EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF LOW-SES STUDENTS VIA ENABLING PATHWAYS

Dr Chad Habel, Dr Kirsty Whitman and Ms Jennifer Stokes

Acknowledgements

Dedication

This report is dedicated to Robert Graf, one of the first and best students of the University Preparatory Program. Robert's incredibly hard work and dedication to study, Nursing, and his fellow students and human beings is an ongoing inspiration for everyone involved in the Program.

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Executive Summary

This research had its earliest origins in a project at the University of Adelaide in 2013, which explored the experience of students (often of low-SES origin) in their enabling program, the University Preparation Program. Subsequently it became clear that it would be very useful to interview these students again once they had spent some time in their degree programs, as well as providing some inter-institutional data by partnering with The University of South Australia.

The project adopted an explicitly qualitative methodology, because the team was interested in the nuances of the lived experience of participants. Its theoretical framework combined Bourdieusian notions of habitus and cultural capital with insights from class theory and the growing emphasis on intersectional analysis in gender studies. Methodologically, it approached the collection and analysis of data from a phenomenological perspective to allow a focus on the lived experience of participants, rather than shaping their experience to the expectations of the researchers.

The findings of the research emphasised the stark diversity of experience that participants had. Overall they tended to have a positive experience of transformation and adaptation into academic culture, which can be broadly characterised as 'social mobility'. However, this was shaped by some selection bias as it proved to be almost impossible to gain the participation of students who had not had a successful experience of enabling education. At the same time, cracks in the façade appeared: several students had difficult or even traumatic experiences of adjusting to University study, and for one at least the pressures from her family and friends (as well as study/life conflicts) prevented her from undertaking her study. More than one student experienced a complete relationship breakdown, partly prompted by the life changes they were undergoing. We present this data through synthesised analysis, then as three separate case studies later on.

Ultimately the report found that while class/SES was a useful approach for understanding the student experience of enabling education and transition into degree-level study; this was just the beginning of the story. For example, for the women who experienced relationship breakdowns, this experience was heavily inflected by gendered narratives of their roles as wives, girlfriends and mothers, and their domestic role in the family. Other students experienced physical or mental health challenges that severely compromised their ability to easily adjust to their new academic environment. This means that many students experience multiple trajectories of disadvantage, and reifying this as 'class' does not do justice to their lived experience. Thus, aside from the standard recommendations that might emerge from a report such as this, our research suggests that incorporating some of the insights of intersectional analysis is a necessary step forward for research in the field.

Introduction

For decades in Australian Higher Education, one of the main alternative pathways for non-traditional students (broadly conceived) has been Enabling Programs.[1] Very distinct from entry programs for International Students (which often focus on language development and national/cultural adaptation), these programs are for domestic students who, for a variety of reasons, do not meet the requirements for traditional mainstream entry to university. Although these students are by definition very diverse, they very often come from what is commonly known as low socioeconomic backgrounds. They may be Indigenous; they may be non-native speakers of English; they may be older women or of various abilities, but they are very often working class.

There is often very good data on the participation rates and retention rates of non-traditional students; prompted by Commonwealth policy and funding structures, universities track the socioeconomic origins of students closely, and have a deep interest in the participation and retention rates of students of diverse origin. When it comes to students via Enabling Programs, such data is a little more patchy. These programs are often unique to the institutions that host them, so it is difficult to have standardised metrics across the sector. Moreover, students who enter via Enabling Programs often become 'mainstreamed' and tracking their progress can be difficult; continuing to treat them as a separate cohort is methodologically dubious, in any case.

Nonetheless, quantitative approaches to understanding the impact of these programs are common, even if much of this research is institutional data and may not be shared outside the boundaries of particular universities.

What has been sorely lacking though, is a nuanced understanding of the lived experience of students who undertake these programs. Aside from some notable exceptions (Levy & Treacy 2015), few researchers have undertaken to explore the experience of low-SES students in these programs in depth. To borrow the perhaps dubious parlance of reality television, what is their 'journey'? How do they see themselves through the process of their induction into academic culture? How do these transformations affect their personal relationships, and their outlook on life in general? These are the questions this research set out to answer, from an unapologetic qualitative stance.

In doing so the research aimed to work towards approaches that have not been implemented in either quantitative or qualitative work in the field. To begin with, it took an inter-institutional approach, exploring and comparing students in similar programs but in very different universities with very different missions: the University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia. Secondly, we aimed to explore the experiences of students who had proceeded at least some way through their Bachelor-level studies having come through Enabling Programs prior to their first year. Some of these participants had actually already been the subjects of research into their experience during their Enabling Program (Habel & Whitman 2016) Finally, we aimed to contact students who had, for some reason, discontinued their studies in the Enabling Program or during their Degree program, or had completed the Enabling Program but not proceeded on to a degree program for some reason. We had success with the first two aims, but encountered intransigent challenges in the final one.

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[1] These programs are variously referred to as Foundation Studies, Foundation Programs, Special Entry Programs, or Alternative Entry Programs, but henceforth we will adhere to the nomenclature 'Enabling Programs'.

In collecting and analysing the data, we implemented a methodology which was germane to the field. Principally, we pursued the research phenomenologically, meaning with a fixed focus on the lived experience of the subjects. Instead of identifying dominant themes or approaches that we wished to explore, we developed a loose structure for the interviews and then elicited the authentic lived experience of the students, analysing the data iteratively to further shape the collection and analysis until a fully-fledged picture of the student experience emerged. In parallel with this, the research took a class analysis as a methodology. Although it is common to explore these issues with reference to the term 'low-SES', the international literature tends to refer more to class as a central concept, in contrast to much Australian research in which class is somewhat invisible. In the course of our research we found that class, as a broad descriptor of social identity was more useful than SES, which tended towards a quantitative and mostly economic function.

Our findings demonstrate that the broad experience of students who have entered University via Enabling Programs is exceptionally rich and diverse, matching the diversity of these students' backgrounds. A major theme was a strong sense of gratitude to the institution and the program for giving them a 'second chance' at entering academic culture. However, students also reported a variety of fundamental difficulties in their transition toward academic culture, including some that perhaps are not uncommon for first-year students generally. In contrast, a particularly common experience (especially for women) included the breakdown of their intimate relationships with partners, as the social disjunction of entering a new academic pathway interfered with their domestic duties and identities. This understanding was a useful complement to the experience of students whose identities were complicated in multiple ways.

Ultimately, this research suggests important new directions for research into enabling programs. It affirms the importance of qualitative approaches to complement quantitative considerations of such programs, as well as the need to align with methodologies which elicit student experience in a natural and undirected manner. Most importantly though, it suggests the importance of considering multiple sites of disadvantage in addition to class when designing research into student experience. The social backgrounds of students are comprised of not just class, but also gender, race and ability that intersect in complex and unexpected ways. To ignore these other facets of student experience risks seeing student as mono-dimensional, which can severely confound the findings of any research.

Background

Student Equity in Higher Education in Australia

The Higher Education sector has undergone significant changes in the last 15 years, ostensibly in order to address social, cultural and economic inequalities regarding access and engagement. Removing caps on student numbers, developing enabling or foundation programs and providing support for non-traditional students have been just some of the methods employed in order to increase equity and access to Higher Education in Australia. In 2008 the Bradley Review of Higher Education made several key suggestions on how to increase participation from non-traditional students, many of which have been taken up by Universities in Australia.

> To increase the numbers participating we must also look to members of groups currently under-represented within the system, that is, those disadvantaged by the circumstances of their birth: Indigenous people, people with low socioeconomic status, and those from regional and remote areas (Bradley et al 2008: ix).

This project explores one such initiative, Enabling Programs, and how such programs impact on the experience of students from low-SES backgrounds. These programs were typically designed to address limited participation of students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds.

The Bradley Review recognised SES as a significant factor in determining access to higher education,

> Quite distinct differences exist in low socioeconomic status participation by type of institution, course level and field of study. Low socioeconomic status students are poorly represented in Group of Eight universities; most highly represented in agriculture and education; and poorly represented in architecture, law and creative arts. They are particularly under-represented in medicine, dentistry and economics. Low socioeconomic status students also comprise the majority of students in enabling courses (Bradley et al 2008).

The implementation of an enabling program at The University of Adelaide in 2012 was in reaction to the Bradley Review's recommendations (as explored below), and increasing participation is an implementation of the University of Adelaide's Strategic Plan: The Beacon of Enlightenment (2012: 6). In comparison the University of South Australia has equity and diversity as a core tenant of its founding legislation (Klinger and Murray, 2011). While enabling programs and other initiatives to increase participation have been implemented, their success is still questionable. The fairly inequitable paradigm as recognised by the Bradley Review seemingly has not changed since 2008. Furthermore the election of the Coalition Government in 2013 saw the introduction of a spate of policies that would arguably further entrench educational inequality. These policies included 'market driven approaches, such as university fee deregulation, a large reduction in funding to the sector, and both commencing students and those enrolled under the previous system paying increased, market determined interest rates on HECS-HELP' (Dinmore and Stokes, 2015). These policies are currently in hiatus, but with the re-election of the Liberal National Party Coalition government at the 2016 election in July, Higher Education policy has rarely been less stable. The possibility of a market-driven Higher Education sector clearly informs the choices of those from equity groups and makes reaching equity targets set by the Bradley review difficult.

Beyond the current political instability around Higher Education policy, there have been several problems in addressing inequity in Australian Higher Education, as explored by Harvey, Burnheim and Brett (2016). Recognising multiple marginalised groupings such as Low-SES students, Indigenous students, Students with disabilities and women in STEM fields (Dinmore and Stokes, 2015) has helped, however there is the potential to 'miss' particular marginalised cohorts, particularly those who exist at the intersections of multiple sites of disadvantage and marginalisation (Harvey, Burnheim and Brett, 2016, 4). Recognising the complex factors that have real-world effects on both the ability to access higher education (Stokes 2014) and the capacity of students to remain engaged (Michell 2015) is crucial if equity targets are to be reached and maintained. This project, while focusing on Low-SES students, hopes to open some of this dialogue in relation to both the commencement and retention of students (from sometimes multiple) recognised equity groups, and students whose specific disadvantages may as yet not get full recognition — for example students with domestic violence (DV) backgrounds, caring responsibilities and significant financial obligations. Indeed, one of our participants occupied a position at the intersection of all three of these factors, and many others were dealing with balancing paid work, welfare, caring responsibilities, and past trauma. This suggests that recent work on intersectional disadvantage needs to be brought into the discourse around low-SES student in Higher Education more broadly, and the role and operation of enabling programs specifically. The relative safety and collaborative and collegial environment of enabling programs therefore needs to be juxtaposed to the potentially less supportive spaces of University as an institution and a culture. Through in-depth interviews with a variety of students this project was able to explore sites of negotiation and difficulty, yet recognise the agency and tenacity involved in negotiating these spaces.

The University Preparatory Program (University of Adelaide)

The University of Adelaide initiated its University Preparatory Program (UPP) in 2012, and it is now delivered from the Faculty of Arts, one of the University's five faculties. It is a one year full-time equivalent program, but students with SACE or VET qualifications can apply for prior credit for up to 50% of the Program's units. The Program is delivered entirely on campus to align with the University's primarily face-to-face mode of delivery in its Bachelor-level degree programs.

Students undertake two core courses (University Culture and University Research), and up to six elective courses ranging from Academic Literacy and ICT Literacy to specific preparation for studies in Science and Social Sciences. The UPP has an internal application process: students apply for the program directly to the Faculty of Arts and they undergo an interview process aligned to specific admission criteria. Students are graded according to the University's standard marking scheme and their results are recorded on their transcript, while they have all the access to support and other services of any student in the University.

The UPP gives access to generalist degree programs such as the Bachelors of Arts, Science, Nursing, Teaching, Health Science, Social Sciences, Finance and Economics. Upon completion of the program students are admitted into a degree program of their choice, provided they have completed the required core courses; i.e. there is no competitive entry. The UPP is a relatively small course, with around 50-70 students at any one time.

The Foundations Studies Program (University of South Australia)

Foundation Studies at the University of South Australia is a one-year, full-time (or part time equivalent) program. At present, all students undertake four core courses focused on academic literacy, critical literacy or English language studies, individual and group skills, and information literacy and research skills. They then select four elective courses relevant to their preferred undergraduate program. The electives offer a wide range of content, including courses in anatomy, sociology, digital literacy, business fundamentals, algebra, and chemistry. The majority of UniSA College courses are taught at the City West CBD campus in Adelaide, South Australia; however, many elective and some core courses are available at alternative campuses, which reflects the distribution of disciplines across the university by campus. The program is also delivered online, and regionally to students in Whyalla and Mt Gambier.

Students apply for the program via standard tertiary admissions processes through the South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre. Students do not require any prior knowledge or experience to apply for the program; however, those who have completed a TAFE Certificate 4 or higher are not able to enter the university via this pathway and must explore alternate admissions pathways. All Foundation Studies students are Australian citizens, permanent residents and Humanitarian Visa holders. The program is not available to international students. The program is Commonwealth-supported, meaning that students only pay a Student Amenities Fee (which may be waived for Humanitarian Visa holders on application). In this way, the program is designed as a low risk pathway to university which supports the transition of students from equity groups.

Foundation Studies students earn a grade point average (GPA) throughout their year of studies, which they use to apply for entry to undergraduate programs. Students work hard throughout the year to earn a competitive GPA in order to gain a place in their preferred program.

The Foundation Studies program was established in 2006 (Klinger and Murray, 2011: 139). Student numbers rapidly increased once teaching was moved to the new UniSA College in 2011 and the College promoted by the university. The program is attractive to students from equity groups, with annual evaluation showing that over 50% of College students come from low socio-economic status backgrounds and around a fifth of students are from non-English speaking backgrounds. The College now also teaches Diploma programs alongside Foundation Studies, and there are over 1000 students studying at the College in 2016.

Theoretical Framework

Socio-Economic Status and Social Class

This project is concerned with the experience of students from low-SES backgrounds in Higher Education as they move from enabling programs into Bachelor degree programs. However defining socio-economic status creates theoretical tension, especially when taking social class into account. Much of the literature informing this project's theoretical background is based in social class theory as opposed to focusing merely on socio-economic status. Therefore a differentiation between the terms and a clarification of where they overlap and where they vary is necessary.

