# Kaleidoscope Special issue, Hazel R. Wright, Anglia Ruskin University Trusting the process: Using an emergent design to study adult education

#### Contextualization

To understand aspects of this paper requires some understanding of the Capability Approach. This is a flexible, theoretical framework developed by economist Amartya Sen (eg: 1985a, 1985b, 1987, 1992, 1999) that places individual choice at the centre of the decision-making process. It explains how governments could facilitate this by providing people with a range of opportunities rather than a single optimal option identified through the economic calculations of utility maximization. It seeks to delineate a means of empowering societies, focusing primarily on the developing world where current practices keep many, particularly women and children, in positions of deprivation within patriarchal family structures. Sen theorizes that choice is neither rational nor random but bounded. Each individual has a 'capability set' of potentially realizable alternatives from which to select compatible options for implementation; a process Sen describes as turning capabilities into 'functionings'. Sen places the attention on this process of choosing. His discourse of people selecting 'beings' and 'doings' that matter to them individually relates to the present, on the achievement of functionings that support a current satisfactory lifestyle, rather than distant future attainments. The capability approach has an affinity with many liberal strategic positions in favouring diversity and is to be locally applied, each group determining their own priorities, and thereby taking responsibility for their own lives.

Additionally, readers may find useful, a brief discussion of certain, sometimes contested, terms used within the main text. As with Bricolage, my usage of the label Emergent Methodology has a broad focus, embracing the eclectic selection of methods across the entire research process. Emergent Methodology is used to describe a flexible design, in which 'the detailed framework ... emerges during the study' (Robson, 2002, p.81). It involves a process that is ongoing, changeable and iterative in nature but implies that choices will be purposeful and carefully considered prior to, during, and after, implementation. Bricolage (in French, simply meaning do-it-yourself) is a postmodern descriptor and as such carries multiple connotations (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) not least an element of randomness, opportunism or multivocalism. Indeed the claim that, like Emergent Methodology, it 'exists out of respect for the complexity of the lived world' (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p.137) should not be isolated from its ideological aim to uncover 'the invisible artefacts of power' (ibid, p.137). Grounded theory, like many inductive approaches, is subsumed within the umbrella term, emergent methodology, but could be said to have 'emerged'. The initial post hoc approach to data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), later (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) became a framework for making theorization from data visible, strengthening validity claims through a systematic application of collecting, coding, checking and categorizing techniques (for overview see Dick, 2001). At the microlevel (eg: sampling and coding choices) flexibility is encouraged, but procedurally grounded theory is quite prescriptive, even in its more relaxed modern usage (see Charmaz, 2000).

#### **Abstract**

This paper describes the process of becoming an educational researcher. Years of carrying out minor research projects where time and disciplinary constraints necessitated a pre-planned research strategy, led to a determination to let the unfolding research agenda dictate the choice of methods in a doctorate. I wanted to explore the interpretative paradigm in depth in addition to adopting an interdisciplinary approach to my research. I therefore spent some considerable time studying different methodologies and questioning my own ontological and epistemological position before electing for 'real world research' using an emergent framework rather than a postmodern form of bricolage. The reasons behind such decisions form the background to this paper.

The research topic was a case study of a group of mature adult women returning to education to train in childcare. Data capture required retrospective recall so, of necessity, the major research strategy was that of interview but the flexibility gained through researching students already known to me, allowed a degree of experimentation with the interview techniques, particularly a shift from semi-structured to conversational style to free-association interviewing. This required a means to evidence the nuances within the discourse, met by the adoption of conversation analysis techniques at the transcription stage. Immersion in the data allowed a holistic interpretation. This led to thematic analysis, the development of typologies and creation of localized theory, and then to the adoption of the capability approach as a conceptual framework taking the theorization to higher levels of refinement, demonstrating that my trust in the process was founded.

#### Introduction

This paper discusses the research methodology used in the study 'Integrating Lives Through Adult Education: A case study of mature women training to work in childcare' (Wright, 2009). It commences with a brief account of the doctoral research undertaken, for although the focus of the paper is how the methodological processes supported and made visible the eventual findings, inevitably the discussion will slide between the general and the specific requiring the reader to have some knowledge of the research content. The project complies with University ethics requirements.

