinking and perceiving differently* as a  cognitive transformation.

### 4.5.3 Factors influencing thinking and perceiving differently- Critical thinking and reflection skills

The development of critical thinking and reflection skills are key to successful doctoral study (for examples see Brookfield, 2015; Stevens-Long et al., 2012; Brodin, 2016). Whilst most participants did not specifically refer to their own development of critical thinking and reflection skills, it is often implicit in other comments they have made, or examples of their own changed behaviour they have given. For example, Hiba, when talking about the change in herself to a more assertive person who speaks out, mentioned the importance of assertiveness in enabling students to engage in critical

thinking, and completed her research study on the development of critical thinking skills. Neither of these things would have happened if Hiba had not learned the skills of critical thinking herself.

Similarly, Grace when referencing her enhanced knowledge discusses how she used to practice teaching on gut instinct, but now has an urge to 'back things up', demonstrating her engagement with evidence and ability to critique her own practice in light of this. Michael also demonstrates his own critical thinking skills in his choice of research study, seeking to develop the critical thinking skills of his own students, and comments on his experience of critical reflection:

> all this reflection has become a part of my life now, in a way which has made my thinking so much more creative and meaningful to me. (Michael)

Suzanne in her description of her visual representation explicitly explained how she has developed the ability to reflect critically.

> So, there's flat little me at the beginning, and then I become many 'Me's'….'reflective me' was really the first new me that I constructed or encountered…I really did experience a 'me' who was here, reflecting on me. (Suzanne)

These examples demonstrate the central role of critical thinking and reflection skills in doctoral study. Wisker et al. (2009) in their research regarding threshold concepts in research education identified that "conceptual threshold crossing" (p.19) or "learning leaps" (p.19) are made by doctoral students when they grasp concepts previously unclear to them that are transformative in nature, in so far as they lead "to significant, and probably irreversible, shifts in perception" (p.5). Kiley and Wisker (2009) identified six threshold concepts in research education, "argument, theorising, framework, knowledge creation, analysis and interpretation [and] research paradigm" (p.439). The ability to think critically and critically reflect underpins the ability to master all of these concepts, and as such could be considered a threshold concept in itself.

### 4.5.4 Factors influencing thinking and perceiving differently- Culture and different ways of knowing

Elizabeth, Suzanne and Grace highlighted the importance of learning about different conceptions of knowledge as key to the development of their own thinking. Becoming aware of the co-existence of multiple different ontologies and epistemologies between disciplinary areas and social, geographical and cultural contexts, requires doctoral students to become aware of the existence of multiple truths, and the truth as a contextual concept. Elizabeth talks about the importance of inter-cultural awareness:

> It's talking to each other, and actually communicating. I understand that if you are Pakistani, or Muslim, I understand why you think the way you do. How do you construct your knowledge? What is your background that makes you say that about how to solve a problem? The assumption is that everybody thinks and does things the same way, and we know that's not true. (Elizabeth)

Grace reflects on the importance of the international cohort of students in developing these different ways of knowing:

> It was interesting because we had so many people from different countries and different cultures, and different teaching experience. We were discussing things together, and you realise that their way of doing things is slightly different from our way. Yet there's also the basis of how we help the students in the same way, despite the different cultures and countries. (Grace)

The impact of encountering diverse others; in terms of culture, geographical location and belief systems, has been identified as a benefit of online doctoral study (Lee, 2020), and is seen as one of the factors that can trigger transformative learning experiences (see for example Swartz and Triscari, 2011; Wang, 2018; Gjotterund & Ahmad, 2018; Xu & Grant, 2017). By collaborating with diverse others we are more likely to encounter alternative views, practices and experiences to our own,

which could result in our engagement with critical reflection as a result of experiencing a "distorting dilemma" (Mezirow, 1978, p.12). Preston et al's. (2014) autoethnographic account of their experience of transformative learning through peer mentorship details all three authors' transformative experience through engagement with each others' culture and religious identity. As Joseph, one of the authors, states:

> With a critical and reflective attitude, long-held personal beliefs can change. For example, some of the paralyzing worldviews I held concerning Western individualism led me to form inaccurate conclusions about a culture that initially I did not understand. In spending time with my friends and being immersed in their culture was a truly transformational experience. I learned to think outside the box (p.62.)

Joseph's transformation outlined above, and the experiences of Grace, Elizabeth and Suzanne in this study can be described as both a cognitive transformation; resulting from Mezirow's "perspective transformation" (1978a, p.7) and transformation as a result of relationships with others (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). The quotes from Grace and Elizabeth both demonstrate the impact that the relationships they had with diverse others on the international Liverpool online EdD programme had on their thinking and practice. Preston et al. (2014) go on to assert that friendship is an important factor in local and international students' experience of peer mentorship, as when you have got to know someone that has different beliefs, values and experiences you are more likely to try to understand them.

### 4.5.5 Factors influencing thinking and perceiving differently- Learning team relationships

Caitlyn and Elizabeth both identified the role of the 'learning team' as important in the development of thinking skills and perspective taking. Learning teams were sometimes part of the weekly tasks set for students to complete during the taught stage of the programme. Students would be allocated to small groups and then asked to complete a piece of work together by the end of that week. Tasks might consist of sharing examples of practices from each members' organisation and compiling a

summary of similar and contrasting practices, or developing a wiki together on a particular topic. At the end of the module 10% of the individual's overall grade would be based on learning team participation. Learning teams could be a frustrating and difficult experience due to the varying engagement of different students, often leading to only a couple of people per team completing the work, or minimal, cursory discussion. Due to this experience, Caitlyn and Elizabeth took the decision to form an ongoing learning team with one other student during the last three modules, as they were dissatisfied with the depth of learning and development offered by random allocation to learning teams. Caitlyn describes the value of having peers she respected to provide her with good feedback and to challenge her thinking:

> The feedback helped, because we knew each other very well, and were able to say, in a kind way, 'No, this won't work, this isn't going to work', and being able to take that it any way it came. It was never critical, but I wanted to take it fully on board because I respected the people that were giving it to me. Then that became the basis of my study, and how was I to know that? Through module eight and nine it was the same thing, building and building, and growing. (Caitlyn)

Whereas Elizabeth identifies the importance of the peer relationship to her doctoral experience:

> The learning team became a very powerful tool…Other people didn't have that experience. We made it happen for us. If we were put on random teams we wouldn't have got to that place of trust or collaboration…I was thinking of dropping out. You know there was an initial struggle, but I think in the end it was a positive experience….Do you see what I've got here? 'No Turning'. No turning back...when I look back…that connection [the learning team] was transformational. (Elizabeth)

These two quotes reflect the conception of transformative learning as a result of relationships with others (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). Caitlyn highlights the impact of the learning team relationship on the development of her thinking skills, and Elizabeth reflects on the importance of the relationship in

terms of pastoral support. Scott and Miller (2017) and Preston et al.(2014) in their studies regarding

peer mentorship in doctoral education also acknowledge the role of emotionally supportive peer

relationships in the process of transformational learning during the doctoral journey.

### 4.5.6 Factors influencing thinking and perceiving differently- Constant challenge and Persistence

Whilst constant challenge and persistence may not immediately sound connected with *thinking and

perceiving differently*, when students have their thinking challenged, it can result in students'

engagement in critical reflection. When a student is exposed to such challenge, there is often

discomfort (Brookfield, 1994). Students may feel out of their depth; they may not want to have their

thoughts challenged, or they may not know how to think differently. In order to learn from such

challenge the student must be willing to persist in questioning their line of thought. Cranton &

Taylor (2012) refer to this persistence to engage with challenges to attitude and deeply held beliefs

as student "willingness" to engage with transformative learning (p. 40). They assert that

transformative learning is a voluntary undertaking, and as such students do not engage with such

processes if they are not ready to do so. Therefore challenge and persistence can be seen as

connected elements; doctoral students must be persistent in their willingness to engage with

challenges to their thinking in order to learn to think and perceive differently.

Caitlyn described the process of constantly being challenged and having to challenge others as part

of the requirement within the taught stage of the EdD programme saying "Everything you do, you're

thinking about it" (*Caitlyn).* In the example below Suzanne shares her own experience of challenge

and persistence during an assignment set within the taught stage, and how this experience

influenced not just her thinking, but also her confidence and teaching practice:

> We had the final paper to write... I was like, 'what? What is that? I have no idea.'…I went
>
> home that night, and in my mind I was saying, 'what is it, what is it?' Then I woke up in the
>
> morning, and I thought, 'Okay, I think I know what it is…I'm just going to go for it'…Nobody

gave it to me. I was left to struggle and find my own way. I was actually proud of that document…I've been thinking of that lately quite a bit…I'd given them [students] an assignment which was nothing like they'd ever done. One student said, 'Could you give us an example?'. I said, 'No, you have to find your own way', then I told them the story. (Suzanne)

Resilience and persistence are frequently cited as characteristics required by students undertaking a doctorate (for examples see Salmon, 1992; Lee et al., 2013; Wellington et al., 2005, Greene, 2015), also expressed as determination (Gibson et al., 2017), perseverance (Ryan, 2013) and 'sheer bloody mindedness' (Groves, 2016 p.165). However, whilst persistence is required to complete the doctoral journey in general, within learning to *think and perceive differently* I would argue that persistence to have your *thinking* challenged over and over again and resilience to cope with that, is a part of that overall resilience.

