Education's not black and white, it's vibrant grey

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Keywords: auto-narrative, reflection, education, motivation, competition, pedagogy

Abstract (CP and JS)

This paper offers a learner's eye-view of a journey through education, written in an auto-narrative style. Sarah's story spans from Secondary School to College and through University finishing at the point of Graduation. Revealed in this open and honest account is an insight to coping with home life whilst navigating the trials of the Education system. Sarah makes criticisms of her peers at every level reminding us how competitive some students have to be to *get on* and achieve *success* in their education. Critical judgements are also made about Sarah's School teachers and University lecturers, which are at times as rewarding as they are uncomfortable, but always truthful. Consequently, there is much to learn by both academics and students from this sensitive and vulnerable personal revelation. Sarah's evidence in turn points to some fundamental questions about the genuine outcomes of the Educational system, e.g. what are we actually teaching young people to be like? And do we like the product in terms of their values, beliefs and motives? A concluding message from Sarah's perspective is that greater independence in learning, freedom in thinking and equipping people to reason, judge and make decisions in whatever realm, may be defining steps towards becoming educated.

Introduction (CP and JS)

This is a first-person reflective account of Sarah's journey through education. It is her voice that tells the story; an auto-narrative. Over and above editing duties in the main text, the voices of Clive Palmer (CP) and John Stoszkowski (JS) appear in occasional footnotes at relevant points for contextual development. The Introduction helps to pitch the narrative as a journal article for academic discussion and in so doing, raises some key questions about Education generally. (The capital E on Education denotes a system of formal or mainstream Education in Schools, Colleges and Universities). These questions are in a section we have called the Pre-Conclusion. Raising these immediately after this Introduction allows Sarah to carry the reader to the end of her story, just as she wishes to tell it. That is, she has the last word, no lecturer is stepping in to summarise or conclude at the end of what has been said. However, the reader is invited to consider what sense Sarah's story makes for them… freely.

ISSN: 1754-2375 [print]
ISBN: 978-0-9566270-9-4
JQRSS Article No: 4/11-9-1-2015-UG3[26]-092 © SSTO Publications, UK.
Web: https://uclan.academia.edu/ClivePalmer/Journal-of-Qualitative-Research-in-Sports-Studies

Sarah's account is structured along a simple chronology from Secondary School to College to University, detailing her progression through years 1, 2, and 3. Clive Palmer and John Stoszkowski taught Sarah at different points in her Degree creating what now appear as milestones in her learning at University. Chiefly these were to encourage a sense of freedom in academic writing (by CP in Sarah's First and Third year) and sharing philosophical thoughts with the sports coaching community through online Blogs (a Second and Third year teaching initiative with JS).

This narrative is purely reflective like an extended diary entry. Consequently Sarah does not seek to align or justify her thoughts with research literature which would disrupt the flow of her storytelling. Indeed, Sarah's motives to draft her thoughts in the first place were not for academic writing at all and usefully, for the good of social research, may be all the more honest and valuable for it. That is, her text was not submitted for academic assessment against some criteria in order to get a grade and eventually a certificate. She wrote what she did because she wanted to. In one sense it is 'pure' data. This said, the paper is offered in the tradition of narrative storytelling which is an increasingly popular means of communicating experiences in socio-cultural research (for example see: Classen (2012); Denison (2006); Duncan (1998); Gilbourne *et al*, (2006, 2011); Howes (2005); McAdams (1993); Sacks (2011, 2011a, 2012); Sparkes (2002); Van Maanen (1988); Wacquant (2006); Wolcott (2009, 2009a)[1].

If education is driven by assessment then one interpretation of Sarah's story is that it is a three-dimensional existence depending upon varying motives, beliefs, needs, desires, experiences, decisions and rewards held by the stewards of the Education system; the teachers, and by Sarah herself. From extrinsic grades to intrinsic senses of personal value her learning experiences have been intertwined with types of assessment which can, broadly speaking, follow three distinct forms:

> **(1) Norm-referenced** assessment when Sarah would be measured against her class or group in a given situation, such as gaining recognition amongst peers or in sport being the fastest sprinter on the day.
>
> **(2) Criterion-referenced** assessment when Sarah's assignment work is evaluated against set criteria for grading and percentages, or in sport like a Decathlete who competes for points. Then there is,
>
> **(3) Ipsative-assessment** when Sarah competes against herself to be the best she can regardless of others, such as reducing her dependency upon extrinsic grading (%), or in sport when the runner who comes last, or who runs alone, gets a personal best time in doing so.

[1] CP and JS: There were no references in the original text that Sarah gave us for this article. She wrote freely to explain her thoughts, not searching for references first which seemed to become a tactic for writing many of her other academic assignments… apart from the ones prior to this paper that also got published, curiously (Nickless and Palmer, 2012; 2014).

All three perspectives seem to flow in two directions simultaneously; one of Sarah making judgements about her Education, the other being the Education system making judgements about Sarah. The first providing impetus, fuelling Sarah's drive to *get on* in Education, the second creating 'friction' operating as a filter determining how she might achieve *success*. Whatever we might choose to judge as success in our Education system could be a moot point, however, what becomes evident from Sarah's story is how a student perceives the Education system as they are confronted with it, showing how they can devise a strategy to manage it, survive in it and somehow rise to the top of the heap - or even escape from it. Mainstream Education can't be for everybody. Thus, for the ones who wish to 'play the game' Sarah demonstrates a strong sense of competiveness in striving for academic attention. She is necessarily very determined, even self-centred, there being an apparent need for selfishness in the education arena. After all, it was Sarah's education, no-one else's.

Pre-Conclusion (CP and JS)

Dear reader, you may wish to skip this section and return to it later. Sarah's story so honestly told begins to lift the lid on some fundamental questions about Education in our society, for example, what effect does it have on the people we visit an Education upon? And, whatever it does do, do we really want that in our society? In the raw light of Sarah's reflections, educators are reminded that the processes and products of the Education we offer are designed, implemented and promoted by us; from what subjects students learn and how they are taught, to how their work is assessed and rewarded. However, the system and our part within it, frequently defaults to rewarding *quantities of knowledge* rather than *qualities of behaviour* which may be a problem? The former having real value for Sarah in the notional measure of becoming educated; in the number of qualifications accrued. The latter being a pleasant by-product of being amongst nice people? So, within the institution that is Education, educators may be largely accountable for reinforcing students' attitudes to learning, shaping their perceptions of academic progress and therein, their concepts of success.

Pejoratively, in terms of the values, beliefs and motives of students who diligently strive for the tangible rewards on offer in School or University; grades, might the true learning outcomes from our Education system be those of competitiveness, self-centredness, self-interest and selfishness? Are these the qualities we really teach young people to *get on* in our society? May be? And perhaps for good reason, worryingly?[2] Sarah shows all of these qualities to progress

[2] CP and JS: These learning outcomes from Education are probably unintended by curriculum planners and may be viewed as undesirable in this socio-educative context - in a perfect world. However, with something as complex as the Education system opening its doors to a hugely diverse group of people, who can predict what might actually come out of the other end? This situation was vividly

through her education, she is determined to get good results and not be held back by her peers. It is survival of the fittest combined with deliberate tactics to be in the best position possible to win, or at least take what she can. However, when the short-term content knowledge requirements in Education are forgotten, such as the strange symbols in Mathematics or quirky bits of Science regurgitated for an exam, it will probably be the qualities of survival, tales of behaviour and other social experiences that are remembered long into adulthood, colouring what may actually be recalled from a given phase of the educational journey (see Palmer 2010, 2010a).

