Psychological perspectives on progression and development within elite
developmental performance domains

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Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

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This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references.

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Abstract

Understanding the processes involved in effective talent development represents an aspiration for individuals involved in elite performance (Abbott and Collins, 2004). The available literature acknowledges a generally significant and extensive commitment required to effectively transition to an elite stage (Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer, 1993). The aim of this thesis was to explore the developmental trajectories of dancers in an elite dance company from the perspectives of staff and performers. The research deployed a series of qualitative methods (including observations, interviews, focus groups and audio diaries) to gain an insight into the conditions supporting and/or inhibiting individuals’ progression. The data were initially discussed in the context of two motivational theories (i.e., achievement goal theory, [Nicholls, 1984], and self-determination theory, [Deci and Ryan, 1985]). However, as the thesis evolved, the data increasingly challenged the utility of these respective theories. Subsequently, several sociologically oriented concepts developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) were introduced to better make sense of the findings. The introduction of the sociological perspectives was reflective of the evolving nature of the thesis; such an evolution was conceptual, methodological and personal in nature, and was documented in a series of reflexive ‘bridging commentaries’. The final picture that emerges is of an elite context characterised by social dynamism, historicity and complexity. In this regard, the thesis reflects the importance of taking an increasingly ‘social’ view of talent development; one that engages with the culture of an organisation, and how this culture both shapes and is shaped by the individuals who experience it.
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## Contents

Chapter One: **Preface** ........................................................................................................1

Chapter Two: **Review of literature** ...............................................................................7
  2.1. Introduction ..............................................................................................................7
  2.2. Talent Development ............................................................................................7
  2.3. Motivation ............................................................................................................10
  2.4. Achievement goal theory ...................................................................................12
  2.5. Achievement goal theory: Summary and conclusions .....................................32
  2.6. Self-determination theory ..................................................................................34
  2.7. Self-determination theory: Summary and conclusions ...................................43
  2.8. Methodological considerations ..........................................................................45
  2.9. Ethics ..................................................................................................................53
  2.10. Significance of the study ....................................................................................54
  2.11. Research aims .................................................................................................56

Chapter Three: **Observations** ..................................................................................57
  3.1. Methodological notes ........................................................................................57
  3.2. Representing data: Style and content ................................................................63
  3.3. Setting the Scene ................................................................................................65
  3.4. Tales from the studio ..........................................................................................65
  3.5. Preliminary theorization .....................................................................................70
    3.5.1 Achievement goal theory ............................................................................71
    3.5.2. Self-determination theory .......................................................................76
  3.6. Summary ............................................................................................................79

Chapter Four: **Bridging commentary one** .................................................................81
  4.1. Personal reflections ............................................................................................83
  4.2. Methodological reflections ...............................................................................85
  4.3. Theoretical reflections ......................................................................................89

Chapter Five: **Staff interviews** ..................................................................................92
Chapter Six: **Bridging commentary two** ........................................ 118
6.1. Methodological reflections .................................................. 119
6.2. Conceptual reflections ....................................................... 124
6.3. Personal reflections ......................................................... 127

Chapter Seven: **Staff focus group** ........................................ 130
7.1. Methodological notes ....................................................... 130
7.2. Focus group analysis and reporting .................................... 135
7.3. Setting the scene ............................................................. 139
7.4. Theoretical considerations ................................................ 141
7.4.1. Habitus ................................................................. 142
7.4.2. Field ................................................................. 145
7.4.3. Capital ............................................................... 147
7.5. Focus group themes ......................................................... 149
7.5.1. ‘Dependent upon their background’ .................................... 149
7.5.2. ‘They do have liberty’ .................................................. 157
7.6. Summary ........................................................................ 161

Chapter Eight: **Bridging commentary three** ......................... 163
8.1. Theoretical reflections ....................................................... 163
8.2. Personal reflections .......................................................... 165
8.3. Methodological reflections ................................................ 166

Chapter Nine: **Dancer focus group** ...................................... 169
9.1. Methodological notes ....................................................... 169
9.3. Setting the scene ............................................................ 171
Chapter Ten: Bridging commentary four
10.1. Personal reflections
10.2. Theoretical reflections
10.3. Methodological reflections

Chapter Eleven: Life story interview
11.1. Introduction
11.2. Life story research
11.3. Methodology
11.4. Analysis
11.5. Helen’s story
11.6. Theoretical discussion (story analyst)
11.7. Life story themes
11.8. Closing thoughts

Chapter Twelve: Audio diary
12.1. Audio diary
12.2. Analysis and presentation
12.3. Summary

Chapter Thirteen: Epilogue and conclusive thoughts
References

Appendices

Appendix One: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form
Appendix Two: Staff interview guide
Appendix Three: Staff interview analysis
Appendix Four: Focus group guide (staff)
Appendix Five: Focus group guide (dancers)
Appendix Six: Life story interview guide
Appendix Seven: PhD Thesis Map
Appendix Eight: Selected redacted field notes
Chapter One: Preface

This Preface contains a preliminary introduction to the main thesis. Its purpose is to guide readers through the research process engaged in, and provide some context to the constructed findings. It is also to frame the evolutionary nature of my disciplinary and conceptual progression as manifest in the thesis, and to promote a multilayered ethnographic perspective that invites the reader into the lives of those who inhabit a world-leading dance company.

Following this brief introduction, a structured review of literature (Chapter Two) is undertaken, where, in broad terms, talent development is introduced as the focus of the thesis. This thematic is initially linked to contemporary psychologically-grounded motivational theories (i.e., achievement goal theory and self determination theory). The literature review considers the core elements of these perspectives, whilst also identifying limitations that eventually impact on the sense making that is brought to the data analysis and discussions. As the review progresses, epistemological and methodological questions allied to post modernist research increasingly come to the fore. The review concludes by examining the methodological structure that ultimately informed the investigation whilst also presenting the key research aims. These relate to:

1. Exploring the perception of dancers who experience life as part of a high performance environment.

2. Developing an insight into the staff’s perceptions and considerations of dancers’ ongoing development, and their role in it.
3. Examining the conditions that both support and inhibit individual progression and development within a professional dance company. And;

4. Reflecting on my development and journey as a researcher from methodological, theoretical and personal perspectives.

Chapter Three (Observations) describes and outlines the initial fieldwork undertaken; a series of observations that spanned several months. The observations provided an insight into the dance environment and served as a period of reconnaissance. During this time, I was given an opportunity to familiarize myself with the environment and the key actors within it. Equally, it gave the ‘residents’ an opportunity to register my presence, and acknowledge an involvement that would ultimately span several years.

The observations are followed by a bridging commentary (Chapter Four). Bridging commentaries are introduced at regular stages of the research process and serve as reflective and connecting discussions that update methodological, conceptual and personal developments. Here, I invite the reader to consider some of the key factors that influenced my attention and subsequent interpretation of events. The bridging commentaries also introduce, and reflect upon, the theoretical evolution that occurred in my personal development and progression.

Following the observations, I was afforded an opportunity to engage selected staff members in individual semi-structured interviews, which, in turn, form the basis of
Chapter Five. Several theoretical considerations and, emphasising the work’s developmental nature, key themes constructed following the observation phase informed the interview structure. The staff offered important perspectives and shared a series of anecdotes that helped identify the relevant processes that existed within the dance environment under study. At this time, the motivational theories previously identified continued to maintain some prominence in the thesis. However, the interviews helped to contextualise and also challenge my initial thinking regarding them.

Bridging commentary two, encased in Chapter Six, discusses access implications and the critical role of the research ‘gatekeeper’. Here, I acknowledge and discuss in more depth the interview dynamics, and concede the potential for some form of ‘impression management’ from the staff members involved. Explicit in these discussions, is recognition of my contribution to the interview process. This second bridging commentary concludes with an introduction to the staff focus group.

The focus group presented in Chapter Seven was designed to encourage interaction and debate amongst key staff members. Emphasising the evolving nature of the thesis, the structure of the staff focus group was informed by the key findings and questions emerging from the preceding interviews and observations. Additionally, the utility of the motivational theories (i.e., achievement goal theory and self determination theory) were put under further scrutiny. The findings presented reinforced the evidence from previous data collection phases, whilst also accepting the uncertainty inherent in the research process. Several context specific findings were constructed and, for the first time in the research process, I felt I was truly getting an insight into the daily
challenges the staff experienced. Evidence from this phase of the research further challenged my thought processes and conviction towards the capacity of the motivational theories to adequately explain the context under study. Subsequently, several sociological perspectives constructed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) were introduced and used to interpret the data.

I reflect on this position during the third bridging commentary (Chapter Eight). This period was characterised by uncertainty and a renewed sense of curiosity. I was, at this time, more content to embrace a sense of uncertainty and, with this, a need to explore alternative and perhaps complementary explanations. With increasing contact and developing methodological approaches, my depth of understanding improved and the limitations of the motivational theories expressed in the literature review became increasingly apparent.

The dancers’ focus group, depicted in Chapter Nine, presented the first opportunity for performers to voice their perspective on the environment, and counter or supplement views previously provided by the staff. The focus group analysis draws attention to the emotional nature of the interactions, and the value the dancers attached to the opportunity to share their thoughts and considerations. Perspectives shared by the dancers aligned with the traditional narrative reported by their acclaimed predecessors who had dominated the stage in a previous age. The significance placed by the dancers on their body, on perceptions of pressure, and on power dynamics within the group, encouraged further use of the theoretical lenses provided by Bourdieu.
More specifically, the writings of Bourdieu (1986) offered an alternative to the motivational theories previously engaged with, and helped to reframe my thinking regarding key issues related to individuals’ progression and development. The ‘discovery’ of the sociological perspectives represented a significant moment in the thesis, and provided a release from the constraints that had restricted my thinking. They helped me in my sense making, allowing different explanations for progression and development to emerge. The sociological perspectives are reflected upon during the fourth bridging commentary (Chapter Ten). Here, I consider the significance of the theories in both research and applied contexts.

The final stages of the thesis, presented in Chapters Eleven and Twelve, offer an in-depth view of an individual dancer’s experience as related to her progression and development. The life story (Chapter Eleven) and audio diaries (Chapter Twelve) offered a level of closure to the research process through affording a detailed insight into the developmental experiences of one particular individual.

An audio diary that accounted for the day-to-day lived experiences further supplemented the life story. The audio diary permitted access to the daily experiences and challenges of an individual’s life often characterised by other roles and responsibilities. Understanding an individual’s daily experiences, in the context of their life story and with an emerging knowledge of the environment and traditions, provided a more complex insight into progression and development.

The thesis concludes with an epilogue (Chapter Thirteen), which hosts my final reflections and offers recommendations for individuals engaged in research and / or
applied support. During a 5-year period, I spent intermittent episodes in the performance environment documented in this research process. During this time, I developed a heightened understanding of the traditions and expectations that defined the environment and, aligned with the core research aims, the processes that encourage progression and development.
Chapter Two: Review of Literature (completed 2009)

2.1. Introduction
This chapter is broadly split into several definitive sections. Firstly, the area of talent development is introduced and establishes the context for the remainder of the Review. The sections that follow consider talent development from a motivational perspective, with a specific focus on the respective contributions of two eminent theories; achievement goal theory and self-determination theory. The Review then proceeds with an appreciation of relevant methodological matters, an examination of the ethics associated with the work, a brief revisiting of the significance of the study, before stating the core research aims. Its basic function in the thesis then is not only to summarise related research as may be considered common place elsewhere. Rather, taking account of the developmental nature of the project (as outlined in Chapter One), the Review attempts to go beyond only searching for information to build the case that the ‘work hasn’t been done before’, to include the identification of relationships between the literature and the proposed field of study (Boote and Beile, 2005). Consequently, it includes an examination of methodology and methods, in addition to a subsequent outline of the ethical considerations associated with the current work. Its greater purpose then, is to provide a context for the research and to justify it, in addition to outlining how the project fits into, and builds upon, the existing body of knowledge (Boote and Beile, 2005).

2.2. Talent Development
Effective talent development is argued as being critical to the enhancement and sustainability of elite performance groups (Martindale, Collins and Abraham, 2007).
The qualities that characterise elite performers have received considerable attention from researchers (e.g., Gould, Dieffenbach and Moffett, 2002). Despite these contributions, the same commentators have called for a greater understanding of how these qualities are cultivated and developed (Gould, Dieffenbach and Moffett, 2002). Patrick, Ryan, Alfeld-Liro, Fredricks, Hruda and Eccles (1999) acknowledged that further research is required to identify those factors that help to support adolescent commitment, in order to ensure that early signs of potential are maximised (Durand-Bush and Salmela, 2001).

In that regard, Abbott and Collins (2004) suggested that,

‘Predictive models of talent that are based on profiles of successful athletes are likely to have limited success, as they employ a static conception of those variables perceived as key, rather than acknowledging that values are likely to alter over time’ (p.396).

Whilst the knowledge acquired from exploring the characteristics of elite performers would intuitively appear to have value, the challenge remains to identify the developmental qualities necessary to transition into the elite category (Abbott and Collins, 2004). One aspiration of this work is to create development protocols focused on shortening the journey to expertise, thus enhancing the probability of consistently optimal performances on an elite stage (Starkes, Helsen and Jack, 2001).

Bloom (1985) is often credited for a pioneering approach towards talent development, following his exploratory investigation focused on the development of 120 talented individuals acquired from a range of performance disciplines including music,
academia and sport. Bloom (1985) concluded that achievement was reliant upon more than simply talent. More specifically, he considered talent development to be a long-term process that involved supporting others over time. This viewpoint is shared by Gould, Diffenbach and Moffett (2002), who suggested that talent should be viewed as a developmental process, not an ‘all-or-nothing’ phenomenon.

Young and Medic (2008) suggested that the journey to expertise might be characterised by a myriad of different challenges that demand individuals demonstrate an intense and enduring persistence to their selected discipline. Indeed, individual athletes are expected to negotiate a series of normative (i.e., anticipated and expected) and non-normative transitions that occur on athletic, psychological, psychosocial and academic levels (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004). Additionally, regularly cited challenges have included the pressure to consistently perform, to make sacrifices and to deal with the constraints imposed by delayed gratification (Holt and Dunn, 2004). Such challenges are further compounded by the thinking of Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer (1993) who argued that 10,000 hours or 10 years of effortful and occasionally non-enjoyable preparation is the prerequisite to achieving expert status. Unsurprisingly, evidence suggests that only a limited percentage of adolescent sport performers (that show early signs of talent) display the required effort and commitment to improve (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde and Whalen, 1993).

Research into talent development has been undertaken from a range of philosophical and theoretical perspectives. For example, Durand-Bush and Salmela (2002) identified multiple support components including training, coaching, parental support, enjoyment, recovery, age, psychological skills and attributes, and innate abilities as...
key factors involved in the attainment of sports expertise. Gould, Dieffenbach and Moffett (2002) explored the development histories of US Olympic champions, and highlighted the mutual impact of individuals and institutions. Gould et al (2002) identified both direct (e.g., teaching) and indirect (e.g., environment) influences. Equally, Morgan and Giacobbi’s (2006) believed that the successful comprehension of talent development could only be acquired by taking an interactional approach that appreciates and emphasises the combined influence of personal and environmental (e.g., Baker, Horton, Robertson-Wilson and Wall, 2003) factors on progression and regression in performance and development.

Ericsson et al. (1993) had earlier postulated that motivation, effort and resources were the major constraints influencing deliberate practice and subsequent development. Several researchers and applied practitioners equate high attainment to ‘talent’ plus high motivation (e.g., Heller & Viek, 2000; Ziegler & Raul, 2000). The literature review to follow builds upon the thinking of Heller and Viek (2000), and Ziegler and Raul (2000) by considering how motivational perspectives might offer insights into factors such as sports participation and attainment. Firstly, from a theoretical perspective, influences and contributions to motivated behaviour are considered. Practical and applied perspectives highlighting the impact of motivation on progression and development complement these considerations.

2.3. Motivation

An understanding of motivation has been viewed as pivotal for those wishing to initiate and influence the incentive and drive to act in others (Mallett, 2005; Kingston, Harwood & Spray, 2006). Kingston, Harwood and Spray (2006) acknowledge a level
of frustration that many definitions of motivation place an emphasis on the intensity and direction of effort, whilst neglecting an appreciation of the concept’s multifaceted nature. Nicholson, Schuler and Van de Ven (1995) recognised the multifaceted nature of motivation in deploying the following definition: ‘a dynamic, internal state resulting from the independent and joint influences of personal and situational factors…(it is) an individual state affected by the continuous interplay of personal, social, and organisational factors’ (p.330).

Woodruffe (2006) stated that ‘there is not much point in employing people at all if you are not going to take steps to make them want to give their best to you’ (p.3). This straightforward and pragmatic statement applies whether you are a PE teacher trying to maximise student motivation and learning (Chen, 2001; Corbin, 2002; Koka and Hein, 2003), senior management attempting to improve nursing morale and performance (McFadzean and McFadzean, 2005; Khomeiran et al, 2006), or managing directors aiming at increasing productivity through motivated staff (Lin and Chang, 2005). Most relevant in the present discussion are the implications for a practitioner charged with supporting individual performers’ progression and development.

Mallett and Hanrahan (2004) suggested that ‘a good understanding of an athlete’s motivation is critical to a coach designing an appropriate motivational climate to realise an athlete’s physical talent’ (p.183). Theoretical and empirical research has highlighted the importance of perceived competence in relation to motivation (Koka and Hein, 2003). More specifically, Koka and Hein (2003) argued that perceptions of competence are critical in determining the level and type of motivation that
individuals experience. An understanding of how managers and educators identify and implement strategies assisting competence development is, therefore, essential to motivation (Tabari Khomeiran, Yetka, Kiger & Ahmadi, 2006).

Several theories have been proposed that examine the relationship between competence and motivation (Kingston, Harwood and Spray, 2006). For example, within achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984), perceptions of competence are considered to be a by-product of the created environment. Duda (2001), who later developed achievement goal theory within the discipline of sport and exercise psychology, identified how the motivational attributes of the environment influenced sport involvement in psychological, emotional and physical ways. Although achievement goal theory has been a dominant force in sport psychology for some time, it is not the only theoretical view on motivation. Indeed, Kingston, Harwood and Spray (2006) identified the existence of thirty-two distinguishable theories of motivation. The present discussion focuses on two of the more prominent and contemporary ones in this regard; achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984) and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985).

2.4. Achievement goal theory

Following a brief outline of the key concepts associated with achievement goal theory, the present discussion will revisit the origins of the theory citing its evolution from school based educational environments into sport and performance settings. The section provides an informed critique of the theory, whilst importantly discussing its applicability to high performance developmental environments.
Achievement goal theory evolved from a concept originally introduced by John Nicholls (1984) to help explain and support motivation in young children. Nicholls (1984) believed that demonstrating ability is a central human motive and suggested that the goal of achievement behaviour was to develop or demonstrate ability to self or others, avoiding perceptions of low ability. Within such thinking, competence is considered to be ‘a critical mediator of performance and persistence’ (Duda, 1987, p.131).

According to Nicholls (1984), the criteria an individual employs to judge ability (i.e., perceived competence) is based on being task or ego involved. A task-focused individual is likely to judge performance based on their self-referenced ability, with an emphasis on learning and improvement (Gano-Overway and Ewing, 2004). In contrast, an ego-focused individual evaluates their performance with reference to others (Nicholls and Miller, 1983; 1984; Vazou, Ntoumanis and Duda, 2006). Nicholls (1984) also suggested that the criteria individuals use to judge competence is influenced by age, individual and situational factors.

Individual goal perspectives provide a cognitive framework that influences the way individuals interpret and react to different events and outcomes. If an individual (based on the established framework) considers their performance to be successful, this is expected to contribute to an enhancement of their perceived level of competence and positively influence their motivation (Nicholls, 1984). An individual with a tendency towards an ego involved state might be expected to interpret interpersonally based negative feedback as failure, possibly leading to defensive and avoidance type behaviours (Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Porter and Tansky, 1996).
more general terms, achievement goal literature has linked ego-type engagement with a number of undesirable outcomes, including reduced enjoyment, reduced interest, increased levels of state anxiety, and minimal intrinsic motivation (Duda, 2005). In later paragraphs of this review, the negativity associated with ego-type engagement will be challenged (e.g., Hodge and Petlichkoff, 2000).

In contrast to outcomes related to ego-involvement, the literature tends to suggest that an individual engaged in a task involved state will examine their results and identify necessary changes to their strategies in preparation for their next effort (Porter and Tansky, 1996). In a task-involved state, negative feedback is interpreted more positively, resulting in adaptive reactions. Generally speaking, task involvement has been reported upon positively throughout the motivational literature. For example, task involvement has been linked positively with teachers’ ratings of student effort (Ferrer-Caja and Weiss, 2000), performance improvement and satisfaction (Balaguer, Duda, Atienza and Mayo, 2002), levels of enjoyment (Hom, Duda and Miller, 1993; Kim and Gill, 1997), greater psychological skill use (e.g., Harwood, Cumming and Fletcher, 2004), increased self-esteem and physical self worth (Reinboth and Duda, 2004), and reduced levels of state and trait anxiety (Yoo, 2003). Additional research has also suggested that individuals perceiving task conditions are less likely to report psychological withdrawal from an activity or experience burnout (Crespo and Reid, 2007).

Following its original inception in schools settings (Nicholls, 1984), achievement goal theory has been recognised as an approach capable of explaining motivated behaviour in a range of disciplines. Roberts (1984) is regarded as the individual responsible for
first observing the possible merits of adapting Nicholls’ approach to sport and other performance settings. Roberts (1984) believed that the theoretical versatility of achievement goal theory could provide an insight into drop-out amongst children from structured sports programmes. Duda (1987), following Roberts’ (1984) initial transfer (from education to sport), sought to explore the concept’s viability in sport, and in particular the extent to which the theory could be adapted to children’s sport.

Duda (1987) highlighted five areas supporting the application of Nicholls’ approach to sport. These included a) that conceptions of ability vary with age, b) that demonstrating competence reflects a subjective perception of goal achievement, c) that athletes may be task or ego oriented, d) that behaviour reflects the aforementioned goal orientation, and e) that goal differences reflect individual preferences. These have subsequently and indirectly become areas of contention for the research that has followed.

Harwood, Hardy and Swain (2000), following Duda (1987; 1992) and Hardy’s (1997) earlier studies, developed the first in a series of papers designed to advance achievement goal theory in sport. Continuing along a similar line, Harwood and colleagues (2000) commended Nicholls’ (1984) original work before identifying several conceptual and measurement concerns limiting the theory’s adoption in a sports context. The paragraphs that follow do not follow a chronological sequence. Instead they reflect coverage of the key constructs central to achievement goal theory. Specifically, I explore how key definitions and concepts have evolved to be more applicable to performance-focused environments. I subsequently discuss how existing literature views the respective contribution and interaction between an individual’s
dispositional tendency and the motivational climate. The section concludes by reflecting on the implications related to researchers traditional use of quantitative methods to assess an individual’s goal profile.

The definitions used by Nicholls (1984; 1989) are still largely adhered to in contemporary sport psychology literature although challenges to the primacy of task-ego structures have occurred. For example, Duda (1992) identified several differences that distinguish classroom and sports based settings and issued a caution regarding the theory’s immediate transferability. Duda (1992) questioned how key terms such as ‘ability’, ‘effort’ and ‘task difficulty’ are construed and demonstrated differently in the respective environments. Additionally, she commented on the different levels of comparison and evaluation that may exist in sport when compared to the classroom. For example, most sporting environments provide immediate feedback on performance from a result and achievement perspective. The critique developed by Duda (1987; 1992) was later evolved by Harwood and colleagues (2000; 2001) who proposed several modifications designed to make Nicholls (1984) original theory more applicable in competitive sport and performance domains.

Harwood and colleagues (2000; 2001) proposed the consideration of three involvement states. Designed to counter the challenges inherited from a conceptual model established in education settings, the involvement states included ego, task-process and task-product. Harwood and colleagues’ (2000) proposal represented the first of several criticisms that need to be recognised and considered in relation to the development of achievement goal theory. A task involved-product state represents a self-referenced achievement recognition that emphasises mastery and improvement.
The task involved-process state defines achievement based on effort and understanding. Finally, an ego-involved state retained the definition provided by Nicholls (1984), thus being concerned with normative superiority.

As previously acknowledged, Nicholls (1984) believed an individual’s judgment of competence (i.e., task or ego involved) was influenced by age, individual and situational factors. Many authors (Dweck, 1986; Gano-Overway and Ewing, 2004), deploying subtle variations of language, have supported Nicholls’ (1984) proposition, and promoted the significance of both dispositional tendencies and the context as the critical factors that influence the framework (i.e., task or ego) an individual uses to establish competence. The perceived environment or created context is mostly referred to as the motivational climate (e.g., Allen and Hodge, 2006). According to Allen and Hodge (2006), the motivational climate represents situational influences (e.g., the structure of a training session) and interpersonal interactions between a coach and athlete. An individual’s dispositional tendencies are considered to represent their goal profile (Fox, Goudas, Biddle, Duda and Armstrong, 1994).

Duda and Hall (2001) believed that an individual’s goal involvement status is dependent upon the strength of the environmental cues (i.e., motivational climate) relative to the individual’s goal orientation (i.e., dispositional tendency). Additionally, they suggested that an individual’s interest in the particular activity engaged in should be considered an influencing factor. The available empirical evidence supports this view (e.g., Balaguer, Duda, Atienza and Mayo, 2002; Pensgaard and Roberts, 2000). However, further research is needed to establish the interactive nature and respective influences an individual’s orientation and perception of the motivational climate have
on their subsequent goal involvement (Allen and Hodge, 2006). Equally, Kingston, Harwood and Spray (2006) identified the importance of further research that aspires to understand what influences an individual’s pre-disposition for a particular goal orientation.

Early achievement goal literature (Nicholls, 1984) suggested that an individual’s ability to differentiate between the concepts of ability and effort contributed to their goal orientation (dispositional tendency) and subsequently underpinned the involvement state experienced. It is widely accepted that conceptions of ability vary with age (e.g., Nicholls, 1984; Duda, 1992). However, the manner in which these conceptions subsequently influence an individual’s tendency for a particular goal involvement state warrants further discussion (Harwood, Hardy and Swain, 2000). Nicholls (1984) original research aimed to identify the developmental processes through which children differentiate the concepts of ability, effort, task difficulty and luck. Nicholls (1984) proposed that by the age of twelve, children are of sufficient cognitive maturity to differentiate between ability and effort. Subsequently, a task state would be reflective of an undifferentiated perception, and an ego state related to a differentiated mindset (Nicholls, 1989). According to Nicholls, the nature of the context was responsible for determining whether an individual held a differentiated or undifferentiated conception of ability at any moment in time.

Harwood, Hardy and Swain (2000) disagreed with this viewpoint and, in doing so, expanded on Hardy’s (1997) brief critique regarding goal orientations. Harwood and colleagues (2000) proposed that once an individual attains the level of cognitive maturity that permits them to view ability and effort as exclusively different concepts,
it is not possible then to have a tendency to differentiate or undifferentiate. Harwood and colleagues (2000) used the example of a fourteen-year-old swimmer to reinforce their point. They argued that at the age of fourteen, it is expected that the swimmer would have reached a level of cognitive maturity that appreciates ability and effort as two very different concepts. The swimmer differentiates between ability and effort and cannot revert back to an undifferentiated state, regardless of the context. Therefore, the emerging involvement state is not reflective of an individual’s ability to differentiate. The goal involvement experienced is determined by the interaction of an individual’s orientation (which is influenced by their age determined ability to differentiate) and the motivational climate (Harwood, Hardy and Swain, 2000).

In the above example, Harwood and colleagues (2000) identified how a young swimmer can be both task and ego involved. The task state is reflective of the need to attain personal best times, with the ego state emerging from the desire to acquire a top 3 placing. The ability to hold task and ego states at the same time raises further debate in the achievement goal literature (e.g., Hodge and Petlichkoff, 2000) and will be addressed later in the discussion. This is important, as the achievement goal literature appears reticent to explore the notion of goal profiles, in particular those of an intermediate nature.

The ability to differentiate between ability and effort is related to an individual’s level of cognitive maturity (Nicholls, 1984). Assuming most people reach this level, a predisposition to be ego orientated is likely (Harwood, Hardy and Swain, 2000). Therefore, further research designed to establish what other factors contribute to an individual’s dispositional goal orientation is necessary (Kingston, Harwood and
Spray, 2006). However, if there is an acceptance that situational characteristics are the dominating factor contributing to an individual’s involvement state, concerns regarding dispositional tendencies (orientation) are perhaps less significant.

The following paragraphs aspire to identify and critically analyse the situational characteristics that contribute to an individual experiencing a particular goal involvement state. Additionally, the significant others that help to create these environments will be acknowledged and discussed in relation to relevant supporting literature. Finally, based on the available evidence the discussion will naturally evolve to consider the potential for dual or orthogonal goal involvement states to exist at the same time (i.e., can you be both task and ego involved? Hodge and Petlichkoff, 2000).

Nicholls (1984) promoted objective environmental influences as responsible for creating a tendency for an individual to become task or ego involved. Based on this consideration, Harwood, Hardy and Swain (2000) inferred that the competitive sport context encourages and foregrounds an ego involved state. Treasure et al (2001) countered Harwood and colleagues’ (2000) argument, suggesting that objective environmental characteristics are interpreted subjectively. Arguably, the subjective nature of these interpretations is perhaps (in some way) influenced by an individual’s dispositional tendency. This further endorses the previous call for research that examines how a dispositional profile emerges (Kingston, Harwood and Spray, 2006). The interaction between dispositional tendency and situation also requires consideration.
Ames (1992) developed work by Epstein (1989) regarding the motivational character of task and ego environments. Epstein (1989) believed the motivational structure of such environments could be defined under the acronym TARGET; Task (design of activity), Authority (locus of decision making), Recognition (reward criteria), Grouping (of abilities), Evaluation (criteria for success and failure), and Timing (pace of instruction). Based on the previous discussion, the task or ego nature of these characteristics is dependent upon how they are subjectively perceived (Treasure et al., 2001). According to Epstein (1989), a task-involving climate is characterised by variety and the encouragement of personal challenges (task). Individuals enjoy opportunities to participate in decision-making (authority). A reward structure focuses on personal improvement and progress (recognition). Group work and cooperation is promoted in favour of intra team competition and conflict (grouping). Reflecting the rewards system, evaluation and appraisal is based upon the subjective criteria of personal improvement (evaluation). The final characteristics of a task involving climate in association with the TARGET acronym is the need to adjust the time structure surrounding goals and assignments to accommodate the needs of individuals athletes. In addition to promoting the need to acknowledge an individual perception of the environment (Treasure et al., 2001), the above structures proposed by Epstein (1989) provide an idealistic view of motivational conditions and, as such, demand further review, particularly with respect to practical applications.