## 4.6 Negative consequences of personal transformations

So far positive themes of personal transformation and the factors influencing such transformation have been discussed. Whilst the experiences shared by Elizabeth and Michael in 'increased self-awareness' were not particularly comfortable for them at the time, both seemed to feel that they had grown personally as a result. However, whilst transformative learning is portrayed generally as a positive thing, there is also a perception amongst doctoral students that it can lead to unexpected negative consequences for individuals who have experienced it. The participants in this study discussed several manifestations of negative consequences that believed they had experienced as a result of their own personal transformations', which are now discussed further.

### *4.6.1 Manifestation of negative consequences of personal transformation-Disillusionment with work.*

Suzanne describes the way that her own transformation has affected her communication with colleagues, explaining that she doesn't know what to talk about with some of them anymore beyond

social niceties, as they are just not able to engage with thinking on a critical level or with multiple perspectives. She goes on to elaborate further:

> To be perfectly honest, this is the first time I've articulated it to anyone, but I'm thinking so clearly now in my work context, in the place that I'm working, that I'm actually looking for another job. *(Suzanne)*

David similarly conveys the impact of his changed perception:

> it's similar to the idea of a threshold concept, where ignorance is bliss, and then suddenly those rose-tinted glasses are lifted and you acquire some knowledge you can't un-acquire. The core part of the EdD…is the way you're constantly asked to reflect on your context at every level, whether it's the relationship with your colleagues, your department, the culture and politics of your institution, so sometimes the rose-coloured views you had of your institution begin to fade as you reflect on the policies in an institutional context…that idea that the EdD fundamentally changes your view, for me, is quite important… I didn't expect that the impact would be a removal of rose-tinted glasses. If anything, I thought I'd have a deeper appreciation. (David)

This experience of disillusionment with the employing institution is not an unusual experience for doctoral students as their critical thinking and evaluation skills improve, especially if they are not in a position to affect change or realise that their observations will not be welcomed by those in authority. Scott et al. (2004) discuss the problemisation of practice by professional doctorate students due to critical reflection in their workplaces, and how this disruption to governing power dynamics is not always welcomed by those in positions of power. Similarly, Lundgren-Resenterra & Kahn (2019) observed that EdD programmes develop critical leaders, but the extent to which they are able to implement organisational change is dependent on the seniority of the role they occupy within the organisation, power dynamics, and their ability to engage colleagues in collective reflexive processes in order to establish the need for such change. Given these observations, it is perhaps

unsurprising that having developed the skills to critically reflect and solve complex problems, doctoral students in roles with little agency seek to move in to positions where these skills can be utilised more readily.

### 4.6.2 Manifestation of negative consequences of personal transformation- Disconnection with others.

Both Caitlyn and Suzanne experienced unexpected loss of relationships due to undertaking doctoral study. Suzanne described how friends she had within a music sub-culture she was involved in criticised her for never being available to go to events with them and disappeared from her life. Caitlyn found that her decision to undertake the doctorate in the first place was not met with encouragement from either her friends or work colleagues. She describes losing a friend over the decision as well as the friction caused between herself and her work colleagues:

> One person, a friend of mine, well, we're no longer friends, said very loudly to my husband so I could hear, "I would never do a doctorate for the glory of it". I thought, "wow, it's certainly not for the glory for four and a half years, and no one ever calls you 'doctor' anyway". People at work were saying, "what are you doing that for?"…I think on some level, me doing the doctorate was kind of rocking the status quo. Almost like, 'if she does one, then what's going to happen? We'll all going to have to do one'. (Caitlyn)

Caitlyn also found herself experiencing a disconnection from her father and to some extent her husband later on during her studies due to a lack of understanding regarding what a professional doctorate is and what it entails.

> My father, for example, he doesn't really get it. He's an educated man, had a great job, but he doesn't really understand what a doctorate is. So he'll say things like, "I hope you're studying hard now". There's no point trying to explain it. For a long time, "how's that PhD?", "it's not a PhD dad, it's a doctorate", "yeah, you know what I mean". In the beginning, that was annoying, and I suppose growing past him, and leaving him behind, and not saying

anything to him about it. Even to an extent, my husband, I don't talk about my research, or my doctorate, to anyone unless they specifically ask me. I just think, 'who wants to know really?' (Caitlyn)

Disconnection with others, even those close to you, has been recognised by other doctoral students. In Brookfield's (1994) study of graduate and PhD students' experience of developing critical reflection skills he identified the theme of "cultural suicide" (p.55) In "cultural suicide" (p.55) students described their experiences of becoming ostracised from friends, family and work colleagues as they started to see things differently and challenge their own perceptions of the world around them. By engaging in critical reflection and becoming aware of their own misconceptions, biases and baseless beliefs, their discourse and opinions change, which can leave those around them feeling resentful that they have changed, or that they think themselves 'above' others now that they have engaged in doctoral study. If we consider Caitlyn's experience in this research study of her 'friends' comment about undertaking doctoral study "for the glory of it" we see a view of doctoral study from the friend as a way to make oneself 'superior' to others, and a resentment that Caitlyn would want to undertake study and make others feel inferior. Similarly, Suzanne talked about losing friends due to her widening interests and limited free time to spend with others once she began her studies, "what happened to you?...we never see you anymore" (Suzanne). Her friends were resentful that she was not the same person as she had been, or making herself as available to them as she had done in the past. These experiences mirror the views of friends and family outlined by students in Brookfield's (1994) study.

### 4.6.3 Manifestation of negative consequences of personal transformation-Perceived 'nuisance' at work.

Suzanne and Elizabeth both identified that their changed thinking, increased confidence, and new knowledge had caused some awkward encounters with their colleagues. Suzanne's new approach to thinking and communicating, along with her refusal to be rushed into action, caused considerable

anguish amongst her colleagues when one wanted to redesign a website quickly and sent a proposed new structure and wording through. Suzanne commented that previously she would have felt pressured to just agree, but that with her newly developed ways of thinking considered the proposal in terms of the potential consequences, discussed the idea with several other colleagues and actually replied saying that she didn't think this was a good idea. She was surprised by the response from colleagues:

> Some of my colleagues were really ticked off with me. Like, "why don't you think of your colleagues and shut up?"…One colleague, she wrote to me and cc'ed in all of the co-ordinators and the director. When I didn't respond she wrote another email to all of us suggesting we hire a mediator. (Suzanne)

Whereas the findings from Elizabeth's research study are proving an inconvenient contradiction of the university's commitment to listening to the student voice:

> What my research is showing, is that in principle they [immigrants] want to be integrated, and recognised, and keep their culture, but also be assimilated into the environment…These immigrants are welcome to come to the university, but we don't do anything to recognise who they are culturally and include them in our pedagogy. So I've been a bit of a squeaky wheel at work already. And nobody takes any notice of me at all. (Elizabeth)

In these examples we are seeing the consequences of action taken as a result of students 'disillusionment at work' due to *thinking and perceiving differently.* In *'*disillusionment at work' Suzanne and David's frustrations with their own organisation were discussed as a result of doctoral students' ability to problematise organisational practices, but not necessarily affect change due to position, power dynamics and/or an ability to facilitate collective reflexivity among organisational influencers (Scott et al., 2004; Lundgren-Resenterra & Kahn, 2019). In 'perceived nuisance at work' we are seeing the response of organisational culture and colleagues to the attempts of doctoral students to change the status quo. Burgess et al. (2013), in their study of the impact of students'

doctoral learning on their employing organisations, found that many students reported having to overcome initial suspicion or reluctance amongst colleagues to listen to their ideas and suggestions, with several students reporting the need to be careful of the language they used (playing down academic terminology), and one student observing the need to balance criticality with relationship building in order to avoid challenging colleagues too much. Fox & Slade (2014) wryly observe in their study of what organisations can expect in terms of impact from employees who undertake doctoral study "it would…be a confident provider that marketed their professional doctorate accordingly – 'Send your employees to us to enhance their ability to disrupt, question and challenge, while also encouraging others to do the same!'" (p.557).

### 4.6.4 Factors influencing negative consequences of personal transformations

Several factors identified as influencing participants' positive experiences of personal transformation within this study can also be identified as influencing the manifestations of negative consequences of personal transformation. I now highlight examples where this can be observed.

#### 4.6.4a Disillusionment at work and critical thinking skills.

Within the manifestation 'disillusionment with work' David highlights how the constant reflection required during the EdD programme removed his "rose coloured views" of the institution he worked in and some of the relationships with his colleagues. Suzanne also commented on how clearly she was now thinking in her work context. These comments imply a change in thinking and perception, and are therefore likely to at least partially be informed by their newly acquired 'critical thinking and reflection skills', one of the factors associated with the transformation of thinking and perceiving differently.

### 4.6.4b Perceived nuisance at work and associated factors

In Suzanne's description of the incident she experienced at work, she described how she had not responded to a work colleague's request in the manner she normally would have. She explained how she had consulted others, and considered the wider implications of taking such action before responding. This more thoughtful approach, and the discussion with colleagues implied an engagement on her part with 'seeing multiple perspectives', a manifestation of the positive personal transformation theme *thinking and perceiving differently*. Her consideration of the implications, and subsequent communication back to her colleagues offering an opinion that it was not necessarily the best time to make the change, seems to demonstrate her enhanced knowledge (of how change necessitates further change) and her ability to express ideas to others. 'Enhanced knowledge and ability to express ideas to others' was identified as a factor influencing the theme of *changes to inner Self*, and the manifestation of 'increased confidence' amongst doctoral students. Whilst Suzanne did not specifically attribute her alternative handling of the incident discussed at the time to an increase in confidence, she had previously commented that she " won't let people pressure me in to reacting, in to writing, or saying, or doing something before I am ready to" (Suzanne). Therefore, it is likely that her increased confidence did impact on how she handled the situation.

