Accessing postgraduate art and design, transitions and intersectionality

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This chapter looks at the issues of widening access to postgraduate study within the field of art and design. My particular study, (drawn from research I have done over a period of four years), considers the learning stories of mature students who have previously studied on an Access course and have progressed onto a taught Masters programme in art and design. The chapter complements previous work around inclusion in higher arts education and acts as a partner to previous chapters in similar volumes (Broadhead, in Hatton, 2015; Broadhead, in Broadhead et al., 2017). Within the context of postgraduate study, mature students are those who were aged 21 and over at the start of their undergraduate study (HEFCE, 2013). Young student transition rates compared with those of mature students were higher for all types of postgraduate study, and the difference in transition to taught masters by age group has widened since 2008-09 (HEFCE, 2013).In all types of postgraduate study, mature students were more likely to stay at their undergraduate institution than the younger students (HEFCE, 2013).

The students referred to within this chapter were deemed mature students and had come from an Access background; all but one had remained at the institution where they had studied their Access course. They had either come from the Access course straight onto a postgraduate course due to their previous work and educational experiences. Or the students had done an Access course, then a degree and finally their postgraduate course. Many Access students had come to art and design late in life due to being discouraged from studying it by teachers, families and parents when they were younger. These people may have a degree in another subject but have dreamed of becoming artists or designers by following a new path in life. Because within schools art and design is seen as a 'soft' subject or one which could lead to a precarious career, people may not have studied it earlier in their learning careers but decide later on, when they have more autonomy in their decision-making to pursue a creative career. Their learning careers often take unconventional paths through formal and informal education, but these educational experiences all contribute their gradual sense of becoming professional artists or designers.

Access students who go on to study at postgraduate level come from a variety of complex backgrounds. Tobbell et al. (2010) have said that postgraduate students lead complex lives and this is significant when considering transitions to postgraduate study. As mature students their stories illustrate three ideas about intersectionality and educational transitions. Firstly, their identities as 'non-traditional students' are constructed through age mediated by class, gender, race and disability. This is because

within the context of education they are described as not achieving academic and artistic success within normative or prescriptive time-frames (many students taking part in this study were in their 40s and 50s). Secondly, their stories challenge the notion that transition and participation in higher education have transformative qualities; that it inevitably changes people's lives. The complexity of mature students' identities and context mean it is difficult to ascribe to one particular experience (e.g. going to university) as causing a transformation their sense of self or situation. Thirdly, their stories challenge the idea that students have linear, incremental learning careers; they may study at level six, then at level three and then at level seven.

This issue of widening access to postgraduate study is an area which needs more attention as more professional careers require level seven qualifications (Hudson, 2013; Wakeling, 2005; Tobbell et al., 2010; BIS, 2010). The number of students studying on Taught Master's programmes increased at the beginning of this century (Sastry, 2004) and the introduction of postgraduate loans in 2016 in the UK, meant potentially there may be more opportunities for students to take these courses. Increasingly, postgraduate qualifications are prerequisite to a professional career (BIS, 2010). However, finance has been acknowledged as a barrier for some students in accessing postgraduate study (Hoad, 2001; Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton, 2005). There is evidence that those people with working-class backgrounds who do succeed in undergraduate and postgraduate education can be disadvantaged in the work place. The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2015) reported that, "Less able, better-off kids are 35% more likely to become high earners than bright poor kids." It went on to say that middle-class parents used their social and cultural capital to help their children gain employment, creating a 'glass floor' in the labour market. Class barriers to promotion and employment in the professions still exist maintaining Britain as a deeply elitist society where (Friedman, Laurison and Macmillan, 2017):

> Too many people from working-class backgrounds not only face
> barriers getting into the professions, but also barriers to getting on.
> (Milburn, 2017: 1)

