



OpenAIR@RGU

The Open Access Institutional Repository at Robert Gordon University

<http://openair.rgu.ac.uk>

Citation Details

Citation for the version of the work held in 'OpenAIR@RGU':

TAYLOR, R. F., 2009. Creating connections: an investigation into the first year experience of undergraduate nursing students. Available from *OpenAIR@RGU*. [online]. Available from: <http://openair.rgu.ac.uk>

Copyright

Items in 'OpenAIR@RGU', Robert Gordon University Open Access Institutional Repository, are protected by copyright and intellectual property law. If you believe that any material held in 'OpenAIR@RGU' infringes copyright, please contact openair-help@rgu.ac.uk with details. The item will be removed from the repository while the claim is investigated.

**CREATING CONNECTIONS: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE
FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE OF UNDERGRADUATE NURSING
STUDENTS**

RUTH FIONA TAYLOR

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of
The Robert Gordon University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2009

ABSTRACT

Ruth F. Taylor

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Creating Connections: an investigation into the first year experience of undergraduate nursing students

This thesis is a study of the experiences of first year undergraduate nursing students. Whilst the first year at university is a much researched field, that of nursing has received relatively little attention. In part, therefore, this work seeks to redress this imbalance.

An evaluative case study approach is utilised to investigate the phenomenon of the first year experience, and to make comparisons between two groups of nursing students one following a 'traditional' curriculum and the other one based on enquiry-based learning (EBL). The use of multiple sources of data enables the phenomenon (the first year experience) to be described holistically. Diaries, experiences interviews, and questionnaires are used in the research. Data are gathered and analysed in the same way for both the groups.

This research suggests that the first year is an important aspect of the student experience for undergraduate nursing students and impacts on the likelihood of success. It also suggests that nursing students have expectations that the curriculum experience will be connected across a range of factors. However, there is some evidence that the participants' expectations did not match their experiences in aspects of the curriculum. While it is not possible to place a value judgment on the match, or lack of it, between expectations and experiences, the discrepancy is important in itself and an emphasis is placed on the importance of dealing with expectations. Additionally, the research shows that students who 'connect' across a range of areas – with people, with the classroom, with practice, and with professional education – are more likely to have a good

experience and to complete first year successfully¹. A 'Connections Continuum' is developed from the findings and this is guided by social capital theory. In essence, student nurses who develop greater connections, and therefore social capital, are more likely to be successful in their first year at university than those who do not.

This thesis is an original contribution to the study of the first year undergraduate experience specifically in the field of nursing education. It builds on the concept of social capital as a key construct in 'creating connections', which in itself is central to the understanding and enhancement of the educational experience of first year undergraduate nursing students.

Keywords: First year, student experience, expectations, empowerment, engagement, social capital, nursing, education, enquiry-based learning, retention, case study.

¹ Successful completion of first year is defined as those students who completed the requirements for progression into second year. There is no implication that students who choose to leave are not successful.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to all the student nurses who participated in this research. In particular, I appreciate the participation of the diary keepers and the interviewees. It goes without saying that I couldn't have done this without their help.

My thanks go to my supervisors – Professor David Lines and Dr. Pete Wimpenny. Their critical feedback, support and encouragement have been invaluable. I really do appreciate everything, particularly their warmth and enthusiasm over the last few years.

Many of my colleagues – both in my own institution and elsewhere – have helped me in different ways. Expert input has been greatly valued, and support from my friends in my workplace is deeply appreciated.

Friends and family have been exceedingly patient over the past five years and I thank them for their encouragement and support – I have needed it. In particular I would like to thank Helen and Malcolm, Rachel and Roger, Carol, Gill, Sarah and Sandra all of whom have remained unfailingly interested in my progress and have kept me going over the years. Thanks must also go to my parents whose support with the girls has been so important to me.

I would like to thank Chris who came into my life later on in the PhD process, but who has been a fantastic support and positive influence.

Finally, I would like to thank my girls – Sophie and Jo – for their incredible patience and I look forward to having more fun with them!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page no
Overview of the thesis	1-4
 Chapter 1: Literature review	
1.1	Introduction 5-6
1.2	The general context of Higher Education 6-8
1.3	Nursing education 9-13
1.3.1	Drivers for nursing education 13-14
1.4	Investigating the first year undergraduate experience and curriculum change in pre-registration nursing 14
1.5	Literature searching process 15
1.6	The first year undergraduate experience and retention in Higher Education 16-18
1.6.1	The issues that affect first year students and can cause them to leave 18-26
1.6.2	The phases of the first year experience 26-29
1.7	Engagement and empowerment for learners in Higher Education 29-37
1.7.1	Definitions: engagement and empowerment 30-31
1.7.2	Educational issues relating to engagement and empowerment 31-34
1.7.3	The relationship between curriculum development through enquiry-based learning, and engagement and empowerment 34-37
1.8	The local context: curriculum change in nursing education 37-43
1.8.1	Broad contextual issues 37-38
1.8.2	The 'traditional' curriculum 38-40
1.8.3	Rationale for curriculum change 40-41
1.8.4	The 'EBL' curriculum 41-43
1.9	Conclusion: The quality of the first year student experience 43-45
 Chapter 2: Research Methodology and Research Methods	
2.1	Introduction 46
2.2	Research methodology 46-60
2.2.1	Definition: Case study research 47-48
2.2.2	Approaches to case study research 48-50
2.2.3	Advantages and limitations of case study research 50-51
2.2.4	Generalisation, transferability and fittingness in case study research 52-55
2.2.5	Philosophical perspective 55-59
2.2.6	Summary: case study research for the research 59-60
2.3	Research methods 61-88

2.3.1	Questionnaires	61-69
2.3.2	In-depth focused experiences interviews	69-74
2.3.3	Dairies	75-78
2.3.4	Trustworthiness of the research	78-81
2.3.5	Ethical issues	81-85
2.3.6	Sampling strategy	85-88
2.3.7	Summary	88

Chapter 3: Findings: Expectations and experiences questionnaires

3.1	Introduction	89-90
3.2	Data collection	90-91
3.3	Demographics	91-96
	31 Summary of demographic variables	97
3.4	University student expectations and experiences questionnaires	97-103
	3.4.1 Analysis of the expectations and experiences questionnaires	98-103
3.5	Quality of the educational experience	104-108
3.6	Summary	109

Chapter 4: Findings: Interviews and diaries

4.1	Introduction	110
4.2	Purpose of the interviews and diaries	110-113
4.3	Themes and categories	114-153
	4.3.1 Relationships with people	114-125
	4.3.2 The classroom experience	125-133
	4.3.3 The practice experience	133-143
	4.3.4 Professional education	143-153
4.4	Integration of qualitative and quantitative findings	153-167
4.5	Summary and conceptual framework for the findings	167-168

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1	Introduction	169-170
5.2	The Connections Continuum (i)	170-173
5.3	Social capital: overview	173-179
	5.3.1 Historical perspective on social capital	174-177
	5.3.2 Social capital and education	177-179
5.4	The Connections Continuum (ii)	179-184

Chapter 6: Limitations, Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1	Introduction	185
6.2	Limitations of the research	185-186
6.3	Conclusions	186-190
6.4	Recommendations for practice	190-191
6.5	Recommendations for further research	192-193
6.6	Summary	193-194

Appendices	195-241
References	242-271
Bibliography	272-281
List of conference presentations associated with PhD and bound in publications	282

TAYLOR, R., 2005. Creating a connection: tackling student attrition through curriculum development. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 29 (4), pp. 367-374.

TAYLOR, R., 2004. Practice Nurses' experiences of undertaking a distance learning degree. *Primary Health Care Journal*, 13 (9), pp. 35-39.

Appendices

1	Databases and search engines and search criteria	196
2	Scottish Executive Facing the Future Group Remit	197
3	A summary of theories of student departure (Tinto 1993)	198-199
4	Definitive Course Document extracts, 'traditional' group	200-201
5	Definitive Programme Document extracts, 'EBL' group	202-208
6	Overview of early interpretations of data for participants	209-211
7	Reflexive diary extracts	212-213
8	Diary letter regarding the nature and purpose of the research	214-215
9	Consent form	216
10	Adapted College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSEQ)	217-227
11	Adapted College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSXQ)	228-238
12	Themes and categories with participants	239-241

Tables

1	Returns frequencies for expectations and experiences questionnaires for the 'traditional' group (group 1) and 'EBL' group (group 2)	91
2	Demographic characteristics of the 'traditional' group and 'EBL' group	95-96
3	Cronbach alpha scores for subscales	98
4	Expectations and experiences differences for the 'traditional' group (group 1) and the 'EBL' group (group 2)	103
5	Spearman's rho scores and significance values for expectations	107
6	Spearman's rho scores and significance values for experiences	108
7	Numbers of interview and diary participants	111
8	Interview and diary participants: demographic characteristics	112-113

Figures

1	The stages of EBL in the 'EBL' curriculum	37
2	Comparison of the 'traditional' curriculum with the 'EBL' curriculum	43
3	The Connections Continuum	172

OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

The aim of the research is to explore the first year experiences of two groups of undergraduate student nurses. The research takes a holistic approach to the investigation of the first year experience. In part, a curriculum change is used as a way to find out about the first year experience, with the research looking at how the introduction of enquiry-based learning (EBL) into a curriculum impacted on the first year. The curriculum change is described in detail in chapter 1. The objectives of the thesis were to:

1. Examine the first year experience of nursing students.
2. Describe the curriculum change, the rationale for the change and the context within which this occurred.
3. Compare the demographic profiles of two groups of students one following a 'traditional' curriculum and the other using 'EBL'; to compare students who chose to leave the courses with those who successfully completed first year.
4. Compare experiences with expectations of first year between nursing students undertaking a 'traditional' and an 'EBL' curriculum.
5. Propose strategies to enhance the student experience and rates of retention in first year undergraduate nursing students.

The context for the research is described in chapter 1 – the literature review. This chapter explores the literature on the first year experience from both national and international perspectives. Inevitably, it reviews issues relating to student retention, which is the focus for much of the first year experience literature. The literature review argues that the contemporary context of nursing education requires nurse educators to consider the whole first year student experience when developing curricula that are fit for purpose. While the content of a course is important, the approaches to teaching need to facilitate learning within a diverse student population and need to prepare students to continue to learn in an increasingly dynamic healthcare environment. The chapter goes on to

argue that the issues that impact on the students' first year experiences (e.g. relationships with peers and with academic staff, external domestic and personal circumstances) can be mitigated through curriculum development and other means (such as the availability and effectiveness of student support). The context of the particular nursing course along with the curriculum change and the rationale for the change are described.

It can be argued that the retention literature takes a deficit approach to the improvement of the first year experience. Such an approach can be viewed as one that emphasises the factors that cause people to leave (or puts them 'at risk'), and attempts to address these. On the other hand, a positive approach to the improvement of the first year is one in which measures and interventions aim to enhance the overall experience for *all* students, not just those who are seen as 'at risk'. That said, the policy drivers for improving retention cannot be ignored and are discussed within the context of HE and nursing education. Finally, it is contended that the first year experience has not been widely explored within nursing literature and merits attention for a number of reasons, including the policy context and the need to determine whether student nurses have differing needs from students within other specialities.

In chapter 2 the research methodology and research methods are described. An overview of case study research is provided and the approach taken within this thesis is described, along with a rationale for its use. The philosophical perspective is discussed with particular emphasis on the relationships between the methodology and the methods used to investigate the first year experience of students. It is argued that case study research is an appropriate methodology to investigate a complex area and provides an opportunity to utilise a number of methods so as to get to a 'thick' description of the phenomenon (the first year experience). All students in the two groups under investigation were asked to complete an expectations questionnaire, and an experiences questionnaire. Everyone who chose to leave the courses was asked to undertake an in-depth focused interview, although not all agreed. A sample of students who successfully completed first year was also asked to undertake an in-depth

focused interview. Finally, a sample of students was asked to complete a diary for the duration of the first year. The use of multiple methods is fitting, given the case study approach and the aim to create a 'thick' description, and an in-depth understanding of the first year experience. The use of the same research methods across the different groups of students allows for some comparisons to be made between the 'traditional' and 'EBL' curriculum students, and between leavers and stayers. The chapter also describes the approaches to data analysis.

Chapter 3 presents the findings from the two questionnaires. Relevant demographic variables are reported, and the quality of the educational experience is measured in relation to the ways in which experiences meet expectations. This chapter shows that the two groups ('traditional' and 'EBL') are similar in terms of demographic variables. It also shows that the participants appeared to expect a 'connected' curriculum experience, but that the experience did not always match expectations.

In chapter 4 the findings from the interviews and diaries are presented. Four themes are identified, with a number of categories in each. The themes (and categories) are: relationships with people (broadening horizons, knowing self and others, being supported and valued); the classroom experience (feeling inspired, becoming empowered, engaging with the learning experience); the practice experience (feeling inspired, becoming empowered, engaging with the learning experience); and professional education (motivation, preparedness, making adjustments). The chapter demonstrates the differences and similarities between the groups of students, before introducing the links to the quantitative findings, and to relevant research findings from the literature.

Chapter 5 - the Discussion - brings together the findings from the qualitative and quantitative data as the case study. A conceptual framework is presented as a way in which the findings can be framed and through which future research can be organised. The assertion is made that the better the relationships, and the closer that experiences meet

expectations, the more likely it is that the student will have a 'good' experience and therefore be successful.

The first year is seen as the foundation for future experiences on a course. While there are some areas that are particularly relevant to nursing students, it seems that the first year experience of student nurses is similar to that seen in other disciplines. Similar issues are identified within the thesis as within the wider literature, although nursing students' issues may manifest themselves in slightly different ways (e.g. issues with practice placements/learning).

In chapter 6, a number of conclusions are drawn that may enable future curriculum development to take a more holistic view of the student experience. Recommendations for practice are made and a focus for future systematic research is proposed. It is asserted that the conceptual framework that has been developed from the findings has allowed for a contribution to be made to the theoretical debate that relates to enhancing the first year experience and, in particular, to propose policy changes within the HE sector that may improve retention rates.

This opening section has provided the reader with the context from which the ideas and focus for the thesis have developed, and has provided an overview of the aim and objectives of the research. It provided signposts for the full thesis and its component parts. Chapter 1 – the literature review – aims to describe the context within which the research is situated.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 begins by providing an overall context for the thesis with an overview of Higher Education (HE), nursing education, and the focus for the research. These matters are important to the thesis as issues such as the massification of HE and nursing's place within it provide a contextual starting point for the reader from which he or she can begin to draw conclusions about the usefulness of the findings to his or her own context. The first section provides a general context for HE and discusses its meaning in relation to developing graduates within contemporary society. The section also presents an overview of the context of nursing education and its current relationship with HE. The first year student experience is an area in which national and international attention is focused (Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) 2008a), and which feeds into the key issues of increasing student diversity and the need to improve retention rates.

The literature review goes on to focus on the first year experience and retention in higher education. Following this, the review examines the local context for the research and the curriculum change. It is argued that, while there is a wide literature relating to student retention in nursing education, there has been little focus on the first year student experience specifically for nursing students².

The literature review points towards the importance of the first year, both in terms of improving the overall student experience (a positive, proactive approach), and in terms of improving retention (a deficit approach). There is a wide national and international literature and this is utilised to develop

² The nursing literature is different from that of the wider international literature because of its focus on student retention probably because retention is a major political driver for nursing education (SGHD 2007), and the approach to dealing with the problem of attrition has been one of quality assurance rather than quality enhancement (SGHD 2007). For these reasons, it seems likely that a more general enhancement of the first year has, until now, been perceived as being of secondary importance.

the argument that enhancement of the first year can improve student engagement (initially) and empowerment (in the longer term). Engagement and empowerment are defined, and relevant educational issues discussed demonstrating that curriculum developments can also have an impact on the overall student experience by providing a means towards academic and social integration. Nursing education is the primary context within which this research is situated, and the review explores why student retention is an important issue for nursing.

The literature review goes on to consider learning theory and teaching methods that are designed to enable students to engage and become empowered learners. As the focus for curriculum change within this research is the introduction of an enquiry-based learning (EBL) strand to the whole curriculum, EBL is discussed in relation to the goals of engagement and empowerment. A comparison is made between the 'traditional' curriculum in which EBL does not feature, and the 'EBL' curriculum.

The assertion is made that it is useful to investigate the first year so as to determine whether the nursing student experience is similar or different from that of the wider student body. As well as this, the first year experience is so important in terms of student retention and attrition, and the political drivers so intense for improving retention that this aspect of the student experience is therefore worthy of investigation. With the assertion that curriculum development through the use of EBL can have an impact on the first year experience, it is necessary to investigate this further and determine whether it is, in fact, the case.

1.2 The general context of Higher Education

There has been a marked change in HE from an elite system to one in which there is widening access (Jarvis et al. 2004). It was not until the 1980s that widespread debate took place around the need to move to a mass system of HE, as opposed to the continuing elitist approach (Jarvis et al. 2004). In 1962, only 6% of the under 21-year old age group in the UK

entered HE. In 2003, the figure approached 50% of 18-30 year olds (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) 2008). The National Audit Office (NAO) (2007) reports that in session 2005/06, there were 1.3 million undergraduate students with 87,000 studying full time (figures for England). In Scotland, the total number (full time equivalent) of students who undertook a first degree in 2004/2005 was 115,170 (HESA 2008).

There is recognition of the demand for the development of skills for the 'information age', and the need to narrow the social class gap of those coming into HE (Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 2003). The Dearing Report of 1997 (Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education: Higher Education in the Learning Society - National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) 1997) was seminal in terms of advocating widening participation and the development of skills. It was important, at the time, in providing an overview of the wider context in which HE found itself. Technological and political drivers continued to impact on the way in which world economies functioned with 'knowledge' becoming an increasingly valuable commodity. The report discussed the way in which the changing nature of work demanded that students were prepared with skills for change and lifelong learning, along with a values base that makes for a civilised society. It went on to emphasise the importance of creating appropriate learning environments for students to actively engage in the learning process and to develop the skills for lifelong learning. The report asked that we enable all students to achieve their potential whether they are the high flyers, or those who have struggled to achieve the requirements for entry into HE. The skills for lifelong learning that Dearing (NCIHE 1997) advocated included the development of independence in learning so as to enable individuals to meet the rapidly changing needs of society (Leathwood 2006).

In 2008 The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) produced a policy document called 'A New University Challenge' (DIUS 2008) with the aim to work with HEIs to continue to widen participation, and to put learners at the centre of provision. It argues that HE is increasingly important to national economies, and to this end the UK

Government aims to have 40% of the population with degrees. In order to achieve this aim, local solutions are required, which is why the Government intends to establish more than 20 new HEIs. The policy underlines the UK Government's intention to achieve the 40% target, and shows how its approach is instrumental in changing the nature of the student population, and thus the issues that impact on universities (Houston et al. 2007). Inevitably, as the Government works to achieve its target, the student population will become ever more diverse bringing with it particular challenges, including social and cultural issues. Gone are the days of the "traditional" student who is seen as the white middle class school leaver. Universities are working with students from across the social spectrum, across the age range and from diverse cultural backgrounds. These changes can be seen by universities either as opportunities or as threats (Haggis 2004).

In Scotland, The Framework for Higher Education (Scottish Executive (SE) 2003a) sets out the country's direction for HE for the next 10 years. It focuses on teaching and learning, research and knowledge transfer, and governance and management. As with The Future of Higher Education (Department for Education and Skills 2003), the policy puts the learner at the centre, with the aim of creating environments in which people can achieve their potential and, thus, contribute fully to society and the economy. Its overarching framework is that of lifelong learning and is supported by The Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland (SE 2003b). Working in partnership with the Government, The Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) vision is for a Higher Education sector that produces graduates who can contribute to a "dynamic, entrepreneurial and internationally competitive Scotland" (SFC 2005). This goal may require a development of the learning culture with higher education generally. This section has provided an overview of some of the issues affecting HE generally. The next section considers nursing education in particular and begins by providing a historical perspective.

1.3 Nursing education

At the beginning of the twentieth century, nursing was under the auspices of the hospital as an apprenticeship (Tompkins 2001). It was in the 1930s that it became clear that nurse training as it was would soon be inappropriate for the modern nursing roles at the time. Tompkins (2001) argues that nursing curricula began to develop beyond medical knowledge to include social sciences at that time. Whilst some did not agree that a strengthened theoretical base was the way forward, by 1941 it had been documented that attitudes were changing (Green 1995). Green cited the 1947 Report of the Working Party on the Recruitment and Training of Nurses which recommended that nurse training should be of 2 years duration as a full time student, followed by a year of supervised practice. Following the inception of the National Health Service (NHS), student nurses were legally employees of the NHS, and provided most of the workforce requirements in hospitals. Some of the problems associated with their employee status included a lack of supervision and ward teaching, and a dissonance between what students saw in practice and what they were taught in the classroom. This contrasts with the present day where the status of students is viewed differently and students are considered supernumerary. However, there is still much in the literature that describes the problematic issue of the theory practice divide (Carson and Carnwell 2007; Barrett 2007).

In 1963 The Report of the Committee on Higher Education made it clear that nursing should not be considered part of HE (Baly 1995). The focus of HE at that time was not on practical techniques, and nursing was not seen as an intellectual area of study. This was, in part, due to the apprenticeship style of training, with the focus on the 'how' rather than the 'why' of the tasks assigned to the role of the nurse (Roxburgh et al. 2008). The needs of the service continued to take precedence over education (Green 1995). The Platt Report (A Reform of Nursing Education) (1964) was commissioned to look into nurse training and recommended that two levels be introduced. First level students were required to meet the entry qualifications of 5 Ordinary levels whilst second level (enrolled nurse)

students were not required to achieve the same level. There remained conflict between what was expected of the students in practice, and their education. However, the Platt Report led to more academic candidates being attracted into nursing (Platt 1964).

Concerns about the status of nursing students and their levels of responsibility continued to be expressed into the 1970s. The Briggs Report (The Report of the Committee on Nursing) (1972) was instrumental in shifting the way in which nurse training was viewed. Its recommendations included:

- An age on entry of 17 years;
- The introduction of an 18 month foundation for all, leading to a certificate in nursing practice;
- A subsequent 18 month course leading to registration for students who were more academically able; and
- The introduction of one statutory body.

By 1980 the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC) had been set up, with four national boards. Colleges of Nursing were formed from the amalgamation of Schools of Nursing that had formerly been associated with NHS teaching hospitals (Watson and Thompson 2000).

Latterly, the UKCC was asked to look at the reform of nursing with the aim of completing 'Project 2000' (as it was known) by the autumn of 1986 (UKCC 1987). The aim of Project 2000 was to produce autonomous practitioners educated to diploma or degree level. Following its recommendations and subsequent consultation phase, changes were introduced as follows:

- The introduction of a Diploma in Higher Education, consisting of an 18 month common foundation programme and an 18 month branch programme;

- The introduction of specified branches of nursing – adult nursing, children’s nursing, mental health nursing, and nursing the mentally handicapped;
- The phasing out of enrolled nurse training;
- The introduction of supernumerary status; and
- The development of links with HE.

With these changes came developments in the way in which nursing education was delivered, from a mandatory curriculum concerned with outcomes rather than processes, to curricula designed within the context of general principles and competencies (Thomas and Davies 2006).

In 1999, the Department of Health (DoH) published ‘Making a Difference: Strengthening the Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting Contribution to Health and Healthcare’ in which further changes to nursing education were proposed and which resulted in the Fitness for Practice curriculum of the late 1990s. ‘Fitness for Practice’ (UKCC 1999) focused on the importance of developing improved outcomes for pre-registration nursing within a competency framework, so as to ensure that newly qualified nurses were better fit for purpose. The aim of the Making a Difference curriculum was to provide wider access to nursing and greater flexibility, enhanced competencies (Scholes et al. 2004), and the ability of nurses to respond to, and initiate, change (Williamson et al. 2008). In both the ‘Fitness for Practice’ and ‘Making a Difference’ documents, the use of student-centred approaches to learning (e.g. the use of enquiry-based learning) was advocated as the means by which these aims could be achieved. The UKCC (1999) acknowledged at that time that the preparation of newly qualified nurses was a complex task and that there was not a single successful formula for undertaking this task (Mcilfattrick 2004). It was widely accepted that healthcare was becoming more complex, and with it the preparation of practitioners (Plsek and Greenhalgh 2001). The Nursing and Midwifery Council’s (NMC 2004) Standards of Proficiency for Pre-registration Nursing Education specify the requirements for programmes of study leading to registration with the NMC. In particular, programmes are required to be comprised of 50% theory and 50% practice.

In Watson and Thompson's (2000) opinion, though, the recommendations from the Department of Health in Making a Difference (DoH 1999) have replaced nursing *education* with *training* in clinical competence. The discourse relates to that of apprenticeship versus autonomy (Kotechu 2002). Within the apprenticeship discourse, learners become 'doers' through training. The process involves the transmission of practical knowledge and skills within a hierarchical structure which facilitates socialisation into the discipline. Autonomous discourse, on the other hand, is academic knowledge as education within a process that facilitates empowerment and the development of the knowledgeable doer. Research has long focused on newly qualified nurses' technical skills and the need to keep pace with a continually evolving healthcare system (Kenny 2004). It appears that the implementation of competency based education has led to increased confidence for students in clinical skills delivery (Farrand et al. 2006). Most recently findings from the National Review of Pre-registration Nursing and Midwifery Programmes in Scotland (Lauder et al. 2008) have shown that the programmes are meeting competence needs from the perspective of the students.

Watson (2006), in writing about the role of HE in preparing nurses, discusses the nature of education versus training. He argues that nursing education should aim to enable practitioners to master technical skills, but that this should take place alongside the ability to "give an account" of the skills (Watson 2006, p. 623). In other words, nursing education needs to prepare students with the ability to base their practice on appropriate evidence in its widest sense. In fact, Watson asserts that nursing education should be taught by research active staff who are leaders of the field. If true, it may be the case that traditional approaches to nursing education may not prepare students with the skills to function autonomously (Mooney and Nolan 2006). Further discussion of approaches to education takes place in section 1.7.2 where empowerment and its relationship to the aims of education are explored.

Tompkins (2001, p. 1) asserts the need to prepare future nurses for the changing face of nursing – “the technological, demographic, intellectual, moral and economic complexities”. It is her view that student nurses should be prepared to become critical questioners who make enquiries into the challenging circumstances in which nurses live and work. This view of nursing provides a clear rationale for the need for *education* rather than training.

Today, nursing sits firmly in HE, working in partnership and collaboration with the NHS. Both HE and the NHS are subject to change and development (Quinn and Hughes 2007) and nursing education must be prepared to not only move with the times, but to lead and influence the path of nursing in general. To do this, nursing students will need to be enquiring problem-solvers with graduate attributes alongside personal and professional characteristics that are suitable for the profession.

1.3.1 Drivers for nursing education

The drivers for HE overall are reflected in those of nursing education. These include widening participation, increasing flexibility and diversity, and enhancing quality (Clouston and Whitcombe 2005). Jarvis et al. (2004) emphasise the fact that universities have historically provided lifelong learning opportunities for the communities that they serve. In the context of the massification of Higher Education, there has been a shift from elite access to HE, to wider and diverse access to HE. As Jarvis et al. (2004) go on to say, this has an impact on the demographic of the student body and their entry characteristics. They argue that universities have a responsibility to actively participate in taking forward a lifelong learning culture within society. The influence of the diversification of the student population is widespread including the impact on student retention. In later sections, retention is explored and links are made with the ways in which widening access affects the student experience.

As we have seen, nursing education is a dynamic field of study that sits within HE. Its shift to the HE context has changed the face of nursing education, bringing with it issues relating to nursing itself and to HE

(Watson 2006). The first year experience at university is particularly relevant to nursing education where policy drivers such as achieving targets for student recruitment and retention are so important (Scottish Government Health Directorates (SGHD) 2007). While there is much literature available on the first year experiences of undergraduate students (as evidenced in Harvey et al. 2006), there is relatively little that investigates the first year experiences of nursing students.

1.4 Investigating the first year undergraduate experience and curriculum change in pre-registration nursing

My interest in the first year for the particular undergraduate nursing courses under investigation resulted from a number of factors:

- Nursing students' first year experiences are little described in the literature;
- Concerns relating to retention of students, particularly in first year, that led me to believe that further attention is required;
- An appreciation that the first year is important in terms of preparing students for subsequent study, and for persistence; and
- Curriculum changes are made with, sometimes, little evidence gathered as to their impact.

While the interest was in the whole first year student experience (social and academic, practice and university), I was in a position in which I could influence the university experience through curriculum development. As a programme leader for pre-registration nursing, my area of responsibility lay in leading the development of the curriculum. This led to the implementation of enquiry-based learning (EBL) as a strand of learning through the pre-registration nursing curriculum. The focus of the thesis, therefore, is on the first year experience of undergraduate nursing students. The curriculum is the vehicle with which some aspects of the first year experience is explored.

1.5 Literature searching process

The literature search was conducted systematically utilising search engines, databases and key words as identified in appendix 1. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were identified:

- Written in English (as it would not have been possible to translate works for the purpose of the thesis);
- Current materials (historical data and seminal works accessed);
- Peer reviewed materials including research;
- Other key reading/relevant sources/background materials;
- Policy documents;
- University websites; and
- Other relevant websites.

Phase 1 of the literature search was undertaken using the terms that had been generated through key reading. This phase produced a wealth of literature with some key words providing higher rates of return than others (e.g. 'education' and 'retention'). Phase 2 refined the searches and enabled a more focused approach to be taken where the relevant sources were identified. With the internet providing an excellent resource, particularly through the newer search engines such as Google Scholar, the process for searching became rather more fluid than had been expected. With this fluidity and improvisation came sources that may not have been identified previously (particularly some of the searches for specific authors).

Hand searches of relevant journals were undertaken to ensure that the most recent articles within those journals (e.g. Journal of Further and Higher Education, Nurse Education Today) had been accessed.

Some comparisons were made with other literature searches that have recently been undertaken to ensure that this review captures those areas that are seen as important by contemporary thinkers (e.g. Harvey et al. 2006). Finally, just prior to completion of the research, a further trawl of the literature revealed most recent papers.

1.6 The first year undergraduate experience and retention in Higher Education

This section provides a description and analysis of the national and international first year undergraduate experience literature. It is structured in such a way so as to enable the reader to take a systematic journey through the first year as follows: the issues that affect first year students generally (and nursing students in particular) and can cause them to leave; and the phases of the first year experience including transition to university, induction and orientation into the university environment and culture, and integration and engagement as ongoing features of the first year. Where the terms 'traditional' student and 'non-traditional' student are used, it is generally held that a 'traditional' student is one who is white, has a family background in HE and is a school leaver. It is perhaps no longer appropriate terminology given the increasing diversity of the student body. However, it remains within the literature and is useful in bringing attention to the complex make up of the student body. Laing et al. (2005) define non-traditional students as those who do not have recent experience of education and study, and are under-represented in terms of social class, ethnicity or age.

In Scotland the QAA identified the first year as a national enhancement theme (QAA 2008a)³. The First Year is defined by the QAA (2008b) Enhancement Theme as being the first year of study, whenever that may occur (e.g. direct entrants). For the purpose of the thesis, the first year is that of two undergraduate nursing courses. The focus of the First Year Enhancement Theme is on the nature and purpose of the first year and the ways in which students can become engaged and empowered. The importance with which the first year is viewed by Government and HE is reflected in the fact that it continues to be a priority for HEIs and the sector.

³ I was a member of the QAA First Year Enhancement Theme steering committee when it was in place and am the University's institutional contact for the theme.

The first year is the year in which students are most likely to leave (and the time when HEIs must work with students to encourage persistence) (Yorke and Longden 2008). The focus on improving retention rates across HEIs (Prescott and Simpson 2004), and in particular, in pre-registration nursing courses, is high on the agenda for the Government in Scotland and the rest of the UK (Vere-Jones 2008; SGHD 2007). The Scottish Executive (SE) set up a Facing the Future Group in 2006 of which one of the subgroups was Student Retention (see appendix 2 for remit). The aim of the subgroup was to come up with ways in which the problematic issue of student nurse attrition could be resolved. With action being taken at governmental level, HEIs have been working towards improvements in retention with the aim of achieving the SGHD 15% target for attrition (SGHD 2007). However, the attrition rate for nursing and midwifery in Scotland ranged from 23.4% (1999/2000 intakes) to 28.9% (2002/2003 intakes). The work is currently being taken forward by a High Level Delivery Group that aims for Scottish-wide solutions to the challenge of student retention⁴. Stakeholders need assurances that student nurse attrition is being taken seriously because of the major political and financial implications caused by students who leave nursing programmes (Chaterjee 2005; Glossop 2002; Yorke 2000a) which in turn affect the public (the tax payers). While money is not the only issue, the Scottish Government has been explicit about the burden that attrition places on the taxpayer (SGHD 2007). It is partly for this reason that the first year experience is worthy of investigation as the general first year experience shows.

The first year experience in HE has been the subject of investigation and interest for a number of years, although less so in the UK than in the US and Australia (Yorke and Longden 2008). For example, in 1985 Baker et al. presented the findings of a study relating to student expectations and experiences in their freshmen year. While the work is not recent, the issues remain familiar. The authors investigated the differences between student expectations and their adjustment to college. They concluded that student

⁴ I was a member of the original Facing the Future Retention Group and chaired the pre-course and selection sub-group. I am a member of the SGHD High Level Delivery Group. In particular, I chair one of the sub-groups the aim of which is to develop a national approach to data collection.

and institutional characteristics impacted on student adjustment, and that interventions prior to university admission could play a positive role in facilitating adjustment. They asserted that the reality of being a student needed to be addressed in its fullest sense. These, and other, issues are discussed in more recent research (Yorke and Longden 2008). Yorke and Longden (2008) reveal that, overall, students who took part in their research were very positive about the first year experience. As others have identified, Yorke and Longden found that the first year is the most critical phase of the student experience in relation to persistence.

Harvey et al.'s (2006) literature review for the HEA reveals a broad range of literature addressing the first year experience across a considerable timeframe (1950-2007). Their review is an important piece of work that gathers much of the published and grey literature together and provides a summary for the reader. They note that the literature includes a considerable number of small scale studies, rather than longitudinal multi-centred studies which may have enabled greater generalisation from the findings. However, it appears that while there is some disagreement on theoretical perspectives across the cited literature, there is much agreement about the issues that are important to address for the first year. They note that there is not a single first year experience. Rather there are a multiplicity of first year experiences all depending on student and institutional characteristics. The first year is complex and evolves over time and is affected (both positively and negatively) by a number of matters as described in the next section.

1.6.1 The issues that affect first year students and can cause them to leave

Retention is a widely researched and debated area both nationally and internationally (Tinto 2005a). While the review draws on a wide range of literature, the work of Vincent Tinto (distinguished University Professor at Syracuse and Chair of the Higher Education Program) is of particular interest and relevance. Much of the international analysis of student attrition is firmly based on his theory of integration (Krause 2005). His is a leading voice in the world of the student experience and a summary of his

work on theories of departure is provided in appendix 3. While he takes a retention perspective, he does so through a sociological lens that advocates the enhancement of academic and social integration for *all* students, not just those who are seen as 'at risk' (Tinto 2005a; Tinto 1993). This provides us with an insight into the means by which we can work towards taking a holistic approach to enhancement of the student experience. His main argument continues to centre on the fact that a complexity of variables come together to cause student attrition. Importantly his guiding principle was that where universities worked together to ensure that education provided students with opportunities for social and intellectual growth, students were more likely to choose to stay (Tinto 1993). The aspects of the student experience that he described included social and intellectual adjustment to university, preparedness for HE, integration into university, and the matching of experiences with expectations. Tinto therefore stressed the need for integration, though not conformity, into at least one community within university for support, with students being active participants in the development of membership of such communities. Individual dispositions were also important within Tinto's theory of student departure (expectations, intentions, motivations and commitment).

Since Tinto's early work, there has been a growing understanding of social, cultural, psychological, economic and institutional forces, and how these impact on the student experience (Knox and Wyper 2008). However, the key aspect of the initial work remains rooted in much of the subsequent work on student retention and the student experience: namely that engagement or involvement is critical, particularly in the first year. Understanding the context of the institution and the particular student body remains important particularly given that Tinto's work focused on traditional, white, young, North American students in private residential institutions (Harvey et al. 2006; Brunnsden et al. 2000). Despite this, the ontological premise is still sound and the essence of his research is evident within much of the literature that attempts to identify ways of engaging students holistically (Krause 2005; Laing et al. 2005; Wharrad et al. 2003).

There are some differences in approaches across countries surrounding the important concern of retention. However, there seems to be general agreement on the issues that affect students who choose to leave a programme of study. First year students have a variety of experiences that are dependent on their background, attitudes, motivations and external personal circumstances. Each of these can impact in a positive or negative way on the student experience and can contribute to students' decisions to persist with, or leave, a programme of study. The circumstances that cause students to leave in first year are not necessarily any different to those that affect them in later stages of study. However, first year is critical in providing the foundations for persistence and anything that adversely affects those foundations can lead to attrition.

Christie et al. (2004) provide three 'explanations' for non-completion linked to the policy that drives the context for HE in the UK:

- Widening participation resulting in students who are ill-prepared for the HE environment;
- Widening participation resulting in HEIs failing to include and support students appropriately; and
- Changes to funding arrangements making financial difficulties more likely for some students.

While they acknowledge that these explanations go some way to helping universities to understand the factors that affect retention, their study develops the explanations further by making comparisons between the experiences of students who leave, and those who stay. They report that students who leave do so because of "a series of interconnected factors" (Christie et al. 2004, p. 622) including poor course choice, lack of motivation, isolation, and financial difficulties (Yorke and Longden 2008; Krause 2005; Prescott and Simpson 2004; Hall 2001). The problems also affect those who stay, and Christie et al. (2004) do not draw any firm conclusions that there are any differences between leavers and stayers.

Socioeconomic variables (class, employment and previous education) have been found to have a bearing on the student experience and to impact on

retention and persistence (Yorke and Longden 2008; Harrison 2006; Quinn et al. 2005). Academic culture is not uniformly accessed or experienced by students (Read et al. 2003), although Yorke and Longden (2008) found that there were only small differences in experience between social groups. With widening participation in Higher Education generally and for nursing education in particular, fewer school leavers and more non-traditional students are coming into nursing through more and more flexible entry pathways thereby impacting on reasons for leaving (Neilson and Lauder 2008). Associated with socioeconomic variables is the issue of first generation university students who may lack support from family and may not have realistic expectations of university (Yorke and Longden 2008).

Part-time work can impact negatively on the student experience resulting in physical and psychosocial strain (Yorke and Longden 2008; Humphrey 2006; Curtis and Shani 2002; Lee et al. 1999) which can influence both academic and social integration into university. Humphrey (2006) concludes that structured inequalities, (based on the finding that students who worked came from state rather than independent private schools), are firmly established within UK higher education, with financial issues being a source of difficulty for some students, and having serious consequences (Gerrard and Roberts 2006). However, Hunt et al. (2004) conclude that while attainment can be significantly affected by employment, there are some positive aspects to working (including keeping borrowing down).

Demographic characteristics (age, entry qualifications and gender) form part of the overall picture for the first year student experience and for the likelihood of persistence or attrition. In terms of academic engagement, older students tend to see the learning experience as more engaging than their younger peers (Yorke and Longden 2008; Lowe and Cook 2003). However, they rate social engagement much lower than younger students, possibly because of the external factors that impact on their lives (such as child care). Students who spend more time on campus engage more with other students in relation to academic work, have a greater sense of belonging to an academic community and are more likely to develop friendship networks (Smith and Wertlieb 2005) and thus it is likely that

younger students have more opportunities to engage socially and have more potential to engage academically. Yorke and Longden (2008, p. 8) refer to "commuter students" who are less likely to engage with the whole student experience than others who can become more involved in all aspects of university life.

There is a lack of agreement across the literature in relation to the impact that entry qualifications have on retention (Harvey et al. 2006). For example, McKenzie and Gow (2004) and Lowe and Cook (2003) report that academic qualifications are the most useful predictor of success in school leavers. Conversely, a recent study by Houston et al. (2007) suggests that entry qualifications are not a predictor of student performance except where this is mediated by other factors such as course workload and the subject discipline. However, Lauder et al. (2006) caution against the prevailing attitude in nursing education that entry qualifications are not related to attrition or to success with the implication that entry qualifications are likely to be helpful in improving the chances of success.

The prediction of student performance is complex, particularly with the relatively recent shift to mass education at a tertiary level (Kantanis 2000) which has created a greater diversity of the student population (in terms of ability, motivation, commitment, age and social skills). McInnis (2001a, 2001b) claims that an apparent lack of student commitment is an everyday feature for many academics although this is not reported widely across the literature. Previous relevant study or experiences have been found to be useful predictors of academic performance (Madigan 2006; van Rooyen et al. 2006; Haggis 2004). Unsurprisingly, students who perform well academically in their first year have been shown to be more likely to persist into second year with the successful students taking a higher level of personal responsibility for their progress (Gifford et al. 2006).

As previously noted, student preparedness for university and motivation for course choice and for learning impact on their ability to engage with the educational experience (Yorke and Longden 2008; Byrne and Flood 2005; Tinto 2005b; Lowe and Cook 2003; Graham and Caso 2002). Intrinsic motivation (learning for interest, engagement, curiosity and self

actualisation) is more desirable than extrinsic motivation (towards the achievement of an external goal whether it relates to reward or punishment). Extrinsic motivation is more likely to result in surface learning as opposed to deep learning in the intrinsically motivated (Byrne and Flood 2005). High self-belief and commitment are also important in influencing motivation and students' willingness to engage with the learning process (Beekhoven et al. 2003).

Additionally, when students' expectations do not match their experiences, disengagement from university life may result (Lowe and Cook 2003). This can be associated with dissonance between expectations and the reality of the academic work, unrealistic aspirations relating to social activities, and a lack of preparation for the move to HE in terms of the cultural changes. Universities therefore need to work with students prior to entry and on entry to a course to ensure that they are adequately prepared for the realities of university life. The issues affecting student retention generally have been explored. These and other factors are relevant to nursing education.

Student nurse attrition is not a recent phenomenon (Glossop 2001), nor is it an issue that only affects the UK (Mashaba and Mhlongo 1995). In fact, attrition has been a long standing problem going back at least sixty years and has been attributed to hierarchical structures, restrictions on student behaviours, poor communication with trained staff, homesickness, shift patterns, financial concerns and low academic ability (Glossop 2001). The Department of Health (DoH 2006) calls attrition of student nurses a wicked problem. This term seems to demonise the issue although the DoH (2006) goes on to advocate that a holistic and systematic approach should be taken to addressing the complex risk factors.

The literature explains that the contributory factors for attrition of nursing students are similar to those of the wider student population and include reduced entry qualifications, personal reasons, academic failure, disillusionment, wrong career choice, financial problems, travel difficulties, poor course organisation, negative staff attitudes, health, inadequate pre-

course information, and lack of support (Glossop 2002; Glossop 2001). Additionally, some mature-age students face particular issues including managing their work-life balance alongside a lack of confidence in their abilities to achieve (Royal College of Nursing (RCN) 2008; Cuthbertson et al. 2004; Osborne et al. 2004; Kevern et al. 1999).

The key area in which nursing students' experiences differ from those of other students is clinical practice. The gap between the learning that takes place in the university and what happens in reality in practice (theory-practice gap) can impact negatively on students' confidence and knowledge (Melia 2008; Last and Fulbrook 2003; Kramer 1974). Being ignored, facing open hostility, negativity from staff, and a feeling of imposing on staff are all factors that have been reported as features of some students' clinical experiences (Jackson and Mannix 2001). Socialisation into nursing can be challenging with students not always knowing what to do when they are on placement (Higginson 2006). In fact, Mackintosh (2006) argues that the effect of socialisation is sometimes negative because of the ways in which staff demonstrate caring. Students expect to work in a caring team. When they experience conflict in practice this can impact on their decision to pursue their chosen career (Brammer 2006a; Henderson et al. 2006; Midgley 2006). Once again, when experiences do not meet expectations, the reality shock can have a negative impact on the likelihood of success.

Section 1.6.1 has explored the reasons that students leave a course and in particular nursing. While there is a lack of literature relating to the first year experience in nursing, this does not detract from the literature that focuses on retention and attrition of nursing and other students. Except for the issues associated with clinical practice, the reasons that student nurses leave are very similar to those of other students. Lessons can be learned that will have an impact on *all* students' experiences and may lead to enhancement of the first year (RCN 2008). Students are individuals, and universities tend to view attrition as an issue affecting a population rather than an individual. The importance of determining the reasons that *individuals* leave cannot be over-emphasised. At the same time, institutions must look at the whole student body, identify trends and draw conclusions

relating to the ways in which the institution can work with students to enhance the likelihood of success. It seems from the literature that individuals' characteristics do have an impact on their first year experiences. However, it cannot be said with certainty that one can predict a student's experience based on his or her characteristics. The first year experience relates to an intermeshing of variables within particular situations. It is true that external influences can induce changing reactions to experiences of the first year (for example, access to relevant support may make the difference between leaving or persisting). However, prediction of experiences of first year cannot always be made, particularly when some students will choose not to confide or seek help.

In summary, the key issues that affect the first year experience and student retention in pre-registration nursing are:

- Adjustment to university
- Academic and social integration
- Student commitment and attitudes
- Preparedness
- Match between experiences and expectations
- Appropriateness of course choice
- Family circumstances
- Socioeconomic background
- Financial issues
- Personal issues
- Experiences in practice

Proactive intervention is essential, but it may be that the notion of 'optimum retention' (Smith and Beggs 2003) is more realistic. There are simply some situations that universities cannot address. What can be enhanced, though, is the quality of the learning experience for students and this should be undertaken from a variety of perspectives with a focus on enhancing academic and social integration. Curriculum development is important for the enhancement of the overall student experience and can put in place support for developing study and other transferable skills,

dealing with the wide range of academic ability, assisting students to work through stressful experiences and develop stress management skills, developing student confidence and motivation for learning in university and practice, preparing students for the realities of the course, and providing the opportunity to develop strong supportive relationships (Bovill et al. 2008). Approaches to working with students that attempt to enable these aspects of the learning experience to be transparent could be termed 'personalisation' of the first year (Knox and Wyper 2008) and this involves the development of academic and social integration for all students by being responsive to individual and group needs with the aim of engaging with students and facilitating empowerment across the phases of the first year undergraduate experience.

1.6.2 The phases of the first year experience

Transition to HE and integration into HE are seen as vital to success for the first year experience (Harvey et al. 2006; Yorke 2000b; Tinto 1993). Generally the literature focuses on the transition that students make from school to HE, although it is widely acknowledged that a more diverse student population with varied backgrounds is accessing university education, and that this will impact on the needs and expectations of students in the transition phase (for example, transition from college to university – Foster et al. 2002). Transition is the period of time when students make the move into university and the new cultural, social and academic environment. Lowe and Cook (2003) tell us that the move into HE can be a challenging hurdle or a leap into the unknown. For some it is a positive and exciting experience, while for others anxiety rather than excitement is the primary emotion.

Transition should not be seen as a particular moment in time when the student walks through the door to the university. Rather, it must be seen as an ongoing process that can last from pre-entry and for the whole of first year (before leading into a new transition phase in the second year) (Whittaker 2008; Blackhurst et al. 2003; Jeffreys 2001; White 1999; Tinto 1994). Transition must take account of the students' individual characteristics as previously described, and the institutional context within

which the experience of first year takes place. The best transition programmes will be part of the student's whole learning experience and will enable their integration both academically and socially into their new environment (Harvey et al. 2006).

A number of key areas are identified as being important for effective transition to higher education and are closely linked to the issues that affect the first year and student retention (Moore et al. 2008; Scheja 2006; Grayson 2003; White 1999; Booth 1997):

- effective academic orientation (induction);
- access to subject/course information; orientation to the learning environment to allow students to stay in phase with their learning experience;
- integration of academic and social activities and attendance at lectures;
- availability, approachability and enthusiasm of academic staff;
- level of student preparedness and confidence;
- appropriate course choice.

Issues that have been identified as detrimental to transition include (Kantanis 2000; Peel 2000):

- heavy workload;
- anonymous and daunting environment;
- uncaring staff;
- sense of apprehension and loss;
- worry about letting self and others down; and
- homesickness.

