

# LEARNING TRANSITIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

DAVID SCOTT

GWYNETH HUGHES

CAROL EVANS

PENNY JANE BURKE

CATHERINE WALTER

DAVID WATSON



# Learning Transitions in Higher Education

*Also by David Scott*

EDUCATION, EPISTEMOLOGY AND CRITICAL REALISM

RESEARCHING EDUCATION (*co-author*)

CRITICAL ESSAYS ON MAJOR CURRICULUM THEORISTS

KEY IDEAS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH (*co-author*)

*Also by Gwyneth Hughes*

IPSATIVE ASSESSMENT: Learning and Progress through a Comparison with Self

*Also by Penny Jane Burke*

THE RIGHT TO HIGHER EDUCATION: Beyond Widening Participation

RECONCEPTUALIZING LIFELONG LEARNING: Feminist Interventions  
(*co-author*)

*Also by David Watson*

THE QUESTION OF MORALE: Managing Happiness and Unhappiness in University Life

LEARNING THROUGH LIFE: Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning  
(*co-author*)

MANAGING CIVIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# Learning Transitions in Higher Education

David Scott

*Institute of Education, University of London, UK*

Gwyneth Hughes

*Institute of Education, University of London, UK*

Carol Evans

*University of Exeter, UK*

Penny Jane Burke

*University of Sussex, UK*

Catherine Walter

*University of Oxford, UK*

David Watson

*Green Templeton College, UK*

palgrave  
macmillan



© David Scott, Gwyneth Hughes, Carol Evans, Penny Jane Burke,  
Catherine Walter and David Watson 2014  
Foreword © Mary Stiasny 2014

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2014 978-1-137-32211-1

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The authors have asserted their rights to be identified as the authors of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2014 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-45830-1      ISBN 978-1-137-32212-8 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1057/9781137322128

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

# Contents

<i>Foreword by Mary Stiasny</i>	vi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	viii
1 Introduction	1
2 The Four Transitions	12
3 Transitions – Attributes, Essences and Distinctions	38
4 Learning Careers	54
5 Identities, Pathologies and Power Relations	74
6 Widening Participation and Academic Literary Practices	95
7 Assessment Careers	106
8 Feedback and Feed-Forward Strategies	127
9 Participatory and Transformative Learning Pedagogies	146
10 Pedagogies for Transitions	165
<i>Annex One: Methodologies and Research Approaches</i>	191
<i>References</i>	197
<i>Author Index</i>	209
<i>Subject Index</i>	214

# Foreword

This innovative and original book is the result of an exciting research project which had at its inception a discussion by a group of colleagues about the importance of the learning and assessment process for postgraduate students, each of whom has a learning and assessment career. Our students make numerous transitions during their learning careers, and as they do so, some are more successful than others, and some find the transitions easier than others.

We wanted to explore this process further and wanted, crucially, to ask the students themselves for their views and experiences. We were aware that all students make transitions – all learners have learning and assessment careers – but we were also acutely conscious that we could identify some very particular and characteristic groups who have specific transitions to make. This is the characteristic of the student community we decided to focus on. Only by understanding more about how this process feels for each group can we facilitate and enable easier and more productive transitions.

One group who come from subject specialist first degrees to highly focused applied and vocational courses are graduates now training to be teachers. They have a particular transition to make and have to navigate the new learning and assessment patterns of this transition effectively and efficiently in order to be successful. Our international students are already expert learners in their own culturally pedagogical contexts, and they come to us to study for postgraduate degrees, having to make what is often a major transition in their understanding of learning and assessment styles.

Students from non-traditional backgrounds who come to us to take postgraduate degrees have successfully negotiated a learning career, but we wanted to explore whether they find the transition to postgraduate study a particular challenge, especially as this transition story is so rarely the focus of support in postgraduate institutions, while being a major focus in undergraduate contexts. And, finally, many of our postgraduate students study part-time, having completed first degrees as full-timers. We wanted to explore whether this is a transition which has characteristic features, while recognising that the concept of part-time is one which is difficult to define.