In Australia 'socio-economic status' is largely used as a quantitative measure of social, political and economic equality and disadvantage. The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines socioeconomic disadvantage 'in terms of people's access to material and social resources as well as their ability to participate in society' (ABS 2009). This is measured in relation to several key factors including 'income, consumption, wealth, education and employment' (ABS 2011). SES is used to influence policy and determine problems with equality across the population, taking in to particular account how specific groups are affected by disadvantage in various key areas such as health and education. SES and other measures of inequality such as poverty, wellbeing, social inclusion and human development are critical in informing policy and improving social, political and economic equity. However such determinants of wellbeing are often applied across populations, leading to broad generalisations for example through postcodes (Chesters and Watson 2013: 202). When undertaking qualitative research focused on individual experiences and personal narratives such as this project does, a less structured approach is needed.

While SES is useful in determining social inclusion and equity across the population, when considering the complexities of individual experiences as they relate to SES, social class theory may provide a more nuanced lens. Class theory has been a site of contestation in both academic and wider social discourses (Pini, McDonald and Mayes 2012: 143), however it has recently gained traction as a site of academic exploration and social and cultural resistance. Social class, while in part a measure of capital (economic, cultural and social) extends beyond SES. Class is a subjective and reflexive position, a way in which people are constructed as they construct themselves. Class is also spatial, occupying different positions within different spaces and places. This is demonstrated in the data collected for this project; participants were often acutely aware of their classed position, and how as they advanced through higher education their positions were shifting. The emotional and 'psychic' (Reay, 2005) work involved in occupying such shifting terrain therefore needs to be explored through a more poststructural reading of class than can be offered by only considering SES. Reay's assertion that 'the choice to move away and become different to the … family can evoke powerful feelings of anxiety, loss, guilt and fear alongside the more accepted emotional responses of hopeful anticipation, excitement and pride' (Reay, 2005: 921) was an ongoing theme throughout this research. In particular feminist perspectives on social class allow for a more nuanced reading of the data than can be supplied through simply applying SES to participant experiences.

In terms of how participants self-identified, we purposely used the term 'social class' in our interviews as opposed to 'low-SES' to avoid the negative associations attached to that term. Asking participants about their classed background allowed for them to identify themselves in classed terms beyond the economic. When discussing their classed

background many participants expressed a solidarity and cultural kinship that moves beyond economic status. Some participants did self-identify as low-SES, however this was often when expressing their experiences of poverty and the difficulties associated with being economically marginalised. When talking about their background and where they felt they fit culturally and socially, participants were far more likely to express these experiences in broader classed terms.

Bourdieusian Theory and Habitus in Higher Education

One of the theoretical frameworks applied to this research is a Bourdieusian approach with particular application of the theory of habitus. Bourdieu's theory allows us to conceive of universities as 'not neutral, value-free spaces dedicated to the disinterested ennobling of the mind; they are heavily encultured spaces, which by their very constitution rule out and exclude membership based precisely on social class' (Habel and Whitman, 2016: 73). While theories of social class may inform this research in terms of what we have defined as extra-institutional factors that influence low SES students' experience of Higher Education, the Bourdieusian theory of field, habitus and cultural capital allow us to more fully explore intra-institutional factors.

For Bourdieu the 'field' is space with particular cultural values and expectations, ways of being, ways of thinking, and ways of communicating. Within the 'field' of the university, such ways of being, thinking and communicating are often middle-class inflected (Keddie, 2008: 199). Students from low-SES backgrounds do not have the cultural capital, 'a form of knowledge, internalised code or cognitive acquisition' (Habel and Whitman, 2016: 74), that comes from familiarity with the field of the university. This lack of cultural capital will arguably impede the success of low-SES students (Keddie, 2008). 'If cultural capital is naturalised and habitus invisible, students are expected to transform themselves one way or another to make themselves amenable to the liberating effects of educational advancement' (Habel and Whitman 2016: 74).

Habitus and access to cultural capital inform student experience. Therefore, if universities are indeed classed institutions this will influence the experience of students who come from an alternative classed background. What this research also explored is students' awareness of how their 'lack' in terms of both cultural capital and habitus informed their experience of educational transformation. As much as participants were aware of their own classed subjectivities, they were also aware of the classed 'field' (Jenkins, 2002: 84) of the university, particularly those from the elite university. Our research shows that a student's relationship with both cultural capital and the field of the university is far more complex than one of 'lack'. While cultural capital or lack thereof has an impact on student experience, students do have agency when it comes to navigating the middle-class field of the university, as explored by Walkerdine (1997) and later by Hattam and Smyth (2015).

Intersections of Advantage and Disadvantage in relation to Higher Education

The focus of this project is how working-class (low-SES) students experience Higher Education when they have come through enabling programs. However the failure to recognise how ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age and ability intersect with class to shape how students experience their transition though Higher Education would be an oversight. Participant experiences were shaped by their classed backgrounds, but they were also

affected by their relationship with gender, ethnicity, age and ability in particular. Therefore the importance of intersectional theory and recognising the ways that student experience occurs across intersecting dimensions is key. While utilising Bourdieusian theories of field, cultural capital and habitus, we must also recognise some of the limits of Bourdieusian theory – one of such being that with its focus on class it may occlude the important role of gender, race, age and ability (Reay, 2004). The participants in this project had, for the most part, experienced certain aspects of higher education through the prism of their position as low-SES, however their gender, their ethnic background, their age and their health (mental and physical) also shaped these experiences.

Methodology

Phenomenology

In following on from previous research undertaken in 2013, this project has a distinct focus on the lived experiences of students from low-SES backgrounds. Therefore this research relies on a methodological approach that includes descriptive phenomenology, which has the advantage of taking in a holistic view of the person, their behavior and their experience (Giorgi, 2012 in Habel and Whitman 2016). Utilising a phenomenological account allows for a descriptive analysis of student experience rather than emphasising an interpretivist account (Giorgi 2012). As explored above, this project seeks to emphasise the experience alongside the ways that students navigate moving through and then from enabling programs into degree programs in their own words with a focus on their own experience, rather than trying to justify or account for 'data or the psychological reasoning behind the experience' (Habel and Whitman 2016: 75). We sought to allow the phenomenological experience of educational transition as experienced by low-SES students to inform this research; as a result we relied on personal narrative, story-telling, and researcher reflexivity.

In adopting descriptive phenomenology we have allowed for student experience to shape the research outcomes, as opposed to the researchers shaping the way data is presented. In doing so rich, narrative-driven data has been collected, data that 'tells' the complex stories of the diversity of low-SES student experience. It has also allowed us to consider the areas (such as external supports and economic considerations) in which narratives and experiences overlapped.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is a key component of many enabling programs, as it allows for the critique and deconstruction of systems of power, privilege and marginalisation. As Kress argues, 'embracing critical pedagogy, as a form of action, involves making a commitment to fighting oppression that emerges from and maintains these power inequalities that negatively impact peoples' lives' (2016: 262). Stokes in turn argues that utilising critical pedagogy within enabling programs makes educational sense, as it allows students who are more likely to come from equity backgrounds to critically assess their own marginalisation and the factors that may limit their access to and involvement with Higher education (2014: 121). Furthermore, critical pedagogy promotes progressive ideas and presents education as 'a political act' (Freire 1994 in Stokes and Ulpen 2015), one that empowers students. Critical pedagogy also deconstructs the more traditional teacher/student relationship based on authority. Students in enabling programs often arrive with a variety of life experiences, which need to be recognised and immersed within classroom culture. Lecturers and tutors also come with a subjective history. The more equitable collaborative learning approaches involved with critical pedagogy allow for students to utilise their real-world experiences and allows for teachers to not only 'teach' as a top-down action but to engage with students on a more meaningful and collaborative level. As Stokes and Ulpen argue, this grants students agency within their learning (2015: 59).

This was an important part of this project, as both the University of Adelaide Preparatory Program and the University of South Australia's UniSA College engage with critical pedagogical approaches, ones which ask students to examine certain academic and theoretical concepts through the prism of their own experience. For example in the

University of Adelaide's Preparation for the Study of Social Sciences course, students explored construction of the 'worthy' citizen through representations of welfare recipients. With a large proportion of the cohort being engaged with the welfare system and Centrelink services, this allowed them to challenge hegemonic social and cultural narratives taking into account their own experiences of marginalisation.

Qualitative Methodological Approaches

The use of quantitative methodology and large data subsets has been crucial in educational research, and indeed, has been used to show population wide trends in relation to higher education and low-SES and other marginalised student cohorts, for instance utilising data from the Australian Graduate Survey (Richardson, Bennett & Roberts 2016; Li, Mahuteau, Dockery, Junankar & Mavromaras 2016). However, while quantitative and mixed methodologies are excellent for determining trends and movements in relation to low-SES students this project explores experience, which requires qualitative approaches. Qualitative methodological approaches including grounded theory and interviewer reflexivity may not provide the breadth of data or precise measurements that quantitative approaches do, but they do things that quantitative approaches can't. For example, while quantitative data may be able to tell us how many students entering university through enabling programs come from low-SES backgrounds, only qualitative approaches can explore the nuances of these experiences to help shape discourse, policy and pedagogy in the light of authentic human experience.

This project relies on participant data that reflects the complexities of lived experience and how participants make sense of how they 'experience the world and/or how they make sense of it' (Gomm 2004: 7). This research prioritised participant voice and researcher reflexivity in order to produce research that provided a genuine reflection on not just what low-SES students experienced, but *how* they experienced.

The data collected was in the form of semi-structured, in-depth one-on-one interviews, most of which were between an hour and two hours duration. This allowed for a conversational tone and a development of a rapport between the interviewer and the participants. The data collected allowed us 'to experience [that which] is gained through talk' (Kitzinger 2004: 128). The open-endedness of the interviews and their conversational style allowed participants to explore their experience in their own words on their own terms. Adopting a qualitative methodology with roots in feminist theory also allows for the recognition of the researcher's subjective position, and offers a more nuanced perspective on the relationship between researcher and researched, one that does not maintain what Margarit Eichler classes a 'top-down' relationship between researcher and participant (1997: 13). Kathy Charmaz argues that 'qualitative researchers can find another way of seeing, of gaining a deeper view. Conducting innovative, incisive, and thorough research breaks down barriers and moves boundaries' (2008: 15). Considering the nature of this project and the reliance on personal narratives, the qualitative approach undertaken allowed for a depth and complexity of data and to explore low-SES student experience *as they themselves experienced it*.

Participants and Procedures

Participants

Overall we undertook 20 in-depth interviews with participants ranging from 1-2 hours duration. Of those 20 participants 12 were current or former students at the University of Adelaide, and 8 were current or former students at the University of South Australia. Of the 12 Adelaide students, 6 had been interviewed for a previous project, and so an iterative and reflexive methodology was adopted.

In terms of gender 14 participants were women and 6 were men. 14 identified as 'working-class', and 6 discussed issues with physical health, mental health or both. In terms of their degree programs, the most common pathways were Science for students from the University of Adelaide (6 participants) and health sciences, including nursing, for participants from the University of South Australia (4 participants), with 7 from the health sciences in total. 3 participants were undertaking Arts degrees, 2 Business degrees, and 1 student was undertaking a Teaching degree. Whilst the project sought a broad cross-section of different degree programs, selecting a large number of Science students was a deliberate strategy since it is relatively uncommon for Enabling Programs to provide a pathway to this degree.

Procedures

Development of this project initially began in 2012 with the previous project 'Exploring student experience in the University of Adelaide Preparatory Program' funded by the School of Education, then located in the Faculty of Professions. Twelve students who were enrolled in the UPP or had recently completed were interviewed, and the data collected provided the locus for this project. What the researchers found was that overwhelmingly students had very mixed experiences of educational transformation, undergoing both positive and negative experience (Habel and Whitman 2016). Furthermore, these experiences were largely informed by the classed positions of students, with most interviewed being low-SES, or identifying as working-class (as explored above). This data clearly indicated a need for further research taking a more pointed approach to class, SES, and student transformation; suggesting opportunities for research considering how this transformation operates at a nexus of positive and negative experience, which students needed to navigate.

The first methodological step was applying for ethics approval; this was done in two separate processes for each university (University of Adelaide ethics number H-2015-126 and University of South Australia ethics number 00000034730). Whilst ethics was being considered an interview schedule was developed building on data collected in the previous 2012/2013 study, with a slightly different interview schedule developed for University of South Australia participants (see appendix a and b). In particular the interview schedule relied on the phenomenological approach previously discussed to ask student about their experiences on a general, but also on a more detailed level. We asked participants to explain and explore individual circumstance and occurrences, and how they navigated these – in particular we asked about both positive and negative experiences.

Students from The University of Adelaide were interviewed in 2015, and then students from the University of South Australia were interviewed in 2016. The first round of interviews was undertaken with students who had been interviewed in early 2013. Six students were initially interviewed in August 2015, and all were given the chance to revisit

their previous interviews through the provision of transcripts. The second round of interviews were conducted with students who had not been interviewed previously. These students were chosen specifically to explore the experience of students undertaking a Bachelor of Science, and mostly occurred in September and October of 2015.

Key Findings

Transition to New Environment (Enabling Program to Degree Program)

The 2013 project that preceded this research explored the experience of students in a foundation program at an elite university. In this research students spoke of change on both a personal and an academic level, and narratives were constructed in terms of 'journeys'. What came out of that project was an overwhelming expression of the positivity of the experience of being in a foundation program coupled with the difficulty of undergoing an educational and classed transformation. However what was also revealed was the difficult transition many students underwent moving from the relative collegiality and highly supportive environment of foundation studies into the less personalised setting of bachelor degree programs. Students spoke of challenging transitions from being in all their classes with the same 40 students to finding themselves commencing a degree in a cohort of 300. There were also comments about the accessibility of staff, the less diverse nature of the student cohort, and the sense of being 'thrown in the deep end'. Coming from this data we wanted to explore how moving from foundation programs into Bachelor degree programs was experienced by low-SES students, and how they navigated this change.

