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Using capital, habitus and field to explore Foundation Year students' Higher Education experiences

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ABSTRACT

This article explores Foundation Year students' experiences of Higher Education learning. The research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and provided a unique opportunity to formulate factors which contribute to the success of a Foundation Year programme. During the pandemic, the demand to study from home, created uncertainty as to whether students, classically with low confidence, reliant on university support, would cope away from a high level of face-to-face guidance during national lockdown. This article draws on qualitative data from interviews with six students from one University in England. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital demonstrate students can develop capital through a Foundation Year programme. This capital can be utilised during extreme learning situations like COVID-19. The findings show that the students felt prepared for independent, online learning due to the capital they had developed during the Foundation Year of their course. Initial analysis, from this small-scale project, identifies five factors which suggest an environment which is conducive to achieving study success for Foundation Year students. These factors contribute to a shift of habitus from when they first started at university.

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KEYWORDS

Foundation Year; capital; habitus; field; widening participation; COVID-19

Introduction

The aim of this article is to explore Foundation Year students' Higher Education (HE) experiences during COVID-19, with a view to suggesting factors which contribute to the success of a Foundation Year programme. This paper explores whether the Foundation Year students in this research were disadvantaged because of the shift from face-to-face online learning and considers whether they had acquired the skills and confidence to be successful in this unfamiliar environment. Although this is based on a small-scale study, the initial findings are useful to prompt further research and indicate possible factors for the development of other Foundation Year programmes. Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field will be used as a theoretical framework to structure this paper.

The emergence and value of foundation year programmes

Opportunities for students who fail to meet university entry threshold standards are beginning to expand, through the growth of Foundation Year programmes. Foundation Years are an integral part of a four-year degree, with the Foundation Year (Year 0) being entry onto the three-year degree for students who fail to meet entry requirements for undergraduate degrees or have been out of

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education for a long time. A Foundation Year eases students back into the educational environment, providing a stepping stone into university (Prospects 2019).

Access to Higher Education (AHE) courses were first established in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland in the 1970s prior to the establishment of Foundation Year programmes (James, Busher, and Suttill 2015). AHE courses were originally seen as the only option for widening participation or students with low university entry qualifications (Busher and James 2019). Student numbers on AHE courses have declined recently as numbers on integrated Foundation Years have tripled due to the growth and popularity of Foundation Year courses across the United Kingdom (OfS 2019). Foundation Years are popular with students as they can study on university campuses, access university resources and feel part of the university environment from the start.

Students on widening participation courses often hold a fragile sense of learner identity (James, Busher, and Suttill 2015). Briggs, Clark and Hall (2012) argue that an HE learner identity is essential to university success. A fragile identity could be due to possible previous educational inequalities (Busher and James 2019), or negative educational experiences (Webber 2017), as well as low academic self-esteem (James, Busher, and Suttill 2015). Previous educational institutions (institutional habitus) can also limit students progression opportunities from secondary school to university or portray their horizons as limited (Smyth and Banks 2012). Past learning experiences can create anxiety and academic doubt (Busher and James 2019), leading to a lack of academic confidence.

Some non-traditional students, such as parents, may experience tension, balancing the demands of study, work, and family life (James, Busher, and Suttill 2016; Webber 2017). Mature students with families may have competing demands from their family for time and energy (Webber 2015, 2017), along with being breadwinners, child carers and spouses (Busher and James 2019). Having a lack of time may affect their academic confidence whilst on the course.

All of these factors often create uncertainty for widening participation students making them feel like university is an unachievable goal for them and not for 'people like me' (Webber 2014, 97). These uncertainties and tensions can affect Foundation Year students' learner identity and academic self-belief. Therefore, creating opportunities for the growth and development of academic confidence and skills is an important function of a Foundation Year programme.

Effects of COVID-19 on teaching pedagogy

In December 2019, China detected an infectious disease (COVID-19). On NaN Invalid Date NaN, it was declared a global pandemic (World Health Organization 2020). At the time of writing, there were 290,959,019 confirmed cases and 5,446,753 reported deaths globally (World Health Organization 2022). The first UK lockdown in March 2020 dramatically affected people's lives impacting health, working life, school attendance and everyday activities. Campus' closed, moving university teaching online from March 2020 (Corbera et al. 2020), to slowdown the easy transmission of the virus (World Health Organization 2020). Students went from face-to-face teaching to online learning in rapid succession. University staff had to balance online learning and the challenges of supporting students who were feeling uncertain (Corbera et al. 2020). Students had to contend with poor internet connections, home schooling and financial stress to create time and space to study. Therefore, the ability to engage in online learning highlighted inequality amongst students (Corbera et al. 2020).