We are grateful to the Higher Education Academy for awarding us funding for the project under the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme Project Strand Initiative and for enabling this work to take place. It has been a real experience of collaboration, between colleagues, between institutions and between staff and students. We hope this project will increase public recognition of the importance of focusing on and developing ideas about taught postgraduate study, which has so often been treated as the poor relation of policy thinking in the United Kingdom. This publication is an important contribution to our knowledge and understanding about how student groups navigate and manage their learning careers. In understanding this better, we can help to provide effective and productive learning experiences for the students in our institutions.

*Mary Stiasny*  
*Pro-Director, Learning and International,*  
*Institute of Education, University of London,*  
*April 2013*



# Acknowledgements

This book emanated from a research project formally located within the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme Project Strand Initiative, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and managed by the Higher Education Academy. The project was the combined work of members of staff from colleges of the University of London: the Institute of Education (IOE), the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM); and the University of Oxford, Roehampton University and the University of Exeter. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the work of Mary Stiasny, Mandy Bentham, Sharon Huttly and Danielle Naoum in the project. We would also like to thank all of the participants in the project who willingly gave their time and effort, but who must remain, for reasons of confidentiality, anonymous. All participants' names in this book are pseudonyms.

# 1

## Introduction

The concept of a learning transition is increasingly being used in higher education to identify key stages such as the first-year undergraduate experience and progression from undergraduate to postgraduate study. This book focuses on such transitions and suggests, firstly, that the notion of a transition is under-theorised and, secondly, that movements between these stages are complex and entwined with a range of other transitions. Current learning, teaching and assessment approaches do not take into account the range of student experiences of transitions and tend to focus on the here and now. In this book, we draw on a study of student transitions that we conducted both to unpack the concept of transition and to develop pedagogic strategies to enable learners to progress their learning careers. Furthermore, we focus on issues that are now central to the concerns of higher education researchers and policy-makers, those of teaching, learning and assessment. These are not fully understood, with the result that inadequate and inappropriate models are used in research accounts and policy forums.

We suggest here that student experiences need to be understood in context, and not through disconnected and decontextualised technologies, such as the various types of student satisfaction surveys currently in use. We set out to theorise the practice of student learning transitions in real-life settings and as episodes in their learning and assessment careers. In doing this, we examined five teaching and learning modes related to learning transitions: identity transformations, academic literacy practices, transformational pedagogies, assessments for learning and feedback mechanisms. This allowed us to develop new and alternative teaching and learning approaches for facilitating student transitions at this level.

## 2 *Learning Transitions in Higher Education*

We focused then on the experiences of postgraduate students at Master's level in a range of institutions and settings. At the outset we identified four groups of students, mindful all the time that the boundaries we set between each of these groups, and the subsequent attributions we gave to these groups, were in the first place approximations to how they constructed their lives and, secondly, became increasingly problematic as we learnt more and developed richer theories about transitional processes. These four groups were: a group of students with undergraduate degrees from a range of pure disciplines undertaking a postgraduate certificate of education (PGCE) programme in preparation for a professional career; a group of full-time international students studying on a variety of Master's programmes who had not had previous residence in the United Kingdom; a group of part-time home students in full-time work who were enrolled on the first year of a Master's programme at a British university; and a group of students from non-standard backgrounds either full- or part-time, and therefore in either their study year or their first study year across the range of courses on a Master's programme at a British university (see Annex One for a full account of how we organised our study). Our contention is that learning transitions at this level have commonalities with other levels, such as research student postgraduate transitions and undergraduate transitions, though we have to be careful to take account of the specific circumstances in which those transitions play out in practice. We address in the final chapter issues of commonality and difference between the different types of learning transitions.

