Qualitatively Different Ways of Experiencing Higher Education Teaching Excellence: A Phenomenographic Enquiry into the conceptions of teaching practitioners of their experiences of higher education teaching excellence within College-Based Higher Education

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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

The word length of the thesis is 46,445 and I confirm that it does not exceed the permitted maximum.

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Abstract

This thesis uses a phenomenographic research approach to find out the different ways in which teaching practitioners from College Based Higher Education (CBHE) understood their experiences of what they considered to be Higher Education (HE) teaching excellence. The research outcomes contribute to existing literature on HE teaching excellence and policy developments within the Teaching Excellence Framework by providing insights into how CBHE teaching excellence is understood by those most involved in the delivery of CBHE pedagogic practices. Methodologically, this research extends the phenomenographic approach to CBHE pedagogic practices contexts.

The research outcomes were informed by data from structured interviews involving a heterogenous group of 30 teaching practitioners. Data analysis provided a hierarchically-inclusive outcome space illustrating four categories of description representing the qualitatively different ways in which these teaching practitioners understood their experiences of CBHE teaching excellence. These categories were also evaluated against two key research perspectives on HE teaching excellence to assess the extent to which they aligned with and/or built upon these perspectives. Exploring the understandings of such practitioners was important because they occupy central roles within CBHE teaching practices and contribute significantly to institutional enhancement of HE pedagogy.

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I confirm that no sections of the thesis have been published or submitted for a higher degree elsewhere.

List of abbreviations

CBHE	College Based Higher Education
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
NSS	National Student Survey
OfS	Office for Students
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for England
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

I start with the recognition that higher education (HE) teaching excellence is a complex and contested concept (Skelton,2005) which is hard to define and measure using standard criteria. Research literature on higher education teaching excellence is extensive, both globally and within the UK (Gunn and Fisk, 2013; Fanghanel et al, 2016; Greatbach and Holland, 2016) but with little agreement as to any definition of excellence (Skelton, 2005; Gunn and Fisk, 2013; Land and Gordon, 2015). Different competing interpretations and terminology on HE teaching excellence exist (Tsui, 2013) and such excellence operates within a changing social, economic and political environment (Land and Gordon 2015). The way HE excellence has been conceptualised has changed over the last 30 years, moving from informal collegiate enhancement-driven peer review to being seen as a mechanism for regulating pedagogic practices. I focus within my research on UK teaching excellence research as my study is about HE teaching excellence within a UK College-based higher education (CBHE) context, from the perspective of a sample of UK CBHE teaching practitioners. My focus within this research is on key perspectives on HE teaching excellence by Skelton (2005) and by Wood (2017) to serve as lenses to evaluate these understandings. Both of these perspectives offer distinct but comprehensive ways in which understandings of HE teaching and its development can be evaluated. Further, they provided me with the opportunity to carry-out a more in-depth analysis rather than a simple overview in relation to my participants' understandings. Both these

perspectives acknowledge the complexity of teaching and I believed they would be a valuable tool for evaluating these understandings.

Skelton's (2005) critical framework acknowledged that teaching excellence is a contested and contingent concept, and assumed it to be an intellectual activity which seeks to identify values and assumptions. This framework involves four ideal types of teaching excellence covering traditional (linked to subject expertise and knowledge creation, development and promotion); performative (linked to economic performance, regulatory control and competition); psychologised (linked to the psychology of the student-teacher interaction); and critical perspectives (linked to emancipation from disciplinary constraints and dialogic participation).

Wood's (2017) perspective, based on the complexity theory, proposed alternative ways of understanding HE pedagogic development using the emerging pedagogies approach. He argued that notions such as excellence or best practice led to complexity reduction of pedagogic activities, and offered five foci to support our understanding of pedagogic growth, covering values, personal growth, collaborative growth, organisational contexts and societal contexts. Perspectives from both Skelton (2005) and Wood (2017) are analysed further and examined in relation to participants' understandings of CBHE teaching excellence in Chapter 7. From a policy perspective, this research has also examined the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which provides external scrutiny of HE teaching through excellence awards of gold, silver or bronze. I discuss how the key aspects within TEF inform criteria for such excellence, and consider the main critiques of this policy initiative.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This research was situated within UK College-based Higher Education (CBHE), where HE is delivered within the overall framework of a larger UK Further Education (FE) Institution. This encompasses, across the CBHE sector, some 137,000 students (AoC, 2020). Outstanding teaching has always been at the heart of FE, even before current developments placed a similar explicit emphasis on HE delivery. HE teaching, learning and assessment strategies within CBHE are normally designed centrally, informed by FE priorities, with limited contributions from CBHE teams. Research on teaching excellence to date has mostly focused on University provision, with very little on CBHE or how CBHE teaching practitioners understand their experiences of CBHE teaching excellence. As French and O'Leary (2017, p138) point out, 'for too long HE learning and teaching has occupied a peripheral position in the sector, strategically and operationally,' to which I would add CBHE pedagogic practices are even less recognised sector-wide, as are the voices of CBHE teaching practitioners who facilitate such teaching. The outcomes of my study address this by producing the different ways in which my sample of teaching practitioners experience HE teaching excellence, and providing insights into what teaching excellence means to such practitioners, based on their routine teaching activities.

1.3 Motivation for the Study

My motivation for this study comes from my interest and experience within the CBHE pedagogic context. To me, teaching, learning and assessment are

central to my CBHE practices, and my engagement within the wider sector. I was aware that, on a national scale, the most recent TEF results show that CBHE is predominantly delivered in Institutions at Silver or Bronze TEF level, whilst Universities tend to be at Gold or Silver level, and I was interested to explore this further. My motivation for this study was not to find out the reasons why, but to explore how CBHE teaching practitioners, at the heart of curriculum delivery, understand what they consider to be CBHE teaching excellence. I also wanted to highlight the voices of these practitioners, to understand how far their experiences relate to key research perspectives which I see as important, observations within research or policy, and TEF.

1.4 Aims of the study

The aims of the study were thus to:

- Contribute to new knowledge on the qualitatively different ways in which teaching practitioners understand their collective experiences of CBHE teaching excellence;
- evaluate the extent to which these understandings relate to key research literature on HE teaching excellence and the policy developments with the current TEF;
- extend the application of the phenomenographic approach to examine HE teaching practices within the context of CBHE;
- examine how these understandings can be used to support and enhance teaching and learning practices within CBHE.

1.5 Research Questions

To address these broad aims, my research questions were:

- What are the qualitatively different ways in which CBHE teaching practitioners understand their experiences of HE teaching excellence from their ongoing teaching practices?
- To what extent do these ways of experiencing align with and/or build upon themes within key research literature and the TEF and relate to wider understandings of CBHE teaching within practice?

1.6 Research Approach

My research is a qualitative study with a design informed by phenomenography, which was described by Marton (1986, p31) as 'the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and various phenomena in, the world around them'. It takes a non-dualist, ontological perspective, seeing the world as one that is experienced, and its epistemological perspective focuses on the knowledge from the relationship between the participant (teaching practitioner) and their world (CBHE pedagogic practice) and is based on the principle of intentionality (Marton, 1988b). It takes a second-order perspective by focussing on how the world is experienced and understood by the participants. The emphasis is on interpreting the critically different of ways of experiencing CBHE teaching excellence at a collective level which is internally related and hierarchically inclusive, and represented within a limited number

of categories of description, and illustrated within an outcome space (Marton and Booth,1997). This approach fitted well with my aim to explore how my sample of 30 purposively selected teaching practitioners understood their experiences of CBHE teaching excellence. I know that there are different views on the effectiveness of this research approach, but argue that it is 'an important niche research design within HE and particularly for research into teaching and learning' (Tight, 2016, p321), and the best approach, I believe, to answer my research questions.

1.7 Summary of the chapters of the thesis

Chapter 2 focuses on the themes within key research literature with particular reference to Skelton's (2005) critical framework, and Wood's (2017) emerging pedagogies approach. This Chapter also includes a brief analysis of the themes within TEF.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of phenomenography as a research approach, and explains its ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions. These assumptions are applied throughout the research process.

Chapter 4 details the data collection methods along with the rationales for the interview format and the sample selection. My position within the interview process is also considered.

Chapter 5 discusses the application of phenomenographic data analysis to explain how the interviews have been transcribed and interpreted to develop the categories of description and the outcome space for this research.

Chapter 6 discusses the research outcomes, including the four categories of description, which are empirically evidenced using relevant interview excerpts. The level of critical variation between the categories is explained, and it includes discussion on how the outcomes from the research have been presented and communicated. Limitations of data analysis are also considered along with a reflection on my role as a researcher within the data analysis process. The final outcome space representing the categories is included followed by discussion of issues of validity, reliability and generalisability of these criteria.

Chapter 7 concludes on how the research questions have been addressed and identifies the contributions to knowledge provided by this research, its overall limitations, suggestions for future research and my personal learning.

Chapter 2: Key research and policy frameworks for conceptualising HE teaching excellence

2.1 A Personal Note

I acknowledge that my understanding of HE teaching excellence is shaped by my values and experiences from my different past and present engagements within CBHE teaching contexts. My review of literature confirms that HE teaching excellence is a contested concept (Skelton, 2005), which is 'difficult to define' (Wood, 2017, p41), and that my understanding of HE teaching excellence may well not be shared by others (Skelton, 2005).

Understandings of HE teaching excellence relate to the complex context in which teaching takes place and are conditional on persons and purposes for describing them. As a student I remember teachers who gave me a learning experience which I understood at the time to be HE teaching excellence. However, I now realise that my recognition of such experiences as excellent teaching was shaped by my perceptions, priorities and expectations which may be different from those of others involved in the same experiences.

2.2 My Focus

I decided against an in-depth review of the literature before undertaking my research to ensure that information gathered from the research would not influence my data collection and analysis stages. I did, however, ensure that I was aware of key insights within research on HE teaching excellence to confirm the appropriateness of my research proposal and research questions and to inform the drafting of interview questions. Once my data collection and

analysis had been completed, I explored the literature on UK and International models of HE teaching excellence (Greatbatch and Holland, 2016; Skelton, 2012) to familiarise myself with national and global discourses on HE teaching excellence. My first research question was focused on exploring participants' understandings of HE teaching excellence within UK CBHE. Apart from one study examining the academic perceptions of HE teaching excellence in a University context (Keeley et al, 2016) there has been little research capturing wider understandings of CBHE teaching excellence, and specifically in relation to CBHE teaching practitioners, and my research sought to address this gap. Thus, I felt it was necessary to target my research on UK HE teaching excellence to support the contextual priorities of my research question.

As my research is about participants' understandings of their experiences of what they believed to be higher education teaching excellence, I opted to focus on two perspectives on higher education teaching excellence, Skelton's (2005) critical framework and Wood's (2017) emerging pedagogies approach, which are most aligned with this approach, primarily because both acknowledge the complex and contingent context that shapes understandings and practice of HE teaching and its development. They are flexible and sufficiently broad to enable to me evaluate my research participants' understandings against them. Contemporary HE teaching and its excellence operates within a complex context, and both these perspectives acknowledge the level of this complexity. I felt that they provided comprehensive lenses through which I have been able to accommodate other narrower research

perspectives on HE teaching excellence when evaluating my categories of description. Thus, after a brief summary of some general ground clearing priorities (1.3) and consideration of meta-level questions relating to HE teaching excellence (1.4) and a general overview of some of reviews of existing literature on HE teaching excellence (1.5) below, I focus in detail on Skelton's (2005) critical framework and Wood's (2017) emerging pedagogic approach as key sources in preparation for my evaluation of participants' understandings of teaching excellence within the four categories of description discussed in Chapter 7. I build upon these two perspectives and argue that they support and develop understandings of HE teaching excellence, including CBHE teaching excellence, promote ongoing critical dialogue and limit the elusiveness associated with such excellence. I believe that these perspectives would provide me with positive and comprehensive lenses for including the different themes within other literature sources on HE teaching excellence when evaluating participants' understandings within categories. The final part of this current chapter also examines the policy developments within TEF and key critiques that relate to this initiative.

2.3 Ground clearing – themes within key research on HE teaching excellence

The first observation from my review of the research literature was a broad acknowledgement of the lack of a shared understanding of HE teaching excellence (Greatbatch and Holland, 2016; Gunn and Fisk, 2013). It has been described as an 'ambiguous and vacuous' concept, and that those deemed to be excellent are expected 'to be yet more excellent' if they are to remain

‘excellent’ (Collini, 2012, p109-110). Further, the different ways in which the term excellence was used in expressions such as teaching excellence, teacher excellence and excellence in teaching, reinforces the ‘ambiguity and ambivalence across the sector as to what constitutes excellence’ (Gunn and Fisk, 2013, p19). Excellence used as a ‘slogan’ (Clegg, 2007, p91) for marketing products and services, linked to HE teaching, can lead to ‘the commodification of HE’, labelling it as a product or service to be sold and purchased by students as customers (Gourlay and Stevenson, 2012, p392). Wood and Su (2017) advocated for comprehensive understandings of the term excellence when applied to key academic practices such as teaching, scholarship and research and Skelton (2005, p3) argued that as a ‘contested concept’ HE teaching excellence was ‘worthy of critical investigation’.

Teachers, students, heads of department, senior managers and heads of Institutions, government and society all want students to experience excellent teaching, but they have different understandings of what this excellence entails (Skelton, 2005). HE teaching happens in a multi-dimensional context, impacted by emerging political, economic and societal priorities (Quinlan, 2014; van Lankveld et al, 2016; Gibbs, 2016; Forstenzer, 2016)**.** Land and Gordon (2015) highlighted the politicisation and multidimensionality of HE teaching excellence, and the impacts of its positioning within individual, departmental or institutional levels. Fanghanel et al’s (2016, p28) review of the scholarship of teaching and learning highlighted the shift in the focus of HE teaching excellence literature from individual’s activities to institutional and national policies to promote HE teaching excellence through scholarship and

teaching and learning initiatives. Gunn and Fisk (2014) concluded that the process of defining, operationalising and measuring teaching excellence was unclear, and in this regard, I found that Skelton's (2005) four key meta-level questions discussed below helped to frame our understandings of HE teaching excellence.

2.4 Skelton's (2005) four meta-level questions

The first question focusses on how we understand the term HE within contemporary practice. Barnett (1992, p15-20) pointed to dominant and contrasting ways of conceptualising HE as a total system of inputs, processes and outputs against a view of HE as a process for developing students as autonomous critical thinkers. For my research, answers to this question reflect the specific characteristics of CBHE teaching, shaped by principles of widening participation, employability and applied learning (Parry and Thompson, 2002). O'Leary (2017) highlighted the different features of HE including class sessions; modes of delivery including one-to one sessions; group meetings; specific delivery sites; and different types of teachers. My experience within CBHE is generally characterised by flexible delivery modes (including week-end sessions), smaller class sizes, extensive individual and collective support for students, and the engagement of both academic and practice-based tutors to explicitly promote the priorities of applied and work-based learning.

Skelton's (2005) second question on whether teaching excellence was an exclusive or inclusive concept, asks whether perceptions of excellence are

associated with a HE system which is selective. Within a CBHE context, this is very much inclusive, in that all teachers are expected to be outstanding/excellent, and this can impact positively by providing a supportive infrastructure and/or negatively by creating stress and anxiety for staff (Dixon and Pilkington, 2017).

Skelton's (2005) third question related to deciding where the locus of teaching excellence lay amongst the range of different potential contexts, including the teachers themselves, students and institutional Boards (Elton, 1998; Skelton, 2005). Applied within a CBHE practice context, the FE regulatory infrastructure governs institutional learning and teaching activities, which can make it more difficult to locate excellence solely within the teachers themselves, as teaching excellence is more likely to be centrally driven through directed and compliance-driven policies and procedures. The teaching environment is important for all contemporary HE, and is particularly so within CBHE which has the additional nuance of being situated within a predominantly FE context, prioritising teaching over research. For example, a CBHE focus on employability and applied learning requires a teaching, learning and supporting infrastructure with appropriate quality assessment tools to assess their effectiveness, and engagement of individuals and teams to facilitate students' vocational outcomes.

The last of Skelton's questions deals with the different meanings of HE teaching excellence given the differences in our understandings of HE and our own perspectives of the best ways of delivering it. In CBHE, HE is almost always a small part of the bigger FE context in terms of income, student and

staff numbers and within the institutional infrastructure. Those best-placed to shape CBHE teaching excellence are those directly involved in its delivery, with often insufficient opportunity to inform such descriptions at institutional level. Any description of CBHE teaching excellence must also address emerging factors relating to the specific vocational orientation of the CBHE curriculum, the characteristics of CBHE students, modes of delivery and employer partnerships. This aligns with Skelton's (2005, p23) observation that teaching excellence in such contexts is 'temporarily specific', and that at any particular time teaching seen as excellent is 'often the outcome of a struggle over meaning' which results in the acceptance of some contexts as excellent and others not so (Skelton, 2005, p24).

Accepting that all four meta-questions are relevant for CBHE, my initial consideration was of existing literature reviews of HE teaching excellence which offered insights into the scope of existing perspectives on HE teaching. Considering how little CBHE teaching excellence has been researched, and wanting to fully explore my participants' understandings of it, I assessed the extent to which existing key research and policy conceptualisations on HE teaching excellence could apply specifically to CBHE teaching. What follows is an examination of key reviews on HE teaching excellence and a specific detailed evaluation of both Skelton's (2005) critical framework and Wood's (2007) approach to emerging pedagogies. I use these perspectives as lenses through which I discuss other conceptualisations within research, as comparisons or contrasts as appropriate. This analysis is then followed by consideration of the criteria that relate to HE teaching excellence within TEF.

2.5 Key literature reviews on HE teaching excellence

I examine here the main literature reviews of HE teaching excellence, starting with Little et al (2007, p14), who explored how HE teaching excellence was conceptualised in research and applied within policy. The review illustrated the drive to measure HE performance, including teaching, using standard procedures and systemised criteria, prioritising form over substance. The authors noted that excellence in relation to teaching and learning does have meaning, in fact they argued it is 'bursting with too much meaning'. They warned against excellence being linked to institutional status and reputation, creating a 'monopoly on notions of excellence' without further evidential support. They called for notions of excellence to reflect the business of learning, foster creativity and originality, and engage learners as 'co-producers of knowledge', by ensuring that 'it is good enough for all who choose to participate.' (Little et al, 2007, p14) This review stimulated further discourse on HE teaching excellence and argued for a focus on its impacts on economic objectives, an inclusive society and holistic institutional excellence in student learning experiences and teaching practices.

A further review by Gunn and Fisk (2013) focused on examining both the research and grey literature on HE teaching excellence. The authors highlighted, among other things, the continuing complexity and lack of consensus particularly in relation to the links between teaching excellence and learning excellence. The review recommended further exploration of the potential impact of contemporary developments within academic roles in HE practice, the increase in diversity of HE providers and the evolving systems

for teaching and research. They also called for exploration of the relationship between teaching excellence and student learning, and the interaction between vocational notions of teaching excellence, and teaching excellence linked to disciplinary priorities. They questioned generalised definitions of HE teaching excellence and explained the need to examine the relationship between externally-driven teaching excellence benchmarks and Institutions' own systems for recognising and measuring teaching excellence. The report recommended further exploration of how teaching excellence definitions could be operationalised to meet the diverse priorities of HE in areas such as collaborative practice, international work, learning analytics and innovation. Calling for the clarification of the difference between teaching excellence and teacher excellence, the review highlighted the need to transcend teacher excellence and capture the different contributions of all the internal and external stakeholders in generating such excellence. The report highlighted the need to develop a sector level definition of HE teaching excellence making ethical use of learning analytics to support and improve teaching, linking excellence to the achievement of expected student outcomes.

This review was further considered by Land and Gordon (2015, p21) in which the authors prioritised the status of teaching as opposed to research; recognised continuous improvement, not just ‘episodic innovation’; signified the importance of programme-level excellence; and the need for modification of the National Student Survey (NSS) ranking systems, along with increased funding opportunities for teaching.

A later review undertaken by Greatbatch and Holland (2016), for the Department of Business was a much broader review, including some qualitative research to explore teaching quality in HE, and engaging professional experts and students. The review examined existing research on current perceptions of HE teaching excellence to inform and underpin the TEF initiative, and highlighted further issues to be considered including:

- Examining the relationship between actual teaching quality and proxies for teaching quality and the impact of evolving student priorities, changes to delivery modes and technological developments.
- The need to capture academics' understanding of teaching excellence.
- Further exploration on how teaching quality metrics can be contextualised to reflect learner analytics.

All of the above reviews were mainly directed at teaching excellence within Universities, with little substantive recognition of the specific characteristics of CBHE.

The most recent such review, by O'Leary et al (2019, p13), was mainly focussed on an evaluation of the impact of TEF, but examined the literature to date. It confirmed that the concept of teaching excellence 'whilst seductive, remains elusive and inherently subjective'. This review is further considered within the discussion of TEF in the latter part of this Chapter after examining the themes within key research on how HE teaching excellence has been conceptualised.

2.6 Key themes within research literature on HE teaching excellence

The above reviews confirm that HE teaching excellence remains a contested concept, and dominated by different interpretations. It is impacted by diverse student groups, different modes of delivery, and ongoing entry of new providers further promoted by Section 42 of the Higher Education and Research Act, 2017. This difficulty is further compounded by the different perspectives on teaching as an activity, as discussed below.

MacFarlane (2007) identified three stages of teaching covering the pre-performance stage (preparatory aspects such as pre-reading and developing learning resources), the performance stage and the post -performance stage (follow up activities aimed at supporting students). Sangoleye and Kolawole (2016) define teaching as a narrow activity involving deep learning in contrast to Fitzmaurice's (2010) focus on a more holistic notion of teaching as facilitating a learning environment. Su and Wood (2012, p143) distinguished between two different perspectives on teaching, the first relating to a 'technical rational' context centring on activity; and the second seeing teaching as 'a virtuous practice' promoting motivation, emotion and relationship building. Similarly, Tubbs (2005) distinguished between teaching as a display of mastery by instructing. and imparting knowledge in contrast to teaching as a service focusing on supporting students to acquire the necessary knowledge outcomes. Both perspectives, despite differences, acknowledged that contemporary HE teaching is much more than a classroom in which a single teacher performs for a group of passive students (Elton, 1998).

Existing interpretations of teaching excellence (Hammer et al 2010; Piascik et al, 2011) highlighted its 'multi-dimensional' (Elton 1998, p9), and ‘contingent and contested’ characteristics (Skelton 2005, p4) and acknowledged the centrality of HE teaching in the holistic establishment of excellence in HE. Difficulties in agreeing the nature of this activity provide further challenges to any consensus on what HE teaching excellence should be, prompting Clegg (2007) to call for the abandonment of the concept altogether, instead opting for teaching that is good enough. However, Skelton (2005) saw teaching excellence as an important concept to enhance teaching practices, and contributed actively to research on teaching excellence, believing it to be worthy of critical exploration, through a ‘critical framework’ (Skelton, 2005, p28) discussed below.

2.7 Skelton’s critical framework

Within this critical framework, Skelton (2005) acknowledged HE teaching excellence as a contested and value-embedded concept, and the priority for developing perspectives for practical application of such excellence. He noted how contextual factors such as managerialism, marketing and performativity impacted upon such excellence. Taking a critical stance for this purpose meant being willing to ‘question, recreate and imagine in a manner which is searching, persistent and resolute’ (Skelton, 2005, p11). Recognising the contestability and the contextual significance of teaching excellence and taking specific intellectual positions on knowledge and people (Skelton, 2005) the framework explored the values and assumptions which shape perspectives on teaching excellence. The main aim of this critical framework

was to enable those involved to critically reflect on what should amount to HE teaching excellence and Skelton (2005) proposed four ideal types: traditional, performative, psychologised and critical understandings to serve as analytical tools to support such reflection, as discussed below.

2.7.1 Traditional understandings of teaching excellence

Traditional understandings of teaching excellence are situated within traditional notions of HE, which signify the acquisition of knowledge, the intellectual development of students and the centrality of a culture of the pursuit of knowledge (Newman, 1976). Excellent teaching based on this understanding encourages students to pursue knowledge and develop as logical and critical thinkers, where knowledge is valued for its own sake. (Skelton, 2005) Such understandings place excellence on the discipline expert and specific tutor-focused teaching styles. He noted, however, that the impacts of such understandings have been overshadowed by the performative and psychologised ideal types.

2.7.2 Performative understandings of teaching excellence

Performative understandings reflect the contemporary priority to control and measure excellence in HE teaching and learning. Excellence here relates to three different aspects, the first of which is the potential for teaching excellence to support government, industry, business and society (Symes and McIntyre, 2000) and positively impact on national economic priorities, by promoting work-based learning (Boud and Solomon, 2001). The curriculum is seen to embed vocational outcomes, employability and entrepreneurship

through the development of Mode 2 knowledge (Gibbons et al, 1994). Teaching and learning within this aspect focuses on outcomes from a vocational curriculum offered through flexible study modes, prioritising the development of competency, technical knowledge, and general, specific and transferrable skills. The second aspect relates to the capacity to capture national and global student interest through an accessible and vocationally relevant curriculum offer. Teaching within such understandings is focused on promoting knowledge, skills and behaviours necessary for business and industry. The third aspect relates to how HE teaching is subject to regulatory controls to ensure that individuals, institutional systems and institutions perform against internally and externally set criteria. Deem (2001, p10) pointed to the impact of globalisation on HE requiring those involved, including teachers, to get used to discourses of 'markets, performance indicators and other business metaphors.' Such understandings of HE teaching excellence reflect government-led regulatory frameworks which control and monitor the effectiveness of institutional and sector level outcomes from the teaching and learning processes. Contemporary examples of this include the outcomes-focused TEF (discussed further below at 2.11) and the assessment of teaching and learning activities within current QAA work. The Government's priority for achieving a return on its investment to ensure 'value for money' was expressed in the recent Augar Report (2019), and clearly illustrates the current application of performative understandings relating to HE practices, including teaching. Further, the current endeavour to ensure HE providers are publicly accountable through sustained efforts to capture HE learner analytics and student feedback on learning, and to assess

institutional performance on teaching through an outcome-focused lens illustrate the ongoing application of performative conceptualisations of excellence. The challenge to establish such excellence is increased when measurement operates within a context of widening participation priorities and reducing direct state funding and, if the Augar Report (2019) is implemented in full, reducing student fees. The contemporary focus on this understanding of HE teaching excellence is reflected further within this chapter in section 2.8 when considering Wood's (2017) approach and also within discussions on TEF. Skelton (2005), however, questioned the efficacy of performative understandings, arguing that there is insufficient ontological justification for HE practices to simply address the priorities for the economy. He maintains that promotion of such understandings is merely a 'defensive reaction to tackle economic imperatives rather than a proactive expression of its identity and potential contribution to society' (Skelton, 2007, p2). He also argued that education cannot be a value-free and simplistic product ready for consumption and maintained that an overwhelming focus on monitoring and measurement of technically-applied outcomes is difficult to reconcile with the intellectual culture (Rowland, 2000) that HE academics in particular relate to. Invariably, this means that teachers have to put aside their own views on HE teaching excellence, and conform to institutionally and externally set directions to shape their interaction with students. Skelton's next ideal type of psychologised understandings of teaching excellence addresses the nature of the interaction between the teacher and the student, and is considered below.

2.7.3 Psychologised understandings of teaching excellence

Skelton's (2005) third ideal type of psychologised understanding of teaching excellence focussed on the transactional arrangements between the teacher and the student. This was founded on psychological interpretations of the teacher/learner interaction, supported by established standardised procedures which aimed to achieve expected outcomes. The excellence is relational and located within the teacher/learner relationship and interaction, using targeted learning and teaching strategies which meet the student's needs and support deep approaches to learning (Marton and Saljo, 1976a; 1976b). Such approaches enable students to work within their 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978, p86) and provide opportunities for collaborative learning (Cowie and Ruddock,1988). Teachers within this perspective are good communicators, reflective practitioners and can empower students to learn independently. Skelton's (2004) analysis of the National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) Scheme highlighted the multifaceted characteristics of teaching excellence and identified seven key factors. The first of these related to the ability of teachers to reflect, whilst the second and third acknowledged the importance of student profiles and student engagement respectively. The fourth factor related to engagement with virtual learning and the final three focussed on developing students on problem solving strategies, transferrable skills and flexible engagement. This provides an opportunity for shaping and controlling the content and process of study, and inform further improvements (Malcolm and Zukas, 2001). Skelton (2005), acknowledged that understandings of teaching excellence can fail to account

for the complex and contextual environment of HE, impacted as it is by social, political and economic factors. Skelton (2005) noted that both performative and psychologised understandings of teaching excellence are inadequate and argued that it is not necessary to obsessively prioritise HE teaching excellence in terms of economy, efficiency and effectiveness or to limit it to the narrow transactional relationship between teacher and student. He preferred to engage in an approach to HE teaching excellence within the fourth ideal type, based upon on a critical understanding of teaching excellence in HE which was more holistic, explained as follows.

2.7.4 Critical understandings of teaching excellence

Skelton (2005) confirmed that teaching excellence is important and worthy of further critical exploration, and associated it with ideas of 'informed citizenry, material considerations, social critique, participatory dialogue, critical intellect and emancipation' (Skelton, 2005, p14). He related in particular to Barnett (1992), who argued for the need to engage in meta-critique outside the disciplinary boundaries, to understand the impact of ethical considerations, and the levels to which disciplinary content and methodologies impact differently on community interests. Skelton (2009, p109) noted that any engagement with excellence within this ideal type requires a 'reflective development of a value-laden, and morally defensible practice' and situated this within six themes.

The first of these themes relate to the importance of avoiding 'value schizophrenia' (Ball, 2003, p221) by developing a personal philosophy on

teaching informed by competing disciplinary, vocational, institutional, sectoral, and government policy related developments. Ball (2003) noted that people displace their values if they no longer see why a particular activity is worthy as opposed to simply pursuing it to make sure that when measured they will appear better than others. Nixon et al (2001, p234) suggested that the best approach to avoid this was for teachers to develop ‘a new professionalism’ which required them to learn from sharing personal, on-the-job educational values with others, to guard against academic perceptions of divisiveness, increased accountability and isolation. Nias (1984) pointed to evidence that even experienced teachers who are able to identify their values as persons and teachers find it difficult to apply their own values in practice (Festinger, 1957) as they navigate through mandatory institutional, departmental and discipline-specific requirements which they perceive to be regulatory and cultural constraints (Deem, 2001).