#### Research overview

The thesis reports a predominately qualitative study that explored the student experience of adult education focusing on expectations, practices and consequences. The research draws upon the characteristics of 150 women enrolling on a level three childcare Diploma in a Further Education College over a ten-year period, and, in particular, a semi-stratified sample of 33. The participants were all students formerly taught by the researcher and this prior acquaintance facilitated the unveiling of a

wealth of detailed and personalized data. The research used a range of methods borrowed from several paradigms in order to fully explore the material that was obtained from background questionnaires and through informal but searching interviews. The latter were transcribed using the coding techniques of conversation analysis in order to highlight the nuances in the text and establish deeper understanding. They were then analysed through a lengthy process of writing out that captured key interpretations as they arose alongside an exhaustive collection of supporting evidence; thus, keeping the themes securely connected to the individual narratives at all times. Typologies (see table 1) were holistically derived and evidenced systematically and an original model (see figure 1) created to explain the significance of education in the adult lives; the triple triangle maintaining integrated lives. A subsequent alignment with the capability approach then stimulated further interpretation of the data and an identification of the 'triple triangle' as an inductively-derived capability set. This in turn prompted a linking of the thematic analysis and the typologies to capability theory allowing me to introduce a longitudinal element and a treatment of time into my use of capability theory and to set my own findings within an overarching 'real-world' discussion of the ways that the participants achieve stasis in their lives whilst managing change; thereby taking the analysis to higher levels of conceptualization not previously anticipated. Thus the overall picture is one of open-minded analysis of data, creation of localized theory, linkage of local theory to an overarching conceptual framework, and subsequent use of the newly derived theory to extend the conceptual framework.

## Defining the indefinable: What is emergent design?

The label 'emergent methodology' does not signify a failure to plan ahead; rather a more sophisticated recognition that data analysis is a core element in the research design. It implies a researcher who is aware of multiple possibilities in the early stages, who selects appropriate strategies as s/he assimilates the material and begins to understand its significance and makes iterative adjustments throughout the process. In my case, it conceals an extensive period of familiarization with a broad range of research literature, involvement in a number of different small-scale research projects that gave me chance to use and fully understand the strengths and limitations of specific methods and considerable effort at every stage of the research process as I monitored progress, analysed both findings and methods, and sought the means to solve problems and improve outputs.

An emergent design is especially appropriate for naturalistic or 'real world' research, that which seeks 'to say something sensible about a complex, relatively poorly controlled and generally "messy" situation' (Robson, 2002, p.4). Robson summarizes Anastas and MacDonald's (1994) division of research into 'fixed' and 'flexible' designs, defining the latter as those where 'much less prespecification takes place and the design evolves, develops and "unfolds" as the research proceeds', and makes the point that this terminology conveys the freedom of approach customarily associated with qualitative methods but goes beyond this to allow the inclusion of quantitative methods too. Quite apart from any formal definition or justification 'emergent methodology' carries with it a

requirement for active involvement with processes, a continual reflection upon ontological and epistemological validity, the flexibility to cross between paradigms and thereby risk the disapproval of the research community, and a confidence to think 'outside of the box' and to make decisions appropriately but not necessarily conventionally. In appropriating the label 'emergent' design I am claiming all the characteristics of flexibility including the right not to pre-select detailed methods.

## Why adopt an emergent methodology?

In short, the label emergent methodology becomes attractive when a researcher recognizes that a project is moving in different directions to those initially anticipated and wants to let the data shape the design. Ironically, I came to claim this methodological approach for my thesis quite accidentally, for it is one that is easier to adopt after the event. In the earlier stages, keen to get proposals and progress reports past the relevant authorities it was simpler to talk of 'grounded theory' as Glaser and Strauss (1967) and their many successors have long become established names, understood by researchers from all paradigms, whether or not they favour this approach. Indeed, there was a point when I thought that I would be using 'grounded theory'. It was really only when I saw how structured it truly was that I realized it was not for me. I had tried 'anticipating the process of data analysis, at least in general terms' (Mason, 2002, p.37) but when I came to start coding I realized that I found the process of systematic coding too mechanical and concurred with Charmaz (2005, p.509) that 'grounded theory methods provided a template for doing qualitative research stamped with positivist approval'. Nor did I want to use a computer package for analysis as I had long considered Polkinghorne's dichotomous division of biographical data into that suitable for 'narrative analysis' (emplotment and analysis in story form) or 'analysis by narrative' (thematic analysis across the interview) and knew that whatever method I chose I wanted to keep my findings contextualized at all times rather than risk fracturing the data. Like Lincoln (in Charmaz, 2000, p.520) I believed that manual analysis aids sensitive interpretation: 'Why would you want to engage in work that connects you to the deepest part of human existence and then turn it over to a machine to "mediate"?.