According to Morris and Kavussanu (2008), coaches regularly convey their criteria for success through a range of behaviours. These include the group structure created, instructional commands, and how feedback and rewards are provided. Ultimately, regardless of profession (sport, dance, business or surgery), individuals will be
selected and promoted on the basis of ability and performance. Mageau and Vallerand (2003) commented that if coaches felt certain athletes would perform poorly this influenced their judgements, contributed to messages of mistrust being shared, and ignorance in recognising successful performances. Clearly, these preconceived views are likely to have a damaging effect on competence and subsequent levels of motivation.

Interestingly, Morgan and Giacobbi (2006) felt teammates provided athletes with both sporting and non-sporting lessons, and offered competition during practice. Duda (2001) had previously predicted the existence of a motivational climate-cohesion relationship determined by the coaches’ created climate. The characteristics of a task environment are expected to promote the positive form of this relationship (e.g., Carron and Hausenblas, 1998). A coach demonstrating favouritism to a group or athlete is expected to undermine the unity developed in the task environment (Turman, 2003). This is an interesting point and one that could be targeted for constructive criticism particularly as performance settings are often designed with the aim of encouraging individual aspiration and promotion.

Coaches are thought to be the agents who design practice, give feedback, share their authority and shape the sport setting to create a motivational climate contributing to their athletes’ motivation (Reinboth and Duda, 2006). Conroy, Kaye and Coatsworth (2006) suggested youth achievement goals represent the link between the coach-created motivational climate and situational motivation. The role of the practitioner would, therefore, appear to be central when considering the influence socialising experiences can exert on personal goal preferences (Gernigon and Le Bars, 2000).
Pensgaard and Roberts’ (2002) study identified how Olympic level skiers preferred a mastery motivational climate in training and that the coach played a significant role in creating the climate.

The successful development of a talented adolescent is dependent upon the existence of a support system of significant adults (e.g., Côté, 1999). Vazou, Ntoumanis and Duda (2005) believed that motivational influences extend beyond practitioners, to embrace other social agents in sport such as peers, parents and team norms. It has been proposed that these ‘others’ play five major roles (Bengoechea and Strean, 2007). The five major roles are considered; being providers of support, sources of pressure and control, sources of competence information, agents of socialisation of achievement goal orientations, and models to emulate (Bengoechea and Strean, 2007). Bengoechea and Strean (2007) suggested a social contagion of motivational orientations and attitudes exists, where others behaviours and attitudes directly influence individuals’ own expectations.

Fredericks and Eccles (2001) believed parents occupy the dual role of providers and interpreters of experience. As interpreters of experience, parents help to define what constitutes success. Previous research (e.g., Defrancesco and Johnson, 1997) had identified the significance that parents attach to winning. This certainly has implications for the manifestation of an environment that might be overtly characterised by ego qualities. Further research (e.g., Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes and Pennisi, 2006) has also found that parents sometimes have difficulty keeping winning in perspective, leading to criticism, pressure and inappropriate behaviour directed towards their children.
Rees and Hardy (2000) examined the perceived social support received by 10 high level sports performers. The authors categorised social support into four dimensions; emotional (i.e., comfort and security), esteem (i.e., confidence), informational (i.e., advice) and tangible (i.e., resources) dimensions. The emotional component of support refers to the belief that you feel cared for, with significant others providing comfort and security during times of perceived stress (Cutrona and Russell, 1990). Morgan and Giacobbi’s (2006) review of collegiate athletes identifies how athletes considered unconditional support from parents, coaches and team-mates as critical to their development. There is a fine line between offering individuals enough comfort and security to ensure high levels of confidence and motivation, and too much comfort and security, capable of promoting complacency.

With regards to esteem-focused support, an ego-involved individual who experiences successful results is likely to feel competent and high in self-esteem (e.g., Feltz and Lirgg, 2001). Feltz and Lirgg (2001) suggested athletes who display robust confidence will actively seek the challenge and motivation related to an ‘upward’ social comparison. However, losses or experiences defined as failures will contribute to expected reductions in self-esteem and subsequent perceptions of competence (Feltz and Lirgg, 2001). The control element characterising a task mindset is expected to contribute to greater stability in self-esteem (Reinboth and Duda, 2004). Sports confidence sources are dependent upon perceptions of success, which are in turn dependent on an individual goal orientation or state (Magyar and Duda, 2000).
Previous research by Harter (1999) and Covington (1992) identified how perceived ability was the strongest predictor of self-esteem. Indeed, Kaplan and Maehr (1999) suggested an environment perceived to be high in its ego-involving features would be hazardous for the development and maintenance of self-esteem. An individual relying on the criteria defining an ego goal structure then was perceived as lacking the control required to prevent fluctuating levels of self-esteem. Deci and Ryan (1995) termed this contingent self-esteem; esteem based on standards determined interpersonally. The concept of contingent behaviour will be further explored following the introduction of self-determination theory in the latter stages of this chapter.

Previous research has shown the significance of social support and its impact not only on motivational variables (Reinboth et al. 2004) but also levels of commitment (Scanlan et al. 2003), and its influence in helping athletes during key transitions (Giacobbi et al. 2004). As individuals progress and develop, it is expected that they will experience a number of transitions (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004). Morgan and Giacobbi (2006) identified the importance of examining how social support changes and evolves during the course of an athlete’s career. Bloom (1985) had previously acknowledged the changes in role and status that key supporters occupied during the lifespan of a talented individual.

Research conducted in tennis (e.g., Crespo and Reid, 2007; Newton and Duda, 1995) suggested the motivational climate becomes more ego defined as a player progresses from beginner to competition level. This is likely to be a natural progression experienced by developing performers from a range of disciplines. However, it is important to (re)emphasise the significance of an individual’s perception and
dispositional tendencies in determining their involvement state. Additionally, Allen and Hodge (2006) identified the need for further research designed to examine the influence of the desired motivational climate in different populations.

Harwood and Swain (2002) believed it is possible to shape optimal motivational profiles in young performers and, therefore, careful consideration must be paid to what constitutes an optimal profile at any stage of an individual’s development. Hodge and Petlichkoff (2000) assisted in suppressing the negative focus associated with ego goals by promoting the value of a goal profile representing a complementary balance of ego and task qualities (i.e., orthogonal goal states). They argued that when combined to produce a ‘complementary balance’, incorporating ego and task involvement states, an individual will aim to demonstrate superior ability and strive to achieve personal mastery. Such individuals are expected to exhibit high levels of motivation (Hodge and Petlichkoff, 2000). The existence of a balanced profile (i.e., an athlete being task and ego involved simultaneously) remains a point of contention for researchers and has implications from a measurement and applied perspective. To date, the research debate concerning the orthogonality of goal states has yet to be settled unequivocally.

Duda (1992) stated that athletes may be task or ego oriented. In the absence of any definitive knowledge regarding the value of an individual’s goal orientation relevant to the emerging involvement state, this finding has limited value. Greater interest is reserved for the orthogonality of involvement states. Harwood and Hardy (2001), in the absence of any substantial evidence, suggested that ‘our contention remains that, until empirical evidence to the contrary is produced, goal involvement states should
be assumed to be orthogonal and therefore able to exist simultaneously, but possibly at unconscious levels of cerebral processing’ (p.334). Further research and advancements in the measurement tools and inventories used are critical in the pursuit of a conclusive answer.

A priority for researchers must be to develop appropriate measurement tools if we are to truly appreciate the motivational origins of an individual’s behaviour. Harwood, Hardy and Swain (2000) suggested research in education had not successfully developed measurement tools that were able to measure the level of task or ego involvement or orientation accurately. Additionally, the authors believed the available measurement tools had failed to consider the interactive nature of goal perspectives and develop a methodology required to consider the potential for orthogonality (Harwood, Hardy and Swain, 2000).

The inability to accurately measure an individual’s goal orientation or involvement state may find its origins in researchers’ eagerness to evolve achievement goal theory (e.g., Duda, 2001). The rapid evolution from school to elite sport created a number of key theoretical casualties. Original ideas and concepts have been misinterpreted or lost in transit. The following statement by Duda (2001, p.131) concurs, ‘sometimes in our zeal to conduct research in a promising contemporary theoretical paradigm, central concepts are homogenized or bastardized and theoretical tenets are misinterpreted or “lost in the shuffle”’. A prime example of this occurred in the differentiation and measurement of an individual’s goal involvement and goal orientation (Duda and Whitehead, 1998).
An overview of measurement methods produced by Schutz (1994) and succinctly summarised by Duda and Whitehead (1998) would appear pertinent to the present discussion. Duda and Whitehead (1998) identified that, ‘there are too many instances when the constructs assessed are not conceptually based, clearly defined, and / or operationalized in a way that is consonant with the conceptual definition’ (p.43). The following paragraphs allude to these issues.

Duda (2001) believed an inability to effectively distinguish operational and conceptual definitions of an orientation and involvement state contributed to an inevitable confusion in the sport psychology literature. Hence, the terms orientation and involvement appear to be used interchangeably. Nicholls (1992, p.45) described orientations as an athlete’s ‘habitual achievement preoccupations’. These ‘habitual achievement preoccupations’ are dispositional. The goal involvement state developed in achievement environments is clearly influenced by an individual’s goal orientation and their perception of the situational characteristics (e.g., Duda and Hall, 2001). Ntoumanis (2001, p.398) reminds us that ‘task involvement and ego involvement represent transitory and situation-specific goal states that are the outcome of the interaction between dispositional goal orientations and motivational climates’. For the theory to advance understanding, researchers are required to clearly and consistently distinguish between goal orientations and goal involvement states. Nowhere is this more critical than in the measurement inventories researchers use to develop implications for applied practice.

Duda and Whitehead (1998) reviewed a number of measurement tools employed to gain an insight into an individual’s goal perspectives. The most regularly used
questionnaire is the task and ego orientation in sport questionnaire (TEOSQ; Duda and Nicholls, 1992). The scale was developed to measure athletes dispositional goal perspectives (Duda and Whitehead, 1998). The TEOSQ includes 13 statements that relate to either task (e.g., ‘I feel most successful in sport when I learn something that is fun to do’) or ego (e.g., ‘I feel most successful in sport when I score the most points’) orientation. Participants rate each statement on a five point Likert scale. The questionnaire has demonstrated good test-retest reliability and internal consistency (Duda and Whitehead, 1998).

Problems with the TEOSQ arise when it is inadvertently used to measure an individual’s goal involvement status. For example, Swain and Harwood (1996) attempted to discover the antecedents of state goals in age group swimmers by using amongst other measures the TEOSQ. Justifying the inclusion of the TEOSQ, the authors suggested that, ‘the TEOSQ was designed to measure an individual’s proneness to be task- or ego-involved in sport’ (Swain and Harwood, 1996, p.113). Clearly, the goal state an individual holds during training or competition is likely to be dynamic and influenced by a number of factors (Duda and Whitehead, 1998) present in the specific context. Relying exclusively on a dispositional measure is unlikely to provide truly valid results.

Additionally, reference must be paid to Duda and Whitehead’s (1998) proposal that, ‘goal states are qualitatively different from dispositional goal orientations rather than simply a manifestation of those dispositions at one moment of time’ (p.42). The challenge to truly advance the area and provide valid and informed data to applied practitioners requires consideration of the contextual and cultural factors influencing
the dynamic involvement state an individual holds at any one moment in time. For applied practitioners to confidently introduce intervention or support strategies they need to accurately assess the needs of their athletes or performers. An appreciation of an individual’s susceptibility to a particular involvement state is critical for coaches and practitioners responsible for developing a motivational climate conducive to their athlete’s needs.

The TEOSQ represents a nomothetic method of assessment (Harwood, 2002). Nomothetic approaches aim to establish generalised laws and fail to effectively consider context and individual differences (Harwood, 2002). Duda and Whitehead (1998) reviewed 70 published studies, involving 12,239 participants, employing the TEOSQ. The authors identified the mean values for task (4.08 + .57) and ego (2.87 + .81) goal perspectives based on the combined results of the included study. The five point scale operates from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Presented in isolation these findings have limited practical use. The contextual limitations strengthen questions regarding the ecological validity of the available measurement tools.

Presently, quantitative research derived evidence constitutes the majority of our knowledge and understanding of motivation in a range of applied contexts. The predictive power of quantitative research approaches (e.g., TEOSQ) introduced in isolation is severely limited. Ultimately, researchers are challenged with discovering and then accurately reporting the origins of an individual’s motivation. This information should then inform the applied behaviour of key practitioners. Relying exclusively on quantitative research designs potentially eliminates significant
motivational indicators. The versatility of self-report questionnaires is limited and makes assessing motivational profiles in different contexts difficult. Harwood (2002, p.109) reinforced the above sentiments by suggesting that, ‘purely quantitative reports can reduce the players to a dehumanized statistic that less than accurately reflects who they are from a motivational point of view’. Quantitative research has provided solid foundations in the pursuit of an understanding of motivated behaviour. However, a number of unanswered questions remain for achievement goal theorists. It could be argued that quantitative approaches alone are ill equipped to provide the required answers. Harwood (2002, p.117) emphasised the significant work ahead when he suggested,

‘Little is still known about the specific contexts within which an athlete should be highly task involved, highly ego involved, or high in both states of goal achievement. It might be that training or practice is the prime time to be task involved, and that a more balanced profile is required in competition’

A further limitation of self-report measures concerns the difference between the goal an individual chooses to publicly announce and the goal internally held. This sentiment is supported by an observation detailed by Harwood and Hardy (2001) in their paper responding to Treasure and colleagues’ (2001) challenge of their original paper. Jeff Rouse, an international swimmer, according to Treasure et al (2001) had tried to divorce himself from the importance of winning and beating others and concentrated on using ‘easy speed’ as his way of defining success. ‘Easy speed’ referred to his relationship with the water. However, Harwood and Hardy (2001) challenged ‘easy speed’ as the primary definer of success after listening to Jeff Rouse present. According to the authors, Rouse recalled a period where he was experiencing
a bad patch. If the use of ‘easy speed’ defined success, it would be reasonable to expect that this period might involve difficulty with ‘easy speed’. To the amusement of Harwood and Hardy (2001), Rouse suggested ‘I hadn’t felt successful, I had some 4th or 5th places and my times were down’. No mention of ‘easy speed’.

Based on the discussions above a clear rationale for the integration of qualitative research methods emerges. Qualitative approaches are capable of extending and offering an alternative perspective to that currently provided by quantitatively focused approaches. Such a perspective is able to appreciate contextual considerations over an extended period of time. Further discussions on the value and defining characteristics of qualitative research are reserved for the final sections of this Review.

2.5. Achievement goal theory: Summary and conclusions

This Review acknowledged the important contribution of achievement goal theory in explaining motivated behaviour, acknowledging its evolution and offering recommendations for future research that the present study can capitalise upon. Achievement goal theory developed in school settings with adolescent participant groups (Nicholls, 1984). Firstly Roberts (1984) and then Duda (1987) identified parallels with sport and initiated the theoretical transfer. Roberts (1984) and Duda (1987) recognised the versatility of the theory and promoted a number of generalized elements. However, a number of authors (e.g., Duda, 1992; Harwood, Hardy and Swain, 2000) have subsequently identified limitations and recommended adjustments designed to improve the compatibility observed in a sporting or performance context.
The relative contributions of an individual’s dispositional goal orientation and the perceived motivational climate on the subsequent goal involvement state have not been established (Allen and Hodge, 2006) and, therefore, arguably undermine the practical utility of the theory. At the present time, an awareness of what contributes to an individual’s dispositional profile is absent (Kingston, Harwood and Spray, 2006) and, therefore, the impact on emerging involvements states is speculative.

In addition to the incomplete knowledge underpinning the pre-requisites of a particular goal involvement state (i.e., dispositional orientation and motivational climate), further advancements in the measurement of the emerging goal involvement state are required. In the absence of appropriate measurement tools, researchers (e.g., Swain and Harwood, 1996) have inappropriately deployed resources that were designed to measure dispositional profiles (i.e., TEOSQ) to account for an individual’s involvement state. Furthermore, the present reliance on quantitatively derived profiles is arguably a limiting factor. Clearly, quantitative approaches have added value, developed our understanding and ultimately advanced the theory. However, an alternative perspective that introduces a qualitative measurement framework has the potential to further expand our knowledge of achievement goal behaviour and its subsequent impact on progression and development.

Finally, achievement goal theory research in sport has largely focused on undergraduate, recreational or junior sport participants. It could be argued that the source of motivation energising these respective groups and more talented individuals is likely to be different. Conducting research involving talented performers must,
therefore, remain a priority for researchers trying to advance the field (Allen and Hodge, 2006).

Achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984) shares a number of characteristics with self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985). The two approaches are considered social cognitive theories of motivation and recognise the significance of the social context in influencing behavioural outcomes (Ntoumanis, 2001). Indeed, Deci and Ryan (2008a, p.14) stated how, ‘although, clearly, motivational processes can be studied in terms of underlying mechanisms in people’s brains and physiology, the vast amount of human variance in human motivation is not a function of such mechanisms but is instead a function of the more proximal sociocultural conditions in which actors find themselves’. Additionally, both theories acknowledge how the meaning attached to an activity influences the quality of engagement observed (Ntoumanis, 2001). The next section of this chapter explores the key characteristics of self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) and examines its utility in explaining progression and development in performance environments. Duda (2001, p.169) endorsed the need to appreciate a range of theories, believing ‘efforts to pull together constructs, assumptions, and proposed relationships from other models of motivated behaviour’ represents a positive move.

2.6. Self-determination theory

This section of the chapter will commence by identifying the core tenets that characterise self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Self-determination theory is based on the belief that individuals have inherent growth tendencies (Ryan and Deci, 2000). According to self-determination theory people are naturally, ‘active
and self-motivated, curious and interested, vital and eager to succeed’ (Deci and Ryan, 2008a). Interactions with the social environment can promote or suppress these inherently positive tendencies. Specifically, self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ryan and Deci, 2000) suggests social factors (e.g., coach behaviour) impact motivation through their perceived influence on self-determination (autonomy), competence and relatedness. Autonomy takes account of how much an individual determines and has control of their behaviour and outcome (Deci and Ryan, 1991). Competence considers the achievement of desired outcomes and relatedness refers to the acceptance and attachment to a group (Deci and Ryan, 1991). Social environments that fully satisfy the core needs correlate with a range of positive psychological and behavioural outcomes (Ryan and Deci, 2000) that will be explored during the remainder of this chapter.

Knee and Zuckerman (1996) identified the benefits of individuals demonstrating autonomy. The authors found participants who displayed the greatest autonomy displayed no self-serving bias. That is, they demonstrated less self-enhancing attributions for their successes and limited defensive attributions for any failures experienced (Knee and Zuckerman, 1996). This evidence has implications for performers from all disciplines. Attributions structured effectively contribute to an environment where learning and subsequent progression is made more probable. Individuals take responsibility for ‘less successful’ performances and, therefore, can make the relevant adaptations for future endeavours. Additionally, successful performance or results will not be over celebrated and the likelihood of complacency should be diminished.
Significantly, Reinboth and Duda (2006) commented how perceptions of autonomy are likely to be reduced in an ego-oriented environment. According to Ntounamis (2001) the controlling features of ego orientation undermine autonomy and support an external locus of causality. Contrastingly, a task-oriented environment facilitates autonomy (Ntounamis, 2001). The notion of perceived control is important with regards to self-determined and intrinsically motivated behaviours (Vazou, Ntoumanis and Duda, 2006). Strong positive links are perceived between a task environment and the satisfaction of autonomy (e.g., Standage, Duda and Ntoumanis, 2003), competence (e.g., Sarrazin, Vallerand, Guillet, Pelletier and Cury, 2002) and relatedness (Sarrazin et al, 2002). Ntoumanis and Biddle (1999) believed a task environment satisfies the basic three needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) and thus creates a positive motivational climate. A task created context provides choice and encourages participant input, therefore satisfying the need for autonomy (Sarrazin, Guillet and Cury, 2001). Positive perceptions of success and competence are likely to be higher when under the control of the individual and not reliant on normative comparisons (Sarrazin et al, 2001). Task environments downplay normative comparisons in favour of cooperation and therefore also satisfy the need for relatedness (Sarrazin et al, 2001).

Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) acknowledges how the type of motivation experienced is more significant than the existence of a level of motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2008b). Importantly, and in contrast to achievement goal theory, the theory does not consider motivation a unitary concept (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Different types of motivation emerge as a consequence of an individual’s experience of activity and context (Deci and Ryan, 1985). The theory initially identified intrinsic
and extrinsic forms of motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Deci and Ryan (1985) believed intrinsic behaviours are characterised by a genuine interest and enjoyment of activities. Individuals experiencing an intrinsic drive seek challenges and explore learning opportunities. Ryan and Deci (2000, p.70) acknowledged how, ‘the maintenance and enhancement of this inherent propensity requires supportive conditions, as it can be fairly readily disrupted by various non supportive conditions’. Contrastingly, individuals engaging in activities as a consequence of extrinsic motivation are said to be participating as a means to an end (Kingston, Harwood and Spray, 2006).

As the theory has evolved, autonomous and controlled forms of motivation have replaced intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as the principle types considered (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Autonomous motivation accounts for intrinsic and several forms of extrinsic motivation, which are valued and integrated into an individual’s sense of self (Deci and Ryan, 2008b). Autonomous motivation is characterised by volition and choice (Deci and Ryan, 2008a) and is positively linked with performance, persistence and well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2008a). Controlled motivation is an externally regulated form of motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2008b). An individual experiences pressure and demand from external factors when operating under the influence of controlled motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2008a).

A sub theory of self-determination theory, organismic integration theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) introduced different types of extrinsic motivation, which vary in their level of self-determination. An organismic perspective considers development to be a process that may involve individuals internalizing and integrating external elements
into their world (Deci and Ryan, 2008a). Deci and Ryan (2008a, p.17) suggested, ‘on the basis of empirical and theoretical considerations, we proposed that conditions supportive of the basic psychological needs would facilitate internalization and integration’. Increased internalization (i.e., self-determined regulation; Ntoumanis, 2001) is expected to contribute to an improved level of behavioural effectiveness, an increase in the volitional persistence and positive well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2000). When an individual identifies with the value of the activity, they are more likely to experience internalization and demonstrate increased ownership of the activity (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Integration represents a level beyond identification in the context of internalization (Deci and Ryan, 2000). An individual who is able to integrate actions extrinsically defined will experience an increased level of volition (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Integration will occur when an individual recognises the importance and meaning attached to a particular activity (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

Deci and Ryan (1985) developed a motivational continuum to illustrate the different levels of control (self determination) contributing to motivated behaviour (see figure 1). The continuum ranges from intrinsic motivation, where high levels of self-determination (autonomy) are displayed, to amotivation where self-determination (autonomy) is limited. Intersecting intrinsic motivation and amotivation is extrinsic motivation. The greater autonomy (i.e., control) an individual has over their motivation, the more likely they are to display high levels of persistence, performance and well being (Deci and Ryan, 2000).
The least autonomous (i.e., controlled motivation) is considered *externally regulated* (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Individual’s acting under external regulation do not accept the motivation as their own, and according to Deci and Ryan (2008a, p.16), experience ‘implicit threats of guilt, shame and self-derogation after failure’. Externally regulated motivation is suggested to be contingency dependent (Deci and Ryan, 2000). According to Deci and Ryan (1985), when the contingency is removed the behaviour is unlikely to be sustained.

*Introjected regulation* is controlled to an extent (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Ntounamis (2001) suggested that the control element of introjected regulation is linked to a need for social recognition and the avoidance of internal pressures or feelings of guilt. *Identified regulation* occurs when there is a conscious valuing of the goal, which ultimately is accepted and subsequently owned (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Individuals tend to have accepted the importance of the behaviour (regulation) and subsequently engage with a perception of increased autonomy (Deci and Ryan, 2008a). Finally,
Integrated regulation occurs when congruence with personal values occurs and is considered the fullest type of internalization (Deci and Ryan, 2008a).

Ryan (1995) suggested that status on the continuum could be influenced by previous experience or situational factors. Patterson and Joseph (2007) proposed the term dialectical interface to describe the two poles influencing an individual’s pursuit or desire for self-determined behaviour. At one extreme you have the organismic tendency to actualise, with the opposite pole representing the social environment (Patterson and Joseph, 2007). As discussed previously, an individual’s position on the motivational continuum subsequently influences the behavioural outcome (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Several authors (Vallerand and Fortier, 1998; Vallerand and Losier, 1999) have acknowledged the positive behavioural, cognitive and affective outcomes associated with more self-determined forms of motivation and, therefore, aspirations to facilitate these appear preferable. For example, more self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation are related to increasingly positive behaviours such as persistence (Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand and Briere, 2001), compared to non-self-determined forms (i.e., externally regulated). As discussed previously, coaches (and significant others) have the ability to adapt and modify the motivational climate (Harwood and Swain, 2002).

Individuals performing at the highest level are characterised by enhanced levels of self-determined motivation (Amiot, Gaudreau, and Blanchard, 2004). It is, therefore, within a management team’s best interest to help create an environment where self-determined behaviours are promoted and facilitated. Duda and Ntoumanis (2004) concluded that, ‘a social environment which is autonomy supportive, emphasises
improvement and effort, and is socially supportive, may help maximise the satisfaction of athletes’ basic needs which, in turn, may possibly foster eudaimonic well-being among adolescent sport participants’ (p.310).

Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ryan and Deci, 2000) encourages the development of a motivational climate that allows individuals access to positive perceptions of competence. Developing a positive learning environment is only possible after the consideration of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Mallet, 2005). In this regard, Mageau and Vallerand (2003) previously proposed an autonomy-supportive environment, which aimed to satisfy the three facets of self-determination theory. The authors proposed seven behaviours including, a) providing choice to athletes (with boundaries), b) providing rationale to tasks and training, c) acknowledging the feelings and perspectives of others, d) initiative taking and independent work opportunities, e) providing competence feedback, f) avoiding controlling coaching behaviours and lastly, g) reducing the perception of ego-involvement in sporting environments. Several of the factors acknowledged by Mageau and Vallerand (2003) compare favourably with the characteristics defining a task-oriented environment previously proposed by Epstein (1989) and reported in the achievement goal theory section. The choice element identified by Mageau and Vallerand (2003) aligns with the authority afforded to individuals by Epstein (1989). Similarly, the competence based feedback promoted by Mageau and Vallerand (2003) shares similar characteristics with the evaluation criteria identified by Epstein (1989).

Mallett (2005) offered a personal insight into creating an autonomy supportive environment following his experience as a coach of an Olympic relay team. His
athletes were offered a level of autonomy by being involved in the informed decision making of training content, times and venues. Rationale for task selection was provided. For example, the inclusion of relay specific training was explained and justified. Suggestions, opinions and feedback were actively sought from athletes and coaches to create an athlete centred approach. However, a cautionary note should accompany the findings provided by Mallet (2005). This is because the research focuses on the perspective of one coach and does not engage with the athletes within the team. An insight into the athletes perception of the coaching approach and motivational climate would offer a useful and valuable extension. The article does acknowledge the improvement in the fortune of the team. However, supplementing this with the athletes subjective experience would provide a comprehensive insight into the coaching initiatives.

Gagne, Ryan and Bargman (2003), studied 45 female gymnasts aged between 7 and 18 years old. The study provided implications for the development of appropriate training contexts. The authors suggested that the coaches helped support the autonomy of athletes by listening to their concerns, providing choice, helping them feel connected with team-mates and providing positive competence feedback. In turn, the gymnasts experienced positive emotions, were energised and displayed high and stable levels of self-esteem.

Gagne and colleagues’ (2003) research is focused on female gymnasts and explores the motivational experiences of a group of individuals from a wide age range. The ability to generalise these results is, therefore, inherently weakened particularly in the context of the debate documented in the achievement goal theory section. Harwood
and colleagues (2000) argued that the ability to differentiate between ability and effort occurs at the age of fourteen. Reporting the motivational experiences of female gymnasts aged between seven and eighteen is, therefore, likely to produce some distorted findings.

Balague (1999) in discussing her work with elite women athletes highlighted the importance of ‘relatedness’ as a motivational element. In Balague’s (1999) reflections, she comments on relationships with coaches, in addition to feeling connected with the group. Balague (1999) suggested some ‘young girls were looking for good relationships and feelings between all the gymnasts, only to have that desire undermined by differential coach attention’ (p.95; see also Morris and Kavussanu, 2008). Reinboth and Duda (2006) also noted that different players may perceive different levels of autonomy depending on their status within the team. This again may reflect the culture characteristic of high performance environments.

2.7. Self-determination theory: Summary and conclusion

The previous section introduced the core tenets of self-determination theory. The core characteristics of this theory were compared with the defining features of achievement goal theory. The Review acknowledged the elements of the respective approaches that complement one another and those aspects that might be considered as useful supplements (Duda, 2001). Similar to achievement goal theory, self-determination theory credits individuals with inherent growth tendencies. However, in contrast, self-determination theory promotes different types of motivation. The type of motivation experienced is (in general terms) a product of an individual’s perception of autonomy, relatedness and competence (a prominent factor in achievement goal theory), and will
subsequently impact the behavioural outcome and positive sustainability of this behaviour. Self-determination theory acknowledges how experience and situational factors are the key determinants of the type of motivation experienced. Similar to achievement goal theory, further research is required to develop an improved insight into the dispositional factors that might influence an individual’s interpretation of a presented scenario (Kingston, Harwood and Spray, 2006).

The final words of this section are reserved for authors that have dominated the self-determination theory literature. Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 68) believed,

‘Research on the conditions that foster versus undermine positive human potentials has both theoretical import and practical significance because it can contribute not only to formal knowledge of the causes of human behaviour but also to the design of social environments that optimize people’s development, performance and well-being’.

The present research initiative aspires to investigate the ‘conditions’ highlighted by Ryan and Deci (2000) and also the factors that determine an individual’s interpretation of the presented environment.

The previous sections of this Review have introduced achievement goal theory and self-determination theory as approaches capable of explaining motivated behaviour related to progression. The core characteristics of the theories have been examined and their applied versatility challenged. The present research aspires to supplement the existing literature and capitalise on the theoretical limitations inherent in these approaches using an alternative methodology. The dominance of quantitative approaches has been well documented in the present review. In light of this evidence,
the penultimate section of this Review will explore methodological perspectives before concluding with the research aims and objectives.