In relation to the 'shock' of moving into 'big-kid uni' (as described by several participants), difficulty of transition was largely affected by several factors: the university attended, the availability of individual staff members, and most crucially the size and diversity of the student cohort in the degree programs students entered. There was some variation in data between the two universities, with University of Adelaide students feeling there was less student diversity than many of the students from The University of South Australia. This was particularly mentioned in relation to the student body being largely composed of school-leavers and younger students. For example R (23) explains:

> … I think I felt more intimidated going into uni, because I felt like there were kids that had just finished school and they all just hop into uni and it's like, they've just finished fresh off schooling, so they're already ahead of us in a sense, as silly as that may be. But I feel like they really know what they're doing more than us (R, 23, No longer attending, UoA).

This was not unique to students from the University of Adelaide however. SB also struggled with the difference in age between herself and the majority of the cohort in her Medical Radiation degree, which she discusses in relation to the question about how enabling program compares to the bachelor degree program in relation to immersion into university culture:

> … probably with foundation studies there were a lot more mature-aged people in foundation studies, and obviously coming into Medical radiation there's not that many. So for my first year because I think the only next older person to me was a 30-year-old-person, and like, here I am in my 40s and there's 30-year-olds; most of

> them are all 18, 19, 20, you know and then it went from like 20, 21 and it went to my friends Saba, who's 30, and then there was me who was — I think 41 or something like that, and it was really really struggling because you've got that age barrier … I did find it harder in that first year (S, 44, Bachelor of Medical Radiation, UniSA).

However after taking time out to have her third child she returned to a much more diverse cohort and found herself more 'in-sync':

> … So it meant that when I went into the next year, the following year that started intake, and there were a lot more mature aged students in that one. There's quite a few actually … One good thing about it is that, with this particular year especially, is that there's other people — we all seem to have been able to group together and help each other out. If you're a little bit unsure about this. You sort of ask this person, and it seems a lot better. I don't know, it's better team-work (S, 44, Bachelor of Medical Radiation, UniSA).

ST also discussed the differences between foundation studies and 'big kid uni', this time in relation to class sizes, however, she also discussed how foundations studies gave her the confidence to overcome the obstacles presented by being in a far larger, less collegial environment:

> …It's hard going from that small UPP class size to 300, 400 student class size, but it works really well in tutes. It's not as stressful or as nerve wracking to just talk about stuff, like talk about assignments or questions, because that's what we do in the UPP. We just talk about everything (S, 24, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

L felt that the large size yet relative lack of diversity within the student cohort of her degree (nursing) contrasted unfavorably with the collegiality within her enabling program and the sense of belonging she found in the Indigenous student's unit:

> Facilitator: Are there any aspects of the university culture that you still feel distanced from, or marginalised by?

> L: Lots of things. I can't name them, because I don't know them. But whatever I wasn't involved in, I just didn't feel like I was in the girl's club with nursing, you know. I just didn't make it.

> Facilitator: Do you feel like it was quite cliquey?

> L: Yes, it was (L, 29, Bachelor of Nursing, UniSA).

Lack of collegiality wasn't a problem for all students however, and some found the transition from their enabling program to their bachelor degree to be relatively smooth in terms of collegiality, however for both of the following participants, the social aspects of university weren't as important as they were to some other participants. This may explain the ease with which they moved from their Foundation Programs to their Bachelor Degrees:

> M: I've met some really lovely people. Like, I've met young, and even younger ones than I am, some of the young ones, I've made nice friends. I've met their mothers and that's been really nice. So I don't have any problems that way … Yes, I do like it, but I like working on my own as well. I prefer to work on my own, but I don't mind

meeting people, and I will meet them, and if you've done an assignment or something and maybe you look over it with a person, but I like to work it out by myself. Then afterwards I will talk to them about it, but I have to work it out by myself (M, 53, UoA, Bachelor of Behavioral Science, UoA).

M: It's very different, and I think as well because I am an older student, I don't necessarily mix with people who are 18 years or 20 years younger. They spend a lot of time on campus, because I don't, so if they are doing work together in the hub or something, they get to know each other more, maybe, and chat more. Otherwise you just come in (M, 38, Bachelor of Psychological Science, UoA).

Accessibility to staff was also another area in which enabling programs differed from Bachelor degree programs, as explained by ST after she had discussed the close relationships with and accessibility to staff in the UPP:

Lecturers that I don't see regularly; there's a couple of my Biology lecturers that — we have them for three weeks, and then I'll never see them again. We don't have that same relationship (S, 24, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

S also found a difference between accessibility to staff in her bachelor degree from her foundation program, however she put it down to the different roles, approaches, and teaching styles of staff members:

I sometimes wonder whether it's the actual lecturer who is replying or whether it's a teacher's assistant or a tutor or one of their PhD students. Some of them, my Chemistry lecturer, replies really quickly, which I am happy with, incredibly happy with. But some of the other lecturers take days. If it's a really important question and you really need an answer, you can't do anything. Even if you're writing on the discussion board, it could still take a couple of days for them to reply, which is not helpful feedback. It's really hard to get feedback (S, 28, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

Other students noted that the level of support was greater in their foundation programs, as C argued when asked about accessibility to staff in his undergraduate degree:

Probably not. I think in foundation studies they're really targeting those who are wanting to succeed and really push you to get the best out of yourself. They give you numerous amounts of opportunities to have access to the tutors, the lecturers, extra classes, they will often sit down with you after class if you have questions … whereas in university now it's limited contact with lecturers and tutors after the class itself (C, 26, Bachelor of Teaching, UniSA).

SB also felt there had been more support in her foundation program, which she directly correlated to the diversity of the student cohort in the foundation program, and the likelihood that those students are more likely to be from a marginalised background particularly in relation to education advantage:

There's more help in foundation studies, heaps more help. I think because they understand where people are coming from, the background of where they've either struggled at school, so they haven't been able to form that good study pattern for whatever reason, or they're coming from having no study pattern whatsoever. So yes, there is definitely a lot more help with foundation studies as opposed to here with uni. You're pretty much on your own at uni, except for like I said, you know, a

few course coordinators (S, 24, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

The positivity of experience in enabling programs and the level of support from both staff and students was clearly an important factor in student success in foundation programs, and in preparing them for their bachelor degrees, Furthermore these positive experiences were for many, the first positive experiences of education they had. This is explored below in considering responses to the question about their overall experience of foundation studies.

Positive experience of enabling programs

Overwhelmingly students spoke of their experience in their enabling programs in positive terms. Most of the participants expressed a belief that their enabling program provided a basis for moving into their bachelor degree programs, without which many would have felt lost. There were several key areas in which enabling programs provided this positive experience. While these will be discussed below — particularly in relation to the building of skills and self-efficacy, the overall transformation was noted by many of the participants when asked about their overall experience of their enabling program:

> Very positive. It completely changed my life, I think. Without it, I would probably still be in retail telling myself I wasn't good enough (M, 28, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

> To me it was an important moment which set me up and gave me sort of more resilience, maybe a confidence (M, 38, Bachelor of Psychological Science, UoA).

> I will continue, and I always have, advocating for it. I just think it's fantastic. There's people that I know that are thinking of education, and I explained how good the UPP was (R, 48, Bachelor of Nursing, UoA).

Other students talked about how it helped prepare them overall for bachelor degree studies:

> I think it prepared me because it gave me the confidence to continue. One of the reasons I did it was I thought if I just got through that, at least I sort of had something (B, 53, Bachelor of Arts, UniSA).

> I don't think I could have written an essay, like structured an essay and things like that before I did foundation studies. Especially with me leaving school so young, I don't think I could have handled the workload if I'd gone straight to uni (L-M, 25, Bachelor of Business, UniSA).

> I loved it, actually. I felt extremely challenged and it was good because I hadn't felt that challenged in a long time, and it wasn't the kind of challenge that wasn't achievable. It was well within my grasp, and there was so much — I guess there was a lot of support from the staff to say, hey, you are capable of doing this clearly. Like. You're doing it. I think that was good. By the time I'd finished it, I felt really rewarded and ready (S, 25, Bachelor of Computer Science, UoA).

These types of testimonials as to the positive experience of foundation studies were common throughout the interviews, with most students expressing positive memories of their time in their foundation programs generally. It was when discussing less generalised

and more personal experiences of transition however that student's experiences became far more ambiguous, with conflict between positive experiences of education and personal transformation, and the difficulties they faced in navigating these changes, difficulties exacerbated by internal (institutional) and external factors. These are explored in the next section.

Space and Place: The importance of spatial relationships to University

When discussing feelings of immersion into the university culture, or feeling 'a part of' the student body, many participants discussed the importance of space and place as providing a sense of belonging. While we were expecting discussions about culture, class and 'fitting-in' the importance students from low-SES backgrounds placed on developing a spatial relationship to the university was one of the foremost areas for discussion.

> What I found was really helpful with the UPP which I still find really great today is I understand in the Uni where everything is … now I understand and have a great idea, and it's not like, oh, where would this be, or you're just sort of seeking it out by yourself (W, 50s, Bachelor of Social Science, UoA)

There were some discrepancies in discussions of spatial relationships with the university between students from the University of South Australia and the students from The University of Adelaide. However there are several logical reasons behind these differences. Students from the University of Adelaide were located wholly at the North Terrace campus, for both their foundation and bachelor degree programs. The University of South Australia participants were located across all four campuses: City East, City West, Magill and Mawson Lakes. The spatial relationships they developed with the university depended on which campus they attended. Students from the City East campus spoke about their connection to the space, and how there was a knowledge that that particular space was for students from Health Sciences. In the following exchange P discusses the sense of collegiality that comes from knowing all the students within the space of the City East Campus are in degrees which will 'help people':

> F: What aspects of the university culture are you comfortable with?
>
> P: The culture?
>
> F: The overall sort of sense of belonging that you've got. You talked a bit about space …
>
> P: Yes. The Nutrition and Dietetics Hub … and across from that is where all your teachers' offices are at. I guess we're just all in that area, and you do feel like … This is all Health Science, like, you have your podiatry, Exercise Physiologist, your Nutritionist and that all in this space, but if you went down to City West, that's where you've got all your journalists and your artists, and you go out to Mawson Lakes and that's like Engineering and Maths and all that. So I think knowing when you walk around here you're all undertaking a Bachelor which is going to help people, so Nutrition and Physiologists and Occupational Therapists, like, we're all under the same head. I feel like I'm trying to get to a word, I just can't think of it.
>
> F: Kind of in the same discipline?

P: Yes. So we're all doing that same discipline, yes. I think that's why you do just feel included, because you know that you're really undertaking subjects that people are going to need in all aspects (P, 24, Bachelor of Nutrition, UniSA).

They also discussed the ease with which study and quiet space could be found at City East:

They have their designated spaces to go, that are no-talking zones, so they're quiet zones. So you have those zones where you have your communal zones. Never had any problems getting a computer of getting a place to study. There's always space (S, 45, Bachelor of Medical Radiation, UniSA).

This contrasted sharply with the students who were mostly located at City West. They largely felt very little connection to the campus, and indeed some utilised services on other campuses, as discussed by N:

I used to always be at Mawson's 24-hour centre for studying at night. It was just more helpful to me than studying in the morning or afternoon. I feel like going to uni at night was just like, ok, I'm at uni, I'm just going to sit here and do my work. No one is going to bother me. I find it a little bit stressful at City West because there's a lot of students and you can never find a spot to just sit there. Sometimes you can, and I just pull my iPad out and watch one of my lectures that I've missed (N, 22, Bachelor of Business, UniSA).

I would think it would depend on the campus, but my experience at City West, it's sort of come in, do your thing, leave. No one really socialises, and there's a lot of external students as well (LM, 25, Bachelor of Business, UniSA).

Many of the students from The University of South Australia developed a spatial relationship with the College building as it provided a dedicated student lounge for students from the foundation program:

Yes, felt home, definitely. I think that was something that was removed from me. It was almost like, where do we go hang out when we're not in class? Before a class, if we were over here, we'd all sit in that room, and then hang out. They've got bit lounges and stuff that you can sort of chill out on, and then you'd go into your class and then you could just go from there, whereas at uni now you're sort of stuck in a corridor and you just sit around talking until you go into your class (C, 26, Bachelor of Teaching, UniSA).

Yes, it was just comfortable. It was smaller. The massive Jeffrey Smart building is fine with its computers and things, but it was small, it had desks for your laptop, it had, like 10 computers, a couple of tables and chairs, some comfy chairs, a blackboard you could write things on; it, was just a comfy place to sit. Because it was smaller, and it only ever had 10, 15 students in it, it was just a lot more private and relaxing than going to the library and being in a massive building with computers everywhere and things like that.
So it was more comfortable, private sort of space where you could just relax. You got comfortable with it, because all the tutorial rooms are just off that community room, so it was where you sort of hung out when you were in the College, whereas you don't have that on the main campus [City West] so much, because your

tutorials could be at one end to the other end, sort of thing. Because this is all in one small building, you just spend a lot more time there (LM, 25, Bachelor of Business, UniSA).

The students from the Foundation Program at The University of Adelaide didn't have a specific allocated space as did the students from The University of South Australia, however they still made a connection with the space in which most of the Foundation Programs were taught:

> F: Is there anything else you think was important in terms of the difference between the Bachelor degree and the UPP?
>
> R: Like I said, I liked being in the Nexus building, because all your classes are basically in there; the computer room was in there; everything was there.
>
> F: That's really interesting. Do you feel like it was a space for you, that this is our space, whereas once you go — because Arts is located in the Napier building, but then everything is located everywhere. So you don't have that connection with space?
>
> W: Yes, and we all sort of got together in the Nexus Building and we'd sit downstairs in the Nexus building and it was very familiar.
>
> R: There wasn't so many uni students, it seemed like, even to me. It was a lot our space, so it was sort of like you didn't feel intimidated or like, oh my god! I'm into this big wide world of where am I or anything like that. I used to love having — when our classes were in that building, it was like …
>
> W: I still go to the Nexus Building, and I sit in the same rooms and sit in there quietly studying. It's like, I know it's my safety place.