Alternatively, if it were possible to take a GCSE in *Developing Good Behaviour Skills* (just as there are GCSEs for developing all sorts of other skills), it might seek to collate evidence about; being polite, courteous and sharing, developing a sense of personal morals, showing benevolence and a having charitable disposition, being professional and courteous to others, being patient and sensitive to other's needs, volunteering, being magnanimous in defeat and generous in victory, a humanitarian who looks out for the well-being of his fellow man. These may be things that Sarah refers to as 'becoming fit for life' in which sport can have a vital pedagogical role. Whilst these may be qualities we admire in a good person, Education seems reluctant to identify them as learning outcomes from a structured course? As it is, they are left to some kind of social osmosis, from home life perhaps? …a soaking up of good traits that a teacher in authority will comment upon in a reference, but rarely take the time to teach directly. Surely, if these qualities were important to society they would be on the timetable? In some considerable measure, if these qualities were formally recognised within Education, there may be a more rounded claim for Education to be developing intelligence beyond that of knowledge recall, i.e. into areas of social responsibility (Laker, 2000) and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996). Again, this may be failing to educate the person with preference given to teaching subject knowledge. Sarah does demonstrate admirable, community-spirited behaviour in the course of her learning journey, such as when volunteering for a sports charity in Africa. However, in her eyes as a student at University, this was not

demonstrated by Paul Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour*, an ethnography of children in the West Midlands and how they interpreted their School lives to reinforce their working class identities. This outcome from their education was obviously not part of any examined subject or syllabus. Similarly, the concept of the Hidden Curriculum refers to the 'unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students learn in school' cited from Steven Abbot's (2014) *Glossary of Educational Reform*. It should also be noted that a hidden curriculum can reinforce the lessons of the formal curriculum, or it can contradict the formal curriculum, revealing hypocrisies or inconsistencies between a school's stated mission, values, and convictions, i.e. a departure from what students actually experience and learn while they are in school. For example, a school may publicly claim one thing in its mission or vision statement, such as academic excellence or exam results, but the reality be something quite different. Eric Margolis' (2001) *The Hidden Curriculum in Higher Education* also shows that unintended cultural messages in education can be very powerful, influencing a person's learning and shaping what picture they 'take away' from University – things that teachers and lecturers alike may have little control over, other than designing and operating the system in the first instance.

worth anything towards the graded outcome of her qualification. It was something separate from her Degree. WARNING: looking out for others may seriously damage your education! The GCSE in *Citizenship Studies* (AQA, 2015), whilst a step in the right direction does little to engender good behaviour skills[3]. Consequently, becoming qualified in *Citizenship* may not equate to being a good citizen, it may only add to the competitive scramble for grades and awards in the Education race.

As University lecturers, CP and JS appreciate that excessive amounts of assessment, driven by subject knowledge, may be counter-productive for educating people intending for a career in community sports, health, welfare or some aspect of education. That is, the human qualities we expect from our students in those roles are rarely a significant feature of the qualification we award. So under this pressure of constant assessment should we be surprised when students react in the only way they know how… and compete, especially on a sports course! Are we missing the point in our bid to provide education for the 'real world' (UCLan, 2015)? as unfortunately our students may be preoccupied with surviving in the Education system, rather than thriving in it. Sarah, by giving us this valuable insight to her learning experiences, provides a glimpse of the Education system as she perceived it. Consequently, her story seems as relevant to teaching staff as it is to students grappling to make sense of their learning journey. It acts like a mirror of experience reflecting back the realities of what it can be like to be on the receiving end of the Education we offer, however well intentioned.

Towards the end of Sarah's time as an Undergraduate at University, she seems to discover how fulfilling and enjoyable education can be. That is, that supplying right or wrong answers to authority figures in the Education system may be a limiting view of teaching and learning that stifles personal development, compared to what an education could be. She finds that in the spectrum between 'black' and 'white' lies all the colours of white light, what Sarah described as 'beautiful and vibrant grey'. Therefore, a valuable outcome of Sarah's education may be that she found new levels of comfort in philosophical uncertainty. In complex reasoning there is rarely a straight answer, usually just more complexity. Whatever beast we serve in education, from helping yourself to helping others, Sarah's story may be evidence of the outcome, for her.

[3] CP and JS: A search through the online syllabus, content links, indicative teaching guidance and assessment plans for the GCSE in Citizenship Studies revealed only mechanical knowledge of administrative workings in society. For example, the political system(s) voting and democracy, campaigning, local councils and MPs, justice and the law, rights and duties in the workplace, interest in world affairs etc… There was nothing on developing good behaviour skills or even, how to become a good citizen.

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Written by Sarah Nickless

…Some reflections
…two months before Graduation,
…prior to receiving my final degree results.

In the beginning

Growing up hasn't been easy. A broken family isn't the best thing, but I have parents and relatives who have made the best out of what they have. My Dad went to University and hated it, stuck it out because my Granddad never got the opportunity to go. Dad's messages growing up have always been to 'do what you enjoy every day and you'll become the richest person in the world', words which are echoed by my Mum. Words I have taken quite literally in my life-choices which have been exactly that, my own. Well I thought they were, but the more I think about things, the more I realise they were influenced by others and earlier life events.

School and education has slowly worked its way into something I enjoy, as opposed to something I just have to get through. I think that has come with greater understanding and also realising that I could have rewarding relationships with teaching staff. As life unfolds the good runs with the bad. At times education provides an escape and you realise that significant others care for you more than previously thought. The power of education goes way beyond exam results and knowledge levels.

Primary school now seems distant, the wrapped up individuals sped along a conveyer belt towards SATS and Secondary school. Following my parents splitting up, I ended up at a Secondary school away from my then school friends. Personal challenges already, not only at home but to enter a school-world knowing only one person, my sister. Not fitting in due to my new-found interests in football, a boys game which lies outside the typically female priorities of hair, make-up, and boys! I started Secondary school as the perfect student, home work was a priority and I wanted to learn new subjects. You can't hate something you've never tried. Ingrained morals of politeness, working hard and giving respect remained true during my early years of school. Morals which my parents instilled, which are echoed throughout my direct and extended family. For me, it only seems right to carry that attitude on.

Secondary School

Secondary schools saw me break out of the girlie status quo, fuelled by the first year (Year 7) perceptions I created of myself. The desire and need to do well came from parental pressures and their ever-present encouragement throughout my school life. PE was my *forte,* I have always seen sport as an escape from daily troubles. My

joining a football club prior to starting Secondary school was honing a competitive edge in me which I still have now. The want to win games and enjoy playing within a team was something I wished to take into PE lessons, it was a shame that not everybody had the same enthusiasm as I did.