2.8. Methodological considerations

Traditionally, achievement goal theory and self-determination theory relied almost exclusively on quantitative approaches to research that, in the words of Harwood (2002), ‘reduce the players to a dehumanized statistic’ (p.109). Although it can be argued that such approaches have advanced our understanding of key concepts relevant to motivation, progression and development, it can equally be stated that further developments in methodological approaches are necessary if practical and realistic implications are to be confidently made.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000b, p.3) offered the following definition of qualitative research:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p.3)

Research methods have been the focus of several critical debates that have defined the past century. Much of the conflict has centered on competing qualitative and quantitative models of social research that have been said to reflect differing philosophical positions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Denzin and Lincoln
(1998, 2005) have, over a series of years, identified eight critical ‘moments’ that defined the emergence of qualitative research. The ‘moments’ include the following phases; traditional (1900-1950), modernist (up to 1970), blurred genres (1970-1986), crisis of representation (mid 1980s), triple crisis (1990s), postmodern period (mid to late 1990s), post experimental (1995-2000) and methodologically contested (2000-2004).

The traditional period was characterised by attempts to provide objective and scientifically rigorous accounts of human beings (Silk, Andrews & Mason, 2005). The modernist ‘moment’ was characterised by qualitative data collection methods that adhered to the scientific (positivist) principles defining the traditional period (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a). The blurred genres moment promoted the integration of a range of theoretical approaches. The crisis of representation which followed questioned the researcher’s authority in being able to write for the ‘other’ (Silk, Andrews & Mason, 2005). The crisis of representation evolved into a triple crisis, which additionally considered the criteria that qualitative research should be judged by, and the practical use (praxis) of conducting such research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The ‘moments’ are chronologically ordered and loosely associated with periods in the last century. Each ‘moment’ was born out of the research challenges present during the identified period and, in turn, influenced the ‘moment(s)’ to follow. Despite being assigned to a particular period, historical moments are still evidently influential in the research strategies and paradigms employed in the present day. This is neatly summarised by Anderson’s (1999, p.453) suggestion that…
The development of new ethnographic moments or genres does not seem to signal the demise of previously existing ones, but rather adds more options in the styles and analysis available to qualitative researchers. New genres proliferate, vying with earlier ones, rather than displacing them.

The new styles, forms of analysis and genres alluded to by Anderson (1999) in his summarising of the ‘moments’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998 & 2005) reflect the philosophies underpinning different paradigms. Sparkes (2002) reflected that, ‘in recent years, there has been, depending on your perspective, a paradigm war, a revolution, or at least a major upheaval in the social sciences’ (p.2). This ‘war’ has witnessed the emergence and dominance of different paradigms and, therefore, different approaches to conducting and reporting research.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) identified six paradigms including, positivism, post-positivism, phenomenology (interpretivist), constructivism, critical theories and participatory. When locating my research in to a paradigmatic framework, it is important to bear in mind the consideration of a blurred genre (1970-1986; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Rigidly adhering to the assumptions defining a particular paradigm is likely to restrict the evolution of any research project. Research is dynamic and, therefore, commitments to paradigms should perhaps be viewed similarly.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000a) suggested a paradigm was characterised by four defining features, namely axiology, ontology, epistemology and methodology. Axiology considers ethics, ontology considers how the researcher views the world and what influences the nature of reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000a). Denzin and Lincoln (2000a) suggested epistemology represents the relationship between the knower and
the known (i.e., the relationship between the researcher and participants). Additionally, Coyle (2007) considered epistemology to be ‘a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the theory of knowledge and that tries to answer questions about how we can know and what we can know’ (p.11). Different methods are related to different epistemologies (Coyle, 2007), with methodology according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000a) reflecting the best approach for gaining knowledge about the world.

The knowledge acquired and represented in each paradigm is dependent upon the researcher’s perception of what constitutes the ‘truth’. Lincoln and Guba (2005) believed, ‘whether or not the world has a “real” existence outside of human experience of that world is an open question’ (p.176). Different paradigms, and indeed different ‘moments’, are operationally different in their philosophies related to truth (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). For example, a researcher operating under the guise of a positivist paradigm (emerging from the traditional and modernist periods) is expected to believe that an accurate knowledge of the world is readily accessible, as long as an impartial, unbiased and objective viewpoint is afforded (Coyle, 2007). Arguably, this approach has characterised much of the work conducted in motivational type research (e.g., Harwood, 2002). Contrastingly, Richardson (1994) believed that a postmodern perception suggests that no method has the ability to claim access to ultimate truth. Previous reflections by Polkinghorne (1989, p.23) emphasised this point:

‘True knowledge is limited to the objects and the relationships between them that exist in the realm of time and space. Human consciousness, which is subjective, is not accessible to science, and thus not truly knowable’
Paradigmatic discussions surrounding the concept of ‘truth’ may benefit from appreciating the possibility for situated knowledge (Gergen and Gergen, 2003). Situated knowledge, according to Gergen and Gergen (2003) recognises that, ‘descriptions and explanations can be valid so long as one does not mistake local conventions for universal truth’ (p.587). Situated knowledge, therefore, emphasises the value of contextually bound research. Extending this perspective, Stake (1980) had previously introduced the concept of naturalistic generalisations. The concept of naturalistic generalisations places an emphasis on the reader, encouraging them to make generalisations, using their knowledge and experience as a reference. Indeed, Robinson and Norris (2001, p. 306) believed naturalistic generalisations present ‘a realignment of the responsibility to generalise away from the researcher and towards the reader / policy maker / practitioner’. Having the confidence to apply research findings is a critical element of the research process and is arguably a central consideration in the triple crisis and postmodern period (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Knowing when to act on specific findings is a concern highlighted by Lincoln and Guba (2005, p.180):

‘How do we know when we have specific social inquiries that are faithful enough to some human construction that we may feel safe in acting on them, or, more important, that members of the community in which the research is conducted may act on them’.

The promotion of ethnography as a viable alternative to scientific principles is a reflection of its ability to appreciate and acknowledge the context in which any behaviour occurs. The following quote by Mehan (1974, p.249) emphasises this point,
‘A question from a language development test instructs the child to choose “the animal that can fly” from a bird, an elephant and a dog. The correct answer (obviously) is the bird. Many first grade children, though, chose the elephant along with the bird as a response to that question. When I later ask them why they chose that answer they replied: ‘That’s Dumbo’. Dumbo (of course) is Walt Disney’s flying elephant, well known to children who watch television and read children’s books as an animal that flies’.

According to Angrosino and Flick (2007) the aim of ethnography is to identify and report complex personalised and field based accounts and thus should deploy a range of methods that are field based, personalised, multifactorial (i.e., use in excess of two data collection techniques) and holistic in outlook. Furthermore, Angrosino and Flick (2007) acknowledged the long-term commitment required from the researcher and the inductive nature of a research process that allows themes and theories to naturally evolve. This point is (in my mind) contentious. The literature review usually precedes data collection and, therefore, several preconceived concepts and theories are likely to be established in the researcher’s mind. Disclosing this information in relevant sections of the methodology, therefore, arguably enhances the trustworthiness of the subsequent data.

Issues surrounding voice, reflexivity and postmodern textual representations evolve through the ‘moments’ and are clearly relevant to discussions surrounding the concept of ‘truth’. According to Hertz (1997, pp. xi-xii) voice can be considered,

‘A struggle to figure out how to present the author’s self while simultaneously writing the respondents’ accounts and representing their selves. Voice has multiple dimensions: First there is the voice of the author. Second, there is the presentation of the voices of one’s respondents within the text. A third
dimension appears when the self is the subject of the inquiry…Voice is how authors express themselves within an ethnography’.

According to Gergen and Gergen (2000; 2003) questions regarding how to treat the researcher’s voice are considered amongst the most difficult in the research process. Gergen and Gergen (2000, p.1028) questioned the placement of the researcher’s voice and indeed the voice of the participants,

Should it simply be one among many, or should it have special privileges by virtue of professional training? There is also the question of identifying who the author and the participants truly are; once we realize the possibilities of multiple voicing, it also becomes evident that each individual participant is polyvocal. Which of these voices is speaking in the research and why? What is, at the same time, suppressed?’

Sparkes (2002) further reflected the uncertainty many researchers face when considering the introduction of their voice. Sparkes’ (2002) comments implied that researchers are comfortable producing narratives that place participants in a specific cultural and historical location. However, there is significantly less assurance in the author’s placement and introduction (Sparkes, 2002, p.17). Many authors have used reflexivity as an approach to effectively integrate their voices. Gergen and Gergen (2003) believed the introduction of reflexivity as a methodological consideration helps to relinquish the “God’s eye view” perception of research and acknowledges the practical influence of a researcher during the collection and presentation stages of the research process (Gergen and Gergen, 2003). Gergen and Gergen (2003, p.580) introduced a reflexive commentary not as a solution to issues of validity but as a conscientious effort to “tell the truth”.
Perceptions of truth and reality have previously been discussed as defining features of different paradigms, and have established a range of positions with regards to what constitutes the truth. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.15) promoted the introduction of the authors voice as critical to redefining what is considered real,

‘What this represents is a rejection of the idea that social research is, or can be, carried out in some autonomous realm that is insulated from the wider society and from the biography of the researcher, in such a way that its findings can be unaffected by social processes and personal characteristics…We do not see reflexivity as undermining researchers’ commitment to realism. In our view it only undermines naïve forms of realism which assume that knowledge must be based on some absolute secure foundation’.

The process of reflexivity emphasises the “human as instrument” (Guba and Lincoln, 1981) and focuses on supporting the legitimation of research findings. I have selected to introduce a bridging commentary at selected intervals of the research process. This is not designed to exist as separate to the main body of literature, but to provide an insight into the thought process that underpins key decisions, choices and interpretations. The reflexive nature of this account also permits access to the dynamic nature of my role as the researcher. This is supported by Reinharz (1997) who suggested that we not only ‘bring the self to the field… (we also) create the self in the field’ (p.3). The above reflections justify the introduction of the bridging (reflexive) commentary that considers ‘foreshadowed problems’ (Malinowski, 1922) at the start of the research process and emerging ‘problems’ at relevant intervals.

Additionally, deploying a process of triangulation is designed to offer a level of perspective to the presented data. Denzin (1978) identified four forms of
triangulation; firstly, researchers could utilise data drawn from different sources at different times. Secondly, data could be considered from different theoretical perspectives. Thirdly, researchers could deploy a between methods approach. Finally, data could be considered from the perspective of different observers (or interviewers). The final form is most consistent with the approach used in the present research. That is, my supervisor was able to offer an alternative perspective designed to challenge and encourage a justification of my initial interpretation.

2.9. Ethics

The British Psychological Society’s (2010) code of human research ethics promotes four guiding principles underpinning ethical research. The principles are defined as respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons, scientific value, social responsibility and, maximising benefit whilst minimising harm. These principles were taken into consideration in the preparation and execution of the current research process and are briefly introduced in the paragraphs to follow.

Respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons reflects the clear duty a researcher has towards the participants. A researcher should ensure a participant understands, when agreeing to participate, that they can withdraw their involvement or any resulting data at any point during the study. Participants’ ongoing consent for involvement was secured (via written and audio-recorded verbal consent) at each stage of the research process and an information sheet presented that included relevant details pertaining to the research (see appendix one). The information sheet described the purpose of the study, introduced the procedures and the participants expected role. Additionally, participants privacy was respected, with confidentiality
and anonymity assured. Pseudonyms were used throughout the thesis to protect the identity of the participants involved, and, where possible contextual details included in the thesis considered to avoid participants being inadvertently recognised.

Secondly, scientific value reflects the importance of maintaining high research standards. To supplement these high standards, the research aims were regularly presented and remained transparent to participants. Thirdly, social responsibility promotes the need for a researcher to develop and retain an awareness of their professional responsibilities. Importantly, a researcher needs to remain open to potential risks and prepare (where possible) for unexpected consequences. Finally, the research should aim to maximise the benefits and minimise potential harm to participants. I was able to fulfil this principle by retaining a participant perspective and ensuring the work engaged in ultimately added value to the research community.

2.10. Significance of the study

Although as stated in the introduction to this chapter, the purpose of the Review as a whole was to provide a context and justification for the study, before introducing the aims of this thesis, several sentences regarding the significance of this study are required. These are designed to consolidate the key theoretical reflections documented and offer further justification for the research. Each year organisations invest significant time and finances into individuals who display characteristics that represent considerable potential (Abbott and Collins, 2004). An improved awareness of how to support these individuals in sustaining a positive performance trajectory are both essential (e.g., Martindale, Collins and Abraham, 2007) and required (e.g., Gould, Dieffenbach and Moffett, 2002). The literature recognises the significant
commitment required to achieve expert status (Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer, 1993) and the challenges characterising the pathway to excellence (Young and Medic, 2008). As a consequence, a motivational perspective that accounts for personal, social and organisational factors was deemed an appropriate place to initiate the research (Nicholson, Schuler and Van de Ven, 1995).

Achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984) and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) provided the theoretical framework that initiated the research. The present research structure was designed to advance and challenge the contributions made by these theories. Specifically, the research aimed to extend previous contributions by deploying (in most cases) a qualitative framework over a significant period in an elite performance environment (Allen and Hodge, 2006). The elite performance environment at the centre of this research was a professional dance company. My interest and subsequent selection of dance was influenced by an article in *The Times* newspaper. Here, the dance environment was depicted as a tough and uncompromising discipline that demanded an enduring commitment from aspiring Ballerinas; this picture resonated with the sentiment I was intended to explore and offered an interesting parallel to the sporting environment I operated within professionally. Despite being considered a ‘greedy institution’ (Aalten, 2005a) that requires a commitment often initiated in childhood (van Rossum, 2001), limited research has explored dancers experience of progression and development. Additionally, the opportunity to complete research in an unfamiliar performance environment (e.g., Louis and Bartunek, 1992) represented an attempt to minimise any pre-conceived beliefs (e.g., Woodward, 2008), whilst providing a perspective designed to challenge my own applied practice based at an elite sporting institution.
As mentioned, these considerations will be discussed at regular stages of the thesis during bridging commentary chapters. The aspiration is to develop an evolving thesis with the capacity to exercise flexibility in both methodological and theoretical terms.

2.11. Research aims
The previous pages introduced talent development from a psychologically orientated motivational perspective with primacy given to both achievement goal theory and self-determination theory. Taking such perspectives into account, the aim of this project was to explore individuals’ experience of progression and development within a professional dance company. The specific objectives of the work then related to:

1. Exploring the perception of dancers who experience life as part of a high performance environment.

2. Developing an insight into the staff’s perception and consideration of dancers’ ongoing development, and their role in it.

3. Examining the conditions that both support and inhibit individual progression and development within a professional dance company. And;

4. Reflecting on my development and journey as a researcher from methodological, theoretical and personal perspectives.
Chapter Three: Observations

This chapter details and promotes several key themes observed during a period of ‘reconnaissance’ in a high performance dance environment. The observations are based on field notes recorded during an 18-month period, which involved regular visits to the dance studio in question (Patton, 2002). The observations, shared via several short vignettes, are designed to illuminate the systems and structures operating in the performance environment. The chapter commences by sharing several methodological notes relevant to participant observation. Following the methodology, a brief discussion regarding field notes precedes the presentation of the data.

3.1. Methodological notes

Participant observation was selected as the most appropriate method to initiate the research process. Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999) defined participant observation as a ‘process of learning through exposure to, or involvement in, the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting’ (p.91). The research setting in this case predominantly comprised the studio and occasionally the theatre, where preparations for performance occurred. The selection of participant observation was based on several factors. Firstly, observations provided me with an opportunity to immerse myself in an unfamiliar environment. They afforded an opportunity to view practice in-context, to initiate my understanding of patterns of behaviour, and to develop a sense of familiarity with the key stakeholders operating in this setting. Secondly, deploying a qualitative methodology from the outset represented a change from the traditional methods consistently deployed in the research highlighted in Chapter Two (review of literature).
Gratton and Jones (2004, p. 159-160) suggested that ‘observation is, arguably, the most neglected research technique in sport, yet it has a number of advantages. Questionnaires and interviews rely on self-reporting by participants in research…an alternative is to observe behaviour, rather than to question people about it’. The reflection offered by Gratton and Jones (2004) provided further justification for the inclusion of observations as the introductory method in the present research process. Patton (2002) also identified several advantages of deploying an observation-based methodology. The author recognised that it provided researchers with an opportunity to understand and capture context. Observations also afford researchers with an opportunity to develop impressions, knowledge and relationships (Patton, 2002). Observations encourage an individual to be open and not reliant on prior conceptualizations (Patton, 2002). Additionally, observations often highlight the taken for granted, and report behaviours that individuals might be less willing to discuss during an interview (Patton, 2002).

Silverman (2000) identified two broad research settings relevant in observational research. Firstly, there are ‘closed’ or ‘private’ settings. An assigned gatekeeper largely determines access to these. Contrastingly, in ‘open’ or ‘public’ settings, access is readily available. Based on the classifications provided by Silverman (2000), the environment I accessed demonstrated characteristics of both ‘private’ and ‘public’ settings. Ongoing issues of access are discussed in elements of the bridging commentaries to follow (e.g., Chapter Four).

Patton (2002) identified five dimensions of fieldwork, which exist on a continuum. Firstly, he suggested the observer operates on a continuum from participant to
spectator. Gold (1958) had previously identified four categories of observation, which can be potentially utilised by the researcher; the complete observer, observer-as-participant, participant-as-observer and complete participant. Each role inherits certain advantages and several disadvantages. The complete observer role occurs when the researcher is detached from the setting. The approach is designed to enhance the objectivity of the research findings. However, it raises several questions from an ethical and deception perspective (e.g., McFee, 2009) and is, therefore, not regularly deployed.

Occupying the observer-as-participant role, the researcher is able to gather important contextual details that might later be used to inform an interview (Gold, 1958). There are rapport and trust benefits here as the researcher is known and recognised by the participants of the study, which may assist any (subsequent) interviewing process. The participant-as-observer approach meanwhile requires the researcher to be fully integrated into the activities of the group under observation. The final category identified by Gold (1958), the complete participant, is commonly referred to as ‘going native’. Although it is believed to improve rapport, it has been suggested that this approach can easily compromise the investigative ability of the researcher (Gold, 1958). Based on the above categorizations (Gold, 1958), the observational approach adopted in the current research design was that of observer-as-participant. During the period of reconnaissance, the ‘participants’ became familiar with my presence in the studios. However, this involvement did not develop into over familiarity or friendship (Adler and Adler, 1994).
Adler and Adler (1994) extended Gold’s (1958) categories by recognising a three level hierarchy of membership defining participant observation. According to Adler and Adler (1994), peripheral membership allows the researcher to establish an insider’s identity. At the next level, Adler and Adler (1994) identified active membership. Active membership permits the researcher to engage in core activities. Finally, complete membership defines the researcher as an active and engaged member. Based on the categories identified by Adler and Adler (1994), the current observations were based at a peripheral membership level.

Secondly, according to Patton (2002), an individual may be an insider (emic) or outsider (etic) to the environment being observed. In this setting, I could be considered an outsider. I had no previous experience of a high performance dance environment. The relative merits of this position are considered in the bridging commentary to follow (Chapter Four). Thirdly, Patton (2002) suggested that an individual or group could conduct the inquiry. The field notes documented in the latter sections of this chapter are solely the product of my observations. Fourthly, Patton (2002) believed a researcher must decide what they disclose with regards to their status and research aspirations. Disclosure can be considered overt or covert. Placed on a continuum, the present research would arguably sit between the overt and covert extremes. This reflects a disclosure of the broad research aims to two key staff members. The remaining actors involved (i.e., dancers and staff) were only made aware of my presence as an interested observer.

Finally, Patton (2002) acknowledged how the duration of observations was an important consideration. Engagement in the environment could range from short and
single to long and multiple observations (Jorgensen, 1989). As highlighted in the introductory paragraph of this chapter, the observations reported are the product of an 18-month period of regular visits to the studio. Each visit would involve spending a day observing the dancers’ daily activities. I deliberately visited the studio on different days during different stages of the dancing calendar to ensure I accessed a varied picture of activity (Jorgensen, 1989). This activity was documented via a series of field notes.

Van Maanen (1988, p.223-224) offered the following definition of field notes:

To put it bluntly, field notes are gnomic, shorthand reconstructions of events, observations, and conversations that took place in the field. They are composed well after the fact as inexact notes to oneself and represent simply one of many levels of textualization set off by experience.

Van Maanen’s (1988) definition promotes the significance and essential role of field notes, whilst also identifying some of the challenges inherent in undertaking them. For example, the temporal impact of note making presents one challenge for researchers engaged in observational research. Understanding the challenges in advance of compiling and reporting such notes should facilitate the productive integration of this approach (Wolfinger, 2002).

In line with Van Maanen (1988), Wolfinger (2002) encouraged researchers to consider three factors in compiling field notes. Firstly, he asked if it was possible for the researcher to actually take notes in the research setting? The time elapsing between observations and note taking will no doubt have an effect on the quality and accuracy of the evidence documented. During the present investigation, I took the
opportunity to write-up my reflections at regular intervals in coffee shops located close to the company studios. These notes were further consolidated on several train journeys home. Wolfinger (2002) believed the expected audience would influence the note taking. At this juncture, it is worth acknowledging the academic structure of the presented notes. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.142) noted, ‘fieldnotes are always selective: it is not possible to capture everything’.

Wolfinger (2002) also encouraged researchers to consider how their research focus naturally becomes more targeted over time, whilst Jorgensen (1989) emphasised the importance of remaining open to the unexpected. Johnson (1975) previously acknowledged how field notes are likely to change as the research progresses and the researcher identifies what factors are considered most significant. Johnson (1975, p.197) commented how, ‘gradually I began to “hear different things said” in this setting. This happened through a shift in attention from what was said or done, to how it was said or done’.

Prior to introducing the observations it is important to provide some background to help contextualise the comments to follow. Jorgensen (1989, p. 54) suggested that ‘the participant observer can be sensitive to how a role limits and facilitates observation’. Indeed, the deductive and inductive nature of the observations and associated stories requires consideration from the outset. Here, I share the sentiments of Richardson, Gilbourne and Littlewood (2004, p.328) who suggested, ‘I cannot pretend I have observed the practice of others with a mindset that was (somehow) divorced from theory or practice’. Indeed, it would be foolish of me to make such a statement. Consequently, I feel the need to come ‘clean’ about the foundations on which my interpretations and perceptions are based.
I have no previous experience of high performance dance environments. I work in a sporting context providing support to talented and elite athletes. My research focus explores issues of progression and development in elite performance domains. Additionally, preliminary links from a theoretical perspective were framed around the assumptions and structure of achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1989) and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985). An attempt to keep an open mind was mediated by these personal and theoretically derived deductive factors.

It is clear that the researcher as participant observer faces many challenges in the research process. Angrosino and Flick (2007) believed success, as a participant observer, required the researcher to possess a certain skill set, which includes competent language skills, an explicit awareness, a good memory, a cultivated naïveté, and sufficient writing skills to place the observations in a narrative context. The representation of the data and subsequent expectations of my writing skills are explored in the following section (representing data: style and content). In response to Angrosino and Flick’s (2007) other skill requirements, I believe I possessed each of these variables and frequently use them in my applied practice.

3.2. Representing data: Style and content

Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) used creative non-fiction vignettes to help present significant moments based on observations of psychological support in football. The current account replicates the approach adopted by Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) and aims to provide the reader with an insight into practice at a high performance dance environment. According to Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul (1997, p. 1997), ‘vignettes are compact sketches that can be used to introduce characters, foreshadow
events and analyses to come, highlight particular findings, or summarize a particular theme or issue in analysis or interpretation’. Several key themes and critical incidents relating to progression and development were identified following an analysis.

A process akin to content analysis was used to categorise the constructed field notes (Côté, Salmela, Baria and Russell, 1993). The field notes were refined (Scanlan, Ravizza and Stein, 1989) using both inductive and deductive means (Patton, 2002). Initially, new themes and categories were highlighted (inductively) before considering their relationship (deductively) with the identified motivational theories (Patton, 1990). This is evident in how the observations are shared and subsequently theorized in the paragraphs that follow.

Replicating a format used by Richardson, Gilbourne and Littlewood (2004), the indented text (to come) communicates my observations from a narrative perspective, with personal reflections dominating the paragraphs to follow. The reflective comments offer a partial interpretation of the selected caveat, whilst also raising several pertinent questions addressed in future chapters. Similar to the sentiments promoted by Gilbourne and Richardson (2006, p. 328), ‘these thoughts are offered within the caveat that the associations offer readers a sense of links that I intuitively make rather than connections they should share’. Indeed, I aim, via the presented narrative, to invite the reader in to the research world and share my lived experience (Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul, 1997). As Knowles et al (2007, p.111) suggested, ‘it seems important to stress that the exercise of foregrounding the personal does not necessarily result in the loss of the conceptual’. The chapter concludes with several
theoretical observations and a series of questions that will inform the sections to follow.

3.3. Setting the Scene

Prior to sharing selected field notes (please see Appendix 8 for a selection of redacted field notes); a paragraph setting the scene is required. The sentences to follow are designed to offer a brief insight into the company and the context from which the observations were made. The dance company had been in existence for nearly 60 years and was founded on the premise that it would introduce dance to the masses. Based in a city centre location, the company has recruited (and continues to recruit) domestically and internationally to secure a diverse multicultural work force of talented dancers and staff. Operating under the same roof, the organisation was broadly divided between performance and commercial staff. The performance staff included dance staff (teachers and coaches), dancers, choreographers, physiotherapists, musicians and those individuals responsible for costumes and the overall production. The company employed approximately 65 dancers who received remuneration in accordance with their status. Hierarchically, ‘lead principals’ were considered the most senior and refined dancers, whilst ‘artists’ occupied the junior roles, learning their ‘trade’ within the corps-der-ballet. In between the ‘artists’ and ‘lead principals’ were the ‘soloists’.

3.4. Tales from the studio

During the train journey home following visits, I would regularly find myself contemplating the dancers’ motives for choosing their profession. They get paid relatively little, work surprisingly long and demanding hours, enjoy and, at times, endure a rigorous performance schedule characterised by extended periods away from
home. They are constantly strapping up injuries, nursing sore feet and stretching strained muscles. They receive limited media coverage or recognition for their efforts. A performing career is relatively short and, like any performance profession, possesses limited opportunities for career development (e.g., teaching or coaching) beyond the performing years. Nevertheless, there remains a clear commitment to improve, excel and perfect assigned training and performance routines. Sessions are defined by their intensity and professionalism.

The dancers and staff follow a schedule focused on producing optimal performances during their production season. The following field notes describe a scene regularly witnessed at the start of the day when the dancers arrived for work.

Posters promoting future productions and a neatly arranged pile of publications populate the small reception area. Dancers in civilian clothing exchange pleasantries with the receptionist as they slowly make their way through to the studios. The corridors and stairs leading to the studios are decorated with pictures of celebrated former performers. As the clock approaches ten, dancers hurriedly enter the studio in preparation for ‘class’. Forty or so dancers find a space in the bright room. Mirrors dominate. Three sides are covered, with the remaining side utilised for the storage of various props. Dancers perform routine technical exercises under the supervision of a senior principal dancer. His instructions punctuate conversations. Several languages and accents are audible.

*Journal entry, December 2008*

The general environment is unspectacular. The modest interior values practicality over sentiment and inspiration. Dressed in civilian clothing, the dancers’ talents and status are unrecognizable. As they complete the set routines, their personal narratives are suppressed. They appeared (simply) as rigid performers constrained by tradition, routine and history. Class was considered an essential component of daily activity. Dancers were contracted to attend a set number of sessions during the week. In broad terms, class was essentially a comprehensive warm up that encouraged the
maintenance of core technical, physical and psychological components of performance. It prepared dancers for the complex choreographed movements they were expected to follow as the day progressed. Principal dancers were often responsible for setting the tempo during class activity, and encouraged younger dancers to recognise and respond to their professionalism.

The diversity of the group presented a significant challenge to the staff. The staff were expected to get the best out of each individual, receptive to the personal needs and behaviour of each performer. However, with in excess of sixty dancers contracted to the company, this aspiration was challenging. The range of languages reflected the cultural diversity that exists.

I was taken into the studios where I placed myself discreetly in the corner. Surrounded by mirrors I maneuvered myself into an optimal position. I had come to watch the dancers, yet every position I took provided me with a further angle of myself! I settled on a position in the wall cavity. Each dancer fixated on their reflection. Every move analysed with the processed information offering a remedy to any perceived minor fault. Minor faults were conditioned to a facial expression; a surprised / disgusted look of an infant who had unexpectedly tasted something sour. There was nowhere to hide. The environment demanded you looked your best (both physically and artistically) and performed to your optimum.

The aim of the session is to perfect rehearsals for a forthcoming performance. The significance of an individual’s role determines their involvement. Firstly, only two dancers are requested to take centre stage in the room. They continually repeat the same movements characterising the start of the selected scene. The music resounding from the piano stops and starts like a car in rush hour traffic. Each footstep is scrutinised. The outer perimeter of the rectangular studio is occupied by small groups of dancers, framing the session in a way a human ring naturally evolves when a fight breaks out in the school playground.

As their colleagues search for the patience required to remedy frustratingly minor faults, dancers not involved observe, stretch, exercise, read and gossip. The original duet remains focused on the pursuit of excellence. A sense of relief and excitement is evident in the subsequent applause as the duet is considered ‘good enough’, and other dancers are invited into the fray.
The incessant pursuit of perfection was noticeable, and the mirrors only seemed to heighten the dancers’ self-awareness. Dancers appeared obsessive and stalker-like in their engagement with their own reflection. The instantly accessed feedback provided by the mirrors was complemented by staff members’ attention to detail. Each step, body movement and facial expression received feedback. The dancers patiently repeated the movements, searching for a subtle (but defining) improvement.

The dancers appeared supportive of one another. They were quick to suggest alternative ways to complete a scene, readily providing advice and acknowledgements. However, ultimately, the dancers are in competition, looking to catch the staff’s eye as they jostle for a role in forthcoming performances. An individual focus was evidently reserved for the dancers selected for leading roles. The effect this had on the group dynamics and motivation of individuals who receive less attention represented an important consideration. There was an acceptance that this is just ‘the way it is’. Nobody expected any focused support until they graduated to the necessary level. The company operated within a hierarchical structure, with senior dancers at the apex.