Student expectations influence transition and are important to the student learning experience (Olsen et al. 1998). Where expectations are not high, experiences of engagement are lower. Students' most common expectations of first year include:

- meeting new people;
- having fun;
- enjoying less regimented styles of learning; and

- being mentally stimulated (Kantanis 2000).

In Kantanis' (2000) study, the experiences did not always match the expectations with students not always finding it easy to make friends, and university not being as exciting and fun as expected. Workload was heavier than expected and staff were not as accessible. However, while results are relevant and should be taken into account, other research has shown that lower than expected workload can lead to demotivation (Jarvis et al. 2004). Additionally students expect lecturers to know them but often find that due to large class sizes they sometimes do not get to know students' names (Darlaston-Jones et al. 2003).

Harvey et al. (2006) note that adjustment is a common theme across the literature and relates to the support of first year students. Adjustment is the process by which students make the necessary changes (academic, social, emotional, geographical etc.) so as to feel a sense of familiarity with the environment and with the expectations of the university. Sources of support are an important component of the process of adjustment. Transition programmes (or induction/orientation programmes) should provide the means through which students can start to develop friendship groups within the university as additional support on top of the existing support networks available to them outside of the university.

There is great agreement across the international literature that the transition to university is an important phase in the first year student experience. Tinto's (1993) integration theory supports this and links to the sociological perspective in which supported movement from one community to another is vital for a person to fit in. Therefore, transition for all students needs to be managed in a way that accounts for the different cultures, backgrounds, expectations and student characteristics. Pitkethly and Prosser (2001) advocate for a co-ordinated, informed, university-wide (holistic) approach to transition as a way of improving the learning experience of all students. It is likely that changes to university and organisational culture will be required to embed an integrated holistic approach to transition where this does not already exist. Their primary

assertion is that by enhancing the student experience for *all* students, some of the issues that lead to withdrawal and poor performance can be alleviated. Tinto's (1993, 2005a) work is highly relevant to these assertions.

Learning communities are much discussed in the literature (Tinto 2003; Beaudin et al. 2002; Crissman 2001; Clulow 2000) as a means of assisting with some of the issues that impact on student engagement, transition and retention. Learning communities began to be widely used in 1969 in California where modules were clustered around interdisciplinary themes (Chesebro et al. 1999). Within this context, learning was seen as a social process. Learning communities are a means through which links can be made between theoretical learning components with students benefiting from increased academic and social involvement, increased collaboration, enhanced success and better retention rates (Beaudin et al. 2002; Clulow 2000). Beaudin et al. (2002) argue that academics and students must work collaboratively in a way that fosters student success and social connection. It is likely that increased formal and informal contact between academics and students encourages student commitment and persistence (Cotton and Wilson 2006; Peel 2000). Additionally, the development of peer relationships is thought to enhance academic and social integration (Black and MacKenzie 2008). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), amongst others, believed that a student's university experience was not just about the development of cognitive skills (and other skills directly relevant to the outcomes of a course, such as psychomotor skills in nursing). It was also about the development of their worldview through learning and interpersonal interactions and the opportunities for engagement and empowerment of the learner. These matters are discussed in the next section.

1.7 Engagement and empowerment for learners in Higher Education

In this section, definitions of, and some discussion around, the concepts of engagement and empowerment are presented. Relevant educational issues

relating to the concepts are discussed, as well as the relationship between curriculum development through enquiry-based learning and its potential impact on the overall student experience, especially as a means of moving towards greater academic and social engagement.

Fanghanel (2007) cites the paucity of research on HE teaching until the 1980s, but goes on to tell us that in the current climate of the massification of HE, the complexity of the student population and flexibility of learning environments within a managed context, there is more and more need to provide evidence to support teaching approaches. The investigation into the first year experience of nursing students within 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups allows for some comparisons to be made, and thus aims to enhance the evidence-base for teaching.

1.7.1 Definitions: engagement and empowerment

Nurse educators are required to produce practitioners who are fit for purpose for an NHS that demands safe, up-to-date, person-focused care. We are challenged, therefore, to educate for capability as well as competence (Fraser and Greenhalgh 2001). The development of capability derives from learning that takes place through engagement and empowerment, which in turn leads to the development of the behaviours for professional practice and changing perspectives.

One definition of empowerment that relates to education is that of a collaboration between lecturer and student so that the student develops the skills to take responsibility for his or her own learning (Leyshon 2002). While empowerment theory originated in radical politics, the term has entered popular language, and is often raised as a goal of education. It relates, not just to the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, but also to the transformation of individuals. Implicit within this discourse is that it is of benefit to the individual and to society and this is highly relevant to nursing education which aims to benefit society through the act of nursing (Leyshon 2002).

According to Coates (2005), student engagement is based on constructivist learning theory where active individual participation in learning is the essence. Although the environment (in its broadest sense) is important in the process of learning, it is the student's own activity and involvement that is most likely to lead to quality learning. Institutions, however, must develop the environments where the enhancement of student learning is the goal.

Section 1.7.2 explores educational issues and associated engagement of the student *in* the learning process and empowerment of the learner *through* the learning process.

1.7.2 Educational issues relating to engagement and empowerment

Learning is a complex process that is affected by internally and socially constructed processes (e.g. motivation) (Walker 2006). The aim of education is traditionally to impart relevant knowledge and skills to the learner. Within this traditional discourse, education leads to the production of individuals who conform to the existing cultural norms and who will fulfill pre-existing roles within society (social control) (Jarvis et al. 2004). However, other views of education encapsulate the educator as a facilitator of learning where knowledge and roles are less certain and subject to changing conditions. Facilitative approaches aim to engender engagement and empowerment within the learner so that 'deep' learning can take place. As Jarvis et al. (2004) assert, deep learning is more likely to occur when students engage with the curriculum. Deep learning is that which enables students to develop their understanding of concepts, to make links between theories, and apply theory in a meaningful way (Rosie 2000). Surface learning, on the other hand, is when students accept information and remember it within only the immediate context of learning (rather than making links with other learning experiences) (Houghton 2004). By helping students to think about their own thinking through reflection and other methods, lecturers can transform the ways in which students approach their learning (Bulman and Schutz 2004).

There are a number of approaches to learning including: behaviourist (where learning is said to take place following changes in behaviour resulting from experience); cognitivist (where learning relates to human development); and social learning (where learning relates to the social context within which it takes place). Each has much to offer, and in different ways they relate to engagement and empowerment (and thus to the transformation of the individual). Jarvis et al. (2004) discuss Vygotsky's view of a developmental process through which individuals move to achieve their learning (cognitive learning). He asserted that the social processes and the dynamics of the learning situation were important as ways of supporting learning (through scaffolding) (social learning). Vygotsky's work is inherent within the need to support students to become engaged *in* learning so as to achieve transformation and empowerment *through* learning (Yorke 2003).

Taking these ideas of engagement and empowerment further (so as to achieve potential and transformation), one school of thought is that education can be used as an "instrument of liberation" (Freire et al. 1994, p. 27). Freire focused on power relationships within education and was optimistic in his thinking that education was the means by which one could question the traditional balance of power through student-academic interactions (Freire et al. 1994). For example, when a lecturer teaches, he or she strives to convince the student of the value of the knowledge or the worldview imparted. This act of convincing can be seen as an act of power on the part of the lecturer, depending on the approach taken to convince.

Freire was ambitious in his desire to achieve social change through education, though he acknowledged the naivety within these expectations. He asserted that what actually happened within education was the reproduction of the ideology of the dominant class so as to perpetuate that power and thus sociocultural conformity (Jarvis et al. 2004). Freire reasoned, though, that the opposite was possible and desirable, though solutions within one context may not be transferable to another. He used the term 'revolution' in his discussions about the changes required in universities and wider society. Although based within a Latin American

context, his writings are still highly relevant particularly in today's world of education where political needs are becoming more of a focus for activity. Many academics are tied to professional and other requirements that impact on the curriculum, and may not allow for the empowerment and emancipation that Freire and his colleagues advocated for. They asserted that rigorous self criticism, and the scrutiny of others, allowed for the possibility of, what they termed, revolution, but what could be seen as a continuing journey towards intellectual empowerment that will impact on students, academics and wider society.

Freire et al. (1994) held strong views on the use of the term 'empowerment'. They were concerned that its frequent use within educational circles had "depleted" and "diminished" (p. 164) it as a meaningful concept. They challenged the reader to revisit and reclaim it by conceptualising it as follows: "A (the subject, for example the first year student) is empowered in respect of B (some aspect of the discursive structuring of power, for example the first year student experience) by/through C (a process of quality, for example a transition programme) such that D (a valued end or outcome, for example academic and social integration) ensues" (p. 166). Enabling greater understanding of the power relationships, the learner and the circumstances, they asserted that academics were more likely to help learners to become truly empowered individuals.

It could be that there is some conflict between the concepts of engagement and empowerment, where engagement is used by the educator to achieve the learning that has been dictated, rather than truly allowing for the development of autonomy in learning. However, for empowerment to take place, the student must be engaged in the learning process. The aim should be to enable people to develop into critical thinkers who are autonomous and able to identify their own learning needs. Empowerment should deliver increased confidence in a variety of situations, enhanced assertiveness and decision-making skills (Chan 2001; Fazey and Fazey 2001), plus skills that allow for being public about views and being able to advocate change where this is seen as appropriate. In nursing, this could be as simple as

being able to deal with bad practice where this is highlighted, to increasing knowledge about the ways in which the caring role of the nurse should develop within the current political context.

The aim of education within the context of the first year experience and the curriculum development in this research was to enable students to develop into empowered autonomous lifelong learners prepared for the realities of evolving practice. Students welcome the opportunity to develop in this way (Chan 2001) and educators need to facilitate the development of the skills required for this way of learning through empathy, approachability and by providing a safe environment in which students can take control of their own learning (Mann 2001).

1.7.3 The relationship between curriculum development through enquiry-based learning, and engagement and empowerment

Academic engagement can be facilitated through teaching and learning approaches (Kuh et al. 2004). Additionally, social integration can be facilitated within the learning environment and academics can utilise particular teaching techniques so as to enable this to happen. Harvey et al.'s (2006) literature review notes that teaching techniques, approaches to learning and conceptions of learning, autonomous learning and learning communities all feature in the literature as being important in consideration of pedagogical approaches to first year. Overall, the conclusions that can be drawn from this collection of literature are that: students are more likely to engage with active creative teaching approaches where assessment is meaningful to the overall learning experience (Yorke 2001); students generally want to develop as autonomous learners but need help to do so; and where help is available and appropriate, cognitive growth can be quite significant within first year and acts as a strong building block for subsequent learning.

In the context of this thesis, the pre-registration nursing curriculum moved from a 'traditional' approach where coverage of topics was seen as important, to an approach where further emphasis was placed on helping

students to learn how to learn (cognitive/social interactionist approach) and students developed responsibility for their own learning that was of relevance to the real situations and experiences they faced in practice. The use of EBL as an integral component of the curriculum was also seen as a way of enabling students to develop attitudes and behaviours that could lead to the transformation of practice. It was deemed to be the responsibility of lecturers to provide a structure in which students could learn to learn independently and collaboratively for the development of critical thinking abilities (Kleiman 2003; Loving and Wilson 2000). It was therefore important to ensure that, as well as covering content, active student involvement in the learning process was of primary importance (Levett-Jones 2005).

One of the ways in which the process of learning was emphasised, and the skills for lifelong learning were developed, was through the use of EBL (Ousev 2003; Morales- Mann and Kaitell 2001; Rideout and Carpio 2001). The 'EBL' curriculum utilised enquiry-based learning alongside more 'traditional' modes of delivery (e.g. lectures, tutorials) to deliver the curriculum. One of the requirements was that students were always placed in the same learning groups so as to facilitate continuity and the development of peer relationships (Chapman 2006; Fraser and Greenhalgh 2001). Further description of the 'traditional' and 'EBL' curricula is provided in section 1.8. This current section deals with EBL, its relationship to engagement and empowerment, and its use in nursing education.

Enquiry-based learning is a form of learning driven by enquiry (Jackson 2003) rather than by problems as with problem-based learning (PBL). EBL does, however, have its origins in the problem-solving US medical programmes of the 1960s (Price 2001) where PBL was used to promote independent learning and problem solving (Bebb and Pittam 2004). So far, much of the PBL literature has focused on medical education, although this situation is changing and more has been published in other health-related fields (Bebb and Pittam 2004). EBL and PBL share many characteristics including: the use of group working to investigate problems or undertake enquiries; the focus on the student as an active participant (and leader) in

the learning process; and the development of skills for contemporary and future practice (Bebb and Pittam 2004; Price 2003). The key difference is EBL's *enquiry*, rather than problem, focus.

EBL is a way in which one can make use of real-life situations as a focus for the exploration of relevant issues. For nursing students this would usually relate to patient or client care. Complex situations can be explored through a process of discovering information and going on to make meaningful links between theory and practice. The issues that nurses grapple with in practice are not always clear, and so skills of investigation, enquiry, interpretation and problem-solving are essential for practice (Mantzoukas 2007; Margotsen 2001). EBL facilitates exploration of the meanings of situations and enables students to investigate the options that are available to the professional within that context. For nursing students, EBL is a way in which students can be encouraged to scrutinise the role of the nurse, the issues that arise in practice, and the decision-making processes that go on at all times (Horne et al. 2007; Price 2003).

EBL has a number of advantages similar to those of PBL. Alexander et al. (2002, p. 249) assert that it is a "promising way of providing students with the characteristics needed for contemporary practice". Some of these have already been alluded to and include the development of autonomous learning skills (Horne et al. 2007), critical thinking, communication skills, problem-solving, and understanding of group processes and dynamics, the enhancement of student mood, class attendance and academic progress (Morales-Mann and Kaitell 2001). Pang et al. (2002) explore the idea that feedback from other group members can be helpful and assert that learning together can broaden a student's horizons. The debates that arise within the groups enrich the learning process (Bebb and Pittam 2004), enhance social skills, and can create positive attitudes (Hwang and Kim 2006) through engagement and empowerment (Arpanantikul et al. 2006).

In the 'EBL' curriculum described in this thesis, there were a number of stages through which the students and facilitators moved when undertaking EBL activities. These are shown in figure 1.

EBL has the potential to facilitate student engagement with the learning process and to enhance the empowerment of the learner. The skills are reflected in those required for nursing and for lifelong learning – attributes that are pre-requisites for nurses who are working in an evolving healthcare environment.

Figure 1: The stages of EBL in the 'EBL' curriculum

Stage of EBL process	Activities
1. Explanation, discussion and planning of activity	1. EBL facilitator/group brainstorming; division of learning activities
2. Group/self-directed activity	2. Collation of information relevant to enquiry
3. Facilitated EBL session(s)	3. Collate, evaluate, synthesise the information, and determine further requirements and plan its presentation
4. Final facilitated EBL session	4. Prepare findings for presentation (written, verbal, etc) to the whole class
5. Presentation and consolidation	5. Individual group presentations, question and answer session, reflection on group work (led by EBL facilitator), identification of further learning needs

1.8 The local context of the first year undergraduate experience

The purpose of this section is to provide a description of features of the first year experience for the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups so as to position the context for this research. In particular, the curriculum change is described as it supplies the vehicle for aspects of the investigation of the first year experience for the two groups.

1.8.1 Broad contextual issues

The Scottish Subject Benchmark Statements for Nursing (QAA 2002) provided a framework for ensuring that the content of the 'EBL' course was

appropriate and met Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) standards. NHS Education for Scotland (NES) also played an important role in the maintenance of quality standards for pre-registration nursing education at the time of the curriculum change. All programmes of study had to be validated by this organisation and subsequently monitored for the NMC.

Pre-registration nursing courses are subject to a number of professional requirements set out within the NMC's Standards of Proficiency for Pre-registration Nursing Education (NMC 2004). Pre-registration nursing programmes differ from other university courses in a number of ways. One of the important differences is that nursing students are required to undertake 2300 hours theory and 2300 hours clinical practice within their course through a 45 week academic year. There are four 'branches' of nursing: Adult, Mental Health, Children's and Learning Disability Nursing. Except for the latter, all branches were offered in the university in question. Mental Health and Children's branch were smaller in size to Adult branch by a considerable number (Adult branch had approximately 6 times as many students as each of the other branches).

The next sections describe the 'traditional' curriculum, the requirement and rationale for change, and the 'EBL' curriculum. These descriptions provide further context for the case study research.

1.8.2 The 'traditional' curriculum

The students in the 'traditional' curriculum group undertook a Diploma of Higher Education/Bachelor of Arts Nursing (DipHE/BAN) course. One of the key curriculum drivers at the time was the Peach Report (UKCC 1999). The Peach Report recommended that at the point of registration, students should be capable of contributing to the planning, assessment and development of services, particularly within primary care. Theory and practice were to be integrated, and the programmes had to focus on outcomes-based competency principles through collaborative and partnership working.

In year one of the 'traditional' course students undertook the following modules:

- Weeks 1-8: Foundations of Care; Introduction to Behavioural Sciences.
- Weeks 9-15: Initial Nursing Practice (Clinical module).
- Weeks 16-23: Foundations of Human Anatomy and Physiology; Theory and Practice of Nursing.
- Weeks 24-30: Initial Nursing Practice (Clinical module).
- Weeks 31-37: Theory and Practice of Nursing; Foundations of Health Promoting Practice.
- Weeks 38-45: Initial Nursing Practice (Clinical module).

The clinical module (Initial Nursing Practice) encompassed all the practice placements (of which there were three) in year one of the course. The titles of the modules reflected their nature and the fact that disciplines⁵ other than nursing were the primary focus for some of the modules. For example, Introduction to Behavioral Sciences was a module in which students learnt about sociology and psychology.

The Definitive Course Document (DCD) (The Robert Gordon University (RGU) 2001) outlines the course philosophy, programme aims and teaching, learning and assessment strategies. The DCD is a university document that all courses are required to have and each one provides full details of a particular course. Extracts from the DCD for the 'traditional' course are provided in appendix 4. It is not clear how the curriculum development process was organised and on what evidence it was based. There is no public documentation available with this information, and the then course leader is unable to provide further information.

In essence the DCD for the DipHE/BAN course informs us that the course was designed with a view to encouraging personal and professional development through the acquisition of lifelong learning skills (e.g. problem

⁵ For example: sociology, psychology

solving, personal effectiveness). The importance of a sound knowledge base for practice was emphasised. The student was seen as an adult learner who would actively contribute to the learning process. The course aim reflected the need to prepare students for entry to the Professional Register.

The teaching, learning and assessment strategy aimed to enable students to develop into autonomous lifelong learners through the use of a variety of teaching and assessment approaches. The use of a portfolio throughout the programme was seen as a way to facilitate structured reflection on learning that had taken place, and the identification of future learning needs.

1.8.3 Rationale for curriculum change

In 2003, the School of Nursing and Midwifery began to prepare for re-approval of the pre-registration nursing course for May 2004. The process that the School had gone through in the development of the DipHE/BAN curriculum, and the lessons learned from its implementation, culminated in the need for further development of pre-registration nursing education in the School. A decision was taken to offer a Bachelor of Nursing (Hons) (BN (Hons)) programme. The course titles at the time (i.e. BA Nursing, BSc (Hons) Nursing) implied that nursing was *either* a science *or* an art. There is ample evidence that this dichotomy is false, and the notion of nursing as a science *and* an art is well supported by a wealth of literature (Rolfe and Gardiner 2006; Corri 2003; Doane 2002; Wynne et al. 1997; Torrance and Jordan 1995). Furthermore, nursing education has amalgamated theory derived from a number of disciplines (e.g. psychology, sociology, physiology) for application to professional practice (Sredl 2001). Therefore it was logical that the title of the academic award conferred on graduates of the nursing course should fit the purpose and explicitly describe the nature of the qualification.

The curriculum development work focused on a number of philosophical underpinnings which linked to the aims of the use of EBL and to engagement and empowerment of the learners:

- The wish to develop each person's capacity to achieve their potential (Walker 2006).
- The development of a curriculum model that enabled students to come to know the subject (nursing) and to participate actively as individuals and with their peers in a way that helped them to engage with the academic curriculum.
- To prepare students for an uncertain world in which their education enabled them to deal with change, and make changes (Ironsides 2004).
- An acknowledgement that people came into the course with beliefs, attitudes, understandings and self-identify, and that the process of education should cause academics and others to look at these and support students to flourish.
- The development of a learning environment in which relationships between learners and academics supported the learning process. The need to provide lecturers with an environment in which they could demonstrate that they cared.
- The development of a learning environment in which friendship networks developed so that students did not feel alienated.
- The development of a learning environment in which previous experiences, knowledge, skills etc were valued.

The need to enhance the student experience and to improve retention was, and remains, important in the process of curriculum development (Taylor 2005).

1.8.4 The 'EBL' curriculum

Mooney and Nolan (2006) assert that nurse educators must work creatively to provide students with learning experiences that are empowering and engaging. Freire et al.'s (1994) work presented a view on learning that advocated for engagement and empowerment. As such, the curriculum model for the curriculum change described within this thesis was designed to enable students to develop the skills for lifelong learning, among other things.

The 'EBL' group of students undertook a Diploma of Higher Education/Bachelor of Nursing programme. In year one of the programme students undertook the following modules:

- Weeks 1-8: Nursing Theory; Nursing Skills; Health Improvement in Nursing/Midwifery.
- Weeks 9-15: Initial Nursing Practice (Clinical module).
- Weeks 16-23: Human Sciences in Nursing/Midwifery; Dimensions of Nursing; Human Dynamics in Nursing.
- Weeks 24-30: Initial Nursing Practice (Clinical module).
- Weeks 31-37: Consolidation of learning/EBL.
- Weeks 38-45: Initial Nursing Practice (Clinical module).

The practice module spanned the whole year (Initial Nursing Practice) and encompassed all practice placements.

The modules had a nursing focus with theory from other disciplines underpinning nursing as an integral part. The final contact time in the university with students in year one was given over to a seven week period of consolidation of learning and enquiry-based learning activities with the aim of enabling further development of independent learning skills. EBL was a strand of learning that ran throughout the first year. It was linked to each of the theory modules and the enquiry activities that students were asked to undertake provided them with the opportunity to:

- Make links between theory across modules;
- Make links between theory and practice learning; and
- Develop relationships with their peers and with their facilitator.

Appendix 5 is an extract from the Definitive Programme Document (DPD) and provides the programme overview and philosophy, aim, and teaching, learning and assessment strategy (RGU 2004). Figure 2 provides a summary of key aspects of the 'traditional' curriculum and the 'EBL' curriculum for comparison.

Figure 2: Comparison of the 'traditional' curriculum with the 'EBL' curriculum

	'Traditional' curriculum	'EBL' curriculum
Time per week	35 hours	35 hours
Length of first year	23 weeks theory; 22 weeks practice	23 weeks theory; 22 weeks practice
Teaching approaches	Lectures; tutorials; seminars; clinical skills; directed study; private study	As 'traditional' curriculum EBL strand attached to each module (equivalent of 40 hours EBL from each module)
Curriculum focus	Discipline specific	Nursing specific
Clinical skills	Mandatory sessions only: moving and handling, CPR, hand washing	One 15 credit module at the beginning of first year; mandatory sessions
Student support	Personal tutor; academic tutors for each module; mentor in practice	As 'traditional' curriculum; EBL facilitator (who was also the personal tutor) for academic, clinical and pastoral support

1.9 Conclusion: The quality of the first year student experience

The quality of the first year experience is composed of a complex range of inter-relating factors which impact on the likelihood that a student will persist or withdraw. As discussed in this chapter the following are important to the quality of the first year student experience:

i. Pre-entry experiences

Preparedness, match between expectations and experiences, high priority of course choice, previous family at university.

ii. Transition arrangements

Adjustment, academic and social integration, student commitment and attitudes, self-esteem, preparedness, match between expectations and experiences.

iii. Support

Adjustment, academic and social integration, teaching quality and approaches, course organisation, match between expectations and experiences.

iv. Expectations

Adjustment, academic and social integration, student commitment and attitudes, self-esteem, teaching quality and approaches, preparedness, match with experiences, high priority of course choice, previous family at university.

The factors that are known to cause attrition are wide ranging and complex. The quality of the first year experience can have an impact on the likelihood of someone leaving, as well as the social and personal factors that have been discussed. The issues that affect first year are inter-related and can have a positive or negative impact on the student experience: financial, personal, role conflict, academic, practice, support, course choice, health, pregnancy, course organisation, staff attitudes, commitment, student attitudes, self-esteem, and teaching quality.

The argument is thus that enhancement of the first year can improve student engagement (initially) and empowerment (in the longer term). Curriculum development can assist in the enhancement of the first year to enable student engagement, and ultimately empowerment, and that the use of enquiry-based learning can assist in this process. EBL, within the context of the research, was used to enable students to develop particular skills as previously described. It was also used as a means to develop relationships between peers and with academic staff. In other words, its use in this context could be termed a 'learning community'.

Therefore it is essential to investigate the first year experience of nursing students to establish whether it is similar or different from that of other students. Whilst retention literature seems to support that the experiences of nursing students are similar, the lack of literature relating to the first year suggests that further investigation is warranted.

In chapter 2 case study research is explored as the methodology of choice for the research. An overview of case study research, an analysis of its use, and a rationale for its appropriateness for the research are provided. The chapter goes on to describe the methods utilised for the investigation of the first year experience.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to investigate the first year experience of student nurses within the context of curriculum change from 'traditional' to 'EBL'. The first year experience is a complex and multifaceted area of study, as has been demonstrated within the literature review. It encompasses phases, features and factors that affect individuals and institutions in different ways. As will be argued, case study research is an appropriate approach with which to investigate such a phenomenon given the range of the research objectives:

1. To examine the first year experience of nursing students.
2. To describe the curriculum change, the rationale for the change and the context within which this occurred.
3. To compare the demographic profiles of two groups of students one following a 'traditional' curriculum and the other using 'EBL'; to compare students who chose to leave the courses with those who successfully completed first year.
4. To compare experiences with expectations of first year between nursing students undertaking a 'traditional' and an 'EBL' curriculum.
5. To propose strategies to enhance the student experience and rates of retention in first year undergraduate nursing students.

2.2 Research Methodology

This chapter provides a description of case study research from a number of perspectives. Philosophical approaches to research and their application to this study are debated, and the chapter goes on to provide a rationale for the choice of the research methodology and its application within the context. Finally, the research methods that were used are identified and discussed with an emphasis on their relationship to the methodology. This

chapter commences by defining case study research, describing a number of approaches with reference to seminal authors, and arguing for the choice of case study research for this research.

2.2.1 Definition: Case Study Research

Case study research has been described and defined widely in the literature (Cohen et al. 2003; Yin 2003; Gillham 2000; Gomm et al. 2000; Bassey 1999; Merriam 1998; Stake 1995). A succinct definition that captures the essence of case study research is provided by Robson (2002 p.178) as: "a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence". Robson (2002) asserts that case study research (CSR) is a flexible approach that allows for the use of quantitative data within a qualitatively designed study. There is a need, though, to ensure that CSR is carried out rigorously in terms of its design, data collection and analysis, and in the development of the 'story' of the research. A case can be one of many things including an individual or a group, an institution or a community. It can be single or there can be multiple cases (Gillham 2000).

Case study research is likely to have been born from the case study approaches used in fields such as social work and medicine (Gomm et al. 2000). The term 'case study' is not used consistently in the literature and its meanings can overlap with others such as 'ethnography', 'qualitative research' and 'participant observation' (Hammersley and Gomm 2000). However, the literature base for case study research succeeds in clarifying the terminology while recognising the differences in viewpoints among researchers. Keeves' (1997) perspective was that the case study is a generic term describing an approach that enables the researcher to investigate the phenomenon in a holistic way so that the characteristics of the parts, which are largely determined by the 'whole', reveal patterns. As Rosenberg and Yates (2007, p. 1) state, "Case study research is an appropriate and flexible approach to research in nursing and the social sciences ... and is most commonly applied where the phenomenon of interest is complex and highly contextualised." Thus, the use of case study research to investigate the first year experience of student nurses enables

the gathering of information across the dimensions outlined within the objectives of the research.

2.2.2 Approaches to case study research

As suggested, there are a number of different approaches to case study research discussed in the literature. While there is some agreement, there are differences in the nomenclature utilised which reflects some differences in the nature and purpose of case study research.

Merriam (1998), whose seminal text gathered together information on CSR to that point in time, listed it as being one of three types. These were: descriptive (a way of describing a phenomenon in depth), interpretive (a way of examining initial assumptions) and evaluative (a way of explaining and judging). She went on to provide more detailed information about evaluative case studies and described them as involving 'thick' description, being holistic and lifelike, and illuminating meaning. 'Thick' description is a term that means a complete description of the inquiry context and enables the reader to make judgments about the conclusions drawn by the researcher. Yin (2003, 1994) is also widely referred to in the literature (e.g. Tellis 1997). The three types of case studies discussed in his work were: exploratory (as a pilot to other studies or research questions), descriptive (as a way of providing a complete description of a phenomenon within a particular context), and explanatory (as a way of testing theories).

Stake (1995) argued that researchers undertake case studies for a variety of reasons. Intrinsic case studies are carried out so that the researcher gains a better understanding of a particular case with no real expectation that the findings will be of use outside of understanding the case: the case is important. Instrumental case studies are used to enable the researcher to refine theory or gain insight into identified issues: the issues are important. Cohen et al. (2003) describe case studies as offering an opportunity for the researcher to utilise a specific instance to illustrate a general principle. The single instance must be that of a 'bounded system' where the phenomenon (the case) is bounded by time and activity (Parahoo 2006). Case study research enables the researcher to study the

particular through the identification of commonalities, and through the illumination of the uniqueness of the case (Stake 2000a). The latter is done by exploring its nature, its context, and by relating the case to others through which it can be recognised. The researcher must therefore gather data on all these aspects. In this research evaluative case study research was used to investigate the phenomenon (the first year experience of undergraduate student nurses). The 'bounded system' in this research was the first year (time) experience (activity).

There are some fundamental characteristics of the methodology that were useful in providing a focus for approaching this research (Cohen et al. 2003, p. 182):

- i. "It is concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case.
- ii. It provides a chronological narrative of events relevant to the case.
- iii. It blends description of events with analysis of them.
- iv. It focuses on individual actors or groups of actors, and seeks to understand their perception of events.
- v. It highlights specific events that are relevant to the case.
- vi. The researcher is integrally involved in the case.
- vii. An attempt is made to portray the richness of the case in writing up the report."

So, for this research, the aim was to let the reader begin to understand what the first year experience was like for the participants through the use of 'thick' description. It is hoped that readers will be able to interpret the findings for use within their own context. The philosophical perspective of

the research is discussed later, and emphasises the importance of the researcher's involvement in the process.

2.2.3 Advantages and limitations of case study research

There are a number of advantages and limitations to case study research as discussed by Robson (2002) and Merriam (1998), among others. These relate to the previous discussion of the characteristics of case study research. The advantages are as follows:

- i. 'Strong in reality' because of the use of a variety of methods within, overall, an interpretive paradigm.
- ii. Allows for generalisations from one instance to another through the communication of the findings in a plausible and convincing manner and with the findings related to relevant research in the literature.
- iii. Pays attention to the complexity of the phenomenon through the use of a number of methods, the grounding in the context (the bounded system), and the careful interpretation of the findings.
- iv. Enables others to make subsequent reinterpretations given the nature of interpretation and the acknowledgement that there are multiple realities. In particular, CSR enables readers to interpret the findings in relation to their own context (thus the importance of providing detailed contextual information).
- v. Insights gained may be put to use in the researcher's own context, and in other contexts.
- vi. Presents the findings in an accessible form for all so that the findings can illuminate others' experiences.
- vii. Highlights differences while recognising similarities. In particular, case study research provides opportunities for comparisons to be made.

- viii. Provides insights into similar situations for others working in similar contexts.
- ix. Is flexible and versatile enough to hold on to the discovery of unexpected variables and to ensure that the uniqueness of the findings does not get lost in the analysis and subsequent writing up of the research.

The disadvantages include:

- x. The undertaking can be time consuming and expensive with the scope of the research, and the use of a number of methods.
- xi. The product can be deemed too lengthy or detailed and therefore requires the researcher to produce the findings in an accessible way for the particular audiences.
- xii. Danger of over simplification or exaggeration leading to erroneous judgments where careful interpretation does not take place. The use of an audit trail makes the process of interpretation transparent if done well.
- xiii. Expertise of the researcher in a variety of methods and their ethical utilisation.

To summarise, a case study is a way of investigating a contemporary phenomenon. The investigation must take place within a real-life context. The context is thickly described for the benefit of the reader. Multiple sources of evidence are utilised to converge and verify the findings. Case study research is a comprehensive and flexible way of investigating a phenomenon.

2.2.4 Generalisation, transferability and fittingness in case study research

A discussion on generalisation, transferability and fittingness for case study research necessarily pulls together the characteristics of good CSR. The issues relating to the generalisability of the findings of case study research are widely discussed in the literature (e.g. Gerrish and Lacey 2006; Cohen et al. 2003; Robson 2002; Bassey 1999). Cormack (2000 p. 27) tells us that, "generalisation involves extending the implications of the findings from the study sample to the larger population from which that sample is drawn".

The view of generalisation from the positivist perspective enables researchers to confidently generalise their findings from the methods used. However this is not the case within the interpretive paradigm. Donmeyer (2000) argues that there are two challenges to the traditional view of generalisability, namely the complexity challenge and the paradigm challenge. The complexity challenge is that human action is constructed and not caused so that innumerable investigations of human behaviour, even within similar contexts, will produce dissimilar findings. Thus the use of large representative samples does not enable the researcher to apply the findings to a particular person or situation. Rather, it simply relates to the likelihood, or probability, of the findings being significant to other similar situations.

Researchers are influenced by a priori theories (the paradigm challenge). Donmeyer (2000 p. 50) states:

"As Kant concluded long ago, it is impossible to talk of the nature of reality with any sense of certainty because we can never know the nature of reality independent of the cognitive structures that influence our perceptions".

Within the interpretive paradigm, the existence of multiple realities is fully accepted. Donmeyer (2000) concludes by suggesting that CSR is a way of expanding and enriching understanding of phenomena as definitive answers

cannot be found for complex social phenomena. Therefore all research findings should be viewed as being tentative but as being helpful in developing a better understanding of phenomena. As Schofield (2000) asserts it is necessary for the case study researcher to come up with a conception of the way in which generalisability can be utilised in an appropriate manner in order to enhance the likelihood that others will be able to see the relevance of the research to situations other than the one under study.

Stake (1995) asserted that through naturalistic generalisation, a case study should enable the reader to transfer the findings from the case context to another context on the basis of what seems to fit properly. Naturalistic generalisations are those conclusions that are drawn through a process of current engagement with past experiences in a way that allows the reader to make personal conclusions about the fit of the research within different contexts. Stake (1995 p. 87) stated:

“To assist the reader in making naturalistic generalisations, case researchers need to provide opportunity for vicarious experience. Our accounts need to be personal, describing the things of our sensory experiences, not failing to attend to matters that personal curiosity dictates. A narrative account, a story, a chronological presentation, personalistic experience, emphasis on time and place provide rich ingredients for vicarious experience”.

The researcher, therefore, has to provide the user with the information in a familiar form if the aim is to enable people to extend their understandings. Naturalistic generalisations are derived from tacit knowledge (as discussed in the next section on the philosophical perspective of the research) and can lead to expectations (although not predictions) therefore acting as a guide for future action. The reader applies aspects of the case study to his or her own experiences of similar cases and develops his or her own understanding of the phenomenon. In this research it is hoped that readers will engage with the experiences of the first year students through the narrative. The ‘thick’ description of the context, the ‘story’ of the first year

experiences, and the assertions made in light of the interpretive process all aim to provide readers with the opportunity to determine the *transferability* of the findings to their own context.

Transferability is the ability to utilise the findings in a different context based on 'fittingness' (Donmeyer 2000). Fittingness is the degree to which the context within the research is congruent with the reader's context. The reader is the only person who can make a judgment of transferability as the researcher is not in a situation to do so. The reader's judgment is the key to determining whether the researcher has made an experience accessible, and whether the research is seen as a vicarious view on another's experience. Seeing the world through someone else's eyes allows for the reader to broaden their horizons and expand their worldview. New perspectives can either be accepted or rejected by the reader. This will depend on whether the findings are congruent with the evidence presented in the research.

A number of key aspects of the arguments laid out in this section are synthesised to produce a mode by which generalisation is clarified within the context of this CSR and relates to its characteristics as described earlier. Case study research:

- i. Provides a 'thick description' of the context in which the research is carried out in an appropriate, recognisable and systematic way. This provides the reader with a 'bounded system' from which he or she can make judgments about the similarities of the researcher's and his or her own situation, and the transferability of the findings. In this research, the thick description includes the demographic information relating to the whole population group and that of the sample, the temporal boundaries, the international literature, the context for curriculum change, a description of the curriculum change, and descriptions of the experiences of the participants.
- ii. Offers a description of the philosophical perspective or paradigm from which the researcher is working. It highlights the assumptions

made within the research, and in this research is within the interpretive paradigm. Along with this, information about the prejudgments that have been brought to the research is provided.

- iii. Provides suggestions as to ways in which the reader may be able to judge the 'fit' of the findings from the research to his or her own context. This is done through the use of other research and literature, the conclusions and recommendations and acts as a guide to the ways in which the findings from one case study can be transferred to other contexts.

So, generalisation in CSR cannot be ignored. In fact, making opportunities for generalisation transparent is an important part of the process. It adds value to the thesis and enables the reader to critically evaluate their own practice in light of others' experiences. In this way, learning takes place, and practice enhancements can begin.

2.2.5 Philosophical perspective

According to Rosenberg and Yates (2007, p. 1) CSR can act as a "paradigmatic bridge" because it is not fixed to a particular philosophical perspective. It has been argued that CSR can add to existing experience and enhance the humanistic understanding of the way we see the world (Stake 2000b), and thus create knowledge. Propositional knowledge is the knowledge of reason made up of the observation of objects and events (Stake 2000a). Positivists assert that propositional knowledge, by providing explanations, comes closest to a true expression of 'Truth'. On the other hand, tacit knowledge is gained from experiences with objects and events and reflections on these experiences. Tacit knowledge leads us to make sense of metaphors, and know ourselves through discovery and by acknowledging that knowledge is not value-free (Polanyi 1966). Non-positivists assert that tacit knowledge comes closest to the 'Truth' by enabling us to understand phenomena. If the aim is to understand, extend experience and increase truthfulness of what is already known, CSR is a useful way of going about this and enables the researcher and the research user to increase both propositional and tacit knowledge relating to a

phenomenon. The process of determining the form of knowledge that is created through research provides one with a focus for considering the philosophical perspective.

Stake (1995), Bassey (1999) and Cohen et al. (2003) all agree that CSR should be carried out within an interpretive paradigm although an argument will be made that the use of multiple methods (including quantitative methods) enhances the development of a 'thick' description of the phenomenon. In fact Merriam (1998, p. 28) asserted that "Any and all methods of gathering data.....can be used in a case study."

For this research, working within an interpretive paradigm supports a belief in multiple realities with the role of the researcher being important to the interpretative process (Silverman 2006). The aim was to create a plausible interpretation of what was found, and from there to convincingly create a worthwhile argument from the interpretation of the first year experiences of the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups (Cresswell 2007; Huberman and Miles 2002). There was a focus on participants' subjective experiences, and an acknowledgement of the importance of context (Parahoo 2006) thus facilitating exploration of the significant features of the case. In other words, the purpose was to understand the subjective world of the research participants. Although this research is qualitatively focused it benefits from quantitative investigation within the broad interpretive framework. The quantitative findings have been reported within the interpretive framework of the case study research and allows for additional exploration of significant features of the case.

The research methods are discussed in later sections and are expectations and experiences surveys (quantitative methods), and experiences interviews and diaries (qualitative methods). As has already been emphasised, the use of questionnaires within the research enabled aspects of the phenomenon to be investigated which could not readily have been accessed through the qualitative approaches. The findings from the questionnaires allow for a contextual backdrop to be presented that aims to enable the reader to determine, in part, the usefulness of the findings to

their context. This also allowed for comparisons to be made across and within the groups under investigation. The context for CSR is of the greatest importance, and the findings from the questionnaires contribute to its 'thick' description. Additionally, the focus of the questionnaires was on expectations and experiences of the first year thus adding an additional layer of description to the findings of the experiences interviews and the diaries. The flexibility of CSR and the ability to use multiple research methods, albeit within an interpretive paradigm in this research, offered an opportunity to explore many aspects of the first year experience that as stated before might otherwise not have been evident through the use of qualitative research methods only.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is utilised as a means to uncover the meaning of the experiences of the participants within the interviews and diaries (Streubert Speziale and Carpenter 2007; Benner 1994). This philosophy links in to the use of CSR as a means of exploring phenomena and contributing to the 'thick' descriptions of cases. Phenomenology is an extensive philosophical framework described by European philosophers, notably Edmund Husserl, in the early twentieth century (Troy et al. 2007). Husserl aimed to gain an understanding of the human experience as it was lived and thereby to get to the essence of the phenomenon. Phenomenology was further developed by Martin Heidegger who took Husserl's work a stage further through the use of hermeneutics to answer the question of the meaning of Being (Elliott 2004). Hermeneutic phenomenology considers the problem of ontology (what it is to be a human being) before considering epistemological concerns (how do we know what we know?) (Troy et al. 2007). By asking what it means to be a person, it is possible to come to some understanding of the way in which we know the world. The use of hermeneutics within this research emphasises the importance of language in allowing the participants to express particular feelings and ways of relating. Its use made possible the blending of narratives through listening to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Understanding of the first year experience is conveyed through written interpretation by entering the 'hermeneutic circle' (Geanellos 2001). The hermeneutic circle is a metaphor for the way in

which the researcher moves towards an understanding of the phenomenon through a series of partial understandings. Each partial understanding leads to further interpretation, moving backwards and forwards, and never completing the circle – there is always room for further interpretation.

I took my prejudgments of the world into this circle so that my values, attitudes and biases (my worldview) informed the interpretive process (Koch 1999). The aim was to come to a fusion of horizons between the participants and myself. Where Husserl bracketed experiences to be free from biases (Elliott 2004), Heidegger used the worldview to inform the interpretive process. Sayer (2006 p. 17) tells us of hermeneutic circles that:

“[they] imply a two-way movement, a ‘fusing of the horizons’ of listener and speaker, researcher and researched, in which the latter’s actions and texts never speak for themselves, and yet are not reducible to the researcher’s interpretation of them either”.

This paragraph provides the reader with a brief overview of what I see as the important issues that impacted on my interpretive perspective. As a nurse and now a nurse educator, I have a good understanding of the components of pre-registration nursing education. In particular, I am the programme leader and (at the time of the research) was responsible for the development of the curriculum. Additionally, I am a student who works full time, and have undertaken previous degree and further degree courses while juggling full time work and bringing up a family alone. These personal circumstances, do, I believe, allow me to empathise with others who experience similar life situations.

In summary, the use of hermeneutic phenomenology within this thesis has allowed me to stay true to the interpretive paradigm by embracing the view of the existence of multiple realities and the possibilities for further interpretations to take place by the reader. The philosophical perspective and the methodology lead one to the tools with which to investigate the

phenomenon, and the data analysis process that facilitates the coming-together of a 'thick' description of the phenomenon.

2.2.6 Summary: Case study research for the research

In order to investigate the first year experience of two groups of student nurses ('traditional' and 'EBL' groups), a case study approach has been utilised. The purpose of the research is to describe, interpret and explain what happened so that the researcher and the reader can make judgments about the usefulness of the case. The expected outcome is that others will use the findings to make decisions as to whether or not to induce change within a similar context (Bassegy 1999). This research seeks to provide a 'thick' description of the context of the first year experience within the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups, provide a holistic and lifelike picture of the phenomenon (the first year experience), enhance understanding and illuminate meaning, and make judgments (Merriam 1998). Judgments relate to the commonalities and uniqueness of experiences within and between groups.

Case study research has enabled comparisons to be made between the two different groups of students studying nursing in different contexts. The two 'bounded systems' provided the focus for the context. The cases are: the first year student experience in the 'traditional' group, and the first year student experience in the 'EBL' group. The temporal boundaries are the first year of the course for each group of students. The activity within the bounded system is the social group. The 'thick' descriptions of the contexts are vital for comparisons to take place and involve the description of the particular situation for each group where the context of learning and teaching activity was different. The illumination of meaning within the contexts aims to enable the reader to make a judgment on the use of the research for his or her own purposes. Judgment is the final and ultimate act of evaluation (Merriam 1998). The intention is to make the results easily understood by a wide audience (other lecturers both in nursing and other disciplines, mentors in practice settings, policy makers and others) so the findings of the research must speak for themselves.

The next section describes and discusses each of the research methods that have been utilised within the research. The research objectives are listed and the research methods that contributed to their achievement are noted as follows:

1. To examine the first year experience of nursing students.

Experiences interviews with those who successfully completed first year and those who chose to leave before the end of first year; diaries.

2. To describe the curriculum change, the rationale for the change and the context within which this occurred.

The literature review and description of the local context in chapter 1; the expectations questionnaire which provides demographic details and offers an overview of the characteristics of the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups.

3. To compare the demographic profiles of two groups of students one following a 'traditional' curriculum and the other using 'EBL'; to compare students who chose to leave the courses with those who successfully completed first year.

The expectations and experiences questionnaires which provide demographic information about the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups.

4. To compare experiences with expectations of first year between nursing students undertaking a 'traditional' and an 'EBL' curriculum.

Expectations and experiences questionnaires allow for comparisons to be made between expectations and experiences and some conclusions to be drawn in relation to the quality of the educational experience for the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups.

5. To propose strategies to enhance the student experience and rates of retention in first year undergraduate nursing students.

The findings from all aspects of the research inform the conclusions and recommendations.

2.3 Research Methods

The rationale outlined in the previous section provides justification for the use of the research methods within the overall research. Attention now turns to examining each of these methods in detail with particular reference to data collection, data analysis, ethics and other associated issues.

2.3.1 Questionnaires

The use of questionnaires contributed to the building of the case study by providing information relating to demographics and to the expectations and experiences of first year.

Data collection

Students were asked to complete two questionnaires. The first, 'expectations' questionnaire, is an adaptation of the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSEQ) (Kuh and Pace 1998a) and was completed during the first week that students commenced the course. The second, 'experiences' questionnaire, is an adaptation of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSXQ) (Kuh and Pace 1998b) and was completed during the first week of year 2 of the courses. See appendices 10 and 11 for CSEQ and CSXQ questionnaires. Permission was sought from the authors, and granted, to use the questionnaires.

The use of questionnaires is a common method for data collection. It is a method in which responses are sought from the participant in either written or verbal form in order to provide answers to research questions or objectives (Murphy-Black 2006). In this research the questionnaires were written. Questionnaires are usually quantitative in nature because they are predetermined, standardised and structured (Parahoo 2006). They can be used to gather wide-ranging information including facts, attitudes, knowledge, expectations and experiences. The CSEQ and CSXQ questionnaires allowed for the collection of some demographic facts and information on expectations of the course or experiences of the course. The information was gathered so that the expectations and experiences in relation to first year could be explained through the use of statistical tests.

So, although expectations and experiences do not naturally appear in a quantitative form, they were collected and analysed quantitatively (Muijs 2004) through the use of rating scales.

The questionnaires were developed to focus on process indicators (such as study skills) rather than on outcome indicators (such as student achievement) (Kuh and Vesper 1997). The questionnaires relied on self-reports and Kuh and Vesper (1997) highlighted that the self-reports relating to 'gains' were consistent with results achieved from academic tests and validity had been thoroughly examined with excellent psychometric properties reported (Ewell and Jones 1996). According to Kuh and Vesper (1997) the CSEQ satisfied the following conditions: the information that was requested was known to participants; the questions were phrased clearly and unambiguously; the questions related to recent activities; participants were likely to think that the questions were relevant and worthwhile answering seriously; and participants should not have felt threatened or embarrassed by the questions, and should not have felt obliged to answer in a socially desirable way.