The book offers an account of a specific form of pedagogy (and therefore of learning), which we are calling transformational and participatory. The origins of this are twofold: the rich data we collected allowed us to make judgements about the viability, effectiveness and efficacy of different types of teaching and learning approaches; and philosophical deliberations about these matters reinforced this analysis. This transformational pedagogy takes account of, and indeed emerges from, understandings of the various contingencies of the postgraduate setting, that is, the heterogeneity of the student body, the need to accommodate the different purposes of postgraduate study, appropriate theories of learning (which also include ipsative and feed-forward assessment approaches), learning and assessment careers, and fundamentally, that pedagogic relations have to be understood in terms of learning transitions. For example, higher education pedagogy is now set within a bureaucratic frame of reference and this has serious implications for how teaching and learning is and can be conceived and more

importantly practised. In other words, it may not be possible to develop a transformational and participatory approach to teaching and learning without in the first place developing an understanding of all the salient factors in the setting, including transition processes. As a result, we developed a teaching and learning theory which is inclusive, responsive to the full range of factors in the environment, and also responsive to the role learning plays in the life-course.

## The discourse of teaching and learning

Writing about teaching and learning in the modern academy can be something of a hit and miss affair. On one end of the scale are all the initiatives to improve the student experience (especially in a context of increasing awareness about personal cost and investment): the drive to have higher education teachers professionally qualified (as in the United Kingdom's adoption through the Higher Education Academy of professional standards; cf. HEA, 2011); the efflorescence of teaching awards at institutional and at national level; the development of specialist teaching and learning units; the assignment of responsibility for teaching matters to senior staff at university, faculty and departmental level; the ubiquity of annual teaching and learning conferences; the emergence of specialist journals; the adoption of feedback and student satisfaction surveys; and the political drive for accountability for quality and intensity of teaching inputs and so on (see Bamber et al., 2009 for an overview). On the other end of the scale there is the growing, almost defeatist, claim that careers, institutional reputations, and above all success in access to competitive funding are all that counts; that, in the case of the United Kingdom, the periodic audits of research volume, quality, impact and environment are (in the words of a former government chief adviser) 'the only game in town' (Watson, 2011b: 23).

There is an irony here, in that as Steve Fuller and others have argued, both the historical origins and much of the modern development of the university have had, as a priority, instruction, education more widely, and the professional development of students. Research has been a means to an end more frequently than the reverse. In Basbøll and Fuller's (2008: 45) words:

I believe that the university is a social technology for manufacturing knowledge as a public good. This goal is most clearly realized the more that research – which is always in the first instance novel and

hence esoteric – is translated into teaching, and hence made available to people who had nothing to do with its original production and are likely to take that knowledge in directions other than those intended, or even desired, by the original researchers. This feat of epistemic justice is most obviously performed in the construction of curricular materials like course outlines, textbooks and other pedagogical devices.

Lee Shulman, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, has developed the powerful concept of the *signature pedagogy* to examine how the professions look at the ‘challenge of teaching people to understand, to act, and to be integrated into a complex way of knowing, doing and being’ (Shulman and Shulman, 2005: 231). He cites examples such as the clinical ward round, the law school case conference, the engineering project, the priestly apprenticeship and so on. This can, we believe, be expanded to cover the primary goals of whole higher education institutions in differing eras and contexts. Broadly, seven major pedagogical styles and techniques can be identified. They flex and overlap between each other.

The first is *dogmatic instruction*. This is fundamentally organised around a holy book or books and the associated commentary and exegesis. The modal inspiration is perhaps the educational parts of the sixth-century *Rule of St Benedict*, based as it is on humility and unhesitating obedience. The curriculum is holy reading and prayer, and during Lent each monk ‘is to receive a book from the Library, and is to read the whole of it straight through’ (Fry, 1982: 28–9, 70). Later on such discipline could be adapted as a style for secular purposes, as in Marxist–Leninist orthodoxy, or even some curricula developed in the wake of claims made by scholarly prophets or leaders. Most contemporary institutions with a religious dogmatic intent (e.g. the *madrassahs* of the sub-continent) are, however, now regarded as outside the family of higher education.