The allocation of space to specific groups of students resulted in some students feeling like it was difficult to find a space that they could use, potentially adding to a sense of spatial disengagement, as explained by M:

> F: Are there any areas where you feel more could be done to immerse students, particularly students from non-traditional backgrounds?
>
> M: I think study space. I know it probably sounds silly because there's tonnes of it everywhere, but there are some areas which are only for certain students. And once you find that out, it becomes scary trying to go around and find anywhere that you can sit down and be comfortable and get everything done. So I think a little bit clearer direction on where you can go to do things.

Self-efficacy and confidence

A key site of student success and development in enabling programs, anecdotally speaking, is confidence in their ability to undertake study, which is linked to more general notions of self-worth. Previous research has distilled this notion into academic-self-efficacy, which is a particular site of transformation for non-traditional students in enabling programs (Habel 2012). This research found measurable increases in self-efficacy for

students undertaking enabling programs, especially in domains which were focused on within the program. Participants began by talking quite generally about their confidence in being able to succeed at University:

> I didn't have confidence. I just felt like uni wasn't for me. I'm just like, doing that assignment, and it was just like an easy bibliography assignment, but it was just something that I'd never done before and I had to use references that I'd never done…. Then when I got my grade back, I was just really surprised. I was like, wow, he actually liked it! This is, what? I'm smart. So that kind of just motivated me more, that I wasn't an idiot, like I could do things. (N, 22, Bachelor of Business, UniSA).

This kind of general concern with self-concept is often reinforced by a sense of being alone, or particularly challenged by the independent nature of the set tasks.

> Yes, I guess I was concerned, just with my writing, because when you're at university, you don't have teachers telling you exactly what to write. You've got to do the research; you've got to find everything out; you've got to put it into your own words, and they scare you with this plagiarism, and you don't want to be caught out, so you do have those concerns. Like, am I going to be able to get the results that I need to get into my Bachelor, so I guess, yes, that's how I felt when I got those high distinctions and distinctions. That was a good feeling, knowing that I could do the Bachelor. (P, 24, Bachelor of Nutrition and Food Science, UniSA)

Arguably, this kind of experience might be common with all students who are relatively new to studying in the University environment. However, it is particularly acute for low-SES students who lack the habitus and cultural capital to feel 'in place' within a University environment to begin with. In this case the development of self-efficacy becomes particularly transformative.

Despite the overall positive story around the development of domain-specific self-efficacy, doubt lingers for some students, suggesting that it's not simply a case of overcoming self-doubt and resolving all those issues at once:

> I've actually improved immensely. I've done really well, I think, in that way, but I still feel unsure about myself. But I can do it if I have to do it. Last semester we had to download a software program for our statistics. I didn't really want to have to do that at all, but I did it, and I got through, and I had to learn how to use — it was like coding to put into the software…. I actually felt that was a really big thing for me, because I did it. I just had to follow what he said, but really it was good, because I didn't think I could do that. He said, if you have problems, come in, but I didn't have to go into him, because I was able to work it. I actually ended up, I was able to reshape the data, then make my graphs. But it's not my favourite pastime. (M, 53 Bachelor of Behavioral Science, University of Adelaide)

Often students discussed time management as an area in which they felt they needed to develop their skills, however when pushed to consider the various factors many of them were juggling (such as children, work, family responsibilities, health and mental health issues) they realised that in fact, they had developed very good time management skills considering the obstacles many of them faced when setting aside time to study:

> I think I've become better with my time management, with me organising my times and things like that. So I've become better at that, but I've also become a bit of a

Nazi at it, too, which is probably not a good thing either, but anyway, it has to be. So that's helped me, I guess, with that side of things. I've improved in that in a lot of places, but also able to help my own kids with their studies as well, especially with my eldest one who's going through high school. I've been able to help him with his assignments and things like that. (S, 44, Bachelor of Medical Radiation, UniSA)

When students are beginning study and becoming familiar with the context of University work, they begin by speaking about domain-specific self efficacy in a general sense, i.e. 'I need to get better at time management'. However, in these interviews, for students who had settled more into academic culture and developed their self-efficacy regarding time management (for example), they are able to speak in much more detail about the specific strategies they use:

> Then I've got uni studies and a social life outside of that [sport and mentoring]. I've got a girlfriend; there's so many things that you sort of have to juggle into your week, I think just getting that stiffer balance between being able to enjoy myself and also being able to refine that and bring it back to making sure that I am getting the grades that I want and achieving a good standard at uni. (C, 25, Bachelor of Teaching, UniSA)

One area that students often identified as a particular challenge was undertaking examinations, especially large examinations in vast venues. Although there was a general story of resilience and survival, many students felt that it would always be an area they would struggle with:

> I realise my limits as well…. For the research skills in Psychology, the exam was really hard. I felt it was really hard, and I had been sick. I had a problem with my kidney, so I had an extension from my exam, and then I did the exam, and when I looked at it, there was no multiple choice, it was horrible, and it was just the scenarios in the exam were very long, and I just panicked. I wasn't even going to do the exam. I was really, really tough on myself, and I know I had worked really hard, and I was so disappointed. But I did the best I could, but I ran out of time, and I didn't get to finish one of the questions, and I really thought I'd failed it. Then I wouldn't be able to go on to the next year. But it worked out okay. I got a credit. But I beat myself. Actually I was so cross with myself when I came out from the exam, I was crying. It's a terrible thing. (M, 53 Bachelor of Behavioural Science, University of Adelaide)

Nonetheless, even the most challenging experience of doing exams is often something that is endured, and participants felt that they would survive:

> I struggle a lot when it comes to exams times. I guess that knowledge as to compiling all your knowledge and be able to break it down so that when a question is asked you can remember it. I still struggle with that. When it comes to exams, I still struggle with that. You try all sorts of different techniques, but at the end of the day it's an area I'm going to struggle with. I think it comes more from anxiety level. It's like, oh my God, it's exams. (S, 44, Bachelor of Medical Radiation, UniSA)

Ultimately, the stories that participants tell about their developing sense of academic self-efficacy aligns with their experiences of adjusting to academic culture more broadly. While there are improvements to both a generalised sense of self (self-concept) as well as domain-specific task achievement (self-efficacy), there are still areas that prove to be

challenging or difficult to adjust to. This suggests that the journey towards fitting in within an academic culture at university always involves unfinished business.

Foundation Programs and Developing Skills: Academic Literacies

Enabling programs provide a space for students to become familiar with the requirements of university study and develop study practices which they will carry on into their degrees. Many of the interviewees highlighted the need for developing academic skills in a supported environment in order to transition effectively:

> …writing an academic essay. I don't think I'd written an essay since grade 7 before coming here, and that was like: what did you do in your holidays? So yes, it's been quite a big learning curve that way. It's just been something very positive, but at the same time challenging and quite different to what I was always used to. (B, 53, UniSA, Bachelor of Arts).

Interview participants felt that their foundation studies prepared them well for university study, and allowed them to develop the necessary skills to successfully undertake their bachelor degree programs. A focus on academic literacies provided students with the skills and confidence to undertake university level tasks:

> I know a lot of kids who I'm friends with at uni now, they still struggle with the referencing and academic writing and the different styles of writing that are required, whereas that's covered quite a lot in the Foundation Studies course. (C, 26, UniSA, Bachelor of Teaching).

> N: I liked it. I enjoyed that. It was like a course that prepared me for uni, like, my undergrad, so I learnt referencing, I learnt how to do research. I remember doing a course of skimming and scanning the books and see what it meant. It kind of prepared me for uni. I'm happy that I did it, because I feel like if I did get into my undergrad, I wouldn't have any idea. Like, I feel like I would have just not done well.

> F: Do you feel like that taught you how to be —

> N: Yes, it taught me how to do uni work. I remember doing my first assignment within my undergrad, and I smashed it. Like, I did really well, but I knew what I was doing. Like, I knew what research I had to do; I knew what I had to look for. I knew how to reference; I knew how to do quotations and stuff. I feel like if I went to uni straight after school, I wouldn't have no idea, and I would have done what I would have done in high school. So it helped me a great deal, yes. (N, 22, Bachelor of Business, UniSA).

Students reflected on how their growing academic abilities provided an advantage in some undergraduate tasks:

> C: I think sitting in classes to do speeches is something that is unbelievable. People coming out of high school are so self-conscious, and have that internal thought that everyone is judging them and everyone is in that — whereas coming from Foundation Studies they really highlight the fact that you're up there, everyone is going to do it, so you're going to have to do it in your academic life or in your professional life. It's something you have to get used to, and they build a lot of

strategies around dealing with how to publicly speak and how to stand up in front of a group of people and talk about something that's academic.

That was something that I found valuable again, to go into my first class and sit up the front and be able to read off a sheet and say exactly what I thought, and then be able to go sit down with confidence, whereas those who got up there and they're shaking, holding the paper, and they're nervous — I can completely understand it. I come from the same background at 17, 18; I got up there, and I'm going, ooohhh, I don't want to talk in front of people.

F: Yes, and it's quite terrifying. Not everybody gets over that.

C: No, and it's something that you can either learn to grow and get a better feeling about yourself up there, but then to sort of sit there and hide in your shell, it's never going to get better.

F: No. Like you said, that is a crucial skill. At some point nearly everybody is going to have to do some form of public speaking.

C: Exactly, whether or not it's to five people on a board or whether or not it's to your boss, you've got to make a presentation about what you've done, there's always times where you're going to have to speak about a subject, even in a social setting. Just sitting in a social setting, you're going to talk about specific times or specific dates; there's something that's going to come up where you need to be succinct with what you're saying, in an argument, even, to have that same ability to be able to project yourself, have the confidence to sort of believe in what you're doing. (C, 26, UniSA, Bachelor of Teaching).

However, some students identified gaps in the preparation for their bachelor degree:

I guess the only thing I probably would have preferred with Foundation Studies is if I was put under an exam situation. I wasn't put under any exam situation. But then again, probably if I'd chosen Physics, I would have been put under exam situation, but I didn't; I chose — I can't think — I think I chose some sort of financial thing as my Maths component. So yes, I wasn't put under any exam, so that could have been something that I probably could have done. (S, 45, Bachelor of Medical Radiation, UniSA).

The enabling programs were about more than just practical skills development; a focus on cultural capital and institutional habitus helped students understand how to *become* a university student. Activities undertaken helped students understand university language and culture, alongside their own learning style and ways to develop effective study habits as independent adult learners.

It taught me something about me and how I learnt that I didn't even know. It brought that out in me and put it in front of my eyes and said: this is how you learn; this is what you do. It was basically a reflection of how I learnt. So it was a really good thing for me. (W, 50s, BSocSci Adelaide)

But I feel like, with the basis that I'm coming from, Foundation Studies, I'm not so reliant on the tutor or the lecturer anymore. (C, 26, UniSA, Bachelor of Teaching).

Students also discussed how their enabling programs allowed them to discover their own ways of 'being' a student, and which approaches to study worked best for them.

> Mum used to stress out so much, and I'd say, oh, who cares. We had such different ways of looking at even our assignments, and mum would be one thing, and I'm like, what are you even talking about. All right, that doesn't mean that. She's like, yes it does, and it was funny — one thing I used to think, it's like, frickin' hell, we think so differently and there's so many different — she interprets things completely different to what I would have got from that. It was really fun to even learn that. (R, 23, UoA, No longer attending).

As students developed academic literacies through their enabling program studies, they felt more comfortable at the institution which led to further development and confidence in their growing abilities.

Transformation, Class and Habitus: Challenges, Negotiating Change and Resilience

There are a variety of challenges faced by low-SES students in Higher Education, many of which have been discussed in previous research (Habel 2012; Habel & Whitman 2016). Of these challenges, negotiating educational and classed transformations have been a major focus of research, particularly for feminist class scholars such as Valerie Walkerdine, Stephanie Lawler and Diane Reay. Where this research diverts from much of that done previously is that ours focuses on the experience of students who have undertaken foundation studies, which, as discussed above, often provide a more diverse and supportive environment. This environment is seen as not only helping students develop the self-efficacy and academic literacies discussed above, but it also can be a 'buffer zone' to the more middle-classed and less inclusive and supportive environment of the wider university. In our interviews several key areas of negotiation arose: personal relationships, relationships to the university (there was some difference between students from each university), and personal change. The following section will explore these areas, and then illustrate the tenacity, resolution and adaptive measures taken – often in the face of major life upheavals and trauma that could be directly correlated with their study. First we will explore this trauma, including the prevalence of relationship breakdown and the difficulties negotiating classed transition with family and friends, then we will look at the adaptive measures and tenacity displayed by participants, and then consider their own narratives of positive transformation and self-discovery, and the overall resilience displayed by participants.

Trauma, disruption and relationship breakdowns

Positive overall transformation has been explored in relation to low-SES students in previous research (Habel & Whitman 2016). What we were interested in is how low-SES students in particular negotiate the trauma and disruption that comes from undergoing not only educational, but classed transformation in an Australian context. What we found was that, while most participants saw their transformation as positive overall, many experienced considerable disruption. Furthermore this disruption often occurred at the intersection of class and gender, with women experiencing trauma and disruption more commonly than men despite extensive research documenting the 'feminisation' of higher education and the subjective difficulties undergoing class transformation at the nexus of

masculinity (Wills 1978; Whitman 2014).

Relationship Breakdown

The biggest disruption women spoke about in their interviews was relationship breakdown. The number of women who had split from their partners during either their foundation studies or their bachelor degree was significant. Five out of the fourteen participants who were women had broken up with their partners prior to the interviews, and another separated from her husband shortly after her interview, a considerable percentage at just under 43% of all the women we interviewed.

Many of the women interviewed spoke about their relationship breakdowns in far less detail, and would mention them in relation to a comment made by the interviewer:

> F: We found that women are more likely to have a lack of support, particularly partners we found were really, really not supportive.

> L-M: My last relationship broke up the week before I started my undergraduate degree (L-M, 25, Bachelor of Business, UniSA).

Whilst they were willing to mention their relationship breakdown it wasn't an area for discussion, even when asked about the level of support they received and how their study and educational transformation affected their personal relationships.