The CSEQ required students to reflect on their experiences, to consider what they put into the experience, and what they got out of their experience. The assumption within the questionnaire was that if students were facilitated to take responsibility for their own learning, they would learn more, and that this would take place through student-academic contact, cooperation amongst students and active learning activities, prompt feedback on activities, investing time in tasks, and respect for diversity in learning and talents (taken by Kuh and Vesper (1997) from Chickering and Gamson's 'Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education'). Student engagement theory originated in the work of Kuh, Pace and Astin (Pike et al. 2005) and the assertion is made that student engagement is positively correlated with test scores and persistence rates. The quality of effort that students put into the courses was measured through the CSEQ which had previously been adapted from the CSXQ.

The CSXQ measured the students' expectations and motivations at the start of the university experience. Expectations are said to provide clues for the way in which students will interact with others and engage with their learning. The use of CSXQ and CSEQ provided an opportunity to determine the degree to which student expectations had been met. As Gonyea (2003) points out, a student's expectation of what university or college will be like will be measured (consciously or subconsciously) against the actual experience. Expectations can have an impact on the experience where expectations act as a stimulant or deterrent to behaviour as represented in psychological theory (e.g. self-efficacy theory or motivational theories) (Olsen et al. 1998).

There are a number of advantages and disadvantages to the use of questionnaires and these have been well documented in the literature (Gerrish and Lacey 2006; Parahoo 2006; Cohen et al. 2003). The important advantages within the context of this research included:

- The researcher did not need to be present, and this addressed ethical issues within this research.
- They were used to reach a large number of people (the aim was to reach all students in the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups).
- The questionnaires were cost effective.
- They were reliable (given that they were well constructed), and in this case the use of a modified version of a widely used questionnaire was helpful.
- Their use enabled comparisons to be made because the data were all in the same form which was particularly useful for this research given that one of the objectives aimed to compare experiences with expectations.
- They kept participants anonymous which was important for ethical reasons.
- Participants were able to complete them in their own time and in a place of their choice.

The disadvantages that were important to this research included:

- While there was space for participants to provide qualitative responses, they chose not to.
- Participants could not seek clarification from the researcher and may have interpreted questions differently, with this proving to be an issue with a question (details provided in chapter 3).
- There was potential for a low response rate, although the response rate for this research was satisfactory.

In this research, the questionnaires used had already been demonstrated to be valid and reliable (Kuh and Vesper 1997) these being important characteristics of questionnaire design (Cohen et al. 2003). The questionnaires addressed the research objectives and participants usually consistently understood the questions and responded to them appropriately (Parahoo 2006). The questionnaires had been, and continue to be, widely used within North American education, but this made it important to situate them within the culture of UK education through some modifications. The changes that were made reflected the language and context within which students are taught in this country. Reliability of the adapted tool is demonstrated through the use of Cronbach's alpha test as described in chapter 3.

The experiences and expectations questionnaires used rating and semantic differential scales so as to build a picture of the issues under discussion while still being able to generate numbers. The rating scales were made up of statements that the participant was asked to rate so as to describe the phenomenon, and to evaluate differences between participants. Semantic differential scales measured the participant's attitude or feeling towards a concept, for example the attitude towards academic staff. These were useful tools but do have limitations (Cohen et al. 2003). Where there were intervals it was not possible to determine that the intervals were equal between categories. Participants may have avoided the extreme poles thereby reducing the actual choice. Participants may have also simply chosen the mid point and, linked to this point, it was not possible to

determine whether participants were offering their genuine viewpoint. The CSEQ and CSXQ utilised a 4 point scale (very often, often, occasionally, never) for a number of the questions and this was likely to lead participants to consider their answers and to measure their expectations and experiences appropriately.

The questionnaires asked the participants to provide information in a number of key areas as follows: Background information, library and information technology, experiences with academic staff, module learning, writing, learning and teaching approaches, campus facilities, clubs and organisations, student acquaintances, scientific and quantitative experiences, conversations 1 and 2, reading/writing, opinion about university and programme of study, university environment, and estimate of gains. The questionnaires were utilised as a way of examining and comparing the experiences and expectations of first year nursing students.

i. Background information

Participants were asked to provide background information in the expectations questionnaire: age; sex; entry qualifications; where they would live during their first year; what they expected their average grades to be at the end of first year; whether either of their parents had graduated from university; whether they expected to enroll on a higher degree on completion of the course; how many hours per week they expected to spend outside of a class on activities relating to the academic course; how many hours per week they planned to work on a job; and how much of their university expenses (on top of their bursary) for first year would be provided by parents or family. In the experiences questionnaire, participants were asked for related background information: what were their average grades at the end of first year; whether they expected to enroll for a higher degree on completion of the course; how many hours per week they actually spent on activities related to the academic course; and how many hours per week they actually worked on a job.

Both the expectations and experiences questionnaires were divided into a number of subscales. For the purpose of the data analysis, some of these

were conflated with reliability of the subscales demonstrated through the use of the Cronbach alpha test as described in chapter 3. Each of the subscales is described below so as to provide a full picture of the information that participants were asked to impart.

ii. Library and information technology

Participants were asked to comment on their expectations and experiences of the use they made of the library, databases, and recommended reading materials. The subscale also asked participants to consider their use of computers for completing assignment work, using email and discussion forums, and searching the World Wide Web.

iii. Experiences with academic staff

This subscale explored participants' expectations and experiences of communications with academic staff relating to module work, course selection, career plans and academic performance. It asked about socialising with a member of academic staff. The experiences questionnaire also asked whether participants had worked harder as a result of feedback from a lecturer.

iv. Module learning

The subscale explored participants' expectations and experiences of activities undertaken within modules: reading recommended texts; taking notes during class; participating in class discussions; application of learning; summarising learning; using prior experience in class; explaining module material to someone else; and preparing an assignment where ideas were integrated from various sources.

v. Writing

This subscale related to participants' writing expectations and experiences to determine whether they sought support and help (through other people, books, or lecturer) for writing.

vi. Learning and teaching approaches

Participants were asked to measure their expectations and experiences of the frequency with which they would undertake, or undertook, lectures, tutorials, small group sessions and directed activities.

vii. Campus facilities

This subscale explored whether participants would, or did, attend activities such as concerts, theatre performances, recreational facilities, additional study skills support, and whether they played team sports.

viii. Clubs and organisations

This subscale related to participation in university and non-university activities and organisations.

ix. Student acquaintances

The purpose of this subscale was to look at participants' expectations and experiences of meeting and talking with people from different social and cultural backgrounds.

x. Scientific and quantitative experiences

This subscale asked about expectations and experiences of working with scientific and mathematical theories and concepts.

xi. Conversations 1

Participants were asked to comment on how often they would, or did, talk about issues such as current events, social issues, ideas of writers and philosophers, the arts, science and computer and other technologies, the economy and international relations.

xii. Conversations 2

Participants were asked to comment on how often they would, or did, talk about issues such as knowledge and understanding gained in module learning experiences.

All of the subscales (ii to xii) were on a scale of 4 (very often, often, occasionally, never).

xiii. Reading/writing

This subscale related to the time the participants expected to spend, or spent, on reading and writing activities per week over the academic year. The scale was none, fewer than 5, between 5 and 10, between 11 and 20, and more than 20 hours per week.

xiv. Opinion about university and programme of study

In the expectations questionnaire, participants were asked to consider how well they thought they would like university and placement experiences. In the experiences questionnaire, they were asked to consider how well they liked university and placement experiences, and whether they would go to the same university if they could start again.

xv. University environment

Participants were asked to rank their expectations and experiences in eight categories from strong emphasis to weak emphasis on a 7 point scale on: academic, scholarly and intellectual qualities; aesthetic, expressive and creative qualities; critical, evaluative and analytical qualities; developing an understanding and appreciation of human diversity; developing information and literacy skills; developing vocational and occupational competence; the personal relevance and practical value of the modules; and developing group and team working skills.

Participants were then asked to rank their expectations and experiences in three categories on a 7 point scale for relationships with other students or student groups, relationships with academic staff, and relationships with administrative and support staff.

xvi. Estimate of gains

Finally, participants who completed the experiences questionnaire were asked to rank gains on a 4 point scale (very much, quite a bit, some, very little).

Pilot

The questionnaires were piloted with a group of twenty first year students from a group who would not be involved in the study. A student group was chosen randomly and asked to participate. Piloting this questionnaire served several purposes, namely: to ensure that the students were clear in terms of layout, instructions and questions, and to deal with any ambiguities; to determine how long it took to complete; and to see whether any of the questions were inappropriate or misunderstood (Cohen et al. 2003). Questionnaires are also piloted for other reasons such as to gain feedback on the use of question format (e.g. scales) although this was not necessary in my research as the questionnaire had been so widely used. The students were asked to complete the questionnaire, and then to complete a short feedback sheet seeking their views on it. All students completed the questionnaire within the specified time frame. The students were comfortable with the format and with the questions that were asked. All questionnaires were completed successfully. Following the pilot, it was determined that no changes were required.

Data analysis

Data analysis was undertaken using the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The use of SPSS enabled the recording of data in a database from particular statistical tests which were performed as described in chapter 3. The SPSS environment also allowed for the production of graphs to illustrate the findings (Field 2005).

2.3.2 In-depth focused experiences interviews

The findings from the in-depth focused interviews contributed to the case study research through the development of the 'thick' description of the participants' experiences of first year.

Data collection

Data were collected from students who chose to leave the course, and students who had successfully completed first year within both the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups. The interview process with students who

successfully completed first year mirrored that of those who had chosen to leave. The topic areas for the in-depth focused interviews were: reasons for coming into nursing; experiences in university; experiences in practice; and reasons for successfully completing first year/leaving before the end of first year.

The purpose of the interviews was to find out about the participants' experiences within the context of first year. It was therefore appropriate to utilise in-depth focused interviews to enable the discussion of particular issues, while still allowing participants to discuss their experiences in their own way (Tod 2006). The aim was to build up a picture of what it was like for the participants to be first year nursing students, and from there, to develop themes and categories that reflected the nature of those experiences. There was a loose agenda with topic areas for exploration. However, the cues that the participants gave determined the flow of the conversation. For example, a number of students focused quite quickly on practice experiences so these were discussed prior to experiences in the university. Lankshear and Knobel (2006) point out that what a person says in an interview is said at a particular time and within a contrived set of circumstances, and may not be the full picture of a person's attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and experiences. However, the interviews did enable exploration into the lived world of the participants as required in order to achieve some of the research objectives, and in congruence with the philosophical perspective of the research.

A number of skills are required to enable a researcher to interview participants well. I had used in-depth focused interviews for previous research (Taylor 2004), and found that my skills at interviewing continued to develop over the two years of data collection for this research. The aim was to ensure that participants were as comfortable as possible in the interview situation. Participants chose the venue and the timing of the interview. All that was required was a venue where external distractions would not interrupt the interview. I strove to convey a genuine interest in the participants by using active listening skills, not interrupting, and providing plenty of time for participants to respond to questions (Lankshear

and Knobel 2006). As the researcher it was my responsibility to consider the dynamics of the interviews which, in essence, were social interpersonal encounters (Cohen et al. 2003).

Questioning techniques were used to facilitate descriptions of experiences and feelings and to enhance the flow of the interviews. Questions were also used to clarify issues and to move the conversation on to another aspect for discussion. While the general focus of the interview had been determined in advance (as described), I was open to new avenues of enquiry where these were relevant to the research objectives.

Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes depending on the participant. The interviews were audio recorded and this enabled the transcription of what was said, and how it was said, accurately. The transcribed interviews ensured that, when it came to reporting the findings of the research, the 'voices' of the participants could be used to assist in the telling of the case study. This enabled a 'thick' description of the text (Tod 2006) consisting of my interpretations, the literature, and the participants' voices.

Data analysis

The data analysis began at the time of the interviews (Koch 1999). As I actively listened to the participant, an initial phase of interpretation took place as I strived to understand the experience. As an active participant in the research process I was able to take into the analysis process my worldview and use it to inform the interpretive process. As previously described, I had experience as a student nurse, as a learner in different contexts, and as a single mother who had worked full time while studying. I felt that I was coming to the process with some understanding of the possible experiences of some of the participants. This coming together is said to reduce researcher and participant social and cultural differences and therefore the problems of interpretation where there is a huge divide in experiences (Miller and Glassner 2004). However, although bringing attitudes, knowledge and beliefs into the research process is important, it is also essential that the researcher remains open minded and willing to be

surprised (Holstein and Gubrium 2004), and that it is remembered that the interviews are situated in the participants' social worlds (Miller and Glassner 2004).

So, in this research, as data were gathered comprehension began through listening, transcribing, reading the transcripts and reflecting in my journal. The data analysis approach taken within this study is based on the work of van Manen (1990), Burnard (1991) and Koch (1999) and I had used it in a previous study (Taylor 2004) (see 'Bound-in publications' for article). The focus on the hermeneutic circle was important throughout the process which was as follows:

1. Verbatim transcription of the interviews took place as soon after the interviews as possible (Burnard 1991). Not only did this allow for greater accuracy in the transcription, but enabled me to become quickly immersed in the words of the participant. To establish that the transcription of the interviews was accurate, the transcripts were sent to the participants so that they could determine whether the interviews had been transcribed appropriately. It also gave the participants the opportunity to make changes, add further thoughts, or choose to withdraw from the study. In fact no one made any changes, added anything or chose to withdraw.

At this point the transcripts were coded with each of the pages and each of the lines numbered so as to provide a means to recording the occurrence of categories and themes. The categories were the key concepts that formulated the themes – the commonalities found during the interpretive process.

2. From the transcription phase onwards, I made notes on the emerging categories and themes (Burnard 1991).
3. I read and re-read the transcripts to come to an overall understanding of the phenomenon. Headings were noted for all

aspects of the interviews (van Manen 1990; Burnard 1991) until categories were formed.

4. As the researcher, I had to believe the stories, accept them as the participants' realities and then compare them with what I already knew (Koch 1999).
5. Similar issues were grouped together to form emerging categories. For example, I initially identified a number of issues as follows:
 - Experiences relating to significant others
 - Experiences of caring prior to course
 - Career aspirations and reasons for being on the course
 - Support and attitudes of significant staff

These issues combined to form the category 'motivations' as these factors contributed to the ability of a participant to engage with the course and with nursing.

6. Following the identification of the categories, they were then grouped into themes that encompassed their essence and that focused broadly on similar areas of the students' experiences. In order to do this, I continued to revisit the texts to clarify my understanding. For example, all of the participants discussed their learning experiences in the university. As I read and reread the transcripts I began to recognise that all of the participants had significant contributions to make about the experiences they had in the classroom, as well as the experiences that they had with people in the university environment. All of them talked about relationships with people although these crossed boundaries between home, classroom and practice. Thus, I identified two of the themes as: 'relationships with people' and 'the classroom experience'.

This moving backwards and forwards between the texts and the interpretive process facilitated interpretation and reinterpretation

where partial understandings developed until no new interpretation unfolded. This was where a fusion of horizons occurred so that the worldview of the participants was incorporated into that of the researcher following this reflective process (Elliott 2004). For example, I had come into the research with some understanding of what it was like to juggle study with work and other commitments. However, I was surprised by the impact that managing the clinical practice placements alongside the other responsibilities had on some participants.

During this time relevant literature was introduced into the interpretive process to enhance understanding and interpretation. It served to provide new ways of looking at the issues that were coming out of the data.

7. By this stage the themes and categories were established and the participants who had discussed them were clearly identified. At this point all participants were sent an overview of the identified themes and categories with an explanation and request for comments (member checking). The purpose of this process was to enhance the rigour of the study to determine whether the themes and categories were recognisable to the participants. Those participants who responded indicated that the themes and categories were identifiable to them.
8. The next step involved comparing and contrasting the texts to identify common meanings and/or differences from others' accounts (Benner 1994).

To summarise, the hermeneutic circle is a metaphor for the way in which participants' descriptions, the researcher's interpretations and the relevant literature findings can combine to facilitate the overall interpretation of the phenomenon (in this case the first year student experience).

2.3.3 Diaries

In addition to the interviews, the findings from the diaries add to the 'thick' description of the first year experience for the case study research.

Data collection

The diaries were useful as a way of finding out about the participants' experiences where other methods were not available. A book chapter has been written for a Romanian textbook that encapsulates their usage in educational research (In translation: Taylor and Wimpenny, awaiting publication). The diaries provided a first hand account of experiences that might not otherwise have been accessible (Robson 2002). They were records of events relating to the first year experience that participants completed over a specified period of time. They were used as a way of capturing the 'particulars' of the experiences within their context (Bolger et al. 2003) and were then collected and analysed (Clayton and Thorne 2000). The diaries served a similar purpose to the interviews in that they were a way of finding out about people's experiences, perceptions and feelings at the time, or soon after, the event occurred. For ethical reasons, the School Ethics Research Panel (SERP) felt that it was not appropriate for me to interview the participants due to my role as Programme Leader. Therefore another way had to be found to uncover the lived experiences of the student nurses. Diaries were an appropriate method. Used well, diaries have the potential to make explicit to others what is implicit to the participant and can lead to an understanding of the experiences for others (Clayton and Thorne 2000). In addition, it was anticipated that their use would assist the participants in the development of reflective and other learning skills (Bulman and Schutz 2004; Rolfe et al. 2001). It was therefore felt that the participants in this study could potentially gain much from their participation in terms of their learning experience on the courses.

Diaries can range in style from unstructured to structured. Unstructured diaries leave the interpretation of what is being asked of the participants very much to the participants themselves (Robson 2002). However, structured diaries can potentially lead to the data being biased in favour of

the researcher's agenda rather than enabling participants to describe their experiences as they see them. In this research, semi-structured diaries were utilised as a way of enabling participants to have some sort of focus for their writing while also offering them the opportunity to write about their experiences as they wished. As Clayton and Thorne (2000) state, the use of semi-structured diaries addresses the balance between the participant's and the researcher's agendas.

There were a number of areas that were acknowledged as being potentially problematic in the use of diaries as one of the data collection tools. There may have been issues associated with literacy (being able to write clearly about a given topic) (Gibson 1995). However, all participants were student nurses and were required to be literate before commencing the nursing courses. Deciphering handwriting may have been a problem so the guidance to participants asked that they considered their handwriting and that they try to make sure that their diaries were easy to read. Participants may have misreported events and experiences, perhaps as a way of trying to please the researcher and as a way of trying to show the diarist in a good light (Robson 2002). It is hoped that this issue did not arise because all participants were informed that the researcher would never know the identity of the diary writers. This should have enabled them to be open and honest without fear of repercussions. Although the diaries were semi-structured, there were differences in the ways in which diarists completed them in terms of depth and detail and this could have made it difficult to make comparisons. However, the use of semi-structured diaries went some way to addressing this issue and allowed for some comparisons to be made (Clayton and Thorne 2000). Over time there tended to be a decline in diary entries particularly during stressful events (Bulman and Schutz 2004).

It was important that the diaries did not take too long to complete so as to enhance the possibility of completion. Participants were asked to complete a diary entry once per week, preferably at the same time each week to aid memory, and that entries were to be around one A5 page in length (the diary was given to the participant). Guidance was also given relating to the types of issues that participants could write about while also offering the

diarist the opportunity to write about other aspects of their experiences. It was also suggested that participants might wish to use a critical incident approach as a way of considering reactions and feelings about specific happenings. Robson (2002) supports this as a way of helping participants to notice events. It is a method that was used within the pre-registration nursing courses under investigation and it was hoped that by completing the diary a participant could enhance their awareness of critical incident reporting and the subsequent reflection that takes place.

Data analysis

Analysis of the diaries enabled the development of themes and categories that reflected the experiences of the participants. The process reflected the approach to data analysis taken with the interviews (Taylor 2004). Analysis also incorporated recommendations from Clayton and Thorne (2000) (who also utilised Burnard's work for analysis) and Astedt-Kurki and Isola (2001) and was as follows:

1. Transcription of the diaries.
2. Checking for accuracy (go back to participants).
3. Immersion in the data by reading and rereading the diaries to obtain a sense of the whole.
4. Note taking and continued systematic reading of the diaries.
5. Generation of sub-categories through content analysis.
6. Noting of similarities and differences.
7. Generation of broader categories.
8. Establishing that categories cover all aspects of the diaries.
9. Finalising categories.
10. Generating themes and deciding under which theme the categories belonged.
11. Guarding against bias.
12. Checking trustworthiness (going back to the participants with the themes).

The analytical processes for the interviews and diaries took place over a period of time and worked in tandem. This enabled the development of

themes and categories that were appropriate for both data strands. In fact, one data collection method and analytical process enabled confirmation of themes and categories to take place with the other data collection method with this process being of great consequence for case study research (Merriam 1998). The process of data analysis was an ongoing iterative process that led towards the formulation of themes and categories, and interpretation of the underlying meaning of the experiences. Should another researcher undertake the analysis process, it is not considered necessary to replicate the themes and categories for the research to have meaning (Brammer 2006b). Rather, the reader should recognise the categories of description.

Each of the research methods have been described in relation to data collection and analysis. The remaining sections of this chapter explore the trustworthiness of the research, the ethical issues associated with the research, and the sampling strategy.

2.3.4 Trustworthiness of the research

While validity and reliability are vital concepts when undertaking surveys and experiments, they do not take the same focus for CSR (Merriam 1998). Reliability refers to the extent to which a research finding can be replicated given the same circumstances. Validity refers to the extent to which a research method measures what it sets out to measure. These concepts pose some problems for CSR where a particular case may be chosen for investigation because of its intrinsic interest and not because it is a 'typical' example (Bassegy 1999). A variety of research methods (diaries, interviews, questionnaires) were utilised within this research so as to provide a holistic view of the first year experience. It was important to address issues of validity and reliability where appropriate to the research methods. However, in terms of the whole case study, it is useful to think about the trustworthiness of the finished product. Trustworthiness was a term coined by Lincoln and Guba in the 1980s (Bassegy 1999) and is focused on highlighting the ethic for respect of truth.

Much has been written in relation to establishing the rigour of qualitative research (Silverman 2006; Robson 2002; Slevin and Sines 1999). The main thrust of the argument is that the product should be understandable and recognisable to the reader, that the reader can see the decision trail, that the end product is useful to the reader, and that the research question has been answered. As Robson (2002) asserts, the trustworthiness of a study is ascertained through the presentation of faithful descriptions recognisable to its readers. The use of multiple methods of data collection in this thesis enabled the investigation of the case from a variety of perspectives leading to a convergence of information (Stake 1995). Through the process of convergence, and the telling of the story of the case study, the reader can make a judgment about the trustworthiness of the thesis.

Stake (1995, p. 131) provided a checklist which is a tool that researchers can use to verify the trustworthiness of research:

- i. "Is the report easy to read?
- ii. Does it fit together, each sentence contributing to the whole?
- iii. Does the report have a conceptual structure (i.e. themes and issues)?
- iv. Are its issues developed in a serious and scholarly way?
- v. Is the case adequately defined?
- vi. Is there a sense of story to the presentation?
- vii. Is the reader provided with vicarious experience?
- viii. Have quotations been used effectively?
- ix. Are headings, figures, artifacts, appendices, and indexes used effectively?

- x. Was it edited well, then again with a last-minute polish?
- xi. Has the writer made sound assertions, neither over- nor under-interpreting?
- xii. Has adequate attention been paid to various contexts?
- xiii. Were sufficient raw data presented?
- xiv. Were data sources well chosen and in sufficient number?
- xv. Do observations and interpretations appear to have been triangulated?
- xvi. Is the role and point of view of the researcher nicely apparent?
- xvii. Is the nature of the intended audience apparent?
- xviii. Is empathy shown for all sides?
- xix. Are personal intentions examined?
- xx. Does it appear that individuals were put at risk?"

Throughout the whole of the research process I worked hard to achieve the requirements for trustworthiness. The 'story' of the research developed through the large amount of data from which I determined what should be included within the thesis so as to contribute to the 'thick' description. The context was described both from the perspective of the participants and from the wider more general context of the national and international literature. The ethical issues relevant to all the participants were seriously considered and much was done to ensure that they were not put at risk (see section 2.3.5). However, it is the reader who will be in the best position to judge the trustworthiness of the research.

Two other tools were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the research: member checking and a case record. Member checking is the procedure by which participants could determine the accuracy of the initial data (for the interviews), and the interpretations of the researcher (for the interviews and the diary writers). Parahoo (2006) and Robson (2002) advocate the use of member checking as part of the whole approach to demonstrating trustworthiness of the research. In this research, each interview participant was asked to review the transcriptions of the tape-recorded interviews and to provide feedback on their accuracy. At this point they were also given the opportunity to make changes and add information where they thought this appropriate. All participants signified that the transcripts were accurate, and no-one asked for changes to be made. Participants were sent an overview of the early interpretations of the data (see appendix 6) and asked to feedback with their views on the preliminary interpretation. Two people responded positively by saying that the document reflected their views of their experiences.

A case record is referred to by Stenhouse in the 1980s as a substantial collection of information from which the case study derives (Bassegy 1999). The case record for this research includes: the literature which provided the context, informed the interpretive process, and related to the findings; interview transcripts; completed questionnaires; recordings of the development of the themes and categories; a diary recording thoughts, processes and ideas; and records of supervisory meetings and discussions. These serve as an audit trail. Appendix 7 provides extracts from my reflexive diary.

2.3.5 Ethical Issues

Ethical issues relating to the undertaking of a research project are well documented in the literature (Gerrish and Lacey 2006; Lankshear and Knobel 2006; Parahoo 2006; Butler 2003; Bassegy 1999). Bassegy (1999) cited respect for truth and respect for persons as being umbrella terms that encompass key aspects of ethics for research. Respect for truth relates to

the approach to data collection, analysis and reporting and the previous discussion on trustworthiness dealt with this.

Respect for persons relates to the participants and the need to recognise that their dignity and privacy were respected, and that the interests and well-being of participants were not harmed (Lankshear and Knobel 2006). Lankshear and Knobel (2006) provide a useful checklist for areas for consideration and these are listed and discussed in relation to this thesis:

- i. The researcher must have a valid research design.

I was supervised in the process of developing the original research proposal as part of the process of preparing for PhD study. As well as this, the research proposal was presented to the School Ethics Research Panel (SERP) for permission to undertake the research. The SERP provided detailed feedback, and agreed that the research design was appropriate. The Head of School supported the request to access the students.

In the initial research proposal I had wanted to undertake in-depth focused interviews with a sample of students in the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups for the duration of their first year. SERP did not allow me to do this as it was felt that my role as Programme Leader at the time could have had a negative impact on the students in terms of my 'power position' in relation to the students. Diaries were therefore chosen as a data collection method so that participants could remain anonymous. When my role changed from its focus on dealing with assessment and student issues, I went back to SERP to seek approval to undertake experiences interviews with students who successfully completed first year. Permission was granted by SERP.

- ii. Obtain informed consent and avoid deception

All participants were made aware of the general aims of the research. Those who completed the questionnaires were given a brief written overview of the purpose of the research. Those who took part in interviews or who were asked to complete diaries were given detailed information about the nature and purpose of the research (see appendix 8). They were informed about the aims of the research, and the research methods that

were utilised (Gerrish and Lacey 2006). Students who agreed to participate in interviews or to complete diaries were asked to sign a consent form (see appendix 9). The consent form stated that participants could withdraw from the research at any time with no adverse effects. Participants were told that they could contact me (in the case of interview participants), or contact me anonymously through an administrator (in the case of the diary writers) for further information or to clarify concerns. Usually participants raised any issues with me on the telephone at the time of arranging the interviews. Diary writers did not raise any concerns.

iii. Minimise intrusion

When a person participates in research their lives are going to be different to some degree than if they had not taken part (Parahoo 2006). Intrusion should be minimised. As the researcher I made sure that I was clear about what information was actually needed from participants. When arranging interviews, I met with participants at a time and a place that suited them, and made sure that they could contact me should their circumstances change. I did go back to interviewees for member checking, but kept this to the minimum. When working with the diary writers, I wrote to them every seven weeks to remind them and to provide guidance. In each letter I stated that they should inform the administrator if they no longer wished to take part.

iv. Ensure confidentiality and anonymity

Anonymity refers to when the identity of the participant is not revealed to anyone (Gerrish and Lacey 2006). Confidentiality refers to when the connection between the information provided and the participant is not made public (Parahoo 2006). When the participants completed the questionnaires, they were assured that the information gleaned would be confidential. They were asked for their names and assured that the questionnaires would be coded and the information in the database coded. This ensured that data were anonymised.

Diary writers were guaranteed anonymity. As the researcher, I never knew who was completing the diaries. The requests for participation were made

through the student codes and an administrator sent all correspondence to the diary writers.

Those who participated in the interviews could not be assured of anonymity, but were assured of confidentiality. Participants were assured that they would be kept anonymous from others. After discussion with the chair of SERP it was agreed that it would be appropriate to inform participants that if any issue of major concern was highlighted, I may have been obliged to discuss it with a member of staff in the School of Nursing and Midwifery. Such situations did not arise.

v. Minimise risk of harm

It was important to ensure that the research did not cause harm (non-maleficence) and to ascertain whether the research could benefit the participants (beneficence) (Cohen et al. 2003). I explained to the interview participants that there was potential to benefit future student groups as the findings from the research may inform future practice within the course team. It was possible that the interviews or the diaries could have triggered negative thoughts relating to particular experiences. If this had happened, I planned to advise the participant to seek support from the personal tutor, academic support tutor, or counsellor as appropriate. During the interviews no issues arose that demanded such intervention.

vi. Demonstrate respect

Respect can be demonstrated through undertaking genuinely useful research which is used responsibly to influence future practice in a positive way. Respect also relates to maintaining trusting relationships and respecting privacy. In all correspondence with participants I communicated politely. When contacting students by telephone to follow up written requests for participation in the study, I always ensured that I was calling at an appropriate time. Where students did not wish to participate I thanked them for their time, and did not contact them again. All interview and diary participants were sent a letter thanking them for their participation. Respect is also demonstrated by being very careful not to misrepresent the views of participants (Parahoo 2006). I achieved this by

going back to the interview and diary participants with my initial thoughts on the themes and categories.

vii. Avoid coercion or manipulation

Where there are unequal power relationships, there is the potential that participants may feel coerced or manipulated (Gerrish and Lacey 2006). It is important to anticipate these issues and to put in place measures to deal with them. Coercion and manipulation can result in people participating where they do not wish to, and producing opinions that they think the researcher wishes to see.

As Programme Leader for the pre-registration nursing courses, I was acutely aware that my role could have an impact on students' perceptions and that it was important to ensure that they did not feel coerced into participating in any aspect of the research. One of the strategies employed was the use of good verbal and written communication skills when liaising with participants. At all stages of the research process, participants were told that they could withdraw at any time and that this would not cause adverse effects.

A member of School administrative staff was asked to hand out the questionnaires to students when they were attending a session relating to practice placement documentation. The administrator was briefed to provide an overview of the nature and purpose of the questionnaires, and to inform the students that completion of the questionnaires was voluntary, and that the questionnaire could be completed at a time that was more convenient if preferred. The administrator handed the questionnaires out, and provided a box at the front of the classroom for those who were happy to complete them at that time. When the 'traditional' group was asked to complete their second questionnaire, one student complained to their personal tutor (who happened to be a member of SERP) that he or she had felt obliged to complete the questionnaire at that time. I was approached by SERP and after due consideration the panel agreed to allow me to utilise the data from the questionnaires. I was asked to ensure that an academic member of staff distributed the questionnaires and that, where students

were willing, they should be completed at a time and place of their choosing. Further emphasis was placed on ensuring that students knew that they had the right to participate or not.

viii. Reciprocate

I was fully aware of the goodwill and generosity of those who participated in the research. All participants were thanked for their involvement and the value of their contribution was emphasised.

Overall, the research was undertaken in an ethical manner and where one issue arose this was addressed immediately.

2.3.6 Sampling strategy

It was essential to ensure the suitability of the sampling strategy for the research (Cohen et al. 2003). The first step was to define the population. Parahoo (2006, p. 538) defines population as “all the possible participants or items that could be included in the sample”. From the total population, a sample was then selected. In this research the population consisted of all year one pre-registration nursing students in the ‘traditional’ group in The Robert Gordon University, School of Nursing and Midwifery (n=151) and all of year one pre-registration nursing students in the ‘EBL’ group in The Robert Gordon University, School of Nursing and Midwifery (n=171). The population provided the frame from which the sample could be identified and selected.

The nature of case study research is such that a number of methods were utilised to gather data. In this research, questionnaires, interviews and diaries were used. Each required a sampling strategy while recognising the overall approach to the research was to gain an in-depth understanding of the cases (the experiences of the two groups of students). Cohen et al. (2003) suggest that the sample size, the representativeness and parameters of the sample, the access to the sample, and the sampling strategy to be used should be considered for a project. The sampling strategy for each of the methods of data collection is discussed in the following sub-sections.

Expectations and experiences questionnaires

All students within each of the groups were asked to complete each of the questionnaires so as to gain a full picture of the case and to ensure that particular characteristics (i.e. age, entry qualifications, gender) were represented in the sample. While it would have been possible to utilise quota sampling (where relevant characteristics are identified and a number of the population are asked to participate from each of the categories - Merriam 1998), it was more appropriate to ask all students to complete the questionnaires. This ensured that the pertinent characteristics were represented and that the response rate was more likely to provide a useful number of questionnaires with which to work.

The total number of students who returned the questionnaires is identified in table 1 in chapter 3. For the purpose of the research it was important that students completed both the questionnaires so that I could make comparisons between expectations and experiences. The focus for analysis was on those who completed both questionnaires. The response rates for completion of both were 53.6% for the 'traditional' group, and 25.7% for the 'EBL' group. The overall combined response rate was 38.8% which is seen as satisfactory (Gerrish and Lacey 2006). Chapter 3 shows that the profile of the students who completed both questionnaires within each of the groups reflected that of the whole student group.

Diaries and experiences interviews

A total of forty students from each of the groups was asked to complete diaries having acknowledged that it was likely that some of the participants would not complete them. Ten people from each of the groups were asked to participate in the experiences interviews.

A quota sampling approach was used in an attempt to represent significant characteristics of the population (Cohen et al. 2003). Quota sampling is the non-probability equivalent of stratified sampling and in the same way seeks to ensure that certain characteristics (strata) are represented in the proportions in which they are found in the wider population. For this

research, these characteristics were age, gender, and entry qualifications. While it is important to acknowledge that it would not have been possible to represent every combination of characteristic, this was not felt to be a barrier to the approach utilised. Judgment was used to choose the participants for the particular characteristics that they brought to the research alongside the need to make an attempt to capture some of the characteristics within the population group.

Interviews with students who chose to leave the courses

A purposive sampling technique was utilised. The participants were handpicked based on the characteristics that they brought to the research (Cohen et al. 2003; Merriam 1998). In this case the required characteristic was that the participants had chosen to leave the course. Therefore all 'leavers' were asked to participate in interviews. Although some of the students chose not to be involved, those who did were similar to the overall student groups in both the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups (as described in chapter 3).

2.3.6 Summary

In summary, in line with case study research methodology, multiple methods for data collection were utilised as a way to develop an in-depth understanding of the cases ('traditional' group, and 'EBL' group). The methods used were a mixture of a quantitative approach (questionnaires) and qualitative approaches (interviews and diaries). Chapter 3 goes on to describe the findings from the expectations and experiences questionnaires.

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS: EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES QUESTIONNAIRES

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 presents the findings of the expectations and experiences questionnaires. A survey was undertaken employing two questionnaires which enquired about multiple aspects of the students' expectations for, and experiences of, first year as described in chapter 2. Data analysis was undertaken employing the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The questionnaires were utilised to address, in part, the following objectives of the overall research:

1. To compare experiences with expectations of first year between nursing students undertaking a 'traditional' and an 'EBL' curriculum.
2. To compare the demographic profiles of two groups of students one following a 'traditional' curriculum and the other using 'EBL'; to compare students who chose to leave the courses with those who successfully completed first year.

In relation to these objectives, the variables that were under investigation included the quality of the educational experience, and various demographic variables. The quality of the educational experience related to the match between expectations and experiences of first year in relation to each of the aspects of the first year that were investigated through the questionnaires. The demographic characteristics under investigation were sex of student, qualifications on entry to the course and age on entry to the course. A number of other variables were investigated and these included the place where the student lived during the first year, whether either of their parents graduated from university, and the amount of expenses that were provided by their family.

The chapter describes the data collection methods and analysis, and the findings. The chapter explores a range of curricular variables including

those that explore the connections between students, staff and other aspects of the student experience. Finally the quality of the educational experience is analysed and conclusions drawn in relation to the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups.

3.2 Data collection

Data were collected by self-report questionnaires which comprised the expectations and experiences questionnaires and demographic data as described in chapter 2.

Table 1 provides an overview of the response rates to the questionnaires. The total population of each of the groups was: 'traditional' (n=151) and 'EBL' (n=171). The table shows that the total response rate where both questionnaires were returned (i.e. the expectations and experiences questionnaires) was 38.8% (n=125). The response rates for the two groups differed, with the 'traditional' group having a 53.6% (n=81) response rate, and the 'EBL' group having a 25.7% (n=44) response rate, to both questionnaires. Responders were defined as those who completed both questionnaires. Non-responders were those who completed only one, or neither, questionnaire. It is likely that the difference related to the way in which students were asked to participate as described in chapter 2. Only 18% of those who were asked to participate did not return either of the two questionnaires. Tests were undertaken to determine whether there were significant differences between responders and non-responders. There was no significant difference between responders and non-responders in terms of gender ($\chi^2 = .015$, $df = 1$; $p = .902$) and entry qualifications ($\chi^2 = 11.506$, $df = 6$, $p = .074$). There was a significant difference in the age of responders with younger people being less likely to respond ($U = 10731.000$, $p = .038$). There was no significant relationship between age and the quality of the overall educational experience ($r = -.129$, $p = .248$).

Table 1: Returns frequencies for expectations and experiences questionnaires for the 'traditional' group (group 1) and the 'EBL' group (group 2)

	Group 1 n(%) 151(100)	Group 2 n(%) 171(100)	Total n(%) 322(100)
Both expectations and experiences questionnaires returned	81(53.6)	44(25.7)	125(38.8)
Only expectations questionnaire returned	46(30.5)	37(21.6)	83(25.8)
Only experiences questionnaire returned	14(9.3)	42(24.6)	56(17.4)
Neither questionnaire returned	10(6.6)	48(28.1)	58(18)

The sample on which the findings are based is those who completed both the expectations and experiences questionnaires.

3.3 Demographics

The demographic data that were collected included:

1. Sex of student
2. Qualifications on entry to the course
3. Age on entry to the course

The information on sex, qualifications and age was available for *all* students as it had been accessed from the university student records database, and then checked against the responses from the participants.

4. Did either of your parents graduate from university?
5. Where will you live during this academic year?
6. How much of your university expenses will be provided by your family?

The information on living location, parents who had graduated and expenses was only available if the participants had responded to the relevant questions in the questionnaires.

Table 2 provides an overview of the descriptive findings, which demonstrate that in terms of sex, age, entry qualifications, parents'

university experiences and financial support, there was no significant difference between the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups. Where there was a significant difference, this related to the participants who left and those who stayed and where participants reported that they would be living during the academic year. The 'traditional' group had significantly more leavers than the 'EBL' group.

For sex of student, the total number of males was 17 (5.3%) and females was 305 (94.7%). In the 'traditional' group the number of males was 7 (4.6%) and females was 144 (95.4%). In the 'EBL' group the number of males was 10 (5.8%) and females was 161 (94.2%) ($\chi^2 = .236$; $df = 1$; $p = .627$). There was no significant difference between the gender composition of the groups. The numbers of men within each of the groups were small although this is not unusual for nursing courses.

The original codes for the entry qualifications were 1=Access; 2=5 Standard Grades, or equivalent; 3=6+Standard Grades, or equivalent; 4=1-2 Higher Grades, or equivalent; 5=3+Higher Grades, or equivalent; 6=Degree/Diploma; 7=Other. The variables were recoded as follows: 1=Access; 2=Standard Grades, or equivalent; 3=Higher Grades, or equivalent; 4=Degree/Diploma; 7=Other. Qualifications could be packaged in any number of ways and there was likely to be a compromise. While conflation loses some discrimination, it was still possible to test whether the groups were significantly different or not. The use of conflated variables allows for comparison with national data (Lauder and Tilley 2008). While conflation of variables can be controversial (Muijs 2004), in this case it provides a succinct overview of the routes through which students came into the courses.

For the total number of students the data for the entry qualifications was Access 58 (18%), Standard Grades 85 (24.4%), Higher Grades 150 (46.6%), Degree/Diploma 18 (5.6%), and Other 11 (3.4%). For the 'traditional' group the entry qualifications were Access 34 (22.5%), Standard Grades 38 (25.2%), Higher Grades 65 (43.1%), Degree/Diploma 7 (4.6%), and Other 7 (4.6%). For the 'EBL' group the entry qualifications

were Access 24 (14%), Standard Grades 47 (27.5%), Higher Grades 85 (49.7%), Degree/Diploma 11 (6.4%), and Other 4 (2.3%) ($\chi^2 = 5.831$; $df = 4$; $p = .212$). The composition of entry qualifications was therefore not statistically significant. Additionally, despite the minimum entry qualifications for the course, over half of the students had higher entry qualifications than required.

The age range for the 'traditional' group was 17-50 years and for the 'EBL' group was 17-52 years. The mean, mode and median for the 'traditional' group were 24.75, 18 and 21 respectively, and for the 'EBL' group were 24.26, 18 and 20 respectively ($U = 12506.00$; $p = .625$). Age was therefore not statistically significant.

Participants were asked whether either of their parents had graduated from university. For the total number of students 158 (49.1%) responded 'no' and 47 (14.6%) responded 'yes' (117 (36.3%) – data missing). In the 'traditional' group, 94 (62.3%) responded 'no' and 28 (18.5%) responded 'yes' (29 (19.2%) – data missing). In the 'EBL' group, 64 (37.4%) responded 'no' and 19 (11.1%) responded 'yes' (88 (51.5%) – data missing) ($\chi^2 = 0.000$; $df = 1$; $p = .992$). Parental graduation from university was therefore not statistically significant. The data indicates that the majority of participants were first generation university students. This is important in relation to students' preparedness for university (Lowe and Cook 2003).

Participants were asked where they expected to live during the academic year. For the total number of students the results were as follows: university accommodation - 33 (10.2%); residence in Aberdeen - 79 (24.5%); residence within 10 miles of university - 13 (4.0%); residence over 10 miles from university - 80 (24.8%); missing - 117 (36.3%). For the 'traditional' group the results were as follows: university accommodation - 26 (17.2%); residence in Aberdeen - 40 (26.5%); residence within 10 miles of university - 8 (5.3%); residence over 10 miles from university - 50 (33.1%); missing - 27 (17.9%). For the 'EBL' group the results were as follows: university accommodation - 7 (4.1%);

residence in Aberdeen – 39 (22.8%); residence within 10 miles of university – 5 (2.9%); residence over 10 miles from university – 30 (17.5%); missing 90 (52.6%). The results were significant ($\chi^2 = 7.926$; $df = 3$; $p = .047$). This significance may have been due to the high numbers of participants in the 'EBL' group who did not provide the relevant information (52.6%, as opposed to 17.9% in the 'traditional' group). With the information that was available, it was identified that few of the students chose to live in university accommodation. This is likely to relate to the age profile and the social circumstances of the students undertaking the courses with many of the students living locally.

Participants were asked to state how much of their university expenses would be provided by their family (including their own contribution and excluding bursary). For the total number of students the results were as follows: all or nearly all – 19 (5.9%); more than half – 22 (6.8%); less than half – 31 (9.6%); none or very little – 125 (38.8%); missing – 125 (38.8%). For the 'traditional' group the results were as follows: all or nearly all – 10 (6.6%); more than half – 17 (11.3%); less than half – 21 (13.9%); none or very little – 67 (44.4%); missing – 36 (23.8%). For the 'EBL' group the results were as follows: all or nearly all – 9 (5.3%); more than half – 5 (2.9%); less than half – 10 (5.8%); none or very little – 58 (33.9%); missing – 89 (52.0%). The findings were not significant ($\chi^2 = 5.784$; $df = 3$; $p = .123$). It appears that only 12.7% of students expected to receive financial support from their family. Although nursing students receive a bursary from the Scottish Government, it may be that this statistic indicates that student nurses may experience some financial difficulties (Read et al. 2003).

The total number of students who successfully completed first year was 265 (82.3%) and who left was 57 (17.7%). In the 'traditional' group those who completed first year were 116 (76.8%) and those who left were 35 (23.2%). In the 'EBL' group those who completed first year were 149 (87.1%) and those who left were 22 (12.9%) ($\chi^2 = 5.789$, $df = 1$; $p = .016$ and thus significant).

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the 'traditional' group (group 1) and 'EBL' group (group 2)

	Group 1 n(%) 151(100)	Group 2 n(%) 171(100)	Total n(%) 322 (100)	Pearson Chi-square value	Df	Asymp.sig	Significance
Sex of student							
Male	7(4.6)	10(5.8)	17(5.3)	.236	1	.627	Not significant
Female	144(95.4)	161(94.2)	305(94.7)				
Entry qualifications							
Access	34(22.5)	24(14)	58(18)	5.831	4	.212	Not significant
SGs, no HGs ⁶	38(25.2)	47(27.5)	85(24.4)				
HGs	65(43.1)	85(49.7)	150(46.6)				
Degree/Diploma	7(4.6)	11(6.4)	18(5.6)				
Other	7(4.6)	4(2.3)	11(3.4)				
Age⁷							
Range	17-50 years	17-52 years					
Mean	24.75	24.26					
Mode	18	18					
Median	21	20					
Mann Whitney U	12506.000					.625	Not significant
Did either of your parents graduate from university?							
No	94(62.3)	64(37.4)	158(49.1)	0.000	1	.992	Not significant
Yes	28(18.5)	19(11.1)	47(14.6)				
Missing	29(19.2)	88(51.5)	117(36.3)				
Where will you live during this academic year?							
University accommodation	26(17.2)	7(4.1)	33(10.2)	7.926	3	.047	Significant
Residence in Aberdeen	40(26.5)	39(22.8)	79(24.5)				
Residence within 10 miles of university	8(5.3)	5(2.9)	13(4.0)				
Residence over 10 miles from university	50(33.1)	30(17.5)	80(24.8)				
Missing	27(17.9)	90(52.6)	117(36.3)				

⁶ Key: SG = Standard Grade or equivalent; HG = Higher Grade or equivalent

⁷ For age, a Mann Whitney U Test was carried out

How much of your university expenses will be provided by family (including your own contribution and excluding bursary)							
All or nearly all	10(6.6)	9(5.3)	19(5.9)	5.784	3	.123	Not significant
More than half	17(11.3)	5(2.9)	22(6.8)				
Less than half	21(13.9)	10(5.8)	31(9.6)				
None or very little	67(44.4)	58(33.9)	125(38.8)				
Missing	36(23.8)	89(52.0)	125(38.8)				
Stayed or discontinued							
Stayed	116(76.8)	149(87.1)	265(82.3)	5.855	1	.016	Significant
Discontinued	35(23.2)	22(12.9)	57(17.7)				

3.3.1 Summary of demographic variables

For the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups there were two variables in which there was some statistical significance. These were the numbers of students who chose to leave the courses and those who successfully completed first year. The significance can be explained simply by the larger number of students who chose to leave the 'traditional' group. There was a statistically significant difference as to where students had chosen to live in first year between the groups, although the significance was marginal (.047). The significance is not easily explained and may be a result of the lack of response (52.6% did not respond) from the 'EBL' group. Section 3.3 demonstrates that, overall, the groups were not statistically significantly different.

3.4 University Student Expectations/Experiences Questionnaires

The Codebook for the Fourth Edition of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (Pace and Kuh 1998) provided information about the subscales derived from the initial questions. The subscales in this research were developed in the same way (see section 2.3.1 for a detailed description of the subscales and their component parts). In this research, two of the subscales could not be deemed as reliable (learning and teaching approaches, and campus facilities). Pallant (2001) recommends that scales should have an alpha of .7 or above. It was therefore better not to incorporate these variables into the analysis. Table 3 provides the Cronbach alpha scores for the subscales. One of the other subscales was found to have been answered differently to what was expected (reading) and was not included for analysis. Most participants had answered the question indicating that they had undertaken more hours of reading during the week, than there were hours in a week. On reflection, the way in which the question was presented was confusing.