The second style was also present at the creation of the modern university and points to members of an expert group or profession (whether or not they act as Adam Smith’s ‘conspiracy against the public’). In the modern era this leads to *expert credentialism*, as in a licence to practice or to charge for services. The contemporary guardians of this arena are generally outside the academy, in the Professional and Statutory bodies (see e.g. *The Framework of European Standards for Degrees in Nursing*). A familiar teaching tool here is the use of case studies or simulations of decision-making or action in the real world.

Meanwhile, as an essential part of the liberal, emancipatory, theory of higher education, a pedagogical style develops which could be called *individual self-discovery*. The goal here is for the individual learner to achieve an independent point of view, and a personal voice. Ron Barnett captures the letting go, or the leap, that this implies, in his *A Will to Learn: The pedagogical challenge* [emphasis in the original] lies in the student's will being so formed that she wills herself to go forward into those spaces which may challenge her being itself' (Barnett, 2007: 155). For a long time the key here lay in a close personal reading of the classics (religious and secular), of great books in general, and the construction of both canons of literature and idiosyncratic interdisciplinary collections of study like Oxford University's *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* (PPE) course, soon to be challenged as an *ensemble* by the new Blavatnik School of Government's Master's degree in Public Policy. In the United States the inspirational equivalent is the Harvard University core; a pattern of requirements that has been constantly tinkered with and overhauled in the modern era (Watson, 2007: 142–4).

The Socratic method and the fetishisation of the *tutorial method* play their part regularly (cf. Palfreyman, 2008). Oxford University, which has built a promotional strategy around one-to-one (or at least very small group) teaching, directed by senior scholars, finds it hard to acknowledge that this is by no means uniformly delivered to undergraduates. Meanwhile, historically, it is equally unpalatable to have to acknowledge that the modern system began as a form of cramming (by private tutors, usually away from the College) to allow ill-educated middle- and upper-class students to pass examinations, including those set for the Indian Civil Service. To be irresponsibly anachronistic, at its point of modern re-invention it was a species of 'dumbing down' (Harvie, 1976: 54–9). What really seems to count for students in this pedagogical context is personal feedback on written and other work, especially in the context of formative assessment. This is something around which the Open University has structured both its teacher-training and its learning strategy, even though the communication is technologically mediated, and there are significant differences between it and Oxford. It may also partly explain why the Open University does so well on key aspects of student satisfaction recorded in the United Kingdom's National Student Survey (NSS).

A more programmatic form of external engagement reaches its height in the North American enthusiasm for *service learning*, or using the resources of the surrounding community for learning scenarios (cf. McIlrath and MacLabhrainn, 2007: 65–82, 103–70). At one end of

the spectrum lies volunteering (whether or not from an expert base), as well as for course credit; at the other lies the educational goal of deep but temporary immersion in the dilemmas of particular groups in civil society.

Service-learning can, however, be less structured than another long-standing approach: Deweyite *learning by doing*. The *Practicum* has a long and honourable tradition in professional higher education in particular, often involving supervised but live practice, and sometimes overlapping with periods of probationary service, after graduation but before full qualification. Sandwich courses, with periods in industry, or what is called in the United States cooperative learning, play a distinctive part here. Each of these so far incorporates a mix of methods of inquiry, which can often be elevated to the level of *research apprenticeship*, whether in the care techniques of the sciences, social sciences or arts and humanities.

Finally, for many, especially in the modern world, graduation is not the sole target, or the final outcome. Post-compulsory education and training has become a much more flexible and messy affair, achieving its goals for many through complex patterns of *life-long learning*. Here, qualifications and part-qualifications need not be sequential or connected, in subject or level. They can be chosen, or prescribed for tactical, strategic or entirely serendipitous reasons (Schuller and Watson, 2009).

