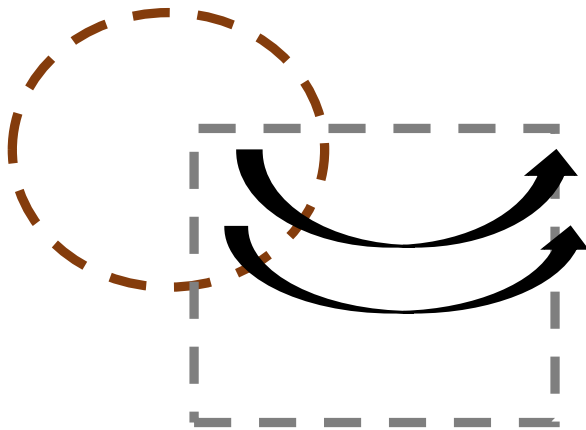


Mature Part-time Undergraduates: rethinking retention and belonging

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retention – and belonging

At the heart of successful **retention** and success is a strong sense of **belonging in HE** for all students. This is most effectively nurtured through mainstream activities that all students participate in ... our definition of 'belonging' is closely aligned with the concept of student engagement, encompassing both academic and social ...

... choosing to continue to live in the family home rather than university accommodation or with student peers ... combining part- or full-time study with employment ... postponing entering HE and thus studying as mature students. All of these factors may make it difficult for students to fully participate, integrate and feel like they **belong in HE**, which might have a detrimental impact on their **retention** and success.

Thomas (2012) *Education at a time of change; What Works*

who belongs?

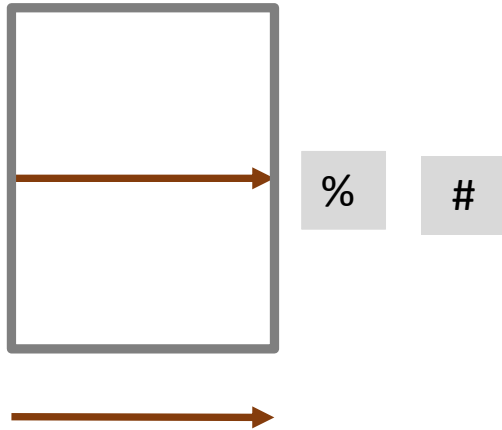
- dominant ideas of 'belonging in HE' are problematic in the context of a diverse undergraduate population
- mature part-time undergraduates occupy a peripheral – and increasingly precarious – position in English HE
- *... mature, working-class and minority ethnic students often choose to apply to post-1992 universities in order to increase their chances of belonging in an academic culture ... to reduce their feeling of 'otherness'.
(Read et al. 2003).*

thinking 'spatially'?

space is the product of social relations, shaped by power
(Massey, 2005)

- pay attention to the spatial relationships of higher education
- consider how space is appropriated and inhabited and by whom
- uncover power dynamics within the institution and in campus spaces
- make visible dominant **and** marginal practices of belonging in HE
- inform institutional practice

for example...

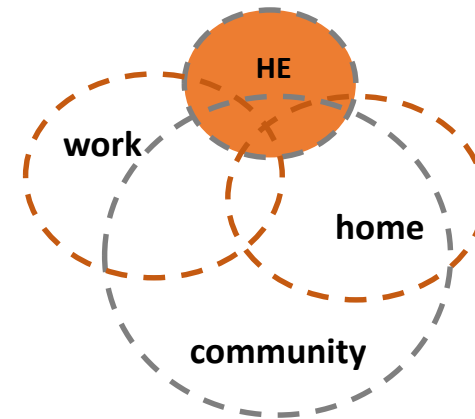


institution-centric retention

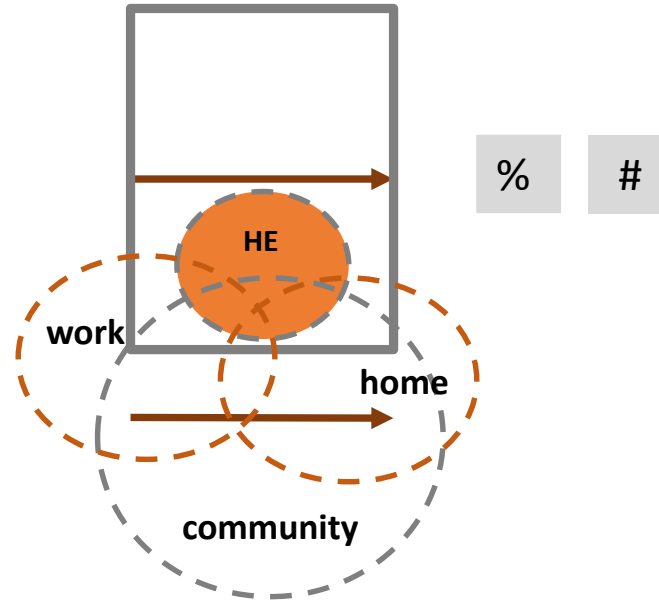
- linear
- bounded
- homogenous

mature part-time engagement in HE

- heterogeneous individuals
- simultaneous, multiple commitments
- complexity



what happens when...?



problematizing 'belonging'

Belonging ... is often used in a way that implies a **common understanding** of what belonging is and why belonging is important. Needless to say, no such common understanding exists.