Students, in this research, moved from face-to-face teaching to online learning instantaneously. Students were offered online synchronous lectures via Zoom, a video conferencing tool. This unfamiliar learning platform was useful in lectures, as students could learn together and access 'break out' rooms for small group discussions. As lectures can be asynchronous or synchronous through Zoom, this programme was delivered in real time, though the sessions were all recorded. Dias et al. (2020, 211), claims that 'the disadvantages exceed the advantages, when compared to classroom interactions', for example weak connections, inferior quality and technical issues can be an issue for some students (Archibald et al. 2019). This paper explores whether the Foundation Year students in this research were disadvantaged because of the shift from face-to-face online learning

and considers whether they had acquired the skills and confidence to be successful in this unfamiliar environment.

Using Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital as thinking tools

Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital can be used as 'thinking tools' (Jenkins 2002) to question the role of education in the reproduction of inequality (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, 1970). Bourdieu's tools will be utilised in this research and will assess whether lockdown heightened Foundation Year students' educational disadvantage. As Bathmaker's (2015) research on field in Further Education and Higher Education environments claims, we cannot assume that if students cope in one field that they can cope in another.

Students enter the world of HE with habitus; '... a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. These dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes' (Bourdieu 1991, 12). Dispositions are unconscious and ingrained; assimilated through early childhood experience, becoming second nature affecting how we act and response to social situations (Bourdieu 1991). Dispositions are 'enduring but not unchanging' (Edgerton and Roberts 2014, 7) and are '... endlessly transformed, either in a direction that reinforces it ... or in a direction that transforms it' (Bourdieu 1990, 116). HE can reinforce a student's disposition of thinking they are not good enough academically or can transform this perception when they achieve assignment success. For example, Foundation Year students can initially lack academic confidence because of habitus derived from unsuccessful or negative educational experiences. This may affect their ability to have a go at educational tasks. As a student's habitus is fluid, it changes as they interact with different fields (James, Busher, and Suttill 2015) as habitus is not independent of field or capital (Maton 2014).

Field is the social space in which interactions take place; there are rules, boundaries and positions occupied by agents within this (Thomson 2014). Within the field of HE, students learn the 'rules of the game'; how to act as a university student, knowing set expectations and how to be part of the academic community. Bourdieu viewed education as reinforcing class inequalities as students are viewed as having advantages or disadvantages depending on capital that they bring to this field (Thomson 2014). These capitals are economic, social, cultural, and symbolic (Bourdieu 1991).

Economic capital accrues certain advantages within HE (e.g. books, access to a personal laptop, private tutor to improve writing skills). Hence, those with greater economic resources can have increased chances of success at HE level (Bourdieu 1991). For example, many Foundation Year students have to reduce working hours in order to study (e.g. Tony in this research). This affects their access to finances and may result in digital poverty (e.g. unable to purchase a laptop), which gives them a disadvantage to other students.

Social capital is the social connections or membership of a group, affiliation to these groups can be used to one's personal advantage to elevate an individual's social standing (Bourdieu 1991). Social capital has the potential to produce or reproduce inequality within the educational system, as Foundation Year students may not have the social connections to help them be successful in the application process. In addition, they are often first generation HE students, lacking the support of family members or friends who have been to university, this may create inequalities (e.g. in this research, Terri, Kate, Diana, Hannah). In contrast, mutual support, reciprocal relationships, co-operation, and trust are essential features of Putnam's (2000) definition of social capital. Putnam's (2000) definition of bonding capital is relevant to Foundation year students as they build relationships, a sense of community and cohesion. Through bonding capital, they can develop 'sociological superglue' (Putnam 2000, 23). Putnam's work allows us to explore further aspects of social capital to supplement the insights of Bourdieu.

Cultural capital is advantageous to those starting out as university students (Winkle-Wagner 2010). Bourdieu (1986) defined cultural capital (tastes, manners, skills, credentials) as embodied (knowledge within us), objectified (material objects used to indicate social class)

and institutionalised (values formal education, degree, prestige). In this research, we will focus on the institutionalised cultural capital of academic skills, legitimate knowledge of educational systems and the understanding of university processes. Like many other widening participation students who have had poor educational experiences (Busher and James 2019), Foundation Year students may lack this type of cultural capital when entering HE.

Symbolic capital is the accumulation of these capitals, giving the recipients community prestige or honour. Within this paper, I will focus specifically on social and cultural capital, as these capitals were most significant in the data. This paper is focusing on capital generation rather than the end result of the prestige and status of passing the degree.

I have argued that HE is not a level playing field, cultural and social norms in education can cause inequalities and those with more capital can receive advantages (see also Duckworth and Cochrane 2012). Capital can also accrue further advantages (Thomson 2014) as the field allows '... one form of capital to be converted into another' (Bourdieu 1991, 14). For example, access to social, cultural, and economic capital affects the routes to university, e.g. those with greater social capital benefit from the support and guidance of their family and friends when accessing a university programme (Brändle 2017). Therefore, those with access to high stocks of family capital (social, cultural, economic, and emotional capital from within the family) may feel better equipped to cope with HE (Webber 2017).