That 'keano' attitude transferred to other subjects in school, but things were soon to change. Peer pressure. I guess I copied the behaviours of my class mates, started to emulate their opinions rather than follow those of my parents. Mum and Dad were so open minded about things they seemed to lack conviction to guide me. That was my interpretation at the time although they were just being tolerant. My own thoughts were always black and white, if I didn't like something that was it, no turning back on a decision or trying to compromise. I was being a young teenager. Judgments about teachers and subjects changed so quickly. I observed that those pupils who were off-task got most of teacher's attention, but still no reason to misbehave, I guess… although I enjoyed having a little bit of attention and that appeared the only way to get it. The real life choices began in Year 8, options around what to take as GCSEs. I guess this could be seen as the start of the end in some respects. It all seemed so serious all of a sudden. My choices were constantly changing being influenced by teachers and peers. For instance, my choice to take French only was changed to French and German because a few of my friends would be in that class. More students than the teacher could cope with elected to study Food Technology so I had a year split between Food Technology and Textiles, something I despised, but I couldn't avoid it - my form tutor was the Textiles teacher. I think here was a point when I did compromise. I hated the subject but got on well with the teacher (more on this further down). I remember taking work home and getting my Mum to help me, there was always a feeling of grudging dislike for this subject and most people close to me knew this, but I just got on with things. At this point, I had it in me to sit between the lines of black and white, but thinking it was not a prosperous place to be I didn't visit there very often.

The black and white opinions didn't help matters, now I look back, not with regret but a wider appreciation of things, possibilities or points of view would have been helpful when I was at Secondary school. I remember getting frustrated at my thoughts being compromised by trying to understand the teacher's point of view. But my thoughts were rigid and narrow, I had the world sorted out in my head, easy. With hindsight I was being challenged to make sense of the world. The teachers were just doing their job and is nearer the actual enjoyment I get out of learning now. Easy to say after a University Degree, but back then, I began to hate certain teachers, so then I hated the whole subject. That was it. Nothing could be changed. I was asked to leave lessons, removed from classes and moved into different sets to deal with the problems I caused. Nothing unsavoury, I wasn't rude, just didn't enjoy

what I was doing, so I didn't work, didn't listen and gave up on it all. Maths and French are two standout subjects. Maths was a teacher/ student relationship problem. We clashed, didn't get on and neither of us made an effort to deal with the problem. French again was a teacher-student problem, which I didn't help. After being moved classes again and with a new teacher, things didn't change because I had the mind-set that I hated the subject, despite having a better relationship with that teacher. I was too far gone to risk that middle ground of trying to make an effort. Making an effort would leave me vulnerable to compromise… could I be bothered? Unfortunately these attitudes and prejudices may have spilled over to other subjects, spoiling some of my school learning experiences. Not purposely, I would just get stuck in a rut or mood and carry these attitudes around with me. Unable to budge the thoughts, it all turned into frustration.

I think back to the teachers who I did get on with; my Form tutor, English teacher, Technology and my Maths teacher in Year 9 and I saw the clear correlation that they felt teaching was a lot more than just the classroom. They made an effort to get to know students and create the necessary relationships. It's as if they had mastered the art of differentiation, knowing how to treat individuals and working towards that before trying to force the learning. These teachers made you 'feel felt' as if you were important and they cared. It is a quality which we should all strive for to support our social and professional ties. In many jobs this features a lot, especially as a sports coach. 'Knowing your players' is a huge aspect of creating relationships and getting the best out of them. It is difficult to pin down exactly what my best teachers did, as they might say something completely different each time I saw them. My guess is that they had a passion for working with and developing people, not just teaching a subject. I know that I let my guard down around these teachers, they got to know me and the mood swings I had, they knew that I had a decent sense of humour and genuinely wanted to do well, but even at the time I remember none of us knowing how to deal with the black and white view I had of things.

A theme I can see emerging from my time in education across School to University is that my rigid black and white thoughts have persisted and I still have them, not as strongly influencing me now, possibly being tempered by experience. At school my Form tutor from the end of Year 9 to Year 11 spent a lot of time with me trying to create a relationship, getting to know why I did things and genuinely wanted to help. I saw her as more of a friend who dug me out of a lot of trouble. I probably didn't thank her enough for it. She was a role model to me which I see more now than I did then. I left school with 9 GCSEs at grade A-C and went to College in a direction away from my School friends.

College

I attended The Telford College of Arts and Technology and completed a BTEC National Level 3 Extended Diploma in Sports Coaching and Excellence. A new start so a positive attitude followed me around, 'I'm here to do well and try my best'. I couldn't see the point in doing the course half-heartedly. I chose a BTEC because there were no exams, all coursework which I did better at. This misconception was soon changed after being told about the Functional Skills test we had to do in Maths and English. The non-existent communication around doing this exam drove me mad, I hated it. It became my 'French' so I didn't try, I wasn't interested and that was it. End of.

Exams aside I struggled at College, not because of the work load, but because of the students, my peers. I am not sure why they were there, other than to pass the time. There was no sense of urgency in their learning, just apathy. Nobody had the drive I did, I couldn't understand it. Frustration that nobody wanted to strive for the highest marks; that going to College was a 'doss'. If I'm honest, Pass and Merit work was a 'doss' as it didn't require too much thought. For others they re-wrote their work multiple times before getting it to the right standard. I know I am bragging here but where was the need to try when it didn't really matter? Studying sport was meant to be something for me to enjoy, that's why I chose it over A Levels as my interests did not span further than a playing field.

Sitting with peers who didn't want to be there, not for an education anyway, in a College with no football teams to help alleviate these frustrations, it seems rather obvious why I didn't like College. The bitchiness and dishonesty of people was horrendous. Things I've veered away from and still do. I can be a bit of a loner that way. None of my former school friends were there and it appeared that the ties I did have were slowly falling apart. Not seeing my old school friends everyday was difficult, they made new friends and I couldn't. Maybe I was too optimistic that I would still be close to them, but that turned out not to be the case. The two-way effort required for relationships to work wasn't there. What dealt a greater blow was that two weeks into College life my football career ended, severe knee problems made it difficult to walk let alone play. My sporting escape had been blown apart which at the time felt like the end of the world. The inability to play sport was difficult, sitting through practicals and only helping by refereeing or umpiring was down-right annoying.