Table 3: Cronbach alpha scores for subscales

Subscale	Expectations Cronbach alpha	Experiences Cronbach alpha
Library and information technology	.784	.708
Experiences with academic staff	.852	.815
Module learning	.764	.749
Writing	.734	.642
Learning and teaching approaches	.572	.561
Campus facilities	.590	.737
Clubs and organisations	.732	.643
Student acquaintances	.883	.870
Scientific and quantitative experiences	.831	.815
Conversations 1	.861	.883
Conversations 2	.837	.819
Reading/writing	.762	.783
University experiences: curriculum	.873	.852
University experiences: relationships	.737	.676
Gains	N/A	.896

3.4.1 Analysis of the expectations and experiences questionnaires

The following subscales were analysed and the findings are provided for each of them:

- i. Library and information technology
- ii. Experiences with academic staff
- iii. Module learning
- iv. Writing
- v. Clubs and organisations
- vi. Student acquaintances
- vii. Scientific and quantitative experiences
- viii. Conversations 1
- ix. Conversations 2
- x. Gains

- xi. University environment: curriculum
- xii. University environment: relationships

Table 4 provides the range for each of the variables, the mode for the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups, and the differences between expectations and experiences scores for the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups for each of the variables. The range varied depending on the number of variables contained within each subscale. For example, where a participant scored 10 on library and information technology, this indicates that a response of 'never' had been given to each of the parts of the subscale. All the items had the same responses to each item (1=never, 2=occasionally, 3=often, 4=very often). The responses as represented here are the reverse order as shown in the questionnaire. It was more intuitive to report the findings with the numbers represented in reverse to those within the questionnaire. Pace and Kuh (1998) did exactly the same thing. The mode was utilised as the variables were non-normally distributed. For each of the variables, the mode for both expectations and experiences are provided (respectively), the range of scores for each of the subscales, and the differences between expectations and experiences for the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups.

The results for library and information technology for the 'traditional' group are: expectations mode = 27, experiences mode = 32; range = 10-40; difference = +5. For the 'EBL' group, the results are: expectations mode = 29, experiences mode = 26; difference = -3. These results indicate that there was a discrepancy between the experiences and expectations of both groups of students with the 'traditional' group experiencing 'more' than expected and the 'EBL' group experiencing 'less'.

The results for experiences with academic staff for the 'traditional' group are: expectations mode = 13, experiences mode = 10; range = 6-24; difference = -3. For the 'EBL' group, the results are: expectations mode = 14, experiences mode = 9; difference = -5. There is a discrepancy between expectations and experiences with both groups experiencing 'less' than expected.

The results for module learning for the 'traditional' group are: expectations mode = 24, experiences mode = 28; range = 9-36; difference = +4. For the 'EBL' group the results are: expectations mode = 28, experiences mode = 27; difference = -1. In the 'EBL' group the discrepancy between what was expected and what was experienced was essentially zero for both the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups.

The results for writing for the 'traditional' group are: expectations mode = 12, experiences mode = 9; range = 4-16; difference = -3. For the 'EBL' group the results are: expectations mode = 16, experiences mode = 10; difference = -6. The 'EBL' group experienced 'more' than the 'traditional' group with both groups experiencing 'less' than expected.

The results for clubs and organisations for the 'traditional' group are: expectations mode = 5, experiences mode = 5; range = 5-20; difference = 0. For the 'EBL' group the results are: expectations mode = 5, experiences mode = 5; difference = 0. Both groups' expectations and experiences were congruent. However, both their expectations and experiences were low with neither group expecting, or experiencing, participation in clubs and organisations.

The results for student acquaintances for the 'traditional' group are: expectations mode = 21, experiences mode = 16; range = 7-28; difference = -5. For the 'EBL' group the results are: expectations mode = 21, experiences mode = 13; difference = -8. The results indicate a discrepancy between expectations and experiences for both groups with the 'EBL' group experiencing 'less' than the 'traditional' group.

The results for scientific and quantitative experiences for the 'traditional' group are: expectations mode = 8, experiences mode = 7; range = 4-16; difference = -1. For the 'EBL' group the results are: expectations mode = 8, experiences mode = 7; difference = -1. The expectations and experiences were effectively zero for both groups.

The results for conversations 1 for the 'traditional' group are: expectations mode = 20, experiences mode = 19; range = 10-40; difference = -1. For the 'EBL' group the results are: expectations mode = 25, experiences mode = 22; difference = -3. Again, the expectations and experiences were discrepant and the 'EBL' group's experiences were less closely matched to their expectations than that of the 'traditional' group's which was effectively zero. However, the 'EBL' group's experience was 'more' than that of the 'traditional' group.

The results for conversations 2 for the 'traditional' group are: expectations mode = 16, experiences mode = 12; range = 6-24; difference = -4. For the 'EBL' group the results are: expectations mode = 18, experiences mode = 12; difference = -6. Both groups had the same experience score although expectations and experiences scores are discrepant within both groups.

The results for University environment (curriculum) for the 'traditional' group are: expectations mode = 48, experiences mode = 40; range = 8-56; difference = -8. For the 'EBL' group the results are: expectations mode = 46, experiences mode = 37; difference = -9. Once again, the scores between expectations and experiences are discrepant with participants experiencing 'less' than expected.

The results for university environment (relationships) for the 'traditional' group are: expectations mode = 18, experiences mode = 18; range = 3-21; difference = 0. For the 'EBL' group the results are: expectations mode = 18, experiences mode = 17; difference = -1. Although the score for the 'EBL' group is discrepant, for both of the groups the experiences scored towards the higher end of the scale.

Overall, these results show that the participants' experiences did not match their expectations. In the 'traditional' group their experiences were 'more' than their expectations in the library and information technology and in module learning variables. Additionally the experiences conformed with the expectations for clubs and organisations for the 'traditional' and 'EBL'

groups and conformed for relationships for the 'traditional' group. Further discussion takes place in the next section when discussing the quality of the educational experience and the relationship between the expectations and experiences of students to their first year experience.

Table 4: Expectations and experiences differences for the 'traditional' group (group 1) and the 'EBL' group (group 2)

	N: group 1	N: group 2	Minimum –and maximum range for subscales	Mode: group 1	Difference between expectations and experiences ⁸ : group 1	Mode: group 2	Difference between expectations and experiences: group 2
Libexpect Libexper	115 91	82 88	10-40	27 32	+5	29 26	-3
Acstaffexpect Acstaffexper	121 93	81 89	6-24	13 10	-3	14 9	-5
Modexpect Modexper	116 91	78 87	9-36	24 28	+4	28 27	-1
Writexpect Writexper	124 93	82 89	4-16	12 9	-3	16 10	-6
Clubexpect Clubexper	125 95	82 87	5-20	5 5	0	5 5	0
Studexpect Studexper	125 95	82 88	7-28	21 16	-5	21 13	-8
Sciencexpect Sciencexper	115 90	70 85	4-16	8 7	-1	8 7	-1
Conv1expect Conv1exper	118 87	81 88	10-40	20 19	-1	25 22	-3
Conv2expect Conv2exper	122 90	80 88	6-24	16 12	-4	18 12	-6
Curriculumexpect Curriculumexper	123 89	84 94	8-56	48 40	-8	46 37	-9
Relationsexpect Relationsexper	120 89	82 93	3-21	18 18	0	18 17	-1

⁸ The difference between the expectations and experiences is calculated by subtracting the expectations score from the experiences score. Thus, a positive score indicates that the experience 'exceeded' the expectation in relation to the score – see later section for discussion

3.5 Quality of the educational experience

Chapter 1 described the complex array of factors that impact on the quality of the first year undergraduate experience. Within this discussion the importance of the differences between expectations and experiences were noted. It is asserted that the quality of the educational experience can be measured, in part, by measuring the difference between expectations and experiences, i.e. by taking the experience score from the expectations score within aspects of the questionnaire. The hypothesis is that where a participant expects something different from that which is experienced, issues relating to integration and assimilation can result. When a participant indicates that the experience matches the expectation (whether low scoring or high scoring), the experience is congruent with the expectation. When a participant indicates that the experience does not match the expectation (whether low or high scoring for expectation or experience), this indicates a discrepancy between the expectation and the experience. A negative score indicates that the participant expected 'more' in terms of scoring higher for the expectation of participation within each of the subscales than was actually experienced. A positive score indicates that the participant expected 'less' in terms of scoring lower for the expectation of participation within each of the subscales than was actually experienced.

In terms of assimilation and integration into first year, discrepancies between expectations and experiences are important. It is not possible to place a value judgment on positive and negative scores because, for example, a participant may not have expected to attend many classroom activities (therefore scoring low on expectations), and may have actually attended all classroom activities (therefore scoring high on experiences). The overall quality of the educational experience score would be a positive number. However, the participant may view the experience as negative if they had expected and hoped for a course in which participation in classroom activities was not the focus of the teaching approach. On the other hand, a negative score does not necessarily imply a negative experience. What they both indicate is the discrepancy between expectations and experiences which is important of itself.

Correlations were looked for using Spearman's rho rank order correlation coefficient between the quality subscales. The correlation does not provide information regarding the direction of causality as the Spearman's rho test does not demonstrate statistically which variable causes the other to change (Pallant 2001). There may also be other variables affecting the result that have not been measured. Tables 5 and 6 provide the statistical results for each variable for expectation (table 5) and experiences (table 6).

For expectations, all, except five correlations were significant. The non-significant correlations were: conversations 1 and academic staff $p = .052$; curriculum and writing $p = .089$; clubs and conversations 2 $p = .065$; clubs and relationships $p = .160$; science and curriculum $p = .080$. There were strong correlations for library and academic staff (Spearman's rho = .549), library and module learning (Spearman's rho = .517), academic staff and module learning (Spearman's rho = .500) and between writing and module learning (Spearman's rho = .526). These may relate to the expectation that information seeking and learning within modules would be closely linked to their interactions with academics and to taking an active approach to learning.

Additionally there were moderate correlations between almost all of the other variables indicating that the participants expected that all aspects of the curriculum would be connected or linked to one another. For example, module learning with its emphasis on active participation in the learning experience (through reading, note taking, discussion, application of theory), has moderate correlations with all other variables. It seems, therefore, that the participants expected that active learning within modules would be related to their experiences in information seeking (library and information technology), their connections with academic staff, contribution to the learning experience (writing, learning and teaching approaches, scientific and quantitative experiences), and other aspects of their curriculum experience (student acquaintances, campus facilities, and clubs and organisations). The expectations correlations indicate that

students have a general level of expectation overall and that they see the course as a whole with many of the parts connected to each other.

For experiences there were fewer correlations that were significant, particularly in relationships and curriculum. There were no strong correlations with all of the strong correlations in expectations moving to moderate correlations (library and academic staff Spearman's $\rho = .411$; library and module learning Spearman's $\rho = .325$; academic staff and module learning Spearman's $\rho = .338$ and between writing and module learning Spearman's $\rho = .325$). There remain moderate correlations across the variables generally although some of these are reduced. For example in module learning, eight out of the ten correlations were lower for experiences. Given the numbers of non-significant correlations and the overall reduction in the strength of the correlations, it may be that students began to pick apart the curriculum experience and started to see some aspects of the curriculum in isolation. It may be that the connections that they had expected across the curriculum were not matched through their experiences.

In summary, the findings show that students' expectations were not matched by their experiences. It appears that students expected to experience a connected curriculum, but that the reality of their experience was that the links across the curriculum became less strong.

Table 5: Spearman's rho scores and significance values for expectations

	Lib	Acstaff	Mod	Writ	Club	Student	Science	Conv1	Conv2	Curric	Relation
Lib	1										
Acstaff	.549 .000	1									
Mod	.517 .000	.500 .000	1								
Writ	.296 .000	.496 .000	.526 .000	1							
Club	.348 .000	.402 .000	.338 .000	.347 .000	1						
Student	.247 .001	.312 .000	.449 .000	.295 .000	.261 .000	1					
Science	.412 .000	.381 .000	.384 .000	.234 .002	.349 .000	.393 .000	1				
Conv1	.165 .025	.141 .052	.295 .000	.225 .002	.164 .002	.294 .000	.203 .007	1			
Conv2	.187 .010	.167 .020	.331 .000	.220 .002	.131 .065	.14 .047	.150 .046	.467 .000	1		
Curric	.190 .008	.140 .049	.317 .000	.120 .089	-.063 .376	.206 .003	.130 .080	.196 .006	.137 .002	1	
Relation	.200 .006	.234 .001	.276 .000	.238 .001	.100 .160	.145 .041	.157 .036	.146 .043	.161 .000	.372 .000	1

Table 6: Spearman's rho scores and significance values for experiences

	Lib	Acstaff	Mod	Writ	Club	Student	Science	Conv1	Conv2	Curric	Relation
Lib	1										
Acstaff	.411 .000	1									
Mod	.325 .000	.338 .000	1								
Writ	.350 .000	.427 .000	.325 .000	1							
Club	.359 .000	.244 .001	.128 .089	.195 .009	1						
Student	.342 .000	.123 .100	.266 .000	.253 .001	.220 .003	1					
Science	.248 .001	.231 .002	.387 .000	.198 .009	.118 .121	.322 .000	1				
Conv1	.244 .001	.155 .042	.248 .001	.136 .074	.273 .000	.413 .000	.419 .000	1			
Conv2	.393 .000	.249 .001	.362 .000	.307 .000	.186 .014	.280 .000	.347 .000	.452 .000	1		
Curric	.082 .277	.166 .026	.175 .020	.005 .946	-.038 .615	.101 .174	.063 .405	.142 .061	.077 .310	1	
Relation	.220 .003	.109 .147	.081 .286	.092 .220	.063 .402	.196 .008	.059 .439	.134 .078	.127 .093	.453 .000	1

3.6 Summary

The quality of the educational experience can, in part, be measured by the differences between expectations and experiences. Students expected to experience a connected curriculum with many aspects of the educational experience linking together to form a whole. However, for both the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups, their experiences did not match their expectations in many areas. Importantly, students in both groups had high expectations of the relationships that they would develop with academic and administrative staff, and with their peers. The findings show that the experiences matched expectations for the 'traditional' group and were very close for the 'EBL' group indicating that the connections with people were both expected and were a part of the reality of the experience. While it is important that discrepancies between expectations and experiences are addressed, it is also necessary to ensure that academics do not simply work towards meeting expectations if these are low or unrealistic.

The first year experience is made up of many components, some of which have been measured using the expectations and experiences questionnaires. The findings contribute to the 'thick' description required in case study research and are integrated with the qualitative findings in the following chapter. The findings point toward the conclusion that many aspects of the first year experience are important in determining the overall experience of the first year, and that some of these aspects have an impact on one another. It is likely, therefore, that when developing a first year curriculum, all aspects should be addressed.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS: INTERVIEWS AND DIARIES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the experiences interviews and diaries of those students who successfully completed first year and those who chose to leave. The interviews and diaries enquired about the first year experience of the participants. Data analysis was undertaken as described in chapter 2. The interviews and diaries were utilised to address, in part, the following objectives of the overall research:

1. To examine the first year experience of nursing students.
2. To propose strategies to enhance the student experience and rates of retention in first year undergraduate nursing students.

The chapter begins by specifying the purpose of the interviews and the diaries, before identifying and describing the themes and categories. Finally, the qualitative and quantitative findings are integrated so as to provide a 'thick' description of the phenomenon of the first year experience of nursing students.

4.2 Purpose of the interviews and diaries

The purpose of the interviews was to investigate the lived experiences of students on a first year nursing course ('traditional' and 'EBL' groups). The interviews and diaries aimed to gather in-depth information about the experiences of students who successfully completed first year, and students who left. Comparisons can be made between students in the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups, and between students who stayed and who left in terms of their perceptions and experiences. Appendix 12 provides a table with an overview of the themes and categories, and those participants⁹ who discussed them. The process of developing the themes and categories is

⁹ All participants' names have been changed to maintain anonymity.

described in chapter 2, and appendix 7 provides extracts from my reflexive diary illustrating a small part of the process of coming to decisions about the final themes and categories. The choice of which quotes should be used was challenging given the richness of the data within the interviews and the diaries¹⁰. The choices were made based on: quotes that were succinct and representative of a number of the participants' discussions; quotes that were different to others' and demonstrated the differences in experiences; and quotes that simply encapsulated an experience in wonderful language. The decisions regarding the themes were iterative, and the process is described in chapter 2. Mind maps and other notes were used during the iterative process and the reading, rereading and reading the transcripts again enabled me to develop my understanding of the 'whole'.

The themes and categories arose across both groups, amongst those students who left and those who successfully completed first year, and amongst diary keepers and interviewees. The diaries provided participants with the opportunity to discuss the 'here and now', whereas the interviews were, by their very nature, retrospective. It was therefore easier to identify the ongoing process of the evolving experiences through the diaries than the interviews. Table 7 provides an overview of the number of participants who kept diaries and participated in interviews. Additionally, table 8 provides an overview of the wide range of demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 7: Numbers of interview and diary participants

	'Traditional' group 1	'EBL' group 2	Both groups
Diary	3 (stayer)	4 (stayer); 1 (leaver)	8
Interviews with people who stayed	6	5	11
Interviews with people who left	4	1	5

¹⁰ The quotes are as spoken by the participants. I have avoided the use of 'sic' so as to provide a faithful and accurate account of what was said or written, and to avoid implying a judgment on their particular ways of speaking or writing.

Table 8: Interview and diary participants' demographic characteristics

Name	Group (1=traditional, 2=EBL) and data	Age on entry	Sex of student	Entry qualifications	Did either of your parents graduate from university?	Where will you live?	Expenses?	Stayed / discontinued
Aileen 4148	1 Interview	28	F	SGs	No	Over 10 miles from Aberdeen	More than half	Stayed
Gail 4127	1 Interview	33	F	Access	No	Over 10 miles from Aberdeen	More than half	Stayed
Craig 4034	1 Interview	28	M	HGs	No	In Aberdeen	None/very little	Stayed
Jenny 4124	1 Interview	17	F	HGs	No	Over 10 miles from Aberdeen	Less than half	Stayed
Barbara 4110	1 Interview	47	F	HGs	No	Over 10 miles from Aberdeen	More than half	Stayed
Lesley 4061	1 Interview	42	F	Access	No	In Aberdeen	None/very little	Stayed
Jane 4126	1 Interview	47	F	Access	Missing	Missing	Missing	Discontinued
Lauren 4074	1 Interview	20	F	HGs	No	Over 10 miles from Aberdeen	None/very little	Discontinued
Tanya 4079	1 Interview	50	F	Diploma	No	Over 10 miles from Aberdeen	Missing	Discontinued
Laura 4030	1 Interview	18	F	HGs	No	University accomm.	None/very little	Discontinued
Linda 4087	1 Diary	41	F	HGs	No	Missing	Missing	Stayed
Louise 4155	1 Diary	24	F	HGs	No	In Aberdeen	None	Stayed
Sarah 4122	1 Diary	32	F	HGs	No	In Aberdeen	None	Stayed

Karen 5137	2 Interview	20	F	HGs	No	In Aberdeen	None	Stayed
Mark 5168	2 Interview	18	M	HGs	Yes	University accomm.	All or nearly all	Stayed
Rebecca 5017	2 Interview	19	F	HGs	Missing	Missing	Missing	Stayed
Alex 5025	2 Interview	19	F	HGs	Yes	In Aberdeen	None/very little	Stayed
Tessa 5032	2 Interview	41	F	Access	No	In Aberdeen	All or nearly all	Stayed
Marie 5163	2 Interview	40	F	HGs	No	Within 10 miles of Aberdeen	All or nearly all	Discontinued
Kim 5085	2 Diary	46	F	SGs	No	Over 10 miles from Aberdeen	None/very little	Stayed
Gill 5131	2 Diary	46	F	HGs	No	In Aberdeen	None/very little	Discontinued
Lynsey 5144	2 Diary	41	F	Degree	No	Over 10 miles from Aberdeen	None/very little	Stayed
Carol 5078	2 Diary	39	F	Access	No	Over 10 miles from Aberdeen	All or nearly all	Stayed
Colin 5096	2 Diary	34	M	Access	No	Over 10 miles from Aberdeen	None/very little	Stayed
Fiona 5034	2 Diary	31	F	Degree	Yes	In Aberdeen	None/very little	Stayed

4.3 Themes and categories

The themes that were developed through the process of data analysis are relationships with people, the classroom experience, the practice experience and professional education.

Within each of the themes, the following categories were identified:

1. Relationships with people

- Broadening horizons
- Knowing self and others
- Being supported and valued

2. The classroom experience

- Feeling inspired
- Becoming empowered
- Engaging with the learning experience

3. The practice experience

- Feeling inspired
- Becoming empowered
- Engaging with the learning experience

4. Professional education

- Motivation
- Preparedness
- Engagement

Although each of these will be discussed separately, links between the themes and categories are evident.

4.3.1 Relationships with people

In the context of this thesis, 'relationships with people' were the interactions between, and the relationships that developed with, people in a variety of contexts. These were with peers, academic staff, practice staff

and patients. The participants' experiences linked to their ability, and opportunity, to broaden their horizons in terms of developing relationships with others, both socially and professionally. Knowing themselves (through self awareness) and knowing others was important as a way of becoming integrated into the different environments in which they found themselves. One way in which the participants measured their relationships with other people was through the ways in which they felt valued and supported. Whether an individual felt empowered through feeling valued and supported in the development of these relationships had an impact on the quality of the experience.

Broadening horizons

Almost every participant talked about broadening horizons through the relationships that developed both socially and professionally. 'Broadening horizons', refers to the process that people go through when they engage with the world and come to a new understanding of what it means to be in the world (in this case, what it means to engage in the first year). In some ways this is reflected in Heidegger's 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer 2004) and the interpretive process one goes through when attempting to come to an understanding of a phenomenon.

The contact with increasing social and professional circles provided the participants with a broader perspective on their social and professional lives. Whether this was a positive or negative experience depended on the individual. Most of those who stayed on the courses found the experience of meeting new people (peers, academic staff, mentors, patients) exciting, whereas some of those who left found it daunting.

The 'EBL' group who successfully completed first year found the process of developing relationships exciting. Most of those in the 'EBL' group seemed to have broadened their horizons further than those in the 'traditional' group overall, probably because they had the opportunity to make better connections through the EBL interactions. Even so, some of the 'EBL' group talked a little about the daunting nature of interacting in large classes, but focused more on the early opportunities to interact in small groups.

In relation to meeting their peers, those in the 'traditional' group waited longer than the 'EBL' group to have the opportunity to meet members of their peer group in a structured way (through small group meetings). As Sarah said:

I made friends with a number of other students and found there was far more of an age diversity than I expected. It wasn't until we were split into smaller groups that I started to bond with fellow students. (Sarah, 1, stayer D, semester 1)¹¹

Jenny is fairly typical of the 'traditional' group for whom it took some time to broaden horizons. She had described how difficult she had found it initially to talk to people in the large classroom environment. However, at the end of her first year she was feeling more settled:

I feel much happier [about university]¹². I know a lot more faces now so I can go and speak to them and they will come and speak to me. (Jenny, 1, stayer I)

This knowing of 'faces' seemed to be important to the initial steps that people took in getting to know others. Tessa highlighted the impact that interacting in small groups (in this case enquiry-based learning groups) had:

It's when you go into smaller groups and you just find out through general chitchat over coffee who's got a lot in common. You get to know people in the smaller [EBL] groups. (Tessa, 2, stayer I)

Interestingly, it was the 'chitchat' that led to getting to know people, and the small group learning activities that provided the opportunities. The leavers in the 'traditional' group were particularly vocal about the impact that coming into university and being in the larger groups had on their experience. This is not to say that others did not feel daunted prior to

¹¹ Key:

D=diary keeper; I=interviewee; 1='traditional' group; 2='EBL' group

¹² Square brackets [] indicate words that have been added for clarity of meaning.

coming into university and at the thought of having to broaden horizons. As Mark and Jenny commented:

[On my first day] meeting new people, I found it easy but still thought things like I hope it'll be ok and things like that. (Mark, 2, stayer I)

When I first started I was just from school and I didn't know anyone at all. And I found it really difficult to start with because they didn't have anything to help you get to know each other. You know, there was no group sessions so when you were coming in like me it was really hard to start with. (Jenny, 1, stayer I)

Lauren's comment is typical of those made by the leavers (and one person who stayed) in relation to their experiences of getting to know their peers initially:

[Deciding who to sit next to] was a really daunting experience in a big room like that. It does make student life a lot easier when you know people. It's a bit harsh when you don't have anyone. (Lauren, 1, leaver I)

This is perhaps indicative of the fact that students in the 'traditional' group, although in a personal tutor group, did not undertake much of their learning in consistent, small groups. Students in the 'EBL' group were allocated to a personal tutor/EBL group from day one, and undertook much of their learning in those same small groups when they were not in lectures. The focus was on the interactions within the group rather than on the EBL itself.

Many of the participants were positive about the impact that broadening their horizons had on their experiences. They noted the opportunities for meeting new people, and enjoying a social life through the relationships they had made in the university:

You don't just come here to learn do you? It's the people that you meet, you know many nice people. (Marie, 2, leaver I)

The social side of things is ace! (Karen, 2, stayer I)

When participants talked about their experiences of developing relationships with patients in practice placements, their descriptions indicated that these interactions broadened their horizons and made them see things a bit differently. The focus that they took on their practice experiences tended to be about their interactions with mentors and others in terms of the support that they felt they received. All the diary keepers, and some of the interviewees, mentioned specific interactions with patients at some point and how these interactions helped them to learn something about the person as a whole. There did not appear to be any differences between experiences for leavers and stayers, or between groups. Two of the participants said:

Meeting patients, undoubtedly [is what I enjoyed on placement]. You know, I don't just mean as a case about their illness and stuff. I mean meeting such interesting people from all walks of life. I think it's good not to just learn about the illness you know. (Aileen, 1, stayer I)

I mean the communications with patients as well. I enjoy finding out about their lifestyles and I enjoy just because you meet all different folks from walks of life. (Gail, 1, stayer I)

Participants valued the diversity of patients that they met and appeared to want to get to know the 'whole' patient.

Overall then, it seems that those in the 'EBL' group developed stronger relationships with their peers than the 'traditional' group, especially in the early stages of being on the course. This seemed to relate to the way in which the course was structured, with the 'EBL' participants being in EBL groups from the beginning, and therefore having more opportunities to get to know each other earlier. Those participants who left seemed to be less likely to form strong relationships than those who stayed, with the possibility that this related more to the person than to the learning experience.

Knowing self and others

As students broadened their horizons, their knowledge of themselves and others developed. Where participants developed relationships with people, they developed an understanding of others, along with a greater understanding of themselves. Some of them used this as a learning experience for practice. Others became more thoughtful about their contribution, and others' contributions, to the learning experience in the university. The experience of developing knowledge of self and others seemed to be fairly positive for most participants overall, although there were some aspects (e.g. group working) that presented challenges for some of the participants. In the 'traditional' group, all of those who successfully completed first year and one of the leavers, seemed to have positive experiences relating to knowing self and others, while the other leavers were negative about this part of the experience. All of the 'EBL' group (except one leaver) were positive about knowing self and others in the context of the overall first year experience.

Some of the 'traditional' group cited negative group experiences. Barbara is typical of those who identified issues, although she placed a positive spin on the learning she gained.

[In group work] you can sometimes get a clash of personalities.....but that's part of nursing as well isn't it? Teamwork, trying to get on with other people. (Barbara, 1, stayer I)

So, while there may have been negative encounters, there could still be a positive learning experience.

The development of understanding of self and others had an impact on the way participants interacted with patients in practice. Becoming open to knowing others through awareness of self and others enabled some of the participants to articulate what this meant for them in practice:

Even being able to communicate with patients, you know, maybe discuss the football.....it helps them relax. It helps me relax. (Craig, 1, stayer I)

Cos it doesn't look good for the patient as well when you have a student who comes in and doesn't talk to them. (Tessa, 2, stayer I)

One of the problems with knowing people and developing close relationships was that sometimes the relationship was destroyed. Whether that was through death or through leaving the course, breaking relationships had an impact on the overall experience. Two poignant comments illustrate this:

I mean you've got to put a lot of stuff aside when you come home [from placement]. You know you've seen a lot in one day, talk away to this lady, next day she would be in a wee room, and the next day she would be gone. (Lauren, 1, leaver I)

I was not sure how I should feel [when a patient died] and feel guilty for not feeling more. (Carol, 2, stayer D, placement 1)

Only one participant talked about a friend leaving, but this seemed to cause an emotional reaction that was, perhaps, unexpected for her:

Somebody that I got really close to dropped out after the summer holidays in first year. That gutted me. I really felt bad cos I was really close to her and thought what am I going to do? (Lesley, 1, stayer I)

Taken as a whole, it appears that the students valued the different ways in which the first year experience offered them the opportunity to get to know others, and to develop their self-awareness. It seems that the participants who left struggled with this aspect of the experience more than those who successfully completed first year. Additionally, the participants in the 'EBL' group had more opportunities to get to know each other through their group work and, in fact, found group work to be less problematic than did those in the 'traditional' group.

Being supported and valued

All of the participants talked about being supported and valued. It was important for the overall experience and had an impact on their perceptions of the relationships that they made with others. In particular, participants focused on the support they received in the university from lecturers and

personal tutors, and the support they received from mentors and others in practice. Some of them discussed support from peers, but not everyone. It could be that peer support works well, and therefore was not a focus of thought for some of the participants during the interviews and diary keeping. Much of the discussion around support from, and being valued by, university and practice staff concentrated on where this went wrong. Leavers in particular talked about their negative experiences of support.

The impact of a perceived lack of support and value for people who were thinking of leaving could be devastating. The following comments paint a picture of where things went wrong:

I hardly saw my personal tutor. I found it really difficult to speak to my personal tutor. She wasn't particularly accessible. Well there was a time when I gave up the course I had actually tried to ring her and she wasn't there – again. I'd spoken to the secretarial staff and they had sorted [my leaving] out. And then I had to ring her and I said that I was giving up. And she said 'do you mind me asking why?' And she said ok, and then just put the phone down at the end of it. (Tanya, 1, leaver I)

Tanya went on to say that she would have liked to have had much more discussion about her decision to leave, and would have liked the personal tutor to have appeared to care more. Marie also felt that she needed to be listened to better. These were not uncommon experiences for students who were thinking of leaving.

I did once go to my personal tutor and said, look, you know, I think I'm going to have to come out of this [the course]. 'Oh you can do it, I know you can do it!' – you know. That was it. I felt that wasn't what I needed to hear. I thought I wanted her to listen to more of what I had to say. (Marie, 2, leaver I)

None of the people who successfully completed first year in either group made comments like these. Perhaps they had never needed support in the way these participants had, or perhaps when they had needed support they had received it in a way that was suitable for them.

Participants in both groups talked about times when they had sought academic support for particular assignments. While some people found the support accessible and helpful, others talked about the difficulties they faced and the negative impact this had on them feeling supported and valued. Lesley succinctly described one such experience. The phoning and phoning indicates her frustration with not being responded to.

There was only once that I was really unhappy [with academic support]. I think there was a breakdown in communication. Because I phoned and phoned and phoned and she never got back to me. I emailed this lecturer about two or three times and again she never got back to me. (Lesley, 1, stayer I)

Some of the participants said that they had at least one negative experience with practice staff. While this did not necessarily colour their view of practice as a whole, it seems that these experiences were difficult for the individuals at the time. The specific difficulties ranged from not being valued as a mental health nurse, to being asked to undertake inappropriate tasks, to being talked to in a way that was not helpful for developing good relationships. All of the participants in the smaller branches had at least one experience similar to that of Marie.

And I mentioned I was doing mental health [to my mentor]. 'Oh well, you're not a real nurse then, a mental health nurse.' (Marie, 2, leaver I)

The approach to mentorship seemed to be so important to the placement experience. Unfortunately a number of the participants cited experiences where attitudes and behaviours were negative in nature.

She [mentor] basically didn't have time for me. (Karen, 2, stayer I)

Because the matron kind of saw me to do odd jobs. You know I was asked a lot of times to do things like the washing up. She wouldn't ask me to do things [directly]. She would ask the health care assistant [to ask me]. [It made me feel] not important. (Rebecca, 2, stayer I)

My mentor actually said to me that the way I spoke was quite common. (Mark, 2, stayer I)

I just wish my mentor would scowl at me less often and not talk to me like a [child] who she has been lumbered with. (Lynsey, 2, stayer D, placement 2)

Not having time, not appearing to value the student, seeing the student as a burden, and making negative personal comments about the student were all areas that participants, unsurprisingly, described as negative attributes for support in practice.

Where participants described what they perceived as good support this focused on feeling that they were valued as individuals. For them, good support meant those providing it were available and accessible, were interested in others, respected others, and recognised others' qualities. This was true for both academic and practice experiences.

The support is there if you want it. It's up to the individual. They throw it in your face all the time that the tutors are there if you need them. (Lesley, 1, stayer I)

Lesley's comment indicates what some of the participants felt: that students should take control of their own learning and seek support if they need it. Tanya's comment shows that being treated as an adult was important. Possibly Tanya had experienced 'being talked down to' in other contexts.

I had a lot of support from the [academic] tutor. She was really very good and very very positive. She made everyone feel a lot more positive about the whole course. She didn't actually talk down to you or anything. (Tanya, 1, leaver I)

Mark's comments, though particularly positive, were not unusual and show just what kind of impact individual academics can have on the student experience.

I'm very fortunate to have Eunice as a personal tutor because she helps me through a lot. And you just love her cos she genuinely

cares for us. She is a role model basically for all of us. I'll always remember her for the rest of my life. (Mark, 2, stayer I)

The ways in which participants talked about the positive experiences of mentorship demonstrated that they valued a caring, positive, friendly approach that enabled them to fit into the practice environment and learn. Both groups of students highlighted very similar things and there did not seem to be a difference between the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups' experiences. A typical positive comment included:

[She] was very approachable, good at explaining things to me. When she wasn't on there was always someone took me under their wings and kept me right. I felt like I fitted in and I thought this is what I want to do. (Tessa, 2, stayer I)

Being cared for ('under their wings') and fitting in were two aspects that were important to the overall experience.

They've always been willing to help me and things. I'm quite shy and I'm always asking lots of questions and nervous about what I'm meant to be doing. But they haven't made that a bad thing. They've just tried to help me build up my confidence. (Jenny, 1, stayer I)

The trust and respect and everything that you have from the staff that you're working with. The last placement I really felt that I was a valued team member. It felt good to be valued. (Lesley, 1, stayer I)

Being valued and respected and having people believe that confidence can be developed were also key to a good experience of working with mentors for these participants.

When peer support was mentioned, this was nearly always in a positive light. Only Lauren described a negative experience with peers and this was addressed with support from her personal tutor. Outside of the realms of socialising (and broadening horizons), peers did appear to provide a useful support network in terms of study and other support. The helpfulness of others for both academic and social support was discussed by a number of the participants, for example:

I like these sort of discussions that you're sitting at the lunch table and somebody mentions something – maybe an ethics thing. You discuss it. Because the friends I've got, none of them really do this sort of thing [nursing]. (Craig, 1, stayer I)

But my class, there's only 11 of us in all. And we're quite close. Constantly phoning each other. And everybody's there if anybody's got something in their personal life. (Mark, 2, stayer I)

As previously highlighted, where groups did not meet very often, social relationships were not formed easily, and therefore the personal tutor groups did not offer a peer support network for those in the 'traditional' group in the same way as the groups did for the 'EBL' group.

Our [personal tutor] group never really met that much. We just met once a term so I didn't even know people in my personal tutor group. (Jenny, 1, stayer I)

The participants consistently identified the qualities that, for them, made a good supporter. These included approachability, availability and a caring manner. Conversely, when the participants did not feel valued they identified difficulty in accessing support and lack of care as the characteristics that impacted negatively on their first year experience.

4.3.2 The classroom experience

On the pre-registration nursing courses students spent 50% of their time on theoretical aspects of their learning and 50% of their time in practice. While the theory informed their practice, and they reflected on their practice experiences in the classroom, the participants discussed each aspect of their course separately. Part of the reason for this was probably the nature of the questions they were asked when interviewed, and the nature of the reminder letters they received for the diaries. In the context of the classroom experience, participants talked/wrote about feeling inspired, becoming empowered, and engaging with the learning experience.

Inspiration was linked to the approaches used by lecturers in the classroom. In particular, where lecturers were said to be inspiring they were enthusiastic, interacted well with students, used humour, and were

approachable. When students felt empowered, this was allied to their ability to manage the volumes of information, to manage assessment work alongside practice, to researching and discovering theory, and to using learning methods to test their knowledge. Engagement with the learning experience was mainly associated with the use of small group work as opposed to learning in lecture theatres. Some of those who undertook enquiry-based learning discussed its impact on the learning experience. The participants also discussed the organisation of the timetable and the impact this had on their engagement. Participants highlighted how the use of clinical skills sessions in the university enabled them to engage with the learning, or would have engaged them if there had been more available skills time.

Feeling inspired

Enthusiasm was cited as an important attribute for lecturers, which in turn was seen as creating enthusiasm and inspiration in students. A number of the participants talked about being in lectures where the environment was uninspiring, with lecturers speaking in monotonous tones and not creating enthusiasm. Mark was gracious in his comments but reflected what many of the other participants felt.

You learned a lot of the tutors have their own ways of teaching. There is one or two who you just wish you would liven things up just a little bit! You've got the odd one that speaks the same way all the way through and I find it hard to keep listening. (Mark, 2, stayer I)

On the other hand, some of the participants talked about their experiences of having enthusiastic lecturers who created interest in the classroom. As Gail said:

Some of [the male lecturers] come around with a microphone and they ask the students and that is good because everybody kind of gets into the discussion. (Gail, 1, stayer I)

When participants discussed lecture experiences that were interactive and humorous, they were animated in the discussion. All those who had

negative or mixed experiences reported lectures that were difficult to handle. Gail's comment was:

There's no interaction, no humour [from some lecturers]. (Gail, 1, stayer I)

Fiona went so far as to describe feelings of anger related to teaching approaches. She was the only one who described her feelings in those terms, although all of the others who had negative experiences spoke at some length about feeling bored or uninspired.

I left the room quite angry and more importantly didn't learn anything as her authoritarian style prevented me from learning. (Fiona, 2, stayer D, semester 2)

Approachability and encouragement were described as positive aspects of lecturers' ways of working with students. This kind of approach enabled participants to open up and discuss the theory in the classroom setting.

Most of the tutors have been fantastic and encourage your learning through discussion, resources or providing a listening ear for your ideas and thoughts. (Fiona, 2, stayer D, semester 3)

In summary it seems that, from the participants' perspective, some lecturers performed well in the lecture situation while others were not as engaging. There did not appear to be differences between the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups or the leavers and stayers in relation to their perceptions of inspiration in the context of the classroom.

Becoming empowered

The participants did not use the term empowerment (except for one – Colin), but did identify at least some of the attributes of empowerment within their first year experience (as described in chapter 1).

In the 'EBL' group, most of the participants appeared to feel empowered in the classroom environment and in their approach to theoretical learning. However, Karen had not enjoyed any aspect of the university learning

experience in first year, but did report that at the beginning of second year she was starting to enjoy it more.

Fiona and Laura provided differing views about being self-directed in their learning approaches:

What has been good is the amount of self-directed study. I think it highlights how much you want to learn or how much you don't. (Fiona, 2, stayer (D), semester 1)

I suppose that I'm quite a motivated person really so I liked the challenge of kind of trying to teach myself. But I suppose I'd never really thought about what university was going to be like. I mean I knew it was going to be a whole different ball game. I mean, I enjoyed it, but it's a hard way to learn. (Laura, 1, leaver I)

Their comments are reflective of others' and could relate to the different approaches to teaching used in the two groups. In the 'traditional' group, students were expected to research topic areas independently and in groups. However, they were asked to do this across a range of modules and in different groups without a consistent approach. Those in the 'EBL' group were involved in EBL activities, as well as module group activities and were almost always working within the same groups.

Some of the participants found the organisation of the learning challenging. They felt that the university timetables were complex and some participants found them confusing to work with.

We got those lovely green timetables and it was like, what is this? I was so confused. (Alex, 2, stayer I)

Some of the participants found that the construction of the timetable had an impact on their experiences. Participants did not like it when the timetabled sessions were spread across the day. In particular, this issue related to the chronology of timetabling where there were gaps between contact within the classroom. As Jane said:

I didn't like the fact that learning is so scattered throughout the week. (Jane, 1, leaver I)

The diary keepers were the only ones who said anything about assessment and its impact on the experience. The participants in the 'traditional' group identified more of the challenges than those in the 'EBL' group:

I find the amount of time we have to pursue academic assignments daunting [on top of practice]. (Sarah, 1, stayer D, placement 1)

I will be a bit happier when I receive the results of my first essay as I just don't know how well (or how badly) I have performed. (Linda, 1, stayer D, semester 3)

The use of computer assisted learning provided the opportunity for students to determine their learning needs and work independently on some aspects of the theory. This seemed to have a positive effect on the learning experience for some as Lynsey said:

I have quite sadly become addicted to doing the practices [for module learning] on my computer. I feel quite chuffed with myself when I manage a good score. (Lynsey, 2, stayer D, semester 2)

Participants who were undertaking one of the smaller branch programmes (mental health or children's as opposed to adult branch), all said that they felt that first year was geared towards adult branch. Karen was a children's nursing student:

And it just felt the first year there was little snippets of children's nursing but, I think it was more adult based. (Karen, 2, stayer I)

The intention had been that EBL experiences should have provided opportunities to consider generic theory in a branch specific way, but perhaps it did not.

A number of the 'traditional' group participants, and those in the smaller branches in the 'EBL' group, wondered about the relevance of aspects of the theory:

I thought oh my god, what on earth has this [sociology and psychology] got to do with nursing? (Aileen, 1, stayer I)

Bringing together what has been discussed so far, the participants in the 'EBL' group appeared to participate in their classroom experiences more than those in the 'traditional' group. They seemed to demonstrate some characteristics of empowerment such as the ability to take control over aspects of the learning experience.

Engaging with the learning experience

Engagement has been described in chapter 1. It involves the active participation of students in the overall learning process, and can lead to the empowerment of the individual.

Most of the participants said that they preferred group work to lectures. They acknowledged the importance of lectures but pointed out some of the pitfalls of working in that learning environment. The pitfalls included the way in which students behaved, the style of the lecturer, and the difficulties with asking (and answering) questions in large classes. All participants said that they preferred the smaller groups and got a lot more out of this approach to teaching.

Barbara was typical of those who found it difficult to ask questions:

I feel that you miss out with lectures. Answering any queries that you have about any of it.....you miss out on that. Where in a tutorial group you can do that. (Barbara, 1, stayer I)

Many of the participants found that the lectures were not conducive to learning. In particular, a number of them said that the environment was distracting with people talking during the lectures. Craig and Karen, while describing different perspectives, highlighted the problem of distraction in a big lecture theatre.

Something I hate about lectures is if you're sitting there and there's somebody yapping behind you. (Craig, 1, stayer I)

I do prefer smaller classes and smaller groups. I don't particularly like the big lectures. I get a bit distracted quite easily. There's always chat around you in the lecture theatre. (Karen, 2, stayer I)

Lauren and Aileen succinctly stated what they thought about lectures. They were typical of most of the participants.

I mean, lectures can't always be fun. They can be a bit of a drag. (Lauren, 1, leaver I)

I'm not saying big lectures aren't good. I'm sure they wouldn't use them if they didn't work. But for me I just prefer smaller groups. (Aileen, 1, stayer I)

Aileen's comment is interesting in particular because it indicated that she felt that academics knew best about teaching approaches ('I'm sure they wouldn't use them if they didn't work').

There seemed to be a general acceptance and expectation that lectures were not necessarily the most interesting of teaching approaches for the participants. In this respect, both groups had very similar experiences. The strong feeling with the participants was that smaller group work was more beneficial overall than the large lectures. While they could see the importance of lectures in some circumstances, they seemed to get more out of the activities in the smaller groups. Fewer of the 'EBL' group participants commented in detail on the group work, and this may have reflected the much higher ratio of group work activities that took place within the 'EBL' course.

None of the 'traditional' group discussed the impact that group discussions had on theory and learning from experiences. However, a number of the 'EBL' group talked about the way in which EBL activities helped them to make links between theory and practice. Some of 'EBL' group found EBL to be a valuable approach to learning (even if they did not realise it at the time). Others did not find it so valuable, particularly the consolidation phase. The consolidation phase was a seven week period at the end of first year where there was no further module teaching. Instead students

undertook consolidation activities within their EBL groups in order to ensure that students were comfortable with year 1 learning and were prepared for year 2. The following comments represented the mixed views of the participants:

For me personally I enjoyed the group work and the [EBL consolidation]. I enjoyed all that, the discussions. (Marie, 2, leaver I)

The EBL activities helped me more now than they did then. It didn't seem to make any sense why we were doing it but now it does. (Rebecca, 2, stayer I)

The one thing that confuses a lot of people is the point behind EBL. Didn't learn or get anything from it. Perhaps a year from now I will say 'I get it'. (Fiona, 2, stayer D, semester 1)

I think EBL is a waste of time. I don't know if it's cos of who my personal tutor is. It just doesn't feel like we're getting anything out of it. The [consolidation phase] was quite good cos we had time to cover stuff ourselves, just work through it ourselves. (Alex, 2, stayer I)

It is difficult to draw conclusions from the limited discussion that took place around EBL. However, the consolidation period caused problems for some people. On the other hand, some of the students identified that it was a positive phase in which there was time for reflection and further learning. The participants stated that facilitators needed to work with students in a consistent and engaging way.

The 'EBL' group seemed to have a better experience of clinical skills teaching in the university than those in the 'traditional' group. Students valued skills practice prior to going out to placement, and the 'EBL' group had a full module devoted to clinical skills in semester 1. The 'traditional' group had very little input. Craig showed how he would have valued clinical skills within first year and the perception that 'doing' is what counts.

The practical side [in the clinical skills laboratories], quite good. Em, we haven't really been down there at all in first year. I mean you sit through a lecture for hours and no practical... (Craig, 1, stayer I)

The 'EBL' group's comments were represented by Tessa who valued the skills input in preparation for practice.

Doing the clinical skills gives you the background before you're out in placement. (Tessa, 2, stayer I)

It seems that the skills practice that students got in the university helped them to develop confidence for when they were out in practice.

Without exception, all the participants preferred to be taught in small groups rather than in big lectures. Many of them stated that there was some value in large group teaching, although they could not articulate what it was. Rather, they credited lecturers with an understanding of what works best for students (and therefore why choices were made about teaching approaches). Some of the EBL participants stated that EBL was helpful in the learning experience. It appears that the value of EBL became clearer for some as time went on and experience grew. There were conflicting views on the consolidation phase, and perhaps this is a reflection on students' preparedness for engagement in learning. In addition, participants valued clinical skills practice in the university prior to going out to practice.

4.3.3 The practice experience

The practice experience was significant to the overall learning experience for all the participants who did at least one placement. Participants talked or wrote about feeling inspired, or otherwise, by the way in which mentors and other staff worked with students during the learning process. Becoming empowered and engaging with the learning experience were also aspects of the practice experiences that came through strongly in the interviews and the diaries. For two participants (one from each group), the experience in practice was the factor that provoked them to leave and related to the ways in which mentors and other practice colleagues communicated – their use of interpersonal skills. Jane ('traditional' group leaver) did not make it to practice as she left in semester 1 prior to her first placement. Positive

and negative experiences did not seem to be linked to belonging to either the 'traditional' or 'EBL' groups.

Feeling inspired

Feeling inspired was associated with the interpersonal skills and role modelling of clinical staff in that students looked to them for 'ways of being' in a professional capacity, and was linked to being seen as part of the team while having the special role as a supernumerary student. Where participants felt a sense of excitement relating to practice experiences, they were more likely to feel inspired, as opposed to those whose lack of confidence made them feel anxious rather than excited. Some of the participants talked about whether they could ever see themselves in the role of a nurse linking closely to the way in which the practice learning experience was inspiring or otherwise.

