# PAUL GREENBANK CLAIRE PENKETH

'I guess it must be up to me'

- student autonomy and reflections on 'writing' the undergraduate dissertation



#### About the dissertation

- **BIG** writing
- Research based
- Analysis and critical thinking

Autonomous learning

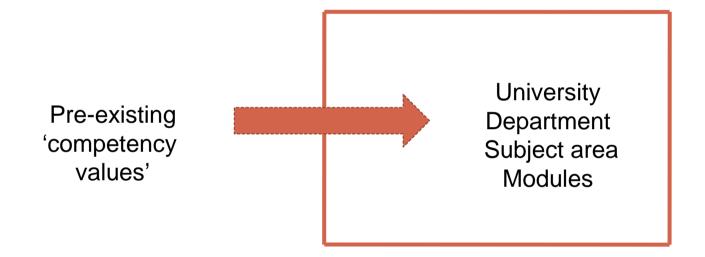
## Methodology

- Action research using an informed perspective to develop practice
- The students
- Loosely structured interviews to promote discussion and obtain rich narratives

## **Writing Histories**

- A range of experiences
- The academic essay a shared experience
- Being 'fed'

## Factors influencing student autonomy



Confidence

Aspiration levels

## Choice of topic

• Students were conscious of the need to satisfy the expectations of tutors

Trade-off

#### Starting the dissertation

- Tutor expectations v. Student behaviour
- Distracted
- Deliberate strategy
  - o 'I work better under pressure. I know if I've got a deadline close up I will get it done. I've never once had an extension since I've been here'.

### Supervisory relationships

- Students generally utilised their dissertation tutor
- Some students were, however, willing to ignore their advice
  - 'I always do my introductions first, it helps me to do it first'.
  - It's what I'm used to, it's what I've always done through all my education. Like I said it works for me'.
- Aware of the contested nature of research

#### **Conclusions and Questions**

Dissertation tutors should aim to provide an environment that encourages autonomy by encouraging:

Dialogue

#### **Critical reflection**

How does your experience of supervising undergraduate dissertations compare to the findings of this research?

How do you think our suggestions will work in practice?