Within his second theme, Skelton highlighted ‘the enduring human struggle to live out educational values’ (2009, p109), and acknowledged that excellence is about how teachers operate within this struggle when external factors restrict engagement with personal educational values, and require them to learn from practice and modify, these values, if necessary. This makes excellence a ‘dynamic concept’ (Skelton, 2009, p109) which promotes enhancement and pro-active reflection, and learning from successes as well as problems, referred to as the ‘swampy lowlands’ which need to be resolved (Schon, 1983, p42).

Within the third theme, Skelton (2009) agreeing with Nixon (2007) classified teaching excellence as a moral category exploring what is good about teaching, how it can be morally justified and what benefits it brings to the community and the world at large. The aim is to improve the world (Habermas,1978) for the benefit of those who inhabit and engage with HE teaching. Different theories which broadly ‘share an interest in emancipation’ (Skelton, 2005, p12). inform understandings that teaching excellence empowers students to ‘act confidently with critical intent in their future lives' (Skelton, 2005, p13). Far from being a technical function, teaching here is founded on ethical and moral perspectives. Applications of such critical approaches require HE teachers to balance ethical and moral ideologies with emerging contemporary neo-liberal imperatives within the HE policy landscape, founded on accountability and measurement. (Gates, 1992). Within CBHE, students who enter HE generally access it as a second chance, for example to get a degree, and invest money and emotion to achieve this. Teaching teams are fully aware of this, and prioritise support to enable them to succeed against demands from centrally-driven administrative processes.

The fourth theme focussed on teaching excellence at the institutional level prioritising pluralistic, deliberative cultures where pedagogic practices, values and principles are shared. In CBHE, these are reflected within Institutional teaching and learning strategies, in some cases specifically targeted at HE curricula, and in others as part of a wider College Strategy covering HE and FE Curricula. Further, institutional governance arrangements within CBHE accommodate deliberative committees including those for Teaching and

Learning which provide an open forum for staff and student members. Students can also be involved in curriculum development, evaluation of teaching and learning, staff student committees and governing bodies, all of which provide a shared agenda to empower and emancipate students to engage fully in improving their academic experiences (Habermas, 1974; Abbas and McLean, 2003). Such inclusive practices accommodate the needs of all students to engage with the disciplinary and pedagogic priorities and to overcome any inherent challenges they present (Cronin et al, 1999). Skelton (2009, p110) confirms that the emphasis is on Institutions as learning organisations to subject their own pedagogic policies to critical analysis and to receive feedback on these policies from staff, (to which I would add students and other stakeholders).

The fifth theme guarded against looking for teaching excellence within 'heroic' individuals. Skelton, (2007, pp 217-220), criticised teaching awards for focussing exclusively on individuals, and favoured situating teaching excellence within the 'material conditions that underpin high quality teaching'. Within CBHE, this relates to an HE-specific institutional infrastructure, appropriate staff-student ratio, fair employment contracts, staff development opportunities and time for scholarship and research for all staff. The main thrust of this theme is to encourage us to look for excellence not within individuals but within those conditions which shape HE teaching, reduce inequalities, promote inclusivity and emancipation and access to opportunities to develop excellent teaching and learning experiences.

Within the sixth theme Skelton saw teaching excellence as integrating different aspects of academic practice so that they mutually inform and support each other (Skelton, 2007). For example, HE academics are engaged in different tasks all of which impact on learning and teaching experiences. The research-teaching nexus (Boyer,1990) has been subject to much discussion, and the approach advocated within this theme is to understand how it integrates to provide mutual benefits and to support productive strategies to draw on the impact of both research and teaching. Using outcomes from pedagogic research and scholarship within teaching provides clear illustrations as to how two academic tasks can integrate to mutually inform learning and teaching experiences. (Boyer, 1990) Again, CBHE academics offer specific targeted extra academic and pastoral support for their students in addition to teaching commitments which are comparatively higher than those of their university counterparts. Any assessment of teaching excellence is required to address the effectiveness of both functions as they jointly inform the student learning experience. In summarising his account of critical understandings, Skelton (2005, p34) noted that such understandings of teaching excellence relate HE teaching to 'the greater social good, emancipation, empowerment, social justice and a struggle against inequalities and oppression'.

Skelton's (2005) four ideal types of HE teaching excellence cannot address all the priorities of the different HE contexts, and abstract typologies. Skelton himself notes that they can at most collectively represent 'an academically neat blue-print (and) messy reality' (Williams, 1997, p28) and a 'distillation of

the real world'. (Salter and Tapper, 1994, p183). They aim to facilitate critical reflection on teaching excellence to enable further learning, and to challenge 'taken for granted assumptions', although Skelton (2005, pp24-25) acknowledges they are 'temporal' in character.

In comparison to Skelton's (2005) four ideal types on how teaching excellence can be understood, Elton (1998) identified two dimensions, the first of which was classificatory in that it distinguished between the different levels at which teaching excellence can be located, to include the individual teacher, the department and institution. The second dimension was substantive, and considered the different ways in which each of the three classification levels can illustrate excellence. He argued that excellence at departmental and institutional levels is hard to achieve, and that institutions and their departments need to enable individuals to develop excellence, rather than just competence. (Kirschner et al, 1997).

On very similar lines, Husbands and Pearce (2012) identified what they consider to be key characteristics of effective pedagogic practices, within a school context, but equally applicable to HE contexts. They signified the need to capture the student voice, explore knowledge, identify the rationale for teachers' actions, to target short and long-term goals, and use assessment as a vehicle. They associated research with teaching and argued that **'**the very best teaching arises when this research base is supplemented by a personal passion for what is to be taught and for the aspirations of learners' (Husbands and Pearce, 2012, p12)**.** James and Pollard's (2011) research focussed on ensuring better outcomes for students, and embedded ten key principles

within four broad themes covering educational values and purposes; pedagogy and assessment; personal and social processes and relationships; and the policy context in which teaching takes place to reflect the multi-layered nature of pedagogic innovation. They suggest that the alternative term for teaching excellence should be teaching ‘fitness for purpose’ to address the student learning priorities (James and Pollard, 2011, p298). Teaching excellence was perceived to capture teaching and learning contexts and the tutors’ passion, disciplinary and pedagogic expertise, vocational knowledge and their ability to support student learning.

In this respect Kreber (2002) linked teacher excellence to teachers as performers and situated such excellence within classroom activity, distinguishing it from other academic activities such as research and scholarship. Shepherd et al’s (2011) insight into the National Teaching Fellowship awardees’ views of teaching excellence highlighted their focus on the technical rational perspective, emphasising an inclusive and innovative activity-based function promoting student learning opportunities, contextualised teaching approaches, supporting student retention, generating appropriate feedback and pedagogic research. Su and Wood (2012), on the other hand, focussed on the affective and moral notions of teaching excellence and the significance of virtuous practices. They cited the work of Ayres (Su and Wood, 2012, p 143) who cautioned against teaching becoming ‘mechanical and sterile', and learning becoming 'the stuff of pigeons pecking for food’. Su and Wood (2012) saw teaching as at its best when it is visionary, committed, energetic and enthusiastically promotes virtuous practice. Wood

(2017, p46) saw such ‘virtuous practice’ with ‘ethical and affective imperatives’ as something which could help to ‘expand and deepen the quality of pedagogic practice’, which aligns with the ideology recognised within Skelton’s (2005) critical understanding. Characteristics such as enthusiasm and motivation, skills and approaches, relationships and reflection and research have been recognised as underpinning excellence in teaching. Promoting such characteristics requires developments in pedagogic practice involving among other things, a culture of collective reflection leading to engaged communities including students to bring about ‘pedagogic community innovation’ (Wood, 2017, p46).

However, even such excellence is an aspirational claim of comparative success in that ‘something - a person, activity or institution- can be asserted in a hopefully convincing fashion to be better or more important than some other’ (Moore et al, 2017, p3). Any assessment of teaching excellence will need a comparator and will be required to address diverse and emerging higher contexts relating to curriculum; institutional and student priorities; and to distinguish between HE practices (Readings, 1996; Saunders, 2015). Collini (2012, p109) argued that ‘there is no such thing as excellence in the abstract’ and that there needs to be a shared understanding of the ‘character and worth of the relevant activity’ and agreed criteria for making ‘comparative judgments of how any one instance embodies more of that worth’. The above discussion shows amongst other things a consensus that HE teaching happens within a complex context, and Wood (2017) used the complexity theory to develop an

approach based on emerging pedagogies to explain pedagogic development within practice, which is considered below.

2.8 Wood's (2017) Emerging Pedagogies Approach

2.8.1 Complexity Theory

Wood (2017) proposed the use of the principles of complexity theory (Zimmerman et al, 2001) 'Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS)' to explain the complex context within which HE teaching operates (Wood, 2017, p55). He argued that we need to understand the complex processes within which teaching takes place and engage with the complexity theory to 'reclaim a framework for teaching which addresses the multi-faceted, the particular and the continual emergence of new and coherent practice' including pedagogic development, which Wood (2017, p50) called 'the development of emerging pedagogies.' Although the complexity theory is challenging in terms of the impacts from multiple interacting factors, and the difficulties of setting boundaries, Wood (2017) maintained that CAS principles can help to understand and identify pedagogic development and innovation from complex HE teaching contexts. The complexity element within CAS relates to the different mutually impacting elements which interact with each other whilst also functioning autonomously. Adaptability reflects the capacity of a CAS to learn from past experiences and address emerging priorities. The systems element relates to the interconnected and interdependent operating networks. Wood (2017) built on Cilliers' (1998, p3-5) list of the characteristics of complex systems, which were seen to incorporate a large number of elements which

interact physically or by transferring information with other elements in dynamic ways. There is rich interaction between elements such that any one of them can influence or be influenced by other elements. The interactions are also non-linear, a pre-condition of complexity in which small causal factors can create big impacts and vice versa. This interaction normally (but not necessarily) receives information from immediate elements by creating reflective feedback loops and innovations. These impact positively by leading to enhancement and stimulating innovation; or negatively by detracting from and inhibiting any such development. Complex systems are usually open systems in that they continuously interact with the environment, maintain a state of 'disequilibrium' and use ongoing energy to survive and develop. This makes it difficult to scope the boundaries of the system, and any boundaries drawn are very much dependent on why and who wants to examine the system (i.e. our reason for framing it). Open systems are contrasted with closed systems which are mainly focused on being in equilibrium, restricting opportunities for innovation. Complexity results from the rich interaction of simple elements constantly struggling to respond to the insufficient information each element individually receives. CASs perform well in complex and unstable contexts, by drawing on support to establish novelty, innovation and even excellence without disintegration and disorder (Zimmerman et al, 2001).

Teaching as a CAS incorporates open systems which facilitate interaction within and beyond the immediate context of the teaching activity, and engagement with the internal and external aspects that impact on teaching**.**

For example, in a CBHE face-to-face tutor-directed session for Degree Apprenticeship students, which focuses on their achievement of vocational learning, both the learning and the teaching can be impacted in disproportionate and unpredictable ways by factors both inside and outside the immediate experiences of that session. These factors can include, for example, internal aspects such as the students' ability; previous practice-based knowledge and experience; current ability to apply knowledge in practice, teachers' own past and current experiences of practice, the priorities of relevant employers; and externally the institutional and sector-level standards and policy landscape for technical learning. This session, if we label it as teaching, is a complex multi-dimensional process-driven pedagogic activity. As an activity it is impacted by its evolving immediate and external context by creating pedagogic activities which are classed as 'emerging pedagogies' (Wood 2017, p58) which can lead to emerging innovation and 'novelty'. Wood (2017) acknowledged that the complexity of the teaching process is heightened by its intrinsic association and interaction with other activities such as learning, curriculum and assessment, each operating as individual CASs (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014), contributing to a continuously changing context for HE teaching and its development. In relation to CBHE teaching excellence, this means that teaching as a single CAS is required to address factors such as the specific characteristics of the students and staff, and the vocational focus of the curriculum leading to emerging pedagogies providing the backdrop against which context-specific CBHE teaching innovation can emerge, (which could be excellence – my words). This is in addition to external factors within elements of policy frameworks such as the

TEF, regulatory controls from the OfS and quality reviews from QAA through which teachers have to navigate. Wood (2017) used the complexity theory and identified five indicative foci for supporting emerging pedagogies, and this is discussed in detail below.

2.9 Wood's five key foci

Wood's (2017, p60) five foci aimed to support the growth of emerging pedagogies, and encompassed affective foundations, personal growth, collaborative growth, organisational contexts and societal contexts (Wood, 2017). He acknowledged that the approach is incomplete and the five foci are merely indicators as to see them as any more would result in some form of complexity reduction (Biesta, 2010b). Nevertheless, the foci provide us with a useful perspective for highlighting key contextual factors that can impact on the development of pedagogic activity.

2.9.1 Wood's first focus

The first focus relates to affective foundations incorporating the values, attitudes and philosophies of actors which inform, shape and justify any perspectives and decisions they make. It identifies the impact that personal values have on the way teachers act and reconcile these values with Institutional priorities, and policy initiatives such as TEF. This focus aligns closely with Skelton's (2012) observation that teachers do at times have to compromise their values to overcome such challenges and need opportunities which provide 'spaces where people can explore and examine value conflicts' (Skelton, 2012, pp 26-27). Such spaces can be a forum for teachers to dare

‘to be vulnerable’, involving taking risks in teaching practices such as ‘self-disclosure’, ‘change’, ‘not knowing’ and ‘failing’. Vulnerability is seen here as an ‘act of courage’ which strengthens learning. (Brantmeier, 2013, p96). Mangione and Norton (2020, pp11-12) built on the above concept, and developed five principles for developing pedagogic vulnerability in HE teaching, involving learning to be ‘courageous in trying new teaching methods; trusting others and being trustworthy; being authentic; being aware of self and others; and being reflective rather than reactive.’ Within CBHE, teacher practitioners often need to continuously promote the HE agenda, and push ahead at times, flexing institutional priorities to meet the needs of HE students, sometimes at the risk of being challenged for this. Wood (2017) acknowledged that values, attributes and philosophies are at the core of emerging pedagogies, but noted that they have to be understood in the context of the potential impacts of the other four foci examined below.

2.9.2 Wood’s second focus

The second focus is on personal growth, and the potential for teachers as individuals to develop professionally as experts on teaching, assessment, knowledge advancement, curriculum development and reflective practice (Schon, 1983; Ashwin, 2015). It includes the teachers’ ability as pedagogic experts to share knowledge on the needs of students (Shulman, 1986, 1987). Wood and Su (2017) captured staff perspectives on teaching excellence within five UK Universities, which identified a preference to locate excellence in the pedagogic and moral codes underpinning academics as teachers, scholars and researchers.

Within CBHE teachers are required to be teacher-trained before they are appointed, or attain this status within a set period after commencement. Commitment to research is not generally a priority, apart from those Colleges with a larger proportion of CBHE provision and/or with Foundation Degree/Degree awarding powers. Undertaking post-graduate study can generally be a personal decision apart from those CBHE sites within the latter two contexts. Even within these, the drive is generally to encourage scholarly case study-based projects relating to all of the College's curriculum including FE. Training for HE curriculum development and programme management can be offered by a partner university for both validated and franchised programmes and internally through staff development days in most cases with FE staff teams. Thus, opportunities for personal growth and expertise are very much shaped by the priority given to the specific CBHE curriculum requirements, and the level of engagement with an HE perspective.

2.9.3 Wood's third focus

The third focus is on collaborative growth relating to collective learning, and helping to provide individuals with the opportunity to share and critique pedagogic approaches with colleagues (Shulman 1993). This focus uses collaboration to develop teams and teacher expertise, leading to the development of professional capital incorporating human, social and decisional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012), and helps to overcome pedagogic solitude (Shulman, 1993). The development of individuals (human capital) is best achieved through collaborative means (social capital) to support the facilitation of genuine and productive decision making (decisional

capital) leading the sharing of expertise, excellence and innovation. Although collaborative growth can lead to learning, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) acknowledged the challenges it brings to arrive at shared agendas which reflect different individual values. For such approaches to succeed, all those involved should be able to arrive at shared decisions without feeling pressured into agreeing to a group decision. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, p185) note that 'professional capital is about enacting more equal, higher-attaining, healthier communities in just about every way that counts.' The principle behind such collaborative growth can be seen as underpinning O'Leary and Wood's (2018) reimagining of teaching excellence through the creation of an independent pedagogic research unit including staff experienced in research and engaged in two levels of activities. The first of these was to explore the issues raised by the teaching community and students and generate small scale research enquiries to address them; and the second involved the co-ordination of areas for research to take forward larger projects to inform institutional priorities. The establishment of such a research unit highlights the nexus between teaching and pedagogic research, and as Clement and Grant (2010, p101) noted 'scholarship is the beating heart of academic work'.

With CBHE such units can exist but its members are likely to be tutors, professional support tutors, students, employers, collaborative University partners and Professional Bodies and this membership reflects institutional priorities for access and widening participation and a vocationally focused HE such as Foundation Degrees, Higher Apprenticeships and Degree

Apprenticeships. In some of the larger CBHE sites, scholarly research can also develop in the form of Institution-led small-scale projects. The underpinning principle within collaborative growth is that learning is situated 'within and between' the members of the collaboration (Wood, 2017, p66). The growth that develops from such collaboration also informs the focus on organisational contexts discussed below.

2.9.4 Wood's fourth focus

The fourth focus related to the organisational context impacting on teaching and learning and emerging pedagogies, which includes institutional priorities within strategic and operational plans, curriculum and discipline specific standards, and institutional policy frameworks. These sources control, impact and shape teaching practices and direct the work of teachers as individuals and collaborative teams. Individual teachers may well find some of the directed teaching methods difficult to accommodate and contrary to their personal preferences for programme delivery. CBHE essentially operates as a smaller provision within a predominantly FE context and CBHE teachers often have to navigate their activities through the FE regulatory requirements, whilst addressing specific HE curriculum priorities. The institutional regulatory context within which CBHE operates is generally controlled through FE frameworks which measure the effectiveness of teaching mainly through the use of targeted metrics such as those relating to student retention and achievement. The current focus of HE on the assessment of teaching excellence through the use of metrics on student feedback and student outcomes has enabled Colleges to better align the HE performance

management approaches with the existing FE processes. Arguably, unlike their University counterparts, CBHE teachers, especially those teaching on both FE and HE provision, are likely to be more familiar with the current metric-based assessment of their HE role as they may be able to relate it to the FE equivalent. However, CBHE teaching practitioners still have to continuously adjust teaching practices and provide extensive academic and personal support to their HE students. This may well be something that requires them to compromise their own views on how HE should be delivered and supported. Dixon and Pilkington (2017) focused on two FE Colleges with HE provision and analysed their responses to the Government scrutiny on teaching and learning systems. These sought to align teaching with the requirements of FE quality review mechanisms especially for achieving an outstanding grade from OFSTED. Teaching observation systems for the HE provision in many colleges are based on OFSTED criteria, embedding a process of surveillance with unannounced teaching audits, and requiring the application of prescribed frameworks to direct teacher performance to meet organisational priorities. One example is the requirement to explicitly address English and Mathematics in every teaching session at all levels of study, irrespective of its appropriateness to the HE curriculum. Dixon and Pilkington (2017) alerted and warned against subjecting HE practices, on the implementation of TEF, to ‘terrors of performativity’ (Ball, 2003, p215) reflected within the experiences of FE teachers. Wood and Su (2017) questioned the efficacy of measuring excellence in this way, and preferred an ethical approach, and Su and Wood (2012) expressed a preference for seeing teaching excellence through Nixon’s (2008) understanding of it as a process

which signifies growth and development. Instead of institutional metric-embedded performance management approaches they express a preference for a unified system of research, scholarship and teaching and learning approaches to excellence. The authors questioned the extent to which the measurement of institutional outcomes can valuably enhance teaching, and cautioned against unintended negative consequences from such measurement (Wood and Su, 2017). Similarly, Golding (2016, p15) pointed to a formal institutional audit culture in which teaching is increasingly scrutinised through sustained assessment from students leading to 'a form of audit, open to endless forms of distortion and exploitation' but serving as a management tool in the form of continued employment and in some cases reward. Nieminen and Rahkonen (2016) questioned the efficacy of measuring excellence through metrics, and preferred an organisational approach with a more ethical and relationship-centred pursuit of excellence. Behari-Leek and McKenna (2017) found that such criteria to establish excellence prioritise performativity rather than the contextual needs of students.

Perception of the status of an institution within the HE sector also presents challenges, and Dixon and Pilkington (2017, p437) describe this in the context of FE Colleges as leading to a 'Cinderella' service', requiring them to continuously establish themselves as a credible brand (and this includes CBHE – my comment). Even when specific funding is available, this funding can be directed to the development of physical resources (admittedly important) rather than directly impacting on teaching and learning. As Dixon and Pilkington (2017, p437) point out, whilst FE Colleges 'are forced to

compete' for shrinking funding with schools and other providers, the government's drive towards raising standards and measuring excellence is generating a 'pressure cooker environment.' In this context, the current Government focus on HE Skills and Higher Technical Education aims to remove differences between technical education and academia, and if FE is seen as the provider of technical education, it will need FE to further reposition itself (DfE, 2020). Emerging pedagogies are thus materially impacted by organisational priorities which in turn have to respond to societal developments within the changing HE landscape.

2.9.5 Wood's fifth focus

The fifth focus was on the societal context impacting on HE teaching and emerging pedagogies, relating to sector level developments within the policy landscape and the wider political and socio-economic context. Different policy interventions discussed below provide examples on how the HE sector had to respond through teaching and learning strategies to ensure that it operates within the required regulatory framework. TEF is one such development, impacting on teaching excellence, underpinned by neo-liberal principles, prioritising the marketisation of HE, student satisfaction, teaching league tables, and encouraging competition, and this is discussed further in 2.10 below. Additionally, the current QAA standards and review methods include observations of teaching applicable to all providers.

The recent Augar Report (2019), relating to a post-16 education review, signposted potential further changes to HE practices. As a societal priority the

CBHE focus to actively promote widening participation by providing opportunities for applicants from diverse backgrounds to engage in HE is expected to continue. This is very much in line with Behari and McKenna (2017, p1) who argue that HE is a public good (admittedly debateable whether it is seen as such within the current UK context), and should focus on 'transformation and inclusivity'. The Augar Report (2019) also recommends the development of technical HE Levels 4 and 5 to explicitly achieve vocational outcomes for students. Linked to the priority given to vocational qualifications the Augar Report also recognises how HE providers make civic contributions and this is particularly reflected within most CBHE curriculum strategies. For example, curriculum development and teaching within CBHE for Foundation Degrees and Higher and Degree Apprenticeships have an explicit focus placed on the application of theory to practice within the students' work places, combined with teaching, learning and assessment processes that operate within a tripartite partnership between employers, CBHE practitioners and students. Curriculum development and delivery is facilitated through such partnerships with, for example, local authorities, and local businesses involving health, public services, financial services, leisure services and engineering. The teaching teams include both teachers and visiting local work-based practitioners who collaborate to deliver place-based and community-focused pedagogic practices to reflect local priorities. Yamamura and Koth (2018, p18) defined place-based community engagement as a sustained commitment of HE providers to 'partner with local residents, organisations and other leaders to focus equally on campus and community impact within clearly defined geographic areas.' The authors

called this the ‘50/50 proposition’, emphasising the equal importance of both HE provider and community-based contexts for informing and confirming student learning opportunities and outcomes. The authors pointed to the merits of HE involvement in place-based community engagement to include the establishment of better profiles for such partnerships, opportunities for more funding, facility for sharing resources and supporting the prosperity and development of the community as a whole. Sobel (2008, p7) defined place-based education as ‘the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language, arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum’. He relates to opportunities for students to have ‘hands-on and real-world learning experiences’, to increase their academic achievement, enable them to connect with their community and to become ‘active and contributing citizens’.

Norman (2010, p3) saw the most ‘revolutionary characteristic’ of place-based education as being its emergence ‘from the particular attributes of place.’ CBHE provision in general has established experience of such place-based initiatives, and a specific example within one CBHE location includes a post-graduate programme focussing on local collaborative leadership development as part of a succession planning initiative for senior staff from local public services bodies. This was designed to provide opportunities to collaborate and use collective approaches within teaching, learning and assessment; to engage in shared problem solving; to address objectives within joint strategic priorities and to promote civic development and community cohesion.

Another example of a societal impact on the HE landscape is the impact of the current pandemic. HE providers are having to move substantial amounts of teaching and assessment on-line, and where students do attend, the need to socially distance has to be prioritised within the learning environment. These developments and requirements within the OfS regulations and QAA guidance have impacted the HE sector by requiring providers to re-examine and implement specific internal strategies, policies and procedures to ensure that they can deliver their programmes in a safe environment. Achieving such excellence in pedagogic practices which are emerging as they address evolving political, social and economic priorities is a very complex exercise and an application of complexity theory. (Cilliers,1998)

All five foci, discussed above (Wood, 2017) can support our understandings of how pedagogies emerge within CBHE, and the difficulty of positioning it within a single context. O'Leary and Wood (2018, p,27) claimed that emerging pedagogies provide a foundation for the 'growth of effective teaching in HE' and are developed through 'academics and students working together' to promote 'academic experiences that are authentic, meaningful and transformative to both'. Wood (2017) argued that pedagogic practice is complex and will always be complex, but we have to try and find ways to understand it. Judging when such practices are excellent is very much more difficult. In fact, Wood (2017) questioned whether excellence is something that is achievable at all, given the complexity of teaching as an activity.

2.10 Summary of Themes within Research Literature

The discussion so far has considered the main themes on HE teaching excellence within research literature. The research findings discussed within this section show that this concept remains both contested and highly situated in specific contexts with ‘a distinct lack of agreement about what teaching excellence actually is, how it can be described and how it can be reported in any meaningful way’ (O’Leary et al, 2019). I have used Skelton’s (2005) critical framework and Wood’s (2017) approach to emerging pedagogies as lenses to examine other research conceptualisations of HE teaching excellence. Both perspectives were able to accommodate important contributions to research from other sources, and the contextual factors that inform and impact on the development of pedagogic practices and any excellence linked to it. Hence, I used both of these frameworks in Chapter 7 to evaluate my participants’ understandings of their experiences of engaging in what they believed was HE teaching excellence. Having highlighted within discussions above that HE teaching excellence is hard to define or formalise, the policy development of TEF has done just that by providing us with general criteria for assessing the nature and application of HE teaching excellence, which is discussed below.

2.11 Policy Framework and Key Themes within TEF

The development of the TEF in 2016-17 was situated within the complexities and controversies surrounding the meaning of teaching excellence within a

HE context. The vision for a successful TEF award was expressed at the time by the Chair of the TEF assessment panel when he said: -

> '*…I hope we will have established TEF as an integral part of the way the sector thinks about teaching excellence'.* (O'Leary et al, 2019, p10)

O'Leary et al, (2019) noted that the implementation of TEF has substantially impacted on HE practices and on HE teaching practitioners within both the University Sector and CBHE. The UK government initiated the TEF development in 2015, aiming to offer prospective HE students, and the general public, quality-assured information on programmes of study. TEF's regulatory assessment of the provider's teaching mission, set within a liberalised HE context, seeks to make each provider accountable for its teaching practices. One welcome impact of TEF is that it sought to balance the perceived status disparity between research and teaching within HE and aimed to address the comparatively lower esteem (Abrahamson, 1991) attributed to HE teaching and this was seen as positive more by CBHE practitioners than their University counterparts (O' Leary et al, 2019). Having acknowledged this much needed and positive re-positioning of higher education teaching by TEF, I focus on the main aspects of TEF that shape the assessment criteria for HE teaching excellence and the key critiques of this policy, in the discussion below.

2.12 Key aspects of HE teaching excellence within TEF

The 2018 Teaching Excellence and Student outcomes Year Four procedural guidance, (TEF 4) specification, the most recent iteration, incorporates three

specific aspects covering firstly teaching quality; secondly, the learning environment; and thirdly student outcomes and learning gains. These aspects are supported respectively by contextualised metrics to enable the assessment of each institutional teaching mission. Within a CBHE context, this means that the institutional mission for HE teaching needs to be distinguished from that relating to FE. Metrics captured for TEF include core metrics and split metrics linked to each of the three aspects, and these are intended to recognise the different forms of excellence within practice reflecting different institutional teaching missions. Core metrics are defined as 'measures deriving from national surveys and data returns (which) are benchmarked and inform assessments' (TEF4 Specification, 2018, p77), and are supported within the contextualised provider submission. Split metrics aim to establish how students from different backgrounds perform on defined measures in comparison to their peers. Providers also have the opportunity to submit a written submission to provide explanations of its contextualised metrics (TEF Guidance 4). Critique of TEF and its excellence criteria have focused on areas such as the use of NSS data, application of consumeristic principles, quantification of quality and lack of engagement of key stakeholders and these are considered further below.

2.12.1 Use of NSS data

The use of NSS data as a measure for assessing HE quality has been questioned on the basis that quality and satisfaction are separate factors and require different assessment frameworks (Callender et al, 2014; G. Brown et al, 2014). Using satisfaction as a criterion can limit pedagogic innovation as

students seem to report better satisfaction when teaching, learning and assessment remain in their comfort zone and risk-free rather than challenging them (Poropat, 2014). HE learning, far from being a ‘cosy experience’, should challenge and unsettle students and foster innovation and novel ideas which are more than economic returns based on value for money principles (Tomlinson, 2018). The difficulty in capturing student feedback for external mechanisms such as TEF comes from trying to shoehorn ongoing feedback into the current fixed feedback mechanisms such as the NSS. Arguably, using Wood's (2017) concept of emerging pedagogies referred to in the previous section, there should be a mechanism for capturing student feedback on the quality of emerging experiences of teaching, from students impacted by emerging contexts (Barefoot et al, 2016). However, the policy paper (OfS, 2020) notes a plan to review NSS based on factors such as its incompatibility with other robust quality measures, concerns about ‘gaming’ and administrative burden on Providers. Ashwin (2020) questions the assumptions behind this review, and feels that answers from it seem to have been pre-determined. The centrality of the student voice is further highlighted within the consumeristic perspective section below.