It should be noted that these pedagogical interventions (i.e. dogmatic instruction, expert credentialism, self-discovery, service learning, the practicum, research apprenticeship and life-long learning), as well as their curricular content, do not map directly onto the developing array of instructional environments and teaching techniques. This is especially true of the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). It has been noted above that the tutorial can just as easily be conducted down a line and asynchronously as from an arm chair and face-to-face. What began as basically the use of new technologies (like correspondence and broadcast) to attract new types of students (particularly, heroic, later in life, second-chancers) shifted to become a mainstream mode of delivery for established and conventional universities. Thus, for example, the British Open University has moved its basic platform from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to the Internet-based iTunes (Watson et al., 2011: 171–2); the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has evolved its simple publication of course material online to a sophisticated programme of custom-designed and assessment-friendly materials (see MIT OpenCourseWare); and institutions across the reputational range are lining up to join the

Coursera Network. The latter now claims over one million registrations (although the organisers acknowledge that many of these will simply be browsing), followed by its rival Udacity (home of Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs) at nearly three-quarters of a million (Young, 2012).

Another profound influence is the developing relationships between students of various types and those who are responsible for designing their academic and professional experience. Alongside the horizontal, or synchronic, tensions and dilemmas raised by external and internal pressures, universities also face a vertical, or diachronic, challenge arising from the relations between the generations. This is the theme of Heller and D'Ambrosio's *Generational Shockwaves* (2008). Here on one level, 'the faculty sometimes lags behind their students in technological prowess' (*ibid.*: 4); on another, technologically adept faculty can be frustrated by how superficial and easily satisfied their charges can be. It is surprising how rare an exercise this juxtaposition of the lived worlds of the teachers and the taught is in the conventional higher educational literature. Not very long ago this was a major concern of those working with undergraduates; now it is a significant factor in postgraduate education, including several of the cases probed in the subsequent chapters.

## Learning transitions: Conspectus

The structure of the book is as follows. In Chapter 2, we focus on the four groups of students that are our principal concern and begin the process of making sense of these categorisations. They are, however, imposed attributions; they are expressions of commonalities and differences between students, but undeveloped accounts of how those students actually structure their lives. Furthermore, they are embryonic attempts at trying to understand commonalities and differences and are therefore superseded in the book by, we hope, richer and deeper understandings of these different transitional groups.

Chapter 3 focuses on those transitions which are relevant to postgraduate study and their characteristics. These characteristics include the following: the transition's structure/agency relations; its compliance capacity in relation to formal rules, regulations and norms; movement through time; the extent of its cultural embeddedness; the transition's pathologising capacity; its position in the life-course; its focus; how knowledge is constructed during the transition; and how the transition relates to some end-point. We also focus in this chapter on transitions as they relate to moments in the development of the reason-giving capacity of the learner.



It is widely agreed in the literature that *life-long learning* is not a sequence of learning events from cradle to grave; that the social context in which learning takes place is significant; and that learning is not just a cognitive process but is socially mediated. A longitudinal perspective on learning which incorporates past as well as present learning experiences and contexts is needed and we use the notion of *learning career* to capture this. The relationship between being a learner and other aspects of a learner's past and present life in a learning career is complex and cannot be understood without consideration of the way the learner constructs their identity and how this changes over time. It might appear that within a learning career, the concept of a clear transition, or stage, becomes redundant. Yet, key transitional *stages* have been identified. The danger here is viewing these stages as discrete and separate. Viewing such transitions from within a learning career means that we can argue that they are not discrete or uniformly experienced, but fluid and variable. Embarking on postgraduate studies can be viewed as a key transitional part of a longitudinal learning career in which particular intellectual, social and emotional challenges are likely to arise. This is the central theme of Chapter 4.