Yet, for other women we interviewed, they often directly correlated their relationship breakdowns to the educational and classed transformation they were undertaking. For many of the women the time demands of study were something their partners were unwilling to contend with:

> Like, in hindsight, I didn't see it at the time, but he always used to get shitty that I'd be gone when he leaves for work, and that I wouldn't be home until 6, 7 o'clock at night, because I'm studying at uni all night. He would just get really shitty for no reason. That played on my stress levels, my anxiety levels (S, 24, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

Yet further of the women interviewed found there were a variety of constraints, such as S (44) explains in relation to both time and financial pressure:

> Not good, no. Personal Relationships is not that good. I don't know, I don't think my ex-partner, I don't think he really understood the study load, not being an academic person himself. It was too much, too much of a strain financially. It was so much of a strain because he was completely supporting me. So it didn't do our relationship any good, but that comes from, it doesn't matter how many times you can sort of say, look, you know the big picture at the end (S, 44, Bachelor of Medical Radiation, UniSA).

As much as she was aware of the financial pressure that led to her marriage breakdown (she also discussed her ex-partner's retrenchment), S was acutely aware of the gendered nature of the division of household labour and the lower priority placed on her study compared to her ex-partner's work:

> But yes, it's not easy, especially being a female. I'd still be the one running around to pick up the kids, drop them off here and there, and even to come home, you're still the one that's got to cook and clean and do all those sorts of things. You're still the housewife, the wife, the mum. My ex-partner just went to work, came home, maybe if I was lucky he might have helped with the dishes or something like that … oh, you're home today, well, why didn't you go out and weed the garden? I might have been home, but I was studying at home (S, 44, Bachelor of Medical Radiation, UniSA).

Women were not the only participants to experience relationship breakdown. Much like the women above, S associates the disintegration and eventual dissolution of his relationship with his changing status and role within the relationship that was a result of undergoing educational transformation:

> I had a girlfriend when I started the UPP, and she stayed with me right up until the start of this year. There was a massive imbalance in that relationship after I was studying for a year. She's doing her Masters in Psychology, and I think at the start of the relationship was completely different to the end of the relationship in regards to where we sat socially. To be honest, she got me into uni firstly. She pushed me to do it, and I think something in me has changed. I'm definitely not the same person I was two years ago (S, 25, Bachelor of Computer Science, UoA).

The commonality of relationship breakdown was clearly an area of shared trauma for our participants, yet it was also an area of self-exploration in relation to educational transformation, and an area of considerable tenacity and resolution. S (44) spoke at length about how, despite having to navigate being a student and a single-parent with three children (one of which had special needs), her relationship breakdown had allowed her to focus on her own needs, and had increased her determination to complete her degree and to move through educational transformation to a resolution that fits in with broader discourses of social mobility through higher education.

Other Relationship Friction: Friends and Family, Classed-fractioning

Romantic relationships were not the only area in which fragmentation and tension were experienced. Many participants felt their friends and family were often suspicious, resentful or disapproving of the transformations they were undergoing, especially in relation to class. Lawler (2005), Reay (2005; 2007) and Skeggs (2004) have all discussed the problematic notion of the 'authentic' working-class self. For many of the students that moved through foundation studies into Bachelor degree programs, their 'authentic selves' were questioned by loved ones as they moved into academic life.

Despite the difficulties in finding participants who had dropped out, several participants talked about their friends from the foundation program who had done so, and some of the reasons they ascribed to this attrition:

> I know some people have found it really difficult and have actually dropped out from the UPP, it was because they did some of the courses and they said it's nothing like the UPP. They said the UPP was quite inclusive; everybody kind of got to know each other and really joined in, whereas when it came to going into a classroom of 800, they could feel like one person in 800 as opposed to being part of the 800 there; just like, I don't know anybody here. Those mature students are already in a

> group; those kids there are in a group, and nobody was really gelling together in that area, and they found that really difficult (R, 48, Bachelor of Nursing, UoA).

A also discussed that a number of his friends from the foundation program had dropped out in the first few months of their bachelor programs, how often it related to time management and difficulties juggling work and study, and the differences between their foundation program and their Bachelor programs:

> I guess going from the UPP to a bachelor degree, especially with things like science, it's quite a step up with the amount of work that you're required to do, especially work outside of the classroom. So I kind of feel like students maybe should be made aware of that, because I feel like a lot of students when they were studying in the UPP they were working and they went on to continue to work, and also study their degree at the same time, but it was really kind of difficult for them. That was a lot of the reasons why a few of them quit, because they just couldn't handle the study load and the workload together (A, 30, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

Many of the students talked about feeling 'torn' between their previous, or 'authentic' selves, and their new academic selves. N expresses this in relation to 'maturity', and a sense that she is 'different' when she is talking about topics related to her studies:

> N: I feel like at uni I'm a different person to what I am outside of uni. Like, outside of it I'm still a little girl and I complain about everything. But at uni, I'm just like, not professional, but I look at things differently … So yes, it really depends on what place I am in. Like, when I know what I'm talking about, I get into my uni mode and I'm just like, even my boyfriend is like, why are you so smart now? I'm like, because I knew what I was talking about (N, 22, Bachelor of Business, UniSA).

This exchange illustrates one of the many ways that people felt themselves challenging pre-existing notions that friends, family and loved ones had of who they were that were changing and transforming as they underwent educational transformation.

M discussed the transformation she underwent in her relationships with friends and family in both negative and positive terms, arguing that this gave her the opportunity to rid herself of 'toxic' relationships and establish who her real friends were:

> I'm first in family, yes, so none of my family really get it. I'm lucky with my husband's side of the family that his brother's girlfriend has gone back to uni at the same time as me, so we've sort of teamed up together and that's helped them to sort of accept it is what it is … The ones who don't have uni experience, I found that going back into study, it really sort of set who my true friends were. Like, the people who wanted to stick around. Anyone who thought I was too hard to spend time with, I don't bother with anymore.

She elaborated further on the way that her educational transformation and academic success made others feel uncomfortable, and how this would manifest in a lack of support:

> I found as well that some people aren't happy for you when you pick yourself up and you achieve things. So I've gotten rid of some toxic sort of friendships there as well (M, 28, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

Financial Resources: Being Poor at University

For many low-SES students combining paid work and study is necessary, and many students discussed the difficulties they had with this. Struggling with work/life balance was often exacerbated by the types of jobs such students had — casual work with no set hours and insecurity:

> F: So how did you go with work/life balance?
>
> K: I've recently been forced out of my job because last semester I was there from 9am to 8pm working, and that was four days a week.
>
> F: That's a lot.
>
> K: I could only effectively work at my job for three days after class. They wanted more hours, so they said, give us more hours, or we can't give you any more shifts.
>
> F: So they wanted you to do more hours?
>
> K: They didn't want me to do more hours, they wanted more availability. They weren't going to give me more than the minimum hours.

M discussed the difficulty in accessing text books for students who did not have the financial resources to purchase the latest editions, and had to rely on second-hand books:

> M: …especially with the things like textbooks. I'm sure everyone has been saying that for decades, but textbooks are impossible. UniBooks closing is scary as hell too. I don't know how I'm going to get cheap textbooks.
>
> F: Do you sort of feel that that's something from an institutional level, maybe recognising that not all students can drop $150 on a textbook; maybe we should have stuff available online, because quite often you don't use the entire textbook.
>
> M: Yes, I feel like if a textbook is required for the course, then the cost of the textbook should be incorporated into the cost of the course and included as your HECS debt so that everyone definitely has access to a textbook.

As she went on to explain, lack of access to latest editions of textbooks left low-SES students at a disadvantage:

> F: And it's not like you can re-sell them because they quite often change, they're updated year by year.
>
> M: Yes, so then it falls to low-SES students like myself who wind up having to buy three editions ago that miss out on things like Mastering Chemistry, which has an online thing which is only valid for your course as you're using it, so you'll get the textbook but you won't get the extra study aid (M, 28, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

Economic hardship also had a negative effect on students' ability to join in activities, as expressed here by K:

> K: There have been like pub crawls that I can't go on because I don't have the

> money and things like that, because I just don't have the money to be able to do that sort of thing (K, 23, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

K went on to describe how much he was struggling since losing his job:

> K: I'd rather focus on uni, but I also need the money. It's a struggle to from — I have to pay $150 board, and I have less than $100 a fortnight to spend on food, travel and all the other things I require (K, 23, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

These financial challenges, although somewhat expected for students from low-SES backgrounds, compounded the other social disadvantages they experienced throughout their transition.

Resolution into Adaptation

Often students had felt that university wasn't something for people 'like them' (low-SES/working class people). W explains how for her, universities were spaces which a class-inflected 'smart' cohort belonged to, and how that made her feel university was 'impossible' for her:

> My outlook on university has changed a lot since doing it. It used to be such a thing that was, I don't know, no one in our family did it. No one did it, and it was just sort of like, that it's really hard, and that it's for really smart people, and that it's almost like an impossible thing that you couldn't do (W, 50s, Bachelor of Social Science)

Her relationship with this sense of not belonging was ongoing, and one that she actively fought against, as shown in the following statement when she discussed how she had to tell herself that she did indeed 'belong':

> Yes, that's a tape in my head playing over. That's my mind trying to say: just go back home and do what's easy. Like, give it up. Stay home. Then I say: no, this is what I want to do. How am I going to think if I don't do this? I'm not living up to my own expectations of my life (W, 50s, Bachelor of Social Science).

S also discussed her previous feelings of university being something that was out of reach for her:

> … I never thought that someone from a low socioeconomic background would be able to go to university. That's why I never even considered it, not just because it didn't have the program I was interested in, I just never could afford it. It wasn't a place for someone like me to be at. It was all those who came from good families who obviously had the money to own their own house or have multiple cars or can afford to have that time. Whereas I work for everything (S, 28, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

S went on to explain that for her, feeling a 'part' of the mainstream student body was less important than a sense of academic achievement and belonging on an academic, as opposed to a social level. This was echoed by a number of participants who felt distanced from the mainstream student body but took pride in their academic success:

> F: Does your feeling of inclusion or exclusion affect your overall experience of the

> university?
>
> S: No. I don't really care if I'm included or not. I am here to study. What affects me is whether I'm doing well or not, and that has no connection to whether I am involved in a group or not … it's a university. It's here to expand on existing knowledge. It's here to push students towards discovering new things and providing facilities in order to do that.
>
> F: That being the case, do you feel connected to the university in that way?
>
> S: Yes. That's my inclusion; that's where I feel connected, is if I'm learning and doing well, discovering new things, then I'm doing what the university is meant to do for a student.

These types of narratives were common throughout the interviews. Students were often aware that were outside of the mainstream student body, however they found ways to adapt. For example S also goes on to discuss the importance of being involved in pool competitions in the Uni Bar at The University of Adelaide as something that facilitates her sense of inclusion and belonging as a student and a member of an academic community:

> S: As an example I compete in the University pool comp every Thursday. That's four hours I could be studying, but doing that I've met so many people who have either graduated or are in their second, third, fourth year at university … I play pool with one of the biology class coordinators, and I didn't even know it and I'm doing biology. Like I can do biology for the whole way and she's in her third year. So she's already done half the stuff I'm doing now, and I've met chemistry wizards; I've met people who have degrees in geology and, like, pretty much every subject that I can possibly do in the next five years. I've met someone who's already done it. Like I said, that's four hours that I could be studying, but that networking is going to really help me later on (S, 23, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

R talks about how his age and background have enabled him to take on a somewhat mentoring role within his degree program, displaying how students mobilise their difference from the mainstream student body as a positive rather than a negative. He found being older allowed him to find a space within the social and academic environment. Furthermore, he found having done the UPP gave him social and academic confidence and a sense of belonging, as he discusses here when talking about his role doing peer teaching for the Health Sciences first-year students:

> R: I did peer teaching at the beginning of this year for the health sciences, and again I got to teach some first-year students some of the things that I learnt in the UPP, and that's the main things that I taught. I wasn't telling them much throughout Nursing, because Health Science is slightly different to Nursing. I did give a few hints and tips on how to get through certain assignments, how to do things like that, but it's like, most of the things that I learnt directly through the UPP were things that I passed on to students.

Other students discussed the feeling of being 'where they were supposed to be', or that being at University had given them a sense of purpose:

> M: I think in the Nexus Basement, I used to sit in the chairs there with Simon, Tristan, Sally and Sam, and just study. You know, we'd stop and have a chat and

> ask each other questions. I think we were sitting there and we were all working on the same project at the same time, so there was a lot of back and forth discussion, because we all had similar issues — I think it might have been Research. There was just that — what's the word I'm after — like collegiate back and forth, and it just felt like, yes, I'm where I'm supposed to be (M, 28, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

Pride and Tenacity

R had found undertaking university study had given him a sense of pride and direction, he felt he had found his place and undertaking his degree had given him a sense of pride and also a desire to use the skills he had learned in his Nursing degree:

> Oh yes, how I was doing the whole UPP, the education and doing my degree wholly and solely for me. It wasn't like I was planning on doing a job at the end of it. It was just like, I wanted to get my degree to say, I'm the first person in my family that has actually done a degree course. It was more of a mental thing to say, I know I was capable of this, I want to see if I am, and get to the point as a challenge to myself. But in doing the course, I've just loved nursing so much that I would be devastated if I didn't get a job at the end of it. It's like, just from that first year where I was like, yes, I just want to get this for myself from the education side of things, it's now, I want to utilise these skills to help other people to really make a difference with what I've been taught (R, 48, Bachelor of Nursing, UoA).

Positive overall transformation

Despite the difficulties discussed previously, the overall narrative from the majority of participants was still one of positive transformation. Some participants expressed this as a growing sense of maturity and positive personal change, such as S explores in the following statement from her interview:

> S: I matured a lot, and I am not saying that because I think that, but this is coming from people who have known me for years — my parents, my aunties and uncles, even just friends I've had for like six or seven years that knew me pre-UPP and know me now. I've matured a lot; I've got that whole, you know, I've got a bit of life skill. Like, I can't just bludge this. If I want to do well, I do have to put in the effort. That's the thing; coming straight out of high school, you don't have that. Unless you've been like really pushed, you don't have that. You don't have the drive to do as well. You don't have that: this is what I want to do, this is where I want to go, and this is why … Like I said, if I had told my 16-year-old self that in eight years you're going to be at university and you're going to do really frickin' well at it, my 16 year old self would be like, nup, you're tripping, because that was just not even on my radar of what I was going to do with my life (S, 23, Bachelor of Science, UoA).