Looking back now the injury has been a blessing. I wouldn't wish injury upon anyone, but for me it has opened numerous doors which I'd have otherwise not seen. I expected to get back playing quickly so I kept going to training sessions and supporting matches. My thoughts were that once I was fit again I'd have a better chance of getting back into the team. At my club, keeping up training sessions and

going to team events meant I was part of the team environment. However, this was a delusion as I didn't get to play on the team, so I took coaching more seriously working with an Under 11s side. I found out that the hours I was putting in could be logged and rewarded through The FA Football Futures Programme. As the hours built up so did the opportunities. I was selected for the FA National Coach Scholarship Programme and The Youth Sport Trusts National Young Coaches Academy and ended up attending The FA National Football Futures Camp – opportunities I certainly would not have had if I had continued playing football. These coaching programmes gave me a new direction within coaching, but also opened my eyes to what other areas of football there are, all the behind the scenes work. Football Futures has allowed me to travel the country and meet some amazing people who have become really close friends. It's not all about the football, but supporting and developing people, becoming fit for life. I left college with full marks on my BTEC and being the first sports student to achieve D*D*D* (Distinction) which was great and rewarded the effort I had put in. No piece of work was re-written, each submission achieved the highest possible grade, although I was happy to move on again.

In reality I hated College. Similar to School I had a module/lesson which I hated and gave up on because I just didn't want to do it. I took frustrations out on the tutors, but again not rudely. I just didn't work for them. Maybe there wasn't enough of an effort from both parties to create a good relationship where we could get on, it is easy to say this now. I also had a 'go to' person, like my old Form tutor at School. I built up a relationship with a College tutor who supported me through troubles and helped when needed. This tutor was a University student on a placement teaching us Psychology, who shared similar thoughts to me about my peers and just studying in general. Leaving college was a pleasure. I had offers from many universities and chose the University of Central Lancashire in Preston.

University

The idea of going to University seemed natural, and still does. This was a logical path of education opening up for me but I was becoming aware of what could be a pre-determined experience of passing through a course, compared to what should be a self-determined exploration of personal learning. I had been subjected to 'schooling' in the past, obediently following a timetable. I wanted more control and a sense of personal investment in my studies, an experience I could call my own education. Influence from family members echoed both positive and negative experiences of going ahead with University life. My Dad graduated with a 'Desmond' after it was expected for him to get a first[4]. He only stuck University out

[4] CP: Slang: A 'Desmond' coined after the Arch-Bishop Desmond TuTu is a Degree classification, a 2:2 is a Lower Second Class Degree. Further, a 'Richard' after Richard the Third, is a 3rd Class degree.

because he felt he had to, my Granddad never got the opportunity to go. My sister lasted less than a month before returning home. College tutors seemed adamant that I should attend University, they said my College work was exceptional compared to my peers and further study seemed the obvious way to go. I always had the dream or hope of attending Loughborough, the highly talked about centre of excellence known for sport. This was where the 'party' seemed to be at. However, those hopes were shot down before I started College, a tutor saying that my sporting ability was not good enough to get in. At the time that was all I needed to put me off going there.

I drew a two hour travel radius around my home in Shropshire, that's as far as I was prepared to go. Being a home-bird isn't fun and two hours seemed reasonable for being just far enough away to be out of reach, but also to return home if I needed to. This constraint limited my options of Universities that offered a Sports Coaching course. The fact that Loughborough did not offer the degree I wanted softened that blow. The University of Central Lancashire was just within my two hour radius, they had the Degree I thought I wanted and the Open Days reaffirmed that choice. Swayed by the extensive playing fields at UCLan Sports Arena (in retrospect the sad irony is that I've hardly used those facilities) the decision was made. I attended most of the Open and Applicant days, trying to get a feel for the place, meeting the tutors and learning the layout of the city. My Dad came along asking numerous questions and marvelled at the overseas opportunities on offer. My Mum took me around the Halls of Residence and held her own view of the University. The only really off putting feature for me was the number of churches I encountered walking around the campus area, sounds silly, but for me they are a thing I dislike, the connotations aren't all positive.

There must have been more reasons to choose UCLan. I think I just liked it first off from the people I met. The tutors to seemed to value the individual and the development of others. I have a real buy-in for people who are 'fully present', who hold a conversation because they want to, not just to be polite. Again that sense of 'feeling felt' I find really important in a friendship, as much as I do in an educational relationship. Open Days at other Universities I attended were all about how brilliant their university was and nothing else. They didn't speak to, nor draw in the potential student. Public address rather than personal communication was their corporate mode and I felt like a commodity. The same works in any walk of life, if you do not feel valued then the experience may not be positive. If I am to invest thousands of pounds and three years of my life in something, you want to be sure it is going to be in the right place.

After a disappointing two years at College, the hope was to progress onto University to join other students who wanted to learn and understand more in their

chosen field. The anticipation of full lecture theatres bustling with engaged students were my honest expectations. The thoughts of raucous nights out were there to complement and subtly fit around the proposed studies; after-all University is about getting a Degree, right? That's what I thought, and I still do. To me University is what you do on the way to working in an area you want to be in. To learn more about your interests and become an early-career professional, not a three-year laze to waste time and energy, pausing reality whilst deciding what to do next in your life. Education is far more important than that. Yes, I understand that people go to University for the freer lifestyle, the parties and the last minute deadline submissions. But if you are constantly submitting work at the last minute you aren't acknowledging the opportunity to put time into learning and finding out new things. Picking up last minute references means rushing around, possibly lowering your standards to a 'that'll do for a pass' just to get by. This was continuing to use a Secondary school attitude to learning, doing the minimum you can to pass an assignment, not learning something for its intrinsic interest and expanding on it. At no point was University a last minute option for me because I didn't know what to do. If anything, not knowing exactly what to do is the point I am at now (graduating) but I am not confused, my education has afforded me choices and I feel confident to apply for positions of responsibility in Sports Coaching. I know full well a Degree does not answer the prayers of the thousands expecting to walk into a good job. For me, whilst University was expected, I was never pressured to go.

First year

Being stuck in College and School mind-sets means listening to teachers as those who are in the know, fonts of all knowledge. It is as if teachers and University tutors have all the answers and if you don't listen you'll miss some important information. In one of my first ever lectures being told to 'bring my personality through the classroom door' was a bit weird. That tutor continued, 'if you don't bring your enthusiasms and interests into the classroom I can't teach you'. Consequently, being encouraged to write freely in some areas (subjects/modules) but feeling unable to in others was difficult. That instant feeling of what different tutors expect and tailoring writing to them was again difficult. Having the thought of not being able to write in the same style or sense of freedom for each piece of work created a sense of risk, and mind-reading trying to predict who likes what. Nobody stated these unwritten rules about learning to me. For some modules, fear of not achieving decent grades meant writing in a way that answered the question, but in a basic way, mediocrity is safe. Unless something more engaging and creative was openly invited, the report-like drivel I wrote for some modules was boring, but this seemed to be expected. So I gave them what I thought they wanted. Whilst other students formed opinions about tutors immediately, I was trying to work out each one, to understand them and break down this 'god like' persona. Some tutors I liked,

other's I hated. I was constantly sat in conversations where I said nothing instead of arguing the point. The very first lecture I can remember not being very exciting, the following seminar was a classroom rammed with people. I answered a question which got a seal of approval and interest from the lecturer, but my question answering didn't reach its potential dizzy heights that I know I would enjoy. I was already conscious of taking up people's time by asking my questions, not wanting to annoy others seemed more important than my own education. I waited to listen to others rather than speak out myself. Sinking into chairs around the edge of a classroom was frequently what I did. Taking a safe position to see everyone in the room where I could write notes without looking like a busy body. I did, and still do prefer seminars, less people meaning more time to talk to lecturers and students who actually want to be there. Some of my favourite seminars had only four people in, there wasn't a nervous thought of asking or answering questions and conversations could dive a bit deeper. For example, the blog post *The £27k Question* was prompted from a PADAR 2 seminar with only three people in it (Nickless, 2014) (University module: Professional Academic Development and Research 1, 2, 3 across First, Second and Third years of the Degree pathway, see Palmer, 2014).