Arguments raised through literature, suggest that students with limited access to capital are at a disadvantage that can be difficult to overcome. I argue, in this paper and previous papers (Webber 2014, 2015), that this does not need to be the case. I claim that students with limited access to capital can develop confidence, study skills and peer relationships through a supportive university environment. Research by James, Busher and Suttill (2015, 16) maintains that students can '... shift the habitus (Bourdieu 1990) with which they had entered the field' of their widening participation course, enabling them to become accomplished independent learners. Therefore, it is possible for widening participation students, such as Foundation Year students, to develop academic confidence on an HE programme. My research questions are:

- Can Foundation Year students overcome the negative positioning, which suggests that a lack of social and cultural capital affects HE success?
- Can Foundation Year students master their anxieties based on their negative prior educational experiences (Busher and James 2019), create a positive learner identity, and use this new identity to cope as independent distant learners during lockdown?

Methods and ethics

This qualitative small-scale research study investigated Foundation Year students' experiences of studying during the first national UK COVID-19 lockdown (during the period of March–July 2020). Like Teti, Schatz, and Liebenberg (2020, 1), I argue that 'Qualitative inquiries are our best method for capturing social responses to this pandemic'. Constraints with this methodology concern the small-scale nature of this research. However, this study does not attempt to generalise all students' experiences but to illuminate the experiences of one new cohort of Foundation Year students during the unprecedented time of studying during lockdown. The research aimed to give students a platform to share their thoughts about how the crisis had affected their learning experiences (see also Corbera et al. 2020). Practice was questioned, to analyse whether the emerging programme had provided sufficient support for students to prepare them for year one of their degree. The COVID-19 pandemic gave the researcher an opportunity to explore this topic in the unlikely adverse conditions of studying during national lockdown. The researcher was a member of the teaching team; the Research Assistant was independent to the teaching team.

Table 1. Participants details.

| Name | Age | Previous qualifications | Studying with children living at home |
|--------|-----|---|---------------------------------------|
| Diana | 36 | Level 3 National Vocational Qualification | Yes |
| Elise | 19 | A level | No |
| Hannah | 20 | BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) Extended Diploma | Yes |
| Kate | 36 | Professional qualification | Yes |
| Terri | 33 | Level 3 National Vocational Qualification | Yes |
| Tony | 35 | Professional qualification | No |

Data was collected from six self-selecting students (see Table 1) from one University in the South West of England. These were the first cohort of students on a new Foundation Year programme consisting of Early Childhood Studies and Education students.

Interviews were conducted by a Research Assistant via Zoom (thus practising social distancing). The advantages of a Zoom interview include being cost-effective, time efficient and are able to be recorded with ease (Archibald et al. 2019). Participants' body language could be assessed, non-verbal clues could be responded to, enabling the Interviewer to adapt the interview accordingly (Archibald et al. 2019).

Each open-ended interview lasted approximately 30 min and took place at the end of the academic year. The questions were centred on three key themes:

- Student experiences of studying during lockdown
- Student experiences of online learning
- Student experiences of developing undergraduate study skills.

Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and analysed by the Research Assistant using a thematic framework, enabling the data to be reviewed, connected, and summarised (Spencer et al. 2014). The Research Assistant conducted an initial preliminary analysis, thus reducing the potential for confirmation bias. Ethical approval was sought and gained, from the University and students were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. BERA guidelines were followed which included the ethics of consent, data management, confidentiality, right to withdrawal etc.

Findings

The initial research findings indicate many varied factors that contributed to a Foundation Year student's ability to cope with their studies and be successful in passing their course during a national lockdown and beyond. It is important to summarise the students' general experiences of studying during lockdown (including the challenges) before considering these factors.

The realities of life as a student during lockdown

Although the students felt fully supported by the University and academically able to cope with their studies during lockdown, studying in this period was challenging. During lockdown, students had to manage a multitude of stressors alongside of their university programme. This was different for each student and included illness, changes to employment and family structure, financial pressures, sharing the home space with others, isolation and dealing with home schooling. During lockdown, the 'campus' field changed to a 'home' field; this was not without its challenges, particularly for the mothers in the study. As with Savage's (2021, 11) research, the COVID-19 pandemic 'exacerbated existing issues for parents who are studying. This disproportionately affected women who remain the primary carers and manage family life'.

