

Designing experiences: friendship and practical wisdom in art and design higher education.

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## Introduction

The national policy of widening participation exists within a competitive and uncertain higher education culture and at the same time receives decreasing governmental support; questions have emerged around its effectiveness in helping to retain students and support their success (Bhagat and O'Neil, 2011; Liasidou, 2012). The impact of this on those who wanted to become artists and designers and were at the same time labelled by higher education institutions as 'second chance' or 'untraditional' students needed to be examined. This paper analysed the narratives constructed by and between Chad, a post-Access to HE student, and myself, the inquirer that represented some of her experiences during her BA (Hons) Surface Pattern course. Surface pattern designers are concerned with designing for surfaces and embellishments which could include wallpapers, fabrics, flooring, and packaging. This case study was part of a longitudinal study (2011-15) that sought to investigate the experiences of post-Access students in art and design higher education. The participants were studying on a range of creative degree programmes in various institutional contexts. Narrative inquiry was used to show the ways in which students reflected on and took stock of their educational journeys.

The analysis drew upon some of the notions concerned with phronesis (prudence or practical wisdom). This was because the participants' narratives often recounted how they had made decisions in the past, for example that they had decided to risk financial and emotional security by taking part in art and design higher education later in life. These difficult decisions were made so that they could ultimately live a better life, working in the creative industries. Also, the processes of deliberation about acting well on the programme of study were made visible through the post Access to HE students' stories and this seemed to be an important part of their learning experiences. Aristotle claimed that only a person of experience could practice practical wisdom, and a young person was unlikely to have extensive life experience, (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, Chapter 8). How then did mature post- Access students draw upon their past experiences in order to navigate through the challenges of higher education? This discussion recounted some of the critical incidents within Chad's story where I had noticed evidence of phronesis or at some points the absence of wise judgement. I suggested that within the context of higher education mature adults sometimes made poor decisions leading them to act in ways that continued their sufferings. This was because they did not always exercise their potential to act with prudence, (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, Chapter 5). Chad offered an explanation of why this maybe so at the end of her story where she described the

culture of her course as being very competitive and not conducive to thinking and acting well for herself and others. The importance of students acting well because of friendship can also be gleaned from Chad's account. A sense of belonging experienced by students has been identified as a factor which improved retention in schools and in higher education (Goodenow, 1993; Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Thomas, 2012). Friendship between students was seen as one way in which a sense of belonging could be developed as well as providing informal support systems, (Tinto 1993; Thomas 2002; Wilcox et al 2005). Duckworth (2014) has also described how friendship could be a means of helping students cope with any symbolic violence they were subjected to from a higher education institution and/or other students. This paper argued that friendship in the sense of deliberating and acting well for others was also an important aspect of phronesis as practised by mature and younger students.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Practical wisdom**

Book six of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* offered a model of deliberation known as phronesis, practical wisdom or prudence where the person who practised this was known as the phronimos, (Ricoeur, 1994:174):

A sagacious man is supposed be characterised by his ability to reach sound conclusions in his deliberations about what is good for himself and of advantage to him, and this not in one department of life – in what concerns his health, for example, or his physical strength – but what conduces to the good life as a whole. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, Chapter 5:176)

The phronimos firstly recognised the singularity of a particular situation and was able to determine a best course of action. They understood what it meant to act well with justice and courage, (Wall, 2005: 315). Phronesis was about being able make good decisions that allowed people to act well for themselves and others in order to live a good life together. It was an intellectual virtue where acting well was not through habit or conditioning, but through thought and deliberation. It sat with the other forms of intellect *sophia* (purely theoretical intelligence) and *techne* (technical expertise) (Skilleas, 2006:267).

Practical wisdom was closely interconnected with the cardinal virtues such temperance, fortitude and justice. The phronimos was guided by these virtues in determining the correct course of action, (Nussbaum, 2001:306). For example the person of practical wisdom could distinguish a situation in which courage was needed from another where moderation was required.

Nussbaum described how there should not be a fixed way of understanding a situation; the generalities of character and principles should be modified in light of a particular context or situation:

Nor does particular judgment have the kind of rootedness and focus required for goodness of character without a core of commitment to a general conception – albeit one that is continually evolving, ready for surprise, and not rigid. (Nussbaum, 2001:306)

Being able to judge and act well was seen as intrinsic to being a human who lived a good life.