Class continues to have an impact on an individual's education and career. Wakeling (2005) suggested that social inequalities in education still continued in postgraduate education; graduates from lower socio-economic backgrounds were twice as likely to enter postgraduate teaching training as those from class 1. Conversely, graduates from social class 1 were three times more likely to study research degrees. However, Purcell et al. (2005) suggested that class, gender and 'A' Level results were not key factors associated with studying for a Masters degree.   Wakeling and Kyriacou (2010) looked at widening access to postgraduate research degrees and found:

> It is reasonably well-established that socio-economic class has no
> direct effect on immediate progression to postgraduate research
> study once academic factors are taken into account. However there is
> some suggestion that class inequalities re-appear in later entry to

postgraduate research study, with those from lower socio-economic classes being disadvantaged. (Wakeling and Kyriacou, 2010)

Whilst the relationships between social class and undergraduate participation have been established (DfES, 2003); the impact of class on postgraduate study is less clear *although by no means less important*. However, (Gorard et al. 2007) found that social inequalities in educational participation are apparent throughout the life course, from initial education to later forms of learning *thus impacting on any potential learner in a number of long term ways*.

Inherent within this chapter is a criticism of the notion of higher education participation as a form of transformation, in particular class transformation (Reay, 2002; Hudson, 2009; Byrom,2010). It can be seen that socio-cultural factors still impact on students' experiences within postgraduate study and beyond. The intersections of class with age or life stage are explored through the students' experiences which are the focus of this chapter. By reading the stories from students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds who have successfully undertaken postgraduate study within the arts it can be seen that firstly identities are not 'overwritten' by new experiences within higher education and secondly, the intersectional nature of identity would make such a transformation problematic. The idea of transformation also implies that students' previous experiences and identities are deficient and need to be improved or cleansed. Experiences in education can therefore be seen as adding to an individual's wider life experience through a process of reflection. The idea of transition also applies to this discourse as it sits around notions of transformation. Transition leading to transformation is both a significant process, or set of processes as well as being a culture and an act of learning, and therefore must be further considered here in order to see how this affects the learner. Within the field of art and design do students feel they have been transformed into artists or designers by their educational experiences?

Current thinking about transition

Within the context of an Australian university Stagg and Kimmins (2013) have applied the ideas around transition pedagogy and the first year in higher education (FYHE) to the context of returning postgraduate students. They argued that there was little difference in the types of support these students needed to complete their coursework when compared with their undergraduate counterparts. However, this way of looking at transition divorced learning and the attainment of academic skills from other affective, cultural and social factors that may have impacted on a student's deposition to study. Literature that focused on the theme of cultural and social transformation also considered barriers certain social groups faced when making the transition to higher education (Fragoso et al, 2013; Hussey and Smith, 2013). Often the work of Pierre Bourdieu was used to explain that some students did not have the cultural capital that was valued in universities (Hudson, 2009; Byrom, 2010; Duckworth, 2014).

The research undertaken by Reay (2002) was a good example of a class analysis of transition that did concern itself with mature students in particular. Reay (2002) carried out research that explored the sociological and psychological processes that made working-class transitions to higher education problematic. In particular she has looked at the point when students chose their higher education course. Her work focussed on the narratives of 23 mature students who attended an inner London Further Education College which she compared with data from interviews carried out on 97 sixth formers in a range of private and state schools. She argued that class although mediated by gender and ethnicity always counted in the transition process. Raey (2002) identified different working-class fractions based on their attitude to risk, challenge and fitting in. She argued that often middle-class cohorts were represented as fragmented whereas the working-class identities were represented as being homogenised. Within her work she identified working-class students who were opted for the risk of higher education as being atypical; but within that group of people there were two fractions. The first one being the majority of students, who sought to avert risk, fit in and felt comfortable. The second fraction; the minority of students sought the challenge and risk of higher education. She described the stories of mature students as being about determination, commitment and adaptability; a triumph of will in the face of class inequalities of access. Many of the initiatives designed to increase access to higher education were seen not to decrease the barriers for working-class mature students (Wakeford, 1993; Reay, 2002).