Lectures were what I expected, some I liked some I didn't. Carrying on some subjects from my previous College BTEC National Diploma, there were modules that I really wanted to understand more about. But there were others that I didn't enjoy so I avoided them. Or rather, I went along but my mind wandered. Part of that may have been the tutors involved or just my waning interest for topics. Modules such as The Principles and Practices of Coaching, Coaching Toolkit, and Coaching Performance and Development seemed like the same module but spread across years 1, 2 and 3, which I didn't like. In terms of the assignments we were asked to do for these modules the learning experience also felt similar across the years. The broadness and elite-ness of the majority of the modules' content was off putting. I couldn't think during the modules, it was just a lot of bland topics, content you picked up but didn't really explore or question.

This strong pre-conception of University life was my driving force during the First year. Turning down nights out to sit and write assignments, locking my room door to block out social engagements. I was there to study, to learn, to do well academically. Yes, First year grades might not contribute to the final Degree classification, but just passing an assignment was not an option, it never was during College. My parents have always instilled the thoughts of working hard for what you get. Spending so much time, effort and money just to scrape 40% (a basic pass) is that really time well spent? I can remember living by the line of 'if you're not going to do it properly, don't bother'. At the time, I thought doing University properly was spending all possible time writing assignments. The social engagements I did have

were typically 4-5 hour one-to-one conversations with flat mates late at night, discussions on personal topics and current problems.

The focus was to obtain the highest possible grades. I was aiming for 100%s, hitting the best possible outcomes. How was I to know that was not possible? 83% on a first ever assignment, and it got published pretty good you'd think? The article was called *Crawling Through Experience* (Nickless and Palmer, 2012) for which I also received an academic award in the *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies* (Palmer, 2012). It was not good enough for me, I wanted to know how to do better, how to gain 17% more. Sounds a bit barbaric now, but at the time perfection was what I wanted. Being told University assignments aren't marked in that way and that I could not have done much better was frustrating. I have since realised how good that 83% was. The thoughts come from all angles I think, trying hard was the thing to do, whether that was writing assignments, playing football or anything.

For the way I have written in the past I was never top of the class, I have had to work hard to get the grades I have. My first drafts are often poor requiring a lot of editing. Like sculpture, writing is a formative process from my initial outpouring of ideas and then chiselling down to something more polished underneath. My school teachers praised me for my effort and hard work and those classes I did not work hard in were shown through poor GCSE results. The influence of teachers and those who I got on with worked its way into everyday motivations, wanting to do well for them as much as for myself. Coming from a family who have worked for what they have, I wanted to do people proud and show them I am capable. Not letting folks down culminates into working hard to reach the highest marks I can. From memory I don't think there is one person or a specific time which establishes this belief. It's an outcome of being educated by a number of people over time who in different environments praised and created students who want to do well.

My University social life may not have been booming as it was for many others, but within sport and football I was travelling around the country delivering national events, coaching every night of the week and pretty much volunteering my life away. University allowed for my volunteering to expand and flourish, at the time I didn't notice, even though I gained every experience I could, the relaxed and sparse way of university structure allowed for them to happen. The handful of lectures and seminars made for a lot of spare time. Although I was busy of an evening, the time in the day was spent reading and doing bits of work. Other students might find the spare time useful for sleeping, drinking or alternative social activities. The possible need to plan time and use it effectively didn't seem to be important to them. The key areas of my life complemented each other nicely, the deeper understanding of Coaching and Sports Development allowed for personal growth and awareness in 'the real world'. I think areas like this show what priorities I hold as a student

compared to some of my peers. I don't think it's a skill to fill time productively, it's an obligation. If you don't want to get involved with your learning and just scrape the barrel with low grades then that's how much effort you will put in. It is a continuous feed throughout this paper that University for me, was not just an extension of College, not just passing time whilst deciding what direction to point my life in. Three years is a long time and really shouldn't be wasted. To 'feed' at University is to have an indulgent educational 'feast', unfortunately, some people couldn't recognise the 'food'.

Generally, my social life went no further than the flat I lived in and the one above. Although we all studied different topics and Degree courses, everyone brought something different to our learning, often sharing thoughts across the dinner table. From October to January 2012-2013 I read *Bounce* by Matthew Syed (2010), borrowed from a flat mate studying psychology. Other than the odd autobiography I didn't read a lot, in fact I tried to avoid it. Through school, reading was always associated with the slow reader in the class, normally me, or books that we had to read in order to write about them. It was never about enjoying a book and just reading it for pleasure. However, reading *Bounce* was to reveal hidden messages. I'd heard of the book before but never really took the time to consider it. Having someone close-by with the *Bounce* on their shelf seemed like fate. Strangely this book seemed to speak to me, the pages questioned my thoughts and unearthed a side of life which I had never thought of. At College I really enjoyed a module on Sports Psychology but that's as far as it went. I must have thought that psychology was all research and theories and not bothered to look into it. Following *Bounce* I read *Mindset* by Carol Dweck (2006), *The Chimp Paradox* by Dr. Steve Peters (2012) and *Finding Your Element* by Sir Ken Robinson (2014). Since then I've grown my own library housing 60 plus books (only two of which I owned prior to starting university). It appeared that *Bounce* hit the spot, an angle I really enjoyed. How people think, why they think in certain ways, things I never had the opportunity to ask about, it was a 'you don't know what you don't know' kind of thing. The easing University timetable allowed for me to read more, spending time getting into books. Now a converted bookworm I can't get enough of it. Why this change? The books I have and continue to read are all of a similar topic, this pop-psychology come self-help area became of real interest. As I've read more, I find myself questioning how to think for myself and how other people might think in their tasks, duties and social situations. A thought-process that supports me when coaching, or when working with other people in my volunteering roles. At the time of starting to read, I jumped on every bandwagon, believing everything I read. Maybe I was having those thoughts already? or I was reading stuff that was too easy to read? Either way they were not demanding texts, I already agreed with them. They reflected back my own knowledge but did not challenge my beliefs. But then I progressed on to reading

things that did challenge my thinking, made me evaluate my everyday life and the decisions I was making, asking questions that nobody had ever asked me before. Up until then education appeared to be black and white, either you were right or wrong – unlike Maths, strangely, where you could be marked on the process as well, your 'working out'. That formative process was never valued enough in my view. It was as if opinions were not important, only the answer. You needed to memorise facts to reproduce them in an exam. Is this really learning? Reading has brought me into the world of learning. Learning about myself as well as the world around me. The difficulty to begin with was resisting and accepting parts of what I was reading. At first I did believe everything, and with that came a little bit of power – knowledge is currency. This blindness to accept views rather than understand them did influence other matters, the views I held within classes, opposing the thoughts of others. It was as if reading and expanding my knowledge opened up a freedom to express views I believed in, but actually, I didn't understand things well enough to create a valuable contribution, just a statement. Books provided me with ammunition for discussions, but they didn't explode. Statement made, bosh. End of. It wasn't a statement of thought where I had looked at opposing sides and created my own thoughts and opinions around it. Maybe this was a School thing, where there has to be a right or wrong answer. Problem was, I was increasingly beginning to enjoy exploring the grey areas between theories, the natural shade between black and white.