The issue about role models seemed to be crucial to students' practice experiences. It was something that all participants discussed to some extent, either positively or negatively, as illustrated by the following quotes:

I don't like the harshness that a nurse had to be. I just didn't think I could have done it for the rest of my days. I just thought it was really too harsh. I would have liked it to be a lot more friendlier. They tried their best but it came to the whole 'it's a job' and I didn't like that. To me it's not a job, it's somebody's life. And I've never seen caring as a job. It's always been a privilege because you're taking care of people. It was just it was a chore for all of them and I didn't want to end up thinking that way. (Lauren, 1, leaver I)

There are nurses at the placement that I can see myself being like and there are quite a few who I definitely don't want to be like. (Sarah, 1, stayer D, placement 3)

Today left me feeling that nursing seemed to be about denial, preconceived ideas and being impervious to patients' feelings. This left me feeling like a square peg in a round hole – the odd one out. But I don't have to be a carbon copy of the trained nurses I work with. (Sarah, 1, stayer D, placement 3)

The participants gave the impression that they expected to be inspired by the nurses that they worked with and became disillusioned when qualified staff did not seem to enjoy their work.

The importance of being seen as supernumerary was identified by some of the participants. Where this was discussed, it was done so negatively so it may be that those who did not discuss it did not come across the issue when they were in practice. As Lauren said:

We're meant to be supernumerary I suppose, but basically we're the staff and we're there and we're made to work. (Lauren, 1, leaver I)

The difference between participating in care as a learning opportunity and 'being made to work' came through in a number of the interviews and diaries. The participants were happy to be involved in all aspects of care when this was seen as part of the learning experience. However, they were unhappy when their activities were perceived as plugging a staff shortage.

Some of the participants talked about being thrown in at the deep end and either the excitement or the anxiety that this evoked. It was hard to determine whether the characteristics of the participant or the characteristics of the placement had an impact on their anxiety or excitement. The negative feelings were reflected in Lauren's comments:

I mean even though I knew quite a lot because of my nursing, my caring background, I still felt I was struggling and in at the deep end [on first placement]. (Lauren, 1, leaver I)

Unfortunately, a number of the participants found that they were working in an environment where there were problems with interpersonal relationships amongst the staff. Even where this was not overt, participants seemed to pick up on the problems quite quickly, and this certainly had a negative impact on the experience as Rebecca explained.

And you don't really know who to trust because they're all against each other [practice staff]. (Rebecca, 2, stayer I)

Disillusionment with practice was depicted through overall negative comments such as those of Sarah and Barbara:

My placements have not been everything I expected or wanted. (Sarah, 1, stayer D, placement 3)

I have been disillusioned at times. Just seeing things done in practice and you think, oh my god – the consequences. (Barbara, 1, stayer I)

It seems that many of the participants' expectations of what the reality of practice learning would be did not match their experiences. On the other hand, many of the participants were inspired by practice and demonstrated this through general comments such as:

Well, I loved all three of my placements I had in first year. Loved them. I really can't say anything bad about any of them. (Aileen, 1, stayer I)

Those who stayed were more positive overall in relation to the way in which they described their placements. Leavers did not describe their experiences in the same terms as people like Mark and Aileen, even when the leavers discussed positive aspects of their practice experiences. They simply were not as positive overall about what it was like for them to be undertaking practice placements. Those who successfully completed first year also identified negative issues as described. For example, Mark talked about one of his experiences where his mentor was a particularly bad role model. However he did not focus on the negative issues, he focused on the positive aspects of the learning experience.

Becoming empowered

Becoming empowered as learners in the clinical environment was linked to the participants knowing their role within the context of care, and being allowed to take on relevant responsibilities. When this did not happen, participants felt disempowered. Those who felt that they were contributing to decision-making about their learning described feelings of being empowered. Participants who identified that feedback from mentors was not constructive and that there were 'office politics', appeared to exhibit

feelings of disempowerment. Useful feedback to inform ongoing practice was found to be empowering. A team approach in a supportive environment where staff members did not appear to have negative issues with each other was also found to be imperative to the promotion of a positive learning environment.

Participants who felt empowered described taking control of their own learning within defined boundaries. As Colin wrote:

I had a very informal discussion on what I wanted from my placement. It is my responsibility to arrange what I will be doing [on community placement]. I feel empowered by the process. (Colin, 2, stayer, D, placement 2)

Where participants felt disempowered they described what it felt like not to be allowed to take responsibility for an area of care for which they felt ready due to previous life experiences. Tessa's situation cropped up in other participants' experiences:

A few times I felt I was belittled in respect I was sitting in a mother and baby clinic. And I was told to sit in a seat in the corner while everything was being done around me. I'm a mum of three. I know how to hold a baby! It made me think that if that's how you treat people there's no way I'll become a health visitor. (Tessa, 2, stayer I)

Some of the participants did not feel in control of their learning, and in fact described what it felt like not to understand what their role was. Lauren provided a typical view:

I think there was a lot of stuff on my placement I wasn't meant to be doing. But you never know what you're meant to be doing and what you're not meant to be doing. (Lauren, 1, leaver I)

The way in which mentors and others provided feedback was influential on the participants' perceptions of their experiences. While participants valued feedback to assist with learning, they found it difficult to deal with when it was given in a negative manner. Sarah, Alex and Gill provided a variety of common perspectives. Two of them (Alex and Gill) focused on the grades

they were awarded for their placements, while Sarah discussed more general feedback.

It's frustrating when you feel you've worked really hard and in the end they only give you a four¹³ and you're like, well I think I deserve more than that. But then they're the senior so you can't argue too much you know. (Alex, 2, stayer I)

What a disappointing day. I just feel like I work hard and don't know what else to do to get a better grade. (Gill, 2, leaver D, placement 1)

When telling [my mentor] what I am not comfortable with, she makes cutting remarks instead of exploring why I am not comfortable with certain (aggressive) residents, and this has a knock-on effect of further reducing your confidence. Someone's attitude can impact on the care you give to others. (Sarah, 1, stayer D, placement 2)

Sarah's comments are particularly insightful with her appreciation of the impact that others' feedback can have on confidence. Gill, on the other hand, sounded disillusioned and wearily frustrated with her situation. In her diary, she had, in fact, described the ways in which she had sought feedback, and how she had tried to take it on board. In the end she did not seem to know what else to do.

A number of the participants mentioned 'office politics':

I just don't know why I'm not more enthusiastic. The other students and I seem to agree that there is quite a lot of office politics going on – and we don't think everyone gets on as well as they should or could. (Louise, 1, stayer D, placement 2)

Louise started by saying that she did not know why she was not more enthusiastic, but went on to provide a potential reason. The relationships between clinical staff seemed to have a significant effect (either positively or negatively affecting the experience). Some who mentioned 'office politics' recognised that the interpersonal relationships of staff members did not have to have a negative impact on their learning experience. For others

¹³ The grading scheme in the university at the time was from 1 (fail) to 6 (excellent pass). Grade 4 was a good pass.

(in particular Gill), the negative learning environment had a major impact, and contributed to her feeling disempowered.

Engaging with the learning experience

Participants who engaged with the learning experience talked about the ways in which they took on every learning opportunity that was available to them. This active approach to learning was often supported by an active approach to mentoring. Some participants identified negative aspects to the clinical learning experience that had an impact on their engagement with the learning. These included: a perception that the participant was taking on auxiliary nurse roles; feeling like a 'lost sheep'; and feeling bored with the learning experience.

Barbara in particular had an issue with the amount of contact she had with auxiliaries because she felt that her learning should have been facilitated by qualified staff:

Most of the time you're working with auxiliaries really. I've got a thing about that.... A fair amount of the practical training tends to be working with somebody who's not trained. And I feel that although some of them have been doing it a long time and can show me lots, and often do. But I've seen the other side as well. They've no training on ethical issues or professionalism or good communication with people. I'm training to be a nurse and I want to be trained as a nurse practically as well as theoretically. (Barbara, 1, stayer I)

Others talked about the fact that they were not always supernumerary and were therefore 'counted in the numbers' of staff on shift:

The staff of the hospital are really nice but there's a few comments you know - 'oh I'm glad you guys are here cos it's easier for us'. (Lauren, 1, leaver I)

Lauren's experience shows that where students were treated as part of the staff complement (an extra pair of hands), and not supernumerary, the learning experience was less satisfactory. For example, Lauren may not have had the opportunity to find out from qualified staff what she should be doing.

Marie (leaver) had a negative experience overall, and never really engaged with the learning in practice. Hers was a different experience to others'. She was fairly negative about nursing and in particular she did not enjoy the one placement she undertook, perhaps because she felt that she had to conform to a particular way of being that did not suit her personality:

The first placement was out in the community and it was boring! I've never been used to wearing a uniform. That was a barrier. I didn't feel comfortable in it. I had to be what they wanted me to be. (Marie, 2, leaver I)

When the participants went into practice they had expectations regarding what the experience was going to be like, what they would be expected to do, how they were expected to behave, and how they thought that they would be treated. The participants appeared to expect that they would enjoy their placements. While most did, some of the participants had concerns about the role they played and the way in which they were dealt with. Interestingly, those participants who had previous caring experiences seemed to find some aspects of their practice experiences somewhat challenging, particularly when they perceived that they were undertaking the same role as an auxiliary. Lauren's feeling that she was working as an auxiliary rather than as a student nurse was typical of the comments raised by those who felt the same way:

You were basically an auxiliary. So I wasn't learning anything. (Lauren, 1, leaver I)

On the other hand, many of the participants recognised that the development of 'core'¹⁴ nursing skills was vital to their learning and that this aspect of nursing could be challenging. Lynsey and Alex described this issue well:

¹⁴ 'Core' nursing skills refer to the activities that students undertake with patients/clients to meet basic needs (such as washing, assistance with eating, making beds etc).

When I got [to my first placement] I was told I was expected to learn basic nursing care. I thought that sounded far too easy. I had done it before and it would be a very boring 7 weeks. I was wrong about all of it. (Lynsey, 2, stayer D, placement 1)

My first placement was quite good towards the end. It was in a nursing home. Initially it was being a care assistant all over again. I didn't like that much. But towards the end I got to do injections and dressings. (Alex, 2, stayer)

Again, Lauren typified the kinds of comments that people made about not fitting in:

It was more that you did kind of feel like a lost sheep. I mean two weeks; it took me two weeks to even start settling in. (Lauren, 1, leaver I)

Participants who actively sought out learning opportunities appeared to be much more engaged than others. Students who took control of their learning, were more likely to be engaged. Mark discussed this. He was interesting because he actually had one negative experience in placement (where the mentor had commented on his accent), but this did not affect his engagement and, in fact, contributed to him becoming empowered:

They [placements] were all brilliant. I mean I go on every shift and try and get the best I can. I'm not somebody who looks on the negative side of things. (Mark, 2, stayer I)

There was a difference in people's experiences depending on the way in which the mentor tried to engage with the participant's learning. Tessa, Gail and Louise's comments indicated the differences. While Tessa did engage with the learning, she found one of the placements challenging in terms of feeling that she could not participate in care:

Second placement was on community. Just didn't enjoy it whatsoever. I was always told you're only here to observe. So seven weeks of just watching people doing things and just reading up is a bit too much. (Tessa, 2, stayer I)

My mentor is really good at explaining psychological problems that patients have and helping me to understand how to cope with them. (Louise, 1, stayer D, placement 2)

And instead of sitting doing absolutely nothing [when the ward is quiet], they were always at you saying, right you can do the care plans, help with the drug stock take. Or go and look something up about diabetes. So they were always pushing you to do something. (Gail, 1, stayer I)

Gail was representative of many of the participants who found that their practice experiences helped them to pull everything together, to literally link theory with practice, and to begin to see the need for working with patients and clients in a holistic way:

Because [my placement] made me see what nursing was all about. You're not just there to care for the physical side. You're there to care for every side. (Gail, 2, stayer I)

The participants seemed to appreciate that they could not always work with one mentor at all times. When a mentor was absent for whatever reason, and when a student found themselves working with a number of mentors, there were varying reactions. Some of the participants looked for opportunities while others focused on the negative aspects. This perhaps related to the participants' motivation and interest in developing skills and knowledge. Lesley was positive in her approach:

If your mentor's not there, just go to someone else. Just pin yourself to somebody and say what are you doing? If someone's too busy there's always someone else who's not. (Lesley, 1, stayer I)

Overall, most of the participants had positive practice experiences. Some of them had individual placements where they found aspects of the experiences uninspiring, disempowering, or not engaging. However, the focus of many of the participants' discussions was on the positive aspects of their experiences. There were no major differences between participants in the two groups. The main differences lay with those who stayed, and those who left the courses. The leavers were more likely to have had an

overall negative experience with some of them coming to the conclusion that nursing was not the right career choice for them.

4.3.4 Professional education

Participants wrote or talked about the aspects of the experience that enabled them to keep going, or were reasons for giving up the course. The interviewees were asked their reasons for leaving (if they were leavers), and were asked what kept them going (if they successfully completed first year). The diary keepers wrote about these issues as they described their experiences, and some of them highlighted times when they were thinking of leaving, even if they did not go on to do so. Overall, what seemed to be important were their motivation, preparedness and making adjustments to the university and the course.

Motivation related to the reasons that people had for being on the course, and why they had chosen nursing in particular; how self-directed the participant was; how determined to succeed they were; how experiences in practice impacted on motivation; and the way in which feedback was given, particularly in relation to performance in practice.

Preparedness related to: previous care experience (although not always in a positive way); the jump into university life from previous educational backgrounds; previous academic experiences and computer literacy; and expectations of the course and of university.

Making adjustments seemed to be crucial in sustaining the relationships with professional practice. Most of the participants experienced challenges on the course (e.g. dealing with home, domestic and financial circumstances). Attitudes of self and others along with the support that participants had from peers and significant others impacted on their adjustment to their new environment.

Within this theme, participants in both groups seemed to have similar experiences with the curriculum change not having a major impact on their perspective of this aspect of the experience. However, it appeared that the

development of relationships was helpful in enabling adjustment to a certain extent.

Motivation

The participants who successfully completed first year all expressed varying degrees of internal motivation to be a nurse. Some of them had been carers before and wanted to take the next step which they saw as becoming a registered nurse (although this was sometimes accompanied by ambivalence rather than a really positive motivation for nursing). A number of them saw the opportunity to do the course as their 'last chance' to achieve what they had wanted to do for some time. The stayers expressed their determination and motivation to complete the course and some said that determination was what kept them going through the more challenging times. All the leavers, except one (Laura) had not necessarily wanted to do nursing. One did the Access to Nursing course (Jane) although she did not feel that she had made the right choice of course. Another had wanted to do teacher training (Tanya) and another had wanted to work in mental health, but not in nursing (Marie). The leavers had a variety of perspectives, but the key within most of their responses seemed to be a lack of real drive to become a nurse. The following provides a flavour of the participants' overall motivations:

I've always really wanted to be a nurse. I think that nursing is something you've really got to want to do.....This is something that I really want. (Aileen, 1, stayer I)

Well, I went into nursing because nursing is something I've always wanted to do. I mean basically I really wanted to work with people, but I suppose I do need a career as well. (Laura, 1, leaver I)

The 'suppose' in the last quote demonstrates that, while Laura enjoyed the caring aspect of her role as an auxiliary, she may not have been completely committed to the idea of undertaking nursing education.

Working in a nursing home I didn't have a career. [Now I can] get a career! (Craig, 1, stayer I)

While Craig had fallen into nursing as the next natural step after working as a carer, he appreciated the fact that nursing provided him with a career.

Some of the participants had always wanted to do nursing and saw the choice of course and career as a vocation. Mark was the most vocal in this respect. Others had different, but equally motivating reasons for wanting to be on the course:

I do think that I am meant to do it. I believe that I am here to help others. (Mark, 2, stayer I)

Plus [nursing] would help me emigrate! I would like to emigrate sometime. (Tessa, 2, stayer I)

Others who left articulated that nursing was not something that they had really wanted to do, while Alex seemed to be unsure of her choice of course:

I actually wanted to do teacher training and tried twice to get into teacher training....And I decided to do nursing because I had nursed before [as an enrolled nurse] and I thought I knew nursing.....I hadn't realised how difficult it was going to be. I thought I could cope and I couldn't. (Tanya, 1, leaver I)

My reasons for coming to the course was really because I wanted to study mental health.....I never wanted to be a nurse. (Marie, 2, leaver I)

I was kind of one of those people for quite a while - I was like I don't know why I'm here, why I am doing this. (Alex, 2, stayer I)

Jenny did encounter problems on the course, but she demonstrated her commitment to nursing and the impact that commitment had on her choice to stay on the course.

And I found it really difficult to start with because they didn't have anything to help you get to know each other. And if I hadn't wanted to do [the course] so much, I probably would have left because of it. (Jenny, 1, stayer I)

Being self-directed for learning, either on placement or in university, seemed to enable participants to make better connections with professional education. The people who demonstrated that they were more self-directed were more likely to have had a positive experience. Some of their comments provided below offer a flavour of the overall experience:

[In my first placement] I have worked really hard and taken every opportunity to do everything and taken up every opportunity of new experiences. (Gill, 2, leaver D, placement 1)

What has been good is the amount of self directed study. I think it highlights how much you want to learn or how much you don't. (Fiona, 2, stayer D, semester 1)

The participants who stayed expressed determination to complete the course, and to become a nurse. The comments indicate that determination to complete nursing is important in order to keep going on the course. This was expressed either directly or indirectly as follows:

I think as a mature student I think you're actually more determined to see it through. You've got to see it through. I kind of think this is like your last chance type of thing for an education. (Gail, 1, stayer I)

If I get stuck I just tell myself that no-one said it was going to be easy. So I just carry on.....I think I'm lucky being able to do the course really. (Barbara, 1, stayer I)

I know a few people who have left and mostly it's because they felt homesick. Which I have a few times as well. But I just wanted to do this more than I wanted to go home I suppose. (Rebecca, 2, stayer I)

The last word on motivation should go to Fiona who was particularly positive, yet realistic, about the whole experience:

For me it has been a year of challenges, enjoyment, sadness, happiness, anger, satisfaction, frustration, puzzlement and awe inspiring. I say bring on 2nd year!! (Fiona, 2, stayer D)

Preparedness

Some participants described what it was like to move from a different educational experience to Higher Education. The approach to learning as more self-directed was difficult for some. For all participants who discussed this, moving towards independence was challenging. The participants came from a range of backgrounds including Further Education (FE) Colleges, school and the workplace. Taken as a whole, more leavers than stayers talked about the jump into Higher Education. Jane's quote encapsulated others' comments:

It was possibly just too big a jump for me. That's how I felt. And I really maybe hadn't understood what university life was like. (Jane, 1, leaver I)

She went on to say:

I knew it was Higher Education but possibly hadn't understood the whole concept of what was being expected of me. I felt that it was up to me how much studying or how much I didn't study. I possibly feel that I needed to be more focused. (Jane, 1, leaver I)

Jane was not the only person to highlight the jump to Higher Education. A number of the participants said that this was an issue for them as the following quotes illustrate:

Cos they work in a different way [FE College] from here which has been quite hard to change over. (Tessa, 2, stayer I)

I think in school you are kind of spoon fed and then in university it's kind of up to you to figure it out. It's a huge jump. (Alex, 2, stayer I)

Coming out of the workplace, I found it quite laid back in the beginning in comparison to being on the go all the time. (Marie, 2, leaver I)

I suppose that I'm quite a motivated person really so I liked the challenge of kind of trying to teach myself. But I suppose I'd never really thought about what university was going to be like. I mean I knew it was going to be a whole different ball game. I mean I enjoyed it, but it's a hard way to learn. (Laura, 1, leaver I)

The key issue for the participants seemed to be the unexpectedness of the experience. They did not seem to be fully prepared for university and this was common across the groups whether they had come from FE, school or the workplace. Some of them did not feel prepared.

Some of the participants had previous care experience. In some ways this had prepared them for what to expect in practice placements, although it did not necessarily remove the anxieties:

I loved my placements. I was a bit apprehensive of my first placement [in a large hospital], and I was used to small hospitals [as an auxiliary], you know where everyone knows people. I was looking forward to it. You know, obviously the first wee while you feel a bit out of my depth until you feel more at home. And the same for the other two placements actually. (Laura, 1, leaver I)

There were some of the participants who had not had previous care experience and expressed their anxieties about initial practice. As Sarah said:

We also received our placements this week. I am a wee bit concerned about the amount of elderly work there is. Spoke to my personal tutor and I am a bit more open to the idea. I'll approach it with an open mind. (Sarah, 1, stayer D, semester 1)

Feeling really nervous about my first placement tomorrow and very apprehensive about the setting. (Sarah, 1, stayer D, semester 1)

Some of the leavers had undertaken care roles prior to coming on to the course. Surprisingly it appears that having carried out these roles did not necessarily make it more likely that a person would complete their course.

Previous academic experiences were also discussed in terms of the impact they had on their feelings about education. These were only discussed in a negative way, and raised issues around confidence. Marie said most:

But [arithmetic] was something that I was never any good at at school. So I think it goes back – it's funny how being in an academic environment can make you feel. [Arithmetic] was something that I

hated at school. And I think that anxiety came back and prevented me from learning. (Marie, 2, leaver I)

The use of computers featured in a number of the participants' conversations and diaries:

Studying for the first time in over 15 years was hard, and I still don't really have a clue about computers. (Lynsey, 2, stayer D, semester 3)

Student life is not simply about gaining an academic qualification. For many people who come to university the social and recreational side of life is very important. However, this was not a side of university life that the participants engaged with. The reasons probably related to the structure of the academic year (which was different to more 'traditional' university courses), the placement pathways and the fact that students were juggling domestic circumstances that may have prevented them from participating fully.

It's not easy with university activities especially if you're on placement when they're on and especially if you're outside [the city]. I think sometimes the nursing students are a bit isolated from the others. (Rebecca, 2, stayer I)

Social networks in the university doesn't happen because of time restraints, commitments at home. We phone each other or email each other. I've made a lot of friends but there's no nights out or anything like that. (Barbara, 1, stayer I)

The mature-age participants recognised that it was not easy to participate fully in university life (for example, by joining university clubs). However, they seemed to accept this, and did not seem to be looking for this side of university. Rather, they were on the course to become a nurse first and foremost. Some of the younger students did seem to be interested in the social aspects of university life:

My first impression [of university] was it was huge. When I was at the college, you kind of knew everybody. But on the whole, I mean, I loved the whole feel of it all. I suppose it's all part of the feeling that you are actually 'in' the university you know. (Laura, 1, leaver I)

So, preparedness seemed to have an impact on the overall first year experience of the participants. However, perhaps surprisingly, previous caring experience did not necessarily prepare students for the realities of being a student nurse.

Making adjustments

Many of the participants talked or wrote about the adjustments that they had made as new student nurses. The concerns that were highlighted were similar across the groups and between the leavers and the stayers. These mainly related to managing the other commitments that participants had outside of the course. Although these varied (some had child care, others had work), the adjustments that people had to make appeared to be challenging. Adjusting to the demands of practice working where shift work was undertaken was both a challenge in itself and also linked to the ways in which participants had to adjust their domestic circumstances to suit their needs. A number of them had given up well paid jobs to do the course and therefore had to adjust financially. However, only one person cited financial issues as a contributing factor to their decision to leave. Lauren lived out of town and spent a substantial amount on travel. Laura talked at length about the problems she faced in student accommodation with other students. She felt that being away from home was not for her and the homesickness she felt throughout the year led to her decision to leave.

For all the people who chose to leave, the decision was not taken lightly or easily. However, they all said that they had made the right decision. Marie's description is typical of what it felt like to make the decision:

It wasn't something that was taken lightly. It was something that was very very difficult to decide....And it was this huge decision to make and a very very difficult one. I think it was one of the hardest I had to make. (Marie, 2, leaver I)

A number of the participants talked about particular times in their course when things started to get overwhelming. For some it was possible to keep

going, whereas for others it proved too much and they made a decision to leave.

I have been working as well as my placement. My heating blew up in my flat so unfortunately I have had to work extra to get the money to pay my mum back. It's times like this I find hard being a student. (Louise, 1, stayer D, placement 3)

And I mean there is times when I think I just don't want to do this anymore. It's too much. You've got a mountain of ironing, you've got a mountain of dishes, you've got a mountain of everything. You've got kids screaming at you for homework help. And I just think, I can't handle this. I'm in the middle of studying. I've got things to do as well! (Gail, 1, stayer I)

However, Gail went on to say:

I mean there is hard times and there is good times. There's more good times than there is hard times really. (Gail, 1, stayer I)

The participants who had children at home all talked about the impact that undertaking the course had on their relationships and family life. Again, for some of them the impact was such that it contributed to them leaving (Tanya and Marie). Others were able to carry on either through sheer determination, or with the support of significant others.

That's one of the reasons I gave up because of my son anyway because I was not actually seeing him. (Tanya, 1, leaver I)

At the moment it is very hard to get peace to work at home, but I can't stay extra time at uni because I need to get home for the children because it's their holiday and I feel guilty working and ignoring them. (Lynsey, 2, stayer D, semester 2)

Juggling university work, family commitments and social life was challenging for many of the participants.

I'm in the middle of studying or doing an essay and I've got things to do [in my personal life] as well! (Gail, 1, stayer I)

The children are back at school which is fine. They all seem to be settling back which is good (so far). Only down side is the football

run three times a week, and the nightly fight for the computer. (Lynsey, 2, stayer D, placement 2)

In Lynsey's diary, she talked about the impact that undertaking the course had on her personal life. She described the issues, and went on to focus on the ways in which she coped. On the other hand, Tanya did not manage to continue. While their circumstances on the surface appeared to be similar, Tanya had been very direct in her discussion about not really wanting to do nursing. Perhaps it was this, rather than the family commitments, that had more of an impact on her decision to leave.

I thought I was going to cope [with the course]. I'd got child minding sorted out. I have a son who did an awful lot of picking up from the after school club and taking to school. And I think he was beginning to get rather fed up. (Tanya, 1, leaver I)

Tessa was another participant who talked about the commitments in her life. She focused positively on the ways in which she managed the family side of her life alongside her university work:

But it's just sort of getting a routine and getting the family into a routine. I try my hardest not to study over the weekend and spend it with the children and do things with them. (Tessa, 2, stayer I)

Finances did crop up in a number of interviews and diaries, although they were not discussed at length. Sarah and Kim voiced concerns about coping financially with Kim finding part-time work to help make ends meet.

During those first few weeks I found myself starting to worry about money. Having given up a full time job to pursue a nursing career I'm starting to wonder if it's feasible to survive on a bursary. (Sarah, 1, stayer D, semester 1)

Am thinking about giving up part-time casual job – (have done so). (Kim, 2, stayer D, semester 2)

Participants who stayed also discussed times when they had thought about leaving the course, and the support that was there for them that helped them to keep going:

And I mean [my oldest son] has often said no mum don't give it up! He's always been there kind of pushing me along. (Gail, 1, stayer I)

Craig had talked at length about some of the domestic challenges for him during the first year.

I kind of lost it a little bit before Christmas time. I don't know what was going on. I think because Christmas was coming up and everyone was going on about presents; the baby was coming up; had to find somewhere to move too. It was just too much going on definitely. (Craig, 1, stayer I)

Others' support was important for him in keeping going, as it was for a number of the other participants as illustrated:

It's a positive attitude from a lot of people that you speak to - the lecturers, other students. (Craig, 1, stayer I)

I think it has been good having my university friends and family this past couple of months or I do not think I would still be on the course. (Louise, 1, stayer D)

All of the participants had to make some kind of adjustment to the course and the first year experience. These adjustments varied depending on their circumstances and did not appear to be affected by whether they were in the 'traditional' or 'EBL' groups. The main differences in the experiences of adjustment were between those who successfully completed first year, and those who chose to leave. Unsurprisingly, those who left did not make the adjustments which may have enabled them to complete.

4.4 Integration of qualitative and quantitative findings

Chapter 4 has provided an overview of the findings from the interviews and the diaries. These demonstrated that there were many similarities, and some differences, between the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups of students and between those who chose to leave and those who successfully completed first year.

The findings also present a view of the aspects of first year that enhance the experience, and those that can have a negative effect for nursing students. The curriculum developments for the 'EBL' group aimed to address some of the factors that affect first year by providing a means through which students could work more closely with peers and with a member of academic staff (through enquiry-based learning). However, the interviews and diaries provided information about other aspects of the first year and suggest that curriculum development work has to take account of a wide range of issues (structure, content, support and interactions, approaches to teaching, and so on). The findings from the questionnaires also showed that the first year student experience is multi-faceted and that many aspects of the curriculum should be inter-linked.

Four interlinking themes were identified through the analysis of the diaries and interviews. These were: relationships with people; the classroom experience; the practice experience; and professional education. Alongside the analysis of the qualitative data, the analysis of the quantitative data provides a fuller picture of the overall experiences of the two groups of students. The expectations and experiences questionnaires provided data relating to the themes, although the emphasis of the questionnaires was on the classroom experience and the curriculum. The next sections aim to integrate the findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data so as to come to a 'thick' description of the first year undergraduate experience for the student nurses who participated in this research.

Relationships with people

The relationships that students created with people were crucial to the overall experience of first year. While there were some differences between the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups and between leavers and stayers, generally the participants' experiences were broadly similar. Students' relationships with peers, academic staff, practice staff, and with patients were described vividly by the participants who were interviewed and kept diaries. The questionnaires provided insights into the expectations of relationships with staff and with students. Both groups of students expected that relationships would be friendly and supportive, with the

'traditional' group's expectation/experiences score being the same, and the 'EBL' group experiencing slightly 'less' in this aspect. It is interesting that the qualitative data provides a picture of stronger relationships within the 'EBL' group than the 'traditional' group. Both the quantitative and qualitative data show that relationships matter.

The students in both the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups talked about the ways in which the first year experience broadened their horizons. Their university experiences were not just about the development of cognitive skills (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991), but were also about the development of their worldviews. The social and professional relationships that ensued from the participants' experiences enabled many of them to begin to see things a bit differently than had they previously. The factors that seemed to have the main impact on the ways in which students 'broadened horizons' were the EBL groups (through the interactions and strong relationships that developed), and the characteristics of the students themselves (the willingness to learn and get to know others). For example, an ambivalence towards professional education reduced integration and students did not, in these circumstances, broaden their horizons in the same way as others did. In particular, where students talked about their experiences with patients, they found that developing relationships enabled them to see the individual as a 'whole' rather than as a 'condition'. They used words such as 'interesting people', 'different walks of life' and 'enjoy' to describe their feelings and developing views of their experiences with patients. Students seemed to expect to develop their interpersonal skills and to develop relationships with patients (Lauder et al. 2002). There were no real differences between the groups or between the leavers and stayers when patients were discussed. Rather, it seems that the participants thoughtfully approached practice with a caring and open attitude, and were pleased to have the opportunity to really get to know patients.

All the participants talked about what it felt like to arrive in the university, and the impact that the large class sizes and the small groups had on their first year experience. Where opportunities for small group work were incorporated into the timetable, students got to know others more quickly.

Those in the 'traditional' group did not have the same opportunities as the ones in the 'EBL' group to quickly meet and work together in an academic setting. In fact, the qualitative data shows that the students in the 'EBL' group (who were all part of smaller EBL groups) seemed to develop stronger relationships with their peers more quickly than the 'traditional' group. The students in the 'EBL' group talked about the importance of working in small groups as a way of providing opportunities for 'chit chat'. The large class sizes on the first day and for lectures seemed to be daunting for some and were not conducive to getting to know people. In this sense, the culture of the university, rather than the characteristics of the student body, may be the most important determinant in helping students to feel a sense of belonging rather than isolation (Read et al. 2003).

Unsurprisingly, leavers seemed less likely to develop strong relationships with people and were more likely to find the experience daunting, though this may have related to their personal characteristics given that leavers' experiences were similar across the two groups. Words that participants (both leavers and those who stayed) used in relation to broadening their horizons through meeting others included 'daunting', 'harsh', 'difficult', 'happier', 'easy', 'nice people'. Therefore, providing students with structured opportunities (learning communities) to meet with their peers facilitated the development of stronger relationships with each other than working in large classrooms (Smith and Bath 2006; Crissman 2001; Jeffreys 2001).

Working in small groups was not without its challenges, and participants discussed the problems they encountered with group dynamics. 'Traditional' participants talked about this more than the 'EBL' participants. Some of the 'traditional' group reflected on the impact that the group activities had on their experiences in practice, in that the conflict within the groups in the university linked to ways of working in practice. It raised their self awareness and sometimes produced concerns about their ability to cope. 'Traditional' students suggested that the fact that they did not work with one consistent group during first year had a negative impact on their

overall experience. Students in the 'EBL' group did not discuss this issue, perhaps because they had been allocated to an EBL group and had not necessarily expected to be moved from group to group as with the 'traditional' group. It seemed that working in a consistent small group provided a place in which students could really get to know others, and could then provide better support to each other (Salinitri 2005; Crissman 2001).

Where participants knew each other well, they seemed better able to support each other (Black and MacKenzie 2008). Support took the form of study and other academic support (Wilcox et al. 2005), and knowing the experience (and therefore being able to empathise). The 'EBL' group was very positive about peer support and asserted that the small group work had contributed to them developing these supportive friendship networks. The 'traditional' group also developed friendship networks, but they also talked about the lack of meetings with peers through their personal tutor groups. The small academic groups provided a means through which vital friendship networks developed (Tinto 2003; Beaudin et al. 2002; Clulow 2000). The friendship networks seemed also, in this research, to have provided tangible support for academic and pastoral issues that might not otherwise have been available.

Participants talked about the support that was available to them in the university both from personal and academic tutors. The groups did not seem to have different experiences with academic tutors, but relationships with personal tutors appeared, on the whole, to be much stronger in the 'EBL' group (Cotton and Wilson 2006; Wilcox et al. 2005). Participants valued timely accessibility, approachability and a caring manner. Those who described negative experiences did not leave the course, but did have a coloured view of the support that was available to them. In particular, one student's frustration of 'phoning and phoning and phoning' an academic tutor represented the barriers to support that students sometimes identified (Wade and Casper 2002).

Personal tutor support was discussed by many of the participants and was important in the overall experience of first year. Some of the participants who were thinking of leaving described what they perceived as a lack of accessibility and then a lack of being heard which impacted on their decision. Others described the excellent relationships that they had with their personal tutors. As stated, the 'EBL' group seemed to have stronger relationships with their personal tutors. They met with them more often in the group sessions, and felt that they were 'known' – a face and not a number. Some of the students in the 'EBL' group were vocal in their praise of their personal tutor and talked about the extent of the support that they received. Rather obviously, students who were provided with opportunities to work in small groups with the same academic member of staff (in this case the personal tutor/EBL facilitator) were more likely to develop stronger relationships with the member of staff (Cotton and Wilson 2006). The key finding in this research is that there were strong links between academic and social integration for the participants (see also Peel 2000).

The quantitative findings indicated that all aspects of the educational experience were important. There was a general level of expectation that the variables under investigation would all link to each other within the whole experience. However, the experiences did not match the expectations. It is not possible to attribute cause to the findings. However, one explanation may be that the students began to pick apart the curriculum and to see things in isolation rather than as a whole. Alternatively, once the students had experienced the first year they were then in a better position to understand the component parts and therefore to make a more informed judgment on the areas under investigation. Despite this, the relationships remained important for both groups and moderately correlated with many aspects of the curriculum.

Participants talked at length about their experiences in practice with mentors and other staff (Grainger and Bolan 2006; Jackson and Mannix 2001). Both groups had similar experiences and the curriculum changes appeared to have no impact on their practice experiences in first year. Some students who left did so partly because of their experiences of

support in practice. Some students who successfully completed first year also had experiences of not being supported in the ways they had hoped to be. However, the students who stayed seemed to adopt a more pragmatic response to the negative experiences of support and were able to learn from the experiences and look forward to better support. Good practice support was seen as having mentors who were available and accessible, caring, positive and friendly, and who treated students as adults (Brammer 2006a; Henderson et al. 2006). Those mentors who were respectful of others, recognised students' qualities, and helped students to fit into the placement were seen as positive role models. On the other hand, the characteristics that students felt were negative attributes for practice staff included making negative personal comments, seeing students as a burden, not appearing to value students, having poor communication skills, asking students to undertake inappropriate tasks, and not being valued (particularly in relation to different branches of nursing) (Jackson and Mannix 2001). Although these all sound self evident, the participants were passionate about the qualities that mentors should display. Words that were used to describe both positive and negative experiences of mentorship included: 'approachable', 'under their wings', 'fitted in', 'willing', 'build up confidence', 'trust', 'respect', 'value', 'didn't have time', 'not important' and 'lumbered with'. The length and depth of discussion that many of the interviews and diaries provided in relation to the support in practice gave some indication of the importance that students attached to this aspect of their experience. It was interesting that students did not comment on a mentor's technical ability or knowledge base. Rather, the interpersonal skills were the focus for discussion.

The relationships between students and staff and peers were shown to be important to the overall experience. Reflecting on the substantive points, new nursing students need to be supported to adapt to HE both in terms of the academic demands and the social aspects of coming into a new environment (Wilcox et al. 2005).

The classroom experience

The classroom experience was important to the participants in first year. While there were some differences between the experiences of the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups and some differences between leavers and stayers, the findings revealed that students had broadly similar issues for this theme.

The participants in this research indicated that it was important that lecturers were 'inspirational'. Where students felt uninspired they described the classroom experience as being monotonous, lacking in interaction and humour, and feeling bored. The characteristics that participants valued for inspiration in the classroom were enthusiasm, good levels of interaction (Wojtas 2008; Smith and Bath 2006), the use of humour (Peel 2000), encouragement and approachability. Participants said that an inspirational approach created enthusiasm, encouraged participation and resulted in discussion. Words and phrases that were used included 'fantastic', 'encourage learning', 'no humour', and 'authoritarian' (Sander et al. 2000). Participants who were undertaking one of the smaller branches (mental health and children's) talked about the way in which they felt their branch needs were ignored, with a focus on the adult branch within the teaching. They found this particularly uninspiring. Participants were exceptionally tolerant of the monotonous lecture indicating that, although they did not enjoy these situations, they expected to be taught in this way. When participants felt empowered they described a collaboration between lecturer and student so that the student could begin to develop the skills to take responsibility for their own learning (Leyshon 2002).

Participants depicted how they managed (or did not manage) the volumes of information (particularly in the beginning). Some of the diary keepers wrote about their management of the assessment workload (particularly when they were out in practice), finding that managing an assessment workload on top of practice (and the assessment required of practice) was challenging and stressful. It left the students with a feeling of a lack of control over their workload, and thus a feeling of being disempowered.

They described both positive and negative feelings associated with the need to be self-directed in their approach to learning. Positive responses to learning in this way included the excitement that came from discovering and researching knowledge and the sense of achievement this provided. Negative responses included the surprise at the perceived lack of direction provided by the university. The students appeared to feel more empowered when there was room for reflection and engagement in learning (for example in the EBL consolidation phase) (Lizzio et al. 2002). Some of the participants commented on the lack of preparedness for university and the mismatch between what they had expected and what they experienced. The 'EBL' group was less likely to be negative about the need for being self-directed and this may have been because EBL provided a framework for enquiry-focused, independent learning (Price 2003). The leavers were more likely to say that they had been surprised at the 'jump' that they had needed to make to university life (Lowe and Cook 2003).

Unsurprisingly, participants engaged in different ways with the learning experience depending on circumstances and interlinked with the inspiration (or otherwise) of the lecturer and empowerment of the learner. All participants talked or wrote about the distractions of learning in large lecture theatres. Without exception they said that they preferred small group sessions rather than the lecture theatres. (Cotton and Wilson 2006; El Ansari and Oskrochi 2004; Franklin 2002). Lectures were often seen as a drag – something to be endured rather than enjoyed. Small group work provided students with an environment in which they felt more able to ask questions, make comments and engage in discussion with their peers and lecturer. Overall though, students were accepting of the teaching approaches used. Students in the 'EBL' group who talked about EBL did so in mixed ways. Some students said that it helped them to relate theory to practice better, and was valuable (even if they had not realised this at the time). Others did not see the point of it and felt that it was a waste of time.

The quantitative data revealed the complexity of the student experience and the connections between many of the aspects of the curriculum and the overall experience. For example, the expectations and experiences of

module learning moderately correlated with almost all other variables. As previously stated, the students expected to experience a connected curriculum, but it appears that the links across the variables became less evident within their experiences. Without qualitative data on student expectations it has not been possible to investigate expectations in any more depth.

Most importantly in this thesis, the relationships that students developed with each other appeared to assist in the process of empowerment by providing a means through which relevant discussions could take place, as well as support. Empowerment within the classroom, then, was found to be important for learning and for relationships. Empowered people formed better relationships, and the relationships themselves seemed to facilitate the development of empowerment in turn.

The practice experience

The practice experience was of great consequence to all the participants who spent time in one or more clinical placement and brought with it a series of challenges that the university experience did not (Carlson et al. 2003). For some, practice was the key to provoking a decision to leave whereas for others, the experiences were positive. However, some of the students who stayed had poor practice experiences but saw them as learning opportunities rather than as an indication of their overall ability to perform in practice.

Students who described feelings of inspiration in practice talked about the qualities of mentors and others who supported their learning in practice (Brammer 2006a). They valued mentors with good interpersonal skills who were good role models with characteristics that they would aspire to. Students who were seen as part of the team (while still remaining supernumerary) felt valued and this helped them to engage with the learning in practice. They did not mind if they were 'thrown in at the deep end' as long as they felt that they were being supported in their learning (Jackson and Mannix 2001). Inspiration was linked to student excitement while students who felt a lack of confidence and felt anxious at the thought

of undertaking practice placements did not exhibit feelings of inspiration initially. Some students talked about the lack of role models and their impact on some students' decisions to leave the course (Mackintosh 2006). Predictably students did not enjoy working with staff who were disillusioned or who demonstrated characteristics and behaviours that were negative. One student described the feeling of being a 'square peg in a round hole' which summed up the experiences of those who came across mentors and others who were not keen to facilitate learning. The 'harshness' of some staff was also commented upon with some students feeling that they should leave rather than turn into the kind of person they perceived particular staff to be. Unconstructive staff group dynamics also impacted negatively on students' feelings of inspiration.

The participants in this research were clear that they needed to know their role within the context of care (see Higginson 2006), be allowed to take on relevant responsibilities, and to work in a positive team environment in order to become empowered in practice. The ability and opportunity to take control within defined boundaries, and to be provided with supportive and constructive feedback on performance in practice were important in enabling students to develop their understanding of their role. Students who were able to contribute to decision making and who were provided with opportunities to take on responsibilities that stretched them within a safe environment showed the characteristics of becoming empowered. Conversely, students who felt that they were not being allowed to undertake responsibilities that they felt prepared for described feelings of disempowerment. For example, a number of students who had their own children were not allowed to provide care for children and babies, even if it simply meant holding the baby. For some, this made them feel belittled. Where students perceived feedback as unsupportive or unconstructive, and where they raised concerns over 'office politics' they described feelings of disempowerment. It is likely that at least one student left, in part, because of the feelings that a perceived lack of constructive feedback evoked (Brammer 2006a). Poor support in practice, for whatever reason, was experienced by a significant number of the participants (Carlson et al. 2003).

Linked to empowerment and to inspiration was engagement with the learning experience. Those who seemed to be engaged with learning in practice talked about taking on any learning opportunity in an enthusiastic manner – taking an active approach to their own learning. They seemed to make good links between theory and practice (Last and Fulbrook 2003). When students took control of their own learning, negative practice experiences did not seem to impact on them as much as on those who were not so active. Students who took control seemed to learn from the negative experiences and turned them into positives through their own motivation and enthusiasm. A positive approach usually led to a successful learning experience (Andrews et al. 2006). Most students engaged with learning in practice, but students who did not described feeling like a 'lost sheep', being bored, and feeling that they were undertaking an auxiliary rather than a student role. Some students found a positive slant on the latter by recognising the 'core' nursing skills that they developed through the learning process. Those who were 'bored' lacked motivation for practice and these people's experiences may have been more closely linked to their personal characteristics rather than to the actual experience.

The questionnaires only asked one question about practice: the level of expected and experienced enthusiasm for practice. In the 'traditional' group most students (79.5% of those who responded) said that they would be enthusiastic or would like placement; in the 'EBL' group 46.8% of those who responded said that they would be enthusiastic or would like placement. With regard to experiences, 96.8% of those who responded in the 'traditional' group, and 97.5% of the 'EBL' group, said that they had been enthusiastic or had liked practice. Those who had left the courses did not complete the experiences questionnaires so therefore did not contribute to the latter response. The statistics indicate that a number of the respondents who did not expect to enjoy the placement experience, actually went on to like the experience.

The transformative nature of the educational experience as a whole should enable student nurses to develop into professionals who can deliver care in

ways that are also transformative for the patient or client. The findings show that the practice experience may have been more important than the experiences in the university particularly in relation to the development of relationships. This may have been because students had the opportunity to begin to develop friendship networks and make adjustments in the university over a longer period of time than they did in practice.

Professional education

The personal characteristics of the students were important in enhancing engagement and empowerment. However, the findings show that the right conditions can make the development of relationships and other associations easier and more durable. Importantly, there were intrinsic factors evident within the student experience that impacted on all the other themes (people, classroom and practice). These were the bonds that students made with the course, with the university, and with nursing itself. The reasons that students gave for being on the course appeared to be significant in their successful completion of first year. Motivation for professional education (in this case nursing education) was linked to students' approaches to being self-directed, to practice experiences and to the type of feedback they got, both in the university and in practice. The findings indicate that, rather obviously, students need to feel motivated in order that bonds with professional practice can be formed (Steele et al. 2005). Students who demonstrated that they had internal motivations (Muller and Palekic 2005) for undertaking the nursing course did so by talking about their desire to be a nurse, the opportunity for a career, and for some about it being their 'last chance' (While and Blackman 1998). Stayers demonstrated internal motivation for nursing whereas all the leavers (except one who was very homesick) had not chosen nursing as their first choice of career (Grainger and Bolan 2006). The latter demonstrated a lack of motivation and drive for nursing which seemed to have been crucial in their decisions to leave. Students who stayed talked about being 'determined' to complete the course, whereas those who left did not. Leavers did, however, talk about how difficult it was to make the decision to leave. Students who talked about the ways in which they were self-directed in their learning (in university and/or in practice) seemed to

be more highly motivated than those who struggled with being self-directed and in control of their learning (Booth 1997).

Practice experiences were important in providing motivation, or otherwise. Some students who described difficult experiences with those practice staff who did not display good interpersonal skills, expressed feelings of lack of motivation. While the thesis did not specifically explore stress in first year student nurses, the findings resonate with other research (Timmins and Kaliszer 2002). The professional responsibilities of the qualified nurse also acted as a demotivator for some students who could not see themselves being able to take on those responsibilities. Finally, in terms of motivation, students who failed an academic assignment, or who had received a lower than expected grade for practice, unsurprisingly talked about feeling demotivated.

Students' perceptions of their preparedness for university were varied (Whittaker 2008; Lowe and Cook 2003). There did not seem to be differences between the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups, although there were some differences between the leavers and the stayers. Some students expressed the unexpectedness of the 'jump' into university and the need for them to move towards independence and self directedness. This jump seemed to be more of a challenge for those who chose to leave the course. The wide entry gate in nursing (with students coming into the course with anything from 5 standard grades or equivalent, to degrees) may explain some of the feelings that students had relating to the 'jump'. Haggis (2004) suggests that the development of lifelong learning can be threatening and uncertain for some. It can be seen as an opportunity for 'renewal' echoed within the findings in this research in which a combination of factors related to the individual experience of the process of learning. Linked to this, some students talked in negative terms about previous academic experiences that impacted on their perceptions of education. One student mentioned arithmetic, and a number of students talked about dealing with computers. Previous care experience intuitively seemed to be something that would provide students with a head start in preparation for the course. In many

ways this was true. However, it did not always seem to allay anxiety about placements and also did not prevent some students from deciding to leave.