I'm having to find time around everybody else. I'm managing to get things done ... but I am missing that time where I can sort of go 'right, I've got four hours to myself to just block everything out and get on with it'. (Diana)

The three most common stressors or barriers to learning the students experienced during lockdown were studying in the home environment, a lack of motivation and issues with technology. Studying in the home environment caused issues of trying to find a quiet space to study but also affected their motivation to study:

It's really hard to sit because not everyone has got the study space because if a lot of people are working from home ... their kitchen has already been taken up with people doing actual paid money jobs. (Elise)

Lockdown interrupted their daily routines and they missed access to the campus, lectures and their peers, this affected their motivation as did family demands for some students including home schooling (see Corbera et al. 2020; Savage 2021). Before lockdown, they had adjusted to the field of the HE campus and learnt the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 98). This all changed when they were in the daily, unfamiliar study environment of home. The rules had changed, as they had to cope with the changing positions at home. For example, trying to negotiate roles such as mother, daughter, partner, carer, 'schoolteacher' against the juxtaposed position of HE student. This placed an 'additional unpaid care burden' on the women in this study during the lockdown (see also Power 2020, 7).

Five students struggled to cope with motivation and fitting their studies into their daily routines during lockdown:

So, before lockdown, I had a specific day ... I would take the children to school. I would then go home, and then I would have the whole day to study without interruption ... But now, it's so much harder. (Terri)

This contrasted with Hannah who enjoyed studying during lockdown:

I feel like studying during lockdown has made lockdown better for me and more enjoyable ... It's been quite easy for me to fit studying in and around my family life. (Hannah)

Being responsible for their own learning as well as home schooling their children caused inequalities for some students (see also Corbera et al. 2020; Savage 2021), though they were able to use their newly developed study skills of time management to get their studies completed. Being able to utilise support from a partner, who was working from home, also helped Kate to persist with her studies and remain motivated (see Stone and O'Shea 2019):

My husband's self-employed, so he's been working from home. So, it's probably been easier than it could have been if I was completely on my own. (Kate)

Problems with technology were an issue for some students as well as the time delay in getting everything set up before they could begin their lectures. Many students discussed the difficulties:

But a lot of the time is taken up with just making sure everybody's there and they can hear and they can see ... 'Hands up if you can see me', ... , 'Can you switch your microphones off because there is background noise?', 'Can you all tell me if you can see my PowerPoint', 'Oh, the screen's frozen again'. (Diana)

Despite these challenges, the students were all successful in their studies as they were able to achieve and pass all their assignments during lockdown. All students described their experiences of online learning positively even though they had to cope with a change of pedagogy: moving from face to face and small group interactions, to online activities. This research identified five factors (see Figure 1) which contributed to the students' managing their academic studies during lockdown.

These factors demonstrated that their newly acquired skills and academic confidence, acquired prior to lockdown, contributed to them achieving success. Although it could be argued that the acquisition of these factors is useful for all university students and these are built implicitly into any programme, I assert there needs to be a focused approach by the staff team to ensure that these factors are developed for Foundation Year students. Therefore, actively fostering these factors is crucial as not all Foundation Year students will have acquired the cultural and social skills to be equipped and successful in the field of HE. Students are more likely to achieve academic success,

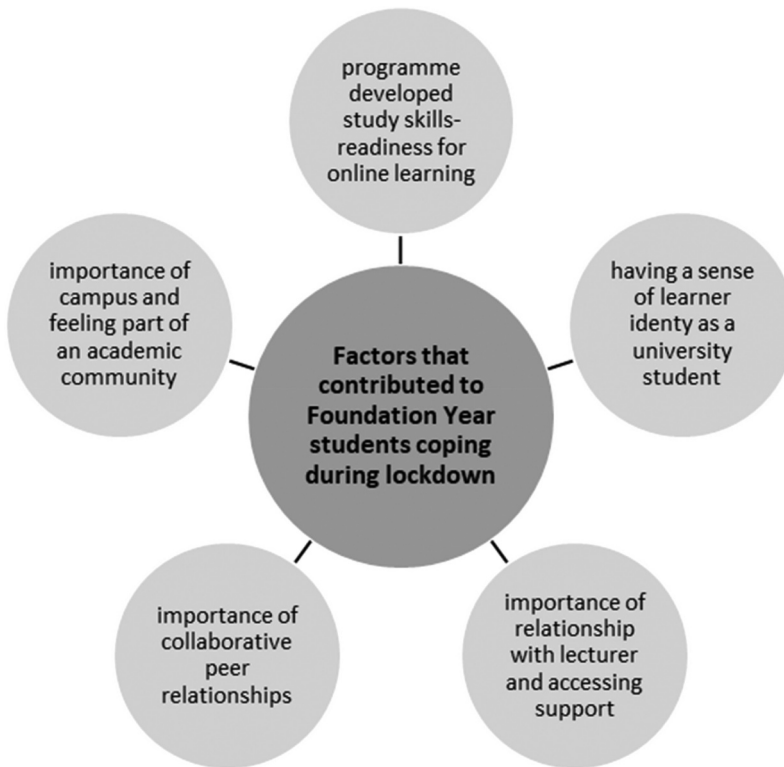


Figure 1. Factors that contributed to the Foundation year students coping with their university studies during lockdown.

when they have been supported to develop HE habitus, through social and cultural capital generation achieved through learning new skills and dispositions.