Hudson (2016) carried out work on the transition of Access to HE students to higher education in East London. This work drew upon the notion of learning career which was developed by Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000). A learning career was subjective and objective. It was a career of events, activities and the making and remaking of meaning. It took into account position and disposition and development over time (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000: 590). By considering Pierre Bourdieu's disposition as related to position, that is the habitus: - a portfolio of dispositions to all aspects of life largely tacitly held this influenced actions. Habitus was who the person is; where the person is in society; where they are positioned as well as their interactions with others. It is the embodiment of social factors like class, gender, ethnicity as well as genetic inheritance. Often it seems that some social groups did not appear to fit in when they made the transition to higher education due to their particular habitus.

Similar work was undertaken outside the United Kingdom. Fragoso et al. (2013) analysed survey results, focus-group interviews and life histories to research the transition of mature students into higher education in Portugal. The recently implemented Bologna Process had let to an increase in non-traditional undergraduate students. The study considered the barriers which identified by the students as well as the significance of peer support and the reflection of life history as part of the transition process. Fragoso et al. (2013) called for a different understanding of the term transition, where it is not just an event within a linear timeframe but a more everyday event. They also claimed that 'non-traditional students' and 'transition' were concepts that were problematized by institutions which diverted their responsibility towards facilitating change.

Gale and Parker (2014) described 'transition-as-development' as a concept that focussed on a 'shift from one identity to another' (Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010: 6). This could be about moving from one life stage to another where going to university is part of this change or development. This is conceptualised as where people are accepted into a new community: by stages of separation from their previous group; transition and interaction with a new group and finally incorporation or integration into the new group. The film Educating Rita (1983) remains a good example of this understanding of transition. Rita is represented as a mature student who, during her degree in English literature, develops into a successful undergraduate through separating herself from her working –class community. Gale and Parker (2014) claimed that this approach still reproduced and maintained existing hierarchies. Typically, students from under-represented backgrounds would experience a challenge to their identities and the threat to their usual ways of knowing and doing. Therefore, 'If a student feels that they do not fit in, that their social and cultural practices are inappropriate and that their tacit knowledge is undervalued, they may be more inclined to withdraw early' (Thomas, 2002: 413). Successful transitions are seen as being those where people can overcome barriers by becoming members of new social groups; rather than the University or HEI adapting to include different dispositions and practices.

Within the context of lifelong learning Ecclestone (2009) explored three perspectives on transition (identity, agency and structure). It was argued that thinking about transitions , 'not only risk pathologising transitions by depicting them as unsettling, disruptive, daunting, anxiety inducing and risky but also create normative assumptions about how best to manage them' (Ecclestone, 2009: 23). The negative aspects of transition are often the focus of the debates and it is assumed that people need help to get through periods of uncertainty and change; like going to university. This perspective, ' erases the positive effects of difficulty, challenge and overcoming problems and risks attributing 'problems' to particular groups so that people become a problem to be supported and managed effectively' (Ecclestone, 2009: 23).

Similarly O'Shea (2014) has carried out extensive research on the experiences of first-in-the-family students at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Within this particular institution people from disadvantaged groups were applying and gaining entry to the university, however, the retention of these students was not very good; the attrition rates being between 18 and 25 percent. O'Shea (2014) was critical of what she described as the deficit model that was often applied to students from certain social groups. Instead she used a concept developed from critical race theory by Yosso (2005) which was a critique of Bourdieu's cultural capital. It was argued that although first-in-the-family students may not have the white, middle-class cultural capital of traditional students they did come with other kinds of capitals (aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant). O'Shea (2014) argued that students and the institution should recognise and value these attributes that would improve the educational experience for everyone. Implicit in O'Shea's argument was that seeing the idea of transition into higher education as being about a change from one identity to another could devalue the attributes the student already had.