How someone lived a 'good life' is in some ways dependant on contexts and the particularities of the situations thrown up by living. For Ricoeur (1994:177) the word 'life' designated the person as a whole rather than a series of practices. He said that to live a life well was the standard of excellence which Ricoeur called the life plan. The 'good life' was a nebulous of ideals and dreams; of achievements in regard to a life being fulfilled or unfulfilled (Ricoeur, 1994:179). The good life was where all actions were directed by these ideals and dreams.

Phronesis appeared to be a very pertinent concept that could be applied to those stories of those mature students who had chosen to make difficult decisions in order to pursue the good life, by achieving a degree to become an artist or designer.

### **Phronesis and friendship**

Aristotle (Nicomachean Ethics, Book VI, Chapter 11: 186) talked about how acting with practical wisdom was based on a good or fellow-feeling towards others; this could also be seen as an important aspect of inclusion. Within an educational context, for example, students and teachers have empathy for others whether they are similar or different to themselves. Ricoeur (1994) would extend this idea of good feeling towards others as a mutual responsibility, where an individual to be an individual must be part of a social relation. For Aristotle too, living a good life entailed acting well for and with others; friendship could be seen as an important aspect of this. Including others and being responsible for people who are not always like ourselves entailed thinking with practical wisdom, whether one was a student, a teacher or a manager. The risks associated with being open to newness and difference might be experienced as fearful but at the same time they could be an opportunity for creativity and innovation in conduct. The importance of friendship in relation to how it can help students belong within an educational institution has been discussed by Thomas (2012).

### **Methodology**

This paper draws upon the accounts of post-Access students who took part in a longitudinal study (2011-2015) that sought to record their experiences as they studied their degrees in art

and design. Eight students participated and this entailed meeting with me (the researcher) twice a year during the duration of their higher education. The students had control over what elements of their education they could talk about. The approach used was based on narrative inquiry, rather than prescribed interview questions, (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004; Butler-Kisber, 2010). Brookfield (1995:92) stated that educational research should start with the students themselves and that teachers should try to see the educational experience through their eyes. Coffield (2006:36-37) has argued that students should be engaged in conversations about education not just answering but asking questions about their experiences. All the students had achieved an *Access to HE* diploma at level three and had progressed to a variety of art and design degrees, including textiles, visual communications and fine art. Due to the entry qualifications to higher education held by these students not being A levels and a Foundation Course, they could be perceived by their institutions as being 'non-traditional' (Hudson, 2009:25; Penketh and Goddard, 2008:316; Burke, 2002:81). They also tended to be mature students with a variety of backgrounds and life experiences (Broadhead, 2014; Busher et al., 2012).

Nine participants agreed to take part in the project. Three of them had no qualifications before they achieved their *Access to HE* diploma; one student had professional qualifications at level seven (postgraduate study). Of the nine one student dropped out of her course in millinery after the first interview. Of the remaining sample five participants had chosen to study at the art college full time, these were two women and three men. Their ages ranged from late 20s to mid-50s. Three students had chosen to study at a local Higher Education Institute (HEI) these were all women in their late 40s to early 50s. Two had decided to study part time and one full time. One of the part time students was the only none-white student in the sample.

For the purposes of this paper Chad's narrative has been treated as a case study in order to illustrate some of the tensions between acting with practical wisdom and higher education in art and design. Chad was a post-*Access* student studying on a *BA (Hons) Surface Pattern* degree course. Surface pattern designers are concerned with designing for surfaces and embellishments which could include wallpapers, fabrics, flooring, and packaging. She was a mature student in her early 40s and was undertaking a very competitive course (with a yearly intake of 60 students). This course attracted a large amount of applications and so the staff could be very selective in recruiting students, who were expected show high quality portfolios of design work at interview. Throughout the degree programme students were encouraged to enter design competitions and compete for 'live' briefs (real design briefs set by industry) in addition to their

studies. Chad was the first post-Access student to gain a place in five years. The college in which she studied could be described as a small specialist arts institution where the student body (1138 undergraduates in 2014) was not very diverse; for example male students made up 26 percent of the whole College student population. This was 11 percent less than the amount of male students who were studying across the Creative Arts and Design Sector (Equality Challenge Unit, 2015). Also the proportion of black, minority and ethnic students studying in the college was 7.5 percent whereas across the Creative Arts and Design Sector the proportion was 13.8 percent (Equality Challenge Unit, 2015). In 2014 7.6 percent of the College's students were over the age of 22 years old and could be defined as mature students. Therefore, the majority of the student body could be described as young, white and female.