All students had to make adjustments of some sort in their transition to university (Lowe and Cook 2003; Tinto 1993). The stories that the students told were very similar across the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups and between leavers and stayers. However, some people with challenging circumstances seemed to make the necessary adjustments, while others did not and decided to leave the course. Many of the students described 'juggling' commitments with managing the course requirements (Steele et al. 2005). The adjustments that students make to undertake study are well documented and reflect those identified in this research (Harvey et al. 2006; Glackin and Glackin 1998). Commitments included child care, work, domestic circumstances and finances. The demands of practice alongside the commitments were challenging for many of the students. Particular triggers caused some students to make the decision to leave – the 'straw that broke the camel's back'. For example one person found that the arrangements for child care could not continue. Support from peers, family and from the university was important during transition. Possibly the type of support that individuals had, reflected in part their ability to cope with making adjustments. Students talked about the peer support that enabled them to offload and discuss circumstances with people who understood. However, it does seem likely that students' own attitudes and motivations were important in making adjustments given that individuals in similar situations either were, or were not, successful in completing first year.

4.5 Summary and conceptual framework for the findings

The four themes – relationships with people, the classroom experience, the practice experience and professional education – have been described. Throughout the process of data analysis the themes and categories developed in the ways described in chapter 2. The literature was utilised as a way of reflecting on the findings and considering the relevance of previous research on the context of the first year experiences of the nursing students under investigation. As this iterative process progressed,

it became clearer that the overarching commonality across and within each of the themes was 'connectivity'. The findings seemed to indicate that the students needed to develop connections across aspects of the first year experience, namely: connections with people, connections with the classroom experience, connections with the practice experience, and connections with professional education. Additionally, the quantitative findings showed that connections between expectations and experiences were important, as well as the connections between aspects of the curriculum. The categories then seemed to express the connections and the extent to which students created these connections within and across the themes. For example, within the 'relationships with people' theme, the ways in which the participants described their experiences indicated that some students felt supported and valued whereas others did not. The extent of the connection could therefore be expressed along a continuum – a student felt supported and valued at the positive end of the continuum, or a student did not feel supported and valued at the negative end of the continuum. This process of reflection on the findings and on the existing literature led to the development of a conceptual framework within which the findings could be located – the 'Connections Continuum'.

The next chapter takes the Connections Continuum as its framework and draws together the overall findings so as to develop the discussion on the first year experience of the undergraduate nursing students.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

In chapters 3 and 4 accounts were provided of the findings that flowed from the data. Section 4.4 presented an overview of the findings and the links between the qualitative and quantitative data with the aim of illuminating the experiences of the participants and providing a 'thick' description of the phenomenon (the first year undergraduate experience). The factors that affected the first year experiences of participants in the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups were described and some comparisons made. Specific attention was paid to the influence that curriculum development (enquiry-based learning) had on the first year experience. Additionally, the factors that influenced successful completion of the first year or their choice to leave, were described. The importance of the relationship between student expectations and experiences was accentuated.

In addition to the findings of the research, the literature review assisted in the overall development of the argument that is laid out here in the discussion. In particular, a synthesis of the literature review led to a description of the quality of the first year student experience summarised as follows:

i. Pre-entry experiences

Preparedness, match between expectations and experiences, high priority of course choice, previous family at university.

ii. Transition arrangements

Adjustment, academic and social integration, student commitment and attitudes, self-esteem, preparedness, match between expectations and experiences.

iii. Support

Adjustment, academic and social integration, teaching quality and approaches, course organisation, match between expectations and experiences.

iv. Expectations

Adjustment, academic and social integration, student commitment and attitudes, self-esteem, teaching quality and approaches, preparedness, match with experiences, high priority of course choice, previous family at university.

All of these facets featured within the research itself as part of the undergraduate nursing students' experiences in relation to both the practice experience and the university experience. Particular attention was given to the importance of the quality of the educational experience in terms of the match between expectations and experiences.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the research within the framework of the 'Connections Continuum'. Social capital theory is drawn on to develop the theoretical argument that, usually, it is beneficial to make connections and that connections are vital for a good student experience. In this research, when students started to become disconnected from one or more of the aspects of their experience, they were less likely to be successful in completing first year. Communities of learning (the EBL groups) provided, in part, the vehicle for the development of connections. It is likely that the communities of learning facilitated movement from disconnectedness to connectedness and increased the likelihood of persistence.

5.2 The Connections Continuum (i)

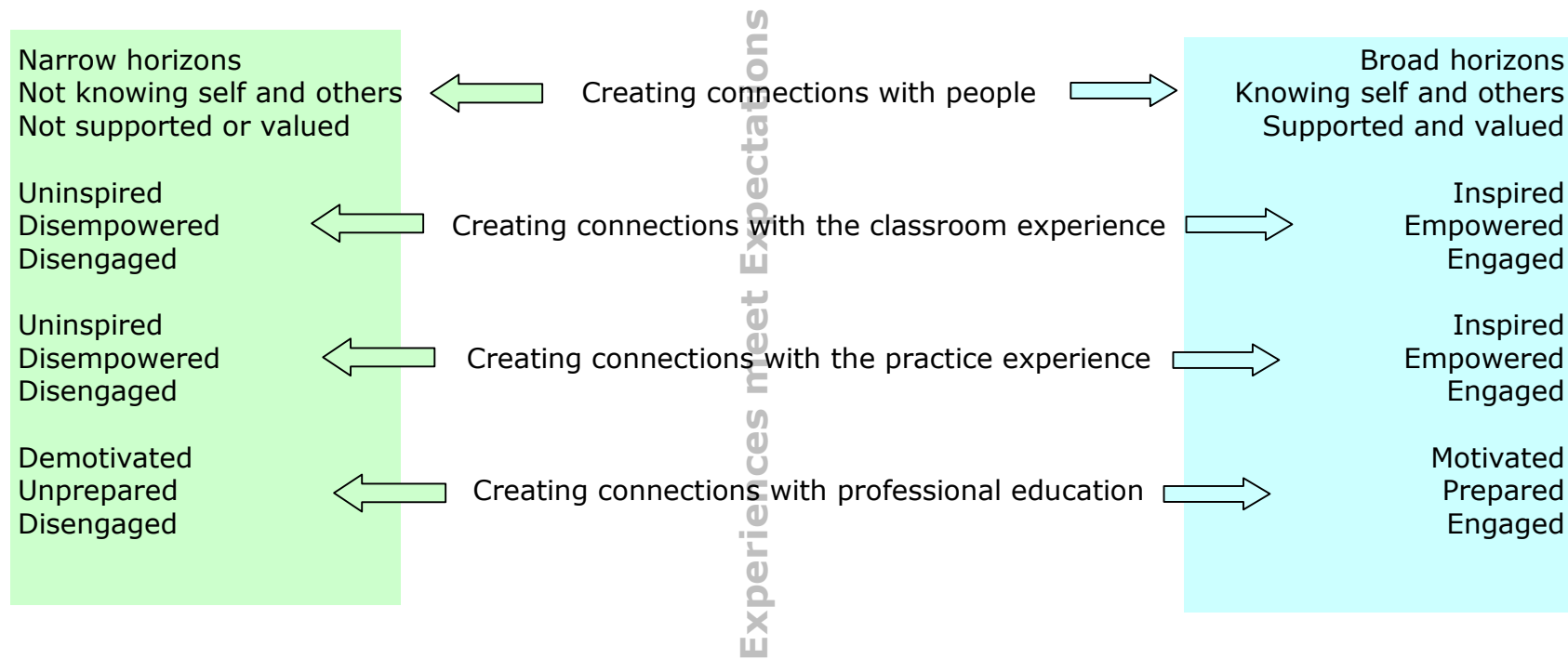
As previously stated, the conceptual framework within which the findings of the research are framed is a 'Connections Continuum'. It takes into account the match between expectations and experiences and the four themes within this research. The latter are the areas in the first year experience of student nurses to which, I argue, they need to feel connected in order to

enhance the likelihood of success. At one end of the continuum, students are 'becoming disconnected from the experience' whereas at the other end of the continuum, students are 'staying connected to the experience' (see figure 3).

The four themes are renamed in the terms of 'connections' thus: creating connections with people, creating connections with the classroom experience, creating connections with the practice experience and creating connections with professional education. The Continuum shows that students may feel more, or less, connected across the categories within the themes. The themes are interlinked, with one or more potentially impacting on another. The Connections Continuum facilitates a holistic approach to an understanding of the experience, and should provide a focus for interventions to address disconnectedness or to facilitate connections.

The Connections Continuum also emphasises the importance of expectations and experiences. As previously stated, it is not always appropriate for experiences to meet expectations (if expectations are low, one would hope that experiences exceed them). However, the relationship between expectations and experiences is important and usually there should be a 'coming together' of both in relation to all aspects of the Continuum. Where there is a lack of understanding of expectations on the part of the student and/or the lecturer, there can be an impact on persistence (Smith and Wertleib 2005). Their position in the Connections Continuum reminds us that students' expectations should be explored with a focus on determining how the experience will relate to expectations within the context of the first year experience and across the Continuum.

Figure 3: The Connections Continuum



Much has been made of Tinto's (1993) academic and social integration theory within this thesis. A holistic view of integration is required if one is to come to an overall understanding of the student experience, and thus determine ways in which student retention and persistence can be improved (Black and MacKenzie 2008; Yorke and Longden 2008; Zepke and Leach 2005). The Connections Continuum is rooted in the concept of integration both across and within the themes. The reading that took place around Tinto's and others' work, and reading of social capital theory led to a view that social capital is useful as a means of adding weight to many aspects of the Connections Continuum. I am not suggesting that Tinto has been writing about social capital. However, my reading of the Durkheimian framework in which Tinto (and others who are interested in integration) operates should easily lend itself to social capital theory. So as to contextualise Tinto's work within social capital theory, it is helpful here to define the theory and discuss its broadest concepts. Seeing the connections through the lens of social capital allows for a stronger contribution to the theoretical debate that relates to enhancing the first year and, in particular, to propose policy changes within the HE sector that may improve retention rates.

5.3 Social capital: overview

While there is no suggestion that social capital is a 'cure-all for the maladies affecting society' (Portes 1998, p. 2), it is a useful theory that enables explanation and exploration of the Connections Continuum. Social capital is defined in Putnam's (1995, pp. 664-5) work as "Features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives", or, as Field (2003, p. 1) puts it, "relationships matter". There is some disagreement within the literature about what should and should not be classed as social capital (Halpern 2005), but basically it means that the social connections that people make and have, develop into networks of shared understanding and ways of being (Halpern 2005).

What follows is a historical perspective of social capital initially with a view of the ways in which social capital is significant within higher education. The subsequent section will, in part, then apply the theory to the research undertaken for the thesis.

5.3.1 Historical perspective on social capital

Social capital theory does not have its roots in education although it has become more widely used within an educational policy context (Office of National Statistics (ONS) 2001) particularly in relation to primary and secondary education. Instead, its roots lie within economics. In the 18th century Adam Smith noted the importance of networks and similar values for the sustainability of economic markets. Later, in the 19th century, Alexis de Tocqueville observed the intellectual and moral links in America that enabled people to work collectively towards similar goals (Halpern 2005). He saw that voluntary bonds (rather than formal bonds) were those that glued people together and he worried about the shift towards individualism (Farr 2004). De Tocqueville's writings displayed the concept of social capital without using the term (which is perhaps what Tinto has done). Around the same time, Emile Durkheim asserted that for a nation to be maintained there must be a series of interconnected groups linking the state and individuals to assure social connections. His work on suicide (described in appendix 3 in relation to Tinto's arguments) was a stark example of his view that where there was a lack of social cohesion, suicide rates were higher (Halpern 2005). In other words, people who linked and connected with others were more likely to be protected from some of life's challenges. Marx, on the other hand, focused on the tentative links between the dominant social classes rather than on the links between individuals (Field 2003). His interest was in the ways that the 'elite' appeared to gain advantages through the networks that were in existence within the class structure.

In 1916 Hanifan used the term social capital (possibly the first person to do so) to express the ways in which social relationships developed between people within particular communities (Field 2003). His use of the term was to facilitate discussion with economists and others about the usefulness of

'soft' skills (such as developing goodwill) in a hard-nosed business environment. His work also related to developing solutions relating to social isolation and urban migration (Farr 2004).

Social capital became a mainstream interest in the 1980s in Europe (Pierre Bourdieu) and USA (James Coleman). Pierre Bourdieu noted that economists had been dominating social science and policy thinking with economic capital but that there were two other missing 'capitals', namely cultural capital and social capital (Halpern 2005). Cultural capital referred to the ways in which some groups enjoyed particular cultural tastes reflecting status (Field 2003). Cultural capital was not just shaped by finances, but also by family background and education. Although Bourdieu focused mainly on cultural rather than social capital he asserted that the latter was important for support, resources and respectability. He was interested in inequalities, and much of his writings reflected the work of Marxist sociology. He argued that social capital belonged to the elite classes and was a way of ensuring that they maintained their position (Field 2003).

James Coleman's work was a broad conceptualisation that suggested that without social capital, achievement of a goal would not be possible (Halpern 2005). He has been more influential than Bourdieu (Field 2003), and made a case that social capital was not the preserve of the elites. Rather, it was useful for the poor and those on the margins of society in terms of the expectation of reciprocity. In his view, social capital was part of the social structure that allowed for collective action. Field (2003, p. 28) sums up his view on Bourdieu and Coleman thus:

"Bourdieu's treatment of social capital is somewhat circular; in summary it boils down to the thesis that privileged individuals maintain their position by using their connections with other privileged people. Coleman's view is more nuanced in that he discerns the value of connections for all actions, individual and collective, privileged and disadvantaged. But Coleman's view is also naively optimistic; as a public good, social capital is almost entirely benign in its functions, providing for a set of norms and sanctions

that allow individuals to cooperate for mutual advantage and with little or no 'dark side'. Bourdieu's usage of the concept, by contrast, virtually allows only for a dark side for the oppressed, and a bright side for the privileged."

Current thinking on social capital is profoundly influenced by Robert Putnam. He compared different regions of Italy and found that the effectiveness of regional governments was based on mutual trust and the vibrancy of social interactions (rather than budget levels or policies). He then considered the concept in his study of social connections in America where he noted a decline in social capital since the 1940s (Putnam 1995). He drew upon a wide range of theory (from de Tocqueville to Coleman) and saw social capital as a means for people to act collectively through reciprocity, information flow, collaboration, and learning for future co-operation. It was therefore seen as a trait of communities rather than of individuals (ONS 2001). The discourse on social capital and health has taken these arguments further with claims that where there are good connections between people and communities, then health is positively affected (Caperchione et al. 2008; Pearce and Smith 2003). It is thought that social capital facilitates access to better resources and networks and can act as a 'buffer' to life challenges, thus enabling people to take more control over their own health.

There are three kinds of social capital and these were originally defined by Woolcock (2001) who was a social scientist with the World Bank:

- Bonding sub-type is found inside families and small communities in which norms develop through care and reciprocity (Gittel and Vidal 1998). Integration takes place within communities (Woolcock 2001) and bonding social capital has the tendency to reinforce similarities. It is good for 'getting by' (Putnam 2000).
- Bridging sub-type is found between relative strangers and norms are developed externally, possibly through state action (Gittel and Vidal 1998) across extra-community networks (Woolcock 2001). Bridging

social capital tends to widen social networks and introduces differences. It is good for 'getting ahead' (Putnam 2000).

- Linking sub-type is found between very different people in very different situations and communities up and down the social scale (thus allowing for greater sharing and creation of resources) (Woolcock 2001).

High levels of bridging and bonding social capital indicate that there is high interconnectivity through which resources and power can be shared. However, social capital can have a darker side when networks and connections are not used for good (for example, terrorist networks that work together to the detriment of others).

Trust is a key concern within social capital theory (Farr 2004; Field 2003; Haezwindt 2003; Fukuyama 1999). Fukuyama (1999) went as far as saying that without trust, communities would not arise. Trust facilitates a number of things that are important for social capital: access to information and resources, and problem-solving without the need for external interventions (e.g. the law).

5.3.2 Social capital and education

The positive view of social capital that exists within much of the literature and has been taken on board by policy makers (Halpern 2005) enables one to consider its importance for education, and in particular to form an opinion on its relationship with academic and social integration theory. Social capital tends to be associated with positive educational outcomes, and education appears to be associated with the development and maintenance of networks (Field 2003; Haezwindt 2003). Those with high social capital are more likely to engage with extracurricular activities, and are more likely to trust other people (evidence of higher social capital). This may be because of living away from home, developing a shared understanding of a particular intellectual and cultural identity, and learning to work together on shared pursuits. Fukuyama (1999) stated that educational institutions pass on social capital through social norms. This is important when one considers that a student may be entering higher education with no experience or understanding of the prevailing norms

within an institution. This Durkheimian perspective on social capital is particularly important to the work of theorists within education who note the imperative of enabling students to form bonds within new communities so as to enhance integration. Great interest has been shown in the theory of social capital for educational policy (Babb 2005).

It is argued that activities or interventions need to be in place for social capital to develop (Hobbs 2000). In other words, people need to undertake a process of learning that leads to the development of social capital. This view is particularly relevant to learning communities and to the development of academic and social integration within the university environment linking to the idea that students need to form relationships within the university community, and to join communities within their new environment in order to adjust and to feel supported. Creating connections through networks enables people to achieve things that they might not otherwise have been able to achieve (Field 2003). Networks where people share values facilitate co-operative links, and the more people that one has these connections with, the higher is the social capital.

For the purposes of exposing the links between social capital theory and Tinto's arguments, the recent conceptualisation of the theory within the sociological world is useful. Tinto's (1993, 2005a) work highlighted the necessity of making bonds across and within communities in order to facilitate integration into particular communities. The emphasis within social capital on networks, norms and trust is particularly relevant within the higher education context when considering Tinto's integration theory. Tinto (1993) utilised ecological theory to describe the bonds that students developed with an institution through the personal 'fit' or integration into the new environment. When this 'fit' did not take place, students were less likely to persist and achieve as their expectations had not been met. When students did not make the transition from their pre-university 'community' to the new community or communities within the university, they were at risk of choosing to leave.

Field (2003, p. 144) tells us that relationships are changing, and “our relationships with relationships is changing”. Western society is more secularised, more focused on the individual, less formal, and with more networks. Habit can create disillusionment, with people feeling taken for granted. There may be a need to enable people to develop the skills for good social capital: the social literacies (for example, interpersonal skills). It is the development of social literacies that relates to the argument that students can be facilitated to move from disconnection to connection along the Connections Continuum.

5.4 The Connections Continuum (ii)

The holistic experience of participants in this research comprised of connections which were described in chapter 4. This section takes a theoretical stance and applies it to the findings of this research. The relationships that students created, and the social literacies developed as part of their transition and integration into first year, were what facilitated connections across the Continuum and the development of social capital.

Students need to ‘get by’ and ‘get on’ in life and in their education (as in bonding and bridging social capital) (Woolcock 2001). This happened in this research when students integrated into the community of peers, practice and others (knowing self and others). It led to a number of benefits including the acquisition of resources (support) and to a feeling of ‘fitting in’ to the overall experience of being a nursing student. In particular, the social capital associated with fitting in to practice was of great consequence to the practice experience. The need for mentors and others in practice to value students and to develop relationships with them was critical to the overall first year experience of the student nurses. Participants described many examples of times when they felt that they did not understand what was expected of them in terms of their role as a student nurse. Positive role modelling was one of the keys to promoting acculturation into practice and determined the strength of the connections that students developed.

It appeared that the most important aspect of social capital for many of the students were the benefits gained through the connections that existed outside of the family and thus within the experience (the classroom and practice contexts) (Portes 1998). So, the students who felt empowered with, and engaged in, the classroom experience did so for a number of reasons: the connections with the academics that led to students feeling valued and which enabled them to engage fully with the educational experience at the time; the interactions with peers within the learning groups (particularly the EBL groups) that enabled them to not only develop their learning potential but also to develop friendship groups (Black and MacKenzie 2008); and their own characteristics that led them to either 'fit in' or, conversely, to feel some dissonance with the prevailing culture within the institutional habitus (i.e. "a set of dispositions created and shaped by the interaction between objective structures and personal histories, including experiences and understanding of reality" (Thomas 2002, p. 430)). The latter was particularly relevant to the students' success at creating connections and thus impacted on their ability to work towards the achievement of learning goals through empowerment (Putnam 1993). In particular, many students described their 'juggling' roles and their impact on their ability to engage with the courses. In part, those who successfully completed first year seemed to have stronger connections across the Continuum themes.

Those students who 'stayed connected' across the academic, practice and peer communities had a greater range of networks. Rather obviously, students who became disconnected from the experience appeared to have fewer networks. For some the disconnectedness contributed to their decisions to leave the courses. It is likely that those who did not develop strong networks were disadvantaged in terms of the resources that they may not have accessed (e.g. academic support, friendships). When students' connections widened through extra-community networks (such as their relationships with mentors and patients), this process introduced differences in terms of social identity and broadened their horizons (Szreter and Woolcock 2004). This is 'bridging' social capital and was influenced by the characteristics and attributes of the students through their interactions,

enthusiasm for learning and approach to experiences in practice. For example, those who talked about being keen to learn were much more likely to create connections and build 'bridging' social capital. The differences in social identity are important in developing connections, particularly when there are differences in the dominant social and cultural norms.

When an institution is biased towards a set of dominant social and cultural norms, the relationship that takes place between peers and academics can be detrimental for some students to the point that some may choose to leave (Thomas 2002). Where diversity is valued and relationships enacted in a relevant manner, the overall first year experience is likely to be improved (e.g. staff attitudes, inclusivity, development of relationships, flexibility, and valuing difference). Thus, the commitment from the HEI to the student experience and to enhancing success is associated with student persistence (Tinto 2005a).

The widening participation agenda which is so much a part of the nursing students' experiences has strong links with social capital (through the discourse relating to elite access to networks – Field 2003). Given the diversity within the student groups (in terms of the age range, social circumstances and the numbers of first generation students) connections did not seem to be made so readily by some, particularly those who chose to leave (Brooks 2008). It is likely that the dominant culture of HE was not familiar to some of the students in this research. Some students identified difficulties with the transition to university (creating connections with people and with the classroom experience). Adjustment to, and transition into, the overall educational experience depended on the formation of relationships and connections (Harvey et al. 2006). Some of them felt unprepared for HE both academically and culturally and these were the ones where the connections with professional education (and often with people) were weaker. They may have found it difficult to make the transition from one community to another leading to a lack of motivation and disengagement from the experience (Tinto 1993). Connections across the Continuum seemed to facilitate the potential for successful completion

of first year and potentially protected people against isolation and stress (a Durkheimian perspective) (Field 2003). However, many of the participants in the research who connected with professional education had similar demographic profiles to those who did not. Those who successfully completed first year were strongly connected through their motivation for nursing. In particular, it may be that some students did not have the characteristics and values that enabled them to fit easily into HE given their 'social location' (Brooks 2008). It may also be that the students in the 'EBL' group were helped to develop their 'fit' (or connection) through the supportive framework of the EBL learning community.

The findings show that connections brought advantages to individuals through access to resources (such as support and knowledge), while at the same time bringing positive outcomes to the whole community of students. If the 'EBL' group connected better across the Continuum, and thereby had higher social capital, the advantage within the 'EBL' group was that fewer students chose to leave the course than those in the 'traditional' group. By creating environments in which student engagement can thrive and empowerment is facilitated (such as the 'EBL' groups) HEIs can play a role in mitigating against factors such as a lack of preparedness for HE (Candela et al. 2006). Through a process of collaboration between students and the HEI, there is a possibility of providing a transformational learning experience (Freire et al. 1994). So, the support that the students received seemed to be vital to the development of social capital across the groups (Tinto 2005b). Academic and social support were articulated as aspects of the relationships across the Continuum within the context of the first year experience (Beder 2001). The connections that people developed served a number of functions including reciprocity (peer to peer connections provided a focus for reciprocal support), information flow (student/academic tutor connections), collaboration (between students) (Putnam 1995) and learning for the future (connections with practice and in the classroom) (Fukuyama 1999). For the students under investigation, the development of connections (and social capital) was related to success and persistence.

The connection (match) between expectations and experiences is an area in which HEIs can positively impact on the student experience (Smith and Wertlieb 2005). Participants' descriptions of their experiences showed that there were times when experiences did not match expectations in relation to preparedness for HE, the realities of practice, the experience of being inspired (or not) in the classroom and in practice, and the expectations of support in the university and (most importantly) in practice. Responding to student expectations by examining practice in relation to the phases of the first year experience is central to a proactive approach to enhancement.

The findings have shown that in two groups of nursing students connections determine, in part, the experience of the first year and impact upon the potential for success. In fact, the comparison between the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups demonstrates that when opportunities for connection creation and social capital building are integral to the student experience (as with the 'EBL' group), the student experience is enhanced. Additionally, the comparison between the experiences of those who successfully completed first year and those who chose to leave demonstrates that connections are vital for success. Although most of the participants experienced some sense of disconnection in one or more aspect of the Continuum, the connectedness within other aspects enabled persistence and success. It is likely that the connections with professional education and with people were most important in staying connected overall given the experiences of those who chose to leave, some of whom were ambivalent about their reasons for being on the course for example. The determination of the level of connectedness (or social capital) across each of the aspects of the Continuum will assist in the development of interventions that will facilitate the move along the Continuum towards better connectedness.

The Connections Continuum provides a conceptual framework for explanation and is underpinned, in part, by the theoretical 'backbone' of social capital. The themes and categories that were identified from the findings feature within the Connections Continuum. They are, therefore, important for the explanation of the experience and the reader can refer

back to chapter 4 for more details. However, when taking a holistic view of the experience, and when utilising the Connections Continuum in this process, the themes and categories are not as important as the need to consider the overall principles relating to connectedness and disconnectedness. It is in relation to this that social capital theory assists in an understanding of the overall first year experience, and enables one to draw conclusions, and make recommendations, that may have a wider impact on those working on the student experience (rather than relating only to the particular context of the thesis).

Social capital is all about developing connections within a particular context. In this case, the context is the first year experience – described through themes and categories and expectations/experiences within the findings chapters. While the nature of the connections is of course important it is the development of social capital that remains the key. The Connections Continuum draws on the concept of social capital by identifying where the connections (the social capital) should lie in order to enhance the first year experience. It seems that social capital does, indeed, facilitate greater engagement with communities (in this case communities of peers, communities within the university, communities in clinical practice, and external communities), and perhaps provides a better environment in which to flourish towards success in first year. Crucially, the connection (match) between expectations and experiences influences the first year experience. For nursing students, the specific issues associated with undertaking practice placements (e.g. perceptions of mentors as role models, 'fitting in' to a clinical area) can potentially be addressed through scrutiny of the Connections Continuum and its relationship to groups of students' and individuals' experiences. Finally, reflecting on the substantive points within the literature and the research, the need to shape the *overall* first year student experience to facilitate engagement is an imperative for enhancement (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005).

CHAPTER 6: LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the limitations of the research prior to presenting conclusions, recommendations for practice and recommendations for research. The strengths of the research are inherent within the conclusions and recommendations.

6.2 Limitations of the research

The research has a number of limitations which need to be taken into account when determining the value of the findings for practice. The limitations relate to the researcher (myself), the methods, and the scope of enquiry. As highlighted within the ethics section, my role as a Programme Leader had to be taken into consideration and may have impacted on the experiences interviews in particular. Great care was taken to ensure that participants did not feel coerced into taking part, and that the interviews were conducted effectively so that students felt comfortable within the interview situation. While my own perspectives influenced the research, this was in line with the philosophical approach as described in chapter 2.

Issues related to sampling and response rates were discussed in chapter 2. The questionnaire response rate was satisfactory. Additionally, the interview and diary participants were representative of the larger groups, although the numbers of students who agreed to complete the diaries and the leavers who agreed to be interviewed were lower than expected. The questionnaires were useful in determining expectations and experiences of the university experience, but did not provide much scope for the practice experience.

The focus of enquiry was on one School of Nursing at a particular point in time. The research has shown that there are findings that should be

relevant to other Schools of Nursing as well as to other disciplines within higher education. The nature of the research is such that it is context specific and bounded in time and place. The 'thick' description of the case study attempts to enable others to take something from the research for their own purposes and for wider application.

6.3 Conclusions

The aim of the research was to explore the first year experience in an undergraduate nursing course. Two types of curricula provided the vehicle through which the investigation took place. The ways in which the objectives of the research were achieved are identified in the following paragraph.

The first year experiences of the undergraduate nursing students were examined through the use of experiences interviews, diaries and an experiences survey. Expectations and experiences were compared between the groups using expectations and experiences surveys. The overall findings indicated that there were many similarities between the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups and between leavers and stayers in relation to their experiences. However, there were some important differences. The key difference between the experiences of the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups was that the 'EBL' group made better connections across what was termed the Connections Continuum, particularly in relation to the connections with people. It seems that the 'EBL' learning communities provided the context in which social capital could be built, and academic and social integration could take place in a structured and useful way. The key difference between those who successfully completed first year, and those who chose to leave, related to their connection with professional education. The students who chose to leave appeared to be less motivated and to have less of a reason for being on the course than the others. The leavers were also less likely to have made good connections with people across the academic, practice and peer communities and thus did not have the same levels of social capital as those who successfully completed first year.

The curriculum change, the rationale for the curriculum change and the context within which the change occurred were described. This process was essential to the case study approach in which the context is required for a 'thick' description of the phenomenon, and to enable the reader to make judgments about the usefulness of the findings to their own context. As part of the process of setting the context, a literature review was undertaken that identified the key issues relating to the first year experience, and to the retention of students. On completion of the research, it seems clear that the experience of undergraduate nursing students is very similar to that of other students, notwithstanding the fact that student nurses have practice experiences that many others do not.

A comparison was made between the demographic profiles of the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups, and between students who successfully completed first year and those who chose to leave. The comparison demonstrated that there were no significant differences between the 'traditional' and 'EBL' groups, except that the 'EBL' group had fewer students who chose to leave. Also, there were no significant differences identified between the leavers and those who successfully completed first year. These findings were useful as it enabled comparisons to be made between the groups within a context of similarity.

The enquiry-based learning groups facilitated speedy interactions and the development of connections with peers and academic staff. In particular, these groups enabled students to build social capital and develop friendship groups. Friendship groups were of great importance for support in the first year for many students. The use of EBL may have assisted in the transition to a more self-directed, independent approach to learning than more 'traditional' approaches by providing a framework for enquiry-based independent learning. However, the success of EBL, like all other teaching methods, depended on the enthusiasm, motivation and skills of the facilitator, who needed to provide an engaging context for learning. Additionally, EBL as a learning community appeared to facilitate social, as well as academic, integration and thus the building of social capital.

The roles of academics and mentors¹⁵ were important to the first year student experience and the building of social capital. Student engagement and empowerment were facilitated through empathy, by demonstrating caring, respect and warmth, by providing a safe environment and respect, by being approachable and accessible, and by helping students to take control of their own learning. Some of the lecturers inspired students partly through their 'performance skills' (use of humour and active approach to teaching) thus promoting engagement and facilitating the development of connections with the classroom experience. The academics and mentors who built connections with students (particularly in relation to the branches of nursing) enabled students to feel valued in the university and in practice.

Role models in the university, and particularly in practice, made a difference to the student experience. Students needed to connect with what they perceived as the kind of people they would aspire to as professionals. Negative role modelling, again particularly in practice, had a hugely negative impact on the overall student experience for some students (to the point that some students chose to leave). The connections that were created with practice were crucial to the overall student experience. While a difficult experience did not necessarily lead to total disconnection from the course, students found these situations hard to cope with. Positive group and team relationships in practice were crucial. Additionally, students needed to understand their role in practice, and feel valued and respected both as individuals and as professionals. Empowerment hinged on being trusted to take on relevant responsibilities, and relevant student characteristics (such as interest in the learning opportunities and a positive approach to learning) that led to engagement with the learning experience. Students, generally, wanted to learn (and wanted to be active in their learning), and wanted to contribute to care (even if they were thrown in at the deep end – with support). Being active in their learning enabled students to overcome negative practice experiences and turn them into positive learning experiences. However, some students did not expect to be

¹⁵ Mentors are currently required to undertake an educational package for preparation for the role and annual updating. Registered nurses are normally expected to act as mentors to students.

enthusiastic about, or enjoy, placement or university. The Connections Continuum would be a useful tool to identify these students early on and to provide opportunities for interventions that shift the expectations towards connection with professional education.

Acculturation into nursing with the professional expectations that go along with this was important and related directly to differences between expectations and experiences. Therefore, nursing students' expectations of practice should be explored, and experiences discussed to create connections between the classroom and practice experiences, as well as managing expectations. Internal motivation appeared to keep students going and helped them to be successful in first year. Intrinsic reasons for undertaking a nursing course were important for sustaining motivation and overcoming challenges in working towards success. Identification of the intrinsic motivations may be useful in selection processes. It is also something that academics and students should work towards within the learning communities. Many students juggled a variety of responsibilities and led complex lives. Some of these people successfully completed first year, while others did not. While flexibility of curriculum provision may enable more students to successfully complete first year, appropriate review processes for students as part of their ongoing transition to university and the course may enable students and academics to identify when they are 'at risk'. Additionally, staff development programmes to assist in transition, induction and review of risk will assist in an enhancement approach to developing the student experience. The use of the Connections Continuum will allow for the creation of opportunities to intervene, in order to facilitate shifts towards the positive end of the Continuum.

The Connections Continuum is a tool that provides a focus for academics, mentors, curriculum developers and others when considering the first year (and possibly other years) experience. For academics and mentors, the Continuum allows for focused discussion on, and observation of the student experience so as to determine where on the Continuum the student sits. It is likely that many students will be at different points along the Continuum

in relation to the four themes. However, the Continuum provides a qualitative approach to determining what is taking place for the student, and whether there are risks to the student experience. The point is that for some students, a slip towards disconnection on one aspect of the Continuum could be a slip towards total disconnection. This will be different for all students, but provides a focus for intervention. It would be a useful tool for students to assess their own connections, and useful as a way for academics to determine if a student is 'at risk' within aspects of the overall first year experience. The Continuum would also be useful in the management of student expectations as it will allow for discussion about the realities of the course. In particular, it would also assist in the development of professional attitudes – the elusive connection with professional education. Students possibly do not need to fully connect across the whole Continuum all of the time. What they do need to do is feel a sense of connection to the whole experience.

6.4 Recommendations for practice

The first year lays the foundations for the whole undergraduate experience and, importantly, there are key areas that educators can influence to address the needs of individual students and groups of students. This can be through curriculum design using a "coherent and comprehensive approach" (Bovill et al. 2008, p. 29) to provide the means for engagement. As Davis (2003, p. 245) asserts, "if the higher education ethos is to provide education for all, the education provided must be suitable for all". Connections are two-way: the university has to reach out and make connections with the student and the student has to feel able to make connections with the university – a transformative experience for both in terms of building social capital across the wider community.

At a macro level, universities need to recognise the possibilities of developing social capital for both individual students and the whole university community. In doing so, it seems likely that everyone will benefit – financially through increased success (and thus retention), academically, and socially within the context of the student experience. University policy

could welcome the concept of social capital as the means for framing the interventions that aim to enhance the first and subsequent years' experiences. The Connections Continuum could be used as a positive tool for staff development to enable an institutional approach to enhancement of the student experience, and improvement of student retention rates. Its use as a staff development tool would enable staff who are working with students to examine the component parts of the Continuum, determine their relevance and application, and subsequently to develop approaches and interventions for enhancement.

At a meso level, curriculum developers need to recognise the importance of academic and social integration through the building of social capital and by developing opportunities within the curriculum to facilitate their development. Additionally, the Connections Continuum provides a conceptual framework within which the whole student experience can be explored while undertaking curriculum development including the need to explore the match between expectations and experiences. Thus the means to address the issues that have been identified as being important to the first year experience can be determined as part of curriculum development.

At a micro level, staff who work with students to support their learning, whether in practice or in the university, should appreciate the relevance of the Connections Continuum (and the development of social capital) to the student experience. It is likely that a positive approach to creating connections across the student experience will benefit everyone. The use of a tool such as the Connections Continuum facilitates a structured and systematic approach to the detection of risk, and thereby to the identification of interventions so as to move from disconnection to connection. This should be through academic/student discussion and through supported self-reflection. The tool will be useful for students to use as a way of reviewing their own perceptions of their connections across the Continuum. This will offer students the opportunity to take control of, and responsibility for, their own first year experience.

6.5 Recommendations for further research

Further systematic research on the first year experience of student nurses (and others) is required. The accumulation of findings will strengthen the pedagogical research base (Yorke 2000c) and limit the risk of any fragmentation of evidence.

In particular the area that would benefit from further research is the theory of social capital and its application to HE in general, and to the first and subsequent years in particular. The research should be focused on areas identified within the Connections Continuum.

Creating connections with people

We already know a great deal about the first year experience of students and the issues that affect individuals in general. The evidence in the literature is limited in relation to the first year experience of student nurses. However, this research shows that the experiences of these participants broadly reflect the wider literature though additional research into the experience of student nurses would be valuable. There is a need to be more focused on the ways in which HEIs (at the top level and at course and support level) can shift their cultural perspective to fit the needs of a diverse range of students. Research should look at the ways in which students can be helped to integrate and assimilate: to make connections and to build social capital.

Creating connections with the classroom experience

There may be a need to more fully investigate the impact that learning communities have on the first year student experience, and in particular that of student nurses within the context of UK higher education. Additionally, it would be useful to investigate how well learning communities assist in the development of social capital.

Creating connections with the practice experience

It may be interesting to investigate the impact of role models in practice on the first year student experience, and the ways in which connections and

social capital building takes place for students. A focus on the mentor perspective would enable a fuller picture to be developed.

Creating connections with professional education

The ways in which connections with professional education can be developed should be investigated to come to a greater understanding of what keeps people on a nursing course, and what can lead to complete disconnection. It may also be possible to undertake some quantifiable research to establish where a student is positioned on the Connections Continuum, and from there to determine how to move a student who is 'disconnected' towards 'connection'.

6.6 Summary

Higher Education Institutions need to work towards the improvement of the overall first year student experience through the building of social capital, connections and the development of academic and social integration. Integration into HE is a challenge and is important, but academic and social integration should not be the sole responsibility of the student as he or she moves into the new environment. The need for institutions to change and adapt to the increasingly diverse student population is essential if assimilation is to take place (Zepke and Leach 2005). Central to this is the absolute right of students to retain their identity culturally, socially, and psychologically, and their cultural capital should be valued by HEIs. Universities who use the Connections Continuum to be creative in their approaches to working with students will provide them with a learning experience which exceeds expectations through the recognition and value placed on them as individuals.

Although developed through research that investigated the experiences of student nurses, the Connections Continuum (or modification thereof) could be used more widely, especially in professional courses, but in every sphere where acculturation is an issue. Importantly, the Connections Continuum is a conceptual framework that provides a practical and grounded approach for policy makers at all levels, be it macro, meso or micro. The range

includes government (particularly the SGHD in the context of this research), the HE sector generally, academics and others working with students. Most importantly of all perhaps, the Connections Continuum could be used by students themselves as a means of self evaluation and empowerment, resulting not only in higher levels of academic achievement but also in greater personal, professional and social satisfaction.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Databases and search engines and search criteria

<p>CINAHL</p> <p>British Nursing Index OVID SAGE Journals Online ERICS</p> <p>Internet sources included: Google Google Scholar University websites QAA Scotland HEA UK and Scottish Government</p>	<p>The Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health Literature</p> <p>Quality Assurance Agency Scotland Higher Education Academy</p>
---	--

<p>First year</p>	<p>Education Pedagogy Experience Retention Withdrawal Attrition Transition/induction/orientation Adjustment Integration Assimilation Expectations Empowerment Engagement Learning communities</p>	<p>Academic, social</p>
<p>Student</p>	<p>As above</p>	
<p>Education Higher Education</p>	<p>Nurs* Policy Enquiry-based learning Problem-based learning Curriculum First year Empowerment/engagement</p>	<p>Design</p>
<p>Nurs*</p>	<p>Policy Enquiry-based learning Problem-based learning Curriculum Education Pedagogy Retention Attrition Withdrawal</p>	<p>Design</p>

Appendix 2: Scottish Executive Facing the Future Group Remit

- “To explore the evidence about student retention improvement;
- To ensure a common definition of attrition is in place throughout Scotland, and accords with the other three UK countries;
- To share best practice and evidence with all HEIs and NHS Scotland;
- To consider the need for additional research into student retention;
- To assist in the development of tools to measure effectiveness of measures to improve retention;
- To assist in the development of tools to measure effectiveness of measures to improve retention;
- To oversee the interrogation of attrition data;
- To link with the Student Nurse Intake Planning process; and
- To explore issues around mentoring.” (SEHD 2006)

Appendix 3: A summary of theories of student departure (Tinto 1993)

There is a range of theories of departure and Tinto (1993) described these. He informed us that psychological theories implicated the student characteristics and personality as the 'cause' for attrition but did not consider the context and its impact on behaviour. Environmental theories emphasised the wider socioeconomic and organisational forces but without considering the role that an institution played. On the other hand, organisational sociology explored the impact of institutional structures, resources and policies on student retention. However, Tinto asserted that the theories did not explain *how* these institutional issues impacted on students' decisions. Tinto, instead, turned to the field of social anthropology and studies that explained the processes of establishing membership within societies to explain student retention. His work was based on that of two key sociologists which he described as follows:

- Arnold van Gennop undertook a study on the rites of passage in tribal societies and found that life was composed of a number of passages from birth through to death, and from membership of one group to another. Movement from one group to another was found to be made up of three distinct phases: separation from past associations which was marked by a reduction in contact with the previous group; transition which was the development of interactions, and an understanding of one's own role, with the new group; and incorporation where new interaction patterns were taken on, and often linked to special ceremonies. Separation and transition could be associated with feelings of vulnerability and isolation, so ceremonies or rituals were important as a way of providing some stability. Van Gennop's work was said, by Tinto, to reflect the stages of entering and experiencing higher education.
- Emile Durkheim undertook the study of community and suicide where suicide represented a person's decision to withdraw from a community. The decision to commit suicide was said to be as much a reflection of the community as of the person. Durkheim wanted to

explain why suicide rates differed between and within countries over time, and to describe how the characteristics of the social environment impacted on the level of suicide. He described four 'types' of suicide: altruistic where suicide was seen as morally appropriate within a particular situation; anomic where temporary disruptions to society (e.g. war) resulted in isolation; fatalistic where excessive normative control resulted in suicide; and egotistical where there was a lack of integration into membership of a community. The latter was important for Tinto's purposes and related to social and intellectual integration, and a lack of community membership. Both social and intellectual isolation were required for egotistical suicide, and one could lead to the other. Durkheim's argument was that where society provided the means for integration, egotistical suicide could be reduced. Tinto, therefore, argued that we needed to consider the social and intellectual character of universities, and look at its communities as a way of preventing attrition.

Course philosophy

"The curriculum focuses on the personal and professional development of the student, facilitating the acquisition of both professional and lifelong learning knowledge, attitudes and skills. Personal and professional integrity, problem-solving, personal effectiveness and research/evidence-based practice are important areas of student development that support the use of reflection and portfolios as key strategies for facilitating learning and development. The curriculum enables the student to develop a sound knowledge-base that can be applied in practice. Each student is valued and supported as an adult with individual needs. In addition each student is believed to possess the capacity to contribute to the course as an active participant with the potential to maximise the learning opportunities provided.

The programme has been devised to ensure that not only are the requirements of Fitness for Practice (UKCC, 1999) incorporated but also the views of consumers i.e. students and service staff have been incorporated within curriculum planning and delivery.

Course aim

The aim of this programme is to provide educational experiences that facilitate each student's personal and professional development towards the achievement of, and eligibility for admission....to the UKCC Professional Register and an academic award. In addition the programme will afford the students a stimulating and challenging learning experience that prepares them for practice at the point of registration and fosters a positive attitude towards self-development and lifelong learning.

Teaching, learning and assessment strategy

As an overview teaching and learning within the programme are aimed primarily at enabling the students to develop the skills to become autonomous learners in both clinical and academic settings. In the initial stages the student will be guided and advised on the range and depth of

topics that require to be covered. This will be undertaken by lectures (masterclasses and modified lectures), teacher-led tutorials and practical demonstrations and supervised practice of clinical skills.

As the programme progresses, the student will be encouraged and facilitated to develop the skills of the autonomous learner with tutorial sessions, problem solving approaches and seminars being led by the student and facilitated by lecturers. Within clinical practice the student is expected to take more responsibility for identifying their own lack of skills and to seek the advice of Practice Supervisors in achieving their required outcomes and clinical competencies.

In addition care has been taken to ensure that the student considers the programme as a whole and, therefore, they are required throughout to maintain a structured reflective portfolio of their learning experiences" (RGU, 2001).

Programme overview and philosophy

"The programme has been designed to prepare students to operate effectively within ever-changing health and social care environments. Contemporary practice requires competent, creative nurses who are critical thinkers and can adapt and respond to the demands of the profession. The profession is expanding and evolving. Students therefore need to be resourceful with a desire to continue to learn and develop. The ability to work in partnership with patients, clients and their families as part of multi-professional teams is essential. To ensure the curriculum is focused, nursing is explicit in all modules and where appropriate the theory of associated disciplines is applied to nursing.

The programme is structured to ensure theory and practice components alternate throughout each stage with each comprising 50% of the total programme. This facilitates preparation for practice and reflection on and analysis of practice experiences. In each stage, the length of theory and practice periods are organised differently with the B Nursing and DipHE Nursing differing from the Honours route. This is a key distinction between these routes. The flexible route follows the same principles but students attend the university for the contact time for theory modules and undertake practice placements as part-time hours. This results in flexible route students taking longer to complete each stage. Students undertaking the 2nd to 1st level conversion will undergo an Accreditation of Prior Learning process for stage 1. During stages 2 and 3 the 2nd to 1st level students will attend the university for two study days for each theoretical module. These contact days will be supported by open and distance learning materials primarily available on the university intranet. Clinical practice outwith the student's own area of work will be determined on an individual basis.

In stages one and two of the programme, theoretical module content is scheduled to be delivered within semesters one and two for all students. In semester three, B Nursing/ DipHE Nursing students continue to have

theoretical input through enquiry-based learning. This allows for ongoing integration of learning and academic support for these students. For B Nursing (Hons) students, theoretical input is completed prior to semester three which comprises practice only. The different structures support the diverse abilities of students who possess a wide range of entry qualifications.

In stage 2 all students are given the opportunity to select an arts or science focused module. In stage 3, B Nursing and B Nursing (Hons) students will undertake a further arts or science module which will build on the module completed in stage 2. Where students undertaking the B Nursing (Hons) route exit at the end of stage 3, the award will reflect the arts or science focus (BA Health Studies or BSc Health Studies).

Programme Philosophy

The curriculum is rooted in a view of learning as an ongoing process of positive change, growth and development, in which students are affected personally, socially, practically and intellectually. The fostering of a deep approach to learning that stimulates the students' desire for enquiry is important within the curriculum and informs its delivery. Change is also acknowledged as a central and enduring characteristic of the professional life to which students aspire. Preparing students to operate effectively and confidently, personally and professionally, within this world is a key tenet of this programme.

Students are valued as unique and motivated individuals each with the capacity to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to achieve fitness for practice and fitness for purpose. Nurturing and enabling each student to develop their distinctive professional style will realise the students' potential and ultimately contribute to the further development of an innovative and creative nursing workforce. The diverse experiences that students bring to the student body are embraced as diversity reflects the real world of professional practice. In the context of the programme, the variety of cultures, populations, individuals, services and activities that

students will access is believed to be fundamental to rich and transformational learning experiences.

The provision of supportive, meaningful and challenging learning environments and systems is central to enabling students to achieve their potential. Collaboration and partnership, engagement and enquiry, and community and dialogue, are concepts that reflect the ethos which underpins the development and delivery of the curriculum. The relationships and roles of students and providers of the learning opportunities are also embodied within these concepts. The process of assessment is emphasised as a vehicle for the enhancement of learning as well as a mechanism for measuring achievement.