Gale and Parker (2014) argued for 'transition-as-becoming' as a rejection of the previous approaches to thinking about transition. It was also the rejection of 'transition' as a useful concept, altogether, because it failed to capture the fluidity of people's lives and the ways they learn. Rather than transition being viewed as linear and smooth; the lived experiences of students was understood to be more complex. There was an acceptance of the interdependence of 'public issues' and 'private troubles'. Anxiety and risk was seen as part of day-to-day life rather than attributed to a rare and special event. It was acknowledged that,

> …transitions can lead to profound change and be an impetus for new learning, or they can be unsettling, difficult and unproductive. Yet, while certain transitions may are unsettling and difficult for some people, risk, challenge and even difficulty might also be important factors in successful transitions for others. (Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010: 2)

Gale and Parker (2014) claimed that a focus on induction or individual development modes of transition implied assimilation and integration of students into the dominant culture of the university, which inevitably privileged some students from middle class backgrounds over under-represented students. However, the 'transition-as-becoming' approach called for an institutional discourse of adaptation, where the diverse cultural capital brought by students to higher education was affirmed. Thus higher education knowledge systems and practices should become more open and flexible.

Intersectionality and transition

The intersection of characteristics that make up part of a person's identity challenges the notion of people transforming from one thing to another through the process of going to university. This is because a person's identity is more complex and fluid; being in constant change as they gain a range of life experiences. Within the context of education the intersection of class, race, gender and life stages can have an impact on a person's experience of change or transition.

Intersectionality is a means of understanding that social inequality and the organisation of power are shaped by many interrelating factors rather than one axis of social division like class, gender or race (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016). Rankin and Ansara (2016) describe intersectionality as a term that can be used in a number of different ways. It can reference the identity and/or experiences of a person who has more than one protected characteristic. It can also be used to describe how protected characteristics, and the distinct forms of discrimination associated with them, can intersect and interact. Intersectionality is an approach to tackling equality issues for those who have more than one protected characteristic. The Equality Act (2010) identifies age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity as 'protected characteristics'. Missing from this list is social class which as has been argued remains an important factor in how people access and experience higher education. Rankin and Ansara (2016) went on to say:

> 'Apart from our protected characteristics, many other aspects of our identities and experiences intersect and interact with how we experience discrimination and access to services (rurality, class, and income). These should of course be taken into account when considering both equality and human rights, as they also greatly impact on situations and solutions. However, the term intersectionality itself is generally accepted in academia and the equalities sectors to refer primarily to intersections of protected characteristics.' (Rankin and Ansara, 2016: 5)

Futhermore, intersectional discrimination is a type of multiple discrimination that would not have arisen in the same way if the specific grounds discriminated against are not intersecting in the situation. For example, a person could be overlooked for hire or promotion because they are both older and a woman. Without using an intersectional approach, it would be difficult to identify the issue if that service discriminates less against older men and younger woman but discriminated more against women as they aged (Rankin and Ansara, 2016). It could be argued that mature, working-class, male students face more cultural barriers and discrimination than mature middle-class women within the context of higher education (McGivney, 1999; Burke,2006; Broadhead, 2017). By making this statement intersectionality is used as an analytic tool for social justice that takes into account the context of social inequality as well as acknowledging the complexities of it (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016). This chapter argues that age mediated by class, race, disability and gender is an important aspect of intersectional analysis within the context of higher education because there is an assumption that successful students are those who achieve 'normal' educational success at expected ages (Osborne et al., 2004; Wilson, 1997). Conversely, those who transition through stages of education later in their lives are perceived as flawed or deficient.

The next section considers the stories written by postgraduate students with an Access background in order to explore their transitions in art and design education. At the same time the meanings of their accounts are understood in relation to the complexities of their identities and particular contexts.

What do mature students think about their postgraduate education?

Postgraduate students with an Access background were asked, as part of a project about mature postgraduate students with Access backgrounds, to write about their learning journeys from Access to postgraduate. The students were from different cohorts from the previous four years starting in 2013. The students decided for themselves what they wrote about and what they thought was significant. Eight

students chose to respond, two males and six females were all between 40 and 60 years old. The narratives were then sorted into themes. These themes (Confidence; Group diversity; Access to HE as a space to think about practice and Becoming a practitioner). The themes were discussed with the students within a focus group.