2.12.2 Consumeristic perspectives of TEF

Tomlinson (2019) identified the student-as-consumer as one of the three dominant policy drivers for TEF, with the other two being graduate employability and formal ranked measurements. One consequence of the application of such consumerist notions is that students as consumers are involved in assessing, and sometimes over-assessing teacher performance

using institutional evaluation mechanisms and their responses may depend on a number of positive or negative contexts they experience at the time. As students they can also be calculating in their choice of modules, opting for those with less complex assessment demands which can ease the contribution they have to make to their studies to achieve their targeted grades (Huang, 2008). Students may also attribute any difficulty in achieving their desired grades to ineffective teaching and assessment strategies they have experienced which means that student understandings shaped by consumerist notions can impact on the assessment strategies staff use for their programmes. As Tomlinson (2018, p718) argues 'students may well extrapolate a specific financial value to a formal educational experience because they can easily calculate the cost specifics against their overall net personal contribution'. Similarly, Wang and Wang (2018), in their critique of the rise of consumerism in UK HE feared that seeing students as consumers undermines the student-teacher relationship and generates potential conflicts between staff and their students.

Even if we acknowledge that some elements of student experiences during their study (such as canteen services, library facilities, accommodation facilities etc) can be commodified, such approaches to HE teaching will need further debate as teaching is a complex, dynamic and relational activity with multiple contributors such as students, teachers and others engaged in a socially situated intellectual activity. The effectiveness of the contributions that each of the actors makes impact on its success or otherwise, and any developments on the judgements for assessing the quality of HE teaching

including its excellence need to take account of these contributions. Valuing teaching excellence is good, in fact it is essential, but it is important that such judgement should take account of the different perspectives on excellence (Skelton, 2005) and how any judgements that assess teaching address the complexity and emerging nature of pedagogic activity (Wood, 2017).

Such consumeristic approaches have been linked to quantification of quality and despite some arguments that market-led consumeristic principles, if applied through carefully planned quantification of quality, can lead to successful student outcomes (Mark, 2013), there is a recognised critique against such quantification and this is discussed below.

2.12.3 Quantification of Quality

TEF expresses a Government preference for a market-centric neoliberalist approach to quantifying HE through a focus on performance indicators and big data sets. Quantification of quality signifies techniques which enable the measurement of teaching quality through the application and evaluation of selected metrics, as highlighted within 2.11 above. The centrality of quantifiable performance measurement principles based on New Public Management ideals (Lorenz, 2014) highlights the significance of externally driven criteria to assess HE teaching, replacing those based on academic professionalism. Kallio et al (2017) saw such quantification of quality as a game which could impact unfavourably on key areas such as scholarly work, and could lead to unintended and undesirable outcomes. Within a Finnish HE study, they noted that the easiest way ‘to meet targets is by lowering quality’

which could for example be by lowering pass marks and modifying assessment tasks to make it easier for students to achieve the desired outcomes. (Kallio et al, 2017, p299)

Contemporary focus on measurement-led assessment frameworks within TEF prioritise performativity through competition, employability and productivity, and require accountability and transparency linking teaching excellence to the human capital theory (Charles, 2017). Human capital theory links teaching and learning processes to vocational outcomes for students through their development of transferrable and employability skills. For example, Charles (2017, p8) prioritised the need to establish the interrelationships between teaching excellence and human capital theory, through state intervention in education 'in order to increase national productivity in the interests of capital.' This has led HE providers to develop effective arrangements with students to increase their vocational competency. Commodification of HE outcomes has necessitated balancing productive and appropriate support for students with the need to maintain professionalism and standards. Biesta (2017, p.320) highlighted this by specifically distinguishing the student-teacher relationship from commercial transactions noting that customers within the latter context can easily quantify what they want to purchase. In contrast, the services that teachers provide to support, shape and control the students' learning experiences is difficult to quantify. Saunders and Blanco Ramirez (2017), albeit within a US context but equally applicable to the TEF developments, noted the relationship between excellence as a construct and the status of students as customers situated within the HE environment which is impacted

by a culture of accountability dominated by quality assessment regimes, such as programme evaluation, satisfaction surveys and league table positions. Such notions of excellence are features of neoliberal ideology focusing more on satisfaction and performative levels than seeking to explore the benefit of HE study as life-long learning. Quantification requires teachers and providers to ensure that students achieve successful outcomes, reducing teaching excellence to a reductive outcome rather than an evolving and emerging construct (Kreber, 2002; Burke et al, 2015). Within this contemporary neoliberalist perspective, HE providers have become more accountable for ensuring that their teaching produces the appropriate outcomes for students and that those outcomes are employability focused. This means, as Doyle and Brady (2018) observed, that managers are always chasing even better data on student satisfaction, attainment and employment.

Wood (2017) related such thinking to three contexts, firstly by identifying the application of neo-liberalism focusing on efficiency and human capital theory through measurement and control. This is identified as one of the factors impacting HE teaching excellence, albeit at the cost of limiting academic freedom and democratic ideologies (O'Neil, 2002). The other two contexts included an assessment framework codifying a range of attributes for evidencing the requirements for Higher Education Academy (Advance HE) fellowship and the positioning of HE teaching excellence within institutional marketing and advertising strategies pursuing targets for the recruitment of the best students (Gaspard, 2013, in Greatbach and Holland, 2016). In relation to the first context, Wood (2017, p 51) highlighted the difficulties of

applying standard measures and ‘reductive materialism’ for assessing HE teaching excellence, as it fails to acknowledge the contributions made by human interactions and the complex and relational contexts seeking to satisfy the priorities of those who apply it (Grifoll Sauri et al, 2014). Wood (2017) maintained that it is difficult to have a shared formula for HE teaching excellence for general application without addressing the characteristics of the different providers. For example, the characteristics of CBHE will need to be addressed within any frameworks for assessing HE teaching excellence.

As Heaney and Mackenzie (2017, p8) note

‘Teachers under the TEF, in a sense, will always be preparing for the next TEF and the next process of monitoring and are incentivised to adjust their behaviour according to these mechanisms of control’.

Within a CBHE context, HE teachers and the whole institution will also be preparing for both the data-centric OFSTED inspections and the TEF priorities within a systems-thinking (Dunnion and O’ Donovan, 2014) and total quality control (Asif et al, 2013) context, which recognises success through the measurement of specific metrics relating to satisfaction from students and also employers given the particular focus on employability within the curriculum offer. This accords well with the observation by Ashwin (2018, p3) on the difficulties of attributing real teaching excellence to TEF where he argues that ‘our discussions always seemed to shift to focus on the measurement of teaching excellence even when we tried to focus on its meaning.’ What has been argued is that we are effectively controlling and

manipulating the excellence concept through internal and external measurement strategies to meet sector targets and priorities (Readings, 1996).

Concerns still remain as to what important aspects of teaching excellence are ignored by this perceived over-reliance on proxy measures from student satisfaction data (such the NSS data) and data on graduate earnings. Gibbs (2010, p49) reminded us that measuring the quality of teaching (and its excellence *my addition)* is a complex task as some 'dimensions of quality relating to teaching are difficult if not impossible to quantify'. Thus, reliance on proxy measures has not been favoured as confirmed by the recent project on the learning gain initiative which confirmed that factors underpinning learning gain are extremely difficult to unpick, and warned against the use of metrics which are easily available when assessing learning gain. (OfS, 2019) Robertson et al (2019) underscored the dangers of such an approach by referring to Yankelovich's (1972, p72) observation that:

> *'The first step is to measure whatever can be easily measured. This is OK as far as it goes. The second step is to disregard that which can't be easily measured or to give it an arbitrary quantitative value. This is artificial and misleading. The third step is to presume that what can't be measured easily really isn't important. This is blindness. The fourth step is to say that what can't be easily measured doesn't exist. That is suicide'*

Robertson et al (2019) label that which cannot be measured as intangible assets, and these are particularly significant to CBHE practices including teaching. This is particularly so given the specific characteristics of students; the strong allegiance to widening participation; the staff/student relationship; and specific institutional priorities on localism and community development. Quantitative approaches have also been employed in the context of measuring employability outcomes for teaching excellence purposes, and this is discussed below.

2.12.4 Quantification and Employability

This quantification of quality within TEF has also been extended to the measurement of metrics on employability outcomes and the longer-term earnings-related data which explicitly prioritises learning for a job over learning for learning's sake. Wild and Berger (2016, p48) saw the benefit of making such data available to students and argued that 'TEF is a good idea' as it promotes the priority of making students from all backgrounds employable. Policy-making within UK HE has consistently highlighted the importance of student employability (Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Moreland 2006; Yorke, 2006; Yorke and Knight, 2006; Cranmer, 2006) including the recent Augar Review (2019) and the Government's skills statement (DfE, 2020). Harvey (2001, p97), however, questions whether employability is a measure of institutional achievement or 'the propensity of the individual student to get employment'. Recognition of such employability outcomes as success indicators can, it has been argued, instigate competition between HE

providers creating a division between winners and losers (Frank and Cook, 1996). An analogy was drawn by comparing such emphasis on employability within HE and HERA 2017 to a spy novel which ‘creates another Tinker and Tailor in the policy plot line in the drama of the last few decades’ (Barkas et al, 2017). Understandably, employability is an important expectation that students have when they enter HE studies but they also expect to gain new knowledge and develop as individuals professionally, academically and personally. Although teachers play a critical role in supporting students in this development, little opportunity has been provided for them to inform the TEF development in any meaningful way. This was recognised and addressed within research undertaken by O’Leary et al (2019) which explored the perceptions of HE teaching practitioners on the impact of TEF on their institutions and practices. The findings from this study were also expected to inform the independent Pearce Review of TEF directed by the provisions of HERA 2017. The participants who engaged voluntarily in the on-line part of the research included 420 from 143 CBHE sites out of a total participant population of 6337. The research found that the majority of participants did not support the TEF development claiming that it failed to acknowledge teaching as a collaborative activity and that the market-oriented ranking system was divisive, leading to an ‘unhealthy and counterproductive competition between providers’ (O’Leary et al, 2019, p4-5). The respondents also reported that TEF development activities had limited engagement with HE teaching staff, and teaching-only participants from CBHE were unsure about the extent to which TEF impacted on their institution. This was mainly due to the lack of any meaningful engagement with the TEF initiative by

teaching teams, coupled with the dominant role of senior managers and non-teaching professional staff in the process. Respondents generally, including those from CBHE, acknowledged that managers and professional services staff often informed them of such matters. Changes reported included an increased focus on learning analytics; programme and student evaluations; and performance-management measures. CBHE participants, along with their University counterparts, reported the negative impacts of such changes in the form of increased work-loads and insufficient supporting resources. Further, even though more of CBHE respondents compared to their University counterparts welcomed TEF's emphasis on teaching rather than research, fewer respondents clamed full awareness of TEF or involvement in any linked activities; whilst even more were unsure as to the extent to which their institutions had operationalised this initiative. However, respondents collectively noted that TEF related developments were, in both universities and CBHE, led by senior management teams and professional staff (O' Leary et al, 2019, p54). Concerns were also expressed generally on the credibility of the current TEF assessment framework and the urgent need for a review. The Government acknowledged the need for such a review, published terms of reference, appointed Dame Shirley Pearce as the independent reviewer, and established a supporting expert advisory group. Finally, while we await the publication of this report, and perhaps even more relevant to CBHE is the perspective on TEF of the recent Augar Review (2019), covering the skills, employability and technical agenda, along with widening participation and apprenticeships. The need for alternatives to quantification of quality has been

widely acknowledged, and solutions proposed and I consider two recent examples briefly below.

2.12.5 Alternatives to quantification of quality

As alternatives to quantification of quality, Wood and O'Leary (2018) argued that HE teaching excellence should be re-conceptualised by exploring the new meanings of pedagogic development, innovation and research. They argued for sustainable organisational strategies and systems that prioritise academic imperatives, and also called for a focus on independent collaborative work involving dialogue and inquiry by academic networks at the bottom of the institution. The model they propose, aligned with Wood's third focus on collaborative growth, signifies critical enquiry and responsibility for pedagogic development and not the current performance-driven, managerialist and accountability-focused approaches. They highlight Vetterlein's (2018, p545) concept of responsibility as more than mere accountability, in a positive way, involving teachers and leaders who voluntarily engage in critical pedagogic practice through peer leadership and review, promoting both individual and collective responsibility. Wood and O'Leary (2018) maintained that such practices lead to interactive pedagogic communities incorporating teachers and their leaders who support and lead as necessary. Admittedly, this requires able and willing leaders who can overcome challenges and accept the centrality of dialogic teacher engagement in further pedagogic development (Wood, 2017b).

A further alternative is Ashwin's (2020) three principles that underpin national systems-wide approaches to teaching excellence. He evaluated two broad existing approaches to system-wide teaching excellence, which include what he referred to as 'exemplar approaches and mapping approaches.' (Ashwin, 2020, p165). The former relates to examining specific 'cases' of teaching excellence, situated at individual, departmental, disciplinary or institutional levels. The latter focuses on the levels of teaching excellence which apply within the sector as a whole. Exemplar approaches were identified within the different national schemes, and mapping approaches were linked to, for example, the TEF development. He discussed the limitation of such approaches, linked to understandings of teaching excellence being based on implicit rather than explicit criteria.

He proposed three principles that can apply to system-wide teaching excellence, which relate to linking teaching excellence to the priorities of higher education, educational processes and outcomes, and situating such teaching practices within an enhancement context. Any system-wide approach to CBHE teaching excellence will need to address its specific characteristics, and processes and outcomes are likely to link to the technical HE brand. Enhancement of such practices are likely to include teaching and learning practices that develop vocational HE.

However, most CBHE providers will find such a shift difficult given a holistic institutional culture of top-down, senior management driven practices with an overriding priority to meet OFSTED imperatives for its larger FE curriculum, and requiring the HE priorities to be flexed into what is best for FE. Any

approach to HE teaching excellence requires specific acknowledgment of the characteristics and priorities for the Provider's HE curriculum and the need to ensure collaborative growth by fully engaging it's HE teaching practitioners in the development and enhancement of teaching and learning practices to avoid 'zombie innovation' (Wood, 2017b, p34).

2.13 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was to ensure that I was informed of the themes within existing literature reviews, key research perspectives (Skelton (2005) and Wood (2017)) and the policy developments in TEF to address my second research question. I examined the themes within existing research literature on HE teaching excellence, with a specific focus on the UK and the policy developments within TEF, including specific criteria for assessing HE teaching excellence. The messages from research literature confirm that teaching excellence remains a contested concept which remains difficult to define. I prioritised my review on two key perspectives (Skelton (2005) and Wood (2017) respectively), both of which helped me to think about HE teaching excellence and the different and important ways in which it can be understood. I found both of these perspectives to be comprehensive and effective lenses to capture other research observations on HE teaching excellence. Both Skelton (2005), and Wood (2017), individually offer distinct yet similar themes which can support attempts to understand HE teaching excellence. Skelton's (2005) critical framework incorporates four ideal types, encompassing traditional, performative, psychologised and critical understandings of HE teaching excellence. Discussions on Wood (2017)

entailed a detailed consideration of the emerging pedagogies approach to understand how those involved in pedagogic practices navigate their actions through the five different foci which inform CBHE in developing innovation (or excellence). I discussed the five foci, based around affective foundations, personal growth, collaborative growth, organisation contexts, and societal contexts in detail. For Wood (2017, p61) it is a 'truism' that 'we will never have either a perfect understanding of the processes of pedagogy or teach a perfect lesson over the course of our career span'.

The final part of this Chapter examined the policy developments on HE teaching excellence within the TEF. The discussion on TEF acknowledged the positive recognition of the importance of teaching excellence, and identified its three main aspects covering teaching quality; the learning environment, and student outcomes, and learning gain; all linked to core and split metrics. Key areas of critique, including the use of NSS data, application of consumerism, quantification of quality, and alternatives to quantification have also been examined in detail.

My review of themes from both literature and TEF confirm the contestability of HE teaching excellence, very much dependent on who is asking the question and their underlying purposes for wanting answers to it. The next Chapter discusses my research into how my sample of CBHE teaching practitioners understand excellence in HE teaching as they go about their routine pedagogic practices.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Methods

3.1 My Approach

My review of themes within research and policy on HE teaching excellence in Chapter 2 has highlighted that HE teaching excellence remains a contested concept and operates within a complex context, with little consensus on what it is, and any understandings that exist depend on the purposes and the people trying to define it. (Skelton, 2005; Wood, 2017). My research aim was to explore the different ways in which a purposively selected sample of CBHE teaching practitioners understand CBHE teaching excellence within their routine teaching practices. Additionally, I wanted to examine the extent to which these understandings align with perspectives from research and policy relating to TEF. My research questions were:

- *What are the qualitatively different ways in which CBHE teaching practitioners understand their experiences of HE teaching excellence from their ongoing teaching practices?*

- *To what extent do these ways of experiencing align with and/or build upon themes within key research literature and TEF, and relate to wider understandings of CBHE teaching within practice?*

My research design has been informed by a phenomenographic approach (Marton, 1981), as I believed such an approach would best support me in answering my first research question, focussing on exploring the different ways in which research participants understood their experiences of the abstract concept of CBHE teaching excellence as teaching practitioners. This

choice was linked to the explicit emphasis that the phenomenographic approach places on interpreting variation in understandings of such experiences and the inter-relations between them. My aim was to use the phenomenographic approach to illustrate contextually both the whole and parts of CBHE teaching excellence based on experiences as understood by my participants within a single outcome space of variation (Akerlind,2010). I believed that identifying the internal relationship between the different understandings would enable me to examine participant understandings holistically while also acknowledging that such understandings can be experienced differently by the different participants or even by the same participant within different contexts or times (Akerlind, 2010). This focus of variation is seen as offering a greater opportunity to understand the meaning of the phenomenon (Marton and Booth, 1997) and it is this feature that distinguishes the phenomenographic approach from, for example, phenomenology. Whilst phenomenography and phenomenology have similarities in that both approaches aim to study the world as perceived by research participants, it is the former which seeks to interpret the variation in how the research participants understand their experiences of the phenomenon. (Marton and Booth, 1977). Because my research aim was to explore the qualitative variation within the research participants' understandings of their experiences of CBHE teaching excellence, and the nature of such variation relating to the different parts of such excellence (Marton and Booth, 1997), I believed that my research design would be best served by using a phenomenographic approach. My focus within this chapter is to examine the development of the phenomenographic approach, the key

assumptions associated with it, and its limitations. The application of these assumptions is discussed further within Data Collection (Chapter 4), Data Analysis (Chapter 5) and Research Outcomes (Chapter 6) below.

3.2 Origins of Phenomenography

Phenomenographic practice originated some time before it was actually identified and formalised as a 'distinct research design' (Tight, 2016, p322). Its origin was situated largely in the study of student approaches to learning, and to the development of 'deep and surface learning approaches' within research carried out in Gothenburg University in the 1970s by Marton and co-researchers (Marton and Saljo.1976a, 1976b; Fransson, 1977; Entwistle, 1997; Svensson, 1977; and Dahlgren and Marton 1978). This was in the context of empirical educational research investigating student perspectives of learning from academic texts (Pang, 2003). Marton first used the term phenomenography in 1981, and defined it as 'the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive and understand various aspects of a phenomenon in the world around us' (Marton,1986, p31; Marton and Booth, 1997). Tight (2016, p321) noted that phenomenography has been variously referred to as 'an approach, a depiction, a method, a methodology, a movement, an orientation, a paradigm, a perspective, a position and a programme'. I refer to it as a research approach as it aligns well with the qualitative paradigm and the inductive reasoning aiming to interpret meanings from the analysis of the data collected (Goddard & Melville, 2004). It takes an interpretivist (Crotty, 1998, p67) approach by exploring 'culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world'.

Marton (1986) developed three types of phenomenographic research, the first of which was a content-related exploration of the relationship between the outcomes of student learning, and the approaches they took to that learning. The second line of research examined learning related to concepts within subjects such as physics, mathematics and economics. The third type explored how people understood broader matters such as concepts within politics and taxes, outside the education context, which Marton (1986, p38) called ‘pure phenomenography’.

A further development by Bowden (2005), who prioritised practical applications and introduced ‘developmental phenomenography’, distinguished the approach from Marton’s pure phenomenography. Bowden’s (2005) developmental phenomenography was designed to bring about practical applications by informing and influencing practice, and he highlighted the link between research and practice as research is intended to inform practice. He articulated the idea of developmental phenomenography as follows:

> *‘Phenomenographic research that I engage in is situated within a particular kind of context. I focus on research which, through finding out how people experience some aspect of their world, will enable them or others to change the way their world operates, normally in a formal education setting. My perspective is developmental, my reasons for undertaking the research are concerned with how I can use the research outcomes to affect the world I live and work in. The research outcomes are not the objectives per se.’*

It is within this variant that my research is situated, as it aimed to report on variations in teaching practitioners' descriptions of experiences of CBHE

teaching excellence to inform both staff development and contextual enhancement of CBHE teaching practices. Green and Bowden (2009) distinguished between pure and developmental phenomenography by highlighting the explicit focus on the practical application of research, and suggest key areas that the researcher needs to address. I used these key areas within Chapters 4, 5 and 6 below to inform the development of research questions, the selection of samples, data collection methods and the presentation of outcomes (Green and Bowden, 2009).

Although development phenomenography prioritises the practical application of its findings, it operates within the general phenomenographic ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions discussed below.

3.3 Assumptions of Phenomenography

Phenomenography was seen ‘as a reaction against, and an alternative to, the then dominant traditions of positivistic, behaviouristic and quantitative research' (Svensson, 1997, p171). Although the assumptions underpinning the phenomenographic approach were in some way informed by the above dominant traditions none of them were fully accepted in their entirety (Svensson, 1997). The phenomenographic approach underpins specific assumptions about the nature of the object of study, relating them to understandings, conceptions and knowledge creation. The challenge for those who use this approach is ‘to clarify and justify what their research involves, ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically’ (Dall’Alba, 1996, p170), and these are considered further below.

3.3.1 Ontological Assumptions

Ontological assumptions relate to 'the study of being' and to the question 'what is there' as far as 'the nature of existence is concerned' (Crotty, 1998, p10). Phenomenography's ontological assumption sees a relationship between 'consciousness and reality' (Uljens, 1996, p114). The reality here is the world as experiences described by participants. Phenomenography applies a non-dualistic ontological assumption which sees the subject and the object of the research in an inseparable relationship, assuming that the world is the world that is experienced, understood and described by the participants. To this end, Marton (2000, p105) confirms

> *'From a non-dualist ontological perspective, there are not two worlds - a real, objective world, on the one hand and, and a subjective world of mental representations on the other. There is only one world, a really existing world, which is experienced and understood in different ways by human beings. It is simultaneously objective and subjective'.*

My research applies phenomenography's non-dualist perspective and assumes an inseparable relationship between my participants and CBHE teaching practices, and the focal point of my research has been to explore that relationship.

3.3.2 Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemological assumptions in research relate to the nature of knowledge, which in turn relates to the theory and the knowledge of truth. (Yates et al,

2012). Phenomenography's epistemological assumptions are situated within the principle of intentionality (Marton and Pang, 2008). The assumed non-dualist perspective of human consciousness holds that knowledge is created from experience as a result of 'an internal relation between human beings and the world' (Pang, 2003, p145). Phenomenography seeks to identify the variation in the participants' experience-informed understandings of the research phenomenon (Marton and Booth, 1997; Sjostrom and Dahlgren, 2002). Various terminologies have been used to describe this knowledge interest, including conceptions, ways of experiencing, ways of seeing and ways of understanding, and it is acknowledged that these terms have been used 'interchangeably' Marton (2000, p115). The different knowledge interests for the participants interpreted from the data are collectively represented within 'categories of description' (Marton and Booth. 1997, p128) as being the results of research enquiries informed by phenomenographic assumptions (Marton,1986; Sandberg, 1997; Bowden, 2000a). These categories of description, discussed later in this chapter, form the different constituent parts of the collective experience, and are both logically related and hierarchically ordered, representing 'a more or less partial grasp of the same complex of constituent parts' (Akerlind, 2010, p47). Phenomenography's research object has the character of knowledge and hence it has been argued (Svensson, 1997) that its ontological assumption becomes its epistemological assumption too.

Within my research, I have used the term "understanding/s" when relating to the knowledge interests, within qualitatively different ways in which my

participants understand CBHE teaching excellence, based on their current practice-based experiences. My focus on participant understandings rather than my own understandings reflects a second-order perspective, which is another distinguishing assumption of a phenomenographic approach.

3.3.3 Second-order Perspective

Phenomenography assumes a second order perspective in that the researcher focuses on the descriptions of different ways in which participants understand and experience their world. Hence, when applying a second-order perspective, the research phenomenon is investigated through understandings of experiences of the participants rather than that of the researcher (Marton and Pang,1999). This second order perspective is linked to phenomenography's non-dualist assumption of seeing an internal and inseparable relationship between human beings and the world, as distinct from a first order perspective in which each are seen as a separate entity. Marton (1981) saw this insider perspective as one of the main characteristics of phenomenographic research enabling researchers to interpret specific aspects of research objects from the perspective of the participants. This second order perspective is fully embedded and explained within all stages of my research, and particularly within data collection, analysis and outcomes within Chapters 4, 5 and 6 below.

3.3.4 Knowledge Aspects within Phenomenography

Marton and Pang (in Yates et al, 2012, p100) have related phenomenography's knowledge aspects to 'the anatomy of experience itself'

rather than ‘the anatomy of the mind underlying the experience’. Marton and Booth (1997, p 88) explain that for analytical purposes experience is seen to include both meaning and structure which together make up the ‘anatomy of experience.’ The latter is associated with the structural aspects and the former refers to the referential aspects of the experience, and both meaning and structure interconnect and interact simultaneously (Marton and Booth, 1997; Akerlind, 2010). The structure of the experience of a phenomenon can be further explained in terms of internal and external horizons. This explanation relates to the interrelationship between the internal horizon (consisting of aspects that make up the phenomenon and give it ‘structural presence’) (Marton and Booth 1997, p87); and the external horizon representing the relationship of these aspects to their context. Marton (1994, p4426) refers to the external horizon as the ‘delimitation’ of the research object from its environment and ‘relating to its broader context.’

The internal and external horizons link to a proposed structure of awareness framework (Marton and Booth, 1997) based on the field of consciousness theory (Gurwitsch, 1964) to describe different ways of experiencing a phenomenon. This theory holds that awareness comprises three overlapping areas - the margin, the thematic field and the theme (Booth, 1992; Marton and Booth, 1997; Marton, 1998; Bowden and Marton, 1999). When a person is contextually aware of a particular phenomenon at a certain time this awareness comprises aspects of the phenomenon informed by existing contextual factors. These aspects, which are experienced simultaneously and collectively, make up the thematic field. An awareness of its related aspects at

the core represents the theme of awareness and those non-related aspects of the phenomenon, for which the awareness is less focused, fall within the margin. It is assumed that this awareness is layered, making it difficult to be aware of all aspects at the same time or to be aware of them to the same extent (Marton and Booth, 1997). The nature of this experience can vary in terms of the which aspects are discerned and focused on simultaneously by the participants within relevant contextual situations (Marton and Booth, 1997). This context brings a specific 'relevance structure', which can differ when the context changes, leading to a situation where different relevance structures can be found even within a single participant's understanding (Marton and Booth, 1997, p143). It may well be that, at times, certain parts of this context may not be discerned, or discerned to different levels, or experienced sequentially rather than simultaneously as 'human experience is always partial' (Akerlind, 2010, p47). Whether an aspect is within a theme, the thematic field or the margin is context-driven and a change in the context can thus bring changes to aspects within that theme, thematic field or margin (Marton and Booth, 1997). Thus, any meanings that participants attribute to any phenomenon - in my case, CBHE teaching excellence - comprise a 'complex of constituent parts' from which the participants can identify specific parts within the context of their current practice (Akerlind, 2010, p47). Therefore, the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which CBHE teaching excellence is experienced can be discerned and identified simultaneously in the participants' understandings (Marton and Booth.1997). The significance of the knowledge interests of phenomenography also inform its methodological assumptions.

3.4 Methodological Assumptions

Phenomenography's methodological assumptions are very much influenced by its ontological and epistemological positions, and inform exploratory data collection and contextual data analysis (Svensson, 1997). The main data collection methods, data analysis methods and the presentation of phenomenographic studies are examined below.

3.4.1 Data Collection Methods

Although other methods have been used (Edwards, 2007), face to face interviews are the main method for data collection when using a phenomenographic research approach (Marton, 1986; 1996; Dall'Alba, 1996; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000). Phenomenographic interviews have similarities with qualitative interviews, but they have also been described as a 'specialised form of the qualitative research interview' (Bruce,1994, p49). They are specialised in the sense that they aim to explore variations in how participants understand their experiences of the research phenomenon, and for this, the focus of the interview is to explore the participant-research phenomenon experience and not the participant or the research phenomenon itself. (Bruce, 1997) Data is gathered from the individual participants, and represented collectively within the categories of description which feed into a focus on collective awareness as to how the research phenomenon was experienced, and the variations within this.

The interview process involves semi-structured interviews and focuses on 'exploring at greater and greater depth of thinking without leading' (Trigwell,

2000, p68), involving a ‘conversational partnership’ facilitating the necessary reflection (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000, p302). The interview questions are open-ended and designed to enable the participants to engage with their experiences with the research phenomenon and shape the conversations (Marton and Booth, 1997). The semi-structured interviews normally include pre-set questions to guide the process (Stenfors-Hayes, 2013), and to enable the interviewer to explore any unexpected observations that the participants make (Booth, 1997) through appropriately responsive probes, (Bowden and Green, 2005), with the potential for different interviews to take different directions even within the shared pre-set questions (Marton, 1986). The requirement for the researcher to refrain from suggesting ideas not highlighted by the participants or affirming or negating what the participant is saying is important. One of the other key decisions for the researcher is to decide the sample population and size, and the key principles for this are discussed below.