L-M also discussed her growing confidence and the change she had undergone, and her sense of achievement in the success she was having in her degree:

> I said that before, with starting. I went into the degree I did because I didn't have the confidence I could do another one, and now I've got the grades and have been showing myself I can do it; now I'm interested in going back and doing what I

originally wanted to do, because yes, it's massively increased my confidence. I never would have thought, having left school as young as I did, that I could do uni, let alone be on the high achiever's list and win merit awards (L-M, 25, Bachelor of Business, UniSA).

What came from participants overall was a sense of surprise, coupled with a sense of achievement and pride. Many of the participants were not only staying engaged with their courses, but they were doing very well, achieving very high grades and maintaining high GPAs.

Enabling Programs: Developing resilience and creating a safe space to experience transformation

The previous data illustrates the self-aware nature of the majority of the participants in this study, and their understanding and self-navigation of educational and personal transformation. Despite the sometimes difficult transition from foundation studies to Bachelor programs, the personal trauma, financial hardship, and dealing with such change; almost all participants expressed an overall positivity about their experiences, and a pleasure they found in such transformation. They also expressed the help foundation studies gave them in developing self-efficacy, academic literacies, and overall confidence in their ability to 'be' a student, and in themselves on a more holistic level. W expresses the sense that foundation studies offered a 'buffer zone' or a safe space to begin this transformation in a vivid and perceptive analogy:

> W: Yes, because you're moving in a group, you're in like a little fishbowl as you go around uni, you're encapsulated into this fishbowl, and then when you're in uni, the glass is taken away from you … Yes, but that's what it is. That fishbowl of safety and that boundary, and everything is within there; you're protected; you're looked after, you're going around the uni with your familiar group from class to class, and then it's broken and taken away … I was worried, because I'm older also, will that come into play? First of all, regardless of my age, what am I doing here? I don't belong here … So I had to break all those barriers to say, no, this is what I want to do and this is how I'm going to go about it, and I'm going to be really unhappy if I just give in to everything and go and sit on the couch at home (W, 53, Bachelor of Social Science, UoA).

Resilience and tenacity were key components of the student experience, as the enabling programs provided low-SES students with a collegial, diverse atmosphere to begin their educational transformation. Exploring belonging, immersion, adaptation, trauma and resilience and finally the pride that came with not only undergoing transformation, but navigating through it, the importance of foundation programs as sites of learning and change was regularly referred to by those who had used them as a pathway.

Case Studies

The phenomenological approach of this research led to the decision to include in the findings several case studies, based on unique narratives of experience that emerged. Although the research had an original intention of interviewing a number of disengaged students (i.e. those who had withdrawn from their studies at any level), this proved extremely difficult in practice as students strongly resisted being involved in the study. However, one participant had experienced this, complicated by the relationship with another student (her mother) who had experienced a disruption that was not as final as hers. This forms the basis for the first case study, while the second case study revolves around a type of experience that was quite common but very difficult to explore: the interactions between experiences of poverty and health problems (including mental health issues). Since this was not built into the original design or ethics approval for the research, we explored this theme only tentatively and so a case study analysis serves to highlights some of the main issues as a guideline for further research.

Case Study 1: Problematic 'Choice' and Classed Constructions of Higher Education[2]

As previously discussed, one of the biggest difficulties in recruitment faced was in finding students who had disengaged with their program of study who were willing to be interviewed. Despite our efforts only one student was agreeable, and it may be that her circumstances do not reflect those of many of the students who dropped out of their programs. However R's experience clearly demonstrates some of the ways in which the experience of low-SES students, especially those with caring responsibilities, shows gaps in the kinds of support being offered at the institutional level. R's decision to drop out however must also be considered in the context of valuing certain 'choices' and the devalued nature of unpaid care work in neoliberal Australia. Indeed, both W and R made specific choices in relation to their families and their studies based on what worked best for them at the time. This case study will explore 'choice' in light of classed and gendered narratives, and how for both, the confidence they built through foundation studies allowed them to make what they felt were the right decisions for their individual circumstances.

R and W undertook their foundation studies program over a year, commencing in Semester 2, 2012, and finishing after Semester 1, 2014. They came through the program together, and the two relied on each other for extra-institutional support, something they discussed at length in the interviews for the 2013 project looking at student experience in the University of Adelaide Preparatory program. They both had a hiatus before commencing their degrees in Semester 1, 2014; in part due to the birth of R's first child in September 2013. They then commenced Bachelor of Social Science programs, however both had left by the beginning of Semester 2, R had two children within 18 months, whereas W had issues with citizenship and the dissolution of her marriage:

> F: We've already covered this, when you left the program, and your main reason for doing so. You left because you had children?

> R: Yes. I had Hugo (3), and then I just fell pregnant and had another one (Henry, 1), and because we don't know if we want another child, so it's sort of at the point

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[2] The case of R, 23, no longer undertaking university study and her mother, W, 53, Bachelor of Social Science (Adelaide).

where we're just sort of starting out our family. I think once they grow up a little bit, even maybe when they go to school, then I'll be able to get into uni, because childcare is so expensive these days.

F: You've had a huge amount of upheaval since the end of 2012, so it's been three and a half years, a really huge amount of upheaval since then.

W: Yes.

F: Even when I was teaching you in 2014.

W: Yes, and that's when it all began to crumble. Everything sort of began to crumble at the beginning of the first time I started the UPP, and I don't know why I didn't apply for citizenship. I just completely overlooked it, and then I had problems with it. They were smoothed out in the long run, but it just took time, and I broke up with my partner and I was unsure what I was — but I had my goal of getting my citizenship, getting back to uni, and I've achieved that, so just doing it and being here now and achieving that goal, it's massive for me. So I'm going to savour every bit of it.

Their decisions to re-engage, or not engage with higher education were complex, and in each case partially shaped by classed and gendered factors (explored below). Before R dropped out however, both R and W had experienced backlash from friends and family in relation to their studies. This backlash came in several forms, for example R and W talk about people questioning the reasons to undertake a degree in Social Sciences:

W: Yes, why are you doing this? Why are you doing this to your family?

F: Exactly, Oh, you're not working and you're just studying. Yes, very much.

W: It's like, oh yes, alternative lifestyle … It's very much a class thing, and I didn't get it directly, but I read people's body language and, oh yeah, lots of other things. I guess my partner never actually said I don't want you to go to uni, but he didn't …

R: But even J at the start used to say …

W: We ended up printing off something for J … because he asked R, so what are you going to do? What are you going to get? Is it really worth it? He hounded R more than I got hounded. I ended up giving him a piece of paper that listed — we'd gone into careers services in our Social Science degree, a careers lady … and she gave us this paper, and it listed some of the things that students who had graduated were doing.

R: I got it constantly, constantly, constantly. Even S, my best friend, was constantly like, well, what are you doing afterwards? I'm like, I don't really know. I said I don't know, and I'm not really bothered. I'm just doing it because I enjoy uni, more than anything.

What can be seen from the above exchange is how both R and W, who identified as working-class and had working-class friends and family, needed to defend their choice of degree in both classed and gendered terms – with them getting questioned both about 'what they could do' after finishing a degree not specifically aligned with a profession (such

as nursing or teaching), and how their choice to study would affect 'their families' iterating gendered narratives around responsibility for family happiness and the overall pressure for women to engage in emotion work. As working-class women, R and W had to defend their decision to undertake a degree that was seen as having less value. Both did so through an external dialogue with family and loved ones, and an internal dialogue reiterating their choice to study, and to study in their chosen area.

Both W and R saw undertaking Foundation Studies as key to developing the confidence to undertake a degree program, and to challenge any questioning of their choice to undertake a degree, and in the area they had chosen:

> R: I think that's why I found the UPP so enjoyable, because I felt safe and it was like everyone knew everyone and your teacher sort of looked after you, and you felt a bit more coached and if you needed any help, you were given a bit of help.

> W: It was sort of like you were nurtured. You were like eggs being incubated around the university.

> R: It was good, I think going into uni, it gets quite …

> W: Yes, I was worried, because I'm older also, will that come into play? First of all, regardless of my age, what am I doing here? I don't belong here. Secondly, I'm an old lady and I shouldn't be here. Thirdly, what am I doing? So I had to break all these barriers and say, no, this is what I want to do and this is how I'm going to go about it, and I'm going to be really unhappy if I just give into everything and go sit on the couch at home.

R and W both further elaborate on how undertaking foundation studies helped develop their confidence and readiness to face their bachelor degree programs, in particular how the UPP helped develop their academic literacies while giving them a sense that they belonged:

> W: If I went into my bachelor degree, I would feel so much better after doing the UPP. I would have felt like an absolute stunned mullet and dropped out within — I would have had to leave class because I would have felt so lost and like I didn't belong here, what am I doing? All of them things would have been going through my head. Like you said, the referencing, we got taught how to do referencing. There was like the annotated bibliographies. We got taught how to do all different writing, so we knew when things were up, and we had assignments due, it was like, I know what that is, and you knew how to do the research, and yes, it was just becoming familiar with the uni. W got taught so many good things. For people going into uni I couldn't recommend any more highly than I do now.

> R: I'm the same. I definitely wouldn't have been able to do uni. I wouldn't have had the confidence. I wouldn't have been able to self-taught my way through some of the difficulties. I wouldn't have had any insight or understanding about what I'm doing, where am I going, is this the right thing, because the feedback and help and the reassurance and the guidance that we had was priceless. It really was.

> W: Yes, and it's just replaying our thought patterns and things that, you know, oh, this is not normal, what are you doing? When someone says something and says, oh what are you doing, and then puts a negative spin on it and that connotation of,

that's weird, you're old, everything replays again. What are you doing? Why are you doing this?

F: That was an experience I had a lot as well, and then going into PhD and trying to explain to people, what are you doing?

W: Yes, and it baffles me how people look at someone wanting to try and explore themselves as a person in the world and do something that it's not going to benefit them but eventually benefit lots of other people. It's looked upon as though, well, what's that? It's not even considered something to do.

W's life had changed dramatically from beginning the UPP. Her marriage had split, and then, she had reunited with her husband however they were living separately, with W living with her youngest son. She discussed this personal upheaval and the eventual choice to live separately from her husband as the right choice for her, despite being considered an unconventional choice in regards to normative constructions of working-class marriage:

W: Yes, everything had to crumble. Everything had to be broken down for it to be — all the building blocks had to be reshuffled and the ones that I didn't need had to be moved aside. What was important, what needed to be there, and if I had to suffer, which I did, because I didn't want to break up with my partner because I loved him very much, but I had to give him up to go forward in my life. That was really hard for me, but I did it. We ended up back together anyway.

F: And you've structured things in a new way that sounds like it's working better for both of you?

W: Yes, and it really is working. It wouldn't work any other way.

Both discussed how they had changed, and how they had come to view university as having been 'inside' of higher education. W and R actively deconstructed classed narratives around higher education, 'being smart' and the 'typical' university student in ways that showed the deep level of engagement they had with their own educational pathways and transformation:

W: I've changed a lot. My life's changed around me. Yes, my life's changed around me, which is probably a reflection of me changing. So everything for me has changed. Every area of my life is a little bit different. Some things are a lot different. I didn't go out and seek to make my life different, to change my relationships, to break up my marriage, to do anything different, but it's just the way — but it's enabled me to come back to a place and start studying in a way that is now, like, I'm going to be like — it's given me the really good foundation to live with. Because if I'd started from that when I went, where I started with you [looking at R], where we started together, I wouldn't have succeeded. I would have crumbled.

R: I think a lot around me has changed. I'm still with J; I still have my kids. I think for me it's just sort of given me the insight more into what I might want to do in my life. I don't want to just settle with something I don't want to do, and I won't be able to study and pass, I don't think, even if it was something that I didn't like, because I just won't do it, and it will slowly drop off, and that will be it. I think it's let me see uni in a completely different light, from just hearing what people say about it. I've seen it in a completely different, like, what it's actually like to be in uni is completely

different.

W: It's doable, and it's a lifestyle …

R: It's doable, yes, and yes, it's a whole different lifestyle thing. It's really good. And the people you meet are really nice.

R's discussion of her choice to put her studies on hiatus is one of agency. She defies classed and gendered narratives that devalue care work, she acknowledges that the work she does is difficult, and is *work*, but it is a choice she feels is right for her, her children and her family. In the following statement she discusses the difficulty she has faced becoming a stay-at-home parent caring for two very small children, and she recognises the devaluing of such work, discussing how despite undertaking very difficult work, it is still viewed as 'doing nothing':

> Yes, I've still got — Hugo's two and a half and Harry's just turned one, so I've got two really young boys, and I stay at home every day. They don't go to daycare at all, so I've got them home seven days a week. Dad and Mum were always sort of like that. Mum had the kids and Dad worked, and it was always like that. So it's what I saw when I grew up, and I guess I sort of idolised it. It's really weird, because I thought it was amazing. For a little while between when I was 16-18, 19 I'd gotten to a period where I was like, oh, I just wish I had kids and a family, and to look after my own family. That's what I wanted. I was so jealous of young mums that had kids … then I fell pregnant with my partner. We've been together now for about five years, so I was quite young when we got together, and he's turned 30 this year, and I'm 23, so a little bit of an age difference, and now I've lived, I'm a mum at home with the two kids. I have days where I just sit here and cry, because sometimes you just feel so lonely.

> F: Yes, I remember those days.

> R: You feel so lonely and you feel so like, what the hell am I doing with my life? It's like you're doing nothing. It's so hard.