Of Russian descendants, this individual was clearly passionate and opinionated about the profession. He was under no illusions about how hard you must work if you want to achieve. ‘It has to be your life’, ‘it is not enjoyable’ were just two often used phrases. He believed many of the younger dancers did not share his philosophy. Instead, they go through the motions and fail to ‘take responsibility’. He compared those dancers to people happy to litter and throw chewing gum on the floor when no one is watching. You must behave as if the big ‘dancing’ brother is always observing.
The commitment required to progress in this environment was significant. Dancers were expected to be dedicated and make life choices with clear reference to their predicted performance impact. Personal responsibility was considered essential and extended beyond the activities displayed in the performance domain. Emphasising the hierarchy, senior dancers were portrayed as the bearers of good practice and role models for the younger dancers with aspirations of performance seniority. In addition to senior dancers, staff clearly played a critical role in creating the environment.

The choreographer’s facial expressions define the quality of the performance. Disappointment, frustration, anguish and joy characterise a 10-minute spell of facial contortions. The choreographer hums the tune out loud as he glides through the required movements. The dancers follow with graceful ease. The dancers think with their hands. Their eyes roll as their imagination conducts their hands through the next movement.

Practice is held at the theatre in preparation for the forthcoming performance series. The session begins with dancers going through the motions. Initial efforts are devoid of the passion often characterizing the dancers’ on-stage demeanor. Cutting an imposing, authoritative figure, Kate seemed intent on draining every ounce of effort out of the dancers. After several muted efforts she requests a microphone to project her voice. There was nowhere to hide. When standards slipped she took on the part of the punter. ‘The cheapest ticket is £50, it’s cost me £30 to get here, and if I bring any of the family we’re looking at over £100…and you’re only going to offer that.’

Journal entry, November 2009

The staff members commanded a clear presence in the studios. The dancers sought out staff for technical and emotional support. Staff provided a major source of feedback and discipline. The core staff members complemented one another with their different personalities and experience.

Early stage analysis followed in the form of further reflections. Hence, the final section of this chapter suggests how several theoretical considerations based on the
presented findings might ‘fit’ facets of the observational data. The tentative nature of theorization is warranted given the relative infancy of the thesis. Achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984) and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) were the featured theories in the review of literature (Chapter Two). As a consequence, these theories retained prominence in the paragraphs to follow.

3.5. Preliminary theorization

The thesis aims to explore the mechanisms that support progression and development. Given the enduring and persistent commitment required in pursuit of expert status (e.g., Ericsson et al, 1993), motivation was identified during the review of literature (Chapter Two) as a concept capable of providing a valuable insight into the processes involved. Variations in motivation are thought to influence cognitions, affect and behaviour (Mallet and Hanrahan, 2004) and, therefore, it would appear reasonable to suggest this (i.e., motivation) will have a subsequent impact on progression and development. Two motivational theories (i.e., achievement goal theory and self-determination theory) were selected and offered complimentary perspectives. The following paragraphs provide a review of the theoretical possibilities for these perspectives in terms of the reported observations.

According to achievement goal theory and self-determination theory, motivated behaviour emerges as a consequence of an interaction between an individual and the social environment. Both theoretical perspectives are underpinned by a belief that individuals have positive behavioural tendencies. Achievement goal theorists suggest that individuals are motivated by a need to demonstrate ability (Nicholls, 1984). Similarly, a key principle of self-determination theory is that individuals possess
inherent growth tendencies (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Whilst I acknowledge that the theoretical variables identified below are interactive in nature, the following section uses subheadings to offer clarity to the initial discussion.

3.5.1. Achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984)

Achievement goal theory recognises that motivated behaviour is the product of an individual’s perception of competence (Nicholls, 1984). Judgments of competence are based on the framework an individual uses to establish their success in any given context. In the literature, this framework is commonly referred to as the goal involvement state (Nicholls, 1989). It is difficult to establish the involvement state experienced by an individual based only from observational data. The discussion will, therefore, primarily focus on the factors that the existing literature identified as contributing towards the emerging involvement state. According to achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984), the framework (involvement state) an individual deploys to judge their success in a given context is the product of an interaction between their dispositional tendencies (orientation) and the motivational climate (Duda and Hall, 2001).

According to Treasure et al (2001), an individual’s interpretation of the presented cues (i.e., motivational climate) is subjective. So, whilst recognising that task and ego cues existed in the environment, each dancer had a unique vantage point and thus processed particular cues differently. The process of registering particular scenes and the subsequent interpretation is dependent upon an individual’s dispositional tendencies (Nicholls, 1984). Harwood and colleagues (2002) suggested that it was possible to develop an optimal goal profile. However, in terms of the present context,
with in excess of sixty individuals drawn from a range of backgrounds and occupying different developmental levels, the reality of reviewing this proposition was somewhat problematic. Nevertheless, the available literature generally indicates that elite athletes have a goal profile that is high in task and high in ego orientations (e.g., Pensgaard and Roberts, 2002). Ryan and Deci (2002) suggested self-determined motives towards behaviour might evolve. Taken within the current (hierarchical) context, based on Ryan and Deci’s (2002) reflections it might be reasonable to suggest that an individual’s goal orientation (dispositional tendency) could evolve and their profile adapt as a consequence of their status within the company. Therefore, a more appropriate question may be, what constitutes an optimal profile at each stage of a dancer’s development?

Kingston, Harwood and Spray (2006) believed that further research was required to establish the factors that contributed to an individual’s goal orientation (dispositional tendency) and this remains an aim for the present thesis. Specifically, the observations highlighted that the company employed a culturally diverse group of individuals who had been exposed to various training philosophies and approaches before their integration into the present environment. Therefore, understanding how and if an individual’s dispositional tendency has evolved should remain a priority. During paragraphs featured later in this chapter, I question the negativity that is often associated with ego defined motivational climates (e.g., Kaplan and Maehr, 1992). The fact that dancers experienced a motivational climate that presented character features reflective of ego environments and still retained a positive outlook and a sense of autonomy over their development, perhaps highlighted the significance of their evolving dispositional tendencies (i.e., orientation).
According to Allen and Hodge (2006), motivational climate defines the situational influences and interactions that occur between coach and athlete. The observations undertaken within this study highlighted the critical role staff and (in particular) senior dancers played in ‘shaping’ such a climate (Reinboth and Duda, 2006). Invariably, in the observed settings, staff (and senior dancers) set the tempo for sessions and established the key markers of performance and group structure (Morris and Kavussanu, 2008).

Ames (1992) identified two types of motivational climate. A mastery climate which promotes effort, personal improvement and skill development (Ames, 1992), and a performance climate that promotes normative comparison and public evaluation (Ames, 1992). In the present environment, task (mastery climate) and ego (performance climate) characterised features were observable. For example, the dancers’ intense engagement with the mirrors was notable. The mirrors provided instant feedback to the dancers on the quality and precision of their movement. Additionally, staff would regular encourage dancers to focus on ‘personal standards’. This encouraged a form of task involvement, with the situational cues promoting a focus on oneself. Task involvement is linked with a range of positive behavioural outcomes including effort (e.g., Ferrer-Caja and Weiss, 2000) and enjoyment (e.g., Hom, Duda and Miller, 1993). A dancer who perceived a task-involving environment could, therefore, be expected to experience an increase in perceived control and the satisfaction of the need for autonomy (Duda, 2001).
Interestingly, Olympiou, Jowett and Duda (2008) believed that athletes perceiving a task-involved (mastery) climate were closer, more committed and more interactive with their coach. The observations provided an insight into the closeness amongst the dancers with regards to their professional interactions and support. The dancers appeared comfortable providing feedback and complementing the performances of their peers. Interestingly, the interactions with staff were influenced by a dancer’s status within the company hierarchy. In this regard, dancers occupying senior roles were more frequently invited to share their observations and experiences of a particular scene with the staff. Indeed, in general there was a notable difference between senior dancers and those dancers involved in the corps-der-ballet with respect to their relationship with staff. This was perhaps a natural consequence of a timetable that facilitated one-to-one interactions between staff and those (senior) dancers who occupied the leading roles, which inevitably involved solo performances. It was clear that the social environment differed dependent upon a dancers’ status within the company hierarchy and, therefore, retaining a focus on personal standards ensured an element of control was reserved for these dancers. The importance of retaining a level of autonomy is discussed further in the self-determination theory section that follows.

Ego-focused situational cues were also evident within the context under study, and promoted the factors characteristic of a performance climate (Ames, 1992). This finding is aligned with previous work by Crespo and Reid (2007), who suggested that a motivational climate is likely to become more ego defining (performance) as individuals progress towards elite status. As mentioned previously, a clear hierarchy existed in the environment, with senior dancers afforded more one-to-one focused
time with staff due to the nature of their solo or partnered roles. Discussed theoretically, the senior dancers set a standard that their younger counterparts aspired to achieve and, therefore, encouraged a level of ego engagement. Ego involvement has been associated with a range of negative behavioural outcomes. For example, Kaplan and Maehr (1992) believed an environment perceived to be high in ego involving features is ‘hazardous’ and will potentially have a detrimental impact on self-esteem (competence).

Given the negative connotations often associated with ego involved goal states (e.g., Kaplan and Maehr, 1992), it is important to highlight several factors evident in the present environment that potentially mediated the negativity. I mentioned previously that a dancers’ dispositional tendency possibly operated as a mediator (Duda and Hall, 2001). I briefly revisit this point here before highlighting other considerations. Whilst outwardly the staff (and dancers) promoted the significance of task cues (e.g., ‘personal standards’), there was recognition that progress within the company required the maintenance or attainment of externally derived standards. Indeed, staff both implicitly and explicitly encouraged dancers to consider their engagement and performance in the studio with direct reference to (competing) colleagues. This evidence is potentially accounted for by an individual possessing a goal profile that considered a complementary balance of task and ego qualities (Hodge and Petlichkoff, 2000). If, as evident in this environment, dancers are exposed to cues that intermittently promote task and ego conditions, their susceptibility to the subsequent involvement state is likely to be increased.
Reinboth and Duda (2006) challenged the argument regarding the exclusively negative impact of ego involved (performance) climates. Reinboth and Duda (2006) identified confidence as one factor that potentially mediated the negative impact (Dweck, 1986). Feltz and Lirgg (2001) suggested that individuals who displayed robust confidence are more likely to make upward social comparisons. Such comparisons would align with the core features of the behaviour characterising ego involvement. In many respects, the environment presented a series of contradictions to the dancers. This is because dancers were encouraged to focus on personal standards whilst operating in a hierarchical environment that actively promoted peer comparisons. Subsequently, a balanced profile that engaged both task and ego focused perspectives in unison, intuitively made good sense for those dancers who had aspirations to progress. From a task perspective, they were able to retain the positive aspects of this reference, whilst from an ego perspective they were able to process cues and operate within the realities of a hierarchically defined performance environment.

3.5.2. Self-determination theory

The previous section, despite focusing on achievement goal theory, consistently introduced concepts aligned to the core features of self-determination theory. The inclusion of these elements is indicative of the close relationship that exists between the two selected motivational theories. A notable difference between the respective theories is that self-determination theory does not consider motivation to be a unitary concept and, instead, identifies different types of motivation that are the product of an individual’s interaction with the social environment (Deci and Ryan, 1985). The
following paragraphs discuss the elements of Deci and Ryan’s (1985) theory that resonated with the observations.

Self-determination theory focuses on the nature of motivation and its antecedents and outcomes (Boiche and Sarrazin, 2007). It purports that individuals develop different motives towards behaviour that vary in their level of self-determination. Social-contextual conditions facilitate or undermine motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1985), with self-determined motivation presenting important cognitive, affective and behavioural consequences (e.g., Boiche and Sarrazin, 2007). Amiot et al (2004) believed that individuals who perform at the highest level displayed high levels of self-determined motivation. Interestingly, it has been suggested that elite sport reduces intrinsic motivation and encourages an increase in self-determined extrinsic motivation (Mallet and Hanrahan, 2004). It was noticeable how the dancers’ approach differed dependent upon the status within the company hierarchy. Indeed, there were significant differences between the observed level and experience of autonomy and relatedness for senior dancers in comparison to their junior counterparts. The implications of these scenarios are considered in the paragraphs that follow.

An individual’s level of perceived autonomy is determined by their experience of choice and their perceived ability to initiate action (Reinboth, Duda and Ntounamis, 2004). According to Black and Deci (2000), autonomy support involves the coach taking others’ perspective, providing opportunities for choice, whilst also minimizing external pressures and demands. Within the observed setting, elevation to senior status was rewarded by an increase in autonomy for established dancers. This was highlighted by their attendance at class, performance negotiations and feedback
conversations with staff (Reinboth, Duda and Ntounamis, 2004). This concurs with previous research (e.g., Amiot, Gaudreau and Blanchard, 2004), which indicated that individuals performing at the highest level tend to experience increased levels of autonomy. Indeed, Reinboth and Duda (2006, p.281) previously speculated that ‘it may be the case that the best players on the team are granted more autonomy’. The difference in autonomy granted to senior dancers in comparison to the dancers operating at the base (i.e., corps-der-ballet) of the hierarchy was notable. Specifically, the members of the corps-der-ballet followed a generic timetable and experienced very little ‘choice’ with regards to their schedule or opportunities.

Securing autonomy in an environment where it was not openly shared or available is critical in the context of progression and development. Endorsing the perspective shared in the previous paragraph, Kimball (2007) believed under certain conditions an individual can retain a level of autonomy when their coach is making decisions on their behalf. Specifically, Kimball (2007) believed that if the athlete’s input was listened to, if the coach set a good example, if it was a willing (unforced) choice and the coach had the best interests of the athlete at heart, then the perception of autonomy could be preserved. Kimball (2007) recognised that student-athletes chose to remain in an environment that threatened their autonomy. He accounted for this behaviour by suggesting that individuals acknowledge the need to make sacrifices, accept the lifestyle and reframe their experiences positively. In the observed environment, the factors identified by Kimball (2007) were utilised by some dancers to ensure they retained the positive motivational response of autonomy. An awareness of the lifestyle choices and sacrifices dancers make outside of the observed environment remains a priority for this thesis. Whilst dancers would occasionally
acknowledge the impact on life away from the studio, Boiche and Sarrazin’s (2007, p.696) reflection that research ‘conducted in the sport context studied athletic motivation in isolation from other life domains’ is a statement that this research has aspirations to avoid in future chapters.

I have acknowledged in previous paragraphs that the dancers consistently demonstrated a supportive empathy towards their colleagues. Relatedness is considered a critical factor in the emergence of motivated behaviour. In self-determination theory, relatedness is defined as an individual’s perception of acceptance and attachment to a group (Deci and Ryan, 1991). Carron and Hausenblas (1998) believed that a supportive environment is more likely to be recognised as one where task focused qualities are perceived. Interestingly, the present environment was also characterised by ego-defined characteristics (performance climate; Ames, 1992). Ego characteristics are expected to breed individual rivalry, which negatively impacts relatedness (Reinboth and Duda, 2006). Considering previous research in the context of the present observations, interchangeable periods of supportiveness followed by the negative aspects of rivalry might be expected. The supportive empathy that characterised most observations would indicate that the negativity associated with the ego defined characteristics were either suppressed as a consequence of the task involved features, or due to dancers containing their emotions to settings beyond the studio environment.

3.6. Summary

The principal aims of the observations were to gain an insight into an unfamiliar performance environment, initiate relationships with key stakeholders and identify
(preliminary) theoretical possibilities. Engaging in the observations provided the necessary contextual grounding and offered an insight into the defining features of the performance environment. Theoretically, the core characteristics of achievement goal theory and self-determination were evident. However, the observations and subsequent discussion revealed several contradictions with the existing literature. Notably, a challenge to the negativity often associated with ego-defined environments was apparent. Given that performance environments inevitably promote ego-defined characteristics (Crespo and Reid, 2007), understanding how to mediate the negative impact often aligned to these features (Kaplan and Maehr, 1992) is essential for individuals (and environments) who have aspirations to sustain a positive developmental trajectory. Reflecting the evolving nature of the research, the questions generated during this Chapter helped to inform the staff interviews (Chapter Five) which follow.
Chapter Four: Bridging commentary one

During the review of literature (Chapter Two), the concept of a bridging commentary was introduced. The introduction of a bridging commentary at regular intervals of the research process was considered an important intervention that allowed me to share personal, methodological and conceptual reflections that influenced the collection and interpretation of evidence. The following chapter provides further justification for the bridging commentary, and presents reflections based on the early stages of this research journey.

Clearly, I have an interest and motivation to study the area, which provided the focus to my PhD (Conteh, 2005). Frank (2000) recognised the significance of discussing the standpoint of the storyteller, and I acknowledge that this process should extend beyond the ‘tokenistic engagement’ (Coyle, 2007, p.18) often observed in the literature. My thought process and decision making is clearly a product of the environments in which I have developed, currently exist, and those to which I aspire. The dynamism of these thoughts are not restricted to monthly or yearly developments, but rather evolve daily and weekly following interactions, observations or literature reviews. I would require infinite resources and time to effectively discuss each of these considerations. However, by providing access to some of my thought patterns, I hope to provide a perspective or framework to assist the interpretation of my work at different stages of the research process.

Such an approach is supported by King (2009, p.103) who suggested, ‘if an author acknowledges the potential ways in which their presence shapes the material they collect, and their voice in the analysis they produce, they offer at least an implicit
acknowledgement of the difficulty of directly capturing the lived experience of their subjects’. Equally, Ellis and Bochner (2000, p.748) suggested, ‘the stories we write put us into conversation with ourselves as well as with our readers. In conversation with ourselves, we expose our vulnerabilities, conflicts, choices, and values. We take measure of our uncertainties, our mixed emotions, and the multiple layers of our experience…The text is used, then, as an agent of self-understanding’.

I accept that a full disclosure of the experiences and influences that impacted my observations and interpretations is clearly not possible, and acknowledge the suppression of elements of myself in the bridging commentaries throughout this work. The bridging commentary is designed to share personal, conceptual and methodological reflections at the identified stage of research. Additionally, the bridging commentary will recognise the emergence of significant strands of literature at the time of writing. Smith (2009) suggested that judgments on research quality should be considered in relation to the context from which they emerge. Smith’s (2009) belief that research judgments, ‘are contingent on historical time and social / cultural / political place’ (p.92) emphasises the importance of such reflexive chapters. Equally, Attard (2008) acknowledged how reflective practice encouraged a rigorous ongoing analysis, and that narrative writing might be considered the best tool to reflect on experiences.

The bridging commentary can be considered a narrative. Polkinghorne (1995) believed a narrative analysis emerges as an individual writes about their experiences, emotions and thoughts. Carr (1997) identified first order and second order narratives. The bridging commentary would be considered a first order narrative, as it focuses on
4.1. Personal reflections

I am presently studying for my PhD part-time, alongside a full time job role. Following the completion of a master’s degree in sport psychology (2004), I had aspirations to progress immediately onto a PhD programme. I believe my main source of motivation at this time was largely driven by the status and recognition attached to being awarded a doctorate. In hindsight, despite being disappointed at not receiving the studentship applied for, I do not feel I had the necessary experience or qualities at the time to write or think at the appropriate level.

It is fair to say that I was naïve in both an academic and applied sense. My experience of applied environments was limited to a short work placement at a professional football club. My thinking was largely directed by others and informed by theory-driven journal articles. Subsequent experiences of teaching and operating in applied settings allowed me to develop a more independent thought process, and reassess the issues and behaviours that I considered significant. I believe it important to share this information as it has influenced and will continue to influence my approach to research.

Frank (2000) considered the standpoint of the storyteller. In doing so, he recognised that, ‘taking a standpoint requires self-consciousness about how fate and choices in
your life have positioned you in the world and with whom you have been positioned’ (p.356). My motivation for studying a PhD part-time was relatively straightforward. I had aspirations to progress in a career related to athlete support. I believed a PhD offered me the vehicle to reflect and discuss important considerations in an informed and systematic manner. I wanted to ensure that my practice was based on a thoughtful and well-considered approach that did not simply follow tradition or established theory.

For the past three years, I was employed in an athlete support role. The role involved the co-ordination of a university and national scholarship programme for talented and elite athletes from a range of Olympic and Paralympic sports. Additionally, I enjoyed several teaching responsibilities that involved delivering or convening units in topics relevant to lifestyle management, sport psychology and coaching. In reflecting on his experiences as a teacher-researcher, Attard (2008) commented on how his research and practice influenced one another. My approach to research differs to Attard’s (2008) in as much as it is not directly conducted in my workplace. However, the sentiments are clearly relevant, as the conducted research has clear implications for my ongoing applied practice.

When I commenced the athlete support role, I was surprised at what I felt was complacency in some of the athletes. These athletes were university age and, in the main, competing at the levels below world class. However, their demeanor reflected the status of established world-class athletes. It seemed to a certain extent that these athletes were content with the standards they had reached. My earliest observations noted with some surprise how being awarded kit, resplendent with national flags
seemed to be enough. Perhaps, I was being unfair. Regardless, I wanted to investigate further, and the focus of the PhD soon became established.

The emergence of the research area was certainly influenced by my Master’s dissertation, which examined motivational influences experienced by professional academy level footballers. Framed theoretically by the achievement goal theory literature, the research clearly dictated my initial thinking and undoubtedly influenced the introductory chapters of this thesis. I appreciate that sports people are often the target of criticism and media speculation questioning their commitment and motivation. My aim was not to add to this criticism. Indeed, I often spent time protecting athletes from such criticism. My aim rather was to identify the environment and characteristics that best support these individuals’ progression.

4.2. Methodological reflections

The following section reflects on my initial experiences of conducting research as a stranger in an unfamiliar environment. The reflections will be broadly categorised to consider the experiences of an insider or outsider researcher, and the potential for inductive or deductive approaches to observation.

Louis and Bartinek (1992) defined an insider as a researcher who occupied a place in the social group prior to study. Contrastingly, the outsider is only beginning to relate to the group being studied. Based on these definitions, I would unequivocally be classified as an outsider. To borrow a phrase from Schutz (1976), I entered the dance world a ‘man without a history’. Prior to commencing the research, my exposure to ballet was ashamedly restricted to Billy Elliot! However, an article in *The Times*
newspaper, which recognised the clear discipline and motivation required to succeed in a tough and uncompromising profession had slightly (and thankfully) distorted the impression created by the film.

Debates considering the relative merits of an insider or outsider perspective to research are inconclusive (e.g., Woodward, 2008). Woodward (2008, p.538-539) suggested that, ‘whilst insider participation may facilitate greater insights, the researcher could be implicated in excessive subjectivity and in privileging one position’. Ultimately, I am only in a position to ‘offer a verdict’ (McFee, 2009, p.303) on what I have observed. This verdict is determined by a history, but also dependent upon my education of the environment observed. Toulmin (2001, p.7) conceded that, ‘the view each of us has of the events through which we have lived is inevitably incomplete’. I initially lacked an appreciation of the ‘cultural pattern of (dance) group life’ (Schutz, 1976). Schutz (1976) used this term to define the ‘peculiar valuations, institutions, and systems of orientation and guidance’ (p.101), which the ‘natives’ use to navigate their environment.

An environment is influenced by cultures and traditions, which extend to micro and macro levels (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). As Denzin (1989, p.73) suggested, ‘no self or personal-experience story is ever an individual production. It derives from larger group, cultural, ideological and historical contexts. To understand a life, the epiphanies and self-stories that shape that life, one must penetrate and understand these larger structures’. If I had spent twenty years in a dance environment, what I would observe as critical may be widely different to what I initially observed (Chapter
Three). The situations and interactions I was, and am, drawn to are clearly products of my education.

Equally, the outsider is not immediately afforded the privilege of ‘insider knowledge’ and, therefore, may be limited in their capacity to understand (Woodward, 2008). The outsider may struggle to access, in any applied sense, the past and present histories (Le Gallais, 2008) influencing practice. This presented a clear challenge in the present research initiative, and reinforced the importance of retaining an open mind and being comfortable with an uncertain and evolving thesis.

Additionally, observations are perhaps limited if introduced in isolation. McFee (2009, p.299) acknowledged that, ‘we cannot detach the subject of the research from the context as that subject conceptualizes it’. An appreciation of cultural and historical factors is, therefore, important. However, to truly understand behaviours, this consideration needs to extend to an individual level. The value of the respective methodologies to follow is, therefore, critical in further deciphering ‘reality’ in a multi-layered fashion.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) categorised contextual considerations into micro and macro influences. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), micro conditions represent the immediate set of conditions that influence an individual on a day-to-day basis. Contrastingly, macro conditions extend beyond the more visible day-to-day influences and acknowledge the significance of socio, political and historical conditions. Clearly, macro influences impact upon the experienced micro conditions.
From a research perspective, and with particular respect to the current study, the challenge was to identify and present both conditions.

I was aware that my presence in the environment may influence the behaviour of the individuals I observed. I anticipated that my influence on the participants extended beyond considerations limited to the observational stages of the research process (Mruck & Mey, 2007, p.519). Vidich (1955) believed, ‘whether the fieldworker is totally, partially, or not at all disguised, the respondent forms an image of him and uses that image as a basis of response’ (p.80). According to Goffman (1969), ‘performers’ behaviour is likely to differ dependent upon the context. Hence, he (1969, p.97) believed that ‘…when one’s activity occurs in the presence of other persons, some aspects of the activity are expressively accentuated and other aspects, which might discredit the fostered impression, are suppressed’. Contrastingly, ‘backstage’, the performer is afforded the opportunity to relax and step out of the character that is scrutinized in the ‘front stage’ environment. Such a position emphasises the importance of, in Denzin’s (1997) words, retaining a ‘mobile consciousness’ (p.46). Such efforts ensured I remained aware of my relationship with the external world.

McFee (2009), in discussing the covert and overt nature of research, suggested that if subjects are aware they are involved in a research project, which has specific aims and a particular focus, this may influence their behaviour to an audience including the researcher. Debesay, Naden and Slettebo (2008, p.64) believed ‘it is also important, that the reader be informed of the theoretical framework for interpretation’. This is supported by Willis (2000), who suggested the need to make a ‘theoretical
confession’ that explicitly stated the theoretical position and subjective influences at the commencement of research. It is to such a consideration that I now turn.

4.3. *Theoretical reflections*

Willis’s (2000) ‘theoretical confession’ might be considered a contemporary interpretation of what Malinowski (1922) had previously referred to as ‘foreshadowed problems’. The following quote defines Malinowski’s (1922) thinking with regards to ‘foreshadowed problems’:

‘Good training in theory, and acquaintance with its latest results, is not identical with being burdened with ‘preconceived ideas’. If a man sets out on an expedition, determined to prove certain hypotheses, if he is incapable of changing his views constantly and casting them off ungrudgingly under the pressure of evidence, needless to say his work will be worthless. The more problems he brings with him into the field, the more he is in the habit of moulding his theories according to facts, and seeing facts in their bearing upon theory, the better he is equipped for the work. Preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of a scientific thinker, and these problems are first revealed to the observer by his theoretical studies’ (p.8-9).

Importantly, Malinowski (1922) acknowledged that commencing research with a specific framework is not necessarily negative if the researcher displays a level of openness.

As I observed, I considered the theoretical links. There was evidence of achievement goal theory. The terms originally championed by Nicholls (1984) many years ago were visible. The dancers’ focus on personal standards were clearly reflective of a
task state. Equally, staff discussions around aspiration and becoming a lead dancer demanded a consideration of ego involvement. The core characteristics of self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) were also evident. The social environment seemingly promoted, to a greater or lesser extent, elements of autonomy, competence and relatedness. However, an appreciation that further knowledge was required before formalising any secure thoughts was clearly necessary.

Werner and Schoepfle (1987) believed that observations evolve through a process that starts broadly and becomes more focused as the research progresses. Initially, researchers engage in descriptive observations that attempt to observe everything. Following descriptive observations, ‘natives’ help the researcher determine what can be considered irrelevant and the observations subsequently become more focused. Finally, selective observations emerge as the researcher becomes interested in specific elements of particular activities. Such a progressive view of observation soon became obvious in the present research.

In summary, the current chapter aspired to provide an insight into the methodological, conceptual and personal factors that influenced the early stages of this thesis. Recognising the significance of the storyteller’s standpoint (Frank, 2000), I have offered a ‘theoretical confession’ (Willis, 2000) and identified several ‘foreshadowed problems’ (Malinowski, 1922) which were the product of my applied and academic experiences. I accepted my initial position as an outsider, and reflected on how this status may evolve with the introduction of different research methodologies. I recognised that my initial status afforded me an insight into the day-to-day micro conditions (e.g., Corbin and Strauss, 2008) that influenced observed behaviours.
However, I aspired to understand how the macro conditions and influences that were not immediately observable impacted on the produced behaviour.
Chapter Five: Staff interviews

This chapter is divided into several sections. Firstly, some of the key elements involved in the preparation stages of semi-structured individual interviews with staff members are discussed. This includes the development of the interview guide, the negotiation of access, and an acknowledgment of the interview setting. Secondly, I briefly acknowledge relevant components of the interview process, before analyzing the findings. The analysis acknowledges the inductive and deductive nature of the final presentation, and highlights the deployment of several strategies such as member checking and triangulation. The Chapter concludes by summarising the key findings in relation to the established research aims (Chapter Two), and the evidence compiled via the observations (Chapter Three).

5.1. Interview preparation

Interviews were selected as the most appropriate method to follow the observations (Chapter Three). Specifically, the interviews provided an opportunity to gain insight into selected staff members’ perspectives of the environment. Several authors (e.g., Atkinson and Coffey, 2002; Becker and Geer, 1970) have discussed the value of combining observation and interview methodologies. In this respect, I agree with the core sentiments of Atkinson and Coffey (2002, p.808) who argued, ‘participant observation and interviewing are themselves distinctive forms of social action, generating distinctive kinds of accounts and giving rise to particular versions of social analysis’. In essence, the interviews provided an alternative view of the dance environment, and added meaning to some elements of the observed activity previously reported (Chapter Three).
In preparing for the interviews, it was important to consider a range of factors. Fontana and Frey (2000, p.645) acknowledged how ‘asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task than it may seem at first. The spoken or written word has always a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we word the questions and how carefully we report or code the answers’. The first stage in the interview process involved identifying and asking the ‘right’ questions. In the present context, the ‘right’ questions should elicit answers that permitted a further appreciation of the factors (individual and environmental) that contributed to progression and development.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) identified main questions, probes, and follow up questions as the essential components of an interview. Each question serves a particular purpose and helps maintain some continuity in the process. Main questions are designed to provide an individual with the opportunity to express an opinion relevant to the research aims (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), probes allow an interviewer to secure the necessary level of depth in the answers provided, whilst also demonstrating to the interviewee that their answers are receiving the appropriate level of attention. Rubin and Rubin (1995, p.153) believed good follow-up questions were the product of ‘trained curiosity, recognizing and pursuing puzzles while exploring emerging themes’. Follow up questions can be prepared or reactive, with again, a constant reference to the core research aims being essential.