3.4.2 Participant Selection and Sample Size

The sampling process for phenomenographic interviews is normally one of purposeful and non-random sampling (Marton,1986; Francis,1996; Booth,1997; Akerlind,2010) aiming to gain deep understanding and produce relevant data to enable the researcher to answer the research enquiry (Patton, 2002). Participant selection reflects their ability to support the purposes of the research enquiry and the phenomenon to be explored. However, Ashworth and Lucas (2000, p300) advise that the selection of participants should avoid pre-supposition about the nature of the phenomenon

or the nature of the conceptions held by particular ‘types’ of individuals whilst observing common-sense precautions about maintaining the ‘variety’ of experience’. As far as sample size is concerned, there is no particular number, but it needs to be sufficient to offer data from which the variation in understandings of the research phenomenon can be interpreted, whilst ensuring the data remains manageable (Bruce,1997; Trigwell, 2000; Bowden, 2005). Some phenomenographers (Morse,1994; Dunkin,2000; Sandberg, 2000) hold the view that the sample size should be decided at saturation point. Dahlgren (1995) suggests that it may be possible to obtain the necessary variation from ten appropriately selected participants, whereas Trigwell (2000) suggests 15 with a maximum of 20, and Akerlind (2010) regards 30 participants as common practice. Whatever sample size is chosen, the key is to ensure that the characteristics of the sample are appropriate to provide answers to the research questions. Once the interview data has been obtained, the next stage is to transcribe it, with the important task (Kvale,1996) of ensuring that transcripts accurately document the participants’ reflections on how they experienced the research phenomenon to facilitate the process of phenomenographic data analysis.

3.4.3 Phenomenographic Data Analysis – Categories of Description

Data analysis starts once the transcripts have been produced, and the phenomenographic data analysis is carried out with a focus on producing a hierarchically-related and critically varied set of categories of descriptions as the outcomes of the research enquiry. Although a number of different methods of data analysis have been identified within phenomenography

(Akerlind, 2010), they all share a focus on interpreting relevant fragments of each participants' reflections on their understanding of experiences which they believe relate to the research phenomena, which in my case is CBHE teaching excellence. Differences include Marton's (1986,1994) Swedish approach involving the initial selection of sections where the participants reflect on their experience of the phenomenon to include within a 'pool of meaning' (Marton, 1994, p4428) which form the bases for further analysis. Prosser's (2000, p45) approach is different in that the whole transcript is considered, followed by a selection of 'related parts' which are then analysed in relation to each other. The categories are developed with no 'pool of meanings', but the 'relevant parts' are situated within the interview context from where they were developed. Bowden's (2000a) approach is labelled as the Australian approach, and takes the whole transcript approach, considering specific utterances against the context of the full interview. These differences in approach have been critiqued, suggesting that 'the pool of meaning' approach creates a risk of complete decontextualization from the interview context (Bowden, 2000a); and in relation to the whole transcript approach, there is difficulty in retaining all of the information when there are, for example, over 20 transcripts. (Trigwell,1994)

The next stage of the analysis process is to develop a limited number of internally and logically related, hierarchically inclusive and qualitatively different categories of description of the research phenomenon. Categories of description represent participants' ways of experiencing the research phenomenon, as interpreted by the researcher (Marton and Booth, 1997).

Within each category of description are aspects of the phenomenon which are shared across categories, and aspects which vary across each category, representing 'the dimensions of variation' (Akerlind, 2010, p89). In order to ensure that this variation is critical, the researcher uses the principles behind the 'theme of expanding awareness' that occur across the different transcripts, and distinguish them.

Marton and Booth (1997, p152) proposed three criteria for assessing categories of description, which include the need for a category to represent something distinct about the way the phenomenon is experienced; for each to be logically related to the other categories; and for the number of categories developed to be decided on the level of the critical variation and represented in as few categories as possible. The principle of parsimony, linked to the requirement for a limited number of categories is particularly relevant for developmental phenomenography in light of the potential for the research outcomes to inform practice (Green and Bowden, 2009). Each category of description includes both a referential aspect and a structural aspect of how the research phenomenon has been experienced (as discussed above). This requires the identification of the variation in meaning based on what is primarily focused on within each experience and the difference in the structure of awareness. Each category of description is represented by a statement which describes what the category represents, and is substantiated with representative quotations from the interviews which mark and differentiate between the categories (Marton, 1986; 1994; Booth,1997; Bowden 2000a; Walsh, 2000).

There has been some debate as to whether the development of these categories is a process of discovery or construction (Walsh, 2000). Both methods have, however, been criticised on the basis that the process of discovery contradicts phenomenography's non-dualist ontology by seeing the categories as pre-existing rather than as developed from the relationship between the participants and the phenomenon. The construction process is criticised for the potential risk of researcher influence on the data interpretation process, but this can be addressed by making attempts to explicitly explain how interpretations are made. Thus, the way individuals experience a phenomenon is only part of the way in which that phenomenon can be experienced, as the categories of description also represent the researcher's interpretations of the different ways in which the selected sample understand their experiences of their engagement within the research phenomenon. The categories of description are presented within an outcome space which is the final outcome of a phenomenographic study (Marton, 2000, p105).

3.4.4 Phenomenographic Outcome Space

Marton and Booth (1997, p125) describe an outcome space as 'the complex of categories of description comprising distinct groupings of aspects of the phenomenon and the relationship between them. Marton (2000, p105) notes that these represent 'a synonym for phenomenon'. Therefore, a phenomenographic outcome space represents the phenomenon and the different ways in which it is experienced as interpreted by the researcher. Bruce (1997) describes the outcomes space as 'a diagrammatic

representation' (1997, p87) of the categories of description, whilst Saljo (1988, p44) sees it as a 'map of a territory' showing how participants understand a part of reality even though it cannot be taken to capture all potential ways of understanding (Marton and Booth, 1997).

3.4.5 Role of the Researcher

During the development of the categories of description and the final outcome space, the researcher's role is shaped by an internal relationship between him/her and the data (Svensson and Theman,1983; Bowden, 1996; Sandberg, 1996; Marton and Booth, 1997). Thus, the final outcome, albeit one that can be argued for, will not necessarily be the only potential outcome that can be developed from the data analysed, and is only a partial understanding of the phenomenon. (Akerlind, 2010). Within its empirical focus, phenomenography prioritises the need for the results of the research to be substantiated by data, and requires the researcher to bracket any pre-existing experiences to allow them to remain receptive to the different meanings represented in the data .The aim of phenomenographic research is both to ensure that the data is presented faithfully and also to interpret the variation in the participants' experiences meaningfully, all of which requires a judicious exercise of professional judgment on the part of the researcher (Akerlind, 2010).

Walsh (1994) explored the different views within phenomenographic research on the impact of researcher experience on the development of outcomes, and concluded that it is a question of degree as the results of such studies are

always informed by both the data and the researcher's professional judgement. The safeguards needed are to ensure that the researcher's professional judgement does not dominate the development of the outcome (Bowden, 1996; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000). The participants' understandings are based on their experiences of the research phenomenon, and the need for the researcher to bracket any of their experience-informed pre-conceptions is important. Ashworth and Lucas (1998, p421) explained that

> *'bracketing of presumptions is about being able to hear what the research participant is saying and about being able to converse in a way which will evoke their life-world. The setting aside of theoretical conceptualizations is part of this discipline, clearing the way for careful hearing.'*

It has also been suggested that the more knowledge and experience the researcher has, the better their capability to experience variation within the data and produce meaningful outcomes from their research (Booth,1992; Trigwell, 1994; Uljens, 1996; Marton and Booth, 1997). In this respect, Pratt (1998) distinguishes between the researchers' duty from, on the one hand, a promise to remain detached during data collection to on the other, one of being totally committed to be aware of any interpretation he/she makes during the analysis stage. The researcher's role is therefore to explicitly 'maintain interpretive awareness to acknowledge and explicitly deal with our subjectivity through the research process instead of overlooking it' (Sandberg,1996, p137).

3.4.6 Limitations and trustworthiness of the phenomenographic approach

Phenomenographic research shares some of the general limitations identified within qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 1981), and has been criticised especially in terms of its methodological assumptions (Richardson,1999). This criticism relates to insufficient disclosure of the methodological procedures within data collection and analysis and the potential impact of research bias during these stages. The research quality needs to ensure that the research aims are followed up by appropriate research methods (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Francis, 1996; Bowden,1994b) requiring a careful selection of participants, appropriate use of interview questions and non-judgemental and empathetic approach to questioning followed by the application of established guidelines for transcription and interpretation of the transcripts (Sandberg, 1994; Kvale,1996; Ashworth and Lucas,2000). Specific guidelines to ensure the quality and rigour of phenomenographic research enquiries (Akerlind, 2005a; Bowden and Green, 2005) exist within established processes for ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of research outcomes for a phenomenographic approach.

Credibility relates to the extent to which the interpretations made from the data have been rigorously applied to produce valid outcomes. Validity for phenomenographic enquiries relate to the level to which the research outcomes reflect the human experiences of the phenomenon studied (Uljens, 1996) and validity checks are applied by ensuring communicative validity and pragmatic validity (Kvale 1996). Akerlind (2010) signifies the need for

communicative validity relating to the extent to which the study has investigated its aims, and communicated all decisions taken and interpretations made by the researcher during the research processes to ensure that the research outcomes can be defended and validated externally. Pragmatic validity relates to how far the findings are useful for the addressees. Interpretations made in the final research outcomes are required to be internally consistent, empirically evidenced and open to feedback from for example those who were not part of individual sample (Uljens, 1996). Research outcomes are thus judged on the extent to which they provide insights into better ways of operating in the research participant's world. (Marton, 1996; Marton and Booth, 1997; Entwistle,1997). Collier-Reed et al (2009), relating to Booth's (1992) observation, proposed three approaches to enable phenomenographic outcomes to be credible, which relate to content-based credibility, methodological credibility and communication-based credibility. Content-based credibility looks at the researcher's knowledge of the areas linked to the research phenomenon; methodological credibility relates to the compatibility between the aims of the study and its design and implementation, and its communicative validity relates to the extent to which the researcher is able to persuade and justify any interpretations within the phenomenographic outcomes produced.

Transferability relates to the extent to which findings from a phenomenographic approach can be generalised and applied to other similar contexts and/or other similar participants sampled (Collier-Reed et al, 2009; Sin, 2010). It is essential to acknowledge that phenomenographic studies are

very context specific (Marton, 1981, 1986) as even the same participants may put forward different understandings in different environments. This makes it important to think about the transferability of findings by exploring the situational and contextual factors that may have influenced the participants when expressing their understandings. However, Johansson et al (1985) pointed out that phenomenographic findings can be applied to a new context to bring about changes in the understandings of a research phenomenon. It depends on whether the researcher sets out to facilitate transferability, and if this is so the research design should facilitate this at all stages, especially in relation to participant selection. The researcher has the responsibility to provide enough justification for others to judge its transferability (Sin, 2010).

Dependability relates to the clarity with which the researcher is able to convince others that the research process was logical, fully documented and traceable especially in relation to the conduct of interviews, transcription processes, data analysis, the development of categories of description, and the outcome space (Bowden, 2005; Bowden and Green, 2005) through to what Akerlind (2010, p 68) highlights as ‘Coder-reliability checks’ and ‘Dialogue-validity checks.’ Coder-reliability checks involve two researchers coding interview transcripts independently and then comparing the categories interpreted to identify the level of agreement. If there is high level agreement it is seen as likely that others could also agree. Dialogue-validity checks involve agreement being reached between researchers through mutual discussion and critique, and provides both balanced results, and an apparent control on subjectivity. However, in relation to a single researcher, the steps should

ensure that the interpretive stages are disclosed openly and substantiated with examples (Sandberg,1994;1996).

Finally, confirmability involves the level to which findings can be empirically trusted. This can be achieved by the accurate description of all of the stages of the research and presentation of data to substantiate interpretations made by the researcher (Akerlind, 2010). Despite these challenges and limitations, phenomenography continues to be regarded as a useful research design' for exploring HE teaching and learning contexts (Tight, 2016). Although a phenomenographic approach has been used in other contexts such as counselling research (Kettunen & Tynjala 2017), it has usually been specifically applied within HE educational research (Tight, 2014b).

3.5 Conclusion

This Chapter has focused on examining the principles underpinning phenomenography as the design for my research. It has explored the origins of phenomenography as a research methodology and examined, in particular, the aims of developmental phenomenography which are the premise on which my research enquiry is based. The important assumptions of the phenomenographic approach in relation to its ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions have been examined. The particular implications of a non-dualist ontology and second-order perspective of phenomenographic studies have been discussed. The methodological priorities for such research have been detailed with specific reference to the characteristics of phenomenographic interviews which provide the necessary data for analysis

at the later stage of the research. The role and nature of a researcher's engagement in data analysis and the development of the phenomenographic outcomes within the categories of description and the outcome space were examined along with the limitations of phenomenographic research. The strategies for ensuring the quality of the research outcomes from phenomenographic studies, and the need to ensure communicative and pragmatic validity, include processes addressing the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the research outcomes. The methods I used for data collection to support the outcomes of my research were informed by phenomenographic principles and are discussed within the next Chapter.

Chapter 4: Data Collection Methods

4.1 Introduction

This Chapter focuses on my chosen methods for data collection using semi-structured interviews, my reasons for this choice and the specific principles relating to phenomenographic interviews which informed them. To ensure transparency of the process, this Chapter also details my sampling strategies, the processes for recruiting participants, and how the interviews were undertaken. A detailed break-down is also provided to make explicit the key characteristics of the participants. Finally, I reflect on my engagement within the interview process before concluding.

4.2 My Choice

Having decided that my research design would be informed by phenomenographic principles, I selected semi-structured interviews, commonly used for phenomenographic enquiries (Marton, 1986, 1996; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000) for collecting data to provide answers to my research questions. I also took into account the specific features of my research setting, the characteristics of my participants, and the timescale for data collection. In line with guidance on phenomenographic interviews (Bruce, 1994; Morse et al, 2002) I prioritised the need to be transparent, and used different verification strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of my research data. This was addressed by explicitly accounting for any pre-conceptions I had about HE teaching excellence, based on my past experience within CBHE learning and teaching contexts, specifically as a HE teaching

practitioner at various levels within different CBHE settings (Burns, 1994). I addressed this by taking a reflexive approach throughout the research process, and specifically during the data collection and data analysis stages by systematically questioning and documenting any perceived impacts from my potential pre-conceptions. The rationale for selecting interviews as the method for collecting the data, the design of the interview questions, the period during which the interview would take place and my choice of participants are explained below. I knew that the interview transcripts would be valuable data for analysis, and provide answers to my research questions (Booth, 1992).

Semi-structured interviews were used for collecting data from 30 teaching practitioners with current experience within CBHE teaching contexts. The process included one pilot interview with a teaching practitioner, and the outcomes from this were used to modify the nature and order of the questions to be used for the main interviews. I also discussed the questions with my supervisor and actioned feedback before starting the formal process. I discuss below my reasons for choosing interviews to collect data, the key characteristics of the research setting and participants; and the process of data collection.

4.3 Data Collection

I used interviews for my research as they have been the most common method of collecting data for phenomenographic enquiries such as mine (Marton,1986,1996; Dall'Alba, 1996; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000). I also saw

benefits in using interviews for reasons very similar to those noted by Bruce (1994, p48), based on the observation that ‘most people are far more comfortable talking than they are writing’ and my participants enjoyed being engaged in this way. The interviews proved an efficient way of accessing them and engaging them effectively within the pre-arranged timescales. I made sure that they did not have to spend time preparing for the interview discussions or do any follow-up work. The interviews also provided them with the direct opportunity to respond freely and engage with the process, and this in turn provided me with a timely opportunity to interact and clarify meanings within the participants’ responses. I was aware that my participants were giving up valuable time to support my research and that it was difficult to go back continuously for further clarification, which has sometimes been a practice within phenomenographic study contexts involving the collection of written data (Bruce, 1994). I accounted for the distinctive features of phenomenographic interviews (Bruce 1994) based on their aims, focus, and design, and the role of the researcher, within semi-structured interviews of between 45 minutes and an hour in duration for my research. The interview included questions aimed at setting the context for the research, and primary questions enabling the participants to reflect on their experiences of the research phenomenon (Akerlind, 2010). The primary questions included open questions to explore what meanings participants attributed to HE teaching excellence, and also questions asking them to illustrate their understandings with concrete examples situated within their experiences (Akerlind, 2010). The focus was to enable participants to give reflective accounts (Marton and Booth, 1997) of their ‘implicit’ and ‘explicit’ (Akerlind, 2010, p 52) ways of

understanding CBHE teaching excellence (Bowden,1994a), based on relevant experiences (Entwistle,1997).

In line with the specific aim of phenomenographic interviews, my priority was to find out the different ways in which my participants collectively described their experiences of what they believed to be CBHE teaching excellence, focusing on the relations between them and their practice (Marton,1988b). Applying phenomenography's second-order perspectives (Marton and Pang, 1999) my priority was to explore participants' understanding of their experiences of CBHE teaching excellence rather than my own. The semi-structured nature of the interview questions enabled me to explore and encourage 'greater and greater depths of thinking without leading' (Trigwell, 2000, p68). The interviews were designed to be 'conversational, collaborative and reflective' (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000, p302) to enable participants to describe their own understandings of their experiences of CBHE teaching excellence contextually, relationally and qualitatively (Marton, 1988b). Even at the design stage, I was aware that during analysis I would need to be able to interpret how participants described their experience of HE teaching excellence and 'what concepts' they used to 'explain it' (Saljo, 1988, p41). I preferred an interview setting which involved one-to-one interviews rather than groups to provide the opportunity to concentrate on that single participant's understanding of his/her experience of CBHE teaching excellence, more fully than would be possible in a group setting, (Bruce, 1994) even though individual understandings were represented collectively within the categories of description (Akerlind, 2010).

The interview process was guided by phenomenographic principles, by ensuring that both the participant and I began ‘with some kind of overall shared topic, verbalised in terms which we recognised as meaningful’ (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000, p299). It was important to stress that the focus was on CBHE teaching excellence as a brand, rather than teacher excellence, to enable them to appreciate the wider context of my research. The interview questions were designed to focus on descriptions of understandings of experiences of CBHE teaching and were deliberately broad to gather ‘meaningful responses' without forcing a particular structure or way of responding (Bruce et al, 2004, p146). The questions included both trigger and open-ended questions **(**Marton,1986) to enable the participants to choose the focus of their answers (Marton,1994), and to reflect fully their descriptions of their contextual experiences of CBHE teaching excellence (Marton and Booth,1997). To facilitate this, I encouraged the participants to reflect on their experiences, and to explore how they understood HE teaching excellence from these experiences. Although not an easy task, I consciously made explicit attempts not to introduce new areas, so that I did not influence the process (Marton and Booth, 1997). My initial set of framework questions and follow-up questions helped to clarify and resolve any apparent contradictions with the participants’ responses (Akerlind et al, 2005). Each question gave me the opportunity to develop further follow-up questions to clarify my understanding of the participants' responses (Bruce et al, 2004). The challenges around clarifications mainly surrounded the need to balance the priority of allowing my participants to set their own terms of reference against my priority to gain answers to my research questions (Dortins, 2002).

Prior to commencing each interview, I applied the ethical requirements of the University in assuring participants of their confidentiality (Akerlind, 2010), and this was achieved by using pseudonyms to protect the individual participants and their practice settings. Participants gave written consent to be interviewed and I in turn gave assurances that they were free to terminate the interview at any time. I also ensured the participants were in agreement with the interview being recorded and later transcribed and analysed (Trigwell, 2000; Bowden, 2000a).

Each interview started with a brief summary of my research and clarification of my research aims. I explained the phenomenographic approach being used, and the implications of its ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions, together with its non-dualist and second order perspectives. In doing so, I accounted for each participants' research experiences as most of them, even those with research expertise, were not familiar with the phenomenographic approach and asked for more information on this. Once I had explained the focus for my research and its potential for producing holistic insights for the CBHE community, I felt the context of the interview was appropriately set.

During the interviews I used contextual questions (Akerlind, 2010) to invite the participants to explain their experiences of HE teaching in a CBHE setting. This was important, particularly because a small number of them were new to me, and I had not engaged with the others professionally for between three and five years. Almost all of them were still engaged with HE teaching, but some had taken on different additional roles such as programme leadership,

line management, senior management or executive leadership of CBHE. Even those in the latter grouping had both a recent engagement with CBHE teaching and learning and a continuing engagement in aspects of such activity through team teaching and staff development activities. The contextual questions helped the participants to situate themselves within my research and realise their contributions to both my research and the wider CBHE context. It also helped both myself and the participants to have a shared agenda which we could both 'recognise as meaningful' (Dortins, 2002, p210).

Some of my initial questions were targeted towards a shared understanding of all the activities which make up contemporary teaching and learning activities to situate and contextualise each participant's understandings of HE teaching excellence. For this I sought their answers to the open questions (Akerlind, 2010) about the meaning of relevant concepts starting with:

> 'Can you identify what activities count as teaching'?

I was initially unsure whether this question was necessary given the time limitations of the interview, but on reflection it proved to be useful to enable a focus on their terms of reference as to what counted as teaching for this interview. Being experienced in CBHE activities, they all had a shared understanding of what the CBHE brand entailed, albeit some referred to it as HE in FE. All participants identified the key characteristics of excellent HE teaching within a CBHE context, although in the case of some the distinction between competent teaching and excellent teaching was less marked. I

realised that this was just their initial response as later into the discussions the distinctions became clearer. Participants were in control throughout the interview, although I probed as necessary for clarifications from their situated examples (Bowden et al, 1992) to reference their understandings and to remain relevant to my research aims (Dortins, 2002). For example, one of my questions asked for situated examples (Akerlind, 2010) of their engagement with CBHE teaching excellence contexts to give them the opportunity to think about the concept in general terms. I then sought more focused examples of their engagement with higher education teaching which they understood to be excellent to gauge the depth of their engagement by asking:

> Can you think of another example where you were engaged in initiating and/or delivering higher education teaching within your Institution which you regard as excellent?

Of the above two questions, the first one was focused on the interviewees' experiences in terms of their involvement as part of a team taking an observation/assessor role within what they regarded as a HE teaching excellence context. The latter question clearly focused on examples of their experience of full engagement in, and responsibility for, the delivery of HE teaching. Both questions were necessary to clarify aspects within their examples which they believed contributed to CBHE teaching excellence. However, a certain amount of further probing with questions such as: 'What did you think was excellent about this experience?' and 'How did you come to the conclusion that you were experiencing excellent HE teaching?' was necessary to further explore the depth of their understandings. These

questions also usefully situated the different participants' understandings and addressed phenomenography's perspective on describing variation in peoples' relationship with the world as they experience it. (Gibbings et al, 2015).

As the discussions proceeded, participants distinguished their experiences of competent HE teaching which conformed to baseline standards from experiences of excellent HE teaching meeting higher standards. It was necessary for both myself and the participants to ensure that the focus of the interview remained on exploring understandings of the CBHE teaching excellence brand rather than on experiences of CBHE teaching excellence.

Before closing each interview, I asked the following summary question:

> 'Now you have had time to think and discuss this during this interview, can you summarise from your experience what excellent HE teaching with CBHE means to you?'

This question was important as it allowed each participant to have a further chance to consolidate their thinking, and for me to confirm the main focus of their understandings to take forward to the data analysis stage. This was specifically intended to facilitate identification of' 'the structural and referential aspects' and the structure of the awareness framework relating to aspects of understandings that fell within 'the margin, the thematic field and the theme' (Marton and Booth, 1997, p87-89). All participants took this opportunity to reflect and confirm the focus of their understanding from their experiences of CBHE teaching excellence 'fully' (Bowden, 2000a, p10). I used this

opportunity to further confirm their answers before concluding, thanking the participants for their time, and reassuring them on confidentiality protocols in line with ethical considerations (Akerlind, 2010). I took a conscious decision not to volunteer to share the transcripts with them, as I knew they would not have the time to further review them. Additionally, I was not certain that they would like to see the transcription of their interview which, along with responses to the questions, included numerous repetitions, gaps and inconsistences in their responses which may well be usual within an oral context, but appeared less articulate within the written transcript (Kvale, 1996; Vincent and Warren, 2001). Additionally, the whole focus of the interview was to identify understandings at that time and context, and further review and checking may well have distorted this (Akerlind, 2010). My priority was therefore to ensure that I utilised the final question to confirm the participants' understandings, and to seek any clarifications where necessary. The next section gives a comprehensive account of the key characteristics of the participants for this study.

4.4 Research participant selection and sample size and characteristics

I used purposive sampling in line with guidance for phenomenographic interviews (Marton, 1986) and my sample selection prioritised the development of as complete an outcome space as possible. (Akerlind, 2010) I therefore interviewed 30 participants (Bowden, 2005, p17) purposefully selected (Patton, 2002), on a non-random basis (Marton, 1996; Akerlind, 2005b) to ensure that the participants' characteristics supported the level of heterogeneity required. I believed that a sample size of 30 participants would

ensure a sufficient level of variation for as complete an outcome space as possible (Akerlind, 2010). I recognised early on that a sample of 30 participants would be time consuming (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000; Akerlind et al, 2014; K. Brown et al, 2016) but wanted to guard against unforeseen problems with access or other logistical issues. I now feel that I might have been able to gain the necessary variation with a smaller sample as I was able to access all participants without difficulty. I interviewed all of the 30 participants within a slightly longer time period than originally planned to accommodate some unexpected personal and professional priorities. The venue for each interview was chosen by the participants and the recording of the interviews went well in all but one instance where the recording failed at an early stage due to technical problems. However, I was able to recognise this and make contemporary notes of the interview.

The participation selection process had to be worked out carefully to achieve a balance between ensuring that the required level of variation (Akerlind, 2010) existed against mechanically fixing participant selection based on my pre-conceptions as to what particular participants would say (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000). I ensured that all participants had HE teaching experience, within CBHE, which enabled them to provide personal experiences to draw upon and inform their understandings. Thus, interviews showed that each participant's understanding was based on descriptions from personal contextual engagement with what they regarded as CBHE teaching excellence, and the differences in these descriptions supported me in achieving the necessary variation (Akerlind, 2010; Durden, 2018). My access

to participants (Laurila, 1997) was in certain cases through my previous professional engagement (three to five years ago), and with others through the help of gatekeepers (Burgess, 1984; Gummesson, 2000) who supported me both as participants and facilitators. The key characteristics of the sample which informed sample selection process are highlighted within the tables below.

The full data table of participants is as follows:

	Job/Role	Institution	Previous Relevant Employment	Highest Qualification (where known)	Subject Area	M/F	Age band
1	Head of HE/Lecturer	College A	n/a	BA	Childcare	F	31-40
2	Head of School/ Lecturer	College B	n/a	PhD	Computing/IT	F	51-60
3	Dean of HE	College C	n/a	PhD	Sciences	F	41-50
4	HE Quality Assessment [External HE Support Professional] and CBHE focused college governor	QAA	Previously University Head of Collaborative Arrangements with Colleges and involved in CBHE Learning and teaching staff development	PhD	Education	M	61-70
5	Professor (ex-College Vice Principal) currently teaching at University	University	n/a	LLM	Law/Media	M	61-70
6	Lecturer/ Subject leader	College B	n/a	PhD	Criminology	M	41-50

7	Dean of HE/Lecturer	College D	n/a	Masters	Maths	F	61-70
8	Head of HE/Lecturer	College E	n/a	BA	Business Studies	F	41-50
9	Practice-based Visiting lecturer [External HE Support Professional]	Private Sector Employer	Linked to College B	MPhil	Engineering	M	41-50
10	Practice-based visiting lecturer [External HE Support Professional]	Private Sector Employer	Linked to College B	BA	Engineering	M	41-50
11	Assistant Principal/Dean of HE	College F	n/a	Masters	Education	F	51-60
12	Educational Consultant [External HE Support Professional]	Independent	Previously College Progression to HE	BA	Health Care	F	51-60
13	Dean of HE	College G	n/a	PhD	Engineering	M	51-60
14	Senior Lecturer	University	Recently College Lecturer	Masters	Psychology	M	41-50
15	Lecturer	University	Previously College Head of School	Masters	Linguistics	F	61-70

16	Deputy Dean/Lecturer	College H	n/a	BA	IT	F	51-60
17	Senior Lecturer	College B	n/a	PhD	Law	M	61-70
18	Lecturer	College B	n/a	Masters	Social Sciences	F	51-60
19	Partnership Manager [Internal HE Support Professional]	College I	College Lecturer	Masters	Law	F	41-50
20	Student Liaison Manager [internal HE Support Professional]	College I	College Lecturer	MBA	Education	F	41-50
21	Outreach/WP Officer and Skills Development Tutor [Internal HE Support Professional]	College I	n/a	BA	History	F	21-30
22	Visiting lecturer [External HE Support Professional]	Private Sector Employer	Previously College Lecturer	Masters (MBA)	Public Services - Fire & Rescue	M	61-70
23	Acting Dean of HE	College B	QAA Reviewer	Masters	Agriculture	M	61-70
24	Head of School/Lecturer	College B	n/a	Masters	English	F	51-60

25	Lecturer	College J	n/a	BA	Dance	F	31-40
26	Lecturer	College B	n/a	Masters	Sport	F	41-50
27	Head of HE/Lecturer	College K	n/a	Masters	Maths	F	61-70
28	College Principal	College I	Previously College Lecturer	Masters	Media	F	41-50
29	Lecturer	College B	n/a	Masters	Art & Design	M	41-50
30	Work-based Director [Internal HE Support Professional]	College L	Previously College Lecturer	BA	Business	M	41-50

Table 4.1: Analysis of Interview Participants

The above table shows the characteristics and demography of the sample. At the first level of analysis, I have devised five groupings, which have some synergy across the different types and sizes of employing Institutions. Although I appreciate that these could have been classified in different ways, I felt that this was the most appropriate way of reflecting the contributions they made to HE teaching.