Practices of belonging within a place not only mark the claims of particular groups to particular territories, but in doing so, inevitably identify '**the other**', excluding on the basis of difference, defined and implemented through relationships of power.

(Mee and Wright 2009, p772)

belonging as inherently geographical, spatial



- academic: disciplinary/cohort
- social: sports/enrichment/voluntary/leisure
- presence on campus/outside contact hours

... **a geography of places** – the bars and ‘student-friendly’ pubs where students can meet new people, the hall of residence, the canteens ... the student community is stitched together out of these places; it relies on this geography.

(Crang 1998, p.5)

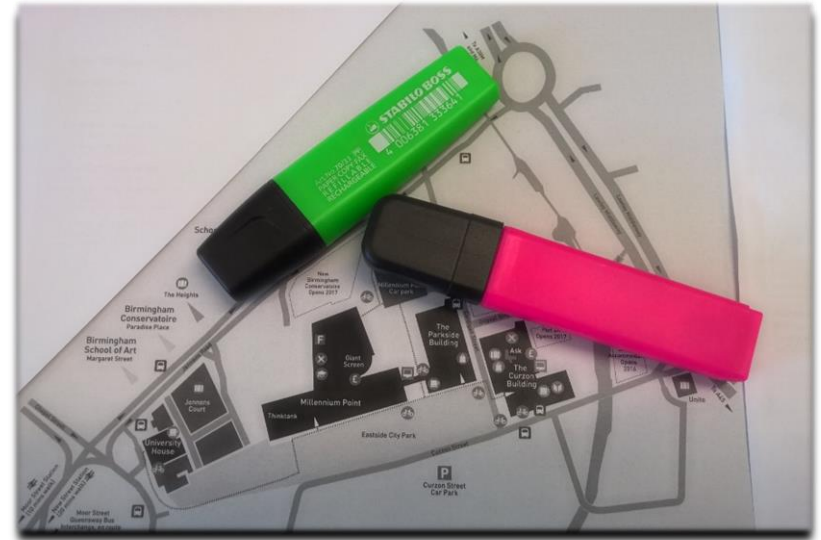
research context

- multiple case study 2013-2015
- 4 English universities
- 3 post-1992, 1 pre-1992
- 8 site visits
- 25 interviews with staff:
(strategic, senior management, teaching , support)
- 5 student workshops



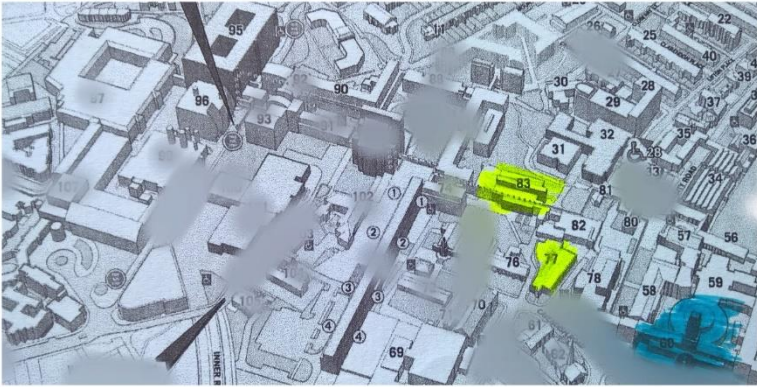
mapping belonging

- student participants
- campus maps/coloured pens
- hot/cold spots, different colours
- trigger for discussion
- on the map? off the map?



Participant-generated visual materials are particularly helpful in exploring the taken-for-granted things in their research participants' lives ... involves the participants reflecting on their activities in a way that is not usually done; it gives them distance from what they are usually immersed in and allows them to articulate thoughts and feelings that usually remain implicit.

mapping belonging



spaces between ...

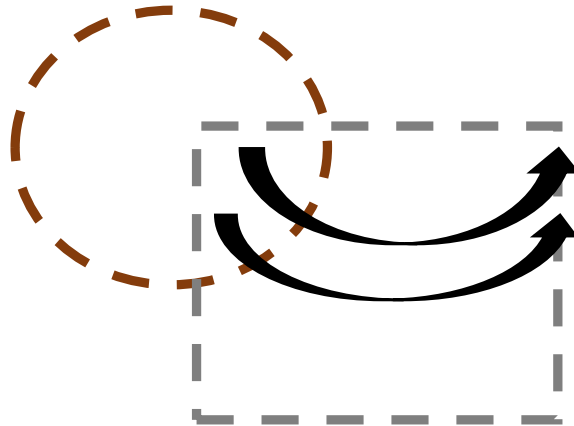
- an institutional rhetoric of belonging and student experiences
- belonging as uniform and finite and belonging as **relational, contested, dimensional**

dominant practices of belonging	negotiated engagement with space
social and sports activities	Facebook pages/groups
halls of residence	cohort identity
voluntary work	professional identity
Student Union	Imagined futures

belonging in HE – common space(s) experienced in multiple ways

shared ownership

- localised – tutors, teachers, support staff
- at the interface of the individual and the institution
- coinciding interests, common effort, through and beyond the university
- bridging rhetoric and experience with compensatory behaviours
- hard to measure, critical work



thinking spatially about retention and belonging

- spatial relationships of HE
 - relationships of power
 - dominant and marginal practices of belonging
- negotiating space(s) to belong
- dimensions of belonging, spaces between: cohort, professional identity
- implications for institutional practice?

Questions?



Thank you

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