Chad previously had a varied career in the Navy and as a flight assistant on a commercial airline. She began her degree with a small child to care for and lived with her husband who was in full-time employment. She told her story to me and I taped and transcribed it. Critical moments in her account were then identified and considered in relation to motherhood, practical wisdom and friendship. The themes of the project were fed back to the participants during a focus group at the end of the time span. The focus group agreed with the themes presented to them and reiterated that studying in higher education could be an 'emotional roller-coaster ride' which confirmed the role of the 'passions' in their educational experiences.

## **Findings**

The next section discusses Chad's story at three points in her educational journey. The first one was at the end of year one when Chad had developed a sense of belonging. A second meeting was when Chad had taken a year out of higher education. Chad's final narrative was shared with me during the end of her third year.

### **End of the first year**

Chad had completed the first year and had been successful in gaining good grades; however, she informed me that she was pregnant. Nussbaum (2001:305) has said that the phronimos should be open to life's surprises; be open and flexible in order to change a course of action to fit an unexpected situation. The question was now how would Chad deal with motherhood, pregnancy and a demanding course. This is an important because student- parents were over-represented amongst those groups facing disadvantage in higher education (NUS, 2009). It was also likely that student- parents would have to navigate around a range of difficulties in terms of retention, attainment and finances due in part to reconciling the conflicting demands of parenthood with

studying (Brooks, 2011, Hinton-Smith, 2012). Would Chad be motivated enough to remain at the college or would this be an extra burden that meant her dream to become a textile designer was untenable? She told me she intended to take a year out, but was already planning how to turn this into an opportunity to improve her own skills and abilities:

S: So do you intend to keep working on your design practice even though you're not here for this next year?

C: Two things I need to do are - I won't be producing any work but I will be collecting visual imagery on future projects. Getting some sketch ideas together to basically give myself more, more of a springboard for the second year so I've got more. I don't have to think too much about the projects because I'll have a . . . I'd like to have a collection of work for me to start the print-making projects. That's my first thing; the second one is to learn Illustrator and Photoshop.

S: Have you got those packages?

C: Yeah I've got those packages. I just haven't had the time to ... I'll try and do as much as I can when the baby comes along it's going to be difficult that's why I'm taking a year off because they just take over, babies take over. I said this on Access - that you can't do it. I have to take the time out it's just not possible, you're not ready to. ..You can't work and juggle that at the same time. (Chad, June 2012)

Chad dealt with this new occurrence by employing her practical wisdom. She planned activities that would be achievable in the time constraints she had. One activity she identified was undertaking visual research which she recognised would be important to later success on the course. She was able to deal with the surprise of pregnancy whilst still keeping her eye on her long term goal. Here her desire to be a textile designer and her desire to be a mother were woven together in order to ultimately live a good life. During Chad's deliberations she used her past experiences of caring for a new baby on her Access course to limit her expectations of what she could achieve during the year away from college. She gained an insight into her physical capabilities and knew it was prudent to take a year out even though she was afraid of starting again with a new group whom she did not know nor has not bonded with.

S: You don't have to start again at Year One?

C: You do with new people. I'll start the second year with completely new and they'll have established themselves as a group so it'll be more difficult for me to fit into that year. But my classmates in this particular year will be in third year and next door. It won't be so bad, my friends will be around so... (Chad, June 2012)

Chad demonstrated foresight in how she imagined her return, showing a concern for possibly feeling isolation. She tried to moderate her fear by seeing that she could position herself next to her old friends in the studio. An important aspect of prudence was being able to imagine a possible future whilst drawing upon past experiences, (Erben, 1998:10-11). Ricoeur (1994) would say that the ability to think narratively enabled Chad to weave the imagined future with the experienced past into a narrative unity, (Simms, 2003: 103). Chad had been able to make friends during her first year and recognised their importance in contributing to her successful future. However, she did not seem to have confidence that as she had already made friends with younger students, she would be able to bond again with a new cohort in a year's time.

## **Second year: out of college but still in education**

Chad had taken a year out from her course and had given birth to her baby who was now three months old. She came into college to catch up with her classmates in the college's canteen, but had slipped away to meet with me in a library tutorial room. She reflected back on the previous year's achievements. She said she was particularly proud of her essay which had got her highest mark of 75 per cent.

S: Good, so last time I saw you, you said you were going to spend time sorting out visual research files, did you do that?