Category
Lecturer or Senior Lecturer
Head of School, Head of HE or Deputy Dean
Dean of HE, Assistant Principal or Principal
Internal HE Support Professional
External HE Support Professional

The distribution demonstrates the following pattern

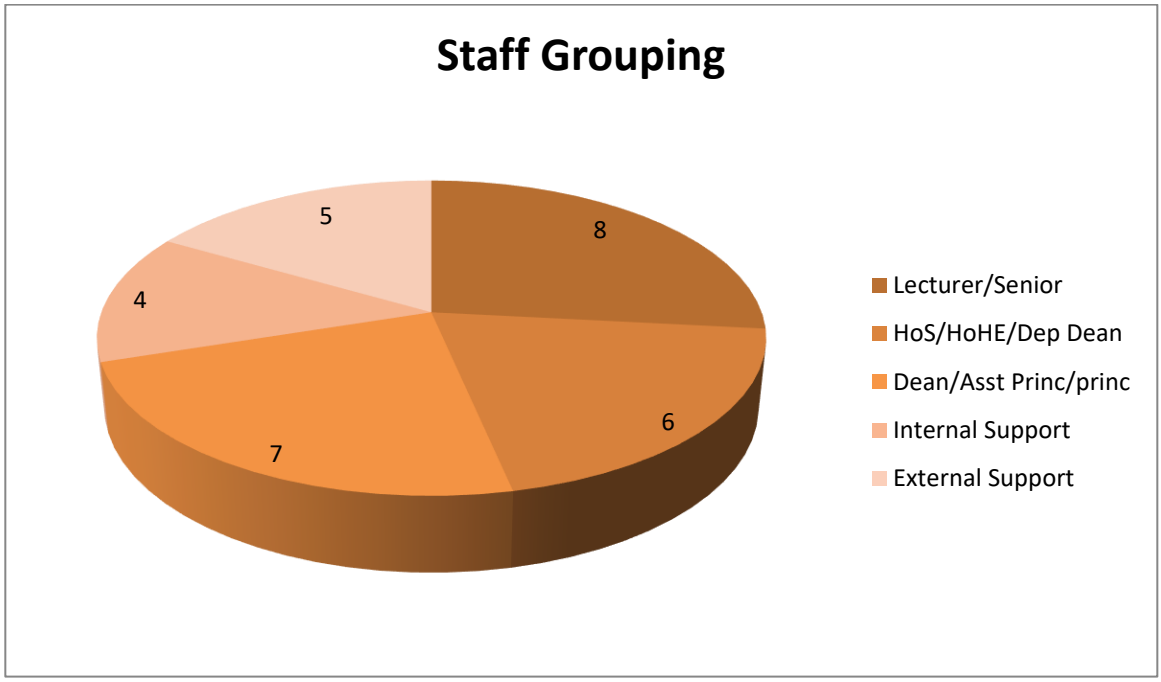

Table 4.2: Analysis of interview sample by Staff Grouping

The sample consisted firstly of **lecturers and senior lecturers,** all with ongoing or recent substantial engagement in direct HE teaching, some of whom also had course management functions to varying degrees dependent upon their seniority, and on the size of the HE provision within their College. **Heads of School/Heads of HE/Deputy Deans** had roles that impacted on teaching practices, and were leaders in the formulation and implementation of related policies whilst also engaging in some reduced level of direct teaching. **Principal/ Assistant Principal/Deans of HE** were former HE lecturers providing ongoing support with HE staff development and continuing as guest lecturers for students within CBHE research sites and providing executive leadership, and overall strategic responsibility for all of the College curriculum including HE. **Internal HE support professionals** were recently promoted former substantive lecturers now involved in managing professional support

services for the HE curriculum which directly impact on learning and teaching practices and included support for students in their academic development, progression and quality. They continue to inform particular academic areas such as personal development and reflective practice. **External HE support professionals** were visiting lecturers from practice, or current CBHE lecturers undertaking University-based collaborative roles supporting the HE collaborative provision within the CBHE research sites. Therefore, all participants shared current or past teaching experiences within a CBHE context, and in some cases now inform HE teaching activities within Colleges in different capacities.

The demographic was varied and reflected a wide range of ages.

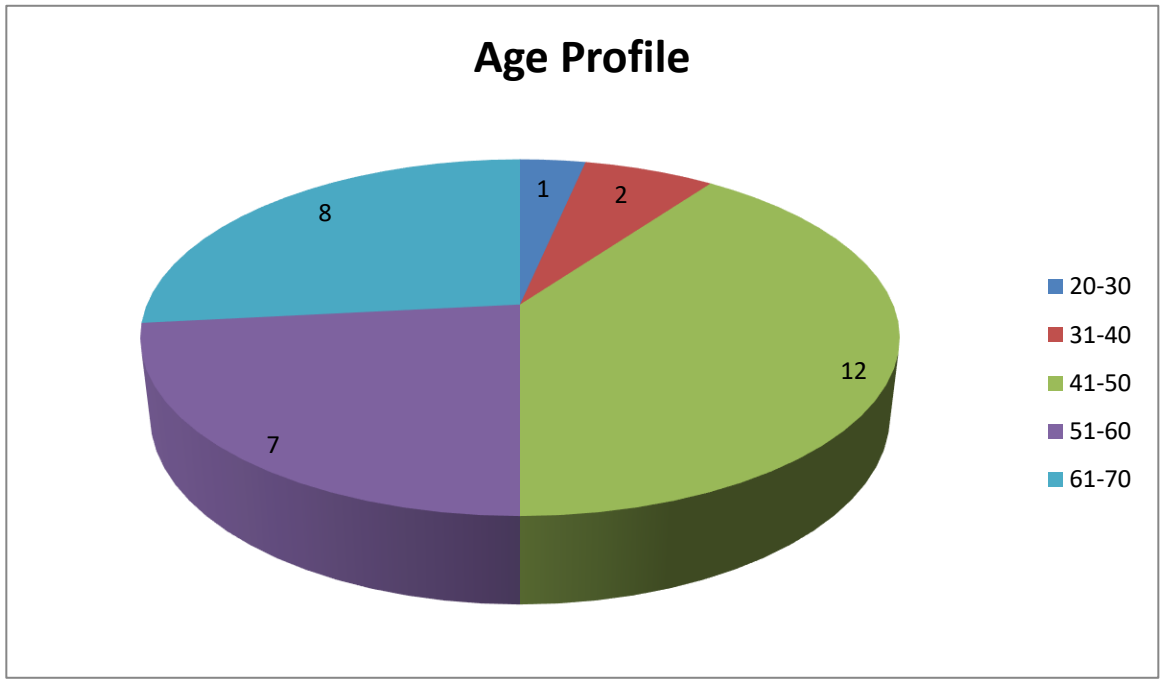

Table 4.3: Analysis of Interview Sample by Demographic Profile - Age

The heterogeneous groups of participants were deliberately selected for their experience and ability to provide informed understandings which could contribute to the variation in collective ways of experiencing CBHE teaching excellence limited (Akerlind, 2010) only by the need for all participants to have current or past experiences of HE teaching excellence.

Their engagement spanned 12 different FE Colleges with HE provision (Colleges A to L) across the North of England and the Midlands.

Over two thirds of the participants are post-graduates and six of them have doctoral qualifications.

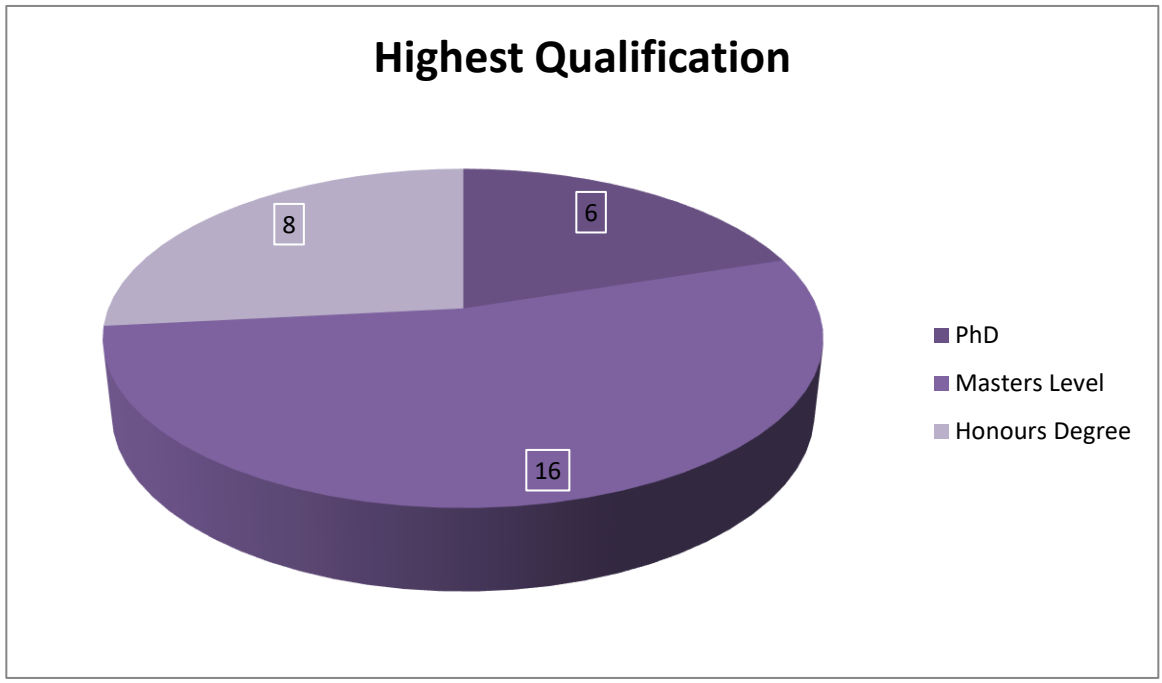

Table 4.4: Analysis of Interview Sample by Highest Qualification

I also included teaching practitioners from a wide range of Arts and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects as part of the sample.

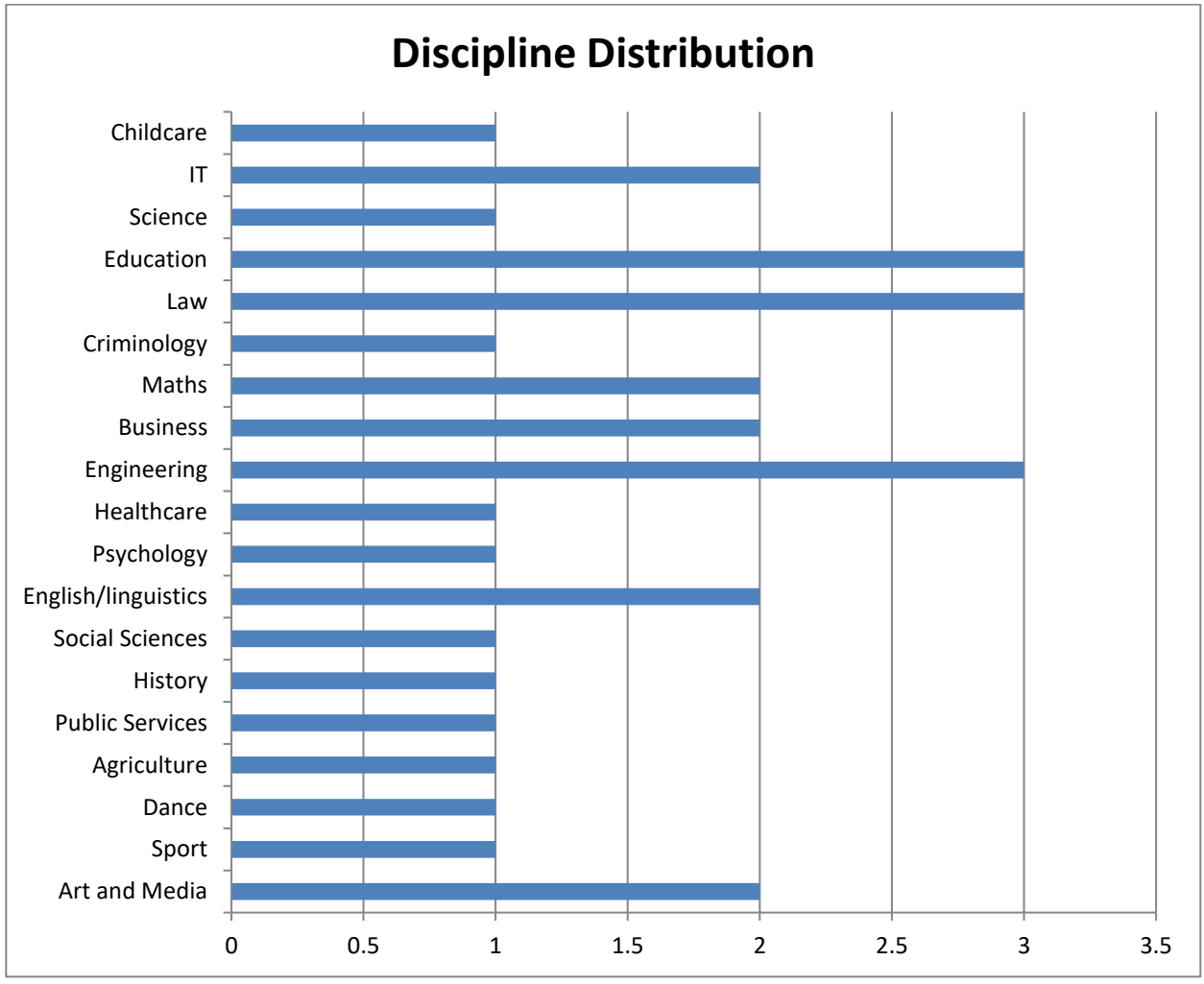

Table 4.5: Analysis of Interview Sample by Subject Specialism

My aim here was not to draw definite conclusions for the respective subject disciplines but to support the identification of variations in understanding at a more general level covering as many curriculum areas as possible within the time and space limitations of this research. My approach was informed by Akerlind (2010, p 54) who points out that subject to the scope of the research question 'interviewees must be as varied as possible, along the lines that are likely to be associated with variation in experience'. Signifying the role of context in shaping the nature of awareness for phenomenographic enquiries (Marton and Booth, 1997; Svensson, 1997; Durden, 2018), I saw each

interview as ‘unique in the joint context of time, place and presence’. (Sin, 2010, p314)

4.5 My Position within the Interviews and addressing of limitations

Throughout the interview process, I addressed the concerns relating to the limitations of phenomenographic interviews (Saljo, 1996, p26) by making sure that my interviews were more than ‘discourse’. Even though it has been argued that talk can be different from experience, the data showing what participants ‘feel’ (Saunders et al, 2015) can still provide meanings which lead to research insights. Hence my focus was on the meanings of CBHE teaching excellence from participant understandings (Akerlind, 2010). I acknowledge that it has been difficult at times, as I had to deliberately step back to give participants the time to think, and not think for them or make suggestions and leave them to just agree with me, and unduly influence the process. I guarded against making value-judgements and gave reflexive consideration to the ‘constructed nature of the research interview’ (Marton and Booth, 1997, p107). I focused on my research aims, and the pilot interview helped to ensure that this focus was explicit. Even though I had to make some adjustments to a couple of the questions, the main framework questions remained the same albeit with additional prompt questions to account for the specific contextual research settings and participant profiles. Throughout the research, I knew that most of the participants were aware of my expertise within CBHE teaching and learning, and related areas of work. The participants had all volunteered to be part of the research and were able to talk freely, since I had no line management or other current professional

engagement with them. (Akerlind, 2010). As hard as it was (Akerlind, 2010), I made every effort to set aside my own perceptions, and not influence the interviews, by restricting myself to using terms introduced by the participants themselves within my follow-up questions (Cope, 2004), and giving the participants opportunities to frame their descriptions with illustrative examples of their experiences. My past and ongoing professional experience in making judicial and quasi-judicial decisions, and leading on HE quality reviews, has always required me to set aside any preconceptions I may have held. Also, my approach to explain the aims of research before starting the interview helped the participants to see that the time spent during the interview was productive and potentially useful to them and their practice. I knew that the quality of the data collected would impact on the analyses which are the next stage of the process considered in Chapter 5 below. (Bruce, 1994).

4.6 Conclusion

This Chapter provided details of my data collections methods using semi-structured interviews. Its reflected on how the processes were informed by the guidance for phenomenographic interviews. I detailed how the sample was selected, and the particular characteristics of the participants and my role within the interviews. Overall, the interviews allowed me to interact effectively with the participants and enabled them to describe their experiences and understandings (Marton, 1996). The participants were at ease and able to talk about controversial issues within institutional and external policy contexts which impacted on their teaching practices. The interviews provided me with the necessary data to explore critical variations in the participants' collective

understandings (Akerlind, 2010) shaped by the frameworks of anatomy of experience, and structure of awareness (Marton and Booth,1997), and themes of expanding awareness (Akerlind, 2010). My interviews created a quasi-therapeutic situation Marton and Booth (1997, p128-131), and enabled thematising of key aspects of the participants' experiences, which have not previously been identified to support CBHE pedagogic developments. I was aware of the time needed to transcribe all 30 interviews, the significance of the 'contextual elements' (Sin, 2010, p 314) and the complexity of analysing interview data during the data collection phase. This is discussed further within the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

In this Chapter I examine how phenomenographic data analysis principles discussed within Chapter 3 were applied to the analysis of the interview data collected from the participants. The process was informed by phenomenography's ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions along with its non-dualist and second-order perspectives, and aimed to interpret the collective variation in participants' understandings of their CBHE teaching excellence experiences (Marton, 1981; Marton and Booth, 1997). The main outcome from my study was a set of four 'categories of description' which are each internally coherent yet distinct from each other, and together represent 'the collective voice' of my participants (Green and Bowden, 2009, p67). The focus within this Chapter is on how these categories were developed rather than what they are, which is addressed fully within Chapter 6. In this Chapter I also explain the transcription and data familiarisation processes, and the approaches and frameworks used for analysing the transcripts, to develop categories of description and the final outcome space as results of my research. The stages are summarised as follows:

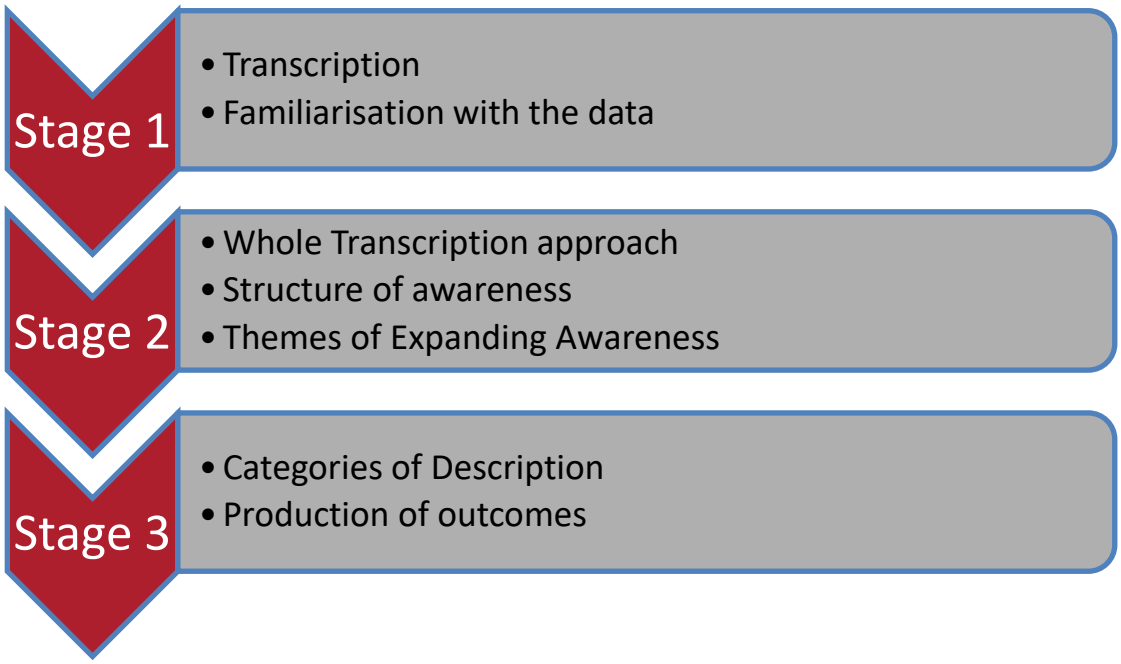

Table 5.1 Stages of the Data Analysis Process

5.2 Transcription of, and familiarisation with the data

Once all the interviews were completed, and even before transcription, I listened to all of the recordings to familiarise myself with the interview context and to ensure that the recordings were audible and complete. The transcription process commenced after all 30 interviews had been finished and during this initial phase of data analysis, I focused on the transcription process and familiarised myself with the data as it was being transcribed (Green and Bowden, 2009). Ideally, I would have liked to transcribe the tapes myself, but felt that the time was better spent familiarising myself with the transcribed data. In line with the guidance given to the transcriber, all the interviews were transcribed verbatim, although as noted in Chapter 4 above, on one occasion I had to use contemporary notes as the recording failed during the interview. Once the whole transcription process was complete (a

total of 172,000 words), I read the transcripts separately in batches of 10, made relevant notes and highlighted sections where participants' responses related to the specific aspects of CBHE teaching excellence, and included examples of what they believed to be their experiences of such excellence. I familiarised myself with the data further by listening to the recordings whilst reading the respective transcripts to confirm their accuracy and alignment with recordings and made further notes where appropriate. I left this work to one side for just over a month to deal with emerging work commitments and also to reflect on the research process to date. This break enabled me to return fresh to the analysis process. I re-read all transcripts several times again in batches of 10, re-examined my notes, and modified them by amending, removing or adding to them as appropriate, until I was confident that I understood the data well enough to progress to the next stage, and this is considered below.

5.3 Approaches to Data Analysis - the Whole Transcript Approach

I knew that there is no single prescribed process for analysing phenomenographic data (Yates et al, 2012) and that I had to choose from the different approaches discussed within Chapter 3 above. I chose Bowden's (2000a, p12) 'whole transcript all the time approach' against Marton's (1994, p4428) 'pool of meanings' even though I was aware of the merits of the latter approach in terms of data management, clarity and better analytical focus, especially when developing collective understandings. (Svensson and Theman, 1983) My preference for the former was founded on the premise that participants' responses are often likely to be situated within key contextual

factors, and the benefit of a whole transcript approach, I felt, would enable me to better situate their responses within those factors, and would support my interpretations of what the participants were telling me (Akerlind, 2010). I was also persuaded by Akerlind's (2005b, p 327) argument that the 'contextualised within the transcript' approach would allow each whole transcript to be 'seen and treated as a set of interrelated meanings' which are best 'understood in relation to each other'. I can only speculate whether the outcomes of my research would have been different if I had chosen differently, but I remained persuaded by Bowden's (1994a;1994b) argument that the whole transcript approach would better support the development of a set of interrelated categories when the understandings of CBHE teaching excellence from the transcripts had been contextually confirmed.

The analysis and development of the categories of description also meant using the relevant analytical framework for interpreting the structure and meanings of participant understandings. (Marton and Booth, 2009).

5.4 Analysing Transcripts to interpret structures and meanings

I approached analysis as a 'learner' would (Marton and Booth, 2009, p133) seeking to understand the meaning and structure of experiences of CBHE teaching excellence as described by the participants using their expertise. I knew I needed to 'bracket' (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000) personal perspectives, experiences and biases so that they did not impact my interpretations on the data. Even though structure and meaning are interlinked, concerns have also been expressed by phenomenographers

about the potential for the researcher to impose a structure on the data rather than leaving it to be interpreted. (Bowden, 1996; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000). I safeguarded against this by interpreting the meanings within the participants' utterances initially, and then by situating these meanings within the structural context (Akerlind, 2010). This helped to control any inadvertent imposition of structure on my part before the preliminary meanings were interpreted. Further, in order to make the structural links between the meanings explicit, I relied on both logic and empirical evidence to confirm these links.

After a relentless iteration and an interactive engagement with the transcripts, I developed four interrelated and hierarchically-inclusive categories of description informed by both logic and empirical data (Akerlind, 2010) represented at a collective level. Hierarchical inclusiveness was confirmed by ensuring that the more complex and complete categories of description of CBHE teaching excellence were hierarchically inclusive, making reference to categories further down the hierarchy but not vice versa. (Akerlind, 2010). I also came across data which were either non-hierarchical, or which lacked the level of variation needed to form a separate category, but was able to sub-categorise these and embed them within one of the four main categories (Akerlind and Kayrooz, 2003, pp 331-2).

Analytically, the categories of description relating to CBHE teaching excellence incorporated 'the two aspects of meaning (referential aspect) and structure (structural aspect)' which were 'dialectically intertwined and occur simultaneously' when such excellence is experienced (Marton and Booth, 1997, pp 87-88). When looking at the structure of experiences of CBHE

teaching excellence, my focus was on the analytical framework of 'the anatomy of experience' (Marton and Booth, 1997, p88) to see how the participants distinguished CBHE teaching excellence from other activities within the wider context of HE practices as part of the external horizon, as distinct from their descriptions of the key aspects that make up CBHE teaching excellence experiences as part of the internal horizon. I acknowledge, however, that whether the participant's focus was on the internal or external horizon was very much dependent on how I, as a researcher, interpreted the meanings they attributed to CBHE teaching excellence, and also accounted for the fact that participants may well have been aware of different aspects of such excellence simultaneously or at different times. (Marton and Booth, 1997). I also found a distinction between the theme, thematic field and margin within the 'structure of the awareness framework' (Marton, 1994, p4427) useful when analysing the interview data, and developing the categories of description, because it guided me to set aside those aspects which I saw were within the margin of awareness; to decide what was within the thematic field; and to focus on what I considered was the theme within participants' utterances. I was then able to group these together collectively based on similarities and differences, to inform the development of each of the four categories. I also found that what I considered to be in the thematic field in one interview became the theme in another, and this allowed for the 'dimensions of variation' very much central to phenomenographic studies to be identified (Akerlind, 2010, p89). The dimensions of variation were developed by identifying the different aspects of CBHE teaching excellence, addressed in some transcripts but not covered in

others, and by applying the principles within the ‘themes of expanding awareness framework’ to identify themes that were present across transcripts with varying degree of awareness, enabling the critical variation to be identified (Akerlind, 2010, p 89).

5.5 Dimensions of variation and the themes of expanding awareness

The variations in participants’ accounts identified as ‘dimensions of variation’ (Akerlind, 2010, p49) helped to separate the four categories of description, enabling me to look at the limited number of different ways of experiencing CBHE teaching excellence at the holistic level. The expectation to limit the number of ways of experiencing developed within this research was founded on logical, empirical and practical grounds (Akerlind, 2010). Given the focus of the analysis was to interpret the variation, the logical ground meant that while there were infinite ways in which my participants could have described their experiences of CBHE teaching excellence, as humans these descriptions were limited by the finite ways they could have such experiences, given the impact of socio-cultural and physiological factors including those relating to time and context (Marton, 1996; Marton and Booth, 1997). Such a limitation in the number of categories also supported the practical application of the principle of parsimony to make findings from this research useful for informing practice within CBHE teaching excellence contexts (Marton and Booth, 1997). Empirical grounds are also significant, given that phenomenographic studies as empirical enquiries need to ensure that the ways of experiencing can be fully triangulated with the empirical evidence within the participants’

understandings of CBHE teaching excellence. These ‘dimensions of variation’ had to be made both explicit and critical (Akerlind, 2010).

To ensure that the variation was critical, I used the principles within ‘themes of expanding awareness’ (Akerlind, 2010, p105). Confirming the critical variation within the dimensions of variation required the consistent occurrence of a theme within all categories which transitioned from less complex and complete ways to the more complete and complex ways of experiencing CBHE teaching excellence (Akerlind, 2010). The four categories of description evidenced an expansion of awareness along five key themes which ran across the categories to link and separate them inclusively and hierarchically. Each theme of awareness was empirically, hierarchically and inclusively represented within all four of the categories of description with levels of awareness increasing across the higher levels within the hierarchy. All five of these themes are considered in detail in Chapter 6 discussing the results of my research.

5.6 Development of categories

During the initial stages of the analysis, I developed five interim categories of description which after further consideration and critique were reduced to four by including the fourth interim category hierarchically and inclusively within the fifth, and this is considered within Chapter 6 below, within the discussion of Category 4. Therefore, the final results of my analysis include four categories of description representing the four qualitatively different ways in which my participants collectively understood their experiences of CBHE teaching

excellence, and the five themes of expanding awareness that run through them (Marton and Booth,1997). These have been presented within an outcome space as a 'logically structured complex' (Marton, 2000), of internally-related and hierarchically-inclusive ways of experiencing CBHE teaching excellence within a particular context and time (Akerlind, 2005). I chose to present the outcome space of my research as a table showing the relationship between the structural and referential aspects within the four categories. It is accepted that the research findings represent a 'contextualised snapshot' (Anderson et al, 2012, p172) capturing the research participants' accounts of CBHE teaching excellence and that the findings represent the interpretations that the researcher makes (Cossham, 2017).

5.7 Conclusion

In summary this Chapter was about how phenomenographic data analysis principles were applied to my research. The Chapter discussed the process for transcribing each interview and how I familiarised myself with the data before and during data analysis. It covered details on interpretation of transcripts using the whole transcript approach and how structure and meaning within categories were discerned. I also discussed the processes used for highlighting the dimensions of variation and how themes of the expanding awareness principle were used to confirm that this variation was critical. I was eager, during the analysis process, to ensure that I remained true to my participants' understandings, and that any interpretations I made were valid, reliable and trustworthy in ensuring that the story I was relaying was that of the participants, and not mine.

Chapter 6: Research Outcomes

6.1 Introduction

In the previous Chapter I focussed on the processes used for transcribing the interviews, familiarising myself with the data, interpreting transcripts and the dimensions of variation, to develop four categories of description. What follows is the analysis of each of these four categories with illustrations of relevant empirical evidence from the interviews to substantiate the understandings emphasised within them. This exercise was at the same time both overwhelming and rewarding. I was overwhelmed because I had to choose between numerous equally relevant statements to illustrate the foci within the individual categories. At the same time, I felt rewarded that I was able to assure myself and others that I had the appropriate empirical data to substantiate any interpretations made when developing the categories of description.