It was at the point, when I had collected and transcribed an overwhelming mass of 'real world' data (some 500 pages of closely packed 12-point text), that I realized that I wanted a different approach and began to look in earnest for ideas, even a justification for my position, finding that many of the methodological texts with a qualitative disposition were unhelpful, to someone past the planning stage. Marshall and Rossman (1999, p.151) stipulate that data collection and analysis 'typically go hand in hand', Bryman and Burgess (1994, p.11) describe analysis as 'not an activity to be relegated to the end of the research', Richards and Richards (1994, p.149) claim that 'analysis commences with the process of data acquisition' and Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p.2) that 'letting data accumulate without preliminary analysis along the way is a recipe for unhappiness': not comments intended to support the struggling qualitative researcher mid-process. Thus, I gave up searching for advice and considered the

'emergent methodology' approach more closely asking myself if I dare to rely on my own intuition and experience rather than follow an established path. Tempted towards an affirmative answer, aware too that I might not have an alternative, I stopped to consider my progress so far, to see whether a review of the research process to date offered any clues to possible routes forward.

Before fully subscribing to this new 'knowingly emergent' approach I took time to reflect on what I had already achieved and how earlier decisions had been made and implemented and decided that the label 'emergent' could validly be applied to the research design in its entirety, although previously I had labelled my decisions 'iterative'.

## Looking back over the data collection processes

At the *initial contact* stage I had considered whether to send questionnaires out 'cold' or to contact students by telephone first. In the event I posted the questionnaires, received 30 replies promptly (out of a possible 170) and determined to 'chase' the others by phone thereby renewing contact and only sending out second questionnaires if necessary when people admitted that they had lost or discarded them. (Many could retrieve them from the 'safe' places they had popped them and were able to post them back quite promptly, resulting in a total of 150 responses).

At the *sampling stage* I had found myself reluctant to select either those capable of telling useful stories (Goodson & Sikes, 2001), or those 'willing to assist in the research process' (Erben, 1998, p.5), finding my earlier social science 'rationality' embedded. Wanting to negate any future accusations of bias, particularly given my prior association with the entire student group, I therefore elected to draw up a sampling matrix, setting current employment activity against student cohort. However, whilst respecting this framework, I made iterative adjustments to the numbers chosen until I felt I had achieved an appropriate balance between the optimal and the possible. I knew at the outset that I wanted to study sufficient students to be able to look for patterns across the data but avoid interviewing so many that I lost track of individual narratives but whether that meant interviewing 20, 30, 40 or 50 students only became apparent when the process was underway and I chose to keep my sample to 33.

The *interview* and *transcription processes* were truly iterative. I had identified exploratory research questions at the outset, deciding to investigate the student experience in terms of their expectations, practices and consequences. I felt that a simple chronological perspective gave me a tidy means of separating antecedent and subsequent behaviours from findings about their study period, a necessary distinction given the retrospective nature of the interviews. I had therefore drawn up a set of semi-structured prompts relating to these categories, perhaps as moral support for me lest the students had little to say. With hindsight I was disappointed with the first interview. It felt clipped and mechanical and seemed to focus on the joint-ground of the daily teaching sessions, material that was already familiar to me. It also lacked depth: the interesting material had been offered spontaneously in general

conversation before and after the tape was turned on. In the second interview, therefore, I put the tape on earlier, started with very open questions like 'what does education mean to you' 'tell me about your own educational experiences'. I found that I could conduct the interview as an open conversation and that together the student or I naturally introduced areas of interest to me when the conversation was moving in an appropriate direction. Thus I had moved from a semi-structured style to a conversational style. During the third interview I merged my approaches. Reading the transcript, it became apparent that I did shape the interviews but in a more sophisticated fashion than that inherent in simple questioning. An initial reading suggested a tendency to step in and control the student responses, prompting me to consider whether I needed to stand back more. However, on closer analysis I realized that I was only intervening to challenge students' stories when they appeared to be inconsistent or did not fit with my own memory of events. Thus, I was beginning to position myself as not just equal conversant but very close listener and seeker of the 'truth'.