Having a strong sense of learner identity as a university student

Students did not have a strong sense of academic learner identity on entry to HE. They had limited reserves of cultural capital to draw upon and discussed not being organised at the start of the Foundation Year. Students lacked academic confidence, as previous habitus may not have enabled them to be disposed to effective study skills or have academic motivation:

In the beginning I felt maybe it meant that I perhaps wasn't good enough to attend university or to jump onto a degree. (Diana)

Many students talked of imposter syndrome, which is often prevalent amongst high achieving women (Clance and Imes 1978) but also mature students who feel that they need to prove themselves (Chapman 2015). Diana doubted her ability to do well or succeed:

I guess, I have impostor syndrome, where I think someone's going to tap me on the shoulder in a minute and say, 'You shouldn't be here, you need to get out. You're not smart enough to be here'. I still think that's going to happen but I just feel valued.

Initially, it was difficult for them to shake off their previous habitus of educational failure or lack of self-belief. Although widening participation students can come with a habitus of a 'fragile learner identity' (James, Busher, and Suttill 2015, 10), lacking academic confidence in their abilities, the Foundation Year students' confidence developed as the course progressed. Demonstrating that learner identity is not fixed but socially constructed (Lawler 2014). They began to change their

learner identities through opportunities to collaborate and develop their academic skills, through receiving positive feedback and achieving on their assignments. Their experiences on the Foundation Year enabled them to develop a particular kind of HE habitus, based on academic skills development, which gave them increased learner confidence development and a distinctive sense of self-achievement. This meant they were prepared for online and independent learning as they had learnt to be successful, confident students before lockdown began:

I feel like staff at the university are genuinely invested in the skills they're giving you and the way you deliver that back out into the world. I can't fault the Foundation Year at all ... (Diana)

Students' academic identity changed due to staff believing in them prior to lockdown, positioning them as equal participants in knowledge construction and situating them, as stated by Busher and James (2019, 648), as 'competent and independent learners'. The self-belief they had created and the shift to being a competent academic learner, sustained them through studying in the turbulence of lockdown. Through studying online together during lockdown, their cultural capital, based on skills development and self-achievement, continued to grow and develop. By the end of their programme, they viewed their student identity quite differently moving from a 'lacking' deficit description (Gibson et al. 2019), to one of the optimism and confidence for the next year of their studies:

I feel eager to start in September [year 1] as I believe I have been well equipped for what the standards are and what to expect. ... I have come out of it a different person than I was before – with different opinion, views, and values. I would most definitely recommend a foundation year to anybody. (Hannah)

Hannah experienced a change of habitus and dispositions, affecting how she thought and felt about herself. She moved from a deficit self-view to a positive self-perspective, which enabled her to experience success on the programme. By developing cultural capital, in the form of academic skills, she had a good understanding of university processes and expectations that enabled her to feel confident transitioning into year 1.

Programme developed study skills – readiness for online learning

Students were ready to embrace online learning, due to the study skills they had developed on the programme before lockdown, enabling them to feel confident to study independently:

I have enjoyed it – using Zoom calls I believe was just as useful as face-to-face teaching and it was great that we were able to still have that personal feel to learning ... (Hannah)

Students felt ready and prepared for online learning as they had a growing strong sense of learner identity (Kebritchi, Lipschuetz, and Santiago 2017) and had already practiced the skills of accessing resources online and contributing to online discussion forums. The Foundation Year course helped the students develop cultural capital through the development of study skills resulting in an emerging sense of confidence as learners:

But as far as skills go, I feel like, by March, we had really taken a chunk out of a lot of the skills that I feel we're going to need for the first year ... I really appreciate the experience and the learning opportunity that I've had within the university. (Diana)

When lockdown began, the students were used to non-didactic, interactive ways of teaching and learning which is not what they had expected on this type of course (see also James, Busher, and Suttill 2015). They were well practiced in using discussion groups, participating in group work, and having a strong voice and opinion. Unlike research by Dias et al. (2020), the Zoom break out rooms were effective; this could be due to the small class sizes and students already being used to collaborative small group working. Therefore, transferring this type of group learning to Zoom interactive break out discussion rooms felt quite comfortable and safe for the students. They were able to continue with familiar ways of learning:

... when they did the breakout rooms that was quite good because it was a smaller group. But then you could talk to each other between yourselves in a smaller group, which was easier, rather than lots of people talking all at the same time ... (Terri)

Importance of relationship with lecturer and accessing support

The students felt incredibly supported during lockdown, they had an increase in personal tutorial time when all lectures moved synchronously onto Zoom. In contrast to research by Sanders and Daly (2013), the students felt that the course was taken seriously; they were treated as equals with the staff, in an environment where their views and perspectives were sought and valued:

I think the staff are incredibly welcoming and really helpful ... I just feel valued. (Diana)

The students believed that the staff support and teaching were excellent and the relationships they had built in the first 6 months of the year continued through lockdown. This research demonstrated that the culture of the course was important (see also Busher and James 2019). Staff encouraged collaborative peer working in and outside of the classroom, they encouraged students to be competent and independent learners. These were all crucial factors in the programme success, measured at the end of the year by excellent student retention and overall achievement. These factors and activities enabled students to develop social capital as they developed contacts and networks (Bourdieu 1991). They also created bonding social capital through peer group support, trust and solidarity (Putnam 2000).