After substantiating categories of description logically and empirically (Akerlind, 2010), I explain and confirm that the dimensions of variation interpreted are critical by using the theory of expanding awareness (Marton and Booth, 1997). Finally, I discuss the outcome space produced, which illustrates the qualitatively different categories of description and the differences in their respective structural and referential aspects, in a hierarchically inclusive way (Marton and Booth, 1997; Akerlind, 2010). To set out the context, the four categories of description are as follows:

Category 1: CBHE teaching excellence is experienced when capable teaching practitioners contextualise teaching, learning and assessment practices to address the inclusive needs of their students (**contextualised teacher practices perspective**).

Category 2: CBHE teaching excellence is experienced when staff, students and employers work in collaborative teams to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment practices actively promote academic and vocational learning opportunities for students (**collaborative teams practice perspective**).

Category 3: CBHE teaching excellence is experienced when internal Institutional HE systems for supporting learning, teaching and assessment create and maintain an HE ethos (**Institutional systems-based perspective**).

Category 4: CBHE teaching excellence is experienced when Institutional higher-level teaching learning and assessment systems, and the HE ethos, lead to participation in the positive transformation of place and communities (**Transformation-based perspective**).

6.2 Categories of Description

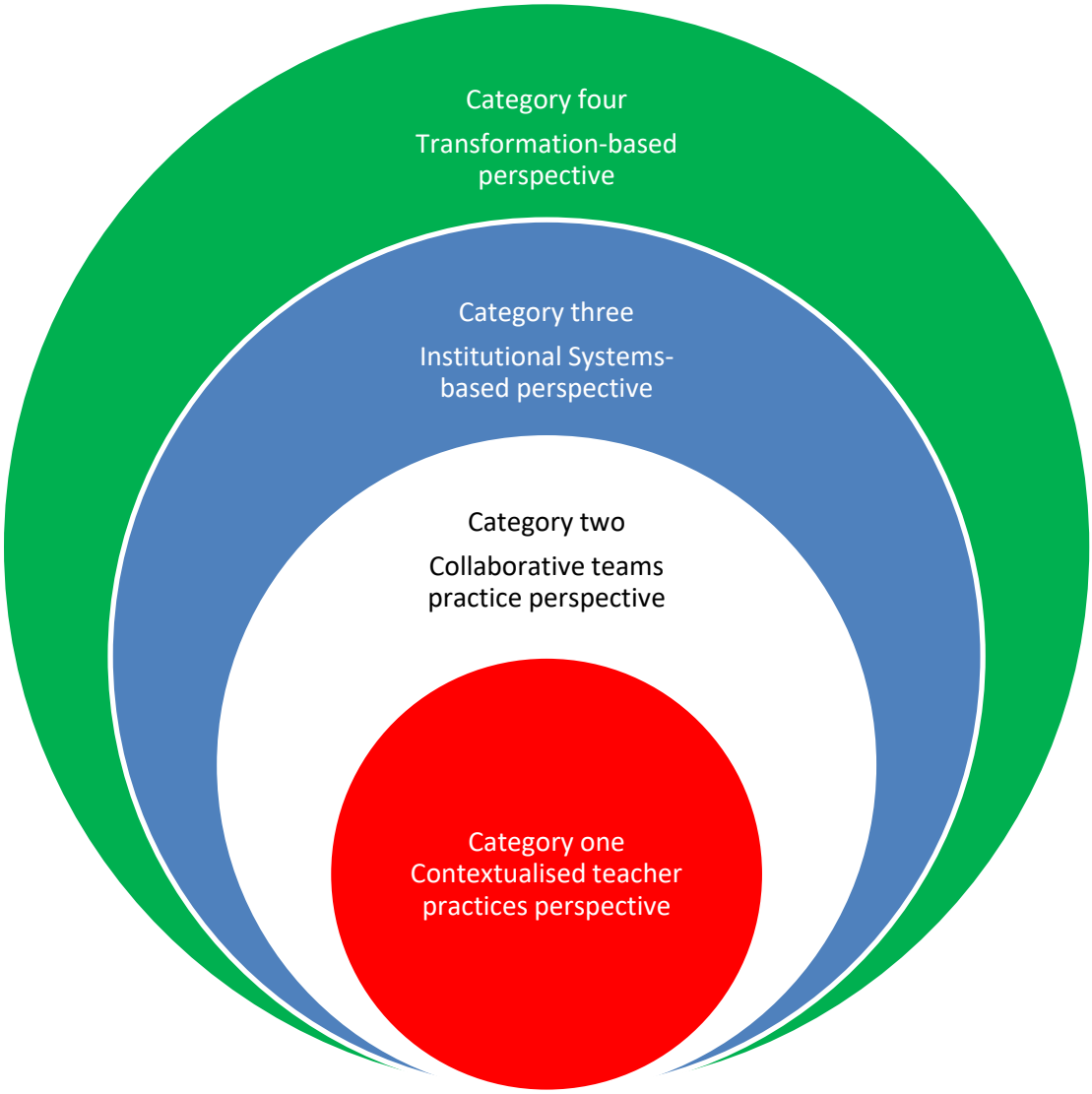

Table 6.1: Categories of Description

6.2.1 **Category of Description One – Contextualised teacher practices perspective**

CBHE teaching excellence is experienced when capable teaching practitioners contextualise teaching, learning and assessment practices to address the inclusive needs of their students.

This category relates to participants' understandings of CBHE teaching excellence, focussing on the effective performance of teaching practitioners. Capable and enthusiastic teaching practitioners were seen as key to furthering enhancement of CBHE teaching excellence. Such excellence was linked to the ability of teaching practitioners to contextualise their teaching and assessment practices to inclusive student needs, especially those accessing HE study as non-traditional students, or from work-based routes. The importance of the contribution that capable teaching practitioners make to CBHE teaching excellence was recognised as illustrated below:

> *It is the 'button in the teacher' - it's their enthusiasm, and seeing that the students are really enjoying the session.* **Interview 11- C**

This inherent ability was recognised to be the personal trait of the teaching practitioner, underpinned by passion and pedagogic, disciplinary and vocational expertise aligned to meet the priorities of CBHE students. Such CBHE practitioners are usually qualified at least one level above their teaching commitments, and/or professionally accredited externally for their discipline-specific, vocational and pedagogic expertise, underpinned by mandatory teaching qualification requirements. Those who teach both at HE

and FE believed that the fundamental pedagogic principles apply to curriculum at both levels. For example, one CBHE teaching practitioner explained how he used experiences of FE teaching to inform an HE teaching and assessment initiative which was commended at a national level:

> *"When I got recognised, those ideas have come from FE …for example O level history, A level media studies …... the syllabus, the way it used to be, doing a research project, so very, very similar to what you do in HE, So, I think I am saying it (HE teaching) is generally the same as FE teaching. It's generally the same because I believe what I do for excellence is the same in whatever subject and whatever level".* ***Interview 6-P***

The focus within this category was as much on assessment as teaching and learning with an excellent teaching practitioner being able to contextualise the assessment processes to meet the inclusive needs of students:

> *"It is all about assessment and being able to do alternative forms of assessment to address different student needs".* ***Interview 6-P***

Participants also highlighted the significance of being both discipline and technical experts, experienced and engaged within practice, and pedagogically informed to meet the particular needs of CBHE student priorities. To illustrate this:

> *"In terms of the difference between a University and College, maybe I see excellence in that you support students to get more hands-on,*

more practical, more technical, more sort-of vocational delivery than you would in a University." **Interview 20-W**

They also highlighted support as a key reason for students to choose CBHE, as explained below:

"*If University learning was suitable to them, they would have chosen that environment. They came to College .....they purposely chose this environment. They need that extra.....well it is to do with self-confidence. They need that extra support. The students that I have come across, they always say that they like having the higher contact time with the tutor, so that they can ask the tutor questions, and get help from the tutor. "* **Interview 21-S**

The ability of the teaching practitioner to encourage students to attend classes was also described as an example of experience of CBHE teaching excellence, on the basis that an able, passionate, knowledgeable and empathetic teaching practitioner will always attract students to regularly attend sessions and engage appropriately, as follows:

"I think for me, experiencing excellence has been about an excellent teacher who will always stand out by the attendance to their sessions, so students will want to go, they will want to go, doesn't matter what time of the day, week, evening, students will be there .....have their own self-drive to get there, so the attendance is always higher than for what you would call a competent teacher. That, as a start, says that the Lecturer is doing something different. So there is something

particular about it that is inciting passion in the students, and it could be that he/she is consistent, fully understands the subject, is willing to adapt teaching methods to suit the nature of the group and take students learning beyond the text book, so gets them to think and encourages them to engage in teaching.....in active learning".

Interview 8-G

The value of face-to-face individualised engagement with students, enhanced by a powerful personality, was seen to directly inform CBHE teaching excellence. The way the teaching practitioners design the learning environment was seen as important to provide opportunities for students to be active in both thought and action, to make excellence visible to all, as illustrated below:

"*Staff Members are genuinely caring about their student in lessons, differentiating the learning so it meets with all of the student needs. Being able to stretch them. Change the pace. Being responsive, so rather than being that 'we're just going to plod our way through' , being able to twist it, going off tangent when they needed to in order to captivate the students, or to do a bit more underpinning knowledge where they have seen that there is a gap, and literally (probably not the right phrase to use) but having the students wanting to lap it up, on the edge of their seats, enthused by it, and not getting to the end of the lesson and going 'oh, gosh, its nine o'clock', but going ' I didn't realise it was nine o'clock, where has that time gone?"* **Interview 1-C**

Ensuring an appropriate balance between maintaining flexibility and addressing curriculum priorities was emphasised by the participants, one of whom said

> *I think that you have got to have flexibility, and you have got to be able to adapt, particularly in HE in Colleges, you've got to be able to adapt to those different needs and still do what you need to do in that lesson.'* **Interview 26 – J**

However, participants also cautioned against impacting upon excellence by extending this flexibility to over-supporting students, thus not requiring them to adopt an enquiring mind and engage in independent learning. This is expressed within the excerpt below:

> *In one sense it's a dampening off of excellence in that the sense is that you are having at times to bring things down to a much lower level - much more basic level. There is a huge differentiation now. Whereas in the past, yes there was differentiation between a slightly weaker student and the rest of the group being fairly strong, now that bandwidth has increased.* **Interview 17-T**

In summary this category of description situates CBHE teaching excellence within individual practitioners who have the responsibility to create their own targeted teaching and learning practices to support and develop students with diverse characteristics and priorities. Category 1 is incorporated within Category 2 which focuses on the performance of teams of which individual teaching practitioners are members.

6.2.2 Category of Description Two – Collaborative teams practice perspective

CBHE teaching excellence is experienced when staff, students and employers work in collaborative teams to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment practices actively promote academic and vocational learning opportunities for students.

Within this Category, participants saw excellence as a by-product of successful collaborations between key players within CBHE teaching. The collaborative activity related to partnership working between teams of teacher practitioners; between students and teacher practitioners; and between teacher practitioners, students and employers.

The first of these recognised collaborations is between teaching teams themselves. The focus, based on the ability and performance of individual teacher practitioners, still applies, but in this category, it goes beyond these individuals and focuses on effective team performances. This involves an approach to teaching where practitioners work together to develop collectively, and to enhance student learning opportunities. The powerful contributions that these teams can make to HE teaching excellence was articulated, with one participant noting:

> *"At the heart of it there is a team. So that's where I have seen inspiration, and this is .....something that is very rarely talked about, I'd be seeing charisma within the team. It's not about managing*

the learning experience; it's about inspiring, and having the kind of personalities where the excellent teachers change lives." **Interview 4-D**

The experiences of teaching excellence have also been described as meaningful and purposeful collaborations of vocationally and academically qualified staff teams ensuring a teaching environment which is academically relevant and vocationally appropriate to meet the priorities of their students.

In the second type of collaboration, students are seen to be contributors as team members in the shaping of their learning environment, rather than being passive receivers of practitioner-directed teaching practices. So, students as team members engage fully by working with teaching practitioners in effective ways. One participant describes this as follows:

"So in previous lessons .....they clearly had foundation blocks of theory and input, so it was seeing that coming alive off the page, and the students taking ownership of that, really, and driving it forward, and you know they were overcoming issues that they had brought to the tables themselves from the feedback from each other, and how they were able to create.....you know, to make decisions, using the decision-making theory and, you know, being able to rely.....on what they had learnt really, and that was great to see". **Interview 8-G**

The advantages of such a reciprocal relationship and an established good rapport between teachers and their students contributed substantially to the experiences of excellence in teaching. This positive role that students play

collaboratively is expressed, within understandings of CBHE teaching excellence for example, within the context of Early Years curriculum delivery:

> *“I think that students want to be there, they want to be engaged, and there's like that mutual respect, that dialogue between the teacher and the students, where almost (to use an Early Years phrase) there is sustained shared thinking, batting ideas backwards and forwards"* **Interview 1-C**

Similarly, in an Art and Design context, one participant noted:

> “*And I see excellence every day, because you can actively see the learner, when they see that the level of expectation is pretty much a professional level expectation, in my experience they rise to it, and they work very, very hard, and engage really, really well, and collaborate with the tutors and with the externals, to make that work, and to ensure they get to the necessary level of skill.”* **Interview 28-L**

Thus, in this partnership, students understood what was expected of them, came to sessions well prepared, and brought new information which facilitated a two-way process, removing assumptions as highlighted below

> “*the tutor doesn't have carte blanche on everything.....can't be all-singing, all-knowing"* **Interview 16-A**

Participants also spoke of their experience of excellence when addressing the challenges of students who do not engage positively, or do not have the ability

to engage. They gave examples of how such challenges were addressed below:

> *"Well, you can't just think about pedagogy in isolation. You have got to think about your audience. So, the first set you are going to get in Universities and in Colleges are the undergraduates who are coming through a schools and FE system which is obsessed by results. Time and time again, students will say to me 'this is how we were taught …. We were taught how to pass examinations. Now if they are coming through that 'feed me, feed me, feed me system' you can't suddenly expose them, it seems, to me, to a system where you actually say 'well, it is self-learning. You have to go away and start reading things. You have to go and pick up the arguments. You have to debate in seminars.' You know, so that sort of pedagogy perhaps wouldn't work in the first year of an undergraduate programme."* **Interview 5-D**

This was further highlighted by another participant who said:

> *What I have found, over the years.....now I think, gone are the days where you had your group of students and they were all there because they were passionate about learning itself. Okay! Any work that you would set them they would go away and do, particularly seminars and workshops. They were far more active when it came to classroom discussions participation, unfortunately that has been attenuated quite a bit. So, in terms of student expectations now, your student expectation is, I'm sorry to say in some cases, 'I want to do as*

little as possible, but still get the same qualification and the same grade.' What that means then to be honest is that you need to adapt or modify. **Interview 17-T**

Participants also gave examples of when and how difficulties have been resolved when students do not initially engage.:

"*started to engage. This is a College thing as well, isn't it where you have had students in your Group to start with who have been really disaffected, and I'm talking over a period of time, where over months you've actually seen that disaffection turning to that real. .....light bulb**,** and you can't describe, and I don't know how I would describe it. Yes. I think it is really important that your self-reflection.....that critical reflection, where students can critique each other, in a safe and secure environment, that they begin to question things, see a different viewpoint, you know and also actually believe in themselves, because the other thing about College HE is that you've got a lot of students coming to you, still with really still low aspirations of themselves. So, for me, teaching excellence is also about confidence, the ability to, I suppose, to have those key employability skills, isn't it? Resilience, confidence, working collaboratively, whereas a lot of my students, particularly at Level 4, and particularly if they have progressed from Level 3 where they are …. not self-aware, very withdrawn, wary in themselves, not really reflective of the environment. It's those things that come into play that I think are really important for excellence ".*

Interview 20-W

Thirdly, participants highlighted the tripartite relationship between the teaching teams, students and employers, with each taking respective actions to inform support and promote experiences of CBHE teaching excellence. This partnership is a strategically important collaboration for CBHE in light of its primary focus on vocational development. This has been particularly so with the development of Foundation Degrees and the current developments in Higher and Degree Apprenticeships. Participants shared the enthusiasm about such collaborative employer engagement, as follows:

> *"I'll tell you what's got me very excited at the minute about excellence in teaching is thinking about the degree apprenticeships and particularly the engineering ones. It is about the link through to the professional bodies. Very much with them thinking about, you know, how they (students) might be using those techniques in the workplace We got feedback from the employers involved and the employer panels that were reviewing it. I think they all found it worthwhile……they actually enjoyed seeing the students in a different context."* **Interview 3-J**

The significance of such employer collaboration was how the tripartite collaboration between the employers, teachers and the students supported student employability, one of the key strategic priorities for CBHE teaching. In work-based qualifications within CBHE employers' input to the curriculum at its development stage, engage within teaching teams and students as part of curriculum development and later in the delivery and assessment of the work-based elements of the programmes. As part of the development and delivery

team, all members have shared priorities to provide student opportunities to develop vocationally as highlighted below by one participant:

> *“So, if I'm a lawyer, for example, and I am teaching HE in FE, I am looking for my students to research.....to be involved in the research of a law, and develop law practice and all of those things. Another really good example is health or care. So if you look at the spiral learning approach in the teaching of these the student is maybe in a lecture, maybe out on a ward, maybe collaborating in research with the tutor, maybe genuinely developing.....active in a research project.....an important research project within a hospital employer .....within the CBHE context. So, they can be one day a student, next day a practitioner, next day a researcher in the field, and that three-way development of their practise, for me, that's how excellence is experienced."* **Interview 28-L**

Similarly, within an Art and Design context the participant described:

> *From experience I think the impact of excellent teaching is easier to talk about in terms of studio practice-remember we aren't in classrooms we are in shared studio spaces, and I think when students become independent, and become scholarly contributors to the exchanges that are happening in the studios, excellence is achieved”* **Interview 29-J**

It was also acknowledged that the maintenance of such collaborations presents both challenges and risks, and that these have to be overcome and

addressed satisfactorily by all team members. Excellence comes when such risks are addressed by teams, as one participant states as follows:

> *"So, the biggest risk to the employer is that the apprenticeship fails, because there isn't a sufficiently strong relationship between the employer, the student and the qualification provider. So, before you even think about what takes place in the learning, the challenge, and I think I have found this particularly in construction, is ensuring the student experience is consistent and effective between the employer and the apprenticeship provider."* **Interview 9-I**

Within the business context, one participant spoke about how challenges to excellence were addressed by a changing focus, as follows:

> *"And something had to change, and* ***employers needed to get involved more*** *in the learner journey, at all stages. I know it's happened, so people like the Chartered Institute of Insurers who are doing their bit, and are informing what HE should look like, …….so in terms of HE (and FE) employers and education need to work together more*." **Interview 30-N**

What was clearly articulated within this category is that experiences of HE teaching excellence reflecting the vocational development priorities for CBHE is achieved best by teaching models which appropriately blend the delivery of academic and vocational outcomes. One participant described its blend of different team members as a community of practice as evidenced below:

What I see.....you see I see the tutor's role as an enabler of a community of practice which .....within which learners can engage, develop, and ultimately make that progress that we are talking about - so that distance travelled. Because I actually think that a teacher and their part in it, and they can draw people in to form an external.....you know, from an external practice, and the students can collaborate together, and that for me is the ultimate."

Interview 28-L

Thus, within this category CBHE teaching excellence is seen to reside with inspirational teams working collaboratively with shared priorities to directly provide students with technical and practice-based learning opportunities and impacting the student experiences directly at an operational level, and it is not as one participant pointed out *'about managers in back rooms* doing *accounts and spreadsheets".* **Interview 4-D.**

In summary, this category relates CBHE teaching excellence to experiences of effective teams made up of a variety of members including teaching practitioners, students and employers. The next category, on the other hand, sees CBHE teaching excellence as more than just experiences based on individuals or teams, but one that incorporates them, and goes further to look at the role of the Institution as a facilitator of teaching excellence through enabling systems.

6.2.3 Category of Description Three – Institutional systems-based perspectives

CBHE teaching excellence is experienced when internal Institutional HE systems for supporting learning, teaching and assessment create and maintain an HE ethos.

The focus within this category is on a supportive Institutional systems-based approach to CBHE teaching excellence, creating an HE ethos to support HE teaching and learning, distinct from FE teaching requirements. It relates to experiences of HE teaching excellence situated within the College's institutional systems, policies and processes targeted to address the specific needs of HE teaching and learning curriculum priorities. Support systems which accommodate the specific needs of HE teaching priorities were seen as really important contributors to CBHE teaching excellence. Participants related to systems in place to support ongoing access to learning materials for students to study at home or at work around the clock, compatible with their daily work and domestic commitments. Reflecting on the specific positioning of CBHE within a FE context, participants related to experiences of excellence in existing systems for example, those on supporting Level 3 FE students within the institution in their transition to CBHE, as follows:

> *"We will be doing even more of it next year, because we have put together systems.....if you go outside you will see we have just been doing our transition plans, and we've been getting each course team to come up with their transitions for students going from level*

three to level four, what are you doing to support their generic skills, their academic skills? So, I think from a teaching excellence perspective, it's taking the big picture, then starting to see how you can pull the threads together through what we are doing at College-level." **Interview 3-J**

The significance of systems for supporting HE teaching practitioners with necessary resources was explained by participants who reflected on difficulties when such systems were not available, and how they limit and inhibit any enhancement of HE teaching, as follows:

"The danger was the situation where staff had to teach FE and HE classes. They did not have and could not have the HE space, and some of them were coping with huge workloads, which cut back the amount of time they could spend on teaching students in terms of student-centred learning etc." **Interview 4-D**

However, some participants did relate excellence to experiences of their engagement with specific systems for Institutional level HE staff development opportunities, including recognition awards for CBHE teaching teams for their success in teaching and learning. These processes were especially effective as CBHE teaching teams got the benefit of HE specific staff development, expressed as follows:

"Looking at how staff development has unfolded, and that the College itself recognised the need for staff development, and put it into place very quickly, with some kind of collegiality, so that there is now some

kind of conference, some kind of ongoing series of HE workshops. There's been a portfolio of awards for staff which are published, so it's celebrated, ... that is, teaching excellence is celebrated." **Interview 4-D**

Other processes experienced included allowing teaching practitioners and teams, including employer representatives, to have opportunities to meet and present good HE practices in teaching. The importance of systems to promote excellent teaching by reducing high teaching contact hours, giving more recognition of time for scholarly activity and providing suitable resources for teachers and students were priorities for participants. There was strong recognition that teaching excellence happens only when adequate and appropriate resources are made available to those delivering CBHE as contributors to such excellence, as illustrated below:

"Well my experience has been that teaching excellence….. happens when teams of teachers are well-resourced, and so it is about the College having enough people, it's about having time for teachers to research, and to have professional development activities that actually add to support the teaching and aren't just ticking Institutional boxes about fire, or health and safety. So, it's about the College giving teachers time and trusting them that they will use that time to develop themselves and, in the process, they will develop their teaching and develop their students. So, I think even with small provision, you've still got to allow the teaching team time to develop and time to think, time to recharge. Otherwise, you just have teams that burnout, and that's been my experience." **Interview 14-J**

It was recognised that CBHE students as life-long learners deserve an HE experience, and the support of a specific HE ethos equivalent to a University, albeit not identical. The experience of HE teaching excellence from a holistic Institution-wide approach was described to be more comprehensive and sustainable than pockets of excellence situated within individuals or collaborative teams.

Significance was also attributed to systems for supporting staff with their student recruitment responsibilities, enabling them to use their professional discretion in making offers only to students who have the potential to benefit from and succeed in their HE studies, and not be placed under undue Institutional pressure to simply meet targets set. One participant commented:

> *"In a place like ours, it has to be the Teacher, but only with support from the Institution, because there is a problem with the students in HE and FE, in that some of them don't want to be students. The reasons are because there aren't jobs, because Mums and Dads tell them to do it, ……. you know they are doing it for those kinds of things. The majority are angry, the majority are victims themselves, they've had poor educational experiences, and so excellence to them is me giving them high marks and letting them finish early, and being easy with them. Some of them hate me because they think it is hard work, doing what I ask them to do. They would rather do an essay that they can download off Google."* **Interview 6-P**

Again, within the same context, one participant highlighted the importance of promoting integrity within student recruitment systems, and the struggles of maintaining excellence, noting:

> *"Integrity is the word. We need to continue to have processes for recruiting with Integrity. If you're lecturing to a group of students who are not interested in the subject, who haven't prepared, it's like lecturing to a stone.....stone statues, and sometimes it's worse, because they start chatting, they're on their phones. The behaviour of students has really gone downhill. Really gone down. I suspected that a lot of the students who were recruited can just be just bums on seats. They weren't interested."* **Interview 18-S**

Employer participants in particular noted the need for Institutional resources to be targeted at the needs for work-based learning, and one participant said:

> "*Robots are used in engineering all the time and the Colleges need to be funded for such facilities. If engagement from the lecturers has to be excellent, then there need to be excellent facilities."* **Interview 10-R**

A further angle which participants addressed was the support from senior management in facilitating a holistic Institutional HE ethos. They referred to examples of experiencing HE teaching excellence from the creation of specific HE leadership roles to ensure that CBHE teaching priorities were explicitly and systematically addressed at that level and not overtaken by FE priorities. Thus, participants saw HE teaching excellence in examples where specific HE systems, policies and processes were developed and supported by HE

expertise within senior management teams. They spoke of excellence where a FE College was really serious about CBHE teaching excellence, with systems to ensure that HE leadership is undertaken by those with HE-specific knowledge and experience, as follows:

> *"The role of the Assistant Principal in setting up the institutional systems for HE was fundamental, and her fundamental focus was to support the HE learning community'.* **Interview 11-C**

Such systems were seen as experiences of CBHE teaching excellence in establishing and maintaining HE-ness, as one participant noted

> *I think that also counts, because teaching excellence is about getting that HE-ness through everything we do at the College…… So, the biggest bit about the change in this culture is to establish an HE culture within the FE system."* **Interview 13-S**

This category sees CBHE teaching excellence as residing within a responsive and context-specific Institutional HE infrastructure which promotes an HE ethos. It offers effective and ongoing support to the right individuals and teams with the right resources, and with effective systems to ensure ongoing engagement, monitoring and enhancement. It requires proactive approaches to addressing emerging challenges and offers the capacity and space to address them. The next category incorporates the role of institutional systems, policies and processes, but goes further by situating CBHE teaching excellence within the College's participation in the transformation of place and community.

6.2.4 Category of Description Four – Transformation-based perspectives

CBHE teaching excellence is experienced when Institutional higher-level teaching learning and assessment systems, and the HE ethos, lead to participation in the positive transformation of place and communities.

I devoted further time to analysing the data before I confirmed this participant understanding of CBHE teaching excellence as a separate, fourth, category. At the interim stage, I developed a narrower category which related CBHE teaching excellence to the achievement of quantitative metric-driven outcomes for student achievements of their qualifications. Some participants saw qualification-based metrics on student achievement as a dominant measure of how CBHE teaching excellence impacts their communities and place. This sentiment is illustrated below:

> "*So, I guess excellence for me immediately relates to experiences of high levels of success rates for learners coming out in terms of quantifiable. So high levels of success rates in terms of destinations, so they are achieving while they are with you in whatever the qualifications are, but more importantly they are going onto something that is a direct result of being with you."* **Interview 30-N**

However, on further reflection and analysis, it became evident that other participants understood that such metric-driven excellence was important, but did not reflect the wider contribution students can and do make to their local communities. As a result of this further analysis, and in line with the phenomenographic principle of parsimony (Marton and Booth, 1997), I

decided that this understanding was a subcategory which would be better situated within the scope of the current category 4. My reasoning for this was that successful qualification outcomes are only one of the ways, albeit an important way, that lead to positive outcomes for students as community members, and as a sub-category it did not acknowledge the wider benefits that students bring from developing as individuals, holistically in the transformation of place and communities.

This category is hierarchically inclusive of the other three categories and the most complete one for this group of participants in that it is the performances of individual teaching practitioners, teams and the institutional systems that enable CBHE teaching excellence to impact strategically on place and community transformation agendas. All of the CBHE sites represented within my research are rooted in, and integral to, the process of driving change and innovation within their local place and communities, contributing materially to strategic economic growth and community cohesion.