My interest in reading was growing, this niche area was engaging[5]. However, this did not always transfer across to my work. Finding references to match my

[5] CP and JS: Sarah's phrase, 'this niche area was engaging' is a genuine comment which in the context of discovering that books can be engaging is worth analysing a little more deeply, it is the understatement of the century. Books have been engaging the masses since the invention of the printing press so 'niche' could mean that the value of these books are new to Sarah in her learning journey, obviously not new to the world. A problem is that students generally, don't read books. If they did, they might discover that Sarah is describing an empowering experience in her education. An ability to reason and take ownership of learning, adding new perspectives to build and personalise beliefs, all in the context of a subject or module. Becoming engaged and learning through reading may be a result of creating time and space to think, to ponder and collect thoughts, being open to possibility and making your own connections between practice and theory. And then sharing these ideas with peers. This may be opposed to being disengaged and recipient in a minimalist way, only relying upon information through the means of a lecturer, who are not fonts of all knowledge. The bodily-present but cognitively disengaged student seems to yield all personal responsibility for their learning. Sarah's phrase reveals more. 'Niche' points to the idea that Sarah has discovered books while her fellow students had not, she was somehow ahead of the game, despite the presence of the library. Technology and the Internet is a primary means of harvesting content on a subject, in fact, no need to harvest at all as it is permanently available. A grab-and-go attitude now pervades the learning experience, snatching at sound bites hurriedly pieced together to satisfy an immediate deadline need. There seems to be a complacency and laziness that festers all the while that students suffer the misconception that learning is about amassing quantities of knowledge rather than thinking what to do with it. Teachers also have a training need and new duty of educational care on this matter as well. Learning and becoming educated may be evidenced a change in personal behaviour; a product brought about by a process of reasoning, problem solving, making critical judgements that are informed by all manner of criteria from philosophical to

opinions seemed the quickest and best way to go about the assignments. Hitting the minimum requirement of six references (as stated in the Module Information Packs) for a First year piece of work seemed a mountain! A mountain I just didn't want to climb. A distant problem considering a Third year assignment I handed in with 80 references. It seemed I wanted the best grades for the least amount of work. This isn't wrong I suppose, but I spent hours writing without reading. I was 'looking at the learning' [tasks] from the wrong angle.

The routine of lectures, coaching and assignment work ran on for most of the year. Whilst complete levels of oblivion were sought by others to satisfy the stereotypical University lifestyle, I wasn't spending nights out in nightclubs and enjoying the effects of alcohol. Enjoyment through going out was not allowed unless work was done, except from the Wednesday night quiz at Wetherspoons Pub. Finishing my First year with 71% was pleasing, not the best, but within that top bracket. Thinking back, I enjoyed staying in and reading more than actually doing the assignments I was writing. There was a mis-match. Assignments felt like chores, but staying in alone offered privacy, a time to re-charge my introvert batteries and sit reading to relax, albeit with a topic focus.

My first University summer was filled with working at Asda supermarket, 6am until 1pm most days, with very few days off in between. Amongst this was a successful job interview to become the University of Central Lancashire's HE Football Activator. This was a part-time role to develop all football provisions at the University. It was a 12 hours a week contract to run alongside my coaching and lectures. With two modules being placement based, the opportunity to take on more hours was there. At the time, I was still writing assignments before finding references[6]. My reading was taking off, I was spending hours a day diving into new and different books. I had free afternoons to do nothing but read. I had had a knee operation a couple of months earlier, so I was fit and able to play sport again but time didn't allow for this. I had other interests and couldn't really get back into playing football through the summer before returning back to Preston. My chosen

aesthetic, from scientific to creative. It is seemingly the role of the teacher/lecturer to bring about such learning but within a new model of 'content free' teaching (Kendra, 2013). That is, while the content of nearly all subjects is reliably held in virtual reality for us to access anytime, learning what to do with it is a matter of new pedagogical debate where the teacher in the classroom has a vital procedural role to teach the person and not use his time to simply deliver content (for example see: Biggs and Tang, (2011) on *Learning at University*; Bergmann and Sams (2014) on *Flipping the Classroom*; Top Hat (2015) on *The Modern Classroom*). What may actually be 'niche' for students is taking time to read, from whatever source, choosing what to read and freedom to make their own connections and associations to support new thinking. Students, if you get into reading your writing will become an easier and more enjoyable task, precisely, because it's yours.

[6] CP and JS: This might not a bad thing if you wish to write freely – could the 'tail' of finding references first, wag the 'dog' of the assignment and what you want to say?

book topics were all very similar; it gave me a chance to read books that I had asked for Christmas. That summer made me realise how boring I found reading a book about sport or football, I just could not get into them, I had moved on. They didn't provoke any thinking, whereas others did. I was really enjoying my coaching and looking forward to the challenges that the new football season would bring, as well as the challenges that the new semester at University might offer.

Second year

Then, about two weeks into the new academic year I was given news of my Granddad passing away. The first week of my job now put on the back burner, a change in attitude to frustration from what was a positive start to the new term. A week at home for the funeral and time away mourning has its repercussions. I had missed some key introduction lectures resulting in no partners for the new assignment in PADAR 2, and missing 3 module assignment briefings. The positive start ruined. The frustrations from the shocking news didn't resolve themselves instantly, nor should they. I hated life for a number of weeks, bit my tongue to save arguments and tried to stay out of the way of people. In a handful of modules I attended, I sat down, wrote notes and left, there was no participation within the lectures or seminars from me. I wasn't in the mood. I didn't want my feelings to become public. This paper is the first news of this life event to many outside of my family and close house-mates. I am very self-conscious and did not want other people to see the faltering individual I was becoming away from the lecture theatre. The insecurity of not wanting to tell people soon influenced everything. Coaching was an escape but I wasn't myself. Work was an opportunity to wallow in self-pity. Frustrations now being taken out on others, I closed up, ended social engagements early and flitted away like the quiet social butterfly I can be. My mind wouldn't stay still and eventually personal life evaded all engagements. It was noticed and I felt I was letting others down and wasting time by not interacting with people. University didn't matter anymore and reading was the only pleasure. I'm a thinker, deep and reflective, but this was too much. I needed a distraction. The desire to do well academically came back in to focus, the phrase 'your Granddad wouldn't want you to worry or let other things slip' slowly started to sink in.