Previous research by Sanders and Daly (2013, 53) argued that some students felt that a Foundation Year had low status as they did not feel like 'proper students', this was not a view shared by students in this research study. Many had assumed that this would be easy and just a Foundation level basic course, they were unprepared for the level of challenge and the status of the course:

I feel like we can discuss, we talk, we critique ... we're given that positive feedback that's, like, you're not talking rubbish, you are making sense. (Tony)

This contributed to their sense of identity as a university student, which enabled them to build academic confidence (Sanders and Daly 2013). These supportive relationships changed their habitus of not feeling 'academically able' to being positioned as competent HE learners. This type of habitus, generated through the distinctive culture and ethos of the Foundation Year, enabled the development of social and cultural capital through the activities on offer.

... it [Foundation Year programme] was really good for getting into that, studying academia, academic kind of mindset. And that really does help with just basic university skills like referencing, writing, researching, communicating ... (Tony)

During lockdown it was important to continue with the supportive relationships with the students and to give them opportunities to share their worries and concerns:

And they [lecturers] kept on asking if we were okay, and always checking in with us and making sure that we're all okay. (Kate)

Importance of collaborative peer relationships

Relationships with their peers were also a crucial factor in being a successful student during lockdown, this enabled bonding social capital to be developed through mutual support, cooperation, and trust (Putnam 2000). Previously to lockdown the students had valued working together in small groups, sharing ideas and resources. The pedagogy of the course structure facilitated peer relationships through group learning, lively discussions, and group activities. Participation in these types of

activities enabled the students to reposition and redefine their previous perceptions of themselves as learners and reconfigure this into more positive perceptions and beliefs.

And at lunch – because we have an hour gap – we [peer group] find ourselves discussing about what we've just learnt ready for the next lecture . . . I really love that concept of community and togetherness. (Tony)

Chatterjee and Correia (2020, 55) argue that 'students who had a sense of community had more favourable impressions about online courses'. The Foundation Year students had already worked collaboratively and built this sense of community prior to lockdown. They saw the value of positive interpersonal relationships, which enabled them to work successfully together. Therefore, transitioning to online learning was straightforward as these relationships and ease at working with each other was already established. This connection, or 'sociological superglue' (Putnam 2000, 23) enabled them to continue to develop their study skills as a group and contributed to their success on the programme.

I think it was really helpful, everything that we had done up until then [developing university skills prior to lockdown] . . . So, we all support each other and help out and send notes or whatever we have got to each other. (Terri)

As argued by Gibson et al. (2019), positive peer relationships also helped students when they were struggling with their motivation:

Staying motivated, keeping in contact with people from the same course and knowing that sometimes if I'm struggling then I always have people to talk about it with and know that I am not the only one feeling this way. (Hannah)

Continuing to develop this sense of community online was also a key factor in supporting the students. Creating opportunities to continue with group work, discussions and online social occasions helped the group to stay as a cohesive supportive network and develop social capital (Bourdieu 1991). However, this was not the same as having face-to-face interactions and was not a long-term solution for Foundation students:

Online learning is strange. To remove that physical interaction with somebody, it's really bizarre. (Diana)

I just can't wait to get back and get back to some sort of normality. (Terri)

The importance of campus and feeling part of an academic community

The importance of the campus field and feeling part of an academic community were also significant factors in students believing that they could succeed. These findings echo research by MacFarlane (2018, 7) who claim that the 'university campus environment clearly had an impact in facilitating a learner identity'. Many students in this research wanted the 'university experience', so chose to study at university rather than accessing an access course at a college:

I had to do the Foundation Year because my qualifications are too old to count . . . and I think it's better to come here than college . . . so I could get used to it quicker, I suppose. (Kate)

Being present on the campus was more than just the face-to-face interactions. Before lockdown, the students had underestimated the importance of the campus to themselves. They had a connection with the physicality and space of the campus:

I miss campus a lot, it's strange, I would have thought that being at home, I'd be more relaxed, more comfortable but I'm not . . . Yes, so with the lockdown and not being able to go in, I did feel quite, almost like I'd lost a limb . . . I definitely absorbed much more and work a lot better being on campus to the point where I was even toying with the idea of charging up my laptop and just going to sit on a bench on campus and to work there. (Tony)

This demonstrates the importance of the physical field in developing a changed habitus and reformed perception of themselves as learners.