Charmaz (2002, p.675-676) believed that ‘researchers cannot know exactly what the most significant social and social psychological processes are in particular settings, so they start with areas of interest to them and form preliminary interviewing questions
to open those areas’. In the present research, the ‘initial area of interest’ through which to explore progression and development was the concept of motivation, particularly in relation to two theoretical perspectives (i.e., achievement goal theory and self-determination theory), which framed this interest. Coupled with the knowledge acquired following the observations (Chapter Three), this helped ‘form preliminary interviewing questions’. The questions were designed to gain an insight into respective staff members’ perception of the systems and structures that operated within the environment, which supported dancers’ progression and development.

Additionally, several questions were introduced to help contextualise the observations previously reported (e.g., training schedule), and to explore the characteristics displayed by those dancers who seemingly benefited most from the environment.

The full interview guide can be found in appendix two. However, a brief summary of the key elements and the rationale for their inclusion is provided here. The interview guide was split into five areas. Each interview commenced with an orienting statement designed to provide staff with a brief insight into the thesis’ purpose, and to promote the critical role they would play in the research process. Following the orienting statement, the interview reserved separate focuses for practitioners, performers and the environment.

The questions included in the practitioner section were primarily designed to provide staff members (i.e., the interviewees) with an opportunity to introduce their role and associated objectives. The performer section comprised seven questions, covering a range of areas that included recruitment, schedule, technical skills, psychological skills, lifestyle skills, performance reviews and personal evaluations. The performer
questions were designed to supplement, clarify and challenge, where appropriate, the knowledge secured following the observations (Chapter Three). Additionally, several questions were designed with reference to specific elements of the two motivational theories (i.e., achievement goal theory and self-determination theory) that provided the initial framework for understanding notions of progression and development.

The fourth section of the interview guide focused on the unity I had observed amongst the dancers. Finally, generic questions provided staff members with an opportunity to reflect on the qualities that determined success and, therefore, ensured that any factors related to progression and development not considered during previous questions, were accounted for (e.g., ‘What are the characteristics and qualities that distinguish elite performers from the rest in the dance world?’).

Seven staff members were recruited in an approach that could be classified as theoretical sampling (e.g., Charmaz, 2002). According to Strauss (1987, p. 38) theoretical sampling describes a process, ‘whereby the analyst decides on analytic grounds what data to collect next and where to find them’. In the present scenario, the staff were selected as a consequence of their role within the company. The staff members selected for the interview process were involved in the coordination and delivery of the core day-to-day activities undertaken by the dancers. The roles staff occupied had varying degrees of seniority, and included artistic director, artistic coordinator, repetiteur and ballet mistress.

Following my guidance, a ‘research gatekeeper’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) was responsible for recruiting the selected sample. Further reflections on the
significant and emerging role played by the gatekeeper are reserved for bridging commentary two (Chapter Six). Each interview was conducted in a private office space at the dance studio and lasted between approximately 45 and 80 minutes. Each respondent was previously invited to select a location and interview time that worked within the confines of their schedule.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.110) suggested that the ‘initial few minutes of an interview can be particularly significant in establishing its nature and tone’. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), the interview dynamic can be influenced by a range of factors including, the researcher sharing reasons for doing the interview, offering reassurances regarding confidentiality, and appropriate small talk. The orienting statement was designed to position the interview and provided some justification for its inclusion in the research process. The orienting statement was preceded by the ‘appropriate small talk’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Discussions at this stage often focused on the routine daily activity performed by staff and dancers. Finally, prior to commencing the interview process, staff were provided with reassurances that the interview content would remain confidential and their anonymity protected.

In offering reassurances regarding confidentiality, I was aware that the discipline in general and the company specifically had previously received some negative research publicity. Therefore, I was conscious of ‘positioning’ myself in a manner that encouraged open dialogue with the staff. Fontana and Frey (2000) believed it is important for a researcher to guard against, and discourage respondents from behaving and responding in ways that might be considered socially desirable (see
Chapter Four; Bridging commentary one). Having spent considerable time in the studio environment during the observation stage (Chapter Three), I entered the interview process with a sufficient level of acquired knowledge and confidence to challenge (if appropriate) answers that might appear overly socially desirable.

According to Fontana and Frey (2000), interviews should not be considered ‘neutral tools’ for data gathering. Indeed, similar to the observations (Chapter Three), they are both negotiated and contextually bound. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 117) suggested, ‘there is a sense in which all interviews, like any other kind of social interaction, are structured by both researcher and informant’. Recognising and accepting the unique nature of each interview then is critical, and represents an important consideration in determining the most appropriate form of analysis.

5.2. Analysis

In advance of introducing elements of the transcribed interview content, it is necessary to briefly provide details of the process undertaken in relation to the analysis. Glaser (1978) suggested that the process of analysis and subsequent dissemination involves three stages. According to Glaser (1978) researchers prepare, organise and, finally, report the data. The first step in preparation, following the completion of each interview, involves transcribing verbatim the gathered content. Following the transcription (i.e., preparation), data are organised (Glaser, 1978) using two operations; namely coding and categorising (Côté, Salmela, Baria and Russell, 1993). This process involves the decontextualising and recontextualising of data (Tesch, 1990), and is discussed in further detail below.
The process of coding has been considered critical to qualitative analysis, as it facilitates the development of core categories through fracturing the data. In doing so, it acts as a mediator between the process of description and interpretation (Strauss, 1987). In terms of the current research, each transcript was reviewed extensively (e.g., Strauss, 1987), with inductive ‘meaning units’ (Tesch, 1990, p.116) identified (Côté et al, 1993). A meaning unit had been defined as ‘a segment of text that is comprehensive by itself and contains one idea, episode, or piece of information’ (Tesch, 1990, p.116). Each meaning unit was also provided with a tag, representative of the content. The tags were considered in-vivo codes as they used the terms provided by the individuals studied (Strauss, 1987), and were representative of first order themes. According to Strauss (1987), in-vivo codes have ‘analytic usefulness’ and ‘imagery’, as they are able to assist in the formation of theory and demonstrate specific meaning.

Once the initial tags were identified, similar segments were regrouped and categorised (Côté et al, 1993) into second order themes. The subsequent categories were assigned sociologically constructed codes (Strauss, 1987), and included as general dimensions (Glaser, 1978). The identified general dimensions were shared with my supervisor in a process akin to triangulation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As acknowledged in Chapter Two (Review of Literature), this form of triangulation involved sharing and discussing the general dimensions with my supervisor (Denzin, 1978), who acted as a ‘critical friend’ by challenging me to consider the appropriateness of the identified general dimensions. Additionally, the individuals involved in the interview process were invited to review their transcripts and acknowledge any inaccuracies or points
requiring further clarification in a process aligned to the core principles of member checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Three general dimensions were constructed following the analysis. These included ‘goals’, ‘determination’ and ‘life outside of dance’. The general dimensions were broadly related to the established research aims (Chapter Two) and will be discussed in this context. In appendix three the raw data are presented in their original format to provide an insight into the language used by the practitioners, and how a general dimension was constructed. The evidence (in appendix two) is structured in tables, replicating a format used by Pummell, Harwood and Lavallee (2008).

5.3. Interview findings

Each general dimension is introduced and discussed with raw data quotes used to illustrate key points where appropriate. Following these preliminary discussions, the theoretical reflections are made where relevant and any remaining questions highlighted and used to inform the data collection methods that follow.

5.3.1. Goals

Goals represented the first general dimension. The following paragraphs discuss the value of goals in relation to progression and development, before appropriate theorising. Specifically, I introduce the type of goals staff believed dancers set, and discuss the origins of the identified goals. The nature of the dance schedule dictated that there were always goals and targets to aspire to.

*I guess because we are always working on the next production, that’s their goal, they always have something to look forward to. Quite often when they’re
not actually going to perform, we get some of the younger dancers to learn the roles. So they have something to feed their brain and soul really (S3)

Staff suggested that dancers established goals based on both standards set by their peers, and their own individual expectations. The dance staff actively encouraged younger dancers to observe more established performers completing their routines. Providing dancers with opportunities to observe and subsequently practice key roles without the ultimate pressure of performance was believed to provide a clear goal and appreciation of the standards they should aspire to achieve.

They learn an awful lot. If nothing else they learn how hard...because some of the principal dancers will make a dance look so easy, but actually it is very hard for inexperienced people to do. So it makes them realize how hard it is. It also gives them a higher goal in a way (S3)

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As a dancer...when I was a dancer, I learnt more from watching other people than I did from really you know...taking class (S1)

In addition to the observations and practice opportunities, being provided with an opportunity to fulfill a more senior role was considered a significant and outwardly evident measure of development. In some respects, this provided dancers with the starkest form of feedback and a clear reference of their existing standard in comparison to peers. However, given the relatively small number of dancers employed by the company, these opportunities were often presented prematurely and perhaps provided a distorted view of a dancer’s development at any given time.
The subjective nature of the discipline meant a dancer had to be mindful of delivering a performance that met the approval of the senior staff ultimately responsible for selection and subsequent contractual decisions. The staff conceded how clarity regarding the expectations (and subsequent goal reference) might be difficult given the range of opinion and contradiction that defined conversations they had when discussing performances. This perspective is highlighted in the quote included below.

*Even within the ballet staff, we are all watching the performance and one of us will think that person looks particularly beautiful in that particular performance. But then someone will go, ‘what are you talking about? She looked dreadful!’ It’s a very personal thing (S3).*

The staff broadly recognised two forms of feedback; general and individual. Both forms assisted in generating goal related references. General feedback was offered with the onus placed on the individual to translate this information and apply it to their situation.

*Because you have one teacher in class and you have...65 dancers in this company and then you have a ladies class and a gentlemen’s class of thirty and thirty, or whatever the numbers. So one teacher is not going to give corrections to everybody. They are going to give general corrections and then it is up to you how you will work with it, work with yourself (S5).*

In addition to general feedback, the staff identified individual feedback. Individual feedback was offered directly to a dancer, and delivered in a manner determined by their individual character and requirements.
Honestly, I think one has to try to find a different way with every single individual. It sounds perhaps very far fetched, but you need to find the buttons to push with each person. Some people need love and affection. Some people will only do it by being kind of driven. That’s part of my job to also find how to push the buttons (S2).

In reality, based on the reflections from Chapter Three (Observations) and the evidence presented in this chapter, providing individualised feedback might be considered ‘far fetched’ and an ambitious aspiration. Due to the intense schedule, feedback was often sporadic, and acknowledged by the staff members as largely lacking the necessary structure. In a performance period, dancers often delivered back-to-back performances late in to the evening. Delivering personalized, specific and focused feedback, therefore, presented a significant challenge. Chapter Three highlighted how this type of feedback was reserved for those senior dancers occupying solo or partnered roles.

In addition to the externally referenced goals, staff recognised how individual dancers established their own standards of performance aspiration. Demonstrating the desire to consistently strive towards personal improvement was encouraged. However, equally, there was an acknowledgment that certain individuals were limited in their capacity for improvement.

But most dancers are…they have ambition to do as much as possible. And sometimes their ambition is more than their talent. But I don’t mind that so much. If people have dreams, it’s quite nice (S1).

***
Unfortunately, there will always be those people who don’t go past just being in the corps-der-ballet. They’ll do maybe nine, ten years and then leave and go on to do something else. There is a girl leaving in June to do a teachers’ course. She has enjoyed it, but she has always known that she would never really get to do anything more that where she was. It can be frustrating for that person, but then they will do something else (S4).

***

I don’t know what people want. Maybe they are happy with what they do. That’s why they don’t go any higher. Or maybe they can’t go any higher because of other reasons. I don’t want to be rude but some people are just not good enough to become principal dancers (S5).

The two goal frameworks identified (i.e., external and personally referenced goals) reflect the goal possibilities enshrined within achievement goal theory (i.e., ego and task; Nicholls, 1984). The goal framework deployed has implications for an individual’s subsequent perception of competence. Competence, in turn, represents a central feature of achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984) and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Competence influences motivation, and can contribute to positive behavioural outcomes such as persistence and effort (Nicholls, 1984).

These attributes have previously been identified as essential to an individual who has aspirations with regards progression and development (Young and Medic, 2008; Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer, 1993).

It has been suggested that performance judgments aligned to a task-involved goal framework contribute to more positive and sustainable behavioural outcomes when compared to judgments made in accordance with an ego framework (e.g., Ferrer-Caja and Weiss, 2000; Balaguer, Duda, Atienza and Mayo, 2002; Hom, Duda and Miller,
1993; Harwood, Cumming and Fletcher, 2004; Reinboth and Duda, 2004). However, the ego perspective is more adept at recognising the intricacies of a performance environment and the normative comparisons that determine an individual’s selection for progression (Harwood, Hardy and Swain, 2000; Crespo and Reid, 2007; Newton and Duda, 1995). The evidence presented endorsed the existence of orthogonal goal states (Hodge and Petlichkoff, 2000). It is a framework that encourages self-referenced reflections, whilst remaining aware of external comparisons that can contribute to more sustainable forms of motivation (e.g., Deci and Ryan, 2008b).

A tentative suggestion existed within the data that the type of goal followed might be partially determined by an individual’s status within the company. The hierarchical structure of the profession provided an insight into the steps the dancers had to take to progress. For example, good performances in smaller roles potentially created opportunities for bigger, more glamorous roles. Staff members also suggested that dancers would not necessarily want to do all the roles selected for. However, those who had aspirations to progress did not need to be ‘nagged’, and were more aware of the ‘overall picture’ related to their development.

*With this particular girl, we don’t have to nag her about doing the small roles. She does that very well anyway. I think she is already thinking if I do this well then there might be the next step (S3).*

***

*I think sometimes with the slightly younger dancers they’ll think, ‘I can do three pirouettes and he can’t, so why is he the prince?’ They don’t see the overall picture. Some of them do, some are much more realistic (S3).*
The narrative presented above can be partially explained by self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Deci and Ryan (2008) broadly identified autonomous and controlled forms of motivation. The type of motivation experienced influences the subsequent behavioural and psychological outcomes. Specifically, the literature recognises autonomous motivation more positively than controlled forms of motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2008). A more autonomous regulation is related to behaviours of increasing persistence, positive affect and improved performance (Deci and Ryan, 2008). It could be argued that the dancers who engaged in the ‘smaller roles’ were experiencing a form of identified regulation (Ryan and Deci, 2000); an extrinsic form of motivation, where individuals consciously value the goal and, importantly, display high levels of autonomy (e.g., Amorose and Anderson-Butcher, 2007). In the present context, for some dancers, the origin of this autonomous form of motivation could have been a product of their awareness of the ‘overall picture’ and the need to satisfy the staff members responsible for making selection decisions.

An individual’s interaction with the environment would appear to be influenced in part by their status within the company. Based on the information presented in this section, a clear inference can be drawn that the type of motivation experienced (autonomous to controlled) will change at different stages of the company (Reinboth and Duda, 2006). Initial progression for the dancers was dependent upon engaging in activities and tasks that, on a personal level, were often not overly desirable (e.g., identified regulation; Deci and Ryan, 1985). Demonstrating an awareness of the ‘overall picture’, and engaging in behaviours that satisfied the requirements of the staff, created opportunities to experience autonomy-supportive contact from the staff.
(Mageau and Vallerand, 2003), which was reserved for dancers with senior or principal status (Amiot, Gaudreau and Blanchard, 2004).

In addition to further establishing an individual’s disposition (e.g., Kingston, Harwood and Spray, 2006), the evidence presented in this section also questioned the static nature of these tendencies. Based on the data, it is suggested that an individual’s perception of the environment is dependent and adjusted according to their status or position within the company. This provided an example of why it might be appropriate to consider dispositional tendencies as more dynamic in nature.

In summary, the content presented in this general dimension indicated that the majority of dancers, from the perspective of the staff, set some form of goal. Goals, and specifically, goal frameworks are considered important in the context of achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984). The subsequent performance judgments have significance in relation to competence (e.g., Nicholls, 1984) and also the positivity and sustainability of the behaviours that are manifest (e.g., Deci and Ryan, 2008b). The dancers’ goals materialized from a range of sources, and arguably assisted an individual’s negotiation of the programme demands.

The ability to remain task focused (i.e., self referenced) appeared difficult in an environment that provided a constant reminder of an established hierarchy (i.e., ego focused) where selection decisions were based on subjective judgments related to the comparative qualities of individuals (Duda, 1992; Harwood, 2002). Additionally, the subjective nature of the discipline encouraged some dancers to engage in behaviours recognised and rewarded by staff who were ultimately responsible for making
selection decisions. An interesting dynamic existed between the staff-provided feedback and an individual dancer’s personal evaluation. A difference of opinion often existed; however, the staff were ultimately responsible for presenting opportunities for progression. A dancer was, therefore, expected to align and make corrections in accordance with this feedback, irrespective of their personal reflections.

5.3.2. Determination

The present theme discusses the existence and origin of determination in dancers. Determination was highlighted as critical to a dancer’s progression in the company. The quote below was representative of the staff dialogue in this respect:

*I think most people who do something well have got determination...they can focus on where they want to go. It’s not necessarily the people with the best physique who make it always to the top (S1).*

Staff used several examples when describing how they might expect to see determination. The examples used below are reflective of these discussions, and referenced several behavioural characteristics.

*I had a girl, a Japanese girl in Amsterdam who, she changed the shape of her legs by the way that she worked. She had rather bowed legs but because she was so determined to make it she found ways of using her body to actually make the look of her Japanese kind of bowed legs look different. That’s determination. She didn’t have surgery and she didn’t have...It was just...she studied and she looked. And said, ‘if I do this and stretch like this’. You know, her legs were still the same as they always were. But she found, through her perseverance how to make herself look good (S1).*
It’s when you see them working. Not just in rehearsals, most of them work very, very hard in rehearsals. But you see them in the corner of your eyes practicing the simplest thing. But they are practicing. Some people will never take ‘walk on’ roles. Some will not take what they see as menial roles. But those with extremely good work ethic would put just as much energy and effort in to those roles as they would for their own variations where they have the spotlight on them (S3).

Staff highlighted a range of sources contributing to the displayed acts of determination. These included a compensation for natural ability, prioritisation, parenting, and training influences. According to staff, a ‘compensatory determination’ characterised individuals with physical limitations.

Usually the people who work the hardest and concentrate the most have had to. To get over the fact that they haven’t been so blessed. And they have fiery determination (S1).

Some of them will have beautiful bodies, the physique, the facility that every dancer would dream of. But they will not do the basics like doing dance every day that will get them better. But because of their look and natural ability and technique they are often given the roles. And the outcome is disappointing because they haven’t prepared themselves well for it. It’s hard for the rest of the company to see as well. Some of them work so hard, but have limitations, and for these reasons are not given the role – but see somebody who has everything not giving 100% work; it must be very frustrating (S3).
The less ‘talented’ individual placed greater value on the importance of working hard to compensate for their perceived physical and aesthetic deficiencies. Equally, staff believed that individuals who possessed the complete ‘facility’ sometimes neglected the importance of determination and a serious work ethic. Deci and Ryan (2000) believed if individuals recognise the value of engaging in particular activities they are able to internalize the behaviour and subsequently experience autonomy. Autonomy is associated with improved levels of persistence, performance and well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2000), and is, therefore, explicitly linked to progression.

The examples above identified individuals who had ‘beautiful bodies’ but, as a consequence, neglected ‘the basics’. These individuals contrasted with the dancers who had to ‘work the hardest and concentrate the most’. It was sometimes considered then that the individuals with the required physical attributes did not recognise the significance of supplementing their physical profile with the necessary work ethic. A challenge for the staff then, was encouraging the dancers (irrespective of physical attributes) to embrace the need to demonstrate the qualities characterising determination.

Some dancers did not demonstrate the desired work ethic because (in the staff members’ opinion) they did not recognise the significance of this attribute relative to their physical talents. Additionally, several staff members speculated that the origins of determination might also be related to individuals’ cultural upbringing and training. Although a rather simplistic perspective, there is a suggestion that those individuals brought up in less privileged or more challenging environments benefited from a stronger desire to succeed.
I don’t want to generalize too much but you know, it’s my experience certainly, that people who come from certain countries where they don’t have it as easy as some British kids have it, they do want it more (S2).

***

I don’t know if it’s parenting. If it’s parents that lead you the right way and support you. You also hear stories of male dancers whose parents don’t want to take it seriously even if they do. Maybe that makes them a little bit stronger and more driven. Because they’ve already had to fight to get into it. For girls, it might be a different story. I don’t know. There are stage mums who push you and the child resents it and can’t do it anymore and can’t listen to authority. Or maybe the parent is just supportive and lets you chose your own path. It’s hard (S2).

***

I was trained in this country and British trained dancers tend to be tougher and they’re more realistic as well. I don’t know why, but some Russian trained dancers quite often are trained to become the leading dancer, rather than trained to become part of the company. From a very young age they are drilled to become a prima ballerina. They do find it very hard to dance with others. To us, it seems like sometimes they are picking what they want to do (S3).

The extracts above suggest, with some contradiction, that previous experiences have left an indelible mark on certain individuals and influenced their subsequent approach to the present environment. As a consequence of previous experiences, some dancers were considered to have invested more value in certain aspects of the discipline (e.g., work ethic).
Dance staff acknowledged the importance of working hard all the time, not just to satisfy attentive staff in some sessions. These sentiments reinforced the core message promoted in the field notes (Chapter Three), which highlighted the significant commitment required to succeed in the discipline. The observations (Chapter Three) and interviews both promoted a commitment that extended beyond the activities directly visible to staff members. These insights challenge the utility of the existing perspectives (i.e., achievement goal theory and self-determination theory) and reinforce the need to redefine the boundaries governing any given ‘motivational climate’ (Allen and Hodge, 2006).

Staff acknowledged on several occasions that factors beyond the studio environment (past and present) contributed to the behaviours and subsequent performances produced by dancers. Indeed, the importance attached to different aspects of performance, and the discipline in general, should be considered in the context of an individual’s life circumstances. The data also revealed that an individual’s priorities, and the importance attached to specific (life) roles, could change over time. For example:

_You can have two equally talented girls and one just wants it a little bit more and she will put in the work. Then a few years will go by and you wonder what happened to the other one because they were so talented. Maybe their priorities changed or they realized this wasn’t the life that they wanted_ (S2).

***

…it depends what people want from their lives. To improve and become even a first soloist, you have to work a lot, you have to think all the time. You cannot allow yourself to come and do class just to allow yourself to do it.
You’ve got to think, you’ve got to work, every day and every hour. And I don’t think everybody is that passionate (S6).

In summary, it was clear that staff members considered determination a critical attribute for dancers retaining aspirations for progression and development. The perceived importance was arguably reinforced by an individual’s upbringing, with cultural and parental influences considered crucial. Finally, considering the importance of the discipline in the context of an individual’s life was also recognised as significant.

These reflections somewhat challenge the existing motivational perspectives and identify several additional factors relevant to progression and development. The evidence suggests that certain behaviours were manifest as a consequence of the perceived importance attached to them by an individual. The factors contributing to the perceived importance and subsequent engagement are representative of a complex interaction between past and present influences. For example, a dancer may demonstrate determination to compensate for perceived physical limitations. Equally, previous training might have predisposed individuals to focus on particular aspects of performance or approaches to training. These factors were essential to better understand an individual’s approach to negotiating the demands of the performance environment.

5.3.3. Life outside of dance

The general dimension ‘life outside of dance’ related to how activity outside of the dance environment impacted performance (and ultimately progression). Interestingly, the data presented in this theme contained several contradictions. For example, some
staff members believed ‘life outside’ could provide the necessary perspective to help an individual establish their priorities, whilst (in contrast) others promoted the need to retain an exclusive focus on dance activity. These reflections were grounded in a schedule that placed significant demands on the dancers (see Chapter Three). During the course of a year, dancers were expected to deliver in the region of 120 performances. Approximately 70 performances were crammed into a busy four-month period between October and January. The extracts included below described the dancers’ lives as ‘brutal’, and depict a relentless schedule of activity.

*You finish a week in Glasgow and then you’re in Bristol. There is no time to spend at home. It’s brutal. You have to really…Dancers have to grit their teeth. You may have one free day to go home and change some of your clothes, do the washing. It’s a very tough life (S1).*

***

*We rehearse, we dance, we rehearse, we dance, there’s this season, there is another season, there’s this production, another production and then something else (S5).*

***

*In this company we have seven, eight shows a week. Sometimes at Christmas we have twelve a week, which is a lot. Then, after we finish a production, we start what is called the rehearsing period. After rehearsing we go on the road again and dance for another…I don’t know how many weeks. It’s quite hard and it is different to what other companies do. It’s a harder life compared to other ballet companies (S5).*
These comments highlighted how time outside the discipline was limited. How this time was used productively to assist performance and progression represented a point of contention for the staff members.

*You can see if they want more from you or if they just see it as a job. They just come in, do their job, go home and are happy how it is (S3).*

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*People who are very...who want to become senior principals, who want to become very good dancers, they have a harder life...because if you have a performance, you think about preparing. You don’t drink, you don’t go out, and you go to bed early. You prepare yourself; you have a very hard routine (S5).*

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*It’s also important to remember that they are human beings and they have a life outside as well (S3).*

The motivational theories introduced in Chapter Two (review of literature) arguably offer an isolated interpretation of (motivated) behaviour with a focus reserved primarily for the performance context (e.g., Allen and Hodge, 2006). Dispositional tendencies are considered, however, based on the findings presented in this chapter, a more holistic approach to understanding motivated behaviour, and progression, is encouraged. A more holistic perspective would consider presented behaviour in the context of an individual’s life and priorities. Boiche and Sarrazin (2007) explored the conflicting nature of various life domains in relation to self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985). They subsequently concluded that ‘sport is not an island
separated from the rest of the world’ (Boiche and Sarrazin, 2007, p. 687); a sentiment which could certainly be applied to the present dance context.

5.4. Summary

The interviews permitted an insight into the performance environment via the interpretive lenses of seven staff members. The evidence supplemented my existing knowledge of the environment and reinforced several core messages observed in Chapter Three. The evidence highlighted several factors not overtly accounted for in the existing theoretical frameworks, yet relevant to an understanding of progression and development. In the context of progression and development, the existing literature recognised the importance of generating behaviours that are sustainable and positive. The present chapter highlighted several factors that required further consideration to understand how the desirable behaviours were manifest.

The staff believed that the environment encouraged dancers to establish goals (general dimension one) based on the recurring schedule, in addition to comparisons with peers and against personal standards of performance. The significance of the goal framework an individual uses was discussed in the context of achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984). Staff also acknowledged how several key individual differences existed between dancers and speculated that these were the product of previous training environments, parental influences and cultural background amongst other factors. Additionally, the staff indicated that a dancer’s behaviour was influenced by their status within the company. Indeed, supporting the evidence from the observations (Chapter Three), staff recognised that the provision of individual feedback was rare and largely restricted to dancers occupying lead positions. The
subjective nature of feedback (and performance judgments) meant that dancers were required to adapt to the expectations established by staff if they had aspirations to progress. This represented a further example of the complexity apparent in the environment and further challenged the static conception of the individual implied within achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984), whilst also endorsing the need to recognise different types of motivation as promoted by self determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985).

The nature of the discipline, which operated a clear hierarchical structure, required dancers to consistently demonstrate determination \((\textit{general dimension two})\). Staff recognised determination as a desirable attribute for dancers who were expected to negotiate the challenges of a performance environment (e.g., Holt and Dunn, 2004). The origin of such determination was considered a product of past and present experiences. In the present, determination often characterised a dancer who did not possess the perfect physique. These dancers’ compensated for their physical limitations by demonstrating an exemplary work ethic. Unfortunately, the reverse was often seen in dancers who had ‘beautiful bodies’ but neglected a commitment to the ‘basics’.

The results here add value to the existing psychological theories, as they provide a more context specific appreciation of progression. This was evident in the final general dimension, \textit{life outside of dance}, which reinforced the importance of understanding an individual’s approach in the context of their life priorities. An agreed consensus regarding how time away from the studio should be used was not forthcoming. However, the evidence reinforced the significance of demonstrating an
awareness of the importance attached to life outside of dance. This further emphasised how an individual’s motivation (and subsequent progression) has to be considered from a holistic perspective. Such a perspective could account for the challenges that exist outside of the performance environment, and determine the status of the discipline according to its assigned priority (and importance).

In conclusion, the present chapter built on previous evidence (e.g., observations; Chapter Three) and provided a further insight into the performance environment central to this thesis. The discussion further challenged the theoretical utility of achievement goal theory and self-determination theory in accordance with the established research aims.
Bridging commentary two retains the same aspirations as the first bridging commentary featured in Chapter Four. The present chapter identifies several pertinent personal, methodological and conceptual reflections that align with the core research aims and, importantly, maintain continuity in the research process. This approach matches Finlay’s (2002) description of reflexivity. Finlay (2002, p. 224) believed that ‘reflexivity can be understood as a confessional account of methodology or as examining one’s own personal, possibly unconscious reactions. It can mean exploring the dynamics of the researcher-researched relationship. Alternatively, it can focus more on how the research is co-constituted and socially situated through offering a critique or through deconstructing established meanings.’ Personal experiences, both within and outside of the research context, coupled with the methodological approach, continued to impact the conceptual possibilities of the current project. Kleinsasser (2000, p. 157) recognised how ‘without collecting more data, reflexivity enables the researcher to present a more passionate, wise, and rich account’. Additionally, McFee’s (2009, p. 306) reflection that truth is ‘perspectival’ highlights the importance of sharing the researcher’s perspective.

From a methodological perspective, this Chapter considers issue of access. Securing access to relevant people and valued knowledge ultimately underpins and determines the effectiveness of the research process. Within the present study then issues of practical access are considered with reference to the role of the gatekeeper, with knowledge being discussed in relation to the interview process. I also reflect on how the data from the interviews were constructed between the interviewer and
interviewee, and how the narrative shared was often the product of the cultural and language resources available.

I further discuss my personal influence on the research process and acknowledge how this fluid dynamic contributed to certain themes and lines of enquiry (Le Gallais, 2008). Fontana and Frey (2000) suggested that authors who considered researchers to be contaminators of the presented research product, shared an unhelpful perspective. Instead, they proposed that, ‘through active reflexivity we should recognise that we are part of the social events and processes we observe and help to narrate’ (Fontana and Frey, 2000, p.812). The bridging commentary will continue to discuss the constructed findings from my dynamic ‘vantage point’ (Tsang, 2000, p.45).