C: No, I have got them - they are continuous - they are not something that I've put on the side-line. Files are there but he has to go to - nursery, as soon as we get Christmas over and done with - doing them on an evening as soon as he's going to goes to nursery. He goes in June for the odd day, till he gets to full-time in September. Then I'll get back on to *Personal Professional Practice* (PPP) and all the rest but I've got loads of stuff in the pipeline especially with my friends. Still I got lots of friends off this course -



they're keeping me up to date with what's going on and what's needed for the next year, which is lovely and it gives me . . . I won't feel so bad about going back, I won't feel as rusty because I've already got a couple of projects in mind for things we have to do like the *Priceless and Worthless* competition. I've already got something in mind for that. You know, I kind of like getting my head round going back already. I can't leave it to the last minute, my files are all part of that. Get on with them once Christmas cards are written. (Chad, December 2012)

Chad was still planning and thinking about her education. She was planning the next few months in advance with a view to returning in the next September. She wove her research with her domestic role; with writing Christmas cards. It was interesting that Chad drew upon the experience of others in order to plan for her future projects. Inherent in her narrative was to be well-prepared when she returned as she was not sure how she would manage her course with two young children. Chad made some good friends in her year group:

C: They text me all the time. I was really busy at one point and I wasn't in touch with them for a couple of weeks and they were worried. They kept sending me a succession of text messages, all of them, Lorraine, Vicky, Ryan, Sophie, Eleanor, all of them. "What's the matter, are you alright?" So I missed them more than anything. I missed the class more than anything and I'm kind of apprehensive about going back because again I'm starting from scratch. (Chad, December 2012)

Chad's friends were acting for her well-being. They showed concern for Chad when they were out of touch and at this point in the Chad's narrative they were willing to share information so that she could be prepared for when she returned to college during the next year.

### **End of third year**

The final meeting with Chad was in May 2014 at the end of her second year. She had successfully returned to College and had managed her domestic situation whilst meeting the deadlines for coursework. However, she seemed to have lost weight and to have lost a little of her sparkle.

C: I am determined and enjoy designing but it is impossible to weave it into the rest of your life. I should be enjoying it but its deadline after deadline

after deadline. I am not 20 years old – I would never take on five or six deadlines at once – you have to be discerning. It's not as bad for the young ones. (Chad, May 2014, 6<sup>th</sup> Interview)

Chad made the point that through her experience of life she knew what she could manage. But when on a course deadlines were set by people who did not consider her other commitments and responsibilities. She had lost the agency to act with prudence when managing her workload. She imagined that the pressure was less for the 'young people', but this may not have been the case.

C: They are happy to keep me up at night. We get given deadline dates well in advance which is fine. But then they give us loads of other tasks. Like the 3000 word essay I finished at 3.30am the night before. I am sure the neighbours think there is something strange going on at our house as the spare bedroom light is always on until the small hours. I creep to bed so I don't wake my husband; he is tired and has to get up early. This is driving him mad. There is no point talking to the tutors because I will only cry and the work still has to be done. I don't want an extension and I don't want to lose marks.

Nana's in hospital – broken her hip – and I 'm the only relative in the area so I visit her and watch the kids as well – What the hell! (Chad, May 2014)

The tutors were not seen as being flexible and an almost antagonistic attitude towards them was beginning to develop. Chad's workload seemed to be impacting on the rest of the family. When another of life's unexpected events happened and her Nan broke her hip I wondered how long Chad could keep up with the pressure. Lack of prudence could be seen in Chad's reluctance to ask for help from her tutors. By not asking for help she would continue to suffer the stresses of her situation.

C: I have to put my all into it because I made a big decision to come here. I have chosen to have a family and come here. I just hope I get a job at the end of it ... I worry because the course leader favours those who want to move to London and abroad - we get lectures where he says you have to be prepared to move far away as a designer. (Chad, May 2014)

Chad rehearsed the reasons why she must succeed; she was mindful of the difficult path she had chosen. She reminded herself it was her decision to do the course. She was also concerned

about the course leader's expectations which appeared to be aimed at younger people with no families.