However, she goes on to discuss how she wants to return to study, not just for her benefit, but also for her children. In the following statement she iterates that being a carer for children is very difficult work, and work that she wants to focus on in the short term, and she justifies her choice to put university on hiatus as the right choice:

> R: Yes. I think once they are both in school, and then my partner will completely have his career [he had recently commenced an apprenticeship], and I think that will be my time to be able to go back to uni, even if it's full or part time. I'll see what I can cope with and what I can do, something for myself then. I don't think I'll feel the pressure, though, to hurry up and finish or anything like that because financially my partner can look after us. It's just finding something — I want to find something that I like … so yes, it's just a matter of time … So when I do something, I want to try and make sure it's something I want to do and enjoy it.

This was a common theme throughout W and R's interview in that they both talked about study not as a means to an end, but as something done for personal development and intellectual enjoyment. Rather than accept the narrative that for working-class people, university study should ideally lead to a 'step up' in terms of profession and earnings, they

reinforced the pleasure of learning for learning's sake. In this final quote, W talks about loss and gain, and how she had shaped a life around study that works for her. Both W and R have resisted certain discursive constructions of class, gender and higher education, and continue to make choices that in many ways subvert hegemonic narratives.

> W: … you know what? I'm poor too, but I've also been in situations and had lots of money and lots of houses, and lots of things. I've never been happier and had less baggage, more authentic, than I am now today. I have the least amount of baggage, the least amount of stuff, and the least amount of money, but I'm closer to my authentic core that I've ever been and where I'm going. I didn't know who that person was. Everything just covered up what I was and what I was about, but I haven't been overseas, I'm not learned, I'm not cultured. I'm from this rough background. I've had lots of children and probably failed in many areas of my life.

> F: Do you feel like you've found a space for yourself now?

> W: Yes, in this space, and like I said, everything had to be broken down and crumbled, and to come back and start learning now, because still wouldn't have been prepared then. I'm prepared now, and my position in life is prepared.

Case Study 2: 'At-risk' students negotiating poverty and (mental) health[3]

There are various factors that mark students as being particularly 'at risk' of either never engaging with higher education at all, or of disengaging. Among these factors SES, mental and physical health problems, previous negative experiences of education and a history of housing insecurity and homelessness are all recognised as significant risk factors (Dinmore and Stokes, 2015). L-M, at 25, had navigated insecure housing, mental and physical health issues (which were exacerbated by each other) and poverty. However, despite belonging to multiple and intersecting 'at-risk' groups, L-M had not only stayed engaged with her course, she had maintained a high GPA and excellent outcomes. L-M successfully navigated education transformation despite facing multiple obstacles. Her early experiences with education were negative, with her leaving high school at just 13:

> I dropped out when I was 13. I went to private school for a year and a half because I skipped a grade and stuff when I was 4, so I started high school when I was 11. I went to private school for a year and a half, transferred to Modbury [a public school in a working-class suburb], lasted about one semester, and couldn't do it anymore. So I dropped out when I was 13. Went into foundation studies; I'd already been out of school for eight years, with a year nine education.

L-M recognised the factors that facilitated her disengagement with formal education:

> I've lived with my mum, never with my dad, and because she was unemployed I grew up in poverty … It was a lot of home issues. I was just — I rebelled, and decided to party instead of study. I had a truancy officer which I got legal permission to leave school early. They just said, there's no point you being here; you're not doing it, so I had to be employed to be able to leave, so I went to Hungry Jacks and I did night shifts at the age of 13, like $6 an hour.

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[3] L-M, 25, B Business, UniSA

Working within fast food led to intermittent employment within hospitality, while L-M moved in and out of secure housing and negotiated being on a variety of welfare payments:

> Yes, and I've had that problem [not being able to access Centrelink payments without a fixed address]. I had to put my parent's address because I was homeless for a couple of years, I was couch surfing, and yes, it's a nightmare if you don't have somewhere you can give them. Like, I was lucky to have parents.

L-M worked in various hospitality jobs until the onset of her illness resulted in her losing both jobs within a couple of months, resulting in her deciding to consider study. Rather than see the development of her illness as a negative however, she has constructed a narrative of empowerment and choice, one in which the development of her illness allowed her to consider other options:

> The upside of getting IBS is that's what made me go to uni in the first place. I had two jobs, not good jobs, but I had two jobs; I got sick; I lost both those jobs within a couple of months, and I was like, I'm not going to sit around and do nothing, so I started doing research, and that's how I found out about Foundation Studies and how I ended up back at uni. So that's one positive with chronic illness.

L-M found that the development of her chronic illness had a direct causational effect on her mental health, with her developing, as she expressed it, 'severe anxiety'. She did not allow this to stop her studies however, and finished her Foundation Studies in 2013 and moved into her degree program. She found that Foundation Studies gave her a solid grounding to enter into undergraduate studies, and allowed her to develop her confidence:

> I wouldn't have been able to go to uni without it, because I hadn't done year 12. But I did consider sitting the STAT test, and I just said, no, I needed that bridging, and it definitely gave me that. Like, we had a subject introduction to Tertiary Education, which really taught you a lot. I'd never written an essay before, because I left school in year nine, so just having that chance to sort of ease into it with small, you-know, 500 word essays and things, I don't think I could have gone straight into a full degree without that.

She goes on to further elaborate on the confidence Foundation Studies gave her in being a student, and knowing that she was capable of succeeding in a tertiary setting. She saw her confidence as a trajectory, discussing that she chose what she saw as the 'safe' option for her undergraduate studies as opposed to a course of study that she was more passionate about, but that she felt was a riskier option:

> Also the confidence, like, I still went into a degree — I did health sciences because I wanted to go into nursing and I didn't have the confidence to do it, so I went into business as a safe option; regretting that now in my third year, where business isn't what I want to be doing. But the confidence to do uni in the first place, it really gave me that, which I think is an important thing. Without Foundations Studies, I wouldn't have had the confidence to start doing a degree.

Rather than view this as negative, as with her chronic health condition, L-M discussed using her current qualifications as a basis to move into an area she was more interested in. This came up when she discussed future study, and the decision to undertake a bachelor degree in an area she is more interested in as opposed to undertaking

Postgraduate studies in her current area:

> That's the problem, because I decided I don't think I'm passionate. Like, I couldn't come up with a thesis idea that I was passionate about for marketing. If I was doing something else, then — I remember my Foundation Studies, because I did Health Science, we did a Health subject and I actually wrote one of my essay's on Crohn's, and the quality of life effect it had as well as psychological effects, and I could write a thesis on something like that, where I'm actually passionate about it, and I want to do research into it and things like that, no problem.

Despite not being 'passionate' about her current course of study, L-M was determined to not only persevere, but to maintain very high grades throughout. This was a goal she had largely maintained throughout her undergraduate studies, as she discussed in relation to being on the High Achiever's list and winning merit awards. L-M discussed using this to leapfrog to even higher expectations of herself, and her desire to do even better in her next degree:

> So yes, definitely improved my confidence, and I'm a very goal-orientated person. I don't think I'll get a Dean's Award. It was my goal. I have to keep trying in my next degree. Top 15 percent isn't good enough, you've got to be top 5 percent.

L-M's self-narrative is one of constant negotiation, and a determination to succeed. This is expressed in the following statement discussing how she has negotiated her study around her anxiety, and in another statement where she discussed having her exam location changed to a place that would be less triggering:

> That's why I'm fully external now. I would love to go on campus to study, but I had one unfortunate lecturer last year who decided it wouldn't be fair on the other students to swap me to external when I was too ill to make it in, and I lost 15 percent of my grade for participation, so after that I was just like, as much as I'd like to go on campus, I like to push myself to get out of the house, not worth it.

Despite external study not being her desired option, L-M's pragmatic approach to negotiating illness led her to choose external study as the best option for her at the time. This was a consistent theme throughout her interview. Rather than view her chronic illness and anxiety as a reason to disengage, L-M merely saw these as factors to be negotiated. She dealt with her housing difficulties in much the same way. L-M was currently living in Government-assisted housing for people with mental health issues, however despite the inner-city location her residence was also located near a drop-in centre for people with substance abuse issues, making the area significantly unsafe, particularly at night. This was yet another area where she was pragmatic, hoping to get moved to a better location, and willing to accept that while not ideal, her current situation wasn't permanent:

> This place is for people with mental health issues, all of these apartments, so that's how I got into this housing in the first place. Uni actually referred me, but yes, it's just a transfer, because there's such a long waiting list for this sort of housing that you're not meant to be able to get a transfer within two years because of my health issues, because I was able to get me transfer approved, but it's waiting for something suitable to come up.

L-M's story is one of negotiation and tenacity. Despite falling into several categories that would deem her 'at-risk' she had forged a successful academic career. L-M, like most of

our interviewees, discusses Foundation Studies as providing a space to transition into higher education, and to develop the necessary skills to succeed as a student despite having left school so early and having a previously antagonistic relationship with formal education. L-M also recognised her own intelligence and capability — something she was increasingly aware of throughout her studies and something that furthered her desire to achieve. Like many low-SES students L-M saw education as a pathway out of poverty and marginalisation. Like many of the other participants she also came to view study not only as a step to something better, but as a space in which she experienced success, pride and enjoyment. L-M found pride in being a student, in being part of university culture, and she was determined to experience this more fully in her future studies:

> But yes, for me this degree has been very much about the academic stuff done and if I do another one, I would love to experience the whole university experience, because I do think everything, including pub crawls, clubs, all that sort of stuff, is part of the experience of being at university, and building friendships and things like that.

Ultimately L-M was intensely proud of her achievements, and the fact that overall, she had managed to achieve a university degree by the age of 25 despite extensive personal and external factors that seemingly could have worked against her.

> Being able to say I did it. Leaving school when you're 13 and partying your teenage years, my family never thought I would do it, and they were disappointed because I had skipped a grade and was in all the gifted programs and all those sorts of things when I was a kid. They had all these high hopes, so I think just having that pride that, you know, I went back and I did it is the most rewarding thing to me. That's why, even though I don't necessarily think I went into the right area for me, I'm dedicated to finishing this degree because I can graduate. I never had a year 12 graduation.

Case Study 3: Embracing Change, Negotiating Transformation[4]

S, like the previous participants, found himself undergoing considerable transformation through his engagement with higher education. His story is different from the preceding ones in that he was financially secure and in a chosen career when he realised that he wanted a change. S had to contend with a classed transition that didn't always sit well with friends, family and loved ones, however he often identified Foundation Studies as giving him the confidence and self-efficacy to both negotiate starting university, and to negotiate undergoing educational transformation. He identified as working-class, and had, as many working-class people do, focused on becoming financially stable when he left school:

> F: How would you describe your family in terms of culture, ethnicity, gender and social class? Particularly in terms of culture and social class?
>
> S: I'd say as far as my family is concerned, working-class, definitely. My dad's a carpenter and my mum's owned businesses most of her life, I guess, small businesses.

S lived in a single-parent household from the age of four, and moved between Queensland

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[4] Case study of S, 28, BScience, Adelaide.

and South Australia, disrupting his schooling:

> F: I imagine in terms of schooling that was a bit disruptive?

> S: Oh hell yes. I think most of the reason why I didn't continue with high school was that, by the time I got to year 10, I'd missed so much. Like, background, basics, and I just lost interest. It got too hard and I lost interest …

S also had a common experience of students that attend largely working-class high schools in that the focus is often not on getting students into higher education:

> S: … so there were constantly different high schools I was going to. I think the main thing was they were public schools as well, and not once did anyone really mention university. It was get a trade, do something practical. As soon as I was offered a Cert 1, I took it and got a trade out of it. That was like, get out of here as quickly as possible, that sort of thing … In 2006 I was offered an apprenticeship and left [school] in year 10.

Despite having experience in study undertaking the necessary TAFE courses to secure his apprenticeship, S felt challenged and nervous about starting university, reflected in his memory of his first day in Foundation Studies:

> S: Oh man, my first day in the UPP I was peaking. I was freaking out. I just remember I couldn't wait to get home, because I was so stressed.

He relates undertaking the UPP to a sense of preparedness and confidence with starting his first day of his bachelor degree, a confidence that was helped by starting with the close cohort he had within Foundation Studies:

> S: But the first day of uni, I think after doing the UPP, I was like, I've got this, like, I'm ready for this, I can smash this out. I was to always do the science core course, so I transferred over with a bunch of UPP students that were doing it at the same time, and we all kind of just walked into it, and went, ah, group — UPP group, right in the middle of the class, and it was good. Having that support, especially from fellow students in the UPP, it was great.

S found a commonality of experience with fellow students in Foundation Studies, in that they had all decided to make a significant change to their lives by undertaking university:

> S: … there's a massive gap, actually. There's your teenagers and your late 20s, and the people that are in late 20s have been to university, done Bachelors, gone into the workforce and gone, nup, that's not for me … there's all sorts of people, and they're the ones that I kind of like hanging around with, because they're at my maturity level … Yes, [the UPP is] extremely more diverse, but the interesting part about it is most of us were there for the same reason. With the UPP, we all pretty much made a big mistake at some point in our lives, and just kind of woke up to that and went, oh, I need to do something with my life.

For S, making the decision to go to university and uproot his entire life was not one he took lightly, and he found the connection with other people who had made the same decision very valuable. S had a great deal of insight into undergoing educational transformation. He found empowerment in doing what he always felt he was supposed to

do. Like many students who undertake Foundation Studies, there was a sense of having always wanted to study, or to be in a particular area. He discusses this in the following statement when he talks about the comparison between building his first computer at age 11, and writing code in his degree:

> S: The most rewarding part I guess would be, not directly, but when I was 11, I built my first computer from scratch. However it was crap. This guy next door had a new shed, and when I finally got it working, six months, and installed some random OFs on it, and finally got it working; like, this is what I want to do with my life. Something went horribly wrong and I became a chef. I think the time I wrote my first code, it was so basic, it was just printing letters, I was like, Yes! I'm now doing that! Like, I just felt so empowered by that, because I told myself that's what I wanted to do, and I got the option to do it, and it was very rewarding.