6.1. Methodological reflections

Negotiating access to the practical environment, and the relevant intellectual resources stored within, presents researchers with a significant challenge. Purdy and Jones (2011, p.2) believed that ‘we should better take into account how we gather data and, in particular, the dynamic role we play as researchers to ensure access and acceptance into the field’. During bridging commentary one (Chapter Four), I acknowledged my role as an outsider (e.g., Woodward, 2008) and reflected on the access that this potentially warranted. I deliberately acknowledged a practical and intellectual element to access. This perspective is reinforced by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.43) who considered access, ‘not simply a matter of physical presence or absence’. I wanted to gain access to the relevant elements of the physical environment, whilst also facilitating the conditions that allowed participants to express their thoughts openly and honestly.
Purdy and Jones (2011, p.7) recognised that ‘a fundamental component of successful fieldwork is related to gaining access and establishing rapport with potential informants’. I was (at least initially) indebted to a ‘gatekeeper’ to facilitate these opportunities. The ‘gatekeeper’, who represented my primary point of contact with the company, acknowledged my research interest and provided me with an opportunity to share my vision for the research process. The ‘gatekeeper’ subsequently organized opportunities for me to observe a range of activities that characterised the daily schedule of dancers and staff. Clearly, the role of the ‘gatekeeper’ was critical to the eventual findings and the sustainability of the research process.

Having acknowledged the significance of the ‘gatekeeper’, a brief narrative that introduces this individual and offers further context to the nature of our interactions is warranted. Initial entry to the organisation was gained following an email sent to a generic address, which introduced my less than refined research aims, a recently established curiosity for the dance profession and my current professional involvement in talent development within sport. Presumably, the recipient of this email identified that the subsequent ‘gatekeeper’ would be best placed to respond on behalf of the organisation, exploring the feasibility of my research aspirations and credibility, as a person and researcher. This internal communication was significant. My email had been forwarded to the inbox of the Human Resources Director. This individual occupied a position at board level and had a remit that focused on the experiences of dancers and staff. He was well placed to facilitate my requests and (as I subsequently learnt) had internally established a reputation for operating in a
discrete and respectful manner with employees (i.e., dancers and staff). Additionally, a member of his family was in the final stages of completing a PhD. The insights he had gained through this relationship seemed to encourage an appreciation and supportive empathy towards my endeavours.

Our initial interactions continued via email. During these exchanges I shared details of my background and honestly expressed my limited knowledge of the dance profession. Having established some credibility, a phone call preceded an invite to the studio for a face-to-face meeting. This meeting represented an opportunity for me to detail my aims and also gain an insight into the context, which would become the main focus of study. The meeting concluded with an agreement that a period of reconnaissance should be undertaken. This represented a safeguard for both parties. I learnt about the periodization of the dance calendar and negotiated initial entry dates primarily based on my availability due to pre-existing work commitments. Over time I was afforded the autonomy to select days to visit and (in consultation) the identification of prospective interviewees. Recruiting participants in a manner representative of theoretical sampling (i.e., selection based on analytical needs; Strauss, 1987) provided an important foundation to the research. From the outset I was keen that the research had the freedom to evolve and theoretical sampling would be at the core of this approach. No requests for interview were rejected and the ‘gatekeeper’ actively facilitated and endorsed the importance of staff engagement on my behalf. In paragraphs to follow I share several cautionary notes regarding ‘gatekeepers’ in general. These represented cautions, that to date, I believe had been negotiated comfortably.
The ‘gatekeeper’ was interested in the research, but perhaps as a consequence of their previous insight into PhD study (mentioned above) and their personality, was keen to avoid being intrusive or put pressure on me with regards to any findings. I was committed to sharing relevant observations, at selected intervals, and was encouraged to do this on my terms. Between visits I maintained frequent contact with the ‘gatekeeper’ via text and email contact. I developed a growing appreciation for the discipline and was keen to share this in an authentic manner. I was also understandably interested in protecting a relationship that had provided me with a level of access beyond what I could have expected. As mentioned, and despite the positivity, several cautionary notes and questions (many rhetorical) are required to accompany this introduction.

For example, I had to consider what information I chose to disclose to the ‘gatekeeper’. In making this decision, I had to seek a balance between sharing sufficient information to acquire the necessary access, and retaining a share to guard against participants acting in a socially desirable manner. In this respect, McFee (2009) identified the relative merits of an overt or covert approach to research. Specifically, McFee (2009, p.300) believed ‘research cannot be successful if conceived in a fully-overt way’. In the present setting, I was open regarding the broad research aims. I also shared with the relevant participants the general focus of the thesis (i.e., progression and development). I continued to emphasise my aspiration to secure context specific knowledge regarding the operational practice, in an approach that would be considered semi-covert (Calvey, 2008).
I was also aware that ‘…Gatekeepers will generally, and understandably, be concerned as to the picture of the organization or community that the ethnographer will paint, as they will usually have practical interests in seeing themselves and their colleagues presented in a favourable light’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.51). This comment by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) represented a concern and emphasised the important role I had as a researcher in trying to negotiate these possibilities (Purdy and Jones, 2011). My longitudinal and intermittent engagement with the company, coupled with the quantity of staff and dancers, meant that it would be difficult for the organization to present itself or themselves in ‘a favourable light’ (if this was their desire) on each occasion that I visited.

Randall and Phoenix (2009) believed that an individual’s ability to tell the ‘truth’ is influenced by a range of factors in an interview scenario. In this respect the level of self-insight an individual has will impact the nature of their disclosure (Randall and Phoenix, 2009). Relatedly McCall and Simmons (1969, p.3) suggested, ‘because many of the features of organization are not recognised by the members, they cannot report them even when carefully questioned by a skilled social science interviewer’. In this context, I recognised my role as an outsider as a significant advantage (Woodward, 2008). I was still securing an appreciation of the culture and, therefore, my ‘cultivated naiveté’ (Angrosino and Flick, 2007) and subsequent questioning challenged staff members’ taken for granted assumptions.

Randall and Phoenix (2009, p.134) also acknowledged how, ‘inescapably, listeners shape what tellers tell’. In this regard, Dean, Eichorn and Dean (1967) identified two broad types of interviewees. Those who are sensitive to the area of concern and those
who are more willing to reveal. The broad categories identified by Dean et al. (1967) can be further divided in a manner that takes into account the origins of the interviewees’ position (e.g., naivety). I recognised that the quality of the final research product would be influenced by the intellectual disclosure permitted by respondents. I was also aware of Hammersley and Atkinson’s (2007, p. 179) suggestion that ‘what people say and do is produced in the context of a developing sequence of social interaction. If we ignore what has already occurred or what follows, we are in danger of drawing the wrong conclusions’. Similarly cultural conditions that exist at a micro and macro level (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) clearly have implications for data collection and analysis (Chase, 2005). Randall and Phoenix (2009) acknowledged how, ‘personal stories that we tell are shaped by cultural narrative resources; they are also shaped by the passage of time’ (p.127). This statement was considered in relation to both the researcher and researched.

The evidence collated coupled with my personal disposition, determined the conceptual possibilities (e.g., Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Given that various approaches to data collection were expected to be deployed, and that I continued a journey of personal development, both within and outside of the research, it was reasonable to expect that the conceptual possibilities would evolve. As Charmaz (2002, p.675-676) previously noted, ‘researchers cannot know exactly what the most significant social and social psychological processes are in particular settings, so they start with areas of interest to them and form preliminary interviewing questions to open up these areas’.

6.2. Conceptual reflections
During bridging commentary one (Chapter Four), I recognised my standpoint as the storyteller (Frank, 2000). I shared some details regarding my position both within and outside the research context. Within the research context, I was a ‘man without history’ (Schutz, 1976), an outsider (Louis and Bartunek, 1992). Outside of the research context, I was aware that my previous and ongoing experience would influence my approach to the research. Malinowski (1922) used the term ‘foreshadowed problems’ to describe the preconceived personal and theoretical factors that researchers inevitably hold. These factors have also been described as sensitizing concepts (e.g., Charmaz, 2002). Charmaz (2002, p. 683) suggested that ‘if researchers make their sensitizing concepts more explicit, they can examine whether and to what extent these concepts cloud or crystallize their interpretations of data’.

The theories included in the review of literature (Chapter Two) retained a moderate level of prominence in the chapters that immediately followed. However, during the previous chapter (i.e., Chapter Five; staff interviews) I provided an account that challenged the theoretical utility of achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984) and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) in relation to the core research aims. Such constructive challenges are in accordance with Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul’s (1997, p.235) belief that:

‘When formal theories or models are used to power the research, and this is often the case, it is essential that the researcher view this as a starting point, a series of questions against which the findings can be compared. The trick here is to compare where information fits, where it does not, and what is called for in reshaping a theoretical rationale or creating a new one’.
Using Ely et al’s (1997, p.235) terminology, achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984) and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) can be recognised as the ‘formal theories’ that were used to initially ‘power the research’. The rationale for deploying these theories was discussed extensively in the review of literature (Chapter Two) and bridging commentary one (Chapter Four). The evolutionary nature of this thesis (discussed in personal, conceptual and methodological terms) accommodates Ely et al’s (1997, p.267) belief that considering alternative theoretical frameworks is only feasible following ‘a lapse of time’.

Using grounded theory principles, Charmaz (2002) suggested that researchers should regularly reflect on three questions. Firstly, she asked researchers to consider what does the concept (e.g., achievement goal theory or self-determination theory) illuminate about the data. Secondly, how does the concept apply here (in the research context)? Finally, where does the concept take the analysis? Charmaz (2002, p.684) believed, ‘as researchers answer such questions, they make decisions about the boundaries and usefulness of the sensitizing concept’.

The existing motivational perspectives (i.e., achievement goal theory and self-determination theory) primarily focus on the factors operating at a micro level within the performance environment. Subsequent evidence promoted the significance of other factors, which recognised the complexity of the behavioural origins. For example, the dynamic nature of an individual’s tendencies and an appreciation of behaviour in the context of life (and the associated priorities) become increasingly relevant. Additionally, there was an acknowledgment of the macro political factors and unspoken traditions that inform expectations and behaviour in a dance context.
In this respect Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p.110) previously suggested that ‘we do not use the literature in order to provide ready-made concepts and models. Rather, we use ideas in the literature to develop perspectives on our own data, drawing out comparisons, analogies and metaphors’. The motivational theories continued to provide a useful perspective and challenged my ideas regarding progression and development.

6.3. Personal reflections

In an applied sense, practitioners’ in general, be they sport or dance based, use of a series of ‘buzz words’ or clichés often frustrated me. I use the term ‘buzz words’ as a reference to those words and phrases that are considered fashionable and regularly inserted, unchallenged, in conversations and on brochures. Jones (2009) has previously warned of the danger of using well-worn clichés as appropriate descriptors of behaviour. A term that appeared to be currently in vogue in the applied sports setting is ‘holistic’. This is particularly relevant given the discussion introduced in a previous paragraph regarding the importance of considering a dancer’s approach to the discipline in the context of life priorities (Chapter Five; Staff Interviews).

Frequently, practitioners will promote the virtues of holistic support. Sadly, often the promotion and actual practice of this support bear little resemblance. I use the anecdote below to make this point. It’s based on a conversation with an individual who managed the support programme at a sports academy. An athlete I was beginning to work with had previously been involved in the academy, and it presented an opportunity to learn about the initiatives they had engaged with.
The support provided by the academy sounded excellent. The coordinator enthusiastically listed the services available to athletes. The well-rehearsed speech was delivered with conviction, and described a programme that was clearly capable of producing individuals equipped to deal with the demands of high performance sport. I listened attentively and was intrigued by the consistent reference to ‘holistic support’. I was impressed that the organisation was apparently taking such a comprehensive perspective. Sadly, in the space of answering one question, the illusion of ‘holistic support’ was discounted. I simply asked, ‘what support do you provide to help an individual negotiate any challenges experienced at home or school?’ The response was swift and sharp. ‘That is their responsibility. We concentrate on the sports part’.

I am aware that delivering holistic support or taking a holistic perspective on an individual’s progression requires a significant commitment from practitioners. In my experience, the term holistic is frequently and freely deployed under the guise presented above and consistently lacks necessary substance. The evidence constructed during the interviews (Chapter Five) highlighted the importance of taking a perspective that extended beyond the confines of the performance environment, and recognised that an individual’s goals and subsequent progression are determined by factors not always initially evident and certainly not always considered in relation to the performance discipline.

The opportunity to reflect and write about the evidence constructed in this thesis proved invaluable to my applied activity. The similarities evident in the applied and research environments are clear. I was conscious of retaining an explicit awareness of the ‘foreshadowed problems’ that I hold (Malinowski, 1922), whilst keeping an open mind on how data were both constructed and interpreted. Indeed, Coffey and
Atkinson (1996, p.158) acknowledged how ‘ideas come from multiple sources. One of the habits of mind that is especially restricting is a concentration on a very narrow field or specialism. If one’s reading and thought are tightly focused, then the chances of fresh discoveries and insights will be strictly limited’.

Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul (1997) acknowledged the value of writing to support the process of understanding and interpreting evidence. The authors suggested that, ‘when we reshape meaning through the writing, it helps us to clarify our understanding’ (p.10). I certainly recognised this process of discovery and the preceding paragraphs have briefly highlighted the implications that this process had both for the thesis and my applied practice. This was the first time I engaged in any form of sustained long-term writing, and I recognised the value created in terms of the insights shared and the development supported (Tsang, 2000). This perspective is further reinforced by Ely and colleagues (1997, p. 20) who suggested, ‘writing will keep the work dynamic; writing is a tool for sorting through and finding nuggets of ideas that trigger new ways of seeing and understanding’. Similarly every time I returned to the writing process, I identified new ways of understanding the data that challenged my theoretical position and applied development.
Chapter Seven: Staff focus group

The evidence gathered during the staff interviews (Chapter Five) supplemented the observations (Chapter Three) and highlighted several factors that will be explored further in this chapter. This chapter begins by documenting several methodological notes justifying the implementation of a focus group. Following this, I discuss how the data were analysed and provide relevant details pertaining to their presentation. The data are presented via two interactions that encase separate but interactive themes representative of the focus group discussion. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings and offers several applied and theoretical implications.

7.1. Methodological notes

Following the staff interviews, a focus group was selected as the most appropriate means to secure further insight into the perspectives held by staff within the organisation under study. Morgan (1997, p. 22) suggested that ‘preliminary individual interviews can help generate focus group discussion guides by giving a feel for how people think and talk about the topics that the group will discuss’. Additionally, Fern (2001, p. 102) identified how, ‘it is commonly believed that focus groups will provide more candor and more intimate information than individual interviews’.

According to Greenbaum (1998), researchers, dependent on their needs, could administer full, mini or telephone focus groups. The full and mini focus groups share a range of similar characteristics, and are only differentiated based on the number of participating members. Specifically, a full focus group engages 8-10 members, whereas a mini focus group usually operates with a sample size of between 4-6. The full and mini focus group tend to last between 90 and 120 minutes with the
participating members sharing similar demographic qualities. Based on the definitions provided by Greenbaum (1998), the current chapter presents findings from a mini focus group that involved four staff members, who were (similar to the interviews; Chapter Five) recruited via theoretical sampling (e.g., Charmaz, 2002).

Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) identified a series of advantages and disadvantages related to the deployment of a focus group. With regards to the present study, several factors highlighted by Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) are particularly relevant. Similar to the interviews, the focus group encourages the moderator to seek clarification, follow up, and qualify responses where appropriate. Additionally, the moderator can acknowledge, report and challenge the non-verbal responses that supplement and reinforce the verbal interactions (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990).

A clear advantage inherent within the focus group design is the opportunity afforded to interact with respondents (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). Indeed, Kitzinger (1994, p.108) acknowledged ‘the fact that group participants provide an audience for each other encourages a greater variety of communication than is often evident within more traditional methods of data collection’. Similarly, an advantage that distinguishes the focus group from the one-to-one interviews (Chapter Five) is the opportunity for respondents to react and build on comments provided by other group members (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990).

Several limitations identified by Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) also require consideration. For example, there is a danger that an opinionated individual at the expense of a more reserved member of the group could potentially dominate
interactions within a focus group (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). Additionally, the moderator can unnecessarily influence the tone and content of the discussion. Furthermore, Kitzinger (1994, p.110) recognised that the group’s familiarity with one another can ‘censor any deviation from group standards’.

As the researcher, I occupied the role of focus group moderator. Having conducted interviews and enjoyed informal conversations with the selected staff members, I had secured a level of familiarity with the participants involved in the focus group. Having an appreciation of the different personalities assisted the process of managing the focus group dynamic as I encouraged all participants to actively contribute. Additionally, the knowledge acquired during the observations (Chapter Three) and interviews (Chapter Five) allowed me to converse with staff using relevant context-specific terminology.

Fern (2001) identified four factors that influence focus group processes and disclosure; namely, production blocking, social influence, free riding and information influence. According to Fern (2001), production blocking is a consequence of the conflict created when listening and preparing to make a contribution to the discussion. Fern (2001) suggested that a listener can become distracted when waiting to talk, and subsequently focuses on rehearsing their script or contribution in preference to listening. Fern (2001) also suggested that the impact of production blocking can be managed if participants are given sufficient time to brainstorm and express their ideas.

The second factor identified by Fern (2001) was social influence, which considered the impact of evaluation apprehension and normative influence. Evaluation
apprehension is defined as ‘the fear that social disapproval may work against the disclosure of personally relevant information in focus group discussions’ (Fern, 2001, p. 107). Fern (2001) suggested that normative influences could encourage a form of attitude polarization. These influences included when an individual has a desire for a favorable evaluation, when the setting encouraged social comparisons and the evaluation of others. I thus was vigilant to conditions that might encourage socially desirable responses in preference to trustworthy contributions.

The term free riding relates to the diffusion of responsibility that some individuals might experience in a group setting (Fern, 2001). Fern (2001) acknowledged the role of the moderator in minimizing the impact of free riding. The moderator can encourage reticent speakers to contribute and challenge responses incongruous with body language. The final factor highlighted by Fern (2001) was information influence. Fern (2001) used the term information influence to describe how the content of discussions can influence an individual’s subsequent contribution. Specifically, Fern (2001, p.114) believed that ‘the exchange of information in groups may lead members to consider facts not considered previously when their initial attitudes were formed’. Encouraging participation in the discussion should, therefore, significantly improve the quality of information shared (Fern, 2001).

Based on the research aims and the evidence presented in previous chapters, six broad research areas were introduced to the participants as a structure for the focus group discussion. According to Morgan (1997), a good research guide is as influential as the moderator in managing the dynamics relating to a focus group. The identified
research areas in this context were ‘the company’, ‘feedback’, ‘achievement goal theory’, ‘self-determination theory’, ‘lifestyle’ and ‘life outside of dance’.

Each area was introduced using a short quotation from the staff interviews (Chapter Five) and guided by several probing questions. Morgan (1997, p.47) recognised an approach that included discussion topics (e.g., ‘the company’) and questions as a ‘more flexible format’. The integration of staff quotes was designed to provide familiarity and continuity to the language and research process. Following the introduction of the focus group aims, I shared with staff my aspirations in terms of structure and established their expectations for the focus group. Subsequently, I introduced the topics identified above. The full focus group guide, including relevant prompts and follow up questions, can be viewed in appendix four.

Wheatley and Flexner (1988) identified a range of questions that could be deployed in focus group research. The questions are designed to elicit different answers, challenge responses and provide the necessary focus for discussions. In developing the guide for the focus group, the types of questions, probes and statements to be used were important considerations. Wheatley and Flexner (1988) identified main research questions, leading questions, testing questions, steering questions, obtuse questions, factual questions, ‘feel’ questions, anonymous questions and silence as a comprehensive menu of options.

Several questions were pre-determined, whilst others required a reactive awareness and subsequent introduction. Main research questions were integrated into the focus group guide to maintain a level of continuity within the research process. The main
research questions were intimately related to the core research aims, with each area including a main research question (e.g., *Life outside of Dance*: ‘How does life outside of dance influence a dancer’s progression?’). Leading questions that offered direction to the focus group were administered reactively where and when it was deemed most appropriate in the context of the discussions. Additionally, several pre-established probes were identified to ensure the necessary level of focus was retained.

Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990) identified range, specificity, depth and personal context as the four essential features of an effective focus group. Merton et al. (1990) suggested that range is accommodated by exploring a series of topics, with the moderator deploying a structure and style that allows new issues to emerge. Specificity is achieved by encouraging the participants to share specific examples relating to their personal experiences. Morgan (1997, p.46) emphasised the need for a moderator to avoid allowing participants to ‘drift off into generalities’. I was mindful of this situation and actively encouraged participants to provide specific examples throughout the focus group. This approach also supported the attainment of a necessary level of depth to each discussion. Finally, I tried to account for the personal context by introducing each participating staff member and presenting the interactions in the sequence in which they occurred. Morgan (1997, p.46) suggested that ‘perspectives and personal contexts may be based on the social roles and categories that the participants occupy; they may also be rooted in more individual experiences.’ The presentation style thus was designed to provide an insight into both the social and personal context from which a comment was constructed.

7.2. Focus group analysis and reporting
In advance of introducing the relevant data, several notes regarding analysis and presentation are necessary. As identified previously, focus groups naturally encourage a level of interaction between respondents (e.g., Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). Therefore, in presenting the findings, I aimed to retain a level of interaction by providing a section of the transcript (in italics), representative of the theme from which the content was constructed. Kitzinger (1994) previously criticised approaches that failed to demonstrate the interaction that occurs within a focus group setting. My contribution as moderator is depicted in bold italics. Interactions are interjected with a descriptive commentary that offers a reflective interpretation of the presented transcripts. The descriptive commentaries are supplemented by several theoretically linked observations and applied questions.

In considering the appropriate method of analysis, I was conscious of identifying an approach that would help retain the advantages inherent in a focus group discussion. Indeed, Frankland and Bloor (1999, p.144) suggested that ‘one of the potential advantages of focus group methods lies in the richness and complexity of the responses of the group members, and much of this richness is lost through a filtering process’. As a consequence, a thematic analysis was selected as the most appropriate tool to analyse the data. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 78) described thematic analysis as a ‘flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data.’

Braun and Clarke (2006) identified six phases relevant to the production of a thematic analysis, which were followed in the present study. Firstly, the researcher should immerse him or herself in the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) believed that
transcription represented the first step towards familiarization in this respect. Relatedly Frankland and Bloor (1999) believed that operating the dual role of moderator and analyst can improve an individual’s understanding of the data. Indeed, Frankland and Bloor (1999, p. 147) suggested that in ‘recalling the events of the focus group itself, the analyst has a participant’s ‘pre-understanding’ of the transcript, and understanding is deepened by submersion in the text’.

The second stage of a thematic analysis involved generating initial codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In generating initial codes, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that the analyst should identify as many patterns as possible and retain the surrounding data to ensure the relevant context is created. Following the generation of codes, an analyst is guided to explore themes (stage three). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme is broader than a code. Specifically, ‘a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.82). In contrast to a content analysis, as deployed in Chapter Five (staff interviews), a thematic analysis does not define a theme solely on the ‘number of instances’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Indeed, ‘the ‘keyness’ of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures, but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question’. Additionally, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 86) acknowledged how a thematic analysis considered semantic (explicit) and latent (interpretive) themes. Given my time in the field and direct involvement in the focus group, the inclusion of latent themes was perhaps even more applicable and relevant.
Once the themes were identified, stage four introduced a review (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The review involved challenging the existence of the identified themes and considering how they interrelated. The final two phases of the analysis focused on naming the themes and subsequently producing the report, which is presented in the later paragraphs of this chapter.

Smith and Sparkes (2012) highlighted several factors that differentiated content and thematic analysis. They also identified the different methodological assumptions that underpin the two forms of analysis. Specifically, they suggested that a thematic analysis is more closely aligned with interpretive assumptions. Given the significant immersion in the environment (i.e., including observations and interviews), I was now in a position to challenge and reflect on the perspectives shared and, therefore, an increasingly interpretative approach was considered relevant.

Endorsing the perspective shared by Braun and Clarke (2006), Smith and Sparkes (2012) suggested that what constitutes a theme is different in content and thematic forms of analysis. Specifically, a thematic analysis does not rely on the quantity of data instances. This reinforces the interpretive perspective and permits the analyst the opportunity to highlight the most relevant themes in relation to the research question. As a consequence, thematic analysis is more comfortably able to consider the social context.

Similarly, Joffe and Yardley (2004, p.57) suggested that a thematic approach adds ‘the advantages of the subtlety and complexity of a truly qualitative analysis’. By not relying exclusively on the quantity of themes, the analysis can recognise more ‘latent’
details (Joffe and Yardley, 2004). Combining latent details with the manifest themes can create a more comprehensive appreciation of the factors highlighted as important and relevant in any data set.

Additionally, Smith and Sparkes (2012) acknowledged how, compared to a content analysis, a thematic analysis retains the narrative sequence and detail of the transcript. Specifically, a thematic analysis avoids fracturing the data. Given the inclusive and interactive nature of a focus group, retaining the finer detail and messy reality of the scenario was a priority in the present context. Indeed, Kitzinger (1994, p. 116) suggested that although ‘focus groups do not easily tap into individual biographies or the minutia of decision making during intimate moments, they do examine how knowledge, and, more importantly, ideas both develop, and operate, within a given cultural context’. Hence, such analysis was considered relevant to this phase of ‘sense making’.

7.3. Setting the scene

Four staff members participated in the focus group. Each staff member had enjoyed considerable success as a performer before making the transition into the teaching / coaching profession. The range of personalities (and roles) present in the small staff room promised and subsequently delivered a balanced perspective. The staff appeared comfortable challenging each other’s viewpoints in an informed and constructive manner. The staff room was based on the third floor of the studio facility, and provided the staff with a quiet haven away from the designated performance facilities and dancer changing rooms. A table centered the room, which was littered with performance schedules, relevant dance articles and coffee mugs.
When I entered the room, the staff members were casually chatting to one another. Conversations drifted between the performance schedule, individual dancers’ progression, and Rose’s dog that remained asleep throughout! The staff were welcoming and made me feel immediately comfortable. I had previously interviewed two of the four staff present, and enjoyed several informal conversations with the others. This familiarity clearly supported my presence.

Despite the apparent closeness of their relationships, the staff were different in their approach and perspectives. For instance, Rose had a wonderfully infectious personality. Each sentence was delivered with a passion, enthusiasm and clear empathy for her dancers. I deliberately use the term ‘her dancers’, as this is the impression I was left with on the countless occasions I observed her sessions. She appeared fiercely protective and caring.

Martha enjoyed an illustrious dance career that permitted opportunities to travel widely. Following her dance career, Martha seamlessly transitioned into a career at the front of the studio. Martha spoke with an air of authority and a confidence that reflected her years studying the profession in many countries. Conversations with Martha were punctuated with anecdotes. She was a thoughtful and engaging individual who clearly commanded the respect of her peers. Despite her relatively quiet tone, it was clear that when Martha spoke she courted the attention of her colleagues.
Joan occasionally still took to the stage as a character artist. This was testament to the clear passion she possessed for the profession. Joan was responsible for compiling the dancers’ performance schedule, a role that involved coordinating the availability and talents of both the staff and dancers. Joan demonstrated a meticulous approach, and her amiable personality was evident in her attempts to accommodate dancer requests.

The final staff member participating in the focus group was Alan. Alan formerly operated in the ‘school’ element of the company structure and, therefore, had an appreciation of the developmental profile of a dancer at various stages of their maturation. Alan was a thoughtful character, patiently contemplating each answer before offering a measured response. Interestingly, Alan often preceded an answer with, ‘I’m not sure if I have this right’. This was mainly due to an apparent lack of confidence and partially related to an unwillingness to forcefully project his opinions on others.

7.4. Theoretical considerations

The evidence gathered from this and previous chapters challenged the theoretical utility of the identified psychological theories introduced in the review of literature (Chapter Two). As discussed, achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984) and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) offer a useful framework for understanding motivated behaviour by broadly acknowledging the respective contributions of an individual’s dispositional tendencies and the motivational climate. However, based on the unfolding evidence and personal reflections (i.e., bridging commentaries) I recognised that an appreciation of behaviour that supports progression and development extended beyond the confines of the performance
setting. Therefore, the views espoused by the psychological theories regarding the motivational climate were arguably restrictive.

The evidence presented in this chapter integrates several sociological perspectives that aspired to provide an alternative framework to consider the structures that support progression and development. Specifically, several concepts developed by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) are utilised to make sense of the context under study. For the purpose of this discussion, I retain a specific interest in the interactions that exist between the concepts of field, capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1990b, p.107) recognised field, capital and habitus as ‘open concepts designed to guide empirical work’. In the paragraphs that follow, I offer a brief interpretation of Bourdieu’s ‘thinking tools’ (Jenkins, 2002), and introduce the possibilities they provide for the current context.

McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh (2005, p.109) broadly summarised Bourdieu’s research focus as exploring the relationship between social structures and subjective practices. Offering a neat departure from the theoretical perspectives shared in previous chapters, Bourdieu (1986) acknowledged the existence of a mutual relationship between the subjective (habitus) and objective (field). Importantly, the reciprocal nature of this relationship creates new insights relevant to progression and development, and challenges the interpretations provided to date. Despite their interdependent nature, Bourdieu’s principal concepts (i.e., habitus, field and capital) will now be introduced under separate sub-headings.

7.4.1. Habitus
According to Bourdieu (1986), habitus is an acquired set of dispositions that influence an individual’s perception, motivation and action. Habitus is considered a concept that offers mediation between objective structures and practice (Harker, 1984). Bourdieu (1990a, p.54) described habitus as ‘a product of history, (that) produces individual and collective practices…it ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctedness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms’. Bourdieu (1990a) highlighted an individual’s habitus as a crucial mediator that helps manage the approach and choices individuals make when confronted with the objective conditions that define each social environment (field).

The interpretation of an individual’s habitus as dynamic is significant, and extends the comparable perspective provided by the dispositional tendencies featured in achievement goal theory. Achievement goal theorists consider an individual’s dispositional tendency as static and, therefore, lack’s the capacity to account for ongoing exposure to different ‘fields’. Alternatively, Bourdieu (1992, p. 133) believed an individual’s habitus is an ‘open system of dispositions’ that is reinforced or modified by the various fields in which an individual operates. An individual’s habitus evolves based on their interactions with the social environment, with the level of evolution determined by the ‘filters’ established as a consequence of previous experience (Wacquant, 1998).