In Elizabeth's example of attempting to highlight and address an important issue in culture at her employing institution, she highlights findings from her own research on the experience of immigrants in education. Her ability to 'see multiple perspectives' and understanding of 'culture and different ways of knowing' has enabled her to identify a lack of recognition for immigrants' educational and cultural experiences. The factor 'culture and different ways of knowing' is part of the positive transformation theme of 'thinking and perceiving differently', and 'seeing multiple perspectives' is a manifestation of such thinking. However, whilst these are positive transformations, the result of those, in this case Elizabeth's report, is a challenge to the status quo at the institution, and as such unwelcomed by her colleagues who "take no notice" of her.

It is highly likely that there are other overlapping relationships between the themes, manifestations and factors identified within this analysis, however this cannot be evidenced from the current data and would need further investigation to be ascertained.

## 4.7 Summary

In this chapter themes identified from the "thematic narrative analysis" (Reissman, 2008, p. 53) of the seven participants' experiences of personal transformation during doctoral study have been shared. The positive themes identified, *changes of inner Self*, *enhanced educational and mentoring practice,* and *thinking and perceiving differently* are mostly reflective of the themes identified within the literature review of *enhanced teaching, enhanced cognitive skills,* and *changes to self.* The theme *negative consequences of personal transformation* also reflects some of those experienced by students reported within the current literature. Findings identified in this study that do not feature in previously identified literature generally form detailed examples of *how* personal transformations experienced by doctoral students manifest, for example David's experience of being told he was not an expert led him to realise that he had started to think of himself as an expert, or Elizabeth's challenge to the view she held of herself as a good team player instigating a revised view of herself and what it means to be a good team player.

However, some notable new findings have also been identified. The phenomena of 'speaking less' and 'improved posture' due to doctoral study provide new manifestations of 'increased confidence' among students. The importance of 'validation from others' for students undertaking a professional doctorate to overcome feelings of inferiority has also been highlighted. Suzanne's experience of becoming more serious as a result of doctoral study is slightly different to the more often reported feelings of increased happiness or calm. 'Enhanced mentoring practice', or taking on informal mentoring roles to support other staff members, adds a new dimension to previously reported enhancements in teaching practice or in providing new knowledge to staff via CPD activities. Being a 'perceived nuisance at work' is also a slightly more nuanced finding than the suspicion or outward

hostility from colleagues reported by students undertaking doctoral study in Kowalczuk et al.'s

(2017) and Burgess et al.'s (2013) studies. Elizabeth and Suzanne are describing how their more

critical and research-informed working practices are seen as threatening or irritating to those around

them. These new findings add to the understanding of doctoral students' experiences of personal

transformation during their studies.

# Chapter 5- Discussion

Within this chapter, I have reflected on the methodology used within this study and how this sits within a social constructivist ontology. I then considered particular aspects from the findings regarding doctoral students' experiences of personal transformation and explored these in further detail. The first aspect is the conceptual framework of transformative learning I used to interpret doctoral students' experience of personal transformation, and how useful that framework was as a lens through which to understand processes involved in the personal transformation of doctoral students. The second aspect relates to female participants' experience of beginning the EdD programme, and their need for 'validation from others' to increase their confidence. This is explored using the concept of "imposter phenomenon" (Clance and Imes, 1978, p.241). Lastly, the emotional burden of doctoral study is explored using findings gathered from participants and relevant literature.

## 5.1 Review of Methodology

During the process of data analysis within this project I encountered a methodological cross roads. Having developed seven individual participant stories of personal transformation it became clear that I could not include all of the stories *and* a thematic analysis using all participants' data within the word restriction for this thesis. A decision had to be made between keeping the seven individual stories and forgoing a thematic analysis, reducing the number of individual stories and including a thematic analysis of a reduced data set, or completing a thematic analysis and retaining as much as possible of each participants' story through pen portraits and extended quotes. It was a choice between pursuing traditional narrative data analysis and representation, a combination of narrative and phenomenological approaches to data analysis, or moving towards a more phenomenological approach to understanding the collective experience of personal transformation experienced during doctoral study.

Narrative research is consistent with a social constructivist ontology and epistemology, as it acknowledges the multiple realities experienced by individuals shaped by their social, cultural context. Conversely, transcendental phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of shared experience, an essence that exists outside of subjective experiences and constitutes the experience itself (Moustakas, 1994). As such transcendental phenomenology is underpinned by a post positivist ontology that experience exists independent of subjective human experience. Although each methodological approach holds a different perspective on the nature of being and knowledge, both seek to understand lived experiences.

Patterson (2018) in her paper on the affordances provided by combining narrative and phenomenological approaches to research, asserts that while narrative research provides unique accounts of experience there are "analytical gaps in this approach if one wishes to discern commonalities across these experiences" (p,225). She goes on to highlight that this limitation is unhelpful as although each individual's story is unique, there are also elements within each story that are common to all of humanity. This view of experience as both simultaneously unique and common resonates with the psychoanalytical view of transformative learning, whereby our personal experiences are seen as enactments of common story motifs involving the twelve archetypes identified by Jung, thus making experience both individual and collective (Boyd & Myers, 1988).

The concept of experience as simultaneously both individual and collective in nature could be seen as mutually exclusive, as could the ontological and epistemological perspectives of narrative and phenomenological approaches to experience. However, from a social constructivist perspective multiple contradictory realities and 'truths' can co-exist without dispute, and each approach provides an understanding of the nature of experience that when combined together deepen the understanding of the overall phenomenon.

As such the position of the methodology used in this study sits on a continuum between narrative and phenomenological research, utilising elements of both at times to explore both the individual and collective personal transformations experienced by EdD students during their studies.

## 5.2 Review of conceptual framework of transformative learning

In chapter two I outlined a conceptual framework of transformative learning for use within this study. This consisted of Mezirow's (2003) cognitive conception of transformative learning, Boyd & Myers' (1988) psychoanalytical conception, Kroth & Cranton's (2014) relationship-based view, and Schnepfleitner & Ferreira's (2021) contextual view of transformative learning. I wanted to establish whether this conceptual framework could be used to understand doctoral students' transformative learning experiences more fully than if the experiences were analysed using one theory alone. I analysed the themes and factors influencing personal transformation that were identified within the findings from this study, and identified where each conception of transformative learning could be used to categorise the nature of the transformation. The results of this analysis are presented in a visual format in Figure 2 within the findings chapter. Each conception of transformative learning proved to be useful in identifying the nature of personal transformation, or the factors influencing such transformations. However, the use of this conceptual framework also revealed limitations.

Firstly, through use it became clear that the cognitive (Mezirow, 2003), and psychoanalytical (Boyd & Myers, 1988) conceptions of transformative learning represented 'types' of personal transformation and both theories provided detailed accounts of the *process* of such transformation. Cognitive transformations represented changes in thinking, attitudes and beliefs, and as such Mezirow's (1978a) description of the ten stages of "perspective transformation" (p.7) and/or definition of "frames of reference" (Mezirow, 2003, p.58) proved invaluable in identifying these within the findings. Psychoanalytical transformations represented changes in inner Self, and were categorised by a change in self-concept among participants. These were sometimes accompanied by strong emotions such as those  experienced by Elizabeth when her concept of herself as a great team player

was challenged. The subsequent "grieving" (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p. 276) experienced by Elizabeth

illustrated the usefulness of Boyd & Myers' (1988) process of "discernment" (p.274) as an alternative

process of transformative learning than that of Mezirow's ten stage "perspective

transformation"(1978a, p.7).

Kroth & Cranton's (2014) relationship- based view of transformative learning, and Schnepfleitner &

Ferreira's (2021) contextual view, primarily applied to factors influencing transformative learning,

and as such rather than being 'types' of personal transformation in themselves, are more accurately

described as  potential facilitators or inhibitors to transformative learning. This is an important

distinction as there are many different factors that facilitate or inhibit transformative learning,

whereas there are potentially limited types of transformation an individual can experience, for

example cognitive, emotional, psychological and physical. In any further research concerning

transformative learning I believe this would be an important distinction to make, so that readers

and/ or future researchers are clear as to which aspects of transformation are under examination

within any particular study.

Secondly, some factors influencing personal transformation within this study could not be

categorised using any of the four conceptions of transformative learning. These were 'enhanced

knowledge and ability to express ideas to others', 'critical thinking and reflection skills' and 'constant

challenge and persistence'. 'Enhanced knowledge and ability to express ideas to others' and 'critical

thinking and reflection skills' are arguably pre-cursors to cognitive or psychanalytical transformation.

Critical reflection is one of the stages of Mezirow's ten stage process of "perspective

transformation"(1978a, p.7), and is implicit within Boyd & Myers' (1988) stage of "recognition"

(p.276) within the process of "discernment" (p.274)."Recognition" (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p.276)

happens when an individual becomes aware that an issue they are experiencing is internal to their

psyche. Without the skill of critical reflection, neither of these processes of transformation can take

place.

As highlighted within the findings chapter, 'enhanced knowledge and the ability to express ideas to others' and 'critical thinking and reflection skills', are more reflective of the cognitive developments experienced by doctoral students during the "conceptual threshold crossings" (Wisker et al., 2009, p.19) that form part of the doctoral students' learning journey.