In Chapter 5, we examine the important idea of identity formation, which assumes a particular shape in relation to transitional activities. Students are positioned within: official rules and arrangements of resources; stories, narratives, arguments and chronologies; structures of agency; and discursive structures, all of which has implications for particular transitions. The student is placed within these arrangements (which are not static but changing) and has to find their way through them. And within the appropriation of these rules and many others is a notion of identity as a student. This never imposes in any absolute sense on the student; however, the person who actively seeks an identity as a student works to these rules and arrangements of resources. In doing this, the student brings to the process previous identities, knowledge constructs, skills, dispositions and so on, and thus the process of identity formation we are referring to here is an overlay.

In Chapter 6, we examine notions of academic literacy, and practices of writing. Particular constructions of *academic knowledge* regulate what can be claimed and who can claim certain meanings in their writing. Knowledge that is seen as subjective or personal is at risk of being discounted and there are certain rules of the game that must be adhered to if a student is going to succeed in higher education. Other bodies of knowledge that the student might bring to their work are often invalidated if the student cannot construct that knowledge to fit in with the

expectations of the institutional assessment frameworks. For example, students are often required to frame their understanding not in terms of practical or professional knowledge but in relation to academic knowledge or the field. Complex processes of selection and regulation are rendered invisible through discourses of writing as skill or technique.

We are suggesting that approaches to teaching writing in higher education tend to construct writing in mechanistic ways. Students who are said to have problems with their writing are often advised to seek additional help through remediation programmes, such as academic writing and study skills courses. In this model, writing is often constructed as a set of techniques that are separate from methodological concerns and that can be straightforwardly taught to those individual students seen as having poor literacy skills. It tends to be embedded in a deficit construction of students seen as lacking the appropriate understanding and skill. Those who struggle to express their understanding in the privileged frameworks are often reconstituted as weak and at risk students. Such discourses often make problematic and flawed links between widening participation and the lowering of standards. Such approaches have the effect of re/locating issues of access and participation with the individual student's writing, rather than understanding that particular literacy practices narrow who can be recognised as a legitimate author and student in higher education.

In Chapter 7, we focus on assessment practices at the postgraduate level. There is a growing recognition that assessment is an area where learners at all levels express dissatisfaction, and this has prompted an interest in the relationship between assessment and learning. There is evidence that assessment regimes have a significant impact on learners because assessment drives both learning and motivation. Learners are motivated both by external rewards such as grades and by personal development in the subject or discipline. Assessment is rarely seen in the wider context of the student's prior experience, external influences and identity transformations. Much of the research work focuses on students' immediate and out of context experiences of assessment and feedback. We are concerned here to redress the balance and thus to locate assessment practices as significant parts of a learning career. A focus on an assessment career highlights an underlying problem with many assessment regimes: that assessments are undertaken on a piecemeal basis and that there is little continuity. Feedback tends to focus on the immediate task and, not surprisingly, rarely includes feedback to future assessments. Meanwhile, any impact of feedback on a learner's performance is rarely monitored as part of an assessment career.

We suggest in this chapter that ipsative assessment (assessment which is based on a learner's previous performance), which is cumulative over time, might provide an alternative to the dominant model of feedback which is directed by immediate marking criteria and standards.

In Chapter 8, we continue this theme by examining feed-forward and feedback mechanisms that are central to learning and thus to the learning careers of students. There is a growing literature on the key role that assessment has in learning at all levels and we would therefore expect assessment to be relevant in the transition to taught postgraduate study. The significance of formative feedback in higher education has been widely discussed and our study provides some useful further evidence on effective practice in both giving and receiving feedback which is particularly applicable to postgraduate learners. Key issues discussed in this chapter are the role of dialogue in feedback, the usability of formative feedback, the relative value of feed-forward compared to feedback activities, the emotional dimension of feedback mechanisms, and the roles of students and tutors in the giving and receiving of feedback and the self-monitoring of their progress.