Confidence and self-doubt

Mature students who become undergraduates for the first time often report a lack of confidence and self-doubt; sometimes feeling like they do not belong (Raey, 2001 in Ball, 2004; Broadhead and Garland, 2012; Kane et al., 2014). These feelings were also identified by the postgraduate students as they reflected on their own learning journeys:

> It was however something of a leap and came with a degree of self-doubt particularly relating to the sophistication of the work produced and the design solutions achieved. I think it is probably quite common for mature students and those taking unconventional routes to Postgraduate study (or education more generally) to be driven to somehow 'prove themselves'. (Sandra, 2017)

Evidence was that the students felt a little of the 'imposter syndrome' because of the leap between level three and level seven study. Even though the students had met the entrance requirements they still felt 'not good enough'. The fear was not based on a perceived lack of academic ability but that the level of art and design practice would not be good enough.

> Initially (and occasionally throughout the 2 years) I felt a bit of a phoney-what a cheek, doing an MA straight from Access. But, on the other hand, and like most mature students, my motivation was strong. I had confidence in my academic ability and enjoyed that part of the 'stretch'. I am much less sure of my skill and competence in 'making', and worry that the emphasis on theory made it easier for me to duck the challenge of actual art practice. ..Maybe that's a general issue, that moving from Access is a 'leap' which makes us vulnerable to self-doubt, wherever that sits for each individual. (Louise,2017)

Both Sandra and Louise identified themselves as mature students compared themselves with other mature students rather than students in general. Similarly, even though Rob had similar fears he was able to allay them by recognising he had life skills he could draw upon.

> I was of course nervous about going from level 3 study to level 7, but in practice I have been able to use my experience in other areas to help me cope with the course.(Rob,2017)

Humour is another coping strategy that students use. Jake echoes the feelings of being some kind of fraud that he was not really meant to be on the course.

> From part time access to MA seemed like a massive leap. All through
> the course I made jokes about the 'MA police' waiting outside, ready
> to whisk me off the premises... Jake, 2017)

The students were aware that their learning journeys were different from traditional-age participation and also perceived that their 'non-linear' transitions were unusual. Feelings of not really belonging or not being a legitimate postgraduate student were common within the group and also acknowledged within the focus group.

In spite of the feelings of self-doubt and feeling out of place the students were successful and achieved their postgraduate qualification. They were able to acknowledge their feelings and understand them in terms of being a mature student and recognising that what they were feeling was shared by others. The capacities for reflection, humour and drawing upon experience are all valuable 'assets' for flourishing in postgraduate education.

Diversity of student group

Implicit within the student stories was a perception that undergraduate cohorts were more homogeneous than both Access courses and postgraduate courses. Studying with a diverse range of people seemed to be important to the students. Perhaps the life experience of mature students let them see the value in mixing with people from different backgrounds:

> [Access] was fantastically stimulating, the learning group was wonderfully diverse
> and interesting, the college resources and the opportunities made available to us
> (not least getting on the MA course) were brilliant. (Louise, 2017)

Even though the students had different backgrounds they all had things in common which were to do with being a creative practitioner. Although individual practices were different it was seen as part of being a professional that one would develop links with other creatives.

> Studying at degree level helped me strengthen my creativity as well
> as reinforcing my art practice and establishing myself as a creative.
> Although as a mature student I missed the diversity of the Access
> course I enjoyed my time immensely and enjoyed working alongside
> younger students, sometimes in more of an advisory role, a great deal
> and still keep in contact with many of them today... MA feels a little
> like being on the Access course; there is a diverse set of students the
> difference is, now we are all professionals in our creative field.
> (Connie, 2017)

The similarity of the group profile of the Access and postgraduate courses was recognised and valued by students.