This discovery sent me back to the methodology literature to reflect further and more deeply on my approach and I quickly found three ideas that I could appropriate. From life history research I saw the value in using a biographical approach to interviews, encouraging students to talk me through their own life stories rather than focusing purely on the educational parts. This was an exciting development for me as it truly 'made the familiar strange' taking me into areas of the students' lives about which I knew nothing, and quite coincidentally opening up later avenues for analysis not intentionally sought. From psychology, I adapted the techniques of free association interviewing (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) whereby the interviewer listens for hesitations, juxtapositions and contradictions in the narrative and intervenes with appropriate comments or questions to encourage the participant to reflect more deeply and perhaps, more honestly. Thus the interviewer is listening closely for what is not being said in addition to that which is being said and has an active and important role to play in the interview process. For me this served the useful additional purpose of helping to define and refine my role as 'participant interviewer', an important development in bringing interviewing closer to ethnography (Fontana and Frey, 2005) but at odds with the neutral, objective role sought in formal biographical research methods (Wengraf, 2001). To adopt an interactive approach was possible because of the positive nature of the initial 'shared' experience: to question the validity of a participant's statement could be a provocative action but becomes acceptable when a friendly relationship pre-exists. Such a method requires sensitivity: the boundary between eliciting and distorting truths is a fine one and demonstrating that the researcher avoided 'leading' the interviews difficult, bringing me to the third idea; the adoption of conversation analysis coding. I needed a means to identify the interactive processes hidden in the written transcripts, of making it apparent that when I stepped in to clarify matters it was because the free-flow patterns were breaking down, the student stumbling to a halt and needing further encouragement. Sometimes, indeed, when the subject matter became complex I found that I summarized what a student was trying to say, relying on a sequence of gestural affirmations to confirm that I was doing this accurately, changing tack if I were not. To make visible these nuances in the data I adopted the techniques of conversation analysis, seeing conversation as 'talk-as-action'

(Edwards, 1997) and using the associated coding conventions to study the structure of the interviews and identify any deviation from the normative patterns within paired utterances. Since I was using conversation analysis as an analytical tool rather than a research method in its own right, I used the coding selectively, marking up areas of text where this was necessary to clarify meaning.

On reflection, I felt that the label 'emergent' could accurately be applied retrospectively to the methodological decisions already made, so I now had to see whether an acceptance that my ideas would continue to develop 'flexibly' would help the research to move forward.

### Looking forward to the data analysis processes

Moving forward, in practice, meant shedding restraints as I turned to the old-established method of immersion in the data, reading and re-reading the narratives and allowing my relaxed mind to play freely with ideas, telling myself to believe that there would be patterns in the data that would become evident over time: in effect, to trust that an 'emergent' process would produce results.

Adopting the 'emergent' label was important, for it allowed me to find a new confidence in what I was doing. I no longer felt that I had failed to plan ahead sufficiently, but that I was choosing to work flexibly with my data. Indeed, in conversation analysis I found new support for the approach of letting the material reveal its meanings. Silverman, (2005, p. 38) invokes Psathas' (1990, p.45) practice of 'unmotivated looking' and reasserts Sacks' claim (1984, p.27) that 'when we start out with a piece of data, the question of what we are going to end up with, what kind of findings it will give, should not be a consideration'. As a form of empowerment, this should not be underestimated. I had at times been attracted to the postmodern notion of 'bricolage' but found that this carried connotations of randomness that I wanted to avoid. My research was being carried out methodically but not conventionally and Silverman's later (2006, p.222) comments on conversation analysis strengthened my own belief in my methodology for he claimed that conversation analysis is 'counter-intuitive in a common-sense world in which actions are usually understood psychologically rather than interactionally'. This statement justified the decision to use conversation analysis to evidence findings derived through psychosocial interviewing processes; the adoption of such a distinctively different method created a form of triangulation.