In the penultimate chapter our central concern is learning, and in particular, participatory and transformative learning pedagogies. Each and every learning episode has a series of elements: a determination of the circumstances in which learning can take place in the specific environment; a set of resources and technologies to allow that learning to take place; a particular type of relationship between teacher and learner to effect that learning; a theory of learning, that is, an account of how the learning (expressed as a knowledge set, skill or disposition/inclination) can be assimilated; and a further account of how the learning which has taken place in a particular set of circumstances, for example, in an institution of higher education, with a set of learners, in a particular way, with a particular theory of learning underpinning it and so forth, can transfer to environments in other places and times.

Learning can be theorised as a process, with a range of characteristics. It has a set of pedagogic relations; that is, it incorporates a relationship between a learner and a catalyst, which could be a person, an object in nature, an artefact, a particular array of resources, an allocation of a role or function to a person, a text or a sensory object. A change process is required, either internal to the learner or external to the community of which this learner is a member. Each learning episode has socio-historical roots. What is learnt in the first place is formed in society and outside the individual. It is shaped by the life that the person is leading. It is thus both externally and internally mediated,

and the form taken is determined by whether the process is cognitive, affective, meta-cognitive, connative or expressive. Finally, learning has an internalisation element, where what is formally external to the learner is interiorised by the learner, and a performative element, where what is formally internal to the learner is exteriorised by the learner in the world.

Participatory pedagogical approaches help to support the processes of developing a sense of postgraduate student identity and of fitting in and belonging to a shared community of learning. The literature and our research data highlight the importance of recognition, identity and a sense of belonging. The development of *participatory pedagogies* helps to address these issues. Participatory pedagogies are underpinned by explicit sets of social justice principles and ethical starting points. In practice, this might involve, for example, that teachers and students initiate their pedagogical relationship with an explicit plan of the ways they will work together, ethically, critically and inclusively. This might also involve a commitment to creating interactive spaces for learning and teaching, where different forms of knowledge and experience might be drawn on and made available to help illuminate and make accessible the disciplinary or subject knowledge at the heart of the course. And in addition, there may be a need for an explicit discussion of the different perspectives, backgrounds and forms of knowledge of the participants whilst also subjecting them to critical reflection in collaborative learning processes. Participatory pedagogies understand concerns with curriculum and assessment as parts of pedagogical practices and relations, not as separate entities. Thus, these pedagogies are concerned not only with explicit practices of teaching and learning, but also with the construction of knowledge, competing knowledge perspectives, and the ways that learning and meaning might be assessed to support pedagogical and meaning-making processes (cf. Burke, 2012).

We conclude the book by focusing on suitable pedagogies for facilitating student transitions. Having in previous chapters suggested that student experiences need to be understood in the contexts in which they took place, and not through disconnected and decontextualised technologies such as the various types of student satisfaction surveys currently being used, we have set out to theorise the practice of student learning transitions in real-life settings and as moments in their learning and assessment careers. This allowed us to develop new and alternative pedagogies for facilitating student transitions at this level.

# 2

## The Four Transitions

The four transitions we are considering here are: movement from a pure to an applied disciplinary context, from an international to a British national context, from full-time work to full-time work and part-time study, and from an historically under-represented background in higher education to an academic setting. The first of these transitions refers to students who, having taken a first degree in a non-applied subject such as physics or philosophy, then undertake a higher degree with an applied orientation. Movement is from a disciplinary base with an agreed set of methodologies and approaches to a new practice-based orientation. The group of students we chose for this strand were participants on a PGCE and were therefore training to be teachers; all of whom already had a first degree in a non-applied discipline. The second refers to the gap between an international student's expectations about learning, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment and British higher education approaches to these matters. The third transition involves the addition of part-time study responsibilities to full-time work. Students may encounter a number of problems in making this transition, including those related to time, energy and commitment. And the fourth transition refers to those students who are undertaking Master's-level study, but whose previous study and life patterns are different from those associated with 'standard' routes into postgraduate study.

Students undergoing these single or multiple transitions are now common in British higher education institutions. A key issue for learner progression and success is the transition between differently structured learning environments; and this may be particularly difficult for students moving across disciplines, across national boundaries, through work intensification (from full-time work to full-time work and part-time study) and from non-typical backgrounds.