The factor 'constant challenge and persistence' similarly defies categorisation, it is not necessarily a cognitive or psychoanalytical transformation, as it may not constitute a change in an individual. In addition, it is not necessarily related to relationship based or contextual transformation. Mowbray & Halse (2010) described the qualities developed by doctoral students during their studies, such as persistence, resilience and assertiveness, as 'personal resourcefulness'(p.657), which they equate to the Aristotelian intellectual virtue of '*phronesis*' or 'practical knowledge' (p.657). If 'constant challenge and persistence' is considered from this perspective, it appears to have more in common with skill and attitude development rather than any conception of transformative learning. From these observations it would appear that some factors that influence transformative learning constitute transformations in themselves, such as 'becoming a student', whereas others, such as 'constant challenge and persistence', act as a pre-cursor to the process of transformative learning.

## 5.3 Imposter Phenomenon

The female participants' experiences that are outlined within the factor 'validation from others' that influenced the manifestation of 'increased confidence'*,* seemed particularly important to unpack, as feelings of inferiority on commencement of study was an experience shared by four of the five female participants. Why did these women need validation from others? On re-visiting the findings from the initial literature review it became clear that an initial feeling of concern or self-doubt regarding the ability to undertake doctoral study was not uncommon (for examples see Gibson et al., 2017; Miles et al., 2019; Lee, 2020;Coffman et al., 2016;Groves, 2016). The female participants in this study had concerns about not being 'good enough' or 'clever enough' for doctoral study. Clance and Imes (1978) first coined the term "Imposter Phenomenon" (p.241) when Clance observed during

therapy sessions that a number of highly successful women did not attribute their successes to any internal abilities or skills within themselves. They felt as though their success was due to numerous external 'lucky breaks' and that they were in fact frauds, living in dread of being found to be incompetent and unworthy of their success.

Subsequent research into Imposter Phenomenon (IP) and gender has produced mixed outcomes. In her large-scale study of university faculty staff, Topping (1983) found that more men experienced IP than women. However Clark et al.(2014), in their study of IP among librarians, found that both men and women experience imposter phenomenon, with no statistically significant difference in prevalence between the genders. Kumar and Jagacinskil (2006) in their study of IP among college students provide some more nuanced findings, that whilst men and women did both experience IP, women were more likely to experience fears associated with IP, and that men and women experienced IP in different ways. In an attempt not to be 'exposed' as an imposter, men were more likely to avoid situations in which they would have to demonstrate competency in a task, increasing the 'fear' of being 'found out'. Women on the other hand were more likely to believe that others found the task easier, or completed it with less effort than themselves, reinforcing the idea that they were 'less intelligent' than others.

Imposter Phenomenon is not uncommon among doctoral students (Parkman, 2016). In their large scale survey of doctoral students in Finland, Nori & Peura. (2020), found that IP was most prevalent in female,  students within the group they identified as "status raisers"(p.523), a group characterised by those with lower socio-economic backgrounds and parents with the lowest levels of qualifications (approximately 50% with an undergraduate degree).  Gardner & Holley (2011), also found a relationship between students experiencing imposter phenomenon and their status as first in family doctoral students, and this is clearly reflected by Jenny Miles in her autoethnographic paper describing her journey from dropping out of college in Year 9 to becoming a doctoral candidate in her fifties (Miles et al., 2019).

As level of parental education was not included within the demographic questionnaire sent to participants in this study, it is not possible to ascertain if the participants' experience of IP related to parental level of education. However from the perspective of gender and IP, four of the five female participants specifically discussed their feelings of doubt in their ability to undertake doctoral study, whilst neither of the male participants addressed this phenomenon in their interviews or visual representations. Both Elizabeth and Caitlyn's visual representations include elements that strongly indicate their initial feelings of IP at the start of their doctoral journey. Elizabeth depicts herself as Head of School (HoS) among a crowd of faceless doctors, with a frown on her face and a black cloud over her head. As she moves toward the start of her EdD studies, (depicted as a sort of tunnel), she can be seen asking if she can do it and if she is good enough. Caitlyn's diagram shows herself in a tiny type face as far away as possible from the larger typed 'super smart people'. Elizabeth and Caitlyn both show how their opinion of themselves changes during the doctoral journey through their visual representations, with Elizabeth emerging from the tunnel of study larger, smiling and bathed in sunlight, and Caitlyn becoming part of the super smart people, or realising that 'super smart' is actually not the definition of successful doctoral candidates. With both participants, the initial reason for this shift away from imposter phenomenon is identified within the interviews as positive validation from tutors or experienced others, mainly in the form of good grades. Hiba and Grace also discussed their feelings of inadequacy and how feedback and grades helped them to overcome these feelings to a certain extent during their interviews.

The fact that the four women were only able to move past those feelings of inadequacy when confronted with external positive validation is a further indication of their experiences of IP; they were unable to credit *themselves* with the ability to undertake doctoral study. This strongly mirrors the experience of one of the women in Brown &Brown's (2015) study of eight women starting a doctorate in later life, where she only overcame her imposter phenomenon and realised that she was capable of doctoral study after completing a full semester of the programme, and receiving

consistently good grades. Before that point she had told no one in her life that she had started the doctorate in case she didn't succeed. Only her partner knew.

## 5.4 Revised conceptual framework

As established in section 5.2, it became clear through use that the initial conceptual framework developed to understand the nature of transformative learning in this study did not capture all of the findings resultant from the research. I therefore decided to re-develop the initial framework to more accurately reflect both the findings from this research and the insights I had gained whilst using the framework as an analytical tool.

The findings from this study which were not represented by the conceptual framework were 'enhanced knowledge and ability to express ideas to others', 'critical thinking and reflection skills' and 'constant challenge and persistence'. I suggested that 'enhanced knowledge' was a pre-cursor to transformative learning, and that critical thinking and reflection skills could also be considered pre-cursors to transformative learning, as both are part of both Mezirow's (2000) and Boyd & Myers (1988) transformative learning process. The 'constant challenge and persistence' I identified was reflected in the "personal resourcefulness" quality identified by Mowbray and Halse (2010 ,p. 657) as essential for doctoral students to develop in order to be successful. Therefore I added enhanced knowledge, critical thinking and reflection and "personal resourcefulness" (Mowbray & Halse, 2010, p. 657) as pre-cursors to transformative learning within the re-developed version of the conceptual framework.

The four different conceptions of transformative learning used within the framework were also found to have different foci. The cognitive and psychoanalytical conceptions of transformative learning represented 'types' of transformation with detailed, associated processes of how transformations occurred. The contextual and relational conceptions of transformative learning did not explain how transformative learning occurred, rather they proffered an explanation of particular factors that could influence the occurrence of transformative learning. As factors instead of
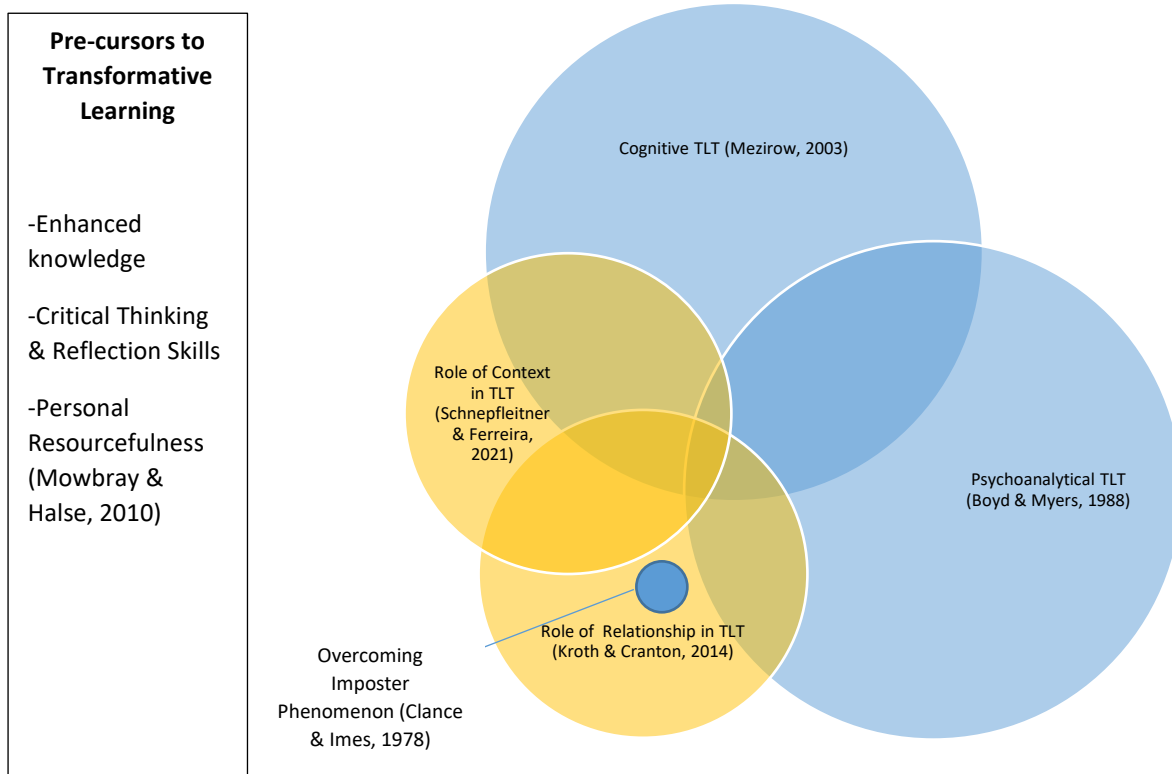
conceptions these serve as adjuncts to the cognitive and psychoanalytic conceptions of transformative learning rather than theoretical conceptions in their own right, and therefore should be represented as such. As a result of this I have redrawn the four spheres within the conceptual framework from chapter two to reflect this change from four conceptions of transformative learning theory to two conceptions of transformative learning theory and two factors influencing transformative learning.