By this stage I had carried out a detailed statistical analysis of the background questionnaires, finding that my sample was surprisingly typical of the larger cohort of 150. Setting my study population in a childcare context demonstrated that my data would possibly have some significance for childcare workers generally. A comparison with findings in the Labour Workforce Survey reported by the Thomas Coram Research Unit (Simon et al, 2007), identified similarities between my students and a much larger cohort estimated conservatively at 51,000 playgroup staff, themselves a small proportion

of a national total 280,000 childcare workers. As far as localized interpretation was concerned, however, I still had a mass of 'messy' 'real-world' data and no real idea how to break into it.

# Listening to the data

Perhaps immersion in the data is a necessary part of the emergent analytical process whatever method one eventually adopts, for it is the researcher who must interpret the material, identify the findings and determine their significance. Mechanical processes merely support data reduction, perhaps even data sorting, but cannot substitute for the theory-laden involvement of a committed researcher. In retrospect I believe that I may have been trying to move forward too rapidly, conscious of the practical need to use time slots outside of key teaching and marking deadlines and unaware of Hughes' (1994, p.40) intellectual claim that immersion in the field 'leaves one almost too close to the data themselves to make any broader sense of them'. Certainly, stepping back from my material worked in this instance for I began to identify characteristic behaviours that stood out. Initially, these related to individuals but slowly over time I began to see similar patterns arising elsewhere in the data, although the detail was different from one person to the next, and thus began the process of defining typologies. This was a holistic process. I read the narratives closely and later salient points would rise to the front of my mind. I would then ask myself if other participants displayed those characteristics and slowly built up a series of groups within which most people could be allocated a place, a process made much quicker once I realized that I was studying two typologies (see table 1 below): one that allowed me to sort participants hierarchically according to occupational pattern and to allocate them to the position of sampler, stager, settler, switcher, or step-upper; a second that I labelled attitudinal that summarized groups by behavioural characteristics: accepters, agonizers, accumulaters and asserters.

Table 1: Taxonomy of typologies	
Occupational typologies: Outcome-related categories:	
Sampler	One who drifted into childcare, found it lacking and quickly moved on
Stager	One who found childcare work convenient when the children were small
Settler	One who chose childcare as a career after experiencing a range of alternatives
Switcher	One who chose childcare as an alternative career to a previous one
Step-upper	One using childcare work to access an associated, better paid position/career
Attitudinal typologies: Process-related categories:	
Accepter	One with a relaxed, opportunistic approach; a reactive decision-maker
Agonizer	One who reflects intensely before making decisions; may analyse guilt
Accumulater	One who steadily acquires qualifications & experiences; maybe with a focus
Asserter	One with goal-oriented behaviour; a striver to 'get on'

This holistic analysis had served several purposes. Producing typologies helped me to feel that I was now in charge of the analysis and, actually, the process of creating the typologies had made this a reality. I no longer faced a mass of unmanageable data. Instead I had some idea of what was in there and a means of identifying the saliences. Deciding to test the typologies over the entire sample (the 33) I produced an appendix for the thesis, that created brief biographies by documenting in tabular form every utterance that supported the typologies, a mechanical cut and paste task at one level but one that encouraged me to think and select and that identified key quotations that might have other applications. Thus, the typologies eased me into the subsequent thematic analysis enabling me to move from an understanding of individual lives, to an understanding of similarities and difference between individual lives and thence to identify commonalities across the narratives that might be used analytically. The process was emerging through the data yet again.