C: The work I have produced is ok the lowest mark I got is 65 and also 70, 71 and 72.50 but it is taking it out of me. This is the only thing I can control, the only thing I can do well. The dissertation is already started – I need to fine tune the title. I enjoy that bit I wish I had more time. (Chad, May 2014)

The last interview echoed issues to do with choice and control. She enjoyed her academic work and in spite of being pushed for time she had already started her dissertation. She really engaged with this aspect of the course but that was in contrast to *Personal Professional Practice (PPP)* which was a module where students prepared for professional life. Chad already had had many jobs previously so there were aspects of PPP she was very familiar with and repeating them was something that she found facile and unchallenging.

C: I am a great researcher but research for *Personal Professional Practice* is a pain, I don't feel there is a use for it. It's about a good interview and portfolio. I might go to the graphic design students to get my CV done. It needs to be slick. *Personal Professional Practice* is a bit rushed; lots of silly little tasks. It's too much amongst other tasks more add-ons, keeping you on your toes. (Chad, May 2014)

Chad did not feel that PPP was a worthwhile activity; also it was delivered through lots of small tasks that contributed to her feeling of pressure. It was interesting that Chad considered getting her Curriculum Vitae presented by someone who had typography skills; it is here she was able to think outside the box. It was part of the art and design culture that people collaborated and Chad identified this as a solution to her problem. The academic year seemed to have been very hard for her.

C: I am not giving up. This is my path - something is making me stay and not give up. At the moment it's not easy it's hard on Access students. It is hard for 21 year olds and a lot harder for adult students. When you get older the difficulties are your choice, when you are younger they are imposed on you. Older people make choices but you can't make a choice on this course you just have to do it. (Chad, May 2014)

The last comment that Chad made raised some pertinent questions. What was it that kept her on course? Her own personal capacities for resilience; the personal investment she had made in

terms of time and also lost time with her family; was it a strong desire to achieve and be a designer? The demands of the course were seen as inflexible, 'you just have to do it' and this seemed to be diminishing her adulthood; her ability to make choices. It was also interesting that she still defined herself as an 'Access student' as if that identity was still with her; she still viewed herself as being different from the other students on her course.

## **Discussion**

For Ricoeur, (1994:180) phronesis aimed at the ethical intention of, 'the good life with and for others in just institutions', where people of practical wisdom were of good character and were concerned with friendship, justice, courage, moderation and generosity. It could be seen that the practices of Chad's friends had been motivated by these virtues in determining the correct course of action, which was to support Chad through her year out (Nussbaum, 2001:306). Ricoeur (1994:184-189) explored the possibility of mutual friendship between self and other, seeing the relationship as fragile. However at one point in the narrative, even though Chad thought of herself as different to the 'younger students,' they did have a bond that stood the test of separation. Her friends took time out of a competitive and busy course to share their experiences with her. This was a generous and moral thing to do. It also could be seen as a democratic act where those on the margins are included (Bernstein, 2000:xx). Students could find courage to empower themselves through the bonds of friendship, (Duckworth 2014:184). The social networks and experiences they encountered could allow them to go beyond their previous experiences which had often resulted in symbolic violence and trauma, (Duckworth 2014:184). Chad demonstrated foresight in how she imagined her return to education after a year at home, showing a concern for possibly feeling isolated. She recognised the importance of the social aspects of the studio culture. Indeed the first year had been about establishing that she belonged on the course both academically and socially. Vallerand, (1997: 300) has defined a sense of belonging as being connected to the institution and feeling that one is accepted as part of the social milieu. Being included is a significant prerequisite of a democratic education, (Bernstein, 2000:xxi). As the only mature or 'non-traditional' student in this cohort there was a danger of not feeling a subjective sense of belonging (Thomas, 2012). Chad had been successful not just academically but also in establishing a group of friends.

She tried to moderate her fear of future isolation by seeing that she could position herself next to her old friends in the studio. Ricoeur (1994) would say that the ability to think narratively

enabled Chad to weave the imagined future with the experienced past into a narrative unity, (Simms, 2003:103). Chad was able to make friends during her first year and recognised their importance in contributing to her successful future. However, she did not seem to have the confidence that as she had already made friends with younger students one year, she would also be able to bond with a new body of students in the next. And whilst she had seen herself as part of a group she still at the same time presented herself as different being an older student. Chad had internalised the 'symbolic violence' described by Duckworth (2013) where people were categorised by being different to the majority, for example as being a mature student, and this made them feel lesser or inadequate. An imagined normative and generalised other, (Holdsworth and Morgan, 2007) had been constructed by Chad by which she could judge herself and find herself lacking.