> In many ways my MA cohort reminds me of my Access cohort; a
> group of Adult Learners with varied practices, supporting, challenging
> and helping each other, and complementing each other's skills. (Ann,
> 2017)

Careful thought to the context in which the students would be studying was given by the mature students. There was an understanding that a community of practice would be beneficial to the learning of the individual.

> In short, I wanted a stretching and challenging university level
> program, within an art college, with tutor support, which would allow
> me to work independently and learn at my own pace, at a much
> lower cost than an undergraduate degree, and I wanted to be part of
> an adult learning environment and community. (Rob,2017)

The strong links made between students were seen as part of developing professional identity in the arts. This socialisation of students into a community of practice was identified by Biesta (2010) as one of the important parts of a good education.

Importance of Access to HE

Tutors who have an expertise in working on Access courses know that part of that role is building confidence in students. Within the context of art and design the Access course prepared students for working within an art and design context.

> I would not have had the confidence to embark on Master level
> study, had I not done this 'preparatory' year in Access to
> HE.(Patsey,2017)

Students still viewed the ideal would be to do a second undergraduate course so they could change their careers and become an artist or designer. However they also had to be pragmatic, in that the cost of undergraduate study would be prohibitive for most people, therefore the postgraduate course was a viable option. So although students had fears about the 'leap' from level three to level seven they were prepared to take the risk for financial reasons.

> This was a really turning point for me as it gave me access to the
> facilities I had always wanted and the time to concentrate fully on
> developing my practice. Although a second undergraduate degree
> might have been an ideal next step this was financially unattainable.
> A direct transition to postgraduate study seemed the best way to
> take full advantage of the opportunity that the Access course had
> brought into view.(Sandra, 2017)

The students used the Access course as a means of preparing them for their degrees and it continued to have a big impact on the students.

> The Access course gave me the foundation to believe in myself and my
> capabilities and prepared me well for the degree course. The richness and
> diversity of the students on this course made for a dynamic environment to
> be part of and an experience that will always stay with me.(Connie,2017)

The experience of being an Access student was powerful for many of the students in this study. There learning identities were formed by them seeing themselves as 'mature', 'non-traditional', or Access and they wore as a badge of pride. Access, her undergraduate degree and her postgraduate course all contributed to Connie's sense of becoming an artist.

> I did the Access course because I felt I needed a way to explore and discover my own art practice. Previous to the Access course I had completed several evening and weekend courses that had allowed me to develop my technical skills but didn't really offer the opportunity to have a continuous and involved discourse into the philosophical theories underpinning the art I was trying to create. (Hattie, 2017)

Hattie was using many learning activities to help construct her emerging identity as an artist. She used the Access course to introduce herself to the theoretical aspects of her practice. Her transition to becoming an artist cannot be attributed to one particular course rather it is a *bricolage* of experiences from formal and informal education that has led her on her particular journey.

The student stories imply that their learning careers are complex and that for them they needed a level three course to develop their confidence; theory and technical skills irrespective of previous undergraduate study. The impression is also that the students identified these needs for themselves rather than being guided by an external advisor. During the focus group the students said that they had to be pro-active in seeking opportunities for study in creative subjects and finding these opportunities was not easy. This may explain why students chose courses could enhance their 'portfolio' of skills and fit in with their lives rather than attending to the level of learning.

Identity as artists

The postgraduate course contributed to a gradual sense of becoming; a process which began on the Access course or perhaps even before (Gale and Parker, 2014). Sandra talked about being at the start of her new career, so that her 'sense of becoming' was going to continue after she had finished her course.

> I am now at the very start of my second career as a maker and designer of printed textiles. I am building new networks and taking up opportunities to make, sell and publicise my work …Without the Access course and the opportunities it opened up for me I doubt this positive change would have happened. (Sandra,2017)

Hattie also talked about her being at the beginning of something rather than seeing the completion of the postgraduate course as an ending. The students convey a sense of continuity which is ongoing rather than a particular learning experience transformed them.