Discussion

When students begin their Foundation Year, they can frequently come with the misconception that they are not 'academic enough' for a degree. Their previous dispositions (Bourdieu 1991) and experiences (Maton 2014) incline them to lack confidence in their own educational abilities and they often have a lack of self-belief. Many are first-generation university students and may have varied access to different forms of capital (see also Webber 2017). Like Tony, they are often on the programme because of a 'lack of choice more than a personal choice', as they failed to reach the entry requirements for their chosen course. Some students in this research, for example Diana, had a negative understanding of what it may be like fearing that they were 'not good enough to do this'.

These findings demonstrate that when entering university, Foundation Year students may have limited resources of cultural or social capital. They may lack *objectified* knowledge of books and literature, *embodied knowledge* of HE systems and desired study skills, or *institutionalised* capital of the appropriate qualifications to progress straight on to a degree (Bourdieu 1986). Initially, prior to starting university, they may have few social capital connections or opportunities to gain advantages through networking (Bourdieu 1986).

Although the acquisition of capital prior to starting university is viewed as advantageous (Duckworth and Cochrane 2012; Winkle-Wagner 2010), many students who have been out of education for some time may feel disadvantaged as they may have lacked previous opportunities to accumulate capital (Webber 2014, 2017). Although Reay, Ball and David (2002) claims that mature students often have a high dropout rate causing limited HE progression due to a lack of capital, I maintain that a HE has the potential to change a student's identity and achieve positive educational outcomes (Webber 2015, 2017). Bathmaker's (2021) and Tomlinson's research (Tomlinson 2017) on graduate capitals identifies the important role a university can play in bridging the capital gap for widening participation students. Tomlinson (2017) also argues that capital can be formulated, acquired and deployed with HE settings. Therefore, a well planned and managed Foundation Year, enables previous educational inequalities to be readdressed though offering widening participation students an opportunity to access the university curriculum and support to enable them to succeed. Wider universities processes can also help to reduce inequalities such as additional financial support (e.g. hardship funds), no detriment assessment policies during Covid-19, learning support with academic writing etc. The Foundation Year programme can also develop students' skills in several different ways. For example, the students discussed being taught how to use the library and how to manage their time. With lecturer guidance, they learnt how to work in groups, extend their computer skills and develop analytical skills through supported discussion groups. All of these activities were planned as part of the curriculum offer.

As indicated through this small-scale research, and highlighted by Sanders and Daly (2013), the selection of teaching staff is important to ensure that appropriate teaching strategies are adopted to meet the needs of Foundation Year learners. For these learners, a supportive study environment and tutor support can enhance a student's social and cultural capital, redefine their identities as learners and enable them to become confident and accomplished (James, Busher, and Suttill 2015; Webber 2017). The Foundation Year in this research, gave the students a motivational space to transform, critically reflect and reposition themselves as academic learners through the development of capital (in particular, social, and cultural capital). Thus, moving from a deficit framework of 'lacking' to a more student-centred perspective (Gibson et al. 2019).

The skills acquired, in the period of study before lockdown, gave the Foundation Year students a good grounding to cope with virtual learning and cushioned them against the stress of studying during COVID-19. This changed their habitus in terms of self-belief, as during lockdown they did not doubt their abilities as learners, which contrasted with when they started the programme. In lockdown, the main stresses they experienced were studying in the home environment, a lack of motivation and issues with technology. Some of these stressors were gendered, giving increased pressure for mothers who studied and juggled family life. None of the students felt isolated from the