Brown (2005, p.8) identified how engagement in practice helps ‘reproduce and legitimize’ certain dispositions, which characterise the habitus. Each experience
further establishes an individual’s habitus, and helps to guide future interactions with the objective environment (Bourdieu, 1990a). This subsequently determines the perceived ‘possibilities and impossibilities’ (Bourdieu, 1990a, p.54) afforded to an individual. Reay (2004, p.435) believed that ‘the range of possibilities inscribed in a habitus can be envisaged as a continuum’. At one end, habitus experiences a level of congruence through encountering a field that reproduces its dispositions. Contrastingly, ‘at the other end of the continuum, habitus can be transformed through a process that either raises or lowers an individual’s expectations’ (Reay, 2004, p.435). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p.127) suggested that when an individual encounters an environment that is compatible with their established habitus, they are like ‘fish in water’.

Bourdieu (1990a) believed experiences early in life are most significant in establishing the habitus, and the subsequent ‘possibilities and impossibilities’. In this respect he suggested that ‘early experiences have particular weight’ (1990a, p.60-61) because they ultimately provide the filter that determines the appropriateness of future activity. Dancers often joined the present company following an ‘education’ that occurred in another country or in a ‘dance school’ environment. These early experiences helped establish their habitus and effected their ability (and perhaps willingness) to orientate the present environment post-transition. Indeed, Bourdieu (1990a, p.61) previously acknowledged how ‘the habitus tends to protect itself from crises and critical challenges by providing itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible’.
The relationship between an individual’s habitus and the environment is considered reciprocal (e.g., Bourdieu, 1990a; 1990b). Consequently, Wacquant (1998, p.221) explained how, ‘as the mediation between past influences and present stimuli, habitus is at once structured, by the patterned social forces that produced it, and structuring: it gives form and coherence to the various activities of an individual across the separate spheres of life’. The structuring nature of habitus thus recognises an individual’s ability to impact the field.

7.4.2. Field

Bourdieu (1986) considered the field to be a social arena, where people compete for resources and demonstrate their power. Di Maggio (1979, p.1462-1463) previously defined a field as ‘both the totality of actors and organizations involved in an arena of social or cultural production, and the dynamic relationships among them’. In the present environment, the ‘actors’ or ‘individuals’ (Jenkins, 2002, p.85) included the dancers, key ‘coaching’ staff, senior management, policy makers and even friends and family. Using the theoretical frameworks provided by achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984) and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985), the discussions to date exclusively considered the relationship between the dancers and ‘coaching’ staff that co-existed in the studio environment. The concept of field is more comprehensive, and seemingly encourages an appreciation of the social interactions and ‘actors’ that exist outside the immediately observable environment, which make an indelible contribution to the social conditions.

The concept of field also acknowledges the interactions that occur between ‘organizations’ (Di Maggio, 1979, p. p.1462-1463) or ‘institutions’ (Jenkins, 2002,
p.85). The primary organisation in the present context was the dance company. However, several other organisations in addition to the immediate ultimately influenced the conditions experienced by the social actors in question.

Research conducted in PE by Hunter (2004) acknowledged the existence of macro and micro influences in determining the structure of the ‘field’. Hunter (2004, p.176) suggested that ‘the field of PE, then, is made up of a structured system of social relations between the education authority, PE teacher educators, PE curriculum writers, health and sport professionals who have influence over curriculum and practices, individual school administrators, PE teachers, and PE students’. Hunter’s (2004) research identified the multiple influences that impact upon the learning environment experienced by the PE student. Bourdieu’s thinking, practically demonstrated by Hunter (2004) and others (e.g., Cushion and Jones, 2006), reinforces the importance of viewing behaviour as socially constructed and the product of interactions that exist at both a micro and macro level (Hunter, 2004). This perspective has clear implications for progression and development.

According to Jenkins (2002, p.85), a field should be considered ‘a ‘field of struggles’ in which agents’ strategies are concerned with the preservation or improvement of their positions with respect to the defining capital of the field’. Similarly, Wacquant (1998, p.222) described a field as ‘a battlefield wherein the bases of identity and hierarchy are endlessly disputed’. Describing the field as ‘a field of struggles’ (Jenkins, 2002, p.85) or ‘battlefield’ (Wacquant, 1998, p.222) highlights the competitive nature of these environments, as individuals look to secure the capital that will enhance their position. Cushion and Jones (2006, p.144) described capital as, ‘the
capacity to exercise control over one’s own future and the future of others, thus containing a type of power’. And it is to this that I now turn.

7.4.3. Capital

Cushion and Jones (2006) acknowledged how a ‘field’ is characterised by a series of struggles as individuals try to enhance their social position. To compete in a field and enhance their social position, individuals require capital. Different forms of capital might exist and potentially include physical, economic, cultural, social and symbolic (Hunter, 2004). Hunter (2004, p. 177) suggested that individuals are ‘distributed according to the volume of the different kinds of capital they possess, and according to the relative weight of the different forms of capital’. Consequently, securing significant quantities of the capital valued in any given field is essential if an individual has aspirations of progression and securing an enhanced social position (Wacquant, 1998).

I previously acknowledged the hierarchical nature of the present dance company. In many ways, the hierarchy was established based on the level of valued capital acquired by the respective dancers. The themes constructed in later sections of this chapter discuss the specific form(s) of capital exchanged for progression and economic reward in the present context. Bourdieu (1986, p.241) believed that capital is ‘what makes the game of society – not least, the economic game – something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle’.

Hunter (2004) observed how a teacher was often responsible for promoting and distributing valued ‘capital’. Similarly, research conducted in soccer by Cushion and
Jones (2006) highlighted how coaches assigned capital to players based on their conformity to the field-determined expectations. Teachers and coaches are often considered the gatekeepers for students’ and players’ careers (e.g., Cushion and Jones, 2006). The evidence presented in Chapters Three (observations) and Five (staff interviews) respectively, highlighted the significant role of staff members in the present environment. For example, staff members were responsible for the selection decisions that defined a dancer’s career. Selection for specific roles and promotion through the company’s hierarchy was dependent upon dancers being able to consistently demonstrate the behaviour rewarded by the capital most valued by staff.

Loic Wacquant (1995a), a student of Pierre Bourdieu, interpreted his experience as an apprentice boxer using the concepts introduced by his former mentor. Wacquant (1995a, p. 66) suggested that ‘we may conceive boxers as holders of and even entrepreneurs in bodily capital’. According to Wacquant (1995a), accumulating bodily capital is essential if boxers have aspirations to progress in the discipline. Wacquant (1995a) observed how securing the necessary level of valued capital required a commitment to the discipline that extended beyond the performance facilities. Indeed, Wacquant (1995a, p.78) suggested that ‘sacrifice penetrates deep into the boxer’s personal life, so deep indeed that it effaces the divide between the private and the public, the gym and the home, the ring and the bedroom, as his entire existence, down to the tiniest details, becomes subordinated to the imperative of care and accumulation of bodily capital’. Wacquant’s (1995a) evidence offers further support regarding the importance of life outside of the performance setting and extends the perspective previously discussed.
The preceding paragraphs have briefly introduced Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, capital and field. These sociological perspectives were introduced to provide an alternative theoretical framework to make sense of the gathered evidence (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Although presented separately, habitus, field and capital are intimately linked and their individual contribution relies on an understanding of their mutual existence. The paragraphs to follow discuss these concepts with direct relevance to the context under study.

7.5. Focus group themes

Two main themes resulted from an analysis of the staff focus group. The themes have been assigned titles based on quotes used by the staff members, and are representative of the interactions that occurred (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The first interaction, ‘dependent upon their background’, discusses how a dancer’s background influenced their experience in and of the performance environment. Here, the ability of an individual to orientate the present environment is discussed in the context of their previous experience and subsequent ‘habitus’. The second interaction, ‘they do have liberty’, discusses strategies deployed and opportunities afforded to dancers to enhance their position within the environment. This theme integrates the concept of capital as a tool to facilitate progression.

7.5.1. ‘Dependent upon their background’

The staff were unanimous in their belief that an optimal background for a dancer does not exist. However, supporting the evidence presented in Chapter Five (i.e., staff interviews), it was evident that an individual dancer’s background, in terms of initiation, culture, training and family, was believed to influence their approach. With
regards to initiation, the staff acknowledged dancers who had chosen dance as a discipline, and actively pursued entry in to the company. In contrast, staff also identified dancers who were chosen (recruited), primarily as a consequence of their physical facility. Following entry into the company, the dancers whose success to date was predominantly achieved as a consequence of their physical facility were expected to develop additional attributes to maintain their progression. The extract below was in response to a question regarding how staff members managed in excess of sixty-five dancers.

J - I think the difference is that you have a complete range of talent as well. You have your young ones, where you can definitely see they will make a Principal. But you have other people who join who will not go that far. Everyone has to be motivated in a different way. With the same encouragement there will be those who will never ‘get the gold’ if you see what I mean?

E - How do you motivate those different individuals?

K - It is quite difficult because some of them think they should be doing things that they are not and some of them stay in the job because it is a wage.

M - Especially nowadays because they are chosen rather than choosing.

This uncontested statement, delivered in an almost aggressive manner by Martha, was a reference to the dancers who were chosen as a consequence of their physical attributes. Supported by her peers, Martha expanded on this point later.

E - Do you think your motivation maybe changes from the start?
M - Yes. That’s why I tried to bring it back to the beginning when you enter a company. It changes. As you see other people getting on you start to fear. ‘Oh my goodness, what’s happening to me, maybe it will never happen for me’. This is where I stop and how do I deal with this’.

Martha paused at this point. Her facial expression reflected her contemplation. She continued,

Then there is the other side. Dancers are often chosen for their physical facility as opposed to ‘I want to dance, I want to dance’ (gestures). ‘You have a beautiful body, you are well turned out, good proportions why don’t you dance?’ It’s hard work anyway but it is not quite the same motivation. When it starts to become difficult after a few years, those people question why they are doing it.

J - It hurts.

M - Yes. It hurts. Technically if they have a facility, after a while that facility appears to disintegrate. It is because they don’t know how to do it, because they have never had to worry about it.

Martha’s voice reflected her frustration. Rose continued the argument,

R - You have those that really have the love of dance and then you have the others who are taken in because of their body. They have ended up doing it and they are there, but there is not any dance in them. They’ve just got a body.

M - They’re the hardest to motivate and they’re the ones...

R - They’re not a ‘dancer’ (gestures).

M - Sometimes they have so much facility – I have seen this in Australia – where they go ‘Oh, it’s sort of happened and I’ve got into the company’. Then
it hits them and it gets hard and they don’t really want it. They are the retiring early type. You can’t motivate those really.

R - And some have the body and mum has sent them and before they know it they are at a ballet school.

J - Then they please Mum rather than wanting to dance. They then move on and make it as a career…(pause) Luckily…(pause) because it is so hard.

M – Unfortunately, it is heart wrenching to see but those who desperately want it don’t have the best physiques or facilities. Some by just sheer willpower transform their technique. Others, however hard will never make the next rank or next role.

A - I think it might be a bit of a generalisation but actually I personally prefer to work with someone who has to struggle. Before coming here I was in the school and generally the people who have got quite a lot of physical attributes can be quite lazy. They need a lot of motivation to push them to do certain things. The person who has to struggle a little bit with what they’ve got is generally...

J - Like a sponge

M – Hungry.

The staff members thus identified a critical difference between a dancer who ‘chooses’ a career in dance and one who is ‘chosen’. According to the staff members, this subtle differentiation can affect an individual’s subsequent progression in the company. This perspective aligned with several reflections shared during the staff interviews (Chapter Five). The experiences an individual has previously been exposed to (particularly ‘early experiences’; Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 60) will influence their future
direction and subsequent perception of ‘possibilities and impossibilities’ (Bourdieu, 1990a, p.54). Indeed, Ingram (2011, p. 290) suggested that ‘the habitus is still constrained by the structuring forces of the field of origin’. If early experiences have been too comfortable (i.e., ‘no struggle’), this was believed not to prepare an individual for the subsequent challenges expected in a performance environment.

Staff members identified individuals who actively sought experiences that developed a habitus orientated towards the current dance environment. This was contrasted with the individuals who had been ‘chosen’ as a consequence of their physical attributes. Each individual possesses their own unique habitus, irrespective of being exposed to similar conditions (Cushion and Jones, 2006). However, Adams (2006, p. 514) suggested that ‘though thoroughly individualized, the habitus in fact reflects a shared cultural context’. Therefore, the broad distinction of these two groups (i.e., chosen or choosing) is worthy of further discussion.

It was believed by the staff that these differing ‘groups’ (i.e., choose or chosen) developed a distinct habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 86) that informed how they (initially) approached and subsequently operated. Following entry into the company, subsequent success, defined in terms of progression, was dependent upon an evolving habitus that met the changing expectations of the environment (e.g., Di Maggio, 1979). For the staff members, some dancers remained over-reliant on their physical attributes during periods of change (or ‘crisis’; Adams, 2006, p.517) and did not develop other qualities necessary for development, and therefore, progression. This became particularly apparent when a dancer’s ‘physical facility appears to disintegrate’.
Progression was dependent upon satisfying the demands of the environment as determined by an individual’s stage of development (e.g., Jenkins, 2002). The staff members acknowledged that an individual’s motivation and approach must inevitably change over the course of their respective careers. At the beginning of their career, dancers were expected to demonstrate physical qualities, considered as pre-requisites for success. This physical foundation had to be added to if a dancer had aspirations of performance seniority and distinction (Bourdieu, 1988). Purdy, Jones and Cassidy (2009, p. 326) acknowledged how securing the appropriate capital affords an individual the opportunity to ‘exercise power over one’s own future and the future of others’. The significance of power and the related autonomy is considered in the following theme (i.e., ‘they do have liberty’).

McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh (2005, p. 104) recognised how ‘capital accrued in one social arena does not necessarily confer value in another’. The new environment (field) establishes the criteria, the ‘rules of the game’ (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 98), and an individual must adapt if they have aspirations for distinction and subsequent progression. In the new environment or field (i.e., the dance company), physical qualities (or capital) remained an important attribute. However, a dancer had to firstly be aware and then, secondly, secure other forms of capital (e.g., artistic) to maintain their progression. However, as the capital available in any given field is limited (Jenkins, 2002), an individual dancer was expected to work hard to secure the resources that would support their progression (e.g., Wacquant, 1998).

During the interviews (Chapter Five) a staff member suggested that a dancer’s previous training would lead them to concentrate on certain aspects of performance
(‘Some dancers are trained to concentrate on their technique, rather than their performance as an artist’). To progress then, a dancer was perceived to have to embrace the concept of ‘artistry’. The concept of ‘artistry’ is anchored in the traditions of dance and seemingly reflects a dancer’s ability to portray the ‘story’ to the audience.

The concept of ‘artistry’ within dance provides an interesting link into feedback. The feedback an individual received was critical in establishing the competency upon which their performances (and ultimately progression) were judged and, therefore, (partially) determined the type of capital required. Previous research (e.g., Harker, 1984; Hunter, 2004; Cushion and Jones, 2006; Purdy, Jones and Cassidy, 2009) highlighted the significant role of staff and coaches in communicating field relevant expectations. Feedback constituted one form of sharing these expectations. The hectic performance schedule and number of dancers meant opportunities for individualised structured feedback were naturally limited (see Chapter Five). Feedback was, therefore, perceived as further cultivating ‘artistic’ qualities and perpetuating a cycle that confined individuals to inferior positions within the hierarchy.

If previous ‘fields’ relentlessly promoted (and rewarded) physical capital, in preference to other forms (e.g., artistic), it would take time for an individual to adjust, as their default mode (habitus) was to engage in practices that principally recognised physical capital. Additionally, if one was exposed to an environment where personal coaches were a normal feature, this affected the expectation and perception of what was currently on offer. An exchange later in the focus group alluded to this point.
M - I think it is dependent upon their background, not only their nationalities. What background do they come from; artistic or non-artistic? We have one from a ballet family; brother dances, sisters dance, parents danced. They have a ballet culture. Whereas others may have no artistic background.

A - It might sound like a generalization but some Russian men can be difficult sometimes - very difficult to handle. There is this perceived thing with their teaching method and technique that they have learnt over their childhood and getting to this stage. As a coach, if you try to deviate from something that they believe in, it can be quite difficult sometimes.

M - So, it is a very different system. That’s why the dancer’s frame of mind is completely different.

The point made is that an individual’s background and training (i.e., habitus) can influence what they consider to be significant. Early experiences in a ‘school’ or ‘ballet family’ can predispose dancers to place greater emphasis on certain elements of performance and training (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 60). If these preconceptions are in contrast with the philosophies and feedback promoted within the present performance environment (i.e., field), it is likely to create a form of conflict between dancer (subjective) and company (objective) (e.g., Reay, 2004).

Bourdieu (1986) was not explicit regarding the time an individual is afforded to adapt to the conditions experienced at each stage of their development. Regardless, success (and subsequent progression) in the dance company under study required an individual to adapt to the field-determined expectations. Based on the feedback from staff, it was clear that certain individuals were able to adapt more comfortably than others. These entered the company with a habitus more closely aligned to the field
determined expectations. These dancers were considered ‘fish(es) in water’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.127).

For others, the inability to adapt created a problematic scenario, likely to conclude with, at best, stalled development (e.g., Ingram, 2011). Opportunities to progress were determined by demonstrating competence and securing capital in the areas valued in the social field (e.g., Hunter, 2004; Cushion and Jones, 2006; Kim, 2004). The following section (‘they do have liberty’) extends this discussion by considering in further detail the different approaches an individual dancer could apply to encourage distinction.

7.5.2. ‘They do have liberty’

Bourdieu’s approach has been criticised for being ‘overly deterministic’ (Adams, 2006, p. 515), with an individual’s ‘filters’ (Wacquant, 1998) guiding them to experiences where habitus and field exist in harmony (e.g., Reay, 2004). Indeed, Bourdieu (1990a, p.61) suggested that habitus ‘protects itself from crisis and critical challenge by providing itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible’.

The previous theme challenged this perspective by providing several examples of conflict between the subjective (habitus) and objective (field) as a consequence of change (e.g., Adams, 2006). In the context of the core research aims, unresolved conflict almost inevitably led to non-distinction and limited progression. The present theme highlights several strategies that dancers were perceived to deploy to maintain a positive developmental trajectory and retain control over their future (e.g., Purdy, Jones and Cassidy, 2009).
Harker (1984) indicated that for an individual emanating from a non-dominant background (i.e., a background that requires time to adapt) to succeed, required them to seek opportunities for habitus adaptation and capital accumulation. The interaction presented below illustrates the responsibility and opportunity an individual had to secure these insights.

_J - We schedule everything for them._

_R - They only have control in, in the way they are, the way they approach it and how well they work. Second handedly, they are in control of it because if they are very good at it, they are on. So, in that way they can be in control._

_M - I think it is a little bit more than that if they are intelligent._

_J - The only thing they have a choice about is whether they do class or floor bar two times a week. That is at their discretion. Everything else is written down._

_R - If they are polite, well mannered and nice to work with then, in a way, they are in control, because they will be pushing, pushing, pushing._

_M - I think their perception of what you are describing is, ‘I am being treated like a child’. I don’t think that is correct because even within that very constructed framework they do have liberty. How many times they do the exercise in class, how they focus, whether they work on their own after class, whether they find studio time to work in between rehearsals to try and put in practice what they have been told and bring it to the next rehearsal. They can ask permission to work at a role that they are not cast in. They can communicate and talk about why they are not satisfied if they are not satisfied...one of the most important things is how they go beyond the structure. Don’t do it exactly the way it has been done before...having an individual approach whilst having a commitment to the traditional style and...
all those things... That then is way, way beyond just being told what to do. That all the structure is actually to give them a liberty once they get on stage in the ideal situation.

It's taking everything that is said to them and utilizing all that, sifting it and making it their own.

R – But then we have the final say on it. Because if there is something that we think does not work.

M – Yes. At the end of the day, if they do not like the company they can go somewhere else.

R – If they are a talent then it is a negotiation. Whereas the corps-der-ballet basically just have to do what they are told.

Within the dance company, control was explicitly linked to progression and development, with implications relevant to motivation and opportunities for change. The staff believed that the dancers retained (some) control over their progression and it was their responsibility to embrace this (Harker, 1984). This control was perceived in terms of dancers’ focus, attitude, work ethic and manner.

Kimball (2007, p.834) suggested that ‘perceptions of autonomy are dynamic and fluctuate depending on context’. This point was illustrated in the examples within the above exchange. For instance, if dancers were not cast for a particular role, they were encouraged to enquire about the reasons for this decision. Additionally, dancers should not see the environment as restrictive but should challenge themselves by practicing key roles. However, as discussed previously, the relatively small nature of the company, coupled with the intense performance schedule meant opportunities
were only likely to be presented to those dancers who were best prepared (in terms of habitus and capital). The degree of liberty available to the dancers then, was certainly questionable.

Shilling (2004, p. 474) suggested that ‘Bourdieu is unable to account satisfactorily for individuals who break free from trajectories assigned to them by their background and training’. An individual may unwittingly experience a ‘crisis’ (Adams, p. 517) where the ‘rules of the game’ (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 98) are different to what is expected, despite the existence of ‘filters’ (Wacquant, 1998) that have governed any transition. The evidence presented in the theme, ‘dependent upon their background’, aligned with the views expressed in previous chapters (e.g., observations and staff interviews) that individuals converged on the company from a range of backgrounds (defined in terms of initiation, culture, family and training). This diversity inevitably created a scenario where some progressed like a ‘fish in water’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.127), whilst others experienced a ‘crisis’ (Adams, 2006, p. 517) and had to evolve if they had aspirations for progression (or distinction).

The dancers who struggled to adapt to the environment were considered to have a non-dominant background (Harker, 1984). Following research into working class boys’ transition into a grammar school environment, Ingram (2011, p.290) reflected how ‘habitus can be destabilized as it is caught in a tug between two conflicting social fields’. Similarly, Harker (1984, p.118) believed that, ‘for an individual from a non-dominant background to succeed, a shift from the bottom cycle to the top is required – the appropriate cultural capital has to be acquired, with inevitable consequences for the habitus’. The ‘dialectical confrontation’ (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 31), occurring as a
consequence of incongruence between habitus and field (Reay, 2004), can according to Kimball (2007) be managed by embracing a given level of autonomy. Specifically, autonomy presents an opportunity for social actors to acquire the desired capital, secure a ‘sense of the game’ (Bourdieu, 1992, p.120-121), influence the field (Wacquant, 1998, p. 221), and subsequently improve their status. Conversely, within the current context, the dancers’ who disengaged from the environment contributed to the ‘maintenance of dominant discourses’ and, therefore, sustained a tradition irrespective of how appropriate (Hunter, 2004, p.181).

7.6. Summary

Staff members were adamant that an optimal background did not exist for a dancer. However, they were in agreement that ‘early experiences’ (Bourdieu, 1990a, p.60) actively contributed to a dancer’s interaction with the present environment. Staff acknowledged how a dancer’s previous experience, which included their initiation, culture and training, created an approach that was not always compatible with the environment. However, it was also evident that the ‘rules of the game’ (Bourdieu, 1992, p.98) were dynamic, and that the capital acquired in a previous field did not always guarantee that a dancer progressed (e.g., McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh, 2005, p.104).

The staff believed dancers were afforded the opportunity to adapt and enhance their position within the field (Harker, 1984). Specifically, dancers were perceived to have a ‘certain liberty’, which they were encouraged to embrace and use to retain the necessary level of control over their future (Cushion and Jones, 2006, p.144) and avoid being part of a ‘game of chance’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). The impact of
embracing this autonomy allowed dancers to adapt to the perceived conditions, whilst remaining in the ‘game’ allowed them to influence the ‘dominant discourses’ (Hunter, 2004, p. 181).
Chapter Eight: Bridging commentary three

Bridging commentary three presents an opportune time to reflect on the progress made in personal, methodological and theoretical terms. On a personal level, I reflect on my development within and outside of the research context. By this stage of the research I had established positive relationships with a number of key stakeholders (e.g., staff and dancers), acquired relevant context specific language, and secured an appreciation of the factors determined by the traditions of dance. Outside of the research context I had continued to operate in an athlete support role, acutely aware that my daily reflections and immersion in different forms of literature and conversations with colleagues contributed to the interpretations I was increasingly encouraged to provide.

In methodological terms, this commentary includes reflections on using focus groups as a research means and a discussion how this supplemented the knowledge acquired following previous chapters. However, firstly I discuss the impact of deploying a sociological framework to assist the interpretation of the data. Specifically, I reflect on how introducing a different framework led to alternative possibilities in terms of knowledge and understanding.

8.1. Theoretical reflections

The content resulting from the staff focus group was principally discussed using a sociological framework (i.e., Bourdieu, 1986). Prior to Chapter Seven (staff focus group), achievement goal theory and self-determination theory had exclusively been considered as the theoretical models most adept at explaining progression and development in this context. The following paragraphs discuss the implications of
deploying an alternative framework, and reflect on how this led to ‘new’ knowledge in relation to the thesis’ aims (Chapter Two).

Exploring the gathered evidence using a different theoretical framework led to different ways of understanding how individuals might accelerate opportunities for progression and development. Several examples relating to the concepts of habitus, capital and field helped illustrate this point. Bourdieu’s (1986) conception of habitus as dynamic recognises the importance of understanding individuals’ previous and ongoing experiences when making judgments on their current behaviour and engagement. This contrasted with the static conception of an individual’s disposition promoted by achievement goal theory and self-determination theory. In the same way that my interpretations of the environment were influenced by previous experiences, the dancers’ developmental journey had a profound affect on how they negotiated the challenges presented in the present context.

The concept of capital provided an appreciation of the context specific attributes that assist progression and development. In the present context, it was highlighted how demonstrating the necessary level of physical capital was a pre-requisite for entry into the environment. Continued progression was subsequently reliant on further enhancing this physical status, supplemented with the acquisition of the highly valued artistic capital. This extended the perspective provided by the motivational theories, which relied on the broad concept of competence as a central determinant of progression. Context specific capital identified the needs that corresponded with the environmental demands.
The theme introduced above was certainly evident in my applied personal practice and was probably most pronounced around periods of transition. For example, often when an individual moves to the University (where I work) it is as a consequence of their sporting and academic ability. That individual has often been courted by their respective sports governing body and encouraged to enroll at the University to secure access to facilities, coaching, specialist support staff and flexible academic programmes. From the sports perspective, these individuals have displayed the necessary level of potential during their youth to warrant ongoing investment in their development. However, to continue that development, they are required to adapt to the demands of their sport at a senior international level. A positive adaptation to this transition is only likely if they recognise or are made aware of the attributes that coaches and support staff identify as important at this stage.

The concept of field highlights the micro and macro influences that provide the conditions for progression and development. This perspective promotes the importance of understanding the social context where behaviour is constructed or indeed restricted. The micro context represents the (often) observable conditions such as the studio environment. The macro context integrates a dancer’s life outside of the studio environment and accounts for the traditions that helped determine the observed behaviour. This extends the perspectives provided by the motivational theories, which are largely restricted to the observable.

8.2. Personal reflections

During bridging commentary one (Chapter Four), I referred to myself as ‘a man without history’ in the present context (Schutz, 1976). Following this declaration, I
enjoyed a longitudinal engagement with the environment that extended beyond eighteen months. This contact allowed me to make a subtle shift from the extreme outsider position on the insider-outsider continuum reported by Louis and Bartinek (1992), which generated a greater appreciation of cultural conditions. This positional shift was encouraged by the integration of alternative theoretical perspectives and methodologies.

It is difficult to differentiate the relative contributions of the personal, theoretical and methodological. They are interdependent. They are reciprocal in their influence. I could fill these pages with personal reflections that track and demonstrate my development following the initiation of this thesis. For example, I made amendments to my personal approach towards working with athletes and the subsequent structure of the athlete support programme I manage. These changes were made to provide a greater appreciation of the context in which an individual operates. The programme now includes personal development plans and an increased number of mentors. The increased number of mentors reduced the athlete-to-mentor ratio and improved the probability of developing relationships that encourage openness and understanding.

8.3. Methodological reflections

As the study unfolded, I considered the critical factors relevant to focus group research. I was concerned about the impression the staff held about me, acutely aware that their active participation in the focus group would determine its success. I had visited the studio frequently over the previous eighteen months and this familiarity was enhanced with interviews conducted with staff several months earlier. However, I
was aware that previous research displaying dance in a slightly negative perspective might affect the staff’s openness to my questions.

The staff were provided information that offered details of the content of the focus group in advance of the scheduled session. The purpose of forwarding information was to afford staff an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the data set and prepare responses that may be relevant. The value of this process may have been limited, as, in reality, the staff seemed to begin their review of the available information on my arrival. The focus group included a discussion devoted to a review of achievement goal theory and self-determination theory. The plan was to expose the staff to these theories with the aim of understanding if they corresponded with the reality of the context they operated in. In reality, introducing the theories distorted the flow of the focus group and seemingly put additional pressure on the staff.

I felt satisfied that the focus group had achieved its primary aims. The focus group was designed to encourage further discussion, in a forum setting of key themes constructed during the preceding observations (Chapter Three) and interviews (Chapter Five). A mutual respect was clearly evident amongst the dance staff. Equally, the staff seemed extremely comfortable challenging one another. The subsequent negotiation was all geared towards enhancing the programme and maintaining a standard close to excellence.

In terms of the focus group content, I was conscious of providing direction but not leading answers. This was recognised in the types of questions prepared and the follow-up probes considered. However, listening to the focus group through
headphones on the train journey home, I was aware that I had missed several opportunities to explore key points further and extract greater detail. This was not ideal in the context of a research project; however, I accepted that despite aspiring to conduct the ‘perfect’ focus group, this was unattainable even to the most experienced researcher. I reflected on my occasional reluctance to challenge staff during the focus group as a consequence of my current status within the company and my long-term research aspirations in the environment. I was determined that such deliberation would impact upon the next stage of the project; a focus group with dancers.
Chapter Nine: Dancer focus group

The dancer focus group contributed further to the multi-layered nature of the research project. To this stage the focus had remained exclusively on the staff’s perception and appraisal of the working environment. The focus in the present section shifts once more and highlights selected dancers’ reflections. Similar to previous sections, comments elicited during the dancer focus group will be grounded in the context of preceding discussions and relevant literature. The principal aim of the focus group was to secure the dancers’ perspectives in relation to their experiences of progression and development.

This chapter begins with a brief consideration of relevant methodological principles, referencing the approach to sampling and analysis, and acknowledging the key learning following the focus group that engaged staff members (Chapter Seven). The construction of the focus group guide is then detailed and discussed in the context of the established research aims (Chapter Two). The introduction of data is preceded by several theoretical reflections, which principally acknowledge the sociological themes introduced in Chapter Seven (staff focus group). The results are then presented in a format similar to the staff focus group, with two interrelated themes highlighted by excerpts from the transcript. Each excerpt is followed by a theoretical discussion, leading to a conclusion related to progression and development.