Transforming the programme philosophy into a lived experience for all participants is an investment in the future and as such is recognised as an ongoing and challenging process of personal and professional growth and development

Programme aim

The programme aims to inspire students to develop as professional and creative leaders of nursing. It will enable student to become versatile and resourceful graduates who are relevantly qualified and fit for nursing practice. The educational environment is designed to stimulate enquiry, innovation and to foster research-based practice.

The programme also aims to provide students with the opportunity to enhance and develop their academic, technical and professional skills to graduate with eligibility for admission to the NMC Professional Register and to assume responsibility for practice as registered nurses" (RGU, 2004).

Teaching, learning and assessment strategy

The curriculum is written in such a way as to allow for its ongoing development. This will be informed by local and published research and will allow for both content and delivery to develop in response to changes in contemporary practice, the evidence-base informing practice as well as

shifts in policy drivers. Currently, interprofessional working and learning, enquiry-based learning and skills development and consolidation, are key areas that have been emphasised for development. To ensure that all stakeholders are fully informed of the programme content, a 'dynamic syllabus' will provide a database that specifies in detail the content of the programme curriculum. The dynamic syllabus will evolve as module teams develop the taught content and directed learning opportunities in response to contemporary policy, evidence, research findings and theoretical perspectives. Its role is to allow for the curriculum to be transparent and to provide the detail that makes the differences between the branches explicit.

The alignment of learning outcomes, teaching methods, learning activities and the assessment strategy to produce an integrated, holistic and meaningful experience for the student is a key feature of the curriculum. Constructive alignment of the curriculum is claimed to be crucial for achieving the optimum conditions for quality learning (Biggs, 2003). Jackson and Cowan (2003) support this view and advocate the theory as a useful framework for understanding the systems that are necessary for the effective delivery of an outcomes-based curriculum. A constructively aligned curriculum is one in which teaching methods and learning activities and the assessment tasks are in tune and are true to the learning outcomes (Biggs, 2002).

The curriculum demands the support of a learning strategy that is embedded and consistently implemented throughout the whole programme. Enquiry-based learning (EBL) is the key strategy employed. Within this approach teachers become facilitators of learning and work with several small EBL groups of students for the duration of the course. This allows for the development of positive working relationships, a secure and open learning environment, and collaborative group work.

EBL is an ongoing process. Students identify areas or issues for exploration and research following reflection on and discussion about the experiences gained through engagement with the curriculum. As well as addressing

gaps in knowledge and understanding, attitudes or skills, enquiry-based learning enables students to develop key skills such as critical analysis and self management in relation to learning and development.

Facilitated sessions focus on group dynamics as well as processes such as analysis and negotiation to agree the focus of enquiry and individual responsibilities, and the building of action plans. Dedicated time is programmed for the action plans to be addressed and this is supplemented by EBL group meetings with and without the facilitator to review progress, summarise learning, consider application to future practice and the identification of outstanding or new areas for enquiry. Prior to the end of each stage of the programme, the EBL groups present their work to the other EBL groups and wider dissemination and sharing occurs.

Alongside and underpinning the EBL process, delivery of module content by module teams takes place. A range of teaching methods such as lectures, small group tutorials, intranet/internet activities and directed study, are utilised within this teacher-led aspect of the curriculum. Module teams prioritise content to address contemporary nursing requirements. Where modules are shared or content is identified as core or generic, different branch programmes are taught together. Further exploration of the content in the context of the specific branches of nursing then occurs to ensure understanding and preparation for application in practice. As the programme progresses, students are challenged through EBL to make connections between the theoretical content delivered by module teams and the experiences they encounter in practice.

The contrast of teaching and facilitation approaches provides balance and variety in learning activities which are believed to accommodate different learning styles of students whilst promoting the development of a deep approach. Students are supported to develop and progress in a variety of ways. Pastoral support is provided by personal tutors who will also undertake the EBL facilitator role for their personal tutor group. This will enable the personal tutor to have a wider understanding of students' needs.

In addition, module teams provide specific academic support relating to the module content and pertinent study skills.

The assessment strategy also reflects the need to integrate the content of modules, the outcomes of enquiry and the learning that students achieve in relation to the learning outcomes. Ensuring assessment is a meaningful experience for students and enhances their learning as well as measuring their achievement is an important characteristic of the assessment strategy and will inform its continued development.

Each stage of the curriculum is treated as an integrated whole to ensure the relationships and connections between modules, including practice modules, are experienced in a holistic way by students. Students will have opportunities to play a more active role in the assessment process through exploration of the nature of evidence that can demonstrate the achievement of module learning outcomes. Module teams and EBL facilitators will work together to enable students to understand and address the summative assessment requirements as part of their ongoing learning and development.

Students are provided with a range of learning opportunities in practice to support the development of professional skills and competencies. Placement locations reflect the branch of nursing that students are undertaking. Exposure to urban, remote and rural settings, NHS and non-NHS service providers, also enhances student learning experiences. Within the programme there are learning opportunities to meet EU requirements for adult branch students. Within each placement students are supported by a named mentor who is responsible for providing a quality learning experience that meets students' needs.

Portfolios of learning experiences in practice will be developed by students to reflect the breadth and depth of learning opportunities encountered and their progress towards achievement of the NMC outcomes and competencies. The Clinical Assessment Tool enables both formative and summative assessment of performance to take place during practice

placements. This is completed by the mentor in the placement areas to which students are allocated. Students are required to maintain an ongoing development plan which is agreed and supported by personal tutors and mentors. Summative assessment of theoretical and practice modules will be graded using the University Grading Scheme.” (RGU, 2004)

Appendix 6: Overview of early interpretations of data for participants

Dear Research Participant

You may remember that some time ago I interviewed you for my PhD research. You may have been a student who was moving into stage 2 of your programme, or you may have been a student who had chosen to leave for whatever reason. I have now had a chance to look at all the interviews together, and have started to analyse the data from these interviews. It has been a very interesting process!

The purpose of getting back in touch with you is to show you what my initial findings are. I have come up with five themes and a number of categories within the themes that seem to encompass the experiences of all the participants that I interviewed. This letter provides you with those themes and categories. I am now in the process of describing these more fully by using the quotes you have given me in your interviews, and by referring to the literature.

As part of the research process, I would like to ask that you look at the themes and categories as a system of 'member checking'. You have already had the transcript of your interview. This final part of the member checking process enables you to see whether you think that the themes and categories are familiar and link to what you told me. If you have any comments, please feel free to write them on the attached sheet and return to me in the pre-paid envelope.

I can assure you that this is the last time I will be in touch with you to seek your views. I hope that it won't be too long before I complete my thesis and you will then have an opportunity to see what the findings are.

May I take this opportunity to thank you once again for taking part. Having sat down with all the interview transcripts and worked with them for the past few months, I have really appreciated your honesty and the interesting and thought provoking discussions we had.

Interviews

A number of themes and categories were identified across all the interviews, whether they were group one or two students, and whether they were 'leavers' or 'stayers'. In fact, it was striking how similar the issues for leavers and stayers were.

The themes are:

1. University experiences.
2. Practice experiences.
3. External experiences.
4. Reasons for leaving (or thinking about leaving).
5. Keeping going (or not keeping going).

Within each of the themes, a number of categories were identified as follows:

1. University experiences
 - a. Teaching, learning and assessment.
 - b. Creating connections between theory and practice.
 - c. Creating connections with peers.
 - d. Creating connections with university staff.
2. Practice experiences.
 - a. Teaching, learning and assessment.
 - b. Creating connections between theory and practice.
 - c. Creating connections with patients/clients.
 - d. Creating connections with practice staff.
3. External experiences.
 - a. Juggling.
 - b. Keeping all the balls in the air.
4. Reasons for leaving (or thinking about leaving).
 - a. University experiences.
 - b. Practice experiences.
 - c. External experiences.
5. Keeping going (or dropping the balls).

- a. Internal drivers.
- b. External drivers.

Each of these will be discussed separately although it will become clear that there are definite links between and across the themes and categories. For example, when discussing the support that students receive, this has an impact across all the themes and many of the categories. The literature is utilised to inform the process of the development of the themes and categories, and to add clarity to the findings. In some cases, the literature clearly demonstrates that the issues are familiar to a number of researchers. In others, the dearth of available literature suggests that further research should, and could, be undertaken in these areas.

Please feel free to comment on the themes and categories. Please return the sheet in the pre-paid envelope.

Appendix 7: Reflexive diary extracts

20.05.05: Reflection on group 1 experiences interview

Does internal motivation help some students to stay on the programme despite other external challenges (emotional intelligence may be important)? If so, how can we help people develop internal motivation?

Similarities across exit and experiences interviews so why do some leave and some stay?

Issues relating to not wanting to be socialised into the behaviour of qualified staff.

Tired. Part time work. Theory 'irrelevant'.

Acculturation into nursing? Professional expectations.

Issues with mentorship: positive/negative.

Social networks: differences between 'mature' and 'traditional' students.

Personal organisation/time management.

Group work: positive/negative experiences.

Support: positive/negative experiences.

18.08.05: Reflection on interviews to date

I always wanted to be a nurse – or did I? (motivation)

Not for the money or the glory!

Internal or external drivers – can have a positive or negative impact.

Support: theory, practice, peers/academics/mentors etc (remember learning communities).

Juggling – keeping all the balls in the air.

Following the road, or taking a detour (keeping going).

Personal/professional enhancement.

Everyone has challenges, just different ones.

In at the deep end (theory and practice).

All of group 1 had mainly good practice experiences.

All of group 1 like small group work.

Theory and practice

Theory

Academics

Peers

Mentors

28.08.06: Reflections on themes/categories

Decisions re themes/categories have been iterative. Mind map and other notes demonstrate this. Reading, rereading and reading the transcripts again enabled me to develop my understanding of the 'whole' while picking up on some of the differences.

Themes:

People (caring, supporting): peers, university staff, practice staff, patients etc.

Professional education: theory, practice, motivations.

Staying: making adjustments, motivation (internal/external), juggling

Appendix 8: Diary letter regarding the nature and purpose of the research

THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

School of Nursing and Midwifery
Faculty of Health and Social Care
Garthdee Campus
Garthdee Road
Aberdeen
AB10 7QG

08 April 2004

Dear

I am writing to ask whether you would be willing to participate in a research study that I am undertaking for PhD study. I am a student with The Robert Gordon University, a senior lecturer in the School of Nursing and Midwifery and course leader for the BSc (Hons) Nursing course.

The purpose of the research is to investigate the first year student experience in two groups of student nurses. The first group will be the March 2004 intake and the second group will be the March 2005 intake. As you may know, the pre-registration nursing curriculum is being developed. A comparison will be made between the March 2004 group (pre-curriculum change) and the March 2005 intake (post-curriculum change). The research will have three strands:

- A survey of the expectations and experiences of year one nursing students.
- An exploration of the experiences of year one students through the use of participant diaries.
- An investigation into the reasons that some students choose to leave the programme through a semi-structured interview or questionnaire.

I hope that the findings will inform the ongoing development of the programme and will enable the School to develop strategies to improve the student experience and enhance retention rates. *I would like to invite you to complete a diary* so that I can explore your experiences. You will be given detailed instructions on the way in which the diary should be completed. However, you will still have the opportunity to describe your experiences of being a first year nursing student in your own way.

I have enclosed a consent form for your perusal. If you are happy to participate, could you please return the consent form in the envelope provided? I have enclosed the diary and instructions so that you can start completing it straight away if you choose to take part. You will see that you have a 'participant code'. This is important as it means that I will *never* know which students are completing the diaries. *This will ensure that your anonymity is assured at all times.* When you receive communications with your name on, this is done through a third party and this information will not become known to me. Just to emphasise the point again, I will not be able to connect any information gleaned from your diary with you personally.

Whilst I hope that you are willing to participate, I appreciate that you may not be able to do so at this time. If you wish to have further information regarding the study, please contact me by letter. It is important that you do not include your name and you should identify yourself within any communication by your participant code. I am pleased to say that I can offer a book token (£5.00) to you if you complete the diary over the course of your first year.

Kind regards,

Ruth Taylor
Senior Lecturer

Appendix 9: Consent Form

**Consent Form
The Robert Gordon University
PhD study**

Name of researcher: Ruth Taylor
Job title: Senior Lecturer/Pre-registration Nursing Course
Leader
Contact details: 01224 262908
ruth.taylor@rgu.ac.uk

Participant code:

I agree to participate in the following research study:

The first year student experience pre and post curriculum change: a case study in first year undergraduate nursing students.

I understand the following:

1. I can withdraw from the study at any time with no adverse effects.*
2. The researcher will ensure that I remain anonymous.**
3. The researcher will ensure that confidentiality will be maintained.**
4. The Robert Gordon University and the programme of study will be identified within the study and in any published papers.
5. All raw data (i.e. tapes, notes, diaries, surveys) will either be destroyed or returned to the participant once data analysis has been completed.
6. If I am participating in an interview, I can examine the transcript of the interview to ensure accuracy if I wish.

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 10: Adapted College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSEQ)

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. Your response will prove very valuable within the research project that I am undertaking for PhD study. It is hoped that the data that are collected for the project will inform continuing curriculum development.

Please include your name. Once your questionnaire has been coded your name will be removed. Your anonymity is assured. I will never know who has made particular responses to any of the questions, as the codes that will be utilised will ensure that you cannot be identified. Unfortunately it will not be possible to utilise your response if you do not include your name.

<p>Your name:</p>

**Researcher details:
Ruth Taylor
Senior Lecturer
The School of Nursing and Midwifery
The Robert Gordon University
Telephone: 01224 262908**

Participant code:

University Student Expectations Questionnaire

Welcome! You have recently started to experience life as a student in the Robert Gordon University School of Nursing and Midwifery. You will have some ideas about how you will spend your time, what you will be doing and so on. I am interested in these ideas and will use the responses to this survey to inform a research study that is looking at the first year experiences of student nurses. More specifically, what do you expect to do this year as a student? Please complete the items on the following pages in a way that answers this question. It takes less than 15 minutes to complete this survey.

Your responses are confidential. Once your questionnaire has been coded, the front sheet with your name on will be destroyed. You will be asked to indicate a response based on a scale as follows:

- 1 Very often
- 2 Often
- 3 Occasionally
- 4 Never

Please circle the response you wish to make. Erase cleanly any responses that you want to change. Please answer all the questions.

The benefits of this survey depend on the thoughtful and honest responses of those who are asked to help. Your willingness to participate is very important and very much appreciated. Thank you!

UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCES

DIRECTIONS: During the coming year in university, how often do you expect to do the following? Indicate your response by circling **one** of the appropriate numbers as indicated above.

Library and information technology	Very	Often	Often
Occas- N ionally			
Use the library as a quiet place to read or study. 4	1	2	3
Use an index or database (computer, card catalogue etc) to find some material on some topic. 4	1	2	3
Read recommended materials other than textbooks in the library (articles etc). 4	1	2	3
Develop a bibliography or set of references for an assignment. 4	1	2	3
Use a computer or word processor to prepare reports or papers. 4	1	2	3

Use email to communicate with a lecturer. 4	1	2	3
Use email to communicate with classmates. 4	1	2	3
Participate in class discussions using an electronic medium (email, list-serve, chat group etc). 4	1	2	3
Search the World Wide Web or Internet for information related to a module. 4	1	2	3
Use a computer to retrieve materials from a library not at this institution. 4	1	2	3

Experiences with academic staff
Occas- N

	Very Often	Often	Occasionally
Ask your lecturer for information related to a module you are taking (grades, assignments etc). 4	1	2	3
Discuss your academic programme or course selection with a member of academic staff. 4	1	2	3
Discuss ideas for a written assignment or other class project with a member of academic staff. 4	1	2	3
Discuss your career plans and ambitions with a member of academic staff. 4	1	2	3
Socialise with a member of academic staff outside the classroom (have a snack, soft drink etc). 4	1	2	3
Ask a lecturer for comments and criticisms about your academic performance. 4	1	2	3

Module learning

Complete the recommended readings before class. 4	1	2	3
Take detailed notes during class. 4	1	2	3
Contribute to class discussions. 4	1	2	3
Try to see how different facts and ideas fit together. 4	1	2	3
Apply material learned in a class to other areas (practice placements, relationships with friends, family, colleagues etc). 4	1	2	3
Summarise major points and information from your readings or class notes. 4	1	2	3
Use information or experience from other areas of your life (job, practice placements, interactions			

with others etc). 4	1	2	3
Explain material from a module to someone else (another student, friend, colleague, family member). 4	1	2	3
Prepare a written assignment or project where you had to integrate ideas from various sources. 4	1	2	3

Writing

Ask other people to read something you wrote to see if it is clear to them. 4	1	2	3
Refer to a book or guide about writing style, grammar etc. 4	1	2	3
Revise an assignment two or more times before you are satisfied with it. 4	1	2	3
Ask a lecturer or staff member for advice and help to improve your writing. 4	1	2	3

Learning and teaching approaches

Attend lectures. 4	1	2	3
Attend group tutorials. 4	1	2	3
Work in small groups in module classes. 4	1	2	3
Utilise directed activities to support the classroom activities. 4	1	2	3

Campus facilities

Occas- N	Very Often	Often	ionally
Go to an art exhibition or a play, dance, or other theatre performance, on or off campus. 4	1	2	3
Attend a concert or other music event. 4	1	2	3
Use a student area to relax or study by yourself. 4	1	2	3
Meet other students at some campus location for a discussion. 4	1	2	3
Attend a lecture or tutorial. 4	1	2	3
Use the Study Skills Centre to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing etc). 4	1	2	3
Use recreational facilities (pool, gym etc). 4	1	2	3

Play a team sport (university, club). 4	1	2	3
Follow a regular schedule of exercise or practice for some recreational or sporting activity. 4	1	2	3

Clubs and organisations

Attend a meeting of a university club, organisation or student group. 4	1	2	3
Work on a university committee or student organisation. 4	1	2	3
Work on a non-university committee or organisation (church group, community event etc). 4	1	2	3
Meet with a member of academic staff to discuss the activities of a group or organisation. 4	1	2	3
Manage or provide leadership for an organisation in or outwith the university. 4	1	2	3

Student acquaintances

Make friends with students whose interests are different from yours. 4	1	2	3
Make friends with students whose family background (economic, social) is different from yours. 4	1	2	3
Make friends with students whose race or ethnic background is different from yours. 4	1	2	3
Have serious discussions with students whose philosophy of life or personal values are very different from yours. 4	1	2	3
Have serious discussions with students whose religious beliefs are very different from yours. 4	1	2	3
Have serious discussions with students whose political opinions are very different from yours. 4	1	2	3
Have serious discussions with students whose race or ethnic background is very different from yours. 4	1	2	3

Scientific and quantitative experiences

Memorise formulae, definitions, technical terms and concepts. 4	1	2	3
Express a set of relationships using mathematical terms. 4	1	2	3

Explain your understanding of some scientific or mathematical theory, principle or concept to someone else (classmate, colleague etc). 4	1	2	3
Read articles about scientific or mathematical theories or concepts in addition to those assigned for a class. 4	1	2	3

CONVERSATIONS

DIRECTIONS: In conversations with others at university during the coming year, how often do you expect to talk about the following? Indicate your response by circling **one** of the appropriate numbers as indicated above.

N	Very Often	Often	Occas- ionally
Current events in the news. 4	1	2	3
Social issues such as peace, justice, human rights, equality, race relations. 4	1	2	3
Different lifestyles, customs and religions. 4	1	2	3
The ideas and views of writers and philosophers. 4	1	2	3
The arts (painting, poetry, theatre, music, films etc). 4	1	2	3
Science (theories, experiments, methods etc). 4	1	2	3
Computers and other technologies. 4	1	2	3
Social and ethical issues. 4	1	2	3
The economy (employment, wealth, poverty etc). 4	1	2	3
International relations (human rights, political differences etc). 4	1	2	3

DIRECTIONS: In these conversations, how often do you expect to do each of the following? Indicate your response by circling **one** of the appropriate numbers as indicated above.

Refer to knowledge acquired in your reading or classes. 4	1	2	3
Explore different ways of thinking about a topic or issue. 4	1	2	3
Refer to something one of your lecturers said about a topic or issue. 4	1	2	3
Subsequently read something related to the topic or issue. 4	1	2	3
Change your opinion as a result of the knowledge or			

arguments presented by others. 4	1	2	3
Persuade others to change their minds as a result of the knowledge or arguments you cited. 4	1	2	3

READING/WRITING

DIRECTIONS: During the coming academic year, about how many hours reading and writing per week do you expect to do? Circle **one** of the numbers as indicated below:

1	None	2	Fewer than 5
3	Between 5 and 10	4	Between 11 and 20
5	More than 20		

Non-recommended books. 5	1	2	3	4
Textbooks or recommended books. 5	1	2	3	4
Journal articles and other recommended resources. 5	1	2	3	4
Written assignments or other assessments. 5	1	2	3	4
Exams for your modules. 5	1	2	3	4
Web-based materials 5	1	2	3	4

OPINION ABOUT UNIVERSITY AND YOUR PROGRAMME OF STUDY

DIRECTIONS: Please answer the following question: **How well do you think you will like university?** Please circle **one** of the numbers as indicated.

I will be enthusiastic about it.	1
I will like it.	2
I will be more or less neutral about it.	3
I won't like it.	4

DIRECTIONS: Please answer the following question: **How well do you think you will like your clinical experiences?** Please circle **one** of the numbers as indicated.

I will be enthusiastic about them.	1
I will like them.	2
I will be more or less neutral about them.	3
I won't like them.	4

THE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT

DIRECTIONS: During the coming year, to what extent do you feel that each of the following will be emphasised in your course or programme? Please circle the number that best represents your impression on each of the following rating scales.

Emphasis on developing academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities.

Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

Emphasis on developing aesthetic, expressive and creative qualities.

Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

Emphasis on developing critical, evaluative and analytical qualities.

Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

Emphasis on developing an understanding and appreciation of human diversity.

Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

Emphasis on developing information literacy skills (using computers, other information resources).

Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

Emphasis on developing vocational and occupational competence.

Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

Emphasis on the personal relevance and practical value of your modules.

Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

Emphasis on developing group and team working skills.

Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

DIRECTIONS: The next three ratings refer to relationships among people at this university. To what extent do you feel that each of the following will be emphasised? The '7' rating refers to the key words next to it, and the '1' rating refers to the key words next to it. You should circle the number that matches your expectations of relationships.

Relationships with other students or student groups.
Friendly, Supportive, Sense of belonging alienation 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Competitive, Uninvolved, Sense of**

Relationships with academic staff.
Approachable, Helpful, Discouraging, Understanding, Unsympathetic Encouraging 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Remote,**

Relationships with administrative and support staff.
Helpful, Considerate, Flexible regulations 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Rigid, Impersonal, Bound by**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

DIRECTIONS: Indicate your response by circling the correct answer.

Age
 18 or younger 19-23 24-29 30-39 40-55 Over 55

Sex
 Male Female

Please indicate what your qualifications were on entry to this course or programme.

- 1 Access course
- 2 5 Standard grades or equivalent
- 3 5 or more Standard grades, but no Highers or equivalent
- 4 Between 1 and 2 Highers or equivalent
- 5 3 or more Highers or equivalent
- 6 Degree/Diploma
- 7 Other (please indicate)

Where will you live during this academic year?

- 1 University accommodation.
- 2 Residence (house, flat etc) within Aberdeen.
- 3 Residence (house, flat etc) within 10 miles of the university.
- 4 Residence (house, flat etc) over 10 miles away from the university.

What do you expect your average grades to be at the end of your first year?

- 1 Mainly 6s
- 2 Mainly 6s and 5s
- 3 Mainly 4s
- 4 Mainly 4s and 3s
- 5 Mainly 3s or lower

Did either of your parents graduate from university?

- 1 No
- 2 Yes, both parents
- 3 Yes, father only
- 4 Yes, mother only
- 5 Don't know

Do you expect to enrol for a higher degree when, or if, you complete your undergraduate diploma or degree?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

During this coming academic year, about how many hours a week do you expect to spend outside of class on activities related to your academic course or programme, such as studying, writing, reading etc?

- 1 5 or fewer hours a week
- 2 6-10 hours a week
- 3 11-15 hours a week
- 4 16-20 hours a week
- 5 21-25 hours a week
- 6 26-30 hours a week
- 7 more than 30 hours a week

During this coming academic year, about how many hours a week do you plan to work on a job?

- 1 None- I won't have a job
- 2 1-10 hours a week
- 3 11-20 hours a week
- 4 21-30 hours a week
- 5 31-40 hours a week
- 6 more than 40 hours

About how much of your university expenses this year will be provided by your parents or family (including your own contribution and excluding your bursary)?

- 1 All or nearly all
- 2 More than half
- 3 Less than half
- 4 None or very little

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

DIRECTIONS: Please feel free to make any further comments in this space that you feel would be useful to provide a full picture of your expectations of your first year as an undergraduate nursing student.

Appendix 11: Adapted College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSXQ)

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. Your response will prove very valuable within the research project that I am undertaking for PhD study. It is hoped that the data that are collected for the project will inform continuing curriculum development.

You may remember completing a questionnaire at the beginning of the programme last year about what you expected from your programme. This questionnaire is designed so that I can find out what your experiences were actually like.

Please include your name. Once your questionnaire has been coded your name will be removed. Your anonymity is assured. I will never know who has made particular responses to any of the questions, as the codes that will be utilised will ensure that you cannot be identified. Unfortunately it will not be possible to utilise your response if you do not include your name.

Your name:

**Researcher details:
Ruth Taylor
Senior Lecturer
The School of Nursing and Midwifery
The Robert Gordon University
Telephone: 01224 262908**

Participant code:

University Student Experiences Questionnaire

This questionnaire asks about how you spend your time at university with colleagues and friends and in classes, social and cultural activities, extracurricular activities, employment, and use of campus facilities such as the library and the student centre. The information gained from you and other students will help the programme/course team to improve the conditions that contribute to your learning and development and to the quality of the experience of those who will come after you. It takes less than 15 minutes to complete this survey.

Your responses are confidential. Once your questionnaire has been coded, the front sheet with your name on will be destroyed. You will be asked to indicate a response based on a scale as follows:

- 1 Very often
- 2 Often
- 3 Occasionally
- 4 Never

Please circle the response you wish to make. Erase clearly any responses that you want to change. Please answer all the questions.

The benefits of this survey depend on the thoughtful and honest responses of those who are asked to help. Your willingness to participate is very important and very much appreciated. Thank you!

UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCES

DIRECTIONS: In your experience at this university, about how often have you done each of the following? Indicate your response by circling **one** of the appropriate numbers as indicated above.

Library and information technology	Very	Often	
Occas- N	Often		ionally
Used the library as a quiet place to read or study. 4	1	2	3
Used an index or database (computer, card catalogue etc) to find some material on some topic. 4	1	2	3
Read recommended materials other than textbooks in the library (articles etc). 4	1	2	3
Developed a bibliography or set of references for an assignment. 4	1	2	3
Used a computer or word processor to prepare reports or papers. 4	1	2	3
Used email to communicate with a lecturer. 4	1	2	3

Used email to communicate with classmates. 4	1	2	3
Participated in class discussions using an electronic medium (email, list-serve, chat group etc). 4	1	2	3
Searched the World Wide Web or Internet for information related to a module. 4	1	2	3
Used a computer to retrieve materials from a library not at this institution. 4	1	2	3

Experiences with academic staff

	Very Often	Often	Occasionally
Asked your lecturer for information related to a module you are taking (grades, assignments etc). 4	1	2	3
Discussed your academic programme or course selection with a member of academic staff. 4	1	2	3
Discussed ideas for a written assignment or other class project with a member of academic staff. 4	1	2	3
Discussed your career plans and ambitions with a member of academic staff. 4	1	2	3
Socialised with a member of academic staff outside the classroom (have a snack, soft drink etc). 4	1	2	3
Asked a lecturer for comments and criticisms about your academic performance. 4	1	2	3
Worked harder as a result of feedback from a lecturer 4	1	2	3

Module learning

Completed the recommended readings before class. 4	1	2	3
Took detailed notes during class. 4	1	2	3
Contributed to class discussions. 4	1	2	3
Tried to see how different facts and ideas fit together. 4	1	2	3
Applied material learned in a class to other areas (practice placements, relationships with friends, family, colleagues etc). 4	1	2	3
Summarised major points and information from your readings or class notes. 4	1	2	3
Used information or experience from other areas of your life (job, practice placements, interactions			

with others etc). 4	1	2	3
Explained material from a module to someone else (another student, friend, colleague, family member). 4	1	2	3
Prepared a written assignment or project where you had to integrate ideas from various sources. 4	1	2	3

Writing

Asked other people to read something you wrote to see if it is clear to them. 4	1	2	3
Referred to a book or guide about writing style, grammar 4	1	2	3
Revised an assignment two or more times before you are satisfied with it. 4	1	2	3
Asked a lecturer or staff member for advice and help to improve your writing. 4	1	2	3

Learning and teaching approaches

Attended lectures. 4	1	2	3
Attended group tutorials. 4	1	2	3
Worked in small groups in module classes. 4	1	2	3
Utilised directed activities to support the classroom activities. 4	1	2	3

Campus facilities

Occas- N	Very Often	Often	ionally
Gone to an art exhibition or a play, dance, or other theatre performance, on or off campus. 4	1	2	3
Attended a concert or other music event. 4	1	2	3
Used a student area to relax or study by yourself. 4	1	2	3
Met other students at some campus location for a discussion. 4	1	2	3
Attended a lecture or tutorial. 4	1	2	3
Use the Study Skills Centre to improve study or academic skills (reading, writing etc). 4	1	2	3
Used recreational facilities (pool, gym etc). 4	1	2	3

Played a team sport (university, club). 4	1	2	3
Followed a regular schedule of exercise or practice for some recreational or sporting activity. 4	1	2	3

Clubs and organisations

Attended a meeting of a university club, organisation or student group. 4	1	2	3
Worked on a university committee/student organisation. 4	1	2	3
Worked on a non-university committee or organisation (church group, community event etc). 4	1	2	3
Met with a member of academic staff to discuss the activities of a group or organisation. 4	1	2	3
Managed or provided leadership for an organisation in or outwith the university. 4	1	2	3

Student acquaintances

Made friends with students whose interests are different from yours. 4	1	2	3
Made friends with students whose family background (economic, social) is different from yours. 4	1	2	3
Made friends with students whose race or ethnic background is different from yours. 4	1	2	3
Had serious discussions with students whose philosophy of life or personal values are very different from yours. 4	1	2	3
Had serious discussions with students whose religious beliefs are very different from yours. 4	1	2	3
Had serious discussions with students whose political opinions are very different from yours. 4	1	2	3
Had serious discussions with students whose race or ethnic background is very different from yours. 4	1	2	3

Scientific and quantitative experiences

Memorised formulae, definitions, technical terms and concepts. 4	1	2	3
Expressed a set of relationships using mathematical			

terms. 4	1	2	3
Explained your understanding of some scientific or mathematical theory, principle or concept to someone else (classmate, colleague etc). 4	1	2	3
Read articles about scientific or mathematical theories or concepts in addition to those assigned for a class. 4	1	2	3

CONVERSATIONS

DIRECTIONS: In conversations with others at university over the past year, how often did you talk about the following? Indicate your response by circling **one** of the appropriate numbers as indicated above.

N	Very Often	Often	Occas- ionally
Current events in the news. 4	1	2	3
Social issues such as peace, justice, human rights, equality, race relations. 4	1	2	3
Different lifestyles, customs and religions. 4	1	2	3
The ideas and views of writers and philosophers. 4	1	2	3
The arts (painting, poetry, theatre, music, films etc). 4		2	3
Science (theories, experiments, methods etc). 4	1	2	3
Computers and other technologies. 4	1	2	3
Social and ethical issues. 4	1	2	3
The economy (employment, wealth, poverty etc). 4	1	2	3
International relations (human rights, political differences etc). 4	1	2	3

DIRECTIONS: In these conversations, how often did you do each of the following? Indicate your response by circling **one** of the appropriate numbers as indicated above.

Referred to knowledge acquired in your reading or classes. 4	1	2	3
Explored different ways of thinking about a topic or issue. 4	1	2	3
Referred to something one of your lecturers said about a topic or issue. 4	1	2	3
Subsequently read something related to the topic or issue. 4	1	2	3

Changed your opinion as a result of the knowledge or arguments presented by others.	1	2	3
4			
Persuaded others to change their minds as a result of the knowledge or arguments you cited.	1	2	3
4			

READING/WRITING

DIRECTIONS: Over the past academic year, about how many hours reading and writing per week did you do? Circle **one** of the numbers as indicated below:

2	None	2	Fewer than 5
3	Between 5 and 10	4	Between 11 and 20
5	More than 20		

Non-recommended books.	1	2	3	4
5				
Textbooks or recommended books.	1	2	3	4
5				
Journal articles and other recommended resources.	1	2	3	4
5				
Written assignments or other assessments.	1	2	3	4
5				
Exams for your modules.	1	2	3	4
5				
Web-based materials	1	2	3	4
5				

OPINION ABOUT UNIVERSITY AND YOUR PROGRAMME OF STUDY

DIRECTIONS: Please answer the following question: **How well do you like university?** Please circle **one** of the numbers as indicated.

I am enthusiastic about it.	1
I like it.	2
I am more or less neutral about it.	3
I don't like it.	4

DIRECTIONS: Please answer the following question: **If you could start again, would you go to the same university you are attending now?**

Yes, definitely	1
Probably yes	2
Probably no	3
No, definitely	4

DIRECTIONS: Please answer the following question: **How well do you like your clinical experiences?** Please circle **one** of the numbers as indicated.

I am enthusiastic about them.	1
-------------------------------	---

- I like them. 2
- I am more or less neutral about them. 3
- I don't like them. 4

THE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT

DIRECTIONS: During the past year, to what extent do you feel that each of the following were emphasised in your course or programme? Please circle the number that best represents your impression on each of the following rating scales.

Emphasis on developing academic, scholarly, and intellectual qualities.
Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

Emphasis on developing aesthetic, expressive and creative qualities.
Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

Emphasis on developing critical, evaluative and analytical qualities.
Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

Emphasis on developing an understanding and appreciation of human diversity.
Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

Emphasis on developing information literacy skills (using computers, other information resources).
Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

Emphasis on developing vocational and occupational competence.
Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

Emphasis on the personal relevance and practical value of your modules.
Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

Emphasis on developing group and team working skills.
Strong emphasis 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Weak emphasis**

DIRECTIONS: The next three ratings refer to relationships among people at this university. Thinking of your own experience, please rate the quality of the relationships on each of the following seven-point rating scales. The '7' rating refers to the key words next to it, and the '1' rating refers to the key words next to it. You should circle the number that matches your experiences of relationships.

Relationships with other students or student groups.

Friendly, 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Competitive,**
Supportive, **Uninvolved,**
Sense of belonging **Sense of**
alienation

Relationships with academic staff.

Approachable, 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Remote,**
Helpful, **Discouraging,**
Understanding, **Unsympathetic**
Encouraging

Relationships with administrative and support staff.

Helpful, 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 **Rigid,**
Considerate, **Impersonal,**
Flexible **Bound by**
regulations

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

DIRECTIONS: Indicate your response by circling the correct answer.

What were your average grades at the end of your first year?

- 1 Mainly 6s
- 2 Mainly 6s and 5s
- 3 Mainly 4s
- 4 Mainly 4s and 3s
- 5 Mainly 3s or lower

Do you expect to enrol for a higher degree when, or if, you complete your undergraduate diploma or degree?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

During this past academic year, about how many hours a week did you spend outside of class on activities related to your academic course or programme, such as studying, writing, reading etc?

- 1 5 or fewer hours a week
- 2 6-10 hours a week
- 3 11-15 hours a week
- 4 16-20 hours a week
- 5 21-25 hours a week

- 6 26-30 hours a week
- 7 more than 30 hours a week

During this past academic year, about how many hours a week did you work on a job?

- 1 None- I don't have a job
- 2 1-10 hours a week
- 3 11-20 hours a week
- 4 21-30 hours a week
- 5 31-40 hours a week
- 6 more than 40 hours

ESTIMATE OF GAINS

DIRECTIONS: In thinking about your university experience up to now, to what extent do you feel you have gained or made progress in the following areas? Indicate your response by circling **one** of the appropriate numbers as indicated.

v lit	Very much	Quite a bit	Some
Acquiring knowledge and skills applicable to 4 nursing	1	2	3
Gaining a range of information that may be relevant 4 to a career	1	2	3
Writing clearly and effectively 4	1	2	3
Presenting ideas and information effectively when 4 speaking to others	1	2	3
Using computers and other information technology 4	1	2	3
Developing own values and ethical standards 4	1	2	3
Understanding yourself, your abilities, interests 4 and personality	1	2	3
Developing the ability to get along with different 4 kinds of people	1	2	3
Developing the ability to function as a member of a team 4	1	2	3
Developing good health habits and physical fitness 4	1	2	3
Learning on your own, pursuing ideas and finding 4 information you need	1	2	3
Learning to adapt to change (new technologies, 4 different environments, personal circumstances etc)	1	2	3

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

DIRECTIONS: Please feel free to make any further comments in this space that you feel would be useful to provide a full picture of your experiences of your first year as an undergraduate nursing student.

Appendix 12: Themes and categories with participants

Theme and categories	Group 1, stayers	Group 1, leavers	Group 2, stayers	Group 2, leavers
1. Relationships with people				
1.1 Broadening horizons	Aileen, Gail, Craig, Jenny, Barbara, Lesley, Sarah (D), Linda (D), Louise (D)	Jane, Lauren, Tanya, Laura	Karen, Mark, Rebecca, Alex, Tessa, Fiona (D), Kim (D), Lynsey (D), Colin (D), Carol (D)	Marie, Gill (D)
1.2 Knowing self and others	Aileen, Gail, Craig, Jenny, Barbara, Lesley, Sarah (D), Linda (D), Louise (D)	Jane, Lauren, Tanya, Laura	Karen, Mark, Rebecca, Alex, Tessa, Fiona (D), Kim (D), Lynsey (D), Colin (D)	Marie, Gill (D)
1.3 Being supported and valued	Aileen, Gail, Craig, Jenny, Barbara, Lesley, Sarah (D), Linda (D), Louise (D)	Jane, Lauren, Tanya, Laura	Karen, Mark, Rebecca, Alex, Tessa, Fiona (D), Kim (D), Lynsey (D), Colin (D), Carol (D)	Marie, Gill (D)
2. The classroom experience				
2.1 Feeling inspired	Aileen, Gail, Craig, Jenny, Barbara, Lesley, Sarah (D), Linda (D), Louise (D)	Jane, Lauren, Tanya, Laura	Karen, Mark, Rebecca, Alex, Tessa, Fiona (D), Colin (D), Kim (D), Lynsey (D)	Marie, Gill (D)

2.2 Becoming empowered	Aileen, Gail, Craig, Jenny, Barbara, Lesley, Sarah (D), Linda (D), Louise (D)	Jane, Lauren, Tanya, Laura	Karen, Mark, Rebecca, Alex, Tessa, Fiona (D), Colin (D), Kim (D), Lynsey (D)	Marie, Gill (D)
2.3 Engaging with the learning experience	Aileen, Gail, Craig, Jenny, Barbara, Lesley, Sarah (D), Linda (D), Louise (D)	Jane, Lauren, Tanya, Laura	Karen, Mark, Rebecca, Alex, Tessa, Fiona (D), Colin(D), Carol (D), Kim (D), Lynsey (D)	Marie, Gill (D)
3. The practice experience				
3.1 Feeling inspired	Aileen, Gail, Craig, Jenny, Barbara, Lesley, Sarah (D), Linda (D), Louise (D)	Lauren, Tanya, Laura	Karen, Mark, Rebecca, Alex, Fiona (D), Colin (D), Kim (D), Lynsey (D)	Marie, Gill (D)
3.2 Becoming empowered	Aileen, Gail, Craig, Jenny, Barbara, Lesley, Sarah (D), Linda (D), Louise (D)	Lauren	Karen, Mark, Rebecca, Alex, Tessa, Fiona (D), Colin (D), Lynsey (D)	Marie, Gill (D)
3.3 Engaging with the learning experience	Aileen, Gail, Craig, Jenny, Barbara, Lesley, Sarah (D), Linda (D), Louise (D)	Lauren	Karen, Mark, Rebecca, Alex, Tessa, Carol (D), Fiona (D), Colin (D), Lynsey (D)	Marie, Gill (D)

4. Professional education				
4.1 Motivation	Aileen, Gail, Craig, Jenny, Barbara, Lesley, Louise (D), Linda (D), Sarah (D)	Jane, Lauren, Tanya, Laura	Karen, Mark, Rebecca, Alex, Tessa, Fiona (D), Carol (D), Kim (D), Lynsey (D)	Marie
4.2 Preparedness	Aileen, Gail, Craig, Barbara, Lesley, Sarah (D), Linda (D)	Jane, Laura, Tanya, Lauren	Karen, Mark, Rebecca, Alex, Tessa, Fiona (D), Colin (D), Carol (D), Lynsey (D)	Marie, Gill (D)
4.3 Making adjustments	Aileen, Gail, Craig, Jenny, Barbara, Lesley, Sarah (D), Linda (D), Louise (D)	Jane, Lauren, Tanya, Laura	Karen, Mark, Rebecca, Alex, Tessa, Fiona (D), Colin (D), Carol (D), Lynsey (D)	Marie, Gill (D)

REFERENCES

ALEXANDER, J. G. et al., 2002. Promoting, applying and evaluating problem-based learning in the undergraduate nursing curriculum. *Nursing Education Perspectives*, 23 (5), pp. 248-253.

ANDREWS, G. J. et al., 2006. Professional roles and communications in clinical placements: a qualitative study of nursing students' perceptions and some models for practice. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 43, pp. 861-874.

ARPANANTIKUL, M., THANOORUK, R. and CHANPUELKSA, P., 2006. Self-directed learning readiness, critical thinking skill, and self esteem in nursing students studying through problem based learning. *Thai Journal of Nursing Research*, 10 (1), pp. 59-71.

ASTEDT-KURKI, P. and ISOLA, A., 2001. Humour between nurse and patient, and among staff: analysis of nurses' diaries. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 35 (3), pp. 452-458.

BABB, P., 2005. *Measurement of social capital in the UK*. London: Office for National Statistics.

BAKER, R. W., MCNEIL, O. V. and SIRYK, B., 1985. Expectation and reality in freshman adjustment to college. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 32 (1), pp. 94-103.

BALY, M. E., 1995. *Nursing and Social Change*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge.

BARRETT, D., 2007. The clinical role of nurse lecturers: past, present and future. *Nurse Education Today*, 27(5), pp. 367-74.

BASSEY, M., 1999. *Case Study Research in Educational Settings*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

BEAUDIN, B. Q. et al., 2002. Science group model: expanding the pipeline for science majors. *Journal of the First-Year Experience*, 14 (2), pp. 105-132.

BEBB, H. and PITTAM, G., 2004. Inquiry-based learning as a 'whole-curriculum approach': the experiences of first-year nursing students. *Learning in Health and Social Care*, 3(3), pp. 141-153.

BEDER, S., 2001. Addressing the issues of social and academic integration for first year students. *Ultibase Articles*. [online]. pp. 1-12. Available from: <http://ultibase.rmit.edu.au/Articles/dec97/beder1.htm> [Accessed 24 April 2009].

BEEKHOVEN, S., DE JONG, U. and VAN HOUT, H., 2003. Different courses, different students, same results? An examination of differences in study progress of students in different courses. *Higher Education*, 46, pp. 37-59.

BENNER, P., ed., 1994. *Interpretive phenomenology: embodiment, caring and ethics in health*. London: SAGE Publications.

BENNETT, R., 2003. Determinants of undergraduate student drop out rates in a university business studies department. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 27 (2), pp. 123-141.

BIGGS, J., 2003. *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. 2nd ed. Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

BIGGS, J., 2002. *Aligning the Curriculum to Promote Good Learning*. LTSN Generic Centre.

BLACK, F. M. and MACKENZIE, J., 2008. *Peer support in the first year*. Glasgow: QAA Scotland.

BLACKHURST, A. E., AKEY, L. D. and BOBILYA, A., 2003. A quantitative investigation of student outcomes in a residential learning community. *Journal of the First-Year Experience*, 15 (2), pp. 35-59.

BOLGER, N., DAVIS, A. and RAFAELI, E., 2003. Diary methods: capturing life as it is lived. *Annual Reviews: Psychology*, 54, pp. 579-616.

BOOTH, A., 1997. Listening to students: experiences and expectations in the transition to a history degree. *Studies in Higher Education*, 22 (2), pp. 205-219.

BOVILL, C., MORSS, K. and BULLEY, C., 2008. *Curriculum design for the first year*. Glasgow: QAA Scotland.

BRAMMER, J., 2006a. A phenomenographic study of registered nurses' understanding of their role in student learning – an Australian perspective. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 43, pp. 963-973.

BRAMMER, J. D., 2006b. RN as gatekeeper: student understanding of the RN buddy role in clinical practice experience. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 697-704.

BROOKS, R., 2008. Accessing Higher Education: the influence of cultural and social capital on university choice. *Sociology Compass*, 2, pp. 1-17.

BRUNSDEN, V. et al., 2000. Why do HE students drop out? A test of Tinto's model. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 24 (3), pp. 301-310.

BULMAN, C. and SCHUTZ, S., eds., 2004. *Reflective practice in nursing*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

BURNARD, P., 1991. A method of analyzing interview transcripts in qualitative research. *Nurse Education Today*, 11, pp. 461-466.

BUTLER, J., 2003. Research in the place where you work – some ethical issues. *Bulleting Medical Ethics*, 185, pp. 21-3.

BYRNE, M. and FLOOD, B., 2005. A study of accounting students' motives, expectations and preparedness for higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 29 (2), pp. 111-124.

CANDELA, L., DALLEY, K. and BENZEL-LINDLEY, J., 2006. A case for learning-centered curricula. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 45 (2), pp. 59-66.

CAPERCHIONE, C. et al., 2008. Associations between social capital and health status in an Australian population. *Psychology, Health and Medicine*. 13(4), pp. 471-482.

CARLSON, S., KOTZE, W. and VAN ROOYEN, D., 2003. Accompaniment needs of first year nursing students in the clinical learning environment. *Curationis*, 26(2), pp. 30-39.

CARSON, A. and CARNWELL, R., 2007. Working in the theory-practice gap: the lecturer practitioner's story. *Learning in Health and Social Care*, 6(4), pp. 220-30.

CHAN, V., 2001. Learning autonomously: the learners' perspectives. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 25 (3), pp. 285-300.

CHAPMAN, H., 2006. Towards effective group-work in nurse education. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 298-303.

CHATERJEE, M., 2005. How many students turn their back on nursing? *Nursing Times*, 101 (7), pp. 12-13.

CHESEBRO, W. et al., 1999. Measuring learning community effectiveness: conceptions, an instrument, and result. *Presented at the Annual Meeting of*

the American Association for Higher Education Assessment Forum. June 15 1999. Denver, Colorado.

CHRISTIE, H., MUNRO, M. and FISHER, T., 2004. Leaving University early: exploring the differences between continuing and non-continuing students. *Studies in Higher Education*, 29 (5), pp. 617-636.

CLAYTON, A. and THORNE, T., 2000. Diary data enhancing rigour: analysis framework and verification tool. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 32 (6), pp. 1514-1521.

CLOUSTON, T. J. and WHITCOMBE, S. W., 2005. An emerging person centred model for problem-based learning. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 29 (3), pp. 265-275.

CLULOW, V., 2000. An analysis of a peer tutoring experience in a first-year business subject. *Journal of Institutional Research*, 9 (1), pp. 89-99.

COATES, H., 2005. The value of student engagement for higher education quality assurance. *Quality in Higher Education*. [online]. 11 (1), pp. 25-36. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13538320500074915> [Accessed 24 April 2009].

COHEN, L., MANION, L. and MORRISON, K., 2003. *Research methods in education*. 5th ed. London: Routledge Falmer.

CORMACK, D., ed., 2000. *The research process in nursing*. 4th ed. London: Blackwell Science.

CORRI, C., 2003. Medical humanities in nurse education. *Nursing Standard*, 17 (33), pp. 38-40.