The "imposter phenomenon" (Clance & Imes, 1978, p.241) experienced by the female participants in this study was identified through the influencing factor of 'validation from others' in the manifestation of increased confidence. This 'validation from others' is illustrative of the relational conception of transformative learning identified by Kroth and Cranton (2014). Through the validation female students received from their relationships with tutors and peers, their view of themselves transformed from that of imposter to capable doctoral candidate. Whilst I have identified 'relationships with others' as a factor influencing transformative learning, rather than a type of transformation, overcoming imposter phenomenon could be considered as one of the *processses* through which relationships with others achieve transformational learning. As such, I have added Overcoming "Imposter Phenomenon" (Clance & Imes, 1978, p.241) within the factor 'role of relationships' into the redrawn conceptual framework.

Through the adaptation and expansion of the initial conceptual framework developed for this study, I have created a framework that captures all the findings from this study, and as such adds a new contribution to transformative learning theory. The new theory draws on psychological conceptions of transformative learning theory, factors influencing transformative learning based on social constructivist learning theory, skills and personal qualities that act as pre-cursors to the transformative learning process and the concept of "Imposter Phenomenon" (Clance and Imes, 1978, p.241). The revised framework is pictured in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

*Revised conceptual framework of transformative learning theory*



**Pre-cursors to Transformative Learning**

-Enhanced knowledge

-Critical Thinking & Reflection Skills

-Personal Resourcefulness (Mowbray & Halse, 2010)

Cognitive TLT (Mezirow, 2003)

Role of Context in TLT (Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021)

Psychoanalytical TLT (Boyd & Myers, 1988)

Role of Relationship in TLT (Kroth & Cranton, 2014)

Overcoming Imposter Phenomenon (Clance & Imes, 1978)

Key: 'Types' of transformative learning (psychological perspectives)

Factors influencing transformative learning (social constructivist view of learning)

## 5.5 The emotional burden of doctoral study

Within this study the negative consequences of doctoral students' personal transformations have been explored. Mezirow (2003), Boyd & Myers (1988) and Brookfield (1994) all identified that there can be initial discomfort in having deeply held personal beliefs challenged as students engage with the critical reflection necessary for transformative learning. Transformative learning writers such as Mezirow (1991), Cranton (2016), and Taylor (2007) stress the importance of support for students engaging in such reflection as a result of this.  When these critical reflections concern students own self-concept, and cause disruption to the views students hold of themselves, this can be particularly distressing as illustrated in this study by Elizabeth and Michael's experiences of 'becoming more self-aware'.  As students experience transformed "frames of reference" (Mezirow, 2003, p.58) or "personal growth" (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p. 276) it can result in the reported 'disconnection from others' or what Brookfield refers to as "cultural suicide" (1994, p.55) experienced by Suzanne and Caitlyn whereby relationships with friends, family members and work colleagues can become strained, distant, or even lost as a result of the change experienced by the student.

The dissatisfaction described by David and Suzanne regarding the practices and values enacted in their own institutions or by their colleagues in the manifestation of 'disillusionment with work'*,* as a result of *thinking and perceiving differently,* can also result in "cultural suicide" (Brookfield, 1994, p.55) as students find themselves at odds with the policies and practices enacted by those with power within the institution. If students go on to challenge the dominant power structure, as Suzanne and Elizabeth did, they can encounter being 'perceived as a nuisance at work,*'* another manifestation of the *negative consequences of personal transformation*. In the workplace environment, students from Brookfield's (1994) study described how their critical reflection skills were not welcomed by their colleagues when they began to question the assumptions made in working policies and practices. Brookfield (1994) observed "there was the perception on the part of colleagues that these educators in critical process had somehow betrayed the group culture and

become pink tinged revolutionaries." (p.57). Students reported losing friendships and becoming openly disliked at work, as well as damaging their career prospects by asking difficult and subversive questions.

This phenomenon has also been observed in other studies, such as those conducted by Wellington & Sikes (2006), Scott et al.(2004), and Kowalczuk-Walędziak et al. (2017).  Nine of the sixteen teachers in Kowalczuk-Walędziak et al.'s (2017) study on the motivations and impact of doctoral study on teachers in Poland and Portugal reported experiencing hostility from colleagues; with one student observing that colleagues appeared to be biased against them since they undertook doctoral study. Another described being shunned, as colleagues stopped phoning her and some even stopped greeting her. Suzanne's experience within this study of her colleagues' annoyance at her questioning of their decision to rewrite a website, and subsequent suggestion to hire a mediator to resolve the issue, is demonstrative of exactly this phenomenon. She asked a question that no one wanted to be asked, and as a result was seen as obstructive. For her colleagues, it was easier to blame her for being difficult rather than considering the question that she was asking, and her rationale for doing so.

What these *negative consequences of transformation* demonstrate, is that there is a significant emotional aspect to doctoral study that is often ignored in mainstream literature (Mowbray and Halse, 2010). As Creely and Pruyn  (Miles et al., 2019) state in their peer analysis of Jennifer Miles' doctoral journey:

> Our analysis of Jennifer's experiences points to the place of the affective as critical to formation and learning as a doctoral student. This includes existential concerns about belonging and issues of wellbeing and survival that often accompany being a PhD student. We contend that doctoral studies are as much an affective journey of transformation and becoming as they are an intellectual journey of growth and discovery. (p.611)

This assertion is supported by Gibson et al. (2017), in their autoethnographic paper exploring the experiences of three women juggling their roles as senior leaders, part-time EdD students and mothers. They highlight the 'emotional work' or 'emotional labour' (Ginsberg and Davies, 2007; Hochschild, 2012) involved in such an undertaking, stating "[it] can place great strain on individuals' emotional resources and resilience" (p.176).

Hochschild (2012) refers to "emotional labor" (p.7) when discussing the management of emotion. She argues that emotion is becoming a commodity, in so far as there are societal and commercial expectations of how and when emotion should and should not be expressed; what she refers to as "feeling rules"(p.56). There is social and employer pressure during working hours to conform to these rules, requiring people to either fake emotionally suitable responses, or use their own experiences/ empathy to place themselves in a socially acceptable emotional state to respond. She differentiates between the two by naming the first example "surface acting" (p.35) and the second "deep acting" (p.35). Whilst there may be times doctoral students feel the need to shield their true emotions from supervisors, (for example when receiving feedback if it is upsetting to them), or may wish to hide an emotional state from family to protect them, this is a slightly different situation from working in a public facing job with a company *expectation* that staff must always seem happy, polite and willing to help. Doctoral students would be engaging in "surface acting" (p.35) for the sake of societal norms in a worst-case scenario; covering their true feelings from others. Whilst this "surface acting'" (p.35) may form part of the emotional burden carried by doctoral students, the findings from this study indicate that emotional experiences encountered by doctoral students were mainly associated with engagement in critical reflection and the resultant outcomes. For example, 'increased self-awareness', 'disillusionment with work', 'disconnection with others', and 'perceived nuisance at work'. They were not associated with having to mask emotions. Therefore, I think it is more accurate in this study to observe that doctoral study has a strong emotional aspect, and sometimes impact, that is not immediately obvious to the potential student, and that completion of a doctorate requires development of emotional resilience.

## 5.6 Summary

In this discussion chapter, the methodology used within this study has been discussed in relation to the space occupied between narrative and phenomenological approaches. Additionally, the initial conceptual framework of transformative learning used within this study has been evaluated as a lens through which to understand the process of transformative learning, and the limitations of the framework identified. The framework has then been re-developed to more accurately represent the findings from this study and account for additional insights in relation to relevant literature such as female doctoral students' experiences of "imposter phenomenon" (Clance & Imes, 1978, p.241). Lastly, the emotional burden of doctoral study has been explored, highlighting the need to understand the doctoral journey as an emotional as well as academic undertaking.

# Chapter 6- Conclusion

This study was initiated as a result of my own experience of personal transformation during the doctoral journey, and the sometimes upsetting and confusing feelings and consequences associated with such unexpected change. The aim of the study was to explore Liverpool online EdD students' experiences of personal transformation during their studies, the manifestation of such transformations, and to identify any contextual factors that might have influenced these transformations. By exploring such experiences, I hoped to draw attention to the potential for personal transformation during doctoral study, and provide examples of the transformations experienced by students, to add depth to current literature regarding the personal transformation of doctoral students. In addition, I wanted to provide a window through which potential students could vicariously gain an understanding of the transformative realities of doctoral study prior to commencement of their own studies. Lastly, I hoped that by identifying and sharing such experiences I might be able to make recommendations for EdD faculty members and/ or curriculum designers regarding measures that could be put in place in order to further support doctoral students with their transformative experiences.

## 6.1 Summary of Study

Using a narrative approach, this study was designed to answer the following research questions:

- What self-identified personal transformations do Liverpool online EdD students experience during their studies?

- How do students describe the manifestations of these transformations?