## **Professional knowledge**

The first of these transitions refers to students who, having taken a first degree in a non-applied or pure subject, then undertake a higher degree with an applied orientation. Movement is from a disciplinary orientation to a practice orientation. Disciplinary knowledge-construction involves the student in being inducted into a disciplinary practice which is well established in the university. The student, if successful in the practice, engages in a form of self-examination. This involves the student in reflecting on those theoretical and methodological frameworks through which they understand reality and more closely aligning themselves with those which characterise their chosen discipline or sub-discipline. The rules of the discipline, in this ideal model, are based on a set of criteria for evaluating knowledge, a set of definitional criteria which includes and excludes what is considered proper knowledge, and a set of methodological criteria through which an initiate operates – a set of procedures which delineates a practitioner from a non-practitioner. An indifference is shown to other forms of practice, whether they be other disciplines or the practicum. The practicum is the source for theoretical deliberation, but the discipline retains its role as the ultimate arbiter of knowledge claims; those knowledge claims being classificatory, evaluative and methodological. A disciplinary practice changes over time because some players in the game are substituted for others, and because the rules of the game develop and evolve. These rules may be invisible and tacit or formally codified and explicit. Success is achieved when those rules are internalised and the student is initiated into the discipline.

This can be contrasted with a different form of knowledge-construction. Gibbons et al. (1994) have characterised the new and old types of knowledge development as two modes – disciplinary forms of knowledge normally produced by the academy and trans-disciplinary forms of knowledge normally produced outside it. Mode one knowledge is linear, causal, cumulative, disciplinary, reductionist and has significant status in society. This has, they claim, recently been challenged by mode two forms of knowledge, where technology is understood as autonomous and able to develop outside of the academy, and where it is trans-disciplinary, problem-solving, workplace-based, synoptic rather than reductionist, heterarchical and transient. This bifurcated division has been criticised for its outmoded characterisation of the academy as exclusively disciplinary, homogeneous, hierarchical and form-preserving, and for its marginalisation of new developments in

knowledge production within universities, alongside the consolidation of older and more conventional forms. For example, Scott et al. (2004) identify four types of knowledge production on postgraduate programmes: disciplinarity, technical rationality, dispositionality and criticality. Disciplinarity is characterised by an indifference to the practice setting; theorising is about the practice setting but is detached from it. Technical rationality prioritises outsider knowledge over practice-based knowledge with the practitioner acting in a technicist manner. Dispositionality identifies certain virtues such as reflection about ends and means and even meta-reflective processes that are taught in the university and applied in the workplace. With criticality, students develop the capacity to reflect critically on the discourses, and practices of the workplace of which they are members, where their intention is to change them.

These different modes of knowledge are ideal types and operate in different ways in Master's-level programmes. Indeed, hybrid versions of each may be produced. Programmes may be constructed as mode one forms of knowledge, but rapidly assume, not least in the minds of students, a mode two form. Furthermore, at different points and in different places programmes operate through these different modes. In each arena and at different times, different modes of knowledge-construction take precedence. One of the consequences of this is that the knowledge which is produced has different impacts in the workplace. We are characterising then the first of our transitions as movement from mode one to mode two types of knowledge production.

## **Internationalism**

Our second transition refers to international students. An *international Master's student* is here taken to mean a student with a first degree awarded outside the United Kingdom, whether in their home country or elsewhere, and includes those students who are classified in Higher Education Statistics Agency reports both as 'EU' and as 'Overseas'. The homogeneity of this group is not unproblematic, as Hyland et al. (2008) have noted: the category comprises students from a range of countries whose educational traditions vary widely on a cline of similarity to that of the United Kingdom.

Analysis of the literature calls into question the degree to which the term *international student* is a useful category, given the range of experience, expectations and resources that these participants bring to their courses; and the degree to which their experience is shared by other