As part of the merged category 4 the understanding of student achievement metrics was expressed in terms of students achieving their planned qualification outcomes and having good learning experiences. These outputs relate to what the students gain from their HE studies and experiences including opportunities for work-based learning. Output measures for such students also reflect on their ability to perform at their optimum level, and any measure of success reflects the distance travelled in terms of the development of knowledge and skills. Where a student starts, how far they develop and where they progress to are key priorities not only for themselves

and the CBHE institutions, but for their contribution to the wider place as graduates in their community. The strength of this sentiment was argued further, holding that students could still be seen as achievers even without completing any assessment if they have been part of an experience of learning for learning sake which quite often happens when they attend modules for reasons of professional updating rather than any formal qualifications. Three participants put the case for outcomes to be considered in the wider context, as follows:

> *"Well I suppose you could argue I've got a bias towards the type of students we get in college HE. So the type of students we get have.....we've got a widening participation in the truest sense, looking at your polar definitions of it, and if you are looking at teaching excellence, it's.....I think you need to measure the distance travelled of that student, not just have they got a first or a 2:1. So for some students who come to us, achieving a third, whilst in the sector may not be seen as a positive outcome, it is for that student who might never - unless they had come here - been able to achieve a degree."*
>
> **Interview 19-S**

> *"A student can really enjoy a module and choose not to submit a piece of work that is an outstanding piece of work, because maybe they have got other commitments, maybe they are not in it for that academic achievement, they're in it because they want to learn, they want to get information. Now that doesn't mean that there isn't excellence in teaching or there is no outcome."* **Interview 1-C**

“Metrics shouldn't matter, because it can vary either way - you can have 100% but teaching is bad, or 60% with excellent teaching. Metrics especially for where you are focusing on WP, where you have students going to prison, having illness, having family problems etc can distort the statistics. It shouldn't play a big role.” **Interview 11-C**

The balance of participants’ understandings was that institutional systems should not prioritise qualification-driven metrics as a single factor. Speaking from experience participants noted below:

"Data does matter..... it is a gradient. Of course, it matters. I mean there are different models of competency; you could be absolutely competent at an academic level, and only partially competent at an experiential level. The problem is humans are entirely different, and so are their experiences.....and what they take from that experience is entirely different as well, which is why I don't much like metrics being used as a measure.....they might be the headlines, but they are not the whole story.” **Interview 2-K**

Understandings of CBHE teaching excellence as a vehicle for the development of economic resilience and social inclusion for communities and place was strongly expressed by some participants. Situated within an FE College context, they saw the achievement of such impacts as the fundamental raison d’etre of CBHE teaching and learning, and they associated excellence with experiences of how such impacts were

successfully achieved. One example of this recognition was the importance of serving local communities:

> *"Above all I think as an FE College our obligation starts with that Community. You know, 'why do the students come to us, and what do they want out of it?', and many of our students would have never been able to go away to University residentially.....they would never have even got a place at University."* **Interview 15-N**

The wider impact beyond narrow metrics of Institutional teaching and learning systems on local communities was clearly articulated by this participant who highlighted how a group of local adult students within the Early Years programmes directly contributed to local priorities and needs:

> *"I'll take a group that I taught a couple of years ago. If you spoke to them, their verbal understanding, their passion for working with children, their understanding .....their ability to go into the workplace and apply it was brilliant. They loved the course, they loved learning, the sessions were great, the.....I would say the..... but in terms of their ability initially to communicate that on paper and achieve high grades, ... they weren't distinction students.....the odd one may be, but yet those students were the best.....they used their learning, were very good in applying learning in their work setting. There is excellence here for me '.* ***Interview 1-C***

Further references are also made which link CBHE teaching excellence with community development in the context of a group of public services students who had placements within their programmes

> *"I guess then in the softer skills that students develop, we have seen that students developed in confidence, that is what we call excellence ... what they are going to bring to the wider community and they already did when they participated in volunteering programmes."*
>
> **Interview 8-G**

One of the key driving forces traditionally and currently for CBHE at institutional level is the twin alignment of widening participation and life-long learning. Strong emphasis was placed on CBHE teaching excellence experiences where teaching is focused on impacting on communities by developing students as life-long learners, as follows

> *"Yes, so it is especially important in an FE context, those students are coming from a vocational background via a vocational qualification, because they are taught differently on that vocational side, so it is fundamental that they understand right at the beginning of their level 3 qualification what the impact that's going to have in later life. Don't just say that's about going to University, or getting a degree, excellent teaching produces life-long learners. It carries on. It's a continuous.....its lifelong learning…. isn't it? And it doesn't stop, and I know it is an old cliché, but ....the lifelong learning thing, and a lot of people sort of crawl away from it - younger people do - lifelong*

*learning...**.....**.....no, I am just going to go out and do this, but my own experience has taught me no you don't just go and stand still, you continue, you develop, you grow.....and I think that being able to say to people that life isn't just going to be what.....isn't just going to be a 9-5 job again, it can be a whole range of things, and it doesn't matter whether you leave college with a degree or with A levels or whatever, there is a place out there for you,.* **Interview 7-T**

This category has represented the most complete reflection based on experiences of CBHE teaching excellence. Its focus is on situating such excellence within the positive transformation that CBHE teaching practitioners, teams, an enabling HE systems framework and institutional contributions brings to place and community priorities. Such transformation has far reaching impacts from students as community members, future employers and place-based influencers. The need to acknowledge the benefits for the community and place, holistically based on overall contributions rather than relying singularly on metrics regarding student achievement in exams, was noted within this category.

In summary the four categories above are qualitatively different, but internally related and hierarchically-inclusive, in that each of the subsequent categories of description incorporates the previous one, and the final one includes all such categories of description.

6.3 Critical Variation and Theme of Expanding Awareness

Each of the categories of description shows a variation in the way that CBHE teaching excellence is experienced, and the extent to which this variation is critical is examined below by applying the theory of the themes of expanding awareness (Marton and Booth, 1997). Five themes of expanding awareness have been identified within this research, which relate to the locus; the responsibility for; the interaction within; challenges of; and the benefits of CBHE teaching excellence. Each of these themes is individually considered below.

6.3.1 Locus of CBHE Teaching Excellence

Locus here relates to where the participants located CBHE teaching excellence. Within category one the locus of excellence is seen to be situated within the individual teacher practitioner (professional individualised focus), whose effective practices stem from their professional pedagogic approach and processes at the point of delivery. The locus within category two is situated within effective teams and in category three it is located within the supporting HE institutional systems. Category four locates CBHE teaching excellence within the Institutional participation in the successful transformation of place, and community-based contexts.

6.3.2 Responsibility for HE Teaching Excellence

The theme relates to examining where the responsibility for CBHE teaching excellence is situated within the categories. Within the first category, the

responsibility is placed fully on the teaching practitioner to ensure that teaching provided addresses the needs of students. Within the second theme this responsibility is positioned within teams involved in professional collaboration, and within the third category responsibility is at Institutional level to establish and maintain HE systems to support all involved in teaching, learning and assessment practices. For the final category this responsibility is situated within the Institution as a participant in the transformation of place and communities.

6.3.3 Interaction Leading to CBHE Teaching Excellence

This theme examines the level and nature of interaction apparent from each of the categories. Within the first category the interaction is between the teaching practitioner and the student and in the second this interaction broadens to encompass collaborative teams. For the third category such interaction takes place at multiple levels as individuals and teams interact with the differing HE systems that support CBHE teaching, learning and assessment. Interaction within the fourth category happens again at multiple levels but is broader than that within category three as it also includes institutional engagement with community and place-based priorities.

6.3.4 Challenges of CBHE Teaching Excellence

The main focus within this category is in the differences in where the challenges of teaching excellence are experienced. Within category one, challenges are at the point of delivery, and encompass the teaching practitioners contextualising their delivery. Within the second category, the

challenge is on the teams to operate in such a way as to ensure that all members' priorities are addressed. Within the third category the challenges are in ensuring the setting and maintenance of separate HE systems within a predominant FE context, as a framework for CBHE. With the fourth category, the challenge is for the Institution to participate in ongoing engagement with place and community priorities such as economic regeneration and community cohesion, and to ensure that students are developed to become active contributors to this.

6.3.5 Benefits of CBHE Teaching Excellence

This theme relates to differences in where the benefits of CBHE teaching excellence are experienced, which can also reflect the way challenges are addressed and overcome. The benefits within the first category reflect the satisfaction that staff get from ensuring that students are developing academically, professionally and personally; and also, the benefit that students get from having teaching which prioritises their individual and collective needs. Within the second category benefit is seen as experienced by all members of the team by collective learning and sharing of ideas, and shaping learning, teaching and assessment practices to reflect staff, student and employer priorities. The benefits within the third category are experienced by all those involved in learning, teaching and assessment practices from working within supporting and supportive CBHE systems. Within the fourth and final category the benefits experienced by successful transformation of place and communities, from the Institutions participation.

Themes of expanding awareness	Category1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
	Effective Teacher Practices	Team Based Excellence	Systems-based Excellence	Place and Community based Excellence
Locus of excellence	Individual	Partnership	Institutional HE Systems	Place and Community contribution
Responsibility for Teaching excellence	Personal	Teams	Institutional HE Systems	Institution as a contributor
Interaction leading to teaching excellence	Narrow interaction	Broad interaction	Multiple interactions	Multiple interactions
Challenges of teaching excellence	Point of delivery	Inter-party relationships	Meeting internal expectations	Meeting external expectations
Benefits of teaching excellence	Personal satisfaction for both staff and students	Team collective learning and influencing	HE Culture benefiting all those involved in Teaching and learning	Place and community based socio-economic benefits

Table 6.2: Categories of Awareness

The five themes of expanding awareness illustrated within the diagram above show the critical variation between the categories of description marked as an expansion of awareness across all four categories which link and separate them. The categories of variation represent the qualitative variation in the participants' understandings of CBHE teaching excellence. As the final stage

of this phenomenographic analysis I have included an outcome space which is explained below

6.4 Outcome Space

My research outcome space illustrates four categories of description, presented in a hierarchically inclusive order based on the qualitative variation between them (Marton and Booth, 1997). The structural aspects relate to the differences in what appears in the foreground of participants' understandings of CBHE teaching excellence within each category. These change from CBHE teaching excellence understandings being about performance by persons within categories one and two to an Institutional system focus in categories three and four. The referential aspects relate to the meaning attributed to CBHE teaching excellence which changes from being about the actions of individuals within category one; operations of teams within category two; supporting institutional HE systems within category three; and Institutional participation in place and community transformation within category four. The table below highlights this relationship as the outcome space.

	Referential Aspects			
Structural aspects	Actions of individual teaching practitioners	Actions of teams including staff, students and employer representatives	HE institutional Systems based	Institutional contribution to Place and Community transformation as a participant
Person/s-focused	*	*		
Institutional focused			*	*

Table 6.3: The referential and structural aspects of the categories of ways of understanding CBHE teaching excellence.

6.5 Validity, Realisability and Generalisability

I ensured the validity and reliability of my research outcomes by openly reflecting upon, and explaining the basis upon which my decisions and interpretations were made during data analysis, and by prioritisation of communicative validity. During the course of the research my Supervisor reviewed drafts on an ongoing basis, and I used his feedback to inform my analysis. I also had planned breaks from my research to give myself time to reflect, and this helped as each time I returned afresh to the analysis. As my research was informed by developmental phenomenography (Bowden, 2005), I thought it best to engage with the wider sector. To facilitate this, I presented my outcomes at different stages of my research at three seminars to seek

input from wider practitioner groups and carried out one small online consultation with the aim of triangulating my outcomes at different stages. I acknowledge that generalisability is not something which can be claimed widely from a research design informed by phenomenography, but the characteristics of my sample participants and the further triangulation of my findings with wider CHBE practitioner groups can help to relate them to the range of understandings within the CBHE population generally (Marton and Booth,1997). Further detail on these sessions is included within the next chapter.

6.6 Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter I have explained how participant interviews were transcribed and have detailed the approach to data analysis selected, including my approach to analysing individual transcripts using the whole transcript approach. I explained and analysed the four categories of description representing the four qualitatively different yet interrelated and hierarchically inclusive ways in which my participants collectively understood CBHE teaching excellence. Each of these categories was analysed and confirmed logically and empirically with relevant interview excerpts. The extent to which the variation between them is critical was explored using the theory of expanding awareness to produce five themes which transcend the four categories of description. An outcome space has also been included which illustrates the different categories of descriptions and their hierarchical relationship based on the qualitative variation between them. It also includes the variation in structural and referential aspects within the categories. I

acknowledge that any claim I make within the outcome space is the result of my interaction with the interview data, and I accept that the set of hierarchically inclusive categories that I produced is not the only possible outcome from my research (Akerlind, 2010). The next chapter evaluates the extent to which my research outcomes on understandings of CBHE teaching excellence align with key research and policy frameworks for HE teaching excellence and wider CBHE practice contexts.

Chapter 7: Discussion of Research Findings in relation to Skelton (2005) and Wood (2017)

7.1 Introduction

In this Chapter I answer my second research question on the extent to which the participant understandings of CBHE teaching excellence within the four categories of description align with, and build on, Skelton's (2005) critical framework and Wood's (2017) emerging pedagogy approach, the TEF and CBHE teaching practices. Since this evaluation is going to be based on participant understandings, I believe that using the categories of description as the source for this analysis would give me the best opportunity to get a broad background, which would include information from the different empirically referenced interview excerpts, to better substantiate the evaluation. In addition to this, the full outcomes from this research, including both the categories themselves and the outcome space, have been identified within Chapter 8 as a potential source for the development of CBHE teaching practitioners.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, the two research perspectives I have selected for this are Skelton's (2005) critical framework and Wood's (2017) approach to emerging pedagogies, as both perspectives provided me with a comprehensive tool to evaluate the understandings of my participants within the four categories of description. Whilst the two perspectives take a different approach to teaching excellence, there are synergies between them and these are highlighted in the discussion where relevant. To recap, Skelton's (2005) critical framework acknowledges the historical and situated context of

such excellence, and its contested nature. However, he believes that to engage in teaching excellence it is important to understand the different ways in which it is understood and experienced. Wood (2017), on the other hand, points to the difficulty in understanding or capturing teaching excellence as it relates to teaching, which itself is a complex system which interacts with other complex systems such as learning and curriculum, and cannot be reduced to simple constructs. I start by examining my participants 'understandings against Skelton's (2005) framework before considering them against Wood's (2017) emerging pedagogy approach, and the five foci supporting such an approach.

7.2 Alignment of Skelton's critical framework with the categories of description

As the background to this framework, Skelton (2005) identifies meta questions examined in Chapter 2 which requires consideration of what counts as higher education; whether higher education teaching excellence is an inclusive or exclusive concept; where the locus of higher education teaching excellence resides; and finally, whether higher education teaching excellence can take different meanings. My participants related to all of these meta questions and in relation to the first question their understandings aligned with CBHE's specific characteristics (Parry and Thompson, 2002). In relation to the second question participants saw that CBHE teaching excellence was an inclusive concept as all teachers were expected to attain excellence, and were provided with institutional guidance to achieve this. In relation to the third question, participants located teaching excellence within four contexts

comprising teaching practitioners, teams, higher education systems and institutional contributions to place and community development. In relation to the final meta question, participants understood CBHE teaching excellence to be linked to its characteristics especially in terms of its priorities for the development of technical higher education graduates. Participants' answers to these questions have been useful to situate alignment of their understandings to Skelton's (2005) critical framework discussed below.

7.3 Skelton's critical framework for HE teaching excellence

My approach within this section is to identify the most prominent theme within each of my Categories of Description and how they relate to Skelton's four ideal types of HE teaching excellence.

7.3.1 Category One – Contextualised teacher practices perspective

Understandings of experiences of CBHE teaching excellence within Category 1 relate most strongly to, and fully align with, Skelton's (2005) psychologised ideal type of HE teaching excellence, and focus demonstrably on the relational characteristics of the teacher and student interaction. Participants' descriptions within this category prioritised the teacher's responsibility to implement learning and teaching strategies to ensure that students have comprehensive access to tutor support, not only during contact sessions but also when engaged in self-study away from HE delivery sites. Priority was also given to the key characteristics of CBHE students who in most cases have work commitments and/or extensive domestic commitments, in some cases as carers for family members.

Participants discussed experiences of CBHE excellence achieved through specific student-centred learning and teaching strategies. They gave clear examples of supporting students in their development and in terms of individual distance travelled resulting in personal and vocational development within the 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978, p86). They spoke about how tutors had to be approachable, aware of and reflective in their engagement with students and continuously flex methods adopted to facilitate student access to learning. Within this category, the primary responsibility within the teacher-student interaction was on the teaching practitioner to ensure effective strategies to engage students as learners, albeit in a passive way.

Understandings of CBHE teaching excellence within this category also aligned with aspects of Skelton's (2005) performative understandings of HE teaching excellence. It focussed mainly on the expected vocational outcomes of the curriculum, which teaching practitioners had to address within their teaching practices to support work-based developments for students. Participants also recognised the need for teaching practitioners to have vocational expertise to support vocational programmes (Boud and Solomon, 2001) which are at the core of CBHE curricula. Students themselves were seen to opt for such programmes which provide them with technical and vocational knowledge and skills. For example, one of the participants referred to the Higher Apprenticeship programmes and Degree Apprenticeships in Engineering programmes which require explicit engagement with work-based knowledge, skills and behaviours. Notwithstanding the concerns expressed by

academics (Collini, 2012) on the potential loss of learning for learning's sake and personal development, the explicit preference for student employability continues to dominate CBHE teacher practices. Therefore, Skelton's performative understandings of HE teaching excellence continue also to influence institutional policy and regulatory practices for developing student employability, and inform teacher practices.

In relation to Skelton's (2005) critical understandings, there is partial alignment in that participants' descriptions of CBHE teaching excellence focused mainly on opportunities for those under-represented within HE. Linked to psychological understandings (Skelton, 2005), participants explanations described how targeted learning, teaching and assessment processes were thoughtfully shaped to meet the inclusive needs (including widening participation) of all students (Skelton, 2005). This was not surprising as promoting and supporting widening participation is central to the mission of CBHE itself. There was, however, little participant reflection on Skelton's (2005) traditional understandings of HE teaching excellence apart from some passing reference to the use of traditional teacher-led lectures as part of the teaching, but that was qualified with descriptions which clearly identified them as workshops with teachers as facilitators rather than lecturers in the traditional sense. In fact, some of the participants were not convinced that traditional lectures were appropriate methods at all for meeting the specific needs of CBHE students who perform better in smaller groups with formative and engaged learning.

In summary, this Category is fully aligned with, and builds upon, Skelton's psychologised ideal type of HE teaching excellence, and aligns with the performative ideal type. It's alignment with aspects of critical understandings was nuanced and partial, mainly limiting involvement of students as passive individuals in the interaction within their teaching sessions, rather than relating to the active engagement of the collective student voice. There was, however, little or no material alignment with 'traditional' understandings of HE teaching excellence as traditional delivery methods were not generally seen as appropriate for CBHE teaching and learning contexts. This category focused on the activities of individual practitioners, and is different from the next category discussed below which is based on team-based activities.

7.3.2 Category Two – Collaborative team practice perspective

Within this category CBHE teaching excellence is situated within collaborative teams including teaching practitioners, students and employers. Participants as members of such teams described themselves as communities of practice, developing teaching excellence, focused on the development of employability and technical and professional skills and knowledge. The understandings within this category thus fully align with Skelton's (2005) ideal type of performative teaching excellence. For example, one participant, a work-based teaching practitioner, was involved in the design and delivery of a Foundation Degree in Public Services, and described how he worked with colleagues to ensure that students completing this qualification had the necessary levels of professional competency. Similarly, a visiting lecturer who was, again, a work-based practitioner, explained in detail how he worked with engineering

curriculum teams to develop students' application of knowledge, skills and behaviour to undertake technical roles and qualify as trainee Chartered Engineers. This category also fully aligned to Skelton's critical understandings of teaching excellence as students were seen to be part of such communities, not just as learners but as partners in reviewing, shaping and enhancing their programmes. Participants' descriptions also focussed on the centrality of student engagement in their learning experiences, explaining how an inclusive and emancipatory collective student voice consistently informed CBHE curriculum development, and learning, teaching and assessment practices. One participant pointed out that HE teaching excellence was also linked to the assessment process, and explained how students were engaged throughout the assessment design process for a multidisciplinary curriculum programme involving Criminology and Photography. Further, another participant described excellence within the experience of teaching a group of work-based learners, which involved examples of 'flipped learning' in which the teacher was very much a facilitator who supported students in their learning through critique and enquiry.

The CBHE teaching excellence descriptions within this Category align fully and build on Skelton's (2005) performative and critical understandings of teaching excellence, because in the case of the former the team's priority was on the vocational context of learning, teaching and assessment; and the latter due to a focus on the engagement of the student voice in partnership. There is an implicit assumption, hence partial alignment, made by participants on Skelton's (2005) psychological ideal type in the interaction and the

contextualisation of teaching, learning and assessment processes by teaching teams to meet students' academic and employability priorities. There is, however, little direct or indirect reference to traditional understanding of teaching excellence. This category was very much about the performance of teams, and is different from the next category which focuses on excellence based on systems with an HE ethos.

7.3.3 Category Three – Institutional systems-based perspectives

The understandings in this Category situate CBHE teaching excellence within specific institutional HE systems for supporting the development, delivery, review and enhancement of CBHE teaching, learning and assessment creating an institutional HE ethos distinct from the equivalent FE systems. These descriptions of experiences of HE teaching excellence were fully aligned with performative understandings focussing on how institutional systems support the development of vocational teaching and learning. Participants described how such systemised support guided and enabled curriculum teams including employers to ensure that learning, teaching and assessment processes were effective in delivering the aims of a vocationally driven curriculum. Examples given included systems governing the quality of Degree, Higher Apprenticeships and Foundation Degrees in particular; and the support for successful and sustainable establishment of tripartite relationships between employers, CBHE teaching practitioners and students. Specific programmes included those on Nuclear Engineering, Public Services, and Criminology. Participants described how CBHE systems supported opportunities for joint delivery and assessment between teaching practitioners

and employer mentors. They also spoke about how specific HE systems allowed for the curriculum development and delivery of such programmes to ensure that students were able to also achieve professional recognition on completion.

This category also has alignment with Skelton's (2005) psychologised ideal type of teaching excellence, in that participant descriptions of excellence articulate the level of support and interaction with tutors when progressing to HE study in CBHE. There was some recognition of the general student engagement in line with Skelton's (2005) critical ideal type of teaching excellence, so this ideal type was partially aligned in comparison with performative and psychologised understandings. There was again little alignment with the traditional ideal type.

In summary this Category has full alignment with, and builds on Skelton's (2005) performative ideal types, because of the focus on systems supporting vocationally informed teaching and learning. There is alignment with the psychologised ideal type of teaching excellence, arising from the participant descriptions of support offered to students by systems within which teaching, learning and assessment functions. Understandings within this category are also partially aligned with Skelton's (2005) critical ideal type with some recognition for systems for student engagement with their learning. Participants also spoke about how they address challenges to maintain a balance between the level of support given to students, and the need to maintain academic standards within Institutional systems. The characteristics of traditional understandings were not considered explicitly or implicitly. This

category is different from the next Category which relates to situating CBHE teaching excellence within the impact that it creates in transforming Place and Communities.

7.3.4 Category Four – Transformation-based Perspective

As acknowledged throughout this research, one of the fundamental features of CBHE is that place and communities and civic engagement are at the heart of CBHE strategic plans. This is further strengthened by the fact that most CBHE students are local residents, from groups under-represented within HE or adult returners. Understandings of CBHE teaching excellence linked to successful participation in local place-based socio-economic priorities are fully aligned to Skelton's performative ideal type of teaching excellence. Such alignment is underpinned by examples given by participants, including students who have been able to access relevant jobs during or after completion of their studies. Examples involved opportunities for students to transfer knowledge to work-places such as childcare, criminology and engineering. Further participant understandings included Arts students supporting enterprise and the environment, commissioned by public and private sector employers. Participants identified learning outcomes in Higher Apprenticeships programmes in the form of research projects which inform the development of Place and Community-based work-places. The focus that this category places on regeneration, social cohesion and economic impacts makes it fully align and build on the performative ideal types of HE teaching excellence.

Further, participants spoke about the specific support given to students to access local opportunities and this fully aligns with the psychologised ideal type, in the form of individual and collective support both within face-to-face tutorial and career development sessions promoting the 'relational' (Skelton, 2005, p31) transactions between practitioners and students. Student achievement in this respect was also seen to accomplish socio-economic priorities primarily for the locality and examples included how graduating students supported community interests which fully align with Skelton's (2005) critical understandings of teaching excellence. Examples of student engagement in community development included those graduating from Foundation Degrees and Honours Degrees in programmes such as sport, care, policing and general public services areas being involved through paid or voluntary placement opportunities while studying, or entering paid employment after graduation as members of local community development teams. The focus by participants on developing students to contribute as good citizens, and agents of social cohesion, through learning and teaching activities which prioritise principles of equality, diversity and safeguarding of communities also build on critical understandings of teaching excellence. However, there was little alignment of participant understandings represented within this category on Skelton's 'traditional' perspectives of higher education teaching excellence.

In summary the focus within this category was broader than the other three with equally full alignment being placed on performative, psychologised and critical understandings. This is evidenced respectively by the vocationally

informed teaching and learning, the support offered for students to access careers and /or enhance current work contexts and the contribution that students make individually and collectively to communities by building on and extending Skelton's (2005) understandings. There is little alignment with the traditional ideal type.

The table below illustrates the level of alignment between participant understandings of CBHE teaching excellence within the categories, and Skelton's (2005) four ideal types of teaching excellence, ranging from full alignment to little or no alignment.

	Performative	Psychologised	Critical	Traditional
Teacher Practitioner activities	Alignment	Full alignment	Partial alignment	Little/None
Team activities -	Full alignment	Partial alignment	Full alignment	Little/None
HE systems-based	Full alignment	Alignment	Partial alignment	Little/None
Transformation	Full alignment	Full alignment	Full alignment	Little/None

Table 7.1: Level of alignment of categories with Skelton's critical framework (Adapted from Skelton (2005) p35)

What the above evaluation shows is that performative understandings dominate most categories, followed by psychological and critical understandings respectively. Given the priority that CBHE gives to vocational education, it is not surprising that performative understandings are most prominent. Similarly, the emphasis that CBHE teaching makes in supporting the inclusive needs of students justifies the level of alignment with psychologised ideal types. Critical ideal types are also key to CBHE teaching excellence given the level of political, economic and social factors that direct and shape FE Colleges and CBHE provision within them. The lack of any meaningful alignment with traditional ideal types of teaching excellence is also understandable given CBHE's focus on individualised and targeted support through small group teaching.

My approach has been to explore participants' accounts to interpret which of Skelton's ideal types of higher education teaching excellence is most prominent within each of the categories. I acknowledge that these are my interpretations, but they relate in some way to the variations within my four research categories. Skelton (2005) accepts that teaching excellence is difficult to define, but argues that it is something that can be understood in different ways. In the next section I discuss Wood's (2017) approach to emerging pedagogies, and although the two perspectives are discussed separately, where there are similarities, I have highlighted them below.

7.4 Wood's (2017) – Emerging Pedagogies Approach

As discussed in Chapter 2 above, Wood's (2017) emerging pedagogies approach is underpinned by the complexity theory holding that teaching and related functions involving humans, such as learning and assessment, are complex adaptive systems that work independently. They impact and are impacted by each other and are not single activities but part of a collective process classed as 'pedagogies' (Wood, 2017, p57). He argues that the best that can be achieved is to develop effective pedagogic literacy (Cajkler and Wood, 2016).

Within participants' interviews, they acknowledged that teaching operates within a complex context, but were still willing to describe their experiences of what they believed to be CBHE teaching excellence. In fact, one participant saw excellence as a "wishy washy word" before starting to describe his experiences of excellent CBHE teaching. Within CBHE, the complexity is deepened by complex adaptive systems (CASs) that cover both FE and CBHE functions. CBHE teaching was seen as a CAS, which is both not random and not always predictable and linear, but constantly interacting with equally non-random and unpredictable CASs such as learning and assessment. It is argued that if we take a more holistic view of CBHE teaching, taking into account both the context and the time (Rescher, 2000, p6) we can see CBHE pedagogic development as emerging. On this basis, invariably, CBHE teaching and its development is an emerging pedagogic context, resulting from the interaction of knowledge, skills and values, and contextual factors that shape the CBHE environment. Wood (2017) offers five

foci which he argues can support us in understanding emerging pedagogic development. These five foci comprise affective foundations, personal growth, collaborative growth, organisational contexts and societal contexts (Wood, 2017), and the focus within the discussion that follows is to examine the extent to which aspects of each of the foci relate to participants' understandings of CBHE teaching excellence within the categories of description. Although Wood's (2017) emerging pedagogy approach differs from Skelton's (2005) critical framework my analysis showed that some aspects with Skelton's (2005) approach are reflected within Wood (2017) and I have identified these as relevant. Each of the above five foci are analysed below in relation to the participant understandings within my research.

7.4.1 Focus One – Affective Foundations

Affective foundations include 'values, attitudes and philosophies' which Wood (2017, p62) labels collectively as 'values' impacting on individuals, teams and institutional practices, admittedly, not always in compatible ways. Participants talked (Category 1) about how their own values inform the support they give to their students, who in many cases cannot go to university due to personal reasons and choose to undertake their studies within CBHE. They also described (within Category 1) how they addressed student priorities through strategies such as flexible delivery methods and accessible one-to-one sessions. They explained (within Category 3) how, for example, institutional policies supported flexible adjustments to be made to assessment processes to ensure CBHE students have the necessary support given their work-based commitments and/or domestic responsibilities. Some participants, however,

also explained how their values to uphold academic standards can contradict those of some students with consumeristic perspectives seeking a return on their investment with minimum effort. They gave clear examples of the difficulties of achieving this without compromising academic standards reflected within institutional learning, teaching and assessment policies.

A potential for contradictions was also identified (within Category 3) between personal values and those of an Institution in terms of teaching, learning and assessment. Examples given here included the importance of having the opportunity to promote, for example, independent learning and an HE ethos, even if this did not fit within their Institutions' predominantly FE context. Also, within Category 3, some participants highlighted the importance of not having to compromise personal values in pursuit of institutional performance targets within strategic plans. In contrast, participants within Category 4 spoke about how they welcomed the institutional values to drive the transformation agenda by enabling students to contribute to place and community priorities.

Expressions within this focus can relate to Skelton's (2005) psychologised, performative and critical ideal types. The values placed within the teacher-student interaction aligns with the former, and those attached to Institutions in terms of informing socio-economic and regeneration agendas through transformation links both performative and critical ideal types.

In summary, my participants' understandings within categories 1, 3 and 4 align with and build upon Wood's (2017) focus on values, distinguishing between individual and institutional values, and illustrating how they can both

interact and at times contradict. Such values can also impact on personal growth, and this is discussed next.

7.4.2 Focus Two – Personal Growth Focus

Within this focus, Wood (2017) recognises the importance of the personal growth of individual practitioners. The teaching commitments of teaching practitioners within some CBHE sites were solely within HE, whilst others were required to teach both HE and FE sessions in varying proportions. Although the latter group (Category 1) spoke of the difficulties of easily moving from FE level to HE level teaching and vice versa, sometimes within a day, they explained how they developed strategies to ensure flexibility to address the academic and pastoral needs of both groups of students. Within Category 3, almost all participants spoke about how systems supported them to achieve teaching qualifications and/or postgraduate degrees within their specialist disciplines (Shulman, 1986; 1987) and develop as pedagogic and reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983). Participants relating to effective teacher practices within Category 1 talked about the importance of reflexive practice and self-assessment, leading to what Schön (1983, pp 102-104) calls ‘knowledge-in-action’ for personal growth. Participants from larger CBHE providers explained how HE systems allocated remitted hours from their teaching commitments to develop scholarly activities, but also discussed how they had learnt to carry-out the remaining teaching commitments which were still comparatively higher than their University counterparts (Category 3). They also discussed how they engaged in scholarship and technical updating whilst also fulfilling administrative responsibilities as programme leaders. When

discussing their personal development in practice-based learning, participants explained (within Categories 1 and 2) how they experienced personal growth by working with employer representatives to understand the immediate and long-term industry and sector priorities.