Quiet thinking has always been what I do, answering questions requires time and patience, not to rush and make off-the-cuff remarks. Enjoying quiet and deep engagements seems appealing compared to small talk. Maybe that is a personality or introvert thing. Maybe it is just looking for something more than the baseline answer. You could compare it to Secondary School English, having to look beyond the words for what the author is trying to say. That inquisitive thinking appears to have continued, it's an identifiable trait. The wish to improve things in my University work and in my football role has required deeper reflection on previous

activities and actions. The more I read and ask questions of others, the more I look to think deeper myself.

My attention switched back to football, successfully applying to sit on the FA National Game Youth Council. I was 1 of 4 young people to be selected to travel to Rwanda as part of the FA Changing Lives Programme. With things going well in my studies it seemed reasonable to focus on experiences external University. However, the experience I was gaining was not being paralleled by many of my Degree course peers and I wondered why not. Time for a rant. The chalk and cheese comparisons between them and me were obvious as many were just about passing and scraping through, thinking 40%s are enough[7]. It was their laziness and lack of interest that frustrated me. Why did they have such low aspirations? They seemed to be intelligent enough to get to University, why were they not using their brains now? Who pays so much money to just about pass? It does not seem right. I think I started to withdraw from being a participative individual at this point. Selfish? Maybe. But not being in the same group as those who didn't see studies as a priority was where I sat. Many people saw me as a 'brown-noser'. I was even described as 'the person who makes lectures last half an hour longer than they should'. I went to classes to learn, others went to get their attendance mark. It is a question around effort levels. The increasing number of people going to University could be diluting the importance and value of it.

Thinking back, the start of 2014 may have been a turning point, half way through my second year. I have always and continue to dislike group work. The need to depend on others who will influence my mark is annoying. The lack of trust is horrendous. The dawning Second year realisation that most of my peers were at University for the ride was disappointing and added to my frustrations. Riding along for three years whilst they figured out where they wanted to go, enjoying money which isn't really theirs, buying drinks, going to concerts and the like. Sounds appealing, right? Hundreds if not thousands of pounds which mostly won't be paid back. Why should I be engaged if they don't need to be? This view meant that choosing assignment partners was difficult. I'd end up doing most if not all of the work. The lack of interest from others meant that they didn't aspire to the same standards as me. At times I may have been the problem, not wanting to delegate out the work, but the truth is, when I was working towards 70%s I couldn't allow the thought of someone else ruining the chance of getting the higher grades. When someone else has the power to tamper with your own learning and grades, it seems

[7] CP and JS: Sarah fully appreciates that there are some students who make lots of effort and are very happy to achieve a pass grade at or around 40%. This may be their success and all credit to them for what they achieve. Their effort is to be celebrated, it is the 'can't be bothered' attitude from some students that seems to gnaw at Sarah's patience for *getting on* in education.

quite obvious why group work is not to like. Their withdrawal of effort can become a form of coercion, even bullying. For those 40%ers it's a great opportunity to take a back seat as a loafer and enjoy the mark that may follow. But, for the hardworking ones, it's hell carrying others.

Still, the need to work effectively within a team and to understand opinions of others is an important element of University assignments and indeed in life. Coming to terms with this and my trip to Rwanda really opened my eyes to what I was thinking and feeling. The FA Changing Lives Programme is the pinnacle of the FA Football Futures initiative that looks to develop young volunteers through football. Following an application and interview process, I was selected as one of the two females on the overseas visit. For me, reaching this point was a dream. The hundreds of hours volunteering in England rewarded with a journey to the other side of the world to use my skills and expertise to mentor young sports leaders in Rwanda. Helping other people is a passion and to be able to do that in Africa was an incredible feeling. It also helped me realise how far I had come in my own learning to now be helping others in their community. At no point was this seen as a CV enhancer or anything of the kind, most people didn't know I was going until the day before I went down to the airport. As my Dad said, it was a trip that would change my life, as well as, hopefully, the Africans we were going to work with. Seeing the world from another angle, with amazing people who make you realise what's important and remind you to be happy with what you have. It's difficult to put the emotions into words. To meet people who really understand the value of others and education. The realisation that the world isn't black or white, you can't put a number on learning, it is a process.

Returning home left three months of University and the lead up to a busy summer. Again, however, my priorities weren't entirely on my studies. The thought of grades were important, but not enough to worry too much about. My mind was constantly on what I was doing away from the classroom. The need to support other people, the Youth Council and the delivery of national events was getting more exciting. Exciting because I was creating opportunities for other young people and working with contemporaries who really cared about what they are doing. Most importantly, I was travelling around doing events, spending time with friends who I didn't get to see very often. Considering I had started to ignore assignment grades, I finished the year on 68%, not far away from the 71% of first year, but I knew I would need to work hard if I wanted a First Class for my Honours Degree.

Third year

My final summer consisted of learning drive and running around to different football events, starting to plan for my Single Research Project (a 20 credit module) and possibly even thinking beyond University life. Things I estimated to have a lot

of time to do in the Third year, but soon realised I didn't. Third year was serious, even more so than the First and Second, but it didn't start that way. Coaching a football side absorbed a lot of my time and resulted in six or seven assignments stacking up which I hadn't started, or those which I had started were just not good enough. I made the decision to leave the football club to save my Degree. Looking back now it was most certainly the right decision. It made me happier and allowed more time to read and write.

The reality check of not writing my assignments correctly came early in November. The 'I'll find references later' strategy was shot down and rightly so. The realisation of this was revolutionary. I started spending tens of hours a week in the library reading and finding references. Papers and books were examined intensely and I really started to enjoy discovering opposing views to clash with what I believed at the time, all to be able to create arguments on the page when I needed. I think it was the moment of being told my work was not good enough for Third year that I really started to switch on and write properly, to enjoy reading different articles and ask questions back of things rather than just accepting them. Creating my own theories of things, creating my own research within research. I was able to take a charge of my learning and writing, some tutors encouraging me to tailor assignments to suit what I liked to do, so I could really get a hold of it. Coaching philosophies and beliefs, formal coach education, stress cycles within psychology, areas which caught my imagination and started a Narnia like fall into a magical world of exploration[8].

For the PADAR 3 module I wrote what I think was my fastest ever assignment. Within the context of the module I was given complete freedom to run away with the brief in whatever way I chose. The story I wanted to write became much talked about by my peers who disputed or even disagreed with the fact that I was allowed to write it. The assignment was aimed at supporting job applications and ideas towards becoming employed. The first draft was written in no more than two hours, but was followed by multiple readings and constant editing. Proof reading to myself, polishing the text, then going public to all of my housemates. Change upon change was made to the text until it told the story I wanted. I even took the chance to read

[8] CP and JS: A second year module on Coaching and Reflective Practice encouraged students to share their ideas about coaching theories and philosophies through an online Blog. Sarah found new space to construct her thoughts and elicit feedback on them in the public domain, for example see Nickless (2014) *Sarah Nickless and the Philosopher's Thought*. This innovative module exploited new freedoms to express thoughts and beliefs during a formative educational process that is critically discussed by Stoszkowski and Collins (2015) *Using shared online blogs to structure and support informal coach learning. Part 1: a tool to promote reflection and communities of practice*. Followed up by Stoszkowski, Collins and Olsson (2015) in *Part 2: the participants' view and implications for coach education.*

the final draft out loud to my PADAR 3 class as the tutor had invited us to share our work before the hand-in[9]. The story is based on my life but projected into the future becoming the tale of a 40-year-old woman reliving memories of her youth and giving advice to her teenage children about life chances and aspirations. *Granddad always said to follow your dreams* (Nickless and Palmer, 2014) is a fictional story that replicated my own recent history which went on to be published - and got me 90%! A paper that I now struggle to read after seeing the impact it has had on my parents. They too are implicated in that story (as they are in this one).

