

**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



Pre-existing
'competency
values'



University
Department
Subject area
Modules

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
 - '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?