## Taking charge of the analysis

My original research formulation had centred on the issue of the 'purpose of education' but I was successfully persuaded that such a question was too big to answer and refocused on the 'student experience'. However, seeking answers to exploratory questions relating to the expectations, practices, and consequences of education, I unwittingly introduced a longitudinal element into the analysis as I established how expectations derived from past educational experiences, practices belonged to a constructed 'present' relating to the time spent studying on the Diploma course, and consequences, as might be expected, came later. Indeed, it was the inclusion of current practices within a historical time-frame that made visible the students' focus on their current lives, an interpretation that is normally concealed within pedagogic research where the focus is on the teaching-and-learning strategies rather than the student experience as a whole. This was important, as it was the awareness that the students were predominately interested in maintaining their present lives rather than investing in their futures that drew me to the capability approach as this also focuses primarily on current 'beings and 'doings', capturing as 'capability' the space before action, when people 'have' rather than 'make' choices. Searching for the language to express these ideas, I realized the extent to which society views 'education' as goal-oriented or remedial, even within a contemporary dialogue that stresses the importance of work-based learning. It was easy to chose the terms 'prospective' and 'reparative' to label the associated functions, but I had to search and eventually appropriate the term 'durative' to capture the focus on the present so clearly evident in my data.

However, at this early stage of the analysis I was content to divide my data into chapters covering expectations, practices and consequences and to 'write out' the evidence until both it, and I, were exhausted (some 146 thousand words later). It was a relief to find (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005; Elbow, 1973 in Murray, 2002; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000) that I am not alone in using this process as at times it seems an impractical one. As a means of analysis, however, I found that writing had both

strengths and limitations. The great advantage of this approach lies in the total contextualization of the data as themes were always linked to the evidence and individual narratives never viewed in isolation. In practice, this leads to a very sensitive analysis as one checks each interpretation against the original evidence rather than a summary that may inadvertently have simplified, even distorted, the data. It also very clearly identified data-saturation as the continual checking against the transcript made me fully aware of material covered and yet to cover. On the down side, it is a very time consuming, unwieldy, and wordy process requiring a continual reconsideration of the significance of data. It also required me to newly explore processes of summarizing and précising that I thought I already fully knew. Grouping findings, simple generalization from a number of similar pieces of evidence, and selecting one key quotation to represent a number of similar expressions was straightforward. However, I did find that when I needed to move copy to support the development of more significant arguments, the paragraph and subject links that I had instinctively written into the text made this difficult. It felt destructive to take text apart in order to reshape it. After a while, however, I learnt to handle this process by transferring copy to be worked-on into intermediate files rather than trying to create 'new' sections directly from existing ones. Somehow having an intermediate stage made it easier to cut the data loose from existing ties before recontextualizing it in the new chapter.

The process, one I termed analysis-through-writing\*, also allowed me to develop rather 'amorphous' categories that truly suited the data in a way that perhaps, I would have avoided with a structured coding system as the latter encourages a tendency to create hierarchical categories and to label them neatly. I truly believe that it was the 'struggles' with the data when it refused to do what I wanted it to do that led me to develop the most important insights, justifying the adoption of an 'emergent' approach. The label 'emergent' had significance for me beyond flexibility. It carried with it a requirement to challenge my own interpretations and to see the research process as a number of 'knotty problems' to solve rather than a pathway to follow and it is this attitude that I believe led to the creation of a number of original conclusions. These I briefly outline below, leaving a much fuller description and analysis to the final thesis.

### From problem-solving to theorization

The first 'knotty' problem of an analytical nature arose from my attempts to structure my chapters. At the analysis-through-writing stage I had written in a fairly amorphous fashion under the headings expectations, practices and consequences but when I came to summarize and structure these chapters I encountered a problem with my educational focus. Try as I might, it was very difficult to separate the students' comments about education from their narrative discourse about their families and their childcare work. After a long period of seemingly wasted effort, not achieving this separation, I realized that I should listen to what the data was telling me. These connections were important to the students; they did not see

education as separate from the rest of their lives but integrated. This realization led me to seek a different solution to my knotty problem, to reassess my data with a view to seeking the nature of the connections between the different facets of their lives rather than attending to one strand. Eventually, this led to the creation of my original model of 'Integrated Lives', a model that emerged quite organically from the evidence in the data once I relinquished the role of 'data-controller'. This is included (see figure 1 below) but not discussed in detail in this paper.