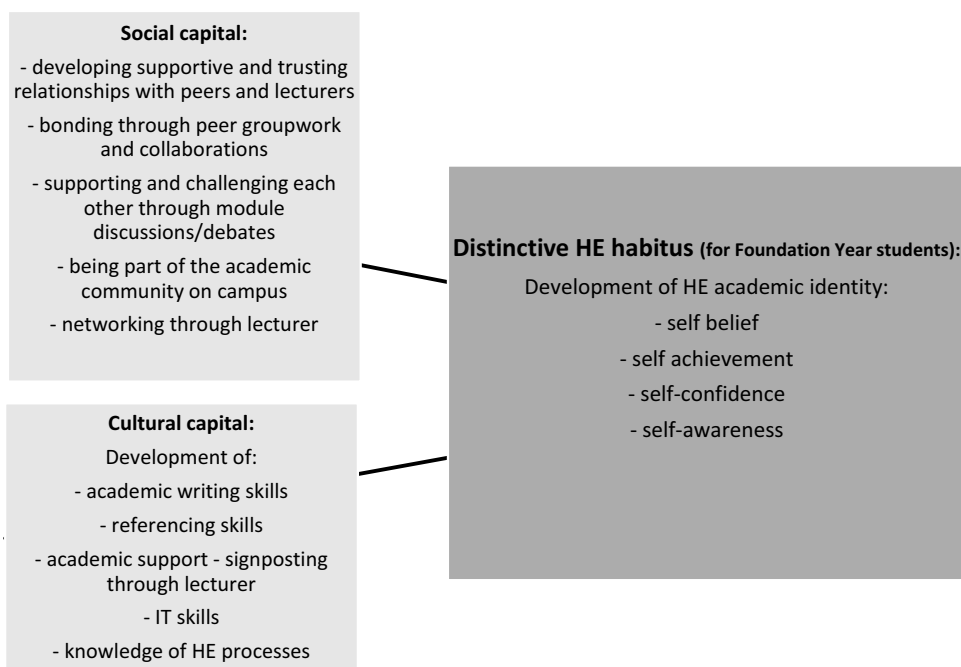


Figure 2. Factors that contributed to the development of a distinctive habitus (for Foundation year students transitioning into HE).

group, even though they missed the campus. None of the students felt unable to cope with the set tasks. Although online learning was not without its challenges, the students were prepared and able to cope with this change showing their readiness for university learning, this is the main purpose of the Foundation Year (Sanders and Daly 2013).

The Foundation Year did so much more than enable progression. I argue that the Foundation Year, in particular, enables a distinctive form of HE habitus to develop (see Figure 2).

The Foundation Year gave the students a unique chance to change their habitus and develop an academic identity as university students. Thus, raising a student's expectations as to what is possible (Reay 2004). This was achieved through opportunities to develop social and cultural capital, which repositioned them as competent, confident, and independent learners. This shows a distinctiveness between Foundation Year students and traditional entry students. Developing these aspects of capital (see Figure 2), contributed to their academic confidence, thus shifting the habitus in which they had entered HE (James, Busher, and Suttill 2015). Like Bathmaker (2021) and Tomlinson's research on graduate capitals (Tomlinson 2017), the environment, culture and HE field of learning enabled their habitus to change and capitals to develop. As Foundation Year learners, they gained the cultural capital of study skills, knowledge of HE processes and confidence around the campus. They developed social capital through networking (Bourdieu 1991) and establishing supportive and trusting peer and staff relationships, which gave them a sense of identity and belonging (Putnam 2000).

Conclusion

This research highlights students' experiences of studying during lockdown and exposes important insights into how one Foundation Year programme gave students, skills and qualities that enabled them to cope with their studies in challenging times. Although it is important not to over generalise from one research case, the findings indicate that being on a Foundation Year is

more than just a stepping-stone onto a degree programme. The Foundation Year in this research study enabled students to begin to change their previous dispositions and habitus, see themselves as confident and capable learners and give them access to HE which previously they would have missed out upon. This research suggests that when a staff team create an environment of taught study skills, actively develop a sense of student university learner identity, and facilitate effective and supportive lecturer relationships, capital can be developed, and academic success can follow. Through facilitating a supportive, collaborative peer community course environment, students can develop academic confidence and skills that enable them to cope in turbulent times (in this case studying during lockdown), as they have developed the social and cultural capital to be self-motivated and successful university students. Through shifting their HE habitus, the Foundation Year students in this research demonstrated that they could succeed in the field of HE, even when this field changed during a global pandemic such as COVID-19.

It is important to note that it is not just being a student on a Foundation Year that shifted their habitus, but the structure, ethos and underlying beliefs of the Foundation Year led by the Programme Manager and staff team. A Foundation Year programme has the potential to work towards equality for students rather than reproducing inequality. Thus, as claimed by Smyth and Banks (2012), an academic institution has power in breaking down barriers of inequality. This research suggests this can be achieved through facilitating the development of capital and enabling social mobility for Foundation Year students. The research has highlighted that lockdown didn't disadvantage this particular group of Foundation Year students as they were able to create a positive learner identity in the period before lockdown, and draw upon this to be successful independent distant learners.

The knowledge gathered in this study could be useful for other Programme Leaders and lecturers when developing Foundation Year programmes.

Lessons for other Foundation Year programmes:

- Create a whole team-teaching pedagogy for Foundation Year students where they feel valued, enabling re-positioning of their previous habitus to create new ways of being.
- Develop students' academic confidence through a comprehensive programme of study skills to develop educational cultural capital and attributes of self-motivation and academic resilience.
- Facilitate social capital opportunities for peer group relationships and peer learning opportunities through group work and problem-solving activities.
- Offer a range of opportunities to foster a sense of community amongst staff and students.
- Connect students with the campus to facilitate an attachment and sense of belonging and place.

Through creating these learning opportunities, Foundation Year students can create academic learning dispositions that prepare them for university level study. This can be achieved through developing a good understanding of university processes and expectations including study skills, developing academic confidence and educational resilience. Learning to value the importance of developing a HE community through supportive and collaborative peer relationships will also support them in their university studies. It is also evident that developing these dispositions can potentially sustain students through turbulent and adverse learning situations as illustrated through these students' experiences of studying during a national lockdown.

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