- What, if any, contextual factors can be identified from the data collected, that may have influenced the personal transformation experiences of these students?

Seven Liverpool online EdD students consented to participate in the study, six of whom were in the process of writing up their thesis and one who had just passed the viva. All had experience of both the taught and thesis stages of the programme.

### 6.1.1 Data Collection

Participants were asked to take part in a three-stage process of data collection. Initially they were asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire detailing their gender, age bracket, country of birth, country of residence and first language. This information was gathered as a result of findings from the literature review which indicated that individuals with particular characteristics (such as women and international students) sometimes shared similar experiences of doctoral study. The data was therefore gathered and set aside for use in data analysis processes. Next, participants were asked to create a visual representation of their doctoral journey and/or any moments of personal transformation. Participants were free to choose the medium for their visual representation and how they wished to represent their journey. Three participants hand-drew images, two used PowerPoint and found images to chart their own journeys, and another two used diagrams. Visual representations were collected prior to interview and formed the basis of the initial interview discussion. The third stage of data collection was a semi-structured interview with each participant conducted via the online platform of their choice, each lasting between 55 minutes and 90 minutes. Usually interviews lasted 60-70 minutes on average.

### 6.1.2 Data Analysis

Following completion of the data collection phase, interviews were transcribed. Each individual participant's visual representation and interview data was then reviewed for data related to personal transformation, and an "interim research text"(Clandinin, 2016, p.47) developed that organised the data into a coherent, emplotted story of transformation for each participant. These individual stories (and the original visual representations and interview data) were then subject to "thematic narrative analysis" (Riessman, 2008, p.53), both as individual stories and as a collective

data set. Demographic data did not indicate any particular patterns across the participants, and therefore was only used as background information to provide pen portrait introductions of each participant within the findings chapter. Four conceptions of transformative learning (cognitive, psychoanalytic, relationship-based and contextual) were used to develop a conceptual framework of transformative learning that was used as a theoretical lens through which to interpret findings from the data.

### 6.1.3 Findings

Overarching themes of positive personal transformation experienced during doctoral study were identified within the data. These included, *changes of inner self*, *enhanced educational and mentoring practice,* and *thinking and perceiving differently.* Manifestations of personal transformation were identified within each of these themes. The manifestations in *changes of inner Self* included 'increased confidence' (including 'speaking out', 'speaking less' and 'improved posture'), 'increased self-awareness' and 'other'. Within *enhanced educational and mentoring practice*, manifestations consisted of 'enhanced educational practice' and 'enhanced mentoring practice'. In the theme *thinking and perceiving differently* manifestations of personal transformation included 'Type Two thinking' and 'seeing multiple perspectives'. In addition to the positive themes of personal transformation identified, *negative consequences of personal transformation* were also identified as a theme. Manifestations of these negative consequences took the form of 'disillusionment with work', 'disconnection with others' and 'perceived nuisance at work'. Following "thematic narrative analysis" (Riessman, 2008, p.53), factors influencing personal transformation were either identified or interpreted. These factors included*:*

- Validation from others

- Enhanced knowledge and ability to express ideas to others

- Unexpected events and outcomes

- Reflexive Practice

- Becoming a student

- Critical thinking and reflection skills

- Culture and different ways of knowing

- Learning team relationships

- Constant challenge and persistence

The relationships between themes and factors are demonstrated in the findings chapter of this thesis (chapter four) and a visual presentation provided in Figure 2, section 4.2.

## 6.2 Measure of Success

In this research study I set out to understand what self-identified personal transformations Liverpool online EdD students experienced during their studies. Student participants identified a number of personal transformations experienced which were presented in themes within the findings chapter of this project. These themes are summarised above.

Once the personal transformations experienced by students were shared, the next question I sought to answer was how these personal transformations manifested, an area under-represented within the current literature. Semi-structured interviews were used as a means through which to encourage student participants to describe the manifestations of these transformations. These manifestations are shared in detail within each theme identified in the findings. However, some examples include David noticing a change in his discourse through discussion with a colleague, and realising he has come to think of himself as an expert as a result of a dispute at work; Elizabeth becoming more self-aware as a result of an unexpected situation experienced within a group work task during the first module of the EdD programme; Suzanne experiencing the repercussions of thinking differently and challenging the status quo at work when a colleague questioned whether they should hire a mediator because she disagreed with a proposed course of action; and Michael becoming more aware of the needs of other people through reflexive practice. These examples are only some of the

manifestations described by participants, and all add to the understanding of *how* doctoral students' personal transformations are enacted in their day to day lives.

Lastly, I sought to identify any contextual factors that influenced the personal transformations of doctoral students. These factors are identified in the study summary above. Some of these factors were identified by the student participants themselves during the course of the interviews, others I have inferred from analysis of the individual and combined participant data. Where inferences have been made I have provided evidence to support my conclusions. I believe that the data collected and analysis completed have successfully answered the questions I sought to address within this study.

## 6.3 Contribution to Knowledge

Overall, the themes identified in this study as personal transformations experienced by doctoral students during their studies reflect those identified during the literature review; *enhanced teaching, enhanced cognitive skills, changes to self* and *negative consequences of personal transformation.* However, a number of new findings were also identified. Whilst increased confidence was a commonly reported personal transformation in the literature (see Burgess & Wellington, 2010; Stevens-Long et al., 2012; Gibson et al., 2017; Preston et al., 2014 for examples), two new manifestations of this were reported in this study, 'speaking less' and 'improved posture'. Additionally, the factor influencing personal transformation, 'validation from others', is a nuanced addition to the current literature. Within 'validation from others' grades received, peer benchmarking and the ability to support other students through informal groups were highlighted as ways in which others influenced students' increases in confidence.

*Changes of inner self* have been previously reported in the literature (see Stehlik, 2011; Wang, 2018, Stevens-Long et al., 2012); however, the detailed examples shared in this study of participants becoming more self-aware provide a deeper insight into this phenomenon than those in previous studies, shedding light on both the process of becoming self-aware, and the feelings associated with

that. In addition Suzanne's change of inner Self, becoming more serious, has not been identified before within the literature searched to inform this study.

The manifestation of 'enhanced mentoring skills', within the *enhanced educational and mentoring practice* theme, demonstrates participants' engagement with informal mentoring and advocacy roles as a result of doctoral students' personal transformation, an activity that has not received attention in other studies reviewed to inform this project. Studies that highlighted the development of colleagues as a result of knowledge and confidence gains within doctoral study focused on more formal CPD activities (Kumar, 2014; Bates and Goff, 2012).

Lastly, the theme of *negative consequences of personal transformation*, and in particular being a 'perceived nuisance at work' due to more critical and research informed working practices, combined with the lived experience of participants' other personal transformations, emphasises the emotional nature of the doctoral journey in a more robust manner than seen in previous literature, and highlights the need for emotional resilience amongst doctoral students.

## 6.4 Contribution to transformative learning theory development

As part of this study I developed an initial conceptual framework of four conceptions of transformative learning that included Mezirow's cognitive conception (2003), Boyd & Myers' psychoanalytical conception (1988), Kroth & Cranton's relationship-based view of transformative learning (2014), and Schnepfleitner & Ferreira's contextual view (2021). Whilst the framework proved to be useful in identifying particular 'types' of transformative learning (cognitive and psychoanalytical) within the themes, the relationship-based and contextual views of transformative learning related more to the factors influencing transformative learning experiences, and were less 'types' of transformative learning than potential factors facilitating or inhibiting transformative learning.

Additionally, not all factors could be explained using the four conceptions of transformative learning, some were better understood as pre-cursors to transformative learning or a process within transformative learning. Therefore I developed a revised conceptual framework of transformative learning in chapter 5, section 5.4 which accounted for all the findings from this study. This revised framework is a contribution to theoretical development in the field of transformative learning as it seeks to provide a unified understanding of transformative learning as a concept.

## 6.5 Contribution to Practice

The findings from this study can provide prospective doctoral students with an understanding of the potential personal transformations they may experience during their studies and the feelings and consequences associated with these transformations. Recommendations can also be made for EdD programme development, or development of programmes where designers wish to stimulate transformative learning amongst students. Lastly, recommendations for student support can be made.

### 6.5.1 For prospective doctoral students

The results of this study provide prospective students with some useful information that may be of benefit to them when considering the possibility of doctoral study. Firstly, the experience of "imposter phenomenon" (Clance & Imes, 1978, p.241), not feeling as though you are clever enough or good enough for doctoral study, was common to female participants within this study, and has also been reported elsewhere (Parkman, 2016; Nori & Peura, 2020). If prospective students knew that it was not uncommon to experience such feelings, it would ensure that if they did go on to experience feelings of imposter phenomenon themselves, they would be aware that other students had felt the same way, and therefore they were not alone. In addition, the knowledge that students experiencing such feelings can still go on to successfully complete a doctorate could provide them with reassurance that it is possible to overcome feelings of imposter phenomenon. Secondly, whilst the participants in this study described many positive transformational experiences, such as feeling

more confident or calmer, and benefiting from enhanced knowledge and thinking skills, they also identified a down side. The process of learning to think differently and undertake critical reflection can be painful, especially if those reflections challenge our own self-concept, as Elizabeth experienced. Similarly, as David and Suzanne experienced, thinking differently may result in students becoming disillusioned with their employing institutions and colleagues if there is little opportunity for them to put their new-found skills to use, or they encounter hostility from dominant power structures and those within them. If students do challenge the status quo as Elizabeth and Suzanne did, they can find themselves ostracised at work and considered a nuisance by their colleagues. Therefore, it is important that prospective students are made aware of these possibilities, and provided with appropriate training and development to handle such situations. For example training could be provided on managing change within the workplace, strategies to develop buy-in from colleagues for new initiatives, career development workshops and self-care strategies and activities.