Some weekends I've spent 30-40 hours in the library researching and making sure that my assignments are as close to perfect as I can get. 60 to 80 references now make up my work but it's far too many really, reams of paper have been used as I made notes, drew mind-maps and wrote drafts. The distance between some of my peers and me had widened. That is, the competitive streak in me really wanted to expand the horizons of my own learning and push my own boundaries. I also wanted to surpass the merchants who haven't been seen since the first week of the year. I think on a taught course consisting of timetabled lectures and tutorial support, a large measure of ignorance has been displayed by some people who were pleading for help at the last minute despite not attending lectures or reading module guidance information. Granted my attendance record has not been exceptional this year, but I've spent lecture hours in the library and taking hold of my learning, not waiting for it to be served up to me.

The importance of grades returned at the start of the Third year. I really wanted to nail things and get the First Class Degree I had been working for. I spent many hours in tutor's offices asking for a little direction and to make sure I was on the right lines. It seems that help is always on offer if you ask for it. It's not a bad thing to ask for, but in fact it opens up new worlds of ideas and thoughts that you wouldn't have alone. I have come to realise that it is conversations and emails with tutors that I really enjoy, that notion of 'feeling felt' captures how staff seemed to know what I mean even when I thought I was taking risks with assignments. It is a feeling I get from most tutors who genuinely want to help students make the most of their education and support their journey. I wish I'd asked for more help sooner in First and Second year.

[9] CP: This was a memorable lecture in which Sarah read her story to her Third year class-mates. She stood up and read with confidence and feeling, accents and all, she performed her own work. All the students really enjoyed the tale and were somehow transported by the story-telling, becoming quiet and wanting to discover the ending. They were mesmerised. Because of the freedom I encouraged in Sarah to draft this work, I think the 'lesson' for the student audience was how much learning took place for them, that morning in late November 2014.

Not the end but a new beginning

Relating back to previous points, I haven't loved every minute of University. On a sliding scale there have been some modules I have hated and others that I really did not enjoy. The difference here is that not enjoying and doing well in one module can influence the others. It doesn't only affect that one area. Disaffection can become infectious. These are modules that I have had to try harder in to make my writing worth reading and of a good academic standard. I've also had my 'go to' people, although at the start of University I tried to avoid contacting tutors as I saw them as superior others. However, the more I've understood University, the more I've realised they may be as lost within education as I am! Growing in confidence I have become a 'go to' person for a couple of others. We listen to each other and share thoughts. The need to have someone to help has been and continues to be so important, even more so now with the stress of trying to find a job and not really knowing what direction to take my life in. Insecurity knocking at the door again.

University was never a party to attend, for the nights out and social highs. It's been a journey of falling into a bottomless pit of education and deep thinking. Questioning the norms and realising that grey areas aren't a bad thing, but in fact create conversation and offer new points of view. I've been allowed to find my niche areas of interest and really excel on the side of reflection in ways that I didn't expect. I came with the attitude of getting my Degree and moving on, however, getting trapped and enjoying long hours in the library was not expected.

My learning journey will continue, spurred on by the attitude I have had across the last year and half. It will be an enjoyable adventure into wider sporting topics taking me long into the future. My learning and education may become even more informal and won't require an assessment at the end of it, or even a certificate, but rather, motivated by a genuine interest to explore things further. An attitude created and developed through the support of my University tutors who have allowed me to 'fall in love' with learning. From my PADAR 3 tutor I have taken the notion of, 'if you don't like what you're writing, you're writing the wrong thing' and have gone with 'if you don't like what you're learning, choose something else'.

With my journey through formal education now over, sealed by my Graduation next month, I cannot thank my tutors enough across the last three years, for their support and helping me through the black and white period into this field of beautiful and vibrant greyness.

Sarah Nickless
Summer, 2015

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JQRSS Author Profiles

Sarah Nickless[1] received a First Class Honours degree in Sports Coaching Development from the University of Central Lancashire and is currently a Football Development Officer (leading on Youth and Mini Soccer) at Somerset FA. (Sarah.Nickless@somersetfa.com)

John Stoszkowski[2] is a Lecturer in Sports Coaching and Development within the School of Sport and Well Being, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK.

Clive Palmer[3] is a Senior Lecturer in Outdoor Education and Sports Coaching within the School of Sport and Well Being, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK.

Reviewer comments:

I have really enjoyed reading Sarah's very thoughtful, biographical picture of her journey through our education system as she experienced it. I don't know whether to laugh or cry after it reading through. To laugh at her memories of being a 'typical teenager' and her responses to the teachers she found herself having to work with and for. I want to say that even in my era (1960s) 'it was ever thus', her truthfulness rings a bell for me still. To cry about the reflections she presents of dull and lifeless work being undertaken in order to gain a degree qualification. Clearly some tutors might be rather embarrassed to read such open criticism, but equally it may just give them food for thought. Sarah comes across as a driven young person who wants to do well in her, what you might term 'accidentally' chosen future as a sports coach. It becomes apparent with hindsight that the knee injury she sustained was a life changing event for her, but it was an adversity that pointed her in a direction of

travel much earlier than she anticipated. Now her degree becomes a means to the achievement of an end, and her attitude to the work that this entails makes for interesting reading. It visibly indicates a determination, a strong work ethic and a steeliness that is indeed admirable. One can only wish her well in her future chosen pathway and admire her honesty about the reflections Sarah presented here.

Note from the Editor

Responses to reviewers are rarely ever published but in this instance, Sarah's letter serves to demonstrate that their comments are valued, prompting deeper and wider reflection for the author, and maybe for the reader too…

Dear Reviewer *3rd September 2015*

Just a quick note to say thank you for the kind words in your review of my paper around my time in education. After re-reading and reflecting on the piece I've come to feel very conscious of how I portrayed myself, a level of arrogance and selfishness which I simply do not possess. Your review is a kind reminder of the journey and the blessing in disguise of an injury which has led to numerous adventures within sport. I am thankful that you have managed to see past the 'education self' which is portrayed to the determined and hardworking individual I believe I am.

Thank you for taking the time to read and review the paper. I'm Glad you were able to experience a range of emotions and memories, but do apologise if the honesty was too much.

Best wishes with all that follows,

Sarah Nickless