This focus also has strong links with aspects of Skelton's (2005) performative perspectives, by prioritising personal growth in academic and technical knowledge, and skills of reflexivity. The opportunities for personal growth remain current with practice-based knowledge seen as important given the specific vocational aims of CBHE curricula and learning and teaching practices, as within categories 1, 2 and 3. Such growth requires effective collaboration with work-based practitioners and other stakeholders and the nature of this collaborative growth, which is Wood's (2017) third focus, is explained below.

7.4.3 Third Focus - Collaborative Growth

Wood (2017) concentrates here on how collaborative partnerships can lead to collaborative growth, and participants (within Category 2) gave accounts of their experiences of CBHE teaching excellence as members of collaborative teams involving practitioners, employers and students in areas such as Media and Arts degrees, producing work and making it 'a community property' (Shulman, 1993, p6-7), and developing 'professional capital' Hargreaves and Fullan (2013, p2). Participants' accounts also included (within Category 2 and Category 4) examples of large collaborative teams, and systems for strategic partnerships with local public sector organisations, to create 'place-based

pedagogies' (Sobel, 2008, p7) which deliver planned outcomes for the locality and communities. Participants from CBHE sites with established expertise in HE also gave examples of collaborative work undertaken by teaching teams including both pedagogic and discipline-specific research to inform teaching, learning and assessment processes (within Category 2). Understandings within Category 3 acknowledged the institutional support necessary for the development of 'social capital' (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2013, p2) to facilitate positive change and opportunities. The aspects within this focus reflected above also relate to Skelton's (2005) performative perspectives, with a focus on collaborative growth, prioritising vocational CBHE teaching excellence.

In summary, these relate to collaborative growth as a key driver for CBHE teaching excellence in terms of people and systems, within Categories 2, 3 and 4 and these align to and build on Wood's third focus. Both individual and collaborative growth require appropriate organisational contexts to function effectively, and these aspects of Wood's (2017) fourth focus are examined below.

7.4.4 Fourth Focus – Organisational Contexts

Participant descriptions within Category 3 of my research identified understandings of CBHE teaching excellence from experiences of having a specific HE infrastructure to support a HE ethos in CBHE pedagogic practice. In this context they spoke of the importance of this ethos, and the support for teaching teams to access subject-specific and pedagogic journals and other library resources by accessing their Awarding Body online facilities. The

CBHE provision within the FE Colleges in my research was proportionately smaller than the equivalent FE provision. Participants from those Institutions which had the benefit of a specific and enabling HE infrastructure explained how FE priorities are less likely to dominate HE pedagogic priorities. They explained (Category 3) that within such contexts CBHE systems fully mirrored those of the Awarding Universities. Participants from the larger CBHE sites also spoke about experiences of organisational contexts which understood the need for explicit institutional acknowledgement of the differences in pedagogic priorities between the FE and HE curricula. For example, they pointed to the importance of staff utilisation policies to acknowledge the pedagogic priorities for HE to support students as independent learners as they progress through their undergraduate studies. They experienced excellence in having time allocated for updating and scholarship, as they felt it was central to the development of CBHE teaching excellence. Participants emphasised that HE learning and teaching strategies should demonstrably provide CBHE students with an HE experience equivalent to their university counterparts. They described their positive experiences of CBHE excellence where effective progression policies enabled FE students to transition and progress to HE study with comprehensive support to understand, engage with and experience the differences of studying HE. One participant (Category 3) saw CBHE teaching excellence in the systems within the organisation offering inclusive academic support systems for those entering HE as adults and as part of widening participation to enable them to access and engage confidently in HE studies. Work-based learning practitioners also referred to the policies and processes that support students with appropriate placements

to ensure that knowledge gained can be applied usefully within a work context. For example, one work-based teaching practitioner spoke about how the organisational contexts support the development and delivery of a work-based Foundation Degree in Fire and Rescue within which academic and work-based practitioners developed teaching and learning sessions which simulated practice scenarios for modules such as crisis management. They noted that institutional systems were effective not only in supporting students to access work-placements but also supporting them throughout the full process to enable them to gain the required vocational outcomes for the programmes. These factors within Wood's fourth focus also reflect aspects of Skelton's performative and psychologised ideal types of teaching excellence. It reflects performative perspectives by prioritising vocational development within Institutional systems, and psychologised perspectives within the systems-based interaction between teaching practitioners and prospective students for example, supporting them to transition to HE.

In summary this focus on organisational contexts for emerging pedagogies is an important one, and impacts heavily on individual, collective and organisational effectiveness within CBHE, as reflected within Category 3. Organisational contexts can operate as complex systems which impact positively or negatively on emerging pedagogic effectiveness of HE teaching, but are invariably influenced by changing societal contexts represented within Wood's (2017) fifth and final focus discussed below.

7.4.5 Fifth Focus – Societal Contexts

Within Category 4 of my research findings, participants expressed CBHE teaching excellence in terms of an organisational contribution to ongoing place-based socio-economic development and change. For CBHE, such developments are impacted by both contemporary HE and FE policies and the wider economic, political and social environment particularly at local and regional levels. One participant, in particular, described the significant and growing economic and financial challenges that FE colleges face in general including the continuing need to adapt to changing policies and to meet the needs and expectations of both employers and students, and changes within a wider context through a series of mergers across the sector. The emerging policy changes in HE add to this (Category 4), and one key example is developments within the TEF which have impacted on CBHE, discussed in Chapter 2 above. Participants noted that these developments have generated extensive debate and critique around the measures used to assess HE teaching excellence. This surrounded the underpinning use of NSS data as proxy measures, with the inbuilt notion of consumerist perspectives (Wang and Wang, 2018; Tomlinson, 2018; Wood and O'Leary 2018; Tomlinson, 2019), and metric-informed quantitative performance management measures (Ashwin, 2017, 2018; Doyle and Brady, 2018) to assess the quality of teaching. Only three participants explained how they were directly involved in TEF submissions and one of them described how relevant staff worked together throughout the process until submission. The work-based teaching practitioners were largely unaware of the TEF development and remaining

participants were aware of the development but explained that senior managers dealt with the whole process. Moreover, when discussing teaching excellence, all participants expressed how they found that students' expectations of them as teachers and the College as providers of HE was changing, driven by consumeristic perspectives. The majority of the participants also agreed that data on student achievement should not be the only measure of teaching excellence, and they noted this was particularly important for CBHE students as community members, especially because as adult learners and/or as students from widening participation backgrounds the very opportunity to access and participate in HE is an achievement in itself. They felt in particular that metric-based measures cannot easily account for the distance travelled in terms of academic, personal and life-long learning in the form of intangible assets. They questioned the value of measuring excellence using metric-based outcome measures, (Wood and Su, 2017) and highlighted the importance of recognising the rich interactions that occur within teaching activities. The majority of the participants were convinced that CBHE teaching excellence can exist even when targeted quantitative outcomes in terms of student qualification achievements are lower than may be expected, as they could still contribute to their communities as lifelong learners. In general, despite a lack of detailed understandings of the TEF initiative, participants were broadly aware of this policy development and its associated bases in consumerism, metrification and the quantification of quality measures to assess excellence in HE teaching. This this focus was reflected in, and aligned with, understandings within Category 4.

Both Skelton's (2005) performative and critical ideal types are reflected within this focus, linked to contributions made by students and institutional practices respectively to the successful transformation of place and communities. This focus shows that changes to national policies and societal priorities impact materially on CBHE pedagogic practice and growth.

The table below illustrates the relationship between Wood's (2017) five foci, supporting growth of emerging pedagogies (Column 1); key factors that potentially impact upon growth within each focus (Column 2); respective aligned categories (Column 3); and contextual evidence within categories showing alignment within each focus (Column 4).

Woods five foci	Key impact factors	Respective aligned categories	Contextual evidence aligned with each focus.
Affective Foundation	Values, attitudes and philosophies	Categories 1, 3 and 4	Different values attached to the Two-tier Institutional systems. Personal values versus Institutional values. Student focussed philosophies
Personal Growth	Professional skills; pedagogic knowledge, reflexivity and research	Categories 1, 2 and 3	Vocational development. Reflective practice
Collaborative Growth	Professional and collaborative development. Learning and research	Categories 2, 3 and 4	Partnership development. Employer engagement. Students as partners. Communities of practice.
Organisational Context	University and disciplinary cultures, and programme regulations	Category 3	Vocational curriculum frameworks. Technical HE ethos. Support structures.
Societal context	Policy, socio-economic and cultural change	Category 4	HE in FE policy. Community engagement. Place and community focus

Table 7.2 Research Categories with Woods five foci. (Adapted from Wood (2017) p62)

Therefore, the participants understandings show that Wood's societal contexts, along with values, personal growth, collaborative growth and organisational contexts, relate to and build on the pedagogies that emerge within CBHE.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how the participants' understandings within the categories of description relate to the two research perspectives, to TEF and to practice, and this is considered further in the conclusion. Firstly, it examined how it relates to Skelton's (2005) four ideal types of teaching excellence, covering traditional, performative, psychologised and critical ways in which HE teaching excellence can be understood and practiced. Analysis of the categories shows that the predominant alignments of participant understandings of CBHE teaching excellence relate to Skelton's 2005 performative perspectives, and this is not surprising when we consider the strategic priorities of FE Colleges within which CBHE operates, which mainly focus on meeting employer needs and student employability. There is also alignment with both psychologised and critical perspectives, which reflect the support for CBHE students who are mostly from non-traditional backgrounds and the strategic priority for CBHE within place and communities respectively. There was little or no alignment with traditional understandings, which again reflects CBHEs increased focus on applied vocational learning.

Wood (2017) argues that HE teaching operates within a complex environment and participants were able to recognise the complex context in which CBHE

teaching practices take place. Participants were also able to describe how CBHE pedagogic practices are informed by Wood's (2017) five foci, equally across all practices. Participants' understandings of the impact of policy developments in relation to TEF was varied, and the level of engagement was different. In all cases they were aware of the consumeristic and metrics-driven agenda, but also confirmed that it was mainly Senior Management who led the process.

When I started to analyse the five foci, I did not fully appreciate the extent to which they could relate to Skelton's critical framework, but during the analysis the synergies between them became more apparent, especially in relation to performative understandings which permeate across, and I have reflected that above. What this evaluation also shows is that themes within Skelton's (2005) critical framework remain relevant within contemporary thinking and practice in HE teaching, and its excellence.

The significance of the analysis undertaken within this chapter is that it illustrates a contemporary application of perspectives on HE teaching excellence within Skelton's (2005) established and much-referenced critical framework, Wood's (2017) novel and recently emerging pedagogic approach, and the TEF Indicators to CBHE contexts. It also provides valuable new insights for the CBHE community into which the extent of the understanding of experiences of HE teaching practices of CBHE teaching practitioners (a minority group of HE practices) reflect and align with both the above research perspectives and TEF, to inform wider research and policy. This is considered further within chapter 8 below.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

Methodologically informed by Bowden's (2005) developmental phenomenography, my research aimed to:

- Contribute to new knowledge on the qualitatively different ways in which teaching practitioners understand their collective experiences of CBHE teaching excellence;
- evaluate the extent to which these understandings relate to key research literature on HE teaching excellence and the policy developments with the current TEF;
- extend the application of the phenomenographic approach to investigate HE teaching practices within the context of CBHE;
- examine how these understandings can be used to support and enhance teaching and learning practices within CBHE.

I achieved the above aims by answering the following questions:

1. What are the qualitatively different ways in which CBHE teaching practitioners understand their experiences of HE teaching excellence from their ongoing teaching practices?
2. To what extent do these ways of experiencing align with and/or build on the themes within key research literature and the TEF and relate to wider understandings of CBHE teaching excellence within practice?

As explained within the introduction in Chapter 1, my choice to explore understandings of CBHE teaching excellence was informed by my interest and

experience in HE teaching, particularly within a CBHE context. The current policy developments within TEF impacting on the HE sector including CBHE has also given my research a contemporary focus. The following discussion concludes on how the above aims have been addressed within answers to the research questions, and the contributions my findings have made to new knowledge informing existing research, policy, phenomenographic approach and CBHE teaching practices.

8.2 First Research Question

The research design used to answer this question was informed by phenomenographic assumptions and principles. Ontologically, the study took a non-dualist perspective, seeing CBHE teaching excellence 'constituted as an internal relationship between' (Marton and Booth, 1997, p13) my participants and their experiences of such excellence. Epistemologically, knowledge was represented within the different meanings that participants attributed to their experiences of CBHE teaching excellence (Svensson,1997) within their semi-structured interviews. Further, application of phenomenography's second-order perspective (Marton and Pang, 2008) meant that the outcomes from my research focused on how participants understood their experiences of CBHE rather than my understandings of my experiences. Further, the research prioritised the interpretation of variations in participants' accounts of their experiences as the 'core of the investigation' (Akerlind, 2010, p6). Data collection, data analysis and presentation of findings were underpinned by phenomenography's methodological assumptions (Akerlind, 2010).

My heterogeneous (Akerlind, 2010, p54) sample comprised 30 participants from 12 CBHE sites who were experienced in CBHE teaching; and were selected to ensure

that I was able to get the maximum level of variation in understandings of CBHE teaching excellence (Marton, 1986; Booth,1997; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000), and as complete an outcome space as possible (Akerlind. 2010, p54). Semi-structured interviews (Bruce, 1994; Akerlind, 2005; Bowden, 2005) focused on the reflective relationship between the participants and their experiences of CBHE teaching excellence (Bruce, 1997); and assiduous use was made of pre-determined questions (Stenfors-Hayes et al, 2013) and follow up questions, to explore their understandings. I consciously bracketed my assumptions about CBHE teaching excellence (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Bowden, 2000a) by operating within an ethical framework (Sin, 2010); refraining from introducing new ideas (Bowden and Green, 2005; Akerlind et al, 2005); and focussing on the priorities of my research question to prevent any pre-planned notions of what the data should say (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). Phenomenographic principles were similarly applied during data analysis and this involved continuous iteration (Yates et al, 2012), and focus upon collective meanings from participants accounts. The four categories of description developed collectively represented aspects of descriptions of qualitatively different, yet interrelated, ways in which participants experienced CBHE teaching excellence. (Svensson, 1977; Marton and Booth, 1997; Bruce, 1997). I used Marton and Booth's (1997, p.88) analytical framework on 'the anatomy of experience' to interpret both the referential (meaning) and structural aspects of the participants' experiences, and the distinctions between 'external and internal horizons.' (Marton and Booth, 1997, p88) I examined how the participants discerned CBHE teaching excellence and its parts (internal horizon) from other contextually situated functions within HE and FE (the external horizon). I answered the first research question by developing four

categories of description which I restate to provide context to this discussion. They are as follows:

1. CBHE Teaching Excellence is experienced when capable teaching practitioners contextualise teaching, learning and assessment practices to address the inclusive needs of their students (contextualised teacher practices perspective);

2. CBHE Teaching Excellence is experienced when staff, students and employers work in collaborative teams to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment practices actively promote academic and vocational learning opportunities for students (collaborative teams practice perspective);

3 CBHE Teaching Excellence is experienced when the internal institutional HE systems for supporting teaching and learning work to create and maintain an HE ethos (Institutional systems-based perspective);

4. CBHE Teaching Excellence is experienced when institutional higher-level teaching, learning and assessment systems and the HE ethos lead to participation in the positive transformation of place and community (transformation-based perspective).

The hierarchical inclusivity and variation between the categories have been explained on the basis that the first category, relating to the contribution that individual teaching practitioners make to CBHE teaching excellence, is included within the second category covering collaborative teams. The third category acknowledges the contribution such teams make, but situates CBHE teaching

excellence more widely within systems which create an HE ethos; while the fourth category extends CBHE teaching excellence to the contribution that such systems make to transforming place and communities. The ‘dimensions of variation’ (Akerlind,1999, p8) between the four categories of description have been confirmed as critical (Akerlind, 2010) by identifying five themes of expanding awareness which link and distinguish them. These themes relate to CBHE teaching excellence, and the differences in its locus; responsibilities; level of social interaction, and its challenges and benefits. The categories are a hierarchically inclusive, interrelated yet different set of findings which have been presented within an outcome space as a ‘logically structured complex’ (Marton, 2000, p105) of the different ways of experiencing CBHE teaching excellence. Having discussed how the first research question was answered I now turn to the findings within my second research question.

8.3 Second Research Question and Contribution to Literature

The focus of my second question was to assess the extent to which the participant accounts within the Categories of Description align with and build upon key ways of looking at HE within the research literature, TEF, and contemporary practice.

Within Chapter 2, I have discussed the various conceptualisations of HE teaching excellence within research literature generally, but focused on two specific perspectives against which I have evaluated the categories of description from my research. I learnt that research sometimes involves making difficult decisions, so to keep within the context of my research question I selected Skelton’s (2005) critical framework incorporating four ideal types of HE teaching excellence; and Wood’s

(2017) complexity-based alternative to HE teaching excellence, based on the emerging pedagogies approach.

Skelton (2005) was selected because his critical framework enabled me to examine HE teaching excellence represented within the four broad ways of understanding HE teaching excellence, relating to traditional, performative, psychologised and critical understandings. Skelton acknowledged the difficulty of formalising HE teaching excellence within specific criteria, but took a positive stance in that he believed teaching excellence could be understood and practiced. The four ideal types of understandings offer a critical framework for analysis, and have been useful in supporting me to evaluate understandings within my categories of description. The different positions taken within the ideal types show that understandings of HE teaching excellence are conditioned by underlying purposes and assumptions. Skelton (2005) highlights the temporal nature of these four ideal types, but still offers an opportunity for us to analyse issues around how we can conceptualise HE teaching excellence to support practice. I found the framework broad, and sufficiently comprehensive to capture most of the conceptualisations within literature in a critical way, and it served as a holistic tool to evaluate and thematise understandings of CBHE.

My choice of Wood's (2017) approach relating to emerging pedagogies was based on the fact that he offers a novel and realistic way of highlighting the difficulty of understanding teaching excellence. This was a response to TEF, but also informs existing literature on HE teaching excellence. Wood (2017) argues that teaching excellence emerges from a complex context and that teaching is itself a very complex activity, interacting with other complex activities such as learning and

assessment; and that neither teaching nor its excellence can be simplified or measured. However, he offered five foci to support pedagogic development which lead to novelty or even innovation, although he does not define these latter terms and how they differ from excellence. The five foci comprise affective foundations focusing on values; personal growth focusing on the development of knowledge and skills; collaborative growth based on professional capital; organisational contexts focusing on institutional systems; and societal contexts focusing on external impacts such as national policies. My reason for choosing Wood (2017) was that his approach on emerging pedagogies to understand HE teaching and its development was different to that of Skelton, in that Wood (2017) focuses on the difficulty of conceptualising HE teaching excellence whereas Skelton (2005) is willing to acknowledge the different ways in which it can be understood and practiced.

In answer to my second research question, the analysis of the categories of description against both perspectives show that for Skelton (2005) there was a predominant focus on performative understandings with psychologised and critical understandings coming next but with little alignment to traditional understandings. In terms of Wood (2017) I looked at the how the research categories of description were reflected within each of the foci. Wood (2017, p61) reminds us that the foci are ‘indicators’ and not ‘a roadmap’ to pedagogic development.

My analysis also examined the extent to which observations within the categories related to TEF development, and subject to a very small minority, the consensus was that the approach taken within TEF, especially its focus on metrics, consumerism, and using quantified measurements of teaching quality, was not welcomed by participants. In the main, participants confirmed that most TEF work was co-

ordinated at management level with teaching practitioners providing the requested data. The knowledge of the details of TEF apart from a recognition that it offered a better status for teaching compared to research, was limited.

My approach to assessing the extent to which the outcomes of my research related to understandings of teaching excellence within a wider CBHE context was addressed within three workshops with CBHE teaching practitioners from three different sites, and one small-scale online consultation, all of whom were not part of the main research participant group. Analysis of these engagements showed all practitioners identified with my research categories of description, but also considered that the emphasis on general student support and the role of professional support teams was less obvious. I agree that these are priorities for CBHE, and I would have considered a focus (within Category 3 at least) on the way that systems are shaped to offer contextualised support for students with protected characteristics, but it is not something that participants explicitly focussed upon. Such analysis using research perspectives, TEF and practice to assess the extent to which they align, build-on and in certain cases nuance, has helped me to identify the contribution my research has made literature, policy and practice.

8.4 Contribution to Knowledge – First Research Question

Key reviews on teaching excellence within HE (Little et al, 2007; Gunn and Fisk, 2013; Greatbatch and Holland; 2016) all recognise the continuing lack of contextualisation of existing conceptualisations of HE teaching excellence to the needs of a diverse and complex HE sector; and lack of acknowledgement of the significance of understanding academics' perceptions of their roles and identities

which strongly influence their approaches to excellence. The review by Greatbatch and Holland (2016) had a broader focus and did engage with academics including CBHE but was focused on the TEF initiative rather than any general understandings of HE teaching excellence. My research has extended the review of higher education teaching excellence and has provided new insights by engaging teaching practitioners operating within CBHE, to explore their understandings of experiences of CBHE teaching excellence. The research outcomes include the four qualitatively different ways in which these practitioners understand their experiences of CBHE teaching excellence, represented as internally-related and hierarchically-inclusive categories of description at the collective level. All four categories have been illustrated within an outcome space and highlight their structural and referential aspects. The categories of description illustrate understandings which relate to activities of people as individuals and partners and those carried out at institutional levels. Even though CBHE provides a substantially smaller HE provision in comparison with that provided by Higher Education Institutions, it still engages some 137,000 students (Association of Colleges, 2020) who in most cases deliberately choose to study within CBHE. Teaching practitioners even within the larger CBHE are likely to be minority groups with their institutions and collectively within the into how this minority group of practitioners understand their experiences of teaching excellence with HE students. Each of the categories provide evidence of the different understandings of such excellence but collectively they vary hierarchically from the least complete to the most complete. CBHE practitioners have had limited meaningful opportunity to date to express their experiences of engagement of higher education practices including those relating to teaching. My research gives voice to this group by finding out their different understandings of their experiences of CBHE

teaching excellence and extending the current research landscape on this area of HE teaching accordingly.

8.5 Contributions to Knowledge – Second Research Question

The contribution to new knowledge from the second question comes from the results of the analysis of my research categories of description against both Skelton (2005) and Wood (2017). The result from the analysis against Skelton's (2005) critical framework contributes to new knowledge by highlighting how participant understandings relate most to three of the four ideal types of teaching excellence (performative, psychologised and critical), and conversely how little reference is made to the fourth, relating to traditional understandings of such excellence. Given that CBHE teaching practices focusses predominantly on vocational and applied higher education this is not surprising. This analysis evaluates the categories of description against Skelton's (2005) critical framework and is thus further consideration of this framework and the four ideal types of understandings of teaching within a new CBHE teaching excellence context.

Similarly, analysing the extent to which Wood's (2017) five foci relating to the concept of emerging pedagogy are reflected within my research categories is also new application of this concept to CBHE contexts. Even though this concept focuses more on pedagogic development and not directly about how teaching excellence, the results of my analysis can usefully inform such developments within CBHE, especially as all of the categories are collectively reflected within all five foci.

Thus, in addressing the second research question, the findings from the evaluation of my research categories of description against both Skelton's (2005) critical

framework and Wood's (2017) emerging pedagogies approach is a contemporary application of both these perspectives within a new context relating to HE teaching excellence understandings within a CBHE teaching context. The second research question also seeks to examine the extent to which my research findings will inform policy as highlighted below.

8.6 Informing Policy

The results of this study inform policy by highlighting the extent to which teaching practitioners within CBHE are aware of TEF and more importantly the level of their engagement with it. For me, the most important way this research informs policy is by highlighting the need for any assessment of CBHE teaching excellence to explicitly recognise the contextual features of CBHE such as the specific characteristics of students, the need to demonstrably credit 'intangible assets' (Robertson et al 2019, pp10-11), and the technical knowledge and skills priorities of its curriculum and teaching, learning and assessment strategies. The fourth category of description, which is the most complete understanding within my research, signifies an institutional focus on transforming communities as experiences of CBHE teaching excellence in line with current Government plans to root FE Colleges, including CBHE, even more deeply within their communities. My research outcomes should thus contribute to the policy developments of initiatives such as TEF to specifically address the CBHE brand of HE teaching excellence. The research question also sought explore the contribution that my findings will make within CBHE and the broader HE teaching practices, which is considered next.

8.7 Contribution to CBHE and Wider HE Teaching Practice

My research findings have practical significance as the findings from this research have been triangulated with CBHE practitioners who were not part of the research sample and this helped to identify the extent to which my participant understandings relate to the views that exist within the wider CBHE practice. My analysis shows that CBHE teaching practitioners had very little direct engagement with the TEF initiative at institutional level. The results of this research should provide institutional leadership with evidence to address the priority for engaging practitioners who are actively and routinely involved in teaching in any decisions on CBHE pedagogic development. Further, my research outcomes have the potential to inform CBHE staff development to facilitate 'conceptual development through conceptual expansion' by highlighting the level of variation in understandings between the categories of descriptions and the nature of expanding awareness in more complete understandings within categories further up the hierarchy (Akerlind,2010 p39).

In summary, findings from both research questions contribute to the research debate on HE teaching excellence, contribute new knowledge on CBHE teaching excellence and inform both policy learning and practice development. In addition, this research develops the phenomenographic approach by specifically extending it to the new context of pedagogic practices within CBHE. However, as with any research, I acknowledge the potential limitations of my work, which I discuss below along with the strategies employed to address them.

8.8 Limitations of the Research

The sample for my research was a purposefully selected pool of CBHE teaching practitioners, and although the sample characteristics related generally to the sector as a whole in terms of gender and job profiles, they are limited geographically to a selection of CBHE sites in the North and Midlands of the country, with a particular bias to the North West of England. I acknowledge that my research findings on the different understandings present a 'contextualised snapshot' (Anderson et al, 2012, p172) of the participants' accounts of CBHE teaching excellence and that the research reports my interpretations of these understandings (Cossham, 2017). Despite my efforts to bracket myself, and to demonstrably set aside my own pre-conceptions and biases (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000), I acknowledge that my background and experience is likely to have influenced the findings in some way.

Further limitations relate to the use of semi-structured interviews as the sole method for the development of the categories of description, ('the most important result') (Marton, 1986, p33). My research interview data was also generated from a highly situated context, and within the specific 'conversational partnership' (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000, p302) between myself as a lone researcher (Sandberg, 1997) and my participants. However, outcomes of experiences from studies informed by phenomenographic principles are seen as partial in any case (Marton and Booth, 1997). Within the chapters on the research approach, I made a determined attempt to make explicit detail on the processes I followed, so that researchers and practitioners can decide the level to which my research methods were appropriate and the trustworthiness of the interpretations I made. Taking Akerlind's (2002) advice for sole researchers using the phenomenographic approach, I sought to provide

external validity (Sin, 2010) by ensuring communicative validity (Akerlind ,2010) to enable the practical transferability of my research. I did this by disclosing how the different decisions were taken and by ensuring the independent review of my findings within the workshops and on-line consultations mentioned above, which helped to further assess the extent to which my findings reflect current practice. The above external engagement, and supportive supervisor review, engagement in conferences of the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) on TEF and phenomenography along with the robust strategies I employed to ensure my research findings were valid and as reliable as possible has helped to address some of the potential limitations of my findings.

8.9 Future Research

My detailed review of the interview data collected has enabled me to assess the extent to which this data could potentially enable further quantitative and qualitative research. Phenomenographic enquiries are mainly qualitative but the data from such studies have been used within some quantitative research studies. In principle, my research could support three areas considered below.

Study one could involve a two-phase process to include an initial small-scale quantitative study based on the analysis of individual transcripts to provide numerical coding of the level of engagement within the understandings within the categories of description, as one transcript can relate to more than one category but not always to the same depth; and this could be followed by a second stage qualitative study exploring the reasons for the stage one results with a new group of participants.

The second area of suggested research involves the opportunity to explore a consistent theme that has emerged throughout the interview data. This theme explicitly highlights the lack of recognition of important achievements of students which cannot be measured or quantified, described as ‘intangible assets’ (Robertson et al, 2019), which is particularly important for CBHE and recognised by my participants.

The third area of research would be to repeat my current study with a sample of HE teaching practitioners from alternative providers (eg Private or not for profit Institutions), which is similarly an area which has not widely been explored, but which is becoming more embedded within the HE sector.

8.10 Personal Learning

I have 30 years’ experience within CBHE as a practitioner at levels to Senior Quality Manager, augmented by working as a reviewer and quality manager for the QAA, all of which gave me a firm basis for my research. Before I entered the Doctoral programme, my academic discipline was Law, and my research experience within my MPhil was a small mixed method exercise to supplement the substantive legal analysis addressed within that research. This study was the first time I had operationalised phenomenography as a research approach in a substantial piece of research, although I had undertaken a small-scale research project as a major assignment on my doctoral programme. I enjoyed doing that work and that experience encouraged me to opt for a research design informed by phenomenography for my doctoral thesis. Learning that has emerged from my research has been extensive, especially in clarifying the implications of the specific

ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that underpin phenomenographic research with the single aim of describing what were recognised as critical aspects of variation within the categories of description. Data collection and data analysis stages have also provided ongoing learning opportunities within CBHE teaching contexts.

This research and policy analysis gave me insights into current literature and policy contexts on HE teaching excellence. Importantly, I feel that the research offered me the opportunity to learn how to offer distinctive perspectives on CBHE teaching excellence through my own thinking and writing and to put forward my research participants' accounts of their understanding of such excellence. I wanted to give voice to my participants and feel privileged that they were willing share their experiences and different perspectives with me, allowing me to understand what CBHE teaching excellence means to this important group of practitioners.

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