S needed to negotiate this sense of being in the right place and taking the right path for him, with a growing sense of disconnect from some friends and family. He recognised the classed nature of this, which he discussed in relation to growing up in a rural working-class area of Adelaide, the lack of opportunity, and yet the distrust and resentment aimed at those who did move out and away:

> S: A lot of my older friends, like strong friendships from outside university, haven't really waivered much. But the kind of loose ends that you have, like, just kind of peripheral friends, a lot of them have dropped right off my radar. Not to sound like I'm up myself, but I think it's a class thing, or a perception of class. Oh, he's going to uni now; he's using all these big words, and he's bettering his life and we're still not.
>
> F: Yes.
>
> S: I don't want to sound like a dick, because it sounds pretty arrogant …
>
> F: But I don't think it's sounding like a dick at all; it's a very common experience.
>
> S: I feel a tad ostracised from that. The other thing is a lot of these people are from the country as well. Like, I moved out to Murray Bridge for four or five years, and that's where I made most of my friends. There's no opportunity to excel in Murray Bridge, there really isn't. It's like, the best you can do is get a job in a factory or at least the meatworks. It sucks. When someone moves out and then moves to town, for one, moving to town is a big no-no, and secondly going to university is just like, yes, wow!

S went on to discuss the break-up of his relationship. As discussed above, relationship breakup was extremely common among our participants, and despite being the only male participant who underwent a breakup, S's story was similar to those of the women who had undergone similar circumstances: his choice to study and the educational transformation he was undergoing was a direct cause of the tension in his relationship that led to its eventual dissolution. S, like many of the other participants who underwent tension in their personal relationships, was extremely perceptive of the classed causes, and how expectations around the 'authentic' classed self were being subverted and making people uncomfortable:

> S: [talking about his ex-partner] She liked being kind of dominant in the relationship, and I don't mind that. It doesn't bother me at all. As far as academically, she was

just smarter than me, and she liked being smarter. When I started climbing that ladder, like every time I got a little bit more — every time I understood a little bit more about what she was talking about, she seemed to get more and more frustrated.

S: [talking about his family] Yes, family is the hardest … my mum's side of the family, being British, they're not so much, they're not as well — I'm the first person in mum's side to go to university.

F: So on that side of the family you're first in family?

S: Yes, and it's full on for them. We've got a lot of electricians and mechanics and plumbers, and for them it's like, oh yeah, good on you, good on you, but they find it very hard to engage, especially like people call it school. It's like, it's not school, it's so different to school. Don't call it that, because it's so different to school. My mum's parents are extremely supportive. They're just so proud of me, but they don't really know what they're proud of. Like, they don't get it, which is fine.

S navigated the growing drift between himself and his family through acknowledging the classed nature of this, he was aware of some jealousy coming from his uncle, for example, that exacerbated existing family tensions:

S: … me and my brother have different last names to the rest of the family. So there's a social gap there already, and I think every family has this thing where your uncle's kids have to be better than his brother's kids. There's this thing, and then all of the sudden you've got all these kids who have trades — and we all have trades — and then all of the sudden one of them goes to university, and all my mum's brothers just went, oh, your son's going to university, is he? It's like, ohh, it's extended that gap.

S was particularly good at negotiating these challenges through his understanding of the classed dynamics of such change, but also his own sense of being on the right path. Much as W had discussed, he felt the change he was undergoing was overwhelmingly a positive one, that he was becoming the person he was meant to be through educational transformation – a transformation made more smooth by his undertaking Foundation Studies. In this final statement he explores this, and illustrates to him how it is less about 'being on the right path' and more about getting ready for the rest of his life.

S: How have I changed? Dramatically. I'm a lot more confident than I used to be. Actually, I'm a little bit too confident sometimes. I'm a lot more stressed out, I'm very tired, I've never been so tired. But no, I can feel myself slipping into a new skin, almost, a skin that's preparing me for the rest of my life, which is an interesting way of feeling. This is me, this is it. This is pretty smart; this is what I'm going to do. I was not prepared for the rest of my life in any way, shape or form … the person I'm supposed to be is, yes — I've always like, most of my life I've stayed away from that whole, I'm on that path that I should be on. I don't like the path. The path pisses me off. But I feel like I'm more ready to be an adult.

Discussion and Recommendations

This research has begun to unearth an enormous depth and complexity behind the student experience of studying a Bachelor's degree, having entered via an Enabling program from a low-SES background. Overall, students had an enormously positive experience of adapting to academic culture, and felt grateful to the staff involved, the Program itself, and the University as a whole for the opportunity to have another chance at studying. This often meant an increase in their subjective sense of academic self-efficacy, something that they felt quite aware of. They often framed their experience as a journey or a path, and articulated their lived experienced as a connected series of phenomena from their earliest experiences of formal education to their current situation.

However, this was rarely a universally positive transformative experience. Although students didn't usually feel stigmatised as being working-class and usually felt 'in place' to some degree at University, this degree varied for individuals. There were definite experiences of disruption or difficult transition, which sometimes created tension for family or friends who struggled to cope with the social mobility that studying at university entailed. In the most extreme cases this led to a complete breakdown of personal relationships, which were often irreversible.

The stark diversity of student experience led the project team to adopt a case study analysis approach, given some unique and unexpected cases. We explored the case of a pair of students who had discontinued their study, for reasons both within their own control, and related to external factors. In this case a major barrier was the classing of their university study and the personal barriers they experienced in attempting to continue. Another case study analysis explored the experience of major health and mental health issues as well as acute experiences of poverty which nonetheless were overcome, whereas a final case study told a relatively positive story of succeeding despite challenges, especially in personal life.

Due to their nature these case studies cannot support any broad or generalisable results, but they still serve an important purpose. They remind us that the results of such qualitative research are not always predictable, and don't always fall within our standard frames of reference. They also provide important suggestions for further research.

Of course, it is an ongoing challenge to explore the experience of students who are not so successful in their studies. This research had high hopes for achieving some success (due to the rapport between the researchers as program coordinators and the students), but the difficulties proved more profound than we had expected. It is perhaps becoming the Holy Grail of research in this field to engage participants who had left the institutions, and disengaged with higher education, but unfortunately despite numerous efforts it fell outside the scope of this particular study.

Our second case study has also highlighted the significance of both physical and mental health issues and the profound effect this can have on opportunities for success. It proved impossible to explore this more in depth and so research projects should be developed that build this consideration into the design, especially at the ethics approval stage.

Other recommendations also emerge from this research. Of course, it demonstrates that enabling programs can have profound and life-changing effects for individuals who feel they have no other options for access into formal education. The programs are essential in the access and equity ecosystem, and so this research serves as a strong

recommendation that they should continue to be supported and resourced. The social value they provide goes beyond quantitative or economic measures.

Furthermore, despite the narratives of positive transformation and social mobility that emerge from this kind of research, it must also be acknowledged that student journeys also involve significant change, trauma, disruption and social stigmatisation. Because of this, institutional support structures are essential and should be given a more prominent place as essential instruments in building towards student success.

Finally, while this research began by focusing around low-SES or working class students, it quickly became clear that this was not the only, or even the dominant, aspect of their social identity. In particular, women experienced significant challenges and even breakdowns in their intimate relationships, as their new student identities were seen to undermine their identities as wives and mothers. This suggests that researchers need to begin to apply the kinds of intersectional analyses that have been called for in the literature.

In applying its theoretical framework, then, this research has returned to its theoretical origins to suggest new directions for research into enabling education. Undoubtedly, class matters need to be considered in research involving students in enabling programs, but to focus on this solely at the expense of the multiple sites of disadvantage that this research has observed does not do justice to the complexity and multifaceted nature of students' lived experience.

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Appendix (A)

Interview Schedule: University of Adelaide Students.

Part 1: Reflection on the previous interviews (Students who have been interviewed in 2012 only)

1/. Having read the transcript from your previous interview about your experience in the University of Adelaide preparatory Program, what is your response to what you said?
- Is this roughly how you remember experiencing the UPP a few years ago?
- What has changed, and what has stayed the same, about your experience of studying at university since then?
- Was there anything that you discussed that you would like to add to? Why?
- Is there anything you still feel is a particularly resonant part of your experience? Why?
- Is there anything you feel differently about now that you have had time to reflect? Why

2/. In particular you spoke about … that you experienced as part of the educational transition you underwent during your time in the UPP. How do you feel about that now?
3/. What other reflections/comments would you like to add?

Part 2: Personal Information
1/. What is your name and age?
2/. Where did you grow up?
3/. How would you describe your background in terms of:
- Culture?
- Ethnicity?
- Gender?
- Social class?

4/. What is your current family/living situation?
5/. Where do you live? Does this have any effect on how accessible the university campus is to you?
6/. What were your previous experiences of education?

Part 3: Moving from the UPP to Bachelor Degree Studies.
1/. When did you undertake the University Preparatory Program? When did you graduate?
2/. What was your experience of the UPP?
- Can you tell a story about one of your most positive experiences?
- What was an experience that wasn't so positive?
- Overall how do you feel about your UPP experience now that some time has passed?

3/. What are you currently undertaking in terms of study (degree program, type of degree etc.)?
4/. How does your current program compare with your experience in the UPP, in terms of:
- Immersion into university culture?
- Accessibility to staff?

- Collegiality (relationships with fellow students?
- Help provided to students?
- Anything else you think is important?

5/. Do you feel that the UPP prepared you well for your bachelor degree? If so, why? In what areas was it particularly helpful? If not, why not? In what ways do you think you could have been better prepared?

6/. If you could offer advice to a student about to undertake the UPP what would you say?

7/. What advice would you offer recent UPP graduates who are heading into their degree programs?

Part 4: Educational Transitions

1/. What, for you, has been the most rewarding part of undergoing your bachelor degree so far?

2/. What aspects of undertaking your bachelor degree have been difficult, or hard to navigate? Consider this in terms of:
- Time management and being a student
- Work/life balance
- Learning to navigate your space within the university?
- Your personal relationships?

3/. How do you feel you have changed throughout the process of completing the UPP and commencing undergraduate degree studies?

4/. In the previous interview we spoke about self-efficacy. How do you feel you have grown in confidence in terms of specific tasks related to being a student? Are there areas you still feel you need to further develop? Why do you think this is?

Immersion and Inclusion: Being a part of the University Culture.

1/. Do you feel acclimatised to the culture of the university?

2/. What aspects of the university culture are you most comfortable with? Why?

3/. Are there any aspects of the university culture that you still feel distanced from, or marginalised by?

4/. Do you feel included within the mainstream student body?
- If yes, how and why? Is there anything in particular that makes you feel included?
- If no, how and why? What makes you feel distanced from the 'average' or 'mainstream' University of Adelaide student?
- How does your experience of inclusion/exclusion affect your overall experience at university?

5/. In what ways has the university as an institution facilitated your immersion into the university culture?

6/. Are there any areas you feel more could be done?

7/. The University of Adelaide is a Group of 8 Institution. How often are you aware of its elite status? How do you feel about this? Why?

8/. Are you aware of the 'Beacon of Light' initiative? If so what do you know about it?

Appendix (B)

Exploring the Experience of low-SES students via enabling programs
Interview Schedule: University of South Australia Students.
Part 1: Report on previous part of the project
1/. Brief summary of main findings of previous project on students undertaking enabling program:

- Many feel a strong sense of transformation, but this is often difficult
- Some feeling of self-efficacy and general confidence
- There are differences between male and female experiences of transition and transformation
- Data understood in terms of habitus, or feeling of attachment to university environment

Part 2: Personal Information
1/. What is your name and age?
2/. Where did you grow up?
3/. How would you describe your background in terms of:

- Culture?
- Ethnicity?
- Gender?
- Social class?

4/. What is your current family/living situation?
5/. Where do you live? Does this have any effect on how accessible the university campus is to you?
6/. What were your previous experiences of education?

Part 3: Moving from enabling programs to Bachelor Degree Studies
1/. When did you undertake Foundation Studies/your Diploma? When did you complete the program?
2/. What was your experience of the program?

- Can you tell a story about one of your more positive experiences?
- What was an experience that wasn't so positive?
- Overall, how do you feel about your Foundation Studies Diploma now that some time has passed?

3/. What are you currently undertaking in terms of study (degree program, type of degree etc.)?
4/. How does your current program compare with your experience in the enabling program, in terms of:

- Immersion into university culture?
- Accessibility to staff?
- Collegiality (relationships with fellow students?
- Help provided to students?
- Anything else you think is important?

5/. Do you feel that the enabling program prepared you well for your bachelor degree? If so, why? In what areas was it particularly helpful? If not, why not? In what ways do you think you could have been better prepared?

6/. If you could offer advice to a student about to undertake an enabling program, what would you say?

7/. What advice would you offer recent enabling program graduates who are heading into their degree programs?

Part 4: Educational Transitions

1/. What, for you, has been the most rewarding part of undergoing your bachelor degree so far?

2/. What aspects of undertaking your bachelor degree have been difficult, or hard to navigate? Consider this in terms of:

- Time management and being a student
- Work/life balance
- Learning to navigate your space within the university?
- Your personal relationships?

3/. How do you feel you have changed throughout the process of completing the enabling program and commencing undergraduate degree studies?

4/. A common experience of students in these programs is a stronger sense of self-efficacy, or enhanced confidence in undertaking particular tasks. How do you feel you have grown in confidence in terms of specific tasks related to being a student? Are there areas you still feel you need to further develop? Why do you think this is?

Immersion and Inclusion: Being a part of the University Culture.

1/. Do you feel acclimatised to the culture of the university? Alternatively, does UniSA College give you a sense of belonging?

2/. What aspects of the university culture are you most comfortable with? Why?

3/. Are there any aspects of the university culture that you still feel distanced from, or marginalised by?

4/. Do you feel included within the mainstream student body?

- If yes, how and why? Is there anything in particular that makes you feel included?
- If no, how and why? What makes you feel distanced from the 'average' or 'mainstream' University of South Australia student?
- How does your experience of inclusion/exclusion affect your overall experience at university?

5/. In what ways has the university as an institution facilitated your immersion into the university culture?

6/. Are there any areas you feel more could be done?

7/. The University of South Australia and especially UniSA College has access and equity as a core part of its mission. Do you feel that the institution is welcoming in this regard? In what ways have you experienced this feeling?