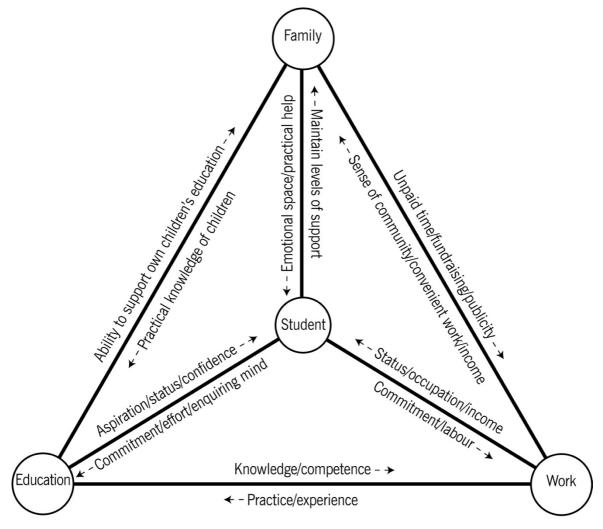


Figure 1: The triple triangle maintaining integrated lives

The narratives simply disallowed the possibility of neatly isolating education. These students were actively linking the familial, the educational and the vocational to make sense of their lives, centring themselves in an integrated web that allowed them to balance their commitments and achieve stasis. Thus, as with the typologies, another important theorization emerged holistically, this time through the process of trying to write coherently. It should be noted, however, that this theoretical model, one of the significant findings from my research, only became visible because I altered my interview approach. It was the move from semi-structured questions to probing in-depth conversation that allowed the students control of the content and led to a broader focus.

Once articulated, I thought the triangle the peak of my analysis for some time. Its recasting as a localized capability set arose after lengthy subconscious mental deliberation. I experienced a further 'eureka' moment on perceiving this possible analytical connection, provoking me to reconsider the data. In questioning how else my material might link with this established analytical framework I realized that biographical patterns common across the narratives could be used to introduce a longitudinal element into our understanding of capability theory.

My data suggested a series of 'aspects' common to all student lives that could be reconstituted as capability indicators. Given scalar values through a variety of existing and newly identified means, these could be used to capture the elements of individual lives as 'capability chains' demonstrating the achievement of functioning. Again, this process is fully discussed in the thesis, but here I merely want to mention how alignment with an existing conceptual framework imbued my own theoretical model with a greater significance. The conceptual connection emerged organically from my creation of localized theory but, reciprocally, the linkage enabled me to suggest additional ways of looking at the capability approach and of introducing time, change and progression through the life-course into the discussion. This new understanding led me to reconsider the original typologies and to realize that the attitudinal set could serve as indicators of agency, the occupational set as indicators of functioning, and that overall the capability chains that I had devised, captured the process of turning capability into functioning. They also created a simple visible means of summarizing and comparing previously incommensurable data hidden within lengthy narratives, enabling its further exploration. This subsequent higher level of theorization was, again, completely unanticipated and arose organically through holistic reflection on the findings.

#### Conclusion

Thus, although applied retrospectively, I believe the label 'emergent methodology' to be an apt one, evident from the inception of the project to its completion. I believe, also, that it was this flexibility that enabled me to collect and interpret a wide range of interesting data, to develop original theory, and to link the localized theory to an existing conceptual framework to produce a unique study of students' lives that challenges the normative idea that the goal of education is progress. In this research the students predominately sought to integrate their current lives not to move them forward. They were intent on maximizing their capabilities rather than specifically seeking new functionings. However, such actions do imply latency. To increase capability is a form of investment in possible futures prior to making choices about what that future will hold. Thus, the research findings are credible despite apparently challenging the normative instrumental values associated with education. For women concerned to centre the needs of their children when making decisions, expanding capability makes sense for it extends the number of option available for later conversion into functioning.

\* Analysis-through-writing describes the process of developing an argument by ongoing textual linkage of relevant quotations taken from the transcripts. Initially, memorable quotations are recalled spontaneously, then the transcripts are checked meticulously until all examples are found and written about and the data declared saturated. Continual grouping and summarising supports argument refinement and, eventually, theoretical development, a process analogous to but more flexible than that used in grounded theory. The method arose from necessity but was influenced by Richardson and St. Pierre's (2005) eloquent advocacy for writing as a research tool. (I would only recommend this method to people who really enjoy writing and editing text.)

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