Lastly, prospective students should be made aware that the doctoral journey is not just an academic journey but also an emotional one, and that the emotional impact of doctoral study, and associated experiences should not be underestimated. As a result, prospective students should be encouraged to build strong support networks with friends, family, other doctoral students and appropriate professional communities of practice. They might also consider approaching a fellow student to start a peer mentoring relationship, or a recent post-doctoral student for mentorship. Lastly, they should be encouraged to develop self-care plans/ strategies to utilise when feeling overwhelmed or emotional, such as mindfulness, meditation or exercise routines.

### 6.5.2 For Faculty members (EdD tutors and/ or curriculum designers)

Several recommendations can be made regarding the implementation of EdD programmes, or for those wishing to design programmes that could facilitate transformative learning. Firstly, it is recommended that students are introduced to the concept of transformative learning early in the programme and informed of the possibility that they may experience it themselves. Whilst students

cannot be prepared for unexpected events, raising awareness of the phenomenon in itself may lessen the shock experienced by students should it happen to them.

Secondly, the female student participants' experiences of imposter phenomenon at the commencement of doctoral study reported here highlights the need for regular, detailed, constructive and supportive feedback from tutors in the early stages of the programme. Regular feedback was received by students within the Liverpool online EdD, helping them to overcome these feelings within the first couple of modules. As such, other EdD curriculum designers might consider a scaffolded approach to feedback whereby significant staff time is dedicated to this activity early in the programme, potentially decreasing throughout the duration of the programme when students are more experienced and allowing staff to spend time developing students' other skills. Dedicated self-directed resources could also be made available to help students develop skills they, or their tutors, identify as areas the student would benefit from improving upon.

Thirdly, EdD programme designers should ensure students have access to student support functions, and consider the development of peer mentoring schemes for doctoral students to ensure students have the opportunity to talk to fellow students experiencing the same, or similar, challenges to themselves.

In terms of curriculum design, findings from this study suggest that certain activities included in the Liverpool online EdD enhanced the potential for transformative learning to take place. Group work tasks that required students to work towards a common goal ensured that students communicated with one another. Interaction with others was found to be an important factor in the transformational experiences of students within this study. In addition, the international student body was found to be a factor featuring in some students' experience of transformation, as working with diverse others generated international and multi-cultural awareness amongst participants and facilitated students' engagement with different ways of knowing.

### 6.5.3 For doctoral student support services

This study has identified the emotional nature of doctoral study and some of the difficulties doctoral students encounter as a result of their personal transformations. For those looking to develop EdD provision, consideration should be given to the availability of pastoral support services for doctoral students, ensuring students have access to student support functions that are available in a variety of formats and at times suitable for the geographical spread of the student body. Staff should be suitably trained to support students during times of uncertainty and distress, and it would be useful to employ some staff with experience of doctoral study if possible.

## 6.6 Study Limitations

My original intention was to provide seven individual participant stories of personal transformation, followed by a narrative thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008) across the seven stories. This would have enabled me to share a more detailed account of each participant's story, providing real depth of experience to the reader and allowing me to retain the whole story of each participant. Unfortunately, this would not have been possible due to word limitations, therefore the individual stories were omitted and the analysis focused on the themes identified *across* the seven stories, therefore shifting the methodology away from a purely narrative approach toward a transcendental phenomenological approach. As a result, whilst I have been able to identify and present manifestations of personal transformation, it is possible that I would have been able to provide even more depth and explore the impact of context on personal transformation further if I had been able to analyse the narratives both individually, and then collectively.

In addition, the validity of this study would have been improved by some form of member checking (Doyle, 2007) with participants regarding the findings reported. By asking participants how well they felt my analysis reflected the meaning of what they had wanted to convey, I would have been able

to test my interpretation of the data, either adding to the credibility of the findings, or reflecting on any differences between my interpretation and participants' intended meaning.

Lastly, the findings presented here are only representative of one online EdD programme awarded by a UK university and generalisability of these findings is therefore limited. A larger scale study consisting of a variety of other professional doctoral programmes, in both face-to-face and online formats, provided through different global universities would provide a more comprehensive view of doctoral students' experience of personal transformation, and identify how context may affect such personal transformations.

## 6.7 Directions for future research

I believe the findings from this research indicate three potential avenues for further investigation. First, considering the role of others in personal transformation, further research into transformative learning relationships, and factors that contribute to successful transformative learning relationships, would be beneficial to curriculum designers and those designing peer mentorship programmes.

In addition, given the experiences of students within this study of 'disillusionment at work' and of becoming a 'perceived nuisance at work', it would be interesting to interview graduates from EdD programmes 12 months post-graduation to ascertain whether they have managed to overcome these experiences, and if so how. This information would be useful to current doctoral students and those doctoral students newly entering management roles.

Lastly, the large scale, international study using different professional doctoral programmes, delivered in multiple formats, described in the limitations section above, would provide useful insights into how context affects the personal transformation experiences' of doctoral students.

## 6.8 Personal Reflections

My journey as a researcher during the course of this EdD programme has been substantial. When I started the programme I had done some previous research that at the time I considered to be interpretive phenomenology but which I now know was not. I had a basic understanding of mainly qualitative research methods such as focus groups, interviews and questionnaires. That was it. Perhaps one of the most time consuming and difficult parts of this doctoral journey was learning how to align research methodologies, methods and analysis with ontological and epistemological positions. This is not something I had ever considered before and it took considerable reading, reflection, false starts and abandoned ideas before the methodology and methods I used in this project were chosen. Before I could do that, I had to understand what the terms ontology and epistemology meant, and identify myself and my own position within the research paradigms. The *process* of conducting this research was thoroughly enjoyable; I loved interviewing and analysing my findings. Writing up has been the most challenging aspect of the doctoral journey for me. I don't particularly enjoy writing and the redrafting, editing and painstaking nature of the process has been very slow, frustrating and, at times, unbearable. However, I now think like a researcher. I analyse other researchers' work and if a colleague asks a question or raises a point concerning research design I advise them automatically. When a fellow academic discusses a new piece of research they are thinking about doing I can usually suggest an appropriate theoretical framework which would enhance the work. At some point over the last seven years I have gone from being the unsure novice, to calling myself a social scientist. It has been an incredible, and intellectually challenging experience.

As an educational practitioner, undertaking the EdD has had a significant impact on my practice. In every project I work on now, my first action is to see what previous research has been done in that area- to establish what is already known. If a suitable course of action within a project is unclear due to a lack of evidence, my first instinct is to get more information, collect some data. I have become

so used to making evidence-based decisions in my research that I automatically now do this in my professional practice too. If other people around me don't do this, I will usually suggest it. If they go ahead without information, I find it frustrating. In terms of my teaching and mentoring, like the findings outlined in this study, I feel as though I am a better teacher and mentor due to my increased knowledge and ability to communicate it. For example, I was able to talk to a life sciences student recently about the concept of bracketing in phenomenological research, something I would not have been able to do before this programme. One of my colleagues has recently started a professional doctorate and I am able to help and advise when they are struggling with a concept or have questions.

In terms of processes and practices at work I now vocally question these if I think they might not be achieving their intended objective any more. I have redesigned processes at work as a result of this. I think in general, every piece of work I do, every class I teach, and every piece of advice I give, is better and more useful to the recipient now than it was before I started the EdD. I can genuinely say that my own "frames of reference" (Mezirow, 2003, p.58) have changed as a result of undertaking doctoral study. I am aware, and appreciative of, different ways of knowing and different conceptions of knowledge. I no longer unquestioningly 'receive' knowledge, and am aware of how white western discourse dominates and limits understanding of phenomena. I am less quick to judge without access to information from multiple sources. The doctoral journey has been truly transformational, and I am so pleased to have experienced it.

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# Appendix A

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dear Ceridwen Coulby | | | |
| | | | |
| I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below. | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| Sub-Committee: | EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) | | |
| Review type: | Expedited | | |
| PI: | Ceridwen Coulby | | |
| School: | | HLC | |
| Title: | The Hero's Journey: EdD student narratives of personal transformation | | |
| First Reviewer: | Dr. Rita Kop | | |
| Second Reviewer: | Dr. Alla Kortzh | | |
| Other members of the Committee | Dr.Lucilla Crosta,Dr. Arwen RaddonDeborah Outhwaite, Mike Mimirinis, Maryia Yukhymenko, Gregg Hickman, Kalman Winston, Mark Ferreira | | |
| | | | |
| Date of Approval: | November 21st, 2018 | | |
| | | | |
| The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions: | | | |
| | | | |
| **Conditions** | | | |
| | | | |
| 1 | Mandatory | M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor. | |
| | | | |

This approval applies for the duration of the research.  If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

Kind regards,

Lucilla Crosta

Chair, EdD. VPREC

## Appendix B

2D to 3D

Scene setting

Amy and I were in the same Liverpool/ Laureate online EdD cohort. Whilst we would engage with each other on the whole group discussion tasks I do not recall us working closely together, for example as part of a learning team so whilst we are acquainted we do not know each other terribly well. It is better to say that we have a shared experience in common and know each other within the context of the programme. I have met Amy once at one of the optional annual EdD summer residency events in Liverpool and watched her present her research plans at that event. Amy responds to my recruitment email enthusiastic to take part. This is my general perception of her, an enthusiastic learner, with a bubbly personality.