COTTON, S. and WILSON, B., 2006. Student-faculty interactions: dynamics and determinants. *Higher Education*, 51, pp. 487-519.

CRESSWELL, J., 2007. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five traditions*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

CRISSMAN, J. L., 2001. Clustered and non-clustered first year seminars: new students' first year experiences. *Journal of the First Year Experience*, 13 (1), pp. 69-88.

CURTIS, S. and SHANI, N., 2002. The effect of taking paid employment during term-time on students' academic studies. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 26 (2), pp. 129-138.

CUTHBERTSON, P., LAUDER, W., STEELE, R., CLEARY, S. and BRADSHAW, J., 2004. A comparative study of the course-related family and financial problems of mature nursing students in Scotland and Australia. *Nurse Education Today*, 24, pp.374-381.

DARLASTON-JONES, D. et al., 2003. Are they being served? Student expectations of higher education. *Issues in Educational Research*, 13 (1), pp. 31-52.

DAVIS, M., 2003. Barriers to reflective practice: the changing nature of higher education. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 4 (3), pp. 243-255.

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS, 2003. *The Future of Higher Education*. [online]. Available from: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/uploads/White%20Pape.pdf> [Accessed 24 April 2009].

DEPARTMENT FOR INNOVATION, UNIVERSITIES AND SKILLS, 2008. *A New University Challenge*. [online]. Available from: http://www.dius.gov.uk/higher_education/shape_and_structure/new_university_challenge [Accessed on 24 April 2009].

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, 2006. *Managing attrition rates for student nurses and midwives: a guide to good practice for Strategic Health*

Authorities and Higher Education Institutions. London: Department of Health.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, 1999. *Making a Difference: Strengthening the Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting contribution to health and healthcare.* London: Department of Health.

DOANE, G. H., 2002. In the spirit of creativity: the learning and teaching of ethics in nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 39 (6), pp. 521-528.

DONMEYER, R., 2000. Generalisability and single-case study research. In: R. GOMM, M. HAMMERSLEY and P. FOSTER, eds. *Case Study Method.* London: SAGE Publications. pp. 45-68.

EL ANSARI, W. and OSKROCHI, R., 2004. What 'really' affects health professions students' satisfaction with their educational experience? Implications for practice and research. *Nurse Education Today*, 24, pp. 644-655.

ELLIOTT, B., 2004. *Phenomenology and imagination in Husserl and Heidegger.* London: Routledge.

EWELL, P. T. and JONES, D. P., 1996. *Indicators of 'good practice' in undergraduate education: a handbook for development and implementation.* Boulder CO: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

FANGHANEL, J., 2007. *Investigating university lecturers' pedagogical constructs in the working context.* London: The Higher Education Academy.

FARR, J., 2004. Social capital: A conceptual history. *Political Theory*. 32 (1), pp. 6-33.

FARRAND, P. et al., 2006. Implementing competency recommendations into pre-registration nursing curricula: effects upon levels of confidence in clinical skills. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 97-103.

FAZEY, D. M. A. and FAZEY, J. A., 2001. The potential for autonomy in learning: perceptions of competence, motivation and locus of control in first-year undergraduate students. *Studies in Higher Education*, 26 (3), pp. 345-361.

FIELD, J., 2003. *Social capital*. Oxon: Routledge.

FIELD, A., 2005. *Discovering statistics using SPSS*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

FOSTER, J. et al., 2002. *Surviving first year: access retention and value-added report on the 2000-2001 pilot*. University of Paisley.

FRANKLIN, K. K., 2002. Conversations with Metropolitan University first-year students. *Journal of the First-Year Experience*, 14 (2), pp. 57-88.

FRASER S. and GREENHALGH, T., 2001. Coping with complexity. *British Medical Journal*, 323 (7316), pp. 799-803.

FREIRE, P. et al., 1994. *Paulo Freire on higher education: a dialogue at the National University of Mexico*. New York: State University of New York.

FUKUYAMA, F., 1999. Social capital and civil society. *Prepared for delivery at the International Monetary Fund 2nd Generation Conference*.

GADAMER, H., 2004. *Truth and Method*. 2nd ed. London: Continuum.

GEANELLOS, R., 2001. Exploring Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory of interpretation as a method of analysing research texts. *Nursing Inquiry*, 7 (2), pp. 112-119.

GERRARD, E. AND ROBERTS, R., 2006. Student parents, hardship and debt: a qualitative study. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 30 (4), pp. 393-403.

GERRISH, K. and LACEY, A., eds., 2006. *The research process in nursing*. 5th ed. Blackwell Publishing: Oxford.

GIBSON, V., 1995. An analysis of the use of diaries as a data collection method. *Nurse Researcher*, 3 (1), pp. 66-73.

GIFFORD, D., MIANZO, F. and BRICENO-PERRIOTT, J., 2006. Locus of control: academic achievement and retention in a sample of university first-year students. *Journal of College Admission*, Spring, pp. 18-25.

GILLHAM, B., 2000. *Case study research methods*. Continuum: London.

GITTELL, R. J. and VIDAL, A., 1998. *Community organizing: Building social capital as a development strategy*. London: SAGE Publications.

GLACKIN, M. and GLACKIN, M., 1998. Investigation into experiences of older students undertaking a pre-registration diploma in nursing. *Nurse Education Today*, 18, pp. 576-582.

GLOSSOP, C., 2002. Student nurse attrition: use of an exit-interview procedure to determine students' leaving reasons. *Nurse Education Today*, 22, pp. 375-386.

GLOSSOP, C., 2001. Student nurse attrition from pre-registration courses: investigating methodological issues. *Nurse Education Today*, 21, pp. 170-180.

GOMM, R., HAMMERSLEY, M. and FOSTER, P., eds. 2000. *Case Study Method*. London: SAGE Publications.

GONYEA, R. M., 2003. *The college student expectations questionnaire: assessing student expectations of their college education*. Essay (no source).

GRAHAM, J. and CASO, R., 2002. Measuring engineering freshman attitudes and perceptions of their first year academic experience: the continuing development of two assessment instruments. *Proceedings of the 32nd ASEE/IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference*. 6-9 November 2002. Boston.

GRAINGER, P. and BOLAN, C., 2006. Perceptions of nursing as a career choice of students in the Baccalaureate nursing program. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 38-44.

GRAYSON, P. J., 2003. The consequences of early adjustment to university. *Higher Education*, 46, pp. 411-429.

GREEN, M., 1995. chapter 23. In: M. E. BALY., ed. 1995. *Nursing and Social Change*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge. p. 300.

HAEZEWINDT, P., 2003. Investing in each other and the community: the role of social capital. *Social Trends*, 33, pp. 19-26.

HAGGIS, T., 2004. Meaning, identity and 'motivation': expanding what matters in understanding learning in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 29 (3), pp. 335-352.

HALL, J. C., 2001. *Retention and wastage in FE and HE*. The Scottish Council for Research and Education. [online]. Available from: <http://www.scre.ac.uk/scot-research/wastage/summ.html> [Accessed on 13 April 2005, site currently being updated 24 April 2009].

HALPERN, D., 2005. *Social capital*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

HAMMERSLEY, M. and GOMM, R., 2000. Introduction. In: R. GOMM, M. HAMMERSLEY, and P. FOSTER, eds., 2000. *Case Study Method*. London: SAGE Publications. pp. 1-16.

HARRISON, N., 2006. The impact of negative experiences, dissatisfaction and attachment on first year undergraduate withdrawal. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 30 (4), pp. 377-391.

HARVEY, L., DREW, S. and SMITH, M., 2006. *The first-year experience: a review of literature for the Higher Education Academy*. The Higher Education Academy.

HENDERSON, A. et al., 2006. Students' perception of the psycho-social clinical learning environment: an evaluation of placement models. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 564-571.

HIGGINSON, R., 2006. Fears, worries and experiences of first-year pre-registration nursing students: a qualitative study. *Nurse Researcher*, 13 (3), pp. 32-49.

HIGHER EDUCATION STATISTICS AGENCY, 2008. *Performance Indicators* [online]. Available from: <http://www-hesa.ac.uk> [Accessed 24 April 2009].

HOBBS, G., 2000. What is social capital? A brief literature review. *Economic and Social Research Foundation* [online]. Available from. <http://www.caledonia.org.uk/papers/hobbs.pdf> [Accessed 24 April 2009].

HOLSTEIN, J. and GUBRIUM, J., 2004. The active interview. In: D. SILVERMAN, ed., *Qualitative research: theory, method and practice*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. pp. 140-161.

HORNE, M. et al., 2007. Using enquiry in learning: from vision to reality in higher education. *Nurse Education Today*, 27, pp. 103-112.

HOUGHTON, W., 2004. *Engineering Subject Centre Guide: Learning and teaching theory for engineering academics*. Loughborough: HEA Engineering Subject Centre.

HOUSTON, M., KNOX, H. and RIMMER, R., 2007. Wider access and progression among full-time students. *Higher Education*, 53, pp. 107-146

HUBERMAN, A. M. and MILES, B. M., 2002. *The qualitative researcher's companion*. London: SAGE publications.

HUMPHREY, R., 2006. Pulling structured inequality into Higher Education: the impact of part-time working on English university students. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 60 (3), pp. 270-286.

HUNT, A., LINCOLN, I. and WALKER, A., 2004. Term-time employment and academic attainment: evidence from a large-scale survey of undergraduates at Northumbria University. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 28 (1), pp. 3-18.

HWANG, S. Y. and KIM, M. J., 2006. A comparison of problem-based learning and lecture-based learning in an adult health nursing course. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 315-321.

IRONSIDE, P., 2004. "Covering content" and teaching thinking: deconstructing the additive curriculum. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 43 (1), pp. 5-12.

JACKSON, D. and MANNIX, J., 2001. Clinical nurses as teachers: insights from students of nursing in their first semester of study. *Nurse Education*, 10 (2), pp.270-277.

JACKSON, N., 2003. A personal perspective on enquiry based learning. *Paper presented at the Learning Based on Enquiry Conference*. University of Manchester, 1-2 September.

JACKSON, N. and COWAN, J., 2003. *Between a rock and a hard place – some personal perspectives on the underlying issues and challenges facing the UUK/SCOP/HEFCE*. Measuring, Recording Student Achievement Scoping Group: LTSN Generic Centre.

JARVIS, P., HOLFORD, J. and GRIFFIN, C., 2004. *The theory and practice of learning*. 2nd ed. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

JEFFREYS, M. R., 2001. Evaluating enrichment program study groups: academic outcomes, psychological outcomes, and variables influencing retention. *Nurse Educator*, 26 (3), pp. 142-149.

KANTANIS, T., 2000. The role of social transition in students' adjustment to the first-year of university. *Journal of Institutional Research*. [online]. pp. 100-110. Available from: <http://www.aair.org.au/jir/May00/Kantanis.pdf> [Accessed 02 August 2007].

KEEVES, J. P., ed., 1997. *Educational research, methodology and measurement: an international handbook*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Elsevier Science Ltd.

KENNY, G., 2004. The origins of current nurse education policy and its implications for nurse educators. *Nurse Education Today*, 24, pp. 84-90.

KEVERN, J., RICKETTS, C. and WEBB, C., 1999. Pre-registration diploma students: a quantitative study of entry characteristics and course outcomes. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 30(4), pp. 785-795.

KLEIMAN, P., 2003. Design for learning: a journey of enquiry. *Keynote speech for the Learning Based on the Process of Enquiry Conference*. University of Manchester, 1-2 September.

KNOX, H. and WYPER, J., 2008. *Personalisation of the first year*. Glasgow: QAA Scotland.

KOCH, T., 1999. An interpretive research process: revisiting phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 24 (1), pp. 174-184.

KOTECHU, M., 2002. Exploring nurse learner wastage/persistence using a discursive approach: towards a theoretical understanding of the subject. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 40 (2), pp. 210-217.

KRAMER, M., 1974. *Reality shock: why nurses leave nursing*. St Louis: Mosby.

KRAUSE, K., 2005. Serious thoughts about dropping out in first year: trends, patterns and implications for higher education. *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development*, 2 (3), pp. 55-68. [online]. Available from: <http://sleid.cqu.edu.au> [Accessed 24 April 2009].

KUH, G. D., LAIRD, T. F. and UMBACH, P. D., 2004. Aligning faculty activities and student behavior: realizing the potential of Greater Expectations. *Liberal Education*, Fall, pp. 24-31.

KUH, G. D. and PACE, C. R., 1998a. *College Student Expectations Questionnaire*. Bloomington: Indiana University for Postsecondary Research and Planning.

KUH, G. D. and PACE, C. R., 1998b. *College Student Expectations Questionnaire*. Bloomington: Indiana University for Postsecondary Research and Planning.

KUH, G. D. and VESPER, N., 1997. A comparison of student experiences with good practices in undergraduate education between 1990 and 1994. *The Review of Higher Education*, 21 (1), pp. 43-61.

LAING, C., CHAO, K. and ROBINSON, A., 2005. Managing the expectations of non-traditional students: the process of negotiation. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 29 (2), pp. 169-179.

LANKSHEAR, C. and KNOBEL, M., 2006. *A Handbook for teacher research: from design to implementation*. New York: Open University Press.

LAST, L. and FULBROOK, P., 2003. Why do student nurses leave? Suggestions from a Delphi study. *Nurse Education Today*, 23, pp. 449-458.

LAUDER, W., MOXHAM, L. and ROXBURGH, M., 2006. Are the current quality systems in nurse education fit for purpose: can we really be sure of current standards? *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp.525-527.

LAUDER, W. et al., 2002. A comparison of therapeutic commitment, support role competency and empathy in three cohorts of nursing students. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 9, pp. 483-491.

LAUDER, W. and TILLEY, C., 2008. *Completions rates on nursing and midwifery courses in Scotland: 1998-2002*. Unpublished.

LAUDER, W. et al., 2008. An evaluation of fitness for practice curricula: self-efficacy, support and self-reported competence in preregistration student nurses and midwives. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 17 (14), pp. 1858-1867.

LEATHWOOD, C., 2006. Gender, equity and the discourse of the independent learner in higher education. *Higher Education*, 52, pp. 611-633.

LEE, T., MAWDSLEY, J. M. and RANGELEY, H., 1999. Students' part-time work: towards an understanding of the implications for nurse education. *Nurse Education Today*, 19, pp. 443-451.

LEVETT-JONES, T., 2005. Self-directed learning: implications and limitations for undergraduate nursing education. *Nurse Education Today*, 25 (5), pp. 363-368.

LEYSHON, S., 2002. Empowering practitioners: an unrealistic expectation of nurse education? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 40 (4), pp. 466-474.

LIZZIO, A., WILSON, K. and SIMONS, R., 2002. University students' perceptions of the learning environment and academic outcomes: implications for theory and practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 27 (1), pp. 27-49.

LOVING, G. L. and WILSON, J. S., 2000. Infusing critical thinking into the nursing curriculum through faculty development. *Nurse Educator*, 25 (2), pp. 70-75.

LOWE, H. and COOK, A., 2003. Mind the gap: are students prepared for higher education? *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 27 (1), pp. 53-76.

MACKINTOSH, C., 2006. Caring: the socialisation of pre-registration student nurses: a longitudinal descriptive study. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 43, pp. 953-962.

MADIGAN, V., 2006. Predicting prehospital care students' first-year academic performance. *Prehospital Emergency Care*, 10 (1), pp. 81-88.

MANN, S. J., 2001. Alternative perspectives on the student experience: alienation and engagement. *Studies in Higher Education*, 26 (1), pp. 7-19.

MANTZOUKAS, S., 2007. Reflection and problem/enquiry-based learning: confluences and contradictions. *Reflective Practice*, 8(2), pp. 241-253.

MARGOTSEN, D., 2001. Can all education be problem-based: can it afford not to be? *Paper from the Problem-based Learning Forum*, Hong Kong Center for Problem-based Learning.

MASHABA, G. and MHLONGO, T., 1995. Student nurse wastage: a case study of the profile and perceptions of students of an institution. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 22 (2), pp. 364-373.

MCILFATRICK, S., 2004. The future of nurse education: characterised by paradoxes. *Nurse Education Today*, 24, pp. 79-83.

MCINNIS, C., 2001a. Researching the first year experience: where to from here? *Higher Education Research and Development*, 20 (2), pp. 105-114.

MCINNIS, C., 2001b. *Signs of disengagement? The changing undergraduate experience in Australian universities*. [Inaugural professorial lecture], Centre for the Study of Higher Education, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne.

MCKENZIE, K. AND GOW, K., 2004. Exploring the first year academic achievement of school leavers and mature-age students through structural equation modeling. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 14, pp. 107-123.

MELIA, K., 2008. Student nurses' construction of occupational socialisation. *Sociology and Health and Illness*, 6 (2), pp. 132-151.

MERRIAM, S. B., 1998. *Case study research in education: a qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

MIDGLEY, K., 2006. Pre-registration student nurses perception of the hospital-learning environment during clinical placements. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 338-345.

MILLER, J. and GLASSNER, B., 2004. The "inside" and the "outside" – finding realities in interviews. In: D. SILVERMAN, ed., *Qualitative research: theory, method and practice*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. pp. 125-139.

MOONEY, M. and NOLAN, L., 2006. A critique of Freire's perspective on critical social theory in nursing education. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 240-244.

MOORE, S., ARMSTRONG, C. and PEARSON, J., 2008. Lecture absenteeism among students in higher education: a valuable route to understanding student motivation. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 30 (1), pp. 15-24.

MORALES-MANN, E. and KAITELL, C., 2001. Problem-based learning in a new Canadian curriculum. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 33 (1), pp. 13-19.

MUIJS, D., 2004. *Doing quantitative research in education with SPSS*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

MULLER, F. and PALEKCIC, C., 2005. Continuity of motivation in higher education: a three-year follow-up study. *Review of Psychology*, 12 (1), pp. 31-43.

MURPHY-BLACK, T., 2006. Using questionnaires. In: K. GERRISH and A. LACEY, eds., 2006. *The research process in nursing*. 5th ed. Blackwell Publishing: Oxford. pp. 367-382.

NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE, 2007. *Staying the course: The retention of students in higher education*. London: The Stationery Office.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY INTO HIGHER EDUCATION, 1997. *Summary Report of the UK Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education: Higher Education in the Learning Society*. (Chairman Sir Ron Dearing). London: The Stationery Office.

NEILSON, G. and LAUDER, W., 2008. What do high academic achieving school pupils really think about a career in nursing: analysis of the narrative from paradigmatic case interviews. *Nurse Education Today*, 28, pp. 680-690.

NURSING AND MIDWIFERY COUNCIL, 2004. *Standards of proficiency for pre-registration nursing education*. London: NMC.

OFFICE OF NATIONAL STATISTICS, 2001. *Social capital: A review of the literature*. Social Analysis and Reporting Division Office for National Statistics.

OLSEN, D. et al., 1998. Great expectations: what first year students say they will do and what they actually do. *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of the Study of Higher Education*, Miami.

OSBORNE, M., MARKS, A. and TURNER, E., 2004. Becoming a mature student: how adult applicants weigh the advantages and disadvantages of higher education. *Higher Education*, 48, pp. 291-315.

OUSEV, K., 2003. The first year of a problem-based learning curriculum. *Nursing Standard*, 17 (22), pp. 33-36.

PACE, C. R. and KUH, G. D., 1998. *College Student Experiences Questionnaire: Codebook for the Fourth Edition*. Indiana University: Center for Postsecondary Research.

PALLANT, J., 2001. *SPSS Survival Manual*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

PANG, S. et al., 2002. Evaluating the use of developmental action inquiry in constructing a problem-based learning curriculum for pre-registration nursing education in Hong Kong: a student perspective. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 40 (2), pp. 230-241.

PARAHOO, K., 2006. *Nursing research: principles, process and issues*. 2nd ed. Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd.

PASCARELLA, E. T. and TERENCEZINI, P. T., 1991. *How college affects students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

PASCARELLA, E. T., and TERENCEZINI, P. T., 2005. *How college affects students: A third decade of research, volume 2*. Indianapolis: Jossey-Bass.

PEARCE, N. and SMITH, G. D., 2003. Is social capital the key to inequalities in health? *Rekindling Health Care Reform*. 93 (1), pp. 122- 128.

PEEL, M., 2000. 'Nobody cares': the challenge of isolation in school to university transition. *Journal of Institutional Research*, 9 (1), pp. 22-34.

PIKE, G. R. et al., 2005. Educational expenditures and student engagement: when does money matter? *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Institutional Research*, San Diego.

PITKETHLY, A. and PROSSER, M., 2001. The first year experience project: a model for university-wide change. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 20 (2), pp. 185-198.

PLATT WORKING PARTY, 1964. *A Reform of Nursing Education*. London: Royal College of Nursing.

PLSEK, P. E. and GREENHALGH, T., 2001. The challenge of complexity in health care. *British Medical Journal*, 323 (7313), pp. 625-628.

POLANYI, M., 1966. The logic of tacit inference. *The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy*, XLI (155), pp. 1-18.

PORTES, A. 1998. Social capital: its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, pp. 1-24.

PRESCOTT, A. and SIMPSON, E., 2004. Effective student motivation commences with resolving 'dissatisfiers'. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 28 (3), pp. 247-259.

PRICE, B., 2003. *Studying nursing using problem-based and enquiry-based learning*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

PRICE, B., 2001. Enquiry-based learning: an introductory guide. *Nursing Standard*, 15 (2), pp. 45-55.

PUTNAM, R. D., 2000. *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American communities*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

PUTNAM, R.D., 1995. Tuning in, tuning out: the strange disappearance of social capital in America. *Political Science and Politics*, 28, pp. 664-683.

PUTNAM, R.D., 1993. The prosperous community: social capital and public life. *American Prospect*, 13, pp. 35-42.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY, 2008a. Home Page. [online]. Available from: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/> [Accessed 24 April 2009].

QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY, 2008b. *Enhancement Themes*. [online] Available from: <http://enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/FirstYear/> [Accessed 24 April 2009].

QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR SCOTLAND, 2002. *Scottish subject benchmark statement nursing*. Edinburgh: QAA Scotland.

QUINN, F.M. and HUGHES, S.J., 2007. *Principles and Practice of Nurse Education*. 5th ed. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Ltd.

QUINN, J. et al., 2005. *From life crisis to lifelong learning: rethinking working class 'drop out' from higher education*. York: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

READ, B., ARCHER, L., and LEATHWOOD, C., 2003. Challenging cultures? Student conceptions of 'belonging' and 'isolation' at a post-1992 university. *Studies in Higher Education*, 28 (3), pp. 261-277.

RIDEOUT, E. and CARPIO, B., 2001. The problem-based learning model of nursing education. In: E. RIDEOUT, 2001. ed., *Transforming nursing education through problem-based learning*. London: Jones and Bartlett Publishers International. pp. 21-51.

ROBSON, C., 2002. *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell publishing.

ROLFE, G., FRESHWATER, D. and JASPER, M., 2001. *Critical reflection for nursing and the helping professions: a user's guide*. Hampshire: Palgrave.

ROLFE, G. and GARDINER, L., 2006. Education, philosophy and academic practice: nursing studies in the posthistorical university. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 634-639.

ROSENBERG, J. and YATES, P., 2007. Schematic representation of case study research designs. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, pp. 1-6.

ROSIE, A., 2000, 'Deep learning': a dialectical approach drawing on tutor-led web resources. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 1 (1), pp. 45-59.

ROXBURGH, M. et al., 2008. A review of curriculum evaluation in United Kingdom nursing education. *Nurse Education Today*, 28, pp. 881-889.

ROYAL COLLEGE OF NURSING, 2008. *Nursing our future: An RCN study into the challenges facing today's nursing students in Scotland*. Edinburgh: RCN.

SALINITRI, G., 2005. The effects of formal mentoring on the retention rates for first-year, low achieving students. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 28(4), pp. 853-873.

SANDER, P. et al., 2000. University students' expectations of teaching. *Studies in Higher Education*, 25 (3), pp. 309-323.

SAYER, A., 2006. *Realism and Social Science*. SAGE Publications: London.

SCHEJA, M., 2006. Delayed understanding and staying in phase: students' perceptions of their study situation. *Higher Education*, 52, pp. 421-445.

SCHOFIELD, J. M., 2000. Increasing the generalisability of qualitative research. In: R. GOMM, M. HAMMERSLEY and P. FOSTER, eds., *Case Study Method*. London: SAGE Publications. pp. 68-97.

SCHOLES, J. et al., 2004. *Evaluation of Nurse Education Partnership: Executive Summary*. No publisher.

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE, 2003a. *A Framework for Higher Education in Scotland: Higher Education Review Phase 2*. [online]. Available from: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/03/16786/20350> [Accessed 24 April 2009].

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE, 2003b. *Life Through Learning; Learning Through Life: The Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland*. Stationary Office: Edinburgh.

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE HEALTH DEPARTMENT, 2006. *Student Retention Sub-Group Remit*. Edinburgh: SEHD.

SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL, 2005. Home page. [online]. Available from: <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/> [Accessed 24 April 2009].

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT HEALTH DIRECTORATES, 2007. *Recruitment and Retention: report of the 'Facing the Future' sub-groups and working groups*. Edinburgh: SGHD.

SILVERMAN, D., 2006. *Doing qualitative research*. 3rd ed. London: SAGE Publications.

SLEVIN, E. and SINES, D., 1999. Enhancing the truthfulness, consistency and transferability of a qualitative study: utilising a manifold of approaches. *Nurse Researcher*, 7 (2), pp. 79-97.

SMITH, C. and BATH, D., 2006. The role of the learning community in the development of discipline knowledge and generic graduate outcomes. *Higher Education*, 51, pp. 259-286.

SMITH, E. and BEGGS, B., 2003. Optimally maximising student retention in higher education. *Proceedings from the SRHE Annual Conference*, Glasgow, December 2002.

SMITH, J. and WERTLEIB, E., 2005. Do first-year college students' expectations align with their first-year experiences? *NASPA Journal*. [online]. 42 (2), pp. 1-23. Available from: <http://publications.naspa.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1470&context=naspajournal> [Accessed on 24 April 2009].

SREDL, D., 2001. Response to: 'The idea of nursing science' by S. D. Edwards (1999) *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 29, 563-569. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 35 (3), pp.386-387.

STAKE, R. E., 2000a. The case study method in social inquiry. In: R. GOMM, M. HAMMERSLEY and P. FOSTER, 2000. *Case Study Method*. London: SAGE Publications. pp. 19-26.

STAKE, R. E., 2000b. Case Studies. In: N. DENZIN and Y. LINCOLN, eds., 2000. *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd. pp. 435-454.

STAKE, R. E., 1995. *The art of case study research*. London: SAGE Publications.

STEELE, R. et al., 2005. An exploratory study of the concerns of mature access to nursing students and the coping strategies used to manage these adverse experiences. *Nurse Education Today*, 25, pp. 573-581.

STREUBERT SPEZIALE, H. and CARPENTER, D., 2007. *Qualitative research in nursing: advancing the human imperative*. 4th ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams and Wilkins.

SZRETER, S. and WOOLCOCK, M. 2004. Health by association? Social capital, social theory, and the political economy of public health. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 33, pp. 650-667.

TAYLOR, R., 2005. Creating a connection: tackling student attrition through curriculum development. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 29 (4), pp. 367-374.

TAYLOR, R., 2004. Practice Nurses' experiences of undertaking a distance learning degree. *Primary Health Care Journal*, 13 (9), pp. 35-39.

TELLIS, W., 1997. Introduction to case study. *The Qualitative Report*. [online]. 3(2). Available from: <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3-2/tellis1.html> [Accessed 24 April 2009].

THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION, 1963. In: M. E. BALY, 1995. *Nursing and Social Change*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge. p. 300.

THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON NURSING, 1972. (Chairman: Professor Asa Briggs). London: Stationery Office.

THE REPORT OF THE WORKING PARTY ON THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF NURSES, 1947. (Chairman, Sir Robert Wood). London: The Stationary Office.

THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY, 2001. *DipHE/BA Nursing Programme Definitive Course Document*. Aberdeen: RGU.

THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY, 2004. *B Nursing (Hons) Programme Definitive Programme Document*. Aberdeen: RGU.

THOMAS, E. and DAVIES, B., 2006. Nurse teachers' knowledge in curriculum planning and implementation. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 572-577.

THOMAS, L., 2002. Student retention in higher education: the role of institutional habitus. *Journal of Education Policy*, 17(4), pp. 423-442.

TIMMINS, F. and KALISZER, M., 2002. Aspects of nurse education programmes that frequently cause stress to nursing students – fact finding sample survey. *Nurse Education Today*, 22, pp. 203-211.

TINTO, V., 1993, *Leaving College: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

TINTO, V., 1994. Learning better together: the impact of learning communities on student success in Higher Education. *Journal of Institutional Research*, pp. 48-53.

TINTO, V., 2003. Learning better together: the impact of learning communities on student success. *Higher Education Monograph Series*, Higher Education Program, School of Education, Syracuse University.

TINTO, V., 2005a. Research and practice of student retention: what next? *Presentation to the National Conference on Student Recruitment, Marketing and Retention*, Washington D.C., July 27-30.

TINTO, V., 2005b. Reflection on retention and persistence: institutional action on behalf of student persistence. *Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development*, 2(3), pp.89-97.

TOD, A., 2006. Interviewing. In: K. GERRISH, and A. LACEY, eds., *The research process in nursing*. 5th ed. Blackwell Publishing: Oxford. pp. 337-352.

TOMPKINS, C., 2001. Nursing Education for the twenty-first century. In: E. RIDEOUT, 2001. ed., *Transforming nursing education through problem-based learning*. London: Jones and Bartlett Publishers International. pp. 1-21.

TORRANCE, C. and JORDAN, S., 1995. Bionursing: putting science into practice. *Nursing Standard*, 9 (49), pp. 25-27.

TROY, P., WYNESS, L. and MCAULIFFE, E., 2007. Nurses' experiences of recruitment and migration from developing countries: a phenomenological approach. *Human Resources for Health*. [online]. 5 (15). pp. 1-7. Available from: <http://www.human-resources-health.com/content/5/1/15> [Accessed 24 April 2009].

UNITED KINGDOM CENTRAL COUNCIL FOR NURSING, MIDWIFERY AND HEALTH VISITING, 1999. *Fitness for Practice: The UKCC Commission for Nursing and Midwifery Education*. London: UKCC.

UNITED KINGDOM CENTRAL COUNCIL FOR NURSING, MIDWIFERY AND HEALTH VISITING, 1987. *Project 2000: the final proposals*. London: UKCC.

VAN MANEN, M., 1990. *Researching lived experience: human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. New York: State University of New York.

VAN ROOYEN, P. et al., 2006. Entry criteria as predictor of performance in an undergraduate nursing degree programme. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 593-600.

VERE-JONES, E., 2008. How can the NHS stop students from dropping out? *Nursing Times*, 104 (8), pp. 8-9.

WADE, G. H. and KASPAR, N., 2002. Nursing students' perceptions of instructor caring: an instrument based on Watson's theory of transpersonal caring. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 45 (5), pp. 162-168.

WALKER, M., 2006. *Higher Education Pedagogies*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

WATSON, R., 2006. Is there a role for higher education in preparing nurses? *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 622-626.

WATSON, R. and THOMPSON, D. R., 2000. Recent developments in UK nurse education: horses for courses or courses for horses? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 32 (5), pp. 1041-1042.

WHARRAD, H. J., CHAPPLE, M. and PRICE, N., 2003. Predictors of academic success in a Bachelor of Nursing course. *Nurse Education Today*, 23, pp. 246-254.

WHILE, A. and BLACKMAN, C., 1998. Reflections on nursing as a career choice. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 6 (4), pp. 231-237.

WHITE, I., 1999. Student interest in academic issues during orientation. *HERDSA Annual International Conference*, Melbourne, 12-15 July 1999.

WHITTAKER, R., 2008. *Transition to and during the first year*. Glasgow: QAA Scotland.

WILCOX, P., WINN, S. and FYVIE-GAULD, M., 2005. 'It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people': the role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30 (6), pp. 707-722.

WILLIAMSON, G., JENKINSON, T. and PROCTOR-CHILDS T., 2008. *Nursing in contemporary healthcare practice*. Exeter: Learning Matters Ltd.

WOJTAS, O., 2008. MTV generation learns through fun. *Times Higher Education*, 11 September, p. 17.

WOOLCOCK, M., 2001. The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes. *ISUMA Canadian Journal of Policy Research*, 2 (1), pp. 11-17.

WYNNE, N., BRAND, S. and SMITH, R., 1997. Incomplete holism in pre-registration nurse education: the position of the biological sciences. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 26 (3), pp. 470-474.

YIN, R. K., 2003. *Applications of case study research*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE publications.

YIN, R., 1994. *Case study research: design and methods*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

YORKE, M., 2000a. The quality of the student experience: what can institutions learn from data relating to non-completion? *Quality in Higher Education*, 6 (1), pp. 61-75.

YORKE, M., 2000b. Smoothing the transition into higher education: what can be learned from student non-completion? *Journal of Institutional Research*, 9 (1), pp. 35-47.

YORKE, M., 2000c. A cloistered virtue? Pedagogical research and policy in UK higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 54 (2), pp. 106-126.

YORKE, M., 2001. Formative assessment and its relevance to retention. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 20 (2), pp. 115-126.

YORKE, M., 2003. Formative assessment in higher education: moves towards theory and the enhancement of pedagogic practice. *Higher Education*, 45, pp. 477-501.

YORKE, M. and LONGDEN, B., 2008. *The first-year experience of higher education in the UK: Final report*. The Higher Education Academy

ZEPKE, N. and LEACH, L., 2005. Integration and adaptation: approaches to the student retention and achievement puzzle. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 6 (1), pp. 46-59.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ADLER, P. S. AND KWON, S., 1999. Social capital: the good, the bad and the ugly. *A modified version of a paper presented at the 1999 Academy Management meeting, Chicago.*

ALLEN, M. N. and JENSON, L., 1990. Hermeneutical inquiry: meaning and scope. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 12 (2), pp. 241-253.

ALSTON, F. et al., 2008. *Introducing scholarship skills: academic writing.* Glasgow: QAA Scotland.

ANAGNOSTOPOULOU, K. and PARMER, D., 2008. *Practical guide: bringing together e-learning and student retention.* Middlesex University: Higher Education Academy.

ANNELLS, M., 1999. Evaluating phenomenology: usefulness, quality and philosophical foundations. *Nurse Researcher*, 6 (3), pp. 5-9.

ARCHER, L., HUTCHINGS, M. and ROSS, A., 2003. *Higher Education and Social Class, Issues of Exclusion and Inclusion.* RoutledgeFalmer: Trowbridge, Wiltshire.

ASMAR, C. et al., 2000. *The First Year Experience Projects.* Institute for Learning and Teaching: The University of Sydney.

BARIBALL, K. and WHITE, A., 1994. Collecting data using a semi-structured interview: a discussion paper. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 19 (2), pp. 328-335.

BEGLEY, C., 1996. Triangulation of communication skills in qualitative research instruments. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 24, pp. 688-693.

BOYLE, R., CARTER, J. and CLARK, M., 2002. What makes them succeed? Entry, progression and graduation in computer science. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 26 (1), pp. 3-18.

BRANNEN, J., ed., 1992. *Mixing methods: qualitative and quantitative research*. Aldershot: Avebury.

BRAXTON, J. M., VESPER, N. and HOSSLER, D., 1995. Expectations for college and student persistence. *Research in Higher Education*, 36 (5), pp. 595-612.

BRYMAN, A., 1993. *Quantity and quality in social research*. London: Routledge.

BURNS, N., 1989. Standards for qualitative research. *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 2 (1), pp. 44-52.

CANDY, P., 2000. Reaffirming a proud tradition: universities and lifelong learning. *Active Learning in Higher Education*. 1 (2), pp. 101-125.

CARLISLE, C., KIRK, S. and LUKER, K., 1996. The changes in the role of the nurse teacher following the formation of links with higher education. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 24 (4), pp. 762-770.

CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION, 2009. *The first year experience in Australian universities: Findings from a decade of national studies*. [online] Available from: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/assuring_quality_in_higher_education/first_year_experience_aust_uni.htm [Accessed 24 April 2009].

CLARKE, J. B., 1999. Hermeneutic analysis: a qualitative decision trail. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 36, pp. 363-369.

COAKLEY, A., 1997. Nurse education: attrition rates in the UK. *Nursing Standard*, 11 (48), pp. 45-47.

COOK, A. and LECKEY, J., 1999. Do expectations meet reality? A survey of changes in first-year student opinion. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 23 (2), pp. 157-171.

COOK, T., 2008. *Student Transition and Retention (The STAR Project)*. [online]. <http://www.ulster.ac.uk/star/index.htm> [Accessed 24 April 2009].

DAVIS, M., 2003. Barriers to reflective practice: the changing nature of higher education. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 4 (3), pp. 243-255.

DAVIES, P. and WILLIAMS, J., 2001. For me or not for me? Fragility and risk in mature students' decision-making. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 55 (2), pp. 185-203.

DEARNLEY, C., DUNN, G. and WATSON, S., 2006. An exploration of on-line access by non-traditional students in higher education: a case study. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 409-415.

DENZIN, N. and LINCOLN, Y., 1998. *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

DINGWALL, R. and MCINTOSH, J., eds. 1978. *Readings in the sociology of nursing*. London: Churchill Livingstone.

DRAUCKER, C. B., 1999. The critiques of Heideggerian hermeneutical nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 30 (2), pp. 360-373.

DUFFY, J., 2005. Recruitment drives fail as one in five student nurses quits before graduation. *Sunday Herald*, 25 September 2005.

EVANS, W. and KELLY, B., 2004. Pre-registration diploma student nurse stress and coping measures. *Nurse Education Today*, 24, pp. 473-482.

FIDLER, P. P., NEURURER-ROTHOLZ, A. AND RICHARDSON, S., 1999, Teaching the freshman seminar: its effectiveness in promoting faculty development. *Journal of the First-Year Experience*, 11 (2), pp. 59-74.

FINE, B., 2001. *Social capital versus social theory*. London: Routledge.

GIDMAN, J., HUMPHREYS, A. and ANDREWS, M., 2000. The role of the personal tutor in the academic context. *Nurse Education Today*, 20, pp. 401-407.

GREEN, A., PRESTON, J. and JANMAAT, J. G., 2006. *Education, equality and social cohesion*. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.

HAASE, J. and MYERS, S., 1988. Reconciling paradigm assumptions of qualitative and quantitative research. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 10 (2), pp. 128-137.

HALL, J. C., 2001. *Retention and wastage in FE and HE. The Scottish Council for Research and Education*. [online]. Available from: <http://www.scre.ac.uk/scot-research/wastage/summ.html> [Accessed on 13 April 2005, URL is no longer live].

HIGHER EDUCATION ACADEMY, 2004. *Curriculum Design Site Map*. [online]. Available from: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk> [Accessed on 24 April 2009].

HU, S. and KUH, G., 2001. Computing experience and good practices in undergraduate education: does the degree of campus wiredness matter?, *Prepared for presentation at the Annual Educational Research Association, Seattle*.

HUNT, A., LINCOLN, I. and WALKER, A., 2004. Term-time employment and academic attainment: evidence from a large-scale survey of

undergraduates at Northumbria University. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 28 (1), pp. 3-18.

HUNT, L., BROMAGE, A. and TOMKINSON, B., eds. 2006. *The realities of change in Higher Education*. London: Routledge.

HUTCHINGS, T. and SAUNDERS, D., 2001. Curriculum methodology: a case study in large-scale curriculum development. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 2 (2), pp. 143-163.

JANSEN, E. P. W. A., 2004. The influence of the curriculum organisation on study progress in higher education. *Higher Education*, 47, pp. 411-429.

JOHNSON, M., 1999. Observations on positivism and pseudoscience in qualitative nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 30 (1), pp. 67-73.

JONES, M. C. and JOHNSTON, D. W., 2006. Is the introduction of a student-centred, problem-based curriculum associated with improvements in student nurse well-being and performance. An observational study of effect. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 43, pp. 941-952.

JONES, M. C. and JOHNSTON, D. W., 2000. Reducing stress in first level and student nurses: a review of the applied stress management literature. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 32 (1), pp. 66-74.

JONES, S. M., KOUTALIS, A. and BROWN, N., 2003. *Why do they come and why do they stay? Meeting the needs and expectations of undergraduate students in the life sciences*. HERDSA conference proceedings.

JRASAT, M., SAMAWI, O. and WILSON, C., 2005. Beliefs, attitudes and perceived practice among newly enrolled students at the Jordanian Ministry of Health nursing colleges and institutes in 2003. *Education for Health: Change in Learning and Practice*, 18 (2), pp. 145-156.

- KANJI, G. K., 2006. *100 statistical tests*. 3rd ed. London: SAGE Publications.
- KAWACHI, I. et al., 2004. Commentary: reconciling the three accounts of social capital. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 33 (4), pp. 682-690.
- KINCHELOE, J. L. and BERRY, K. S., 2004. *Rigour and complexity in educational research: Conceptualizing the bricolage*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- KINSELLA, F. E., WILLIAMS, R. W. and GREEN, B. F., 1999. Student nurse satisfaction: implications for the common foundation programme. *Nurse Education Today*, 19, pp. 323-333.
- KOCH, T., 1994. Establishing rigour in qualitative research: the decision trail. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 19, pp. 976-986.
- KRAUSE, K., 2001. The university essay writing experience: a pathway for academic integration during transition. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 20 (2), pp. 147-164.
- LAIRD, T. F. N. and KUH, G. D., 2004. Student experiences with information technology and their relationship to other aspects of student engagement. *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting for Institutional Research*, Boston, MA.
- LAWN, C., 2006. *Gadamer: A guide for the perplexed*. London: Continuum.
- LINCOLN, Y. and GUBA, E., 1979. *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.
- LINGE, D. E., 1977. *Philosophical hermeneutics: Hans-Georg Gadamer*. London: University of California Press.
- LOBIONDO-WOOD, G. and HABER, J., eds., 2002. *Nursing research: methods, critical appraisal and utilisation*. 5th ed. London: Mosby.

LOGAN, C. R., SALISBURY-GLENNAN, J. and SPENCE, L., 2000. The learning edge academic program: towards a community of learners. *Journal of the First-Year Experience*, 12 (1), pp. 77-104.

MAILLOUX, C. G., 2006. The extent to which students' perceptions of faculties' teaching strategies, students' context, and perceptions of learner empowerment predict perceptions of autonomy in BSN students. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 578-585.

MAKINEN, J., OLKINUORA, E. and LONKA, K., 2004. Students at risk: students' general study orientations and abandoning/prolonging the course of studies. *Higher Education*, 48, pp. 173-188.

MILLER, K. et al., 2008. *Personal development planning (PDP) in the first year*. Glasgow: QAA Scotland.

MOSER, C. A. and KALTON, G., 1971. *Survey methods in social investigation*. 2nd ed. London: Heinemann Educational Books.

MOUSTAKAS, C., 1994. *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Ltd.

MUNTANER, C. and LYNCH, J. 2002. Social capital, class gender and race conflict, and population health: an essay review of Bowling Alone's implications for social epidemiology. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 31, pp. 261-267.

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTRE FOR THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION, 2009. [online]. Available from: <http://www.sc.edu/fye/resources/fyr/index.html> [Accessed 24 April 2009].

NAVARRO, V., 2004. Commentary: Is *capital* the solution or the problem? *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 33, pp. 672-674.

NELMS, T., 1996. Living a caring presence in nursing: a Heideggerian hermeneutical analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 24 (2), pp. 368-374.

NICOL, D., 2008. *Transforming assessment and feedback: enhancing integration and empowerment in the first year*. Glasgow: QAA Scotland.

OFORI, R., 2006. Measuring motivational orientations toward support-seeking: the development and predictive validity of the motives for tutorial support-seeking questionnaire. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, pp. 228-239.

OOTIM, B., 1998. Self-esteem. *Nursing Management*, 4 (10), pp. 24-25.

PEAT, M., DALZIEL, J. and GRANT, A. M., 2001. Enhancing the first year student experience by facilitating the development of peer networks through a one-day workshop. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 20 (2), pp. 199-215.

PEPLAU, H., 2003. Specialization in professional nursing. *Clinical Nurse Specialist*, 17 (1), pp. 3-9.

PHILLIPS, E. M. and PUGH, D. S., 2005. *How to get a PhD*. 4th ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

PINTO, J. B. T. and PEPE, A. M., 2007. Nursing education: contradictions and challenges of pedagogical practice. *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, 15 (1), pp. 120-6.

REVANS, R.W., 1964. *Action learning in hospitals: diagnosis and theory*. McGraw Hill.

REYNOLDS, K. C. and NUNN, C. E., 1998. Engaging freshmen in the classroom discussion: interaction and the instructor techniques that encourage it. *Journal of the First-Year Experience*, 10 (2), pp. 7-24.

RICKINSON, B. and RUTHERFORD, D., 1995. Increasing undergraduate student retention rates. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 23 (2), pp. 161-172.

ROBOTHAM, D. and JULIAN, C., 2006. Stress and the higher education student: a critical review of the literature. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 30 (2), pp. 107-117.

RODGERS, B. and COWLES, K., 1993. The qualitative research audit trail: a complex collection of documentation. *Research and Nursing in Health*, 16, pp. 219-226.

SEIDEMAN, I. E., 1991. *Interviewing as qualitative research: a guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. London: Teachers College Press.

SMITH, B., 1999. Ethical and methodologic benefits of using a reflexive journal in hermeneutic-phenomenologic research. *Image: Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 31 (4), pp. 359-363.

STENHOUSE, L., 1980. The study of samples and the study of cases. *British Educational Research Journal*, 6 (1), pp. 1-6.

TAYLOR, B., 1995. Interpretive approaches in nursing research: the experience of Husserl and Heidegger. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 21, pp. 827-38.

THE FOUNDATION OF EXCELLENCE IN FIRST YEAR COLLEGE PROJECT, 2002. [online]. Available from: <http://www.fyfoundations.org/projectOrigines.aspx>. [Accessed 02 August 2007, URL no longer live].

THOMSON, S., STRUCKER, C. and DROPELMANN, P., 1998. It hurts the most around the heart: a phenomenological exploration of women's anger. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 28 (2), pp. 311-322.

TIERNEY, A. et al., 1988. On measurement and nursing research. *Nursing Times*, 84 (12), pp. 55-58.

TINTO, V. and GOODSELL, A., 1994. Freshmen interest groups and the first-year experience: constructing student communities in a large university. *The Journal of Freshman Year Experience*, 6 (1), pp. 7-28.

TODRES, L. and WHEELER, S., 2001. The complementarity of phenomenology, hermeneutics and existentialism as a philosophical perspective for nursing research. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 30, pp. 1-8.

WASHINGTON, C. M., 1998. African-American freshmen in an historically black college. *Journal of the First-Year Experience*, 11 (1), pp. 39-62.

WELSH, I. And SWANN, C., 2002. *Partners in Learning*. London: Radcliffe Medical Press Ltd.

YORKE, M. et al., 1997. *Undergraduate non-completion in Higher Education*. Bristol: Higher Education Funding Council for England.

YORKE, M., and LONGDEN, B., 2004. *Retention and Student Success in Higher Education*. Maidenhead: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press

YORKE, M. and LONGDEN, B., 2007. *The first year experience in Higher Education in the UK: Report on Phase 1 of a project funded by The Higher Education Academy*. HEA.

LIST OF CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH PHD AND BOUND IN PUBLICATIONS

LINES, D. TAYLOR, R. and McClean, D., 2006, Enhancing the curriculum: empathy, engagement and empowerment. *Innovations in Student Success Conference*, Higher Education Academy, London, February.

TAYLOR, R., 2006. Interprofessional Education. *Poster presentation for Scottish Executive 10 out of 10 conference*, Edinburgh, December.

TAYLOR, R., 2006. Creating a connection: first year student experiences of curriculum enhancement. *iPed conference*, Coventry, September.

TAYLOR, R., 2008. First Year Enhancement, *Invited presenter to the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland Enhancement Themes Conference*, Edinburgh, March.

TAYLOR, R., 2008. Creating connections with the classroom experience, *Conference presentation, European First Year Experience Conference*, Wolverhampton, May.