During the last meeting Chad did not refer to her friends explicitly again, nor did she mention their names. When she referred to others on the course they were generalised as 'the younger students'. Perhaps this supported Ricoeur's assertion that friendship between self and others was fragile, thus the pressured context of the course might not always support it.

## **Conclusions**

Chad believed that she did belong on the course and had made good friends with the other students. However, within her narrative there was also a fear of not making new friends after she had taken a year away from her education to have her baby. Fear was an emotion that seemed to stymie her ability to think and act with practical wisdom, thus she was reluctant to ask for help when she was struggling for fear of losing marks. This seemed to be an unrealistic assumption as she had done well previously, and there was no evidence that asking for help would be detrimental to her achievement. The sacrifices Chad and her family had made so she could study were recounted in the narrative. It could have been the burden of these big decisions that was the cause of Chad's fear of failure.

Chad was able to act well in response to her pregnancy by drawing upon her previous experience of motherhood on her Access course. She also was able to imagine her future needs when she returned to education in terms of the friends to support her and the skills she could learn.

Although Aristotle had said that it was unlikely that young people could act with practical wisdom due to their lack of life experience, this was partly challenged by the actions of Chad's friends. They supported her through her year out and shared their own educational experiences

with her so that she would succeed when she returned to the course. This was an example of acting well for others that could be seen as an inclusive and democratic moment of Chad's educational experience.

Within Chad's account she mentioned people other than students and teachers. When she was planning her work it was clear she considered her family (children, husband and Nana). Success on the course was part of Chad's desire to live a good life with her family whilst being a designer.

The final meeting revealed Chad to be under a lot of pressure, she believed there are too many tasks to do and she could not see the value in some of them. It was at this point she seemed to be unable to act with phronesis. Her sufferings were likely to continue until she asked for help. There was a sense that she has lost her sense of agency; that being on a degree course meant she just has to comply with the assessment regime even if she felt the work load was unreasonable. She referred to the other students as the 'younger ones' rather than named individuals as if her relationships had shifted to ones of competition rather than of friendship.

The method of narrative inquiry, carried out over three years, revealed how Chad thought about and responded to various issues over time. The consequences or impact of her actions were also suggested from her narratives, for example how making friends helped her stay on her programme of study. In some instances the ways in which she responded to the ever changing demands made on her from family and her educators were illuminated. It showed that phronesis, as a means of coping with the difficulties of being a mature student, was only at times possible. Good deliberation by the student was occasionally impeded by the processes and regulations of higher education. Chad's friends were definitely important, in not only making her feel she belonged on the programme, but also in maintaining her engagement with her studies when she was pregnant. The friendships were inter-generational; Chad being in her early 40s and the other students being in their early 20s and this would have added to the richness of their learning experiences.

Chad used the process of telling her story about her experiences as a means of re-establishing what her hopes and dreams were in relation to why she was studying to be a textile designer. Part of the re-counting of her story was that she sometimes needed to modify her life plan; her future aspirations in order to cope with the aporias (contradictions and uncertainties) of time. The constant restating of her ultimate goals associated with the sacrifices she had made seemed to help Chad keep motivated when her education became challenging. Her educational

experiences did not seem to increase her confidence in her own abilities in spite of doing well as seen from the range of marks she had achieved. Her story began by being quite optimistic about her situation; however the later narrative became more critical of some of the processes of higher education. In particular, Chad's sense of agency as seen through her ability to practice phronesis seemed to be diminished. The marks at level five contributed towards the final degree classification so this could have added to Chad's anxiety about achieving on her course. It seemed that as the demands of life and her education caused Chad to be fearful and unconfident her ability to practice phronesis was diminished; she was not able to temper her 'passions' so she could see her aptitudes and achievements clearly.

Evidence of transformation or self-development did not come through strongly in her story, she remained uncertain; perceiving herself to be different from 'the younger ones.' She referred to herself an Access to HE student rather than an undergraduate which suggests that her identity as a non-traditional student was deep-rooted.

Further work is still needed on identifying the ways educators could encourage and celebrate phronesis or wise judgments so that students feel they have agency over their own learning. It seems that the confidence needed to be a self-directed learner, one of the aims of higher education, can be diminished, if a student feels under pressure to succeed whilst managing other responsibilities like parenthood. Strategies need to be devised to enable students to share their anxieties with staff and peers without being made to feel they are failing. Accepting a mix of students with different educational histories and ages onto a design degree can facilitate intergenerational friendships; the impact of this on their creativity and innovation needs to be investigated further.

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