Amy's story

Amy was born in the United States and has travelled significantly, living and working in different countries as a journalist and for the last twenty years as an English for Academic Purposes Tutor. She is in her fifties, married and living with her husband in Berlin at the time of our conversation. She has no dependents living at home. Amy speaks several languages fluently and has been heavily involved in the rock and roll scene for decades, booking tours for bands and going to festivals, where she met her musician husband.

Amy was initially approached to undertake a PhD by her tutors at Graduate School in the early nineties following completion of her Masters degree, however she wanted a break from study; as she said at the time, "I've had enough school…I want to go out and work". However this early approach was instrumental in Amy's eventual decision to complete a doctorate as it provided her with a level of confidence in her ability to do so:

"that was a really good thing, because I think it said 'it's possible'. It was something I could do".

This proves to be a powerful narrative as it affects Amy's whole attitude towards doctoral study. Whilst many students might experience feelings of imposter syndrome and doubt their ability to study at a doctoral level this is not the case for Amy as can be seen from our exchange below:

"**Amy:** Confidence has not ever been a big issue for me, I don't worry about it. It doesn't mean that I'm super-confident, but I don't let confidence colour what I do. I have to remind myself sometimes that I've written a Masters thesis before, I know what I'm doing. We all have to remind ourselves of that sometimes. I don't have big issues with confidence. I've never said, 'I don't know if I can do this.'

**Ceri:** Never? You've never wondered if you could do it?

**Amy:** No.

**Ceri:** Wow, that's amazing to me because everybody who I've spoken to has said that when they started, they were thinking, 'I'm not sure I can do it.'

**Amy**: Really? See, that's also a choice that I've made before I could even go and open that door. "

Amy's decision to start the doctorate in 2015 is a result of several different contributing factors. She has a stable 65% contract at the University she works for in Berlin, and with her mother's recent death

has provided both a financial opportunity for her to undertake further study, as well as an emotional motivation to make her mother (a medical doctor) proud of her.

Amy's picture shows a single 2D smiley faced 'me' at the start of the programme, followed by a series of different 'mes', (learning me, struggling me, reflective me and persevering me) ending with multiple 3D faces with eyes pointed in many different directions. I ask her to talk me through it…

"Well, what I was trying to convey, and what I have experienced as the most profound transformation of doctoral becoming, is the ability to take different perspectives, and the ability to view things critically in different ways. To step aside, if you will, and step away from things, or above them, and turn them, and evaluate them… Also, I sort of multiply. So, there's flat little me at the beginning, and then I become many 'Mes'….'reflective me' was really the first new me that I constructed or encountered, and that was in module two, or something like that. I really did experience a 'me' who was here, reflecting on me... So, that was the first thing that happened and then the other 'me', and 'learning me' is a really important part of me in the doctorate programme…Then, the other one, especially in this writing phase, is 'persevering me'…Of course, I have days when I come home from university, and I just want to watch Netflix with a glass of wine, which I do because I can't write after I've worked all day, but the next morning I get up and start again. Persevering is, as we both know, a key aspect to doing the doctorate, and it's why many people never finish… I had an experience, after I finished ethics with you. I'd had a surgery on my foot, which required general anaesthesia, and you're pretty exhausted by the time you finish ethics, aren't you? So, I had this surgery, which in a way, I was sort of looking forward to, as an excuse to just not do anything. I had trouble concentrating for a couple of weeks, so I couldn't really read or anything. I was feeling guilty all the time, and I guess that's the reason why I picked up the Helen Ford. I was struggling, thinking, 'Okay, I know I'm at a moment here where I can walk away. I didn't really consider it, but I guess there are those milestones in the journey where you could say, 'I've had enough.' Or, you say, 'I've got to keep at it.' Then, my secondary supervisor, I let her back into the loop recently to let her know where I was, I wrote in guilty ways, saying, 'Well, I sort of took a break, and I had surgery, and I had to reapply for my job.' She wrote back with a smile, 'Well, many students take a short break after the ethics approval.""

The multiple 'mes' Amy talks about are not just new identities for her, but allow her to see the multiple perspectives, ontologies and epistemologies not only in her doctoral work but also the world around her…

"I remember sitting one day in the middle of the coursework, maybe the first three modules, and we live in a very international city, and I remember sitting and hearing somebody speak another language. I can't explain it, but it has to do with this, sitting with these people around me, and seeing them from different cultural contexts, and not judging them. Just seeing them as different, and that difference as a positive thing. I read something from an anthropologist that struck me. They said anthropologists use people as repositories for knowledge. Each of us has context and knowledge from our culture. I loved that way of thinking about other people who are different to me. It helped with my inter-cultural understanding and sensitivity. I don't know if that was an intended thing, but it happened…and as you were saying, I've lived abroad for a long time, my husband is British, I've had a pretty multi-cultural experience. This is my sixth university. I've lived in France and had relationships with men in other countries, so I could have assumed that I have a pretty radical cultural sensitivity, yet, it took everything to another level. Maybe I wasn't as multi-culturally adept as I thought."

When I ask Amy what is different about her now than when she started the doctoral journey she has this to say:

"I think I'm a little more serious, and I don't mean in the sense of not having a laugh. I think I have less tolerance for something that's not important or relevant. You know, 'Who cares?' Why waste my time? I think I've become a lot more reserved, a lot less quick to speak, but more time thinking. I think about it and consider exactly what I want to say. I'm not 'off the cuff' at all. I won't let people pressure

me into reacting, into writing, or saying, or doing something before I'm ready to… There was an example about a French colleague who's trying to re-design a webpage about [inaudible], and I'm responsible for English Language, so he came up with this text, and sent it out to everybody, and said, 'What do you think? Shall we change some copy?' In the past, what I probably would have done is read it, and thought that I needed to respond, that it would look bad if I didn't, or that I had to, that I was obligated to. This time, I read it, and I thought about the whole thing of re-writing the text, and what the implications were. I talked to two of my colleagues in the English department about it, to get their perspective on it, and then I spoke to the Director, to show my initial reaction and get her perspective on it, which is, 'What's the harm? Why does he have to rush into this?' Then I wrote an email saying why I didn't think it was time right now… I really pissed some people off. One colleague, she wrote to me, and then cc'd all of the coordinators and the Director in the English department. [Inaudible] and then when I didn't respond to that, she then wrote another email to all of us suggesting we hire a mediator…so it was very threatening.”

The change in Amy's behaviour at work as a result of her personal transformations meets with resistance in this instance as she is not conforming to a previous, expected and 'status quo maintaining' behaviour; her change makes others around her uneasy and defensive. This is also echoed to a certain extent in her friendship circle…

“**Amy**: I met my husband in the rock and roll scene…so I had a whole sub-culture life of people and very good friends from all walks of life. When I did start, there were a whole lot of people who said, 'What happened to you? You don't go to festivals anymore, we never see you anymore.' Just a handful of people have been steadfast and not demanding. I have a good friend, she's one hundred percent rock and roll, but she's been so supportive. It's been an interesting thing, and it made me feel like some people are just like that. I'm changing, becoming something new, and some people are just [inaudible].

**Ceri:** I think sometimes people aren't comfortable with us when we change.

**Amy**: Yeah, that's right. [Inaudible] is not the person I met; you know?

**Ceri**: That's a strange thing to say, isn't it, because most people aren't at the end of a ten-year friendship.

**Amy:** That's right, but I think the process we undergo as we undertake a doctorate is so radical, and intense, and bound by time, that it's a different than normal change.

**Ceri:** I agree with you because I think it changes the way you see things, and the way you look at situations, and that's not always comfortable for other people, is it?

**Amy:** No, it's not. You talk about different things. I love rock and roll, and talking about it, but I have other things on my mind. Also, in terms of my work colleagues, that has been an amazing transformation. It's transformed my discourse, the things that I do, and the way that I do them, with more rigour, and frameworks. They support the work that I do. I can talk about my teaching practice. Teachers that I supervise, I can talk to them about it in ways that I could not before.”

As we can see the change in Amy's focus; away from rock and roll, causes some friends to shut their doors to her, however whilst their doors shut a whole new world opens up to her, providing her with a new depth of knowledge, understanding and language with which to communicate with her colleagues. Amy's openness to learning and change suffuses our conversation and makes the doctoral journey sound like an amazing and exciting adventure.

“I see the doctoral journey as a new thing, after a new thing, after a new thing that you've never done before. You're involved in new things, like doing ethics. I'd never done that before. So, that's the way that I look at everything. Writing up this thesis, working with the supervisor, it's all new, and that's an intense thing. So, when I've done something I've never done before, I think, 'Wow, I've done it and I

can do it again.' I can do something new as a result. I'm actually really elated. This morning, I was reading how an academic said that they open their document and start writing, even just a paragraph, so I'm working on that technique. I make the notes the night before for what I want to do in the morning, and then I think, 'It's exciting that I did that this morning.'

I am left in no doubt as to Amy's positive experience of the doctoral journey as a whole, and wonder how much her apparent willingness to experience new things has contributed not only to the scale of her perceived transformation as a result of the doctoral experience; but also her lack of fear of failure or imposter syndrome. Her attitude appears to have made her strong and resilient, seeing opportunity rather than threat in the tasks and activities undertaken as part of doctoral study. Her journey is primarily one of joy.