Whilst my artistic career is still very fledgling I have a clearer understanding of where my practice is situated and the approach I want to take to develop my ideas and skills.(Hattie,2017)

Connie also saw that her identity as an artist had developed over time, her Access course, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees has all contributed to how she saw herself. It seemed to go beyond a change in career, but acknowledgment of where her interests and capacities lie.

I feel proud and privileged to be able to call myself, without hesitation, an artist and embrace the fact that I am a creative. Taking these courses has not only facilitated the opportunity to grow as a practitioner but, also as an individual. (Connie, 2017)

The transition from level three to level seven was not smooth or unproblematic. Sometimes people were anxious, fearful or felt like an imposter. However, facing their fears was something that was integral to the learning experience and the students felt   more confident about their art and design practice when they met the challenge.

Every MA day involved me forcing myself to college, best foot forward, feeling uncomfortable every step of the way. The walk home was different. My practice was being challenged and so growing in strength. (Jake, 2017)

Implicit in some of the stories is a continuing reluctance to identity oneself as being a creative practitioner, in spite of years of participation in art and design education formally and informally. Words like fledgling or developing imply that these participants do not exhibit that self-assurance   or an irreverent ease associated with middle-class students (Banks, 2017).

Conclusions

Transitions from one level to another are gradual and may not be smooth. At the same time students who are more mature and have not come to art and design education in conventional ways continue to have doubts about their sense of belonging and ability to do postgraduate study.

The students in this study were able to articulate, through reflective writing, the feelings they had about their learning journeys from Access to postgraduate study. This could be due to the fact that they were required to reflect on their own practice as part of the postgraduate curriculum and were practiced in thinking about the self in relation to a wider social context. These students had decided to pursue a new career in art and design and this had been a process of gradual becoming. The students had come to postgraduate study later in life and came from a variety of social class backgrounds. Age, gender and class mediated their experiences of their learning journeys.

All the respondents talked about their fears and anxieties. It was surprising to the researcher that the levels of confidence were not high in spite of them having undergraduate experience

and a previous career. Many of the students did not have a first degree in an art and design subject and used the Access course as a second chance to study a creative subject. They talked about 'the leap' from level three to level seven. It was interesting that the word 'leap' was used by more than one participant, which evokes a notion of risk, stretch, movement and ambition. They were aware that they had progressed through an unconventional means of transition within the art and design subject area. This led to the students feeling like 'a fraud' or 'a phoney' which is akin to feeling like an imposter. When considering non-traditional students and working-class students in particular the fear of 'being found out' of not having anything to contribute are common feelings (Raey, 2001 in Ball, 2004, p.40). On the other hand they were also proud of being mature students who had come to study art and design later in life. Far from overwriting the identity of being a mature student the respondents saw the route they took to get to postgraduate study as being very significant; one that would have a long term impact.

The accumulative educational experiences of these students all contributed to their growing sense of being professional artists or designers and this process began either with the Access course or before when they took short courses to develop technical skills. It was not only undertaking undergraduate study that led to a transformation in identity, but the totally of their learning experiences. Nor was their identity fixed by the end of postgraduate course; the students talked about their professional identity being in the early stages or as being a fledgling practice.

The student stories support the arguments presented by Gale and Parker (2014) who argued for 'transition-as-becoming' as a concept that captures the fluidity of people's lives and the ways in which they learn. The outcome of this small project based on student's reflective writing was the realisation that Access courses potentially need to prepare students for postgraduate as well as undergraduate study. This is because 'non-traditional' and mature students do not have linear learning journeys where levels of learning are always incremental.

Inclusion and widening participation issues still impact on people who are able to study postgraduate art and design and those who are able to have careers in the creative industries (Banks, 2017). Often people do not imagine they can succeed in art and design subjects and jobs and so do not study these at school or as part of their undergraduate education (Broadhead, 2017). However, Access and postgraduate study can offer a way for people to fulfil their dreams of becoming artists or designers later in their lives.

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