9.1. Methodological notes

Readers are referred to Chapter Seven (staff focus group) for an extensive review of focus group methodologies. I do not intend to repeat the methodological principles in this chapter. Instead I use the following paragraphs to share relevant context specific
elements of the focus group involving the dancers. In accordance with the categorizations provided by Greenbaum (1998), the present chapter shares findings from a large focus group, with seven dancers involved. Due to the wide demographic and number of dancers employed by the company, a focus group was selected as the most appropriate method to initiate formal contact with the dancers. The focus group represented a time efficient and interactive approach that would encourage debate and discussion amongst a group of dancers (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). The selected group occupied different roles and emanated from a range of backgrounds. In line with the established research aims (Chapter Two – Review of Literature) the dancer’s involvement in the research process followed previous contributions from staff (i.e., Chapter Five – Staff Interviews; Chapter Seven – Staff Focus Group).

The role of the gatekeeper in facilitating the sample selection was critical. The gatekeeper supported my aims in securing a sample that included a range of dancers (Charmaz, 2002; Strauss, 1987). In previous chapters (e.g., Chapters Seven and Nine), there has been an inference that the type of motivation and challenges experienced is a product of a dancer’s status within the company. Recruiting a sample diverse in status was anticipated to generate a better insight into the challenges experienced at different stages of the performance pathway. Additionally, the dancers invited to take part in the focus group were drawn from a range of (cultural and training) backgrounds and, therefore, their developmental profiles and individual experiences were expected to provide an interesting insight in relation to the research aims.

The structure of the focus group guide was determined by previous contributions from staff (i.e., Chapter Five, staff interviews; Chapter Seven, staff focus group) and key
observations (Chapter Three) noted in the early stages of the research process. The questions covered a range of areas relevant to a dancer’s progression and aligned with the research aims documented at the conclusion of the review of literature (Chapter Two). These included questions that aspired to understand dancers’ perceptions of the environment (e.g., How much control do you have over your development in this company?), in addition to questions that focused exclusively on how a dancer operates within it (e.g., What are the biggest challenges you face as a dancer?). A full list of the questions is available in appendix five.

Replicating that utilised in Chapter Seven (staff focus group), the results are displayed in the conversational style that they were acquired. This provides a partial insight into how quotes were constructed in the context of general discussions (Kitzinger, 1994). Comments I made are presented in bold italics to clearly depict my facilitation of the focus group. The dancers’ comments are presented in italics, with key terms underlined to provide greater emphasis. The presented evidence is the product of a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This replicates the approach used to analyse the staff focus group data (see Chapter Seven) and permitted the necessary level of flexibility to account for semantic and latent themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

9.2. Setting the scene

The focus group commenced at six thirty in the evening. It concluded a day in the studios that had started eight and a half hours earlier for the dancers. The day had focused on mastering several routines in the build up to a forthcoming intense performance period. The dancers were clearly and understandably tired as they made
their way into the studio, where the tables remained following a board meeting earlier that afternoon. The seven dancers broadly represented different stages of the performance hierarchy and five different nations. Their involvement with the company spanned from three to eight years, with an average of five and a half years employment.

9.4. Focus group themes

Following the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), two themes (‘a fish in water’ and ‘a field of struggles’) representative of micro and macro considerations were selected. The construction of these themes further developed the appreciation of sociological concepts and abandoned some of the founding principles of the psychological theories. The selected titles acknowledged terms Bourdieu and others (e.g., Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) have used to describe elements of his theory.

‘A fish in water’ details how an enduring commitment to the discipline in various settings contributed to an individual dancer’s (or agents) ability to adapt to the environment or field (or structure) that they currently occupy. The individual who has developed the qualities most closely aligned with the present field increases their opportunities for success. A challenge was created when the field a dancer transitions from has differences (often subtle) in terms of the expectations of the current field. During these periods of change, dancers required sufficient time and support to adapt and sustain their aspirations of progression. The second theme, ‘a field of struggles’, highlights the complex power dynamics operating within the company. The theme discusses how dancers were in a constant process of negotiation with the aim of enhancing their position within the company hierarchy.
9.4.1. ‘A fish in water’

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p.127-128) suggested that, ‘when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a “fish in water”: it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted’. The term, ‘a fish in water’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.127-128), was introduced to describe individuals who were able to adjust adaptively to their new surroundings. During Chapter Three (i.e., Observations), I acknowledged the range of diverse backgrounds and cultures represented within the company. Dancers were drawn from all corners of the globe and occupied the present environment with these unique experiences influencing their every move (Bourdieu, 1990). With in excess of sixty dancers employed by the company, understanding each individual’s respective needs was a significant challenge for staff (e.g., Chapter Five, staff interviews; Chapter Seven, staff focus group). The present section aimed to further understand these individuals’ unique vantage points and discusses the implications for progression and development.

An individual (agent) interacts with the environment (structure), with progression dependent upon the compatibility of this partnership. Indeed, Cushion and Jones (2012, p.4) suggested that ‘day-to-day life (social interaction, social behaviour) is considered to be produced by the interaction of agent and structure’. An agent is the product of their past, influenced by the present and directed by their future aspirations (e.g., Bourdieu, 1990a). The structure of the current context of study was perceived subjectively, often as a consequence of an individual’s position within the company (and previous experience; Chapter Seven, staff focus group, ‘dependent on their
background’), and was ultimately influenced by factors operating at micro and macro levels (e.g., Hunter, 2004; Di Maggio, 1979; Jenkins, 2002).

According to Bourdieu (1986), different transitions provide different challenges and an individual requires time to prepare and subsequently adapt. An interaction during the staff focus group (i.e., Chapter Seven) acknowledged how the training and cultural expectations that dancers had been exposed to during their development affected their engagement with the present company. This sentiment was reinforced by the following quote extracted from Wainwright, Williams and Turner (2006, p. 542): ‘The institutional habitus has been diluted by an influx of dancers with a more widely varied individual habitus than, say, 20 years ago when almost the whole company of around 80 dancers were products of the ballet school’. The reciprocal relationship that exists between habitus (individual) and field (company; Bourdieu, 1998) means the ‘rules of the game’ (Bourdieu, 1992, p.98) are dynamic and constantly changing. Individuals outside of the ‘game’ cannot influence the field and subsequently encourage ‘the maintenance of dominant discourses’ (Hunter, 2004, p.181). The following interaction highlighted dancers’ experiences preceding their introduction to the present company.

**EV - How were you introduced to dance and when did you aspire to become a professional dancer?**

E - *It was actually an accident. My parents took me to the art school, just to give a good impression as a girl. The person at the school said he thought I should try ballet. I said I would try. I was seven.*

**EV - And when did you aspire to become professional?**
E - Probably at about the age of twelve. When I was nine I decided I wanted to go to the professional ballet school, which is for ten to eighteen. At the age of twelve I had to make the most difficult decision of my life. I had to move away from home...a three and a half hour flight. I cried. It was hard work. Days started early and finished late.

(Reminiscing) It was never about being a professional dancer. Every child has a dream. You do not realize that you can be a professional dancer. You have a dream to be a ballerina.

J - For me the question is quite hard because I do not think I ever chose to be a professional ballet dancer. It just sort of took over my life. It was a lifestyle more than a decision to do it.

EV - You agree Stephen?

S - I chose to move away to ballet school but I never really chose...

J - It was just something I was always going to do. I had never thought what if I didn’t.

JA - I went to boarding school when I was eleven. It was only an hour from my parents by car, so it was relatively near in that respect. When I was eight, my ballet teacher from where I went locally, suggested I should try to do classes once a week with the royal ballet school. The next step from those classes was to audition for the professional full time school. It wasn’t so much a conscious decision, but because I liked it and was good at it, it was the next step moving to a professional school. To go to the best ballet school in the country seemed good and the steps from there just followed. No one can really decide when they are nine or ten, so if a path is laid out for you...If you start when you are eighteen it is too late.
The excerpt presented above emphasised how the dancers almost inadvertently pursued a career in dance. The pursuit was often not considered consciously, and for many of the dancers the pathway laid out, coupled with their initial progression, determined that a career was feasible. This evidence reinforced the sentiments shared during the staff focus group (Chapter Seven), which suggested that those dancers chosen to dance as a consequence of their physical facility often enjoyed an accelerated development at the start of their performance career. However, there was a clear inference that sustaining this progression was difficult if the individual remained overly reliant on their physical facility.

Despite not initially holding a clear career goal focused on dance, it was evident that the dancers invested heavily in the discipline from an early age (e.g., ‘if you start when you are eighteen it is too late’). Hamilton (1998) had previously identified how a career in dance often started in infancy before coming to a premature end before the age of thirty. Equally, Young and Medic (2008) identified how becoming an expert performer required an intense and enduring persistence. Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer (1993) previously equated this endurance to approximately 10,000 hours or 10 years of engagement in the identified discipline. Indeed, Wainwright and Turner (2004, p. 313) believed the ‘ballet dancers’ habitus is the product of an intense training that starts in early childhood’. These ‘early experiences’ provided a critical foundation to the career possibilities that followed (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 60).

Wacquant (1995a) believed that ‘through prolonged immersion in the game, the fighter has embodied not only the technique of puglism but also its most important unstated presuppositions, its specific doxa’. If a boxer moves from gym-to-gym, from
trainer-to-trainer, from country-to-country it is reasonable to expect subtle differences in the qualities required to succeed within each context. This perspective was at the core of the theme, ‘dependent upon their background’, introduced during the staff focus group (Chapter Seven). Despite the investment, there were no guarantees of success for any of the dancers. Only a limited number of individuals could covet senior roles.

Paradis (2012) conducted an ethnographic study that explored female boxers’ experiences. The research focused on the relationship between habitus and field. Specifically, it highlighted how individuals negotiated hysterisis, which was described as ‘a delay in the realignment of habitus and field that result from changes at the field level’ (Paradis, 2012, p. 83). Paradis (2012) believed that a field and habitus might change at different speeds, subsequently producing hysterisis. The present context highlighted the convergence of ‘dancers with a more widely varied individual habitus’, which challenged the doxic standards previously defined (Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2006, p. 542). Similarly, in the context of the present research, if an individual remained in a period of hysterisis for too long, opportunities for progression became limited.

In a previous study, which also explored ballet dancers, Turner and Wainwright (2003, p.285) commented how, ‘Professional ballet is not just something that you do – it is something that you are, and hence being a dancer is an embodiment of identity’. Turner and Wainwright’s (2003) comments would appear to replicate the evidence constructed in the present study. The dancers dialogue within the present study also emphasised that a career as a dancer in the company amounted to a ‘lifestyle’ choice.
Wacquant (1995a, p.78), following his research in boxing, suggested that ‘sacrifice penetrates deep into the boxers’ personal life, so deep indeed that it effaces the divide between the private and the public, as his entire existence, down to the tiniest details, becomes subordinated to the imperative of care and accumulation of bodily capital’. Such findings echoed those of the current project. To understand opportunities for progression it was important to consider the wider context and the implications for an individual.

Each stage of development (e.g., Bloom, 1985) and environment (field) presented a different challenge for a dancer to negotiate. As a consequence of the ‘structuring’ nature of an individual’s habitus (Wacquant, 1998, p. 221), the convergence of so many culturally diverse backgrounds (e.g., Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2006) created a scenario where the field experienced a constant process of change and the clear potential for hysterisis (e.g., Paradis, 2012). A dancer’s ability to negotiate these challenges and maintain the rate and direction of progression relied on a constant process of negotiation. The range of adaptation was dependent upon the gap between an individual’s habitus and the field determined expectations (e.g., Reay, 2004). Bourdieu (e.g., 1986, 1990) inferred that an individual would only find opportunities compatible with their habitus. However, the presented evidence perhaps challenges this perspective as an idealistic view. Providing the time and resources to assist adaptation ultimately allowed an individual the opportunity to excel in a ‘field of struggles’ and represented the principal role of the ballet staff in this context (Cushion and Jones, 2012).

9.4.2. ‘A field of struggles’
An accumulation of the desired cultural capital (e.g., McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh, 2005) facilitates access to the power necessary to support progression (Cushion and Jones, 2012). Acquiring the valued cultural capital is essential in ‘a field of struggles’ (Jenkins, 2002) where individuals are ultimately competing for a superior social position. Bourdieu (1985, p. 724) highlighted how ‘the kinds of capital, like the aces in a game of cards, are powers that define the chances of profit in a given field. For example the volume of cultural capital determines the aggregate chances of profit in all games in which cultural capital is effective, thereby helping to determine position in social space’.

McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh (2005, p. 105) believed ‘professional football players utilize valued bodily capital to attain positions within their field, yet they always face the prospect of losing this position once their bodily capital is exhausted’. This was also a significant challenge for the dancers in this study, who recognised that physical capital was vulnerable to change and thus possessed a limited life expectancy. Physical capital was essential in the field. It was crucial to support entry in to the environment (see Chapter Seven; Staff focus group) and provided the basis for artistic formation. Accumulating (and maintaining) the necessary level and type of capital permitted dancers with an improved level of autonomy and credibility (Purdy, Jones and Cassidy, 2009). This was evident in the senior dancers, and particularly relevant given the subjective nature of the discipline. Demonstrating capital was essential and ultimately determined opportunities for progression.

As highlighted in Chapter Seven, individuals possessed different types and levels of capital (e.g., Bourdieu, 1985). Indeed, capital has ‘value and can be traded or
exchanged for desired outcomes within their own field or others’ (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002, p.109). In the context of the present research, a desired outcome would include progression. The interaction presented below, following a question regarding dancer challenges, shared the dancers’ perception of the body and its critical role in providing a platform for success.

**EV - What challenges exist?**

S - *I think injuries. Your body is the biggest challenge. Getting injured then getting back from injury. As you get older your body doesn’t do what it used to do. Maintaining optimum fitness...*

JA - *Everyone has a different optimum, but maintaining it throughout the year is a hard challenge.*

**EV - Is it a realistic challenge?**

JA - *No. Everyone has different levels. There is a lot of things you can do to change it. How much are you sleeping? How much are you going out? Do you take class each day? There are a lot of things to take into consideration, but you have to manage your body and that is often a lot to ask. Going from a school into a company where they work more or less. These are challenges.*

**EV - I get the impression that this company is quite intense in terms of performance and schedule.**

S - *I just got injured yesterday. It’s difficult.*

As soon as I asked this question the atmosphere in the room changed. The dancers understood that an injury at an inopportune time or a change in
performance staff could detrimentally affect progression and ultimately a career. They all had witnessed contracts and dreams terminated prematurely.

E - It’s a hard time when you get injured.

S - It’s exactly how it works. As soon as you are injured you are forgotten.

E - It is the way.

JA - We are totally dispensable.

EV - Dispensable is an interesting word and presumably makes being injured even more tough?

JA - You often force yourself. Because you are dispensable you force yourself. You do extra even though there is a pain here or there. As soon as you can’t anymore they are on to the next person.

S - They kind of have to...

JA - But, it is hard, especially if it is a first injury. You don’t exist in a way because you are not useful to them.

E - You work so hard. When I first started it was about going from here to here (gestures). It is constant. It is non-stop. Whether you have a temperature, whether you have a period. From here to here. From here to here (gestures, fist hammering the table aggressively). That is why you get injured. It is continuous.

E - You are not asked, ‘how are you feeling today?’ Or told, ‘do not push it’. It’s, ‘work on this’. From beginning to end non-stop. Push. Push. ‘One more’.
In the context of the research aims, two elements from the interaction documented above warrant further discussion. Firstly, the significance of the body was highlighted as a critical tool to progression. Physicality was considered the most desirable and rewarding attribute within the environment. Artistic capabilities were ultimately reliant on physical attributes (Chapter Seven). Individuals had to understand, secure and demonstrate the field-appropriated capital if they had aspirations of progression. Secondly, the dancers held a belief that they were dispensable and, therefore, felt the need to force themselves to deliver performances regardless of their physical condition. Such a perspective challenged the staff view that ‘dancers do have liberty’, as suggested during their focus group (Chapter Seven).

McGillivray et al (2005, p.106), referring to the bodies of footballers, suggested that ‘they work on it and with it as their main exchangeable asset’. Wacquant (1995) had previously described boxers as ‘entrepreneurs in bodily capital’ (p.66). This sentiment could certainly be applied to dancers. Sparkes, Partington and Brown (2007), in their study of a University environment, accepted how physical capital can essentially reward some individuals, whilst inhibiting others’ development. The authors commented how, ‘physical capital exists within systems of exchange and so is a resource that empowers some while disempowering others within situations characterised by structural inequality’ (p. 300). In the present context, injury contributed to the experience of disempowerment.

The significance of injuries is well documented in a dance environment (e.g., Wainwright and Turner, 2006). Injuries are accepted as an occupational hazard inherent to dancers. However, their occurrence can be damaging to a dancer’s well
being and, in certain cases, their career progression. McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh (2005, p. 120) previously acknowledged, following their research in professional football, that ‘reliant at first on an appreciating bank of physical capital, players face precarious futures once this asset depreciates and their working bodies are deemed surplus to requirements’. The dancers were similarly expected to manage ‘the investment of their physical assets over time’ (Wacquant, 1995a, p. 67), with the aim of avoiding the occurrence of injuries and maintaining participation within an intense schedule of activity, described previously by a staff member as ‘brutal’ (Chapter Five).

Wainwright and Turner (2004, p.317) commented that ‘injury is a sign of a dancer’s vocational habitus. Dancers’ attitude to pain are embodied, and they epitomize the connections between the individual and the institution. Being a dancer requires a stoical attitude to pain. Pain is just a cost that you have to endure as a dancer in a leading ballet company’. The authors acknowledged how a series of dancer biographies (e.g., Bull, 1999; Bussell, 1998; Fonteyn, 1975) consistently identified performing with pain as a characteristic of a career. Echoing the current findings, Wainwright and Turner (2004) further supported this position by suggesting that dancing with injuries is almost an accepted requirement for an aspiring dancer.

McEwen and Young (2011, p.162) acknowledged the individual impact of injury when suggesting that ‘the ones who embrace dancing in an unquestioning and almost addictive manner, are left with no other resources to help them feel fulfilled’. It was previously acknowledged (i.e., Turner and Wainwright, 2003) how pursuing a career in dance amounts to a lifestyle choice. For these individuals, the impact of an injury
not only suppresses their ability to demonstrate capital, it also has far reaching consequences for well-being. Brinson and Dick (1996) identified in a national study that ballet dancers attributed injury to amongst other factors, a managerial pressure to dance. The strength of the dancers’ language presented in the current section demands further examination in the context of Brinson and Dick’s (1996) findings. ‘In our profession until you cannot walk they need you’, ‘we are totally dispensable’ and ‘you often force yourself’, were sentences delivered with anger and frustration. The dancers believed that they were under pressure to consistently produce optimal performances in training and performance settings. The perception that this optimum was necessary regardless of an individual’s current state of fitness was a point of high contention in the context of progression and development.

Brinson and Dick (1996) suggested that, ‘it is true that this pressure may be as much in the dancer, reluctant to lose the chance of a good role or status in the company, as from the management, but the dancers perceived it as coming from the management’ (p.82). McEwen and Young (2011) provided a further insight into this situation following their study with Canadian ballet dancers. McEwen and Young (2011, p.163) commented how ‘obsessed with the fear of missing key opportunities, dancers often feel a certain degree of antagonism towards their employment and career circumstances’. The perspectives provided by Brinson and Dick (1996), and McEwen and Young (2011) are supported by Roderick’s (2006) research in professional football. Roderick (2006, p.251) suggested ‘the player as worker is put under pressure to perform and produce results or else face replacement’.
During the focus group, comments expressing the dancers’ dissatisfaction with the programme were punctuated with those that offered a justification and acceptance of the behaviours they perceived from the staff (e.g., ‘\textit{they kind of have to...}’). The dancers’ engagement with the programme, despite these frustrations, was reflective of their desire to progress and be successful. In the dance environment, the staff were considered the primary ‘gatekeepers’ determining a dancer’s career progression. McEwen and Young (2011, p.160) suggested that, ‘to display pain and physical weakness – and by extension, personal vulnerability – is to call into question the dancer’s ability, dedication and commitment in the eyes of the instructors and others responsible for ‘opening doors’ in the world of dance’. The comment below from the focus group discussion highlighted the perceived pressure that the dancers experienced to impress staff members.

\textit{D - I think there are many, many challenges. Firstly, you have to constantly improve your technique. That is a basic thing. We were talking about casting before and it is a challenge trying to impress them. You have to impress people in order to get more. There is competition. There is envy.}

Aalten (2005a, p.9) believed that ‘the permanent dependency of dancers creates authoritarian relations within the ballet world, where teachers and artistic directors are credited with power and knowledge, and dancers are expected to be obedient and available’. Contrastingly, based on his research in professional football, Roderick (2006) proposed an alternative perspective on the relationship and subsequent power dynamic between coach and player. Roderick (2006) suggested that the relationship between player and coach is built on a mutual dependency. The player needs the manager to secure selection. However, the manager needs the player to produce
performances. It would be insightful to consider how Roderick’s (2006) findings could be interpreted in a hierarchical organisation. Such work was somewhat begun by Purdy, Jones and Cassidy (2009) who acknowledged an ebb and flow of power between an athlete and coach in their study based in elite rowing.

In recognising the aforementioned hierarchy, Aalten (2005a) believed younger dancers are often more vulnerable and perceive a greater urgency to demonstrate their physical capital as they are yet to prove themselves. This perspective would align with the evidence gathered during the staff focus group (Chapter Seven). Progression required that a dancer satisfy the expectations established by the field to secure the capital that permitted increased autonomy (i.e., ‘they do have liberty’). Aalten’s (2005a) perspective supplemented the belief that individuals express different types of motivation and experience different challenges at different stages of their development as a consequence of their position in the social environment.

Bourdieu (1989, 1990a) reflected how domination is sometimes considered more ‘symbolic’ than ‘actual’. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) introduced the term ‘symbolic violence’ to explain the maintenance of a particular behaviour or expectation as a result of an ‘indirect cultural mechanism’ (Jenkins, 1992). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, p. 7) highlighted how certain conditions need to be in operation to encourage the ‘imposition and inculcation’ of a symbolic effect. Specifically, the existence of a power dynamic, where the interests of the dominant group are satisfied is usually evident (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Indeed, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, p. 10) believed that ‘there is no power relation, however mechanical and ruthless, which does not additionally exert a symbolic effect’. During the staff focus group (Chapter
Seven), it was identified that sociological perspectives are adept at accounting for micro and macro influences (e.g., Hunter, 2004; Cushion and Jones, 2006). This also includes a symbolic perspective and, importantly allows for a more comprehensive appreciation of factors influencing progression and development.

Accounting for the ‘indirect cultural mechanism’, it might be argued that the staff of the current project were not fully aware of the perceived pressure that the dancers experienced when injured. This would endorse the position evident during the staff focus group (Chapter Seven). Cushion and Jones (2006) identified how symbolic violence operated at Albion FC. The coaches in Cushion and Jones’s (2006) study were considered ‘gatekeepers’ for the players’ futures. The players were, therefore, conscious of their conduct and reluctant to challenge particular coaching behaviour in fear of jeopardizing their current and future career prospects. This would reinforce the perspective of Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 167) who suggested symbolic violence is a, ‘violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity’.

Bourdieu’s sentiments are reinforced by Pickard (2007, p.43) who suggested that, ‘the dancer wishes to conform to specific standards to be seen as a ‘good’...(and) so may learn to discipline him or herself to conform through self regulation and unconscious habit through fear of criticism or rejection’. The dancers within this project were also seen to develop strategies to acquire the capital required to support progression. For example, they discussed the importance of ‘looking after yourself’, whilst also ‘getting the balance between what you have to give to them (i.e., staff)’.
Collinson (2003, p.532) believed that subordinated employees often perceive that they are ‘anonymous and disposable functionaries’. Collinson (2003) suggested individuals adopt a particular identity principally as a method of survival in ‘surveillance based’ organisations. Ballet is replete with examples of surveillance. For example, a dancer in Wainwright, Williams and Turner’s (2005, p.54) research stated ‘you really are always auditioning. Every single day that you come to work, people are watching you. You’re looking at yourself; your colleagues are looking at you, you’re looking at colleagues. You’re always being watched by somebody’. The perspective described by Wainwright and colleagues (2005) certainly aligned with the core research findings reported in this thesis (e.g., see Chapter Three; Observations). Collinson (2003) identified three forms of self or identity as prevalent in these types of organisations; conformist selves, dramaturgical selves and resistant selves.

The identity of a ‘conformist’ is exclusively shaped and influenced by the organisation. Specifically, ‘in conformity, individuals tend to be preoccupied with themselves as valued objects in the eyes of those in authority, subordinating their own subjectivity in the process’ (Collinson, 2003, p. 536). Collinson (2003) considered this a form of ‘careerism’ (p.537). In Bourdieu and Passeron’s terms (1977, p.10), this perspective might ‘reproduce the system of cultural arbitraries characteristic of that social formation, thereby contributing to the reproduction of the power relations which put that cultural arbitrary into the dominant position’.

The dramaturgical self is closely aligned with the work of Goffman (1959; as cited in Cushion and Jones, 2006). Essentially, in Collinson’s (2003, p.539) terms, ‘employees can become skilled at choreographing their own practices and managing
their reactions to the ways they are monitored’. Presumably, this level of impression management might contradict with an individual’s values or beliefs. However, importantly, it regularly satisfied the requirements of the career gatekeepers who are critical to continued progression in a subjective and surveillance-based environment.

The final self, acknowledged by Collinson (2003), is the resistant self. The resistant self is relatively self-explanatory and describes an individual who resists the conformity. It might be reasonable to suggest that this individual will have difficulty in retaining their status in an organisation. Collinson (2003) reminded us of the dynamic nature of the context when suggesting that ‘employees may seek to survive ‘the gaze’ through the construction of a variety of conformist, dramaturgical, and / or resistant selves’ (p.541-542).

It was clear that the dancers often perceived the need to push their bodies to, and occasionally beyond, their physical limits. Clearly, the body is a critical tool in the development of an effective dance career and, therefore, its preservation is essential. The significance placed on the body can be discussed in terms of physical capital. If physical capital is considered the currency exchanged for progression opportunities, or providing the basis for the emergence of other forms of capital (e.g., artistic and economic), a dancer will naturally engage in practice that enhances this position. Indeed, the current project and previous literature (e.g., Wainwright and Turner, 2004) highlighted the dancers’ perception that continuing despite injury was a necessary element of a dance career and a pre-requisite to progress.

The evidence presented, in the form of the focus group transcript and previous research, has promoted an acceptance of injury, with performers ‘encouraged’ to
continue regardless of the short or long term impact upon their performance career. Seemingly, this encouragement evolved from a culture that has traditionally embraced injury, and finds its origins in the individual and institutional habitus developed in and from a dance environment. Wainwright and Turner (2004, p.320-321) succinctly concluded a discussion on injuries by suggesting that ‘their visibility or presence is masked by a ballet culture that is committed to the notion that “the show must go on”’. Irrespective of the accuracy of attributions, ‘a vicious circle’ (Brinson and Dick, 1996) develops where dancers are performing while injured.

9.5. Summary

The dancer focus group provided an alternative and complimentary perspective to that offered in the preceding sections of this thesis. In advance of introducing the key discussion points, it is important to acknowledge the dancers’ commitment to this process. The dancers’ level of professionalism and passion for their discipline was clearly evident in the focus group exchanges.

This chapter has consolidated the evidence presented in previous chapters by recognising how the motivation to engage in activities with the aim of securing opportunities for progression and development was the product of a complex interaction between agent(s) (individual) and structure (environment). Extending previous commentaries, several sociological themes were again utilised to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the experiences shared by the dancers. The ‘thinking tools’ developed by Bourdieu permitted an appreciation of factors that exist on macro, micro and symbolic levels. These perspectives confirm the need to view
talent development as a dynamic and holistic process influenced by the complex interaction that exists between agent and structure.

The group demographic presented within this chapter provided an insight into the experiences of individuals occupying various social positions within the company. An individual’s interpretation of these structural considerations was broadly determined by their past, present and future aspirations. An individual agent’s past and current experiences helped to establish a habitus unique to them, which contributed to their direction of travel and their ability to secure the capital (and therefore power) required to underpin opportunities for progression.

The sample included within the focus group was somewhat representative of a company that promoted a multicultural demographic. Each individual had followed a unique pathway to his or her current position. It would, therefore, seem reasonable to suggest that not every dancer will experience being like a ‘fish in water’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.127-128) and some may indeed experience hysterisis (Paradis, 2012). This is particularly relevant given that staff previously suggested (see Chapter Seven) that the attributes required to secure entry to the environment are different to the factors required to sustain progression.

The ‘rules of the game’ (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 98) are dynamic and susceptible to change. The convergence of dancers from various cultural and training backgrounds (e.g., Chapter Seven; Staff focus group) exacerbated this scenario in the dance environment (Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2006). With coach support (Cushion and Jones, 2012), dancers who had aspirations to progress were required to identify
and subsequently recruit the relevant cultural capital. Cushion and Jones (2006, p.152) suggested that ‘such capital then, being grounded in acceptance and endorsement of wider cultural values is converted to the individual’s advantage in his or her struggle for resources in the social space’.

A common concern for dancers, alluded to consistently during the focus group, was their body’s ability to manage the various demands and transitions that characterise a career. Maintaining optimum fitness was a challenge in light of a perceived pressure to demonstrate and sustain performance standards. The origin of this pressure contributed to a wider discussion encased in the theme ‘a field of struggles’ (Jenkins, 2002). The company environment could be considered ‘a field of struggles’ (Jenkins, 2002) where individuals (staff and dancers) were constantly looking to improve their social position and facilitate opportunities for progression. An accumulation of physical and artistic capital was essential if individuals had aspirations for performance seniority and distinction (Bourdieu, 1985).

The distribution of capital can change over time. Consequently dancers needed to develop strategies necessary to accumulate and evolve desired capital (e.g., McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh, 2005). Physical capital was vulnerable to change, and clearly challenged by an intense performance schedule and the perception that dancers should continue to push themselves irrespective of their physical condition (Wainwright and Turner, 2006). The perception to engage as such was a product of power and a dependency on coaches and staff considered the career gatekeepers (Brinson and Dick, 1996; McEwen and Young, 2011; Roderick, 2006). The perceived
dependency contributed to dancers engaging in activities deliberately aimed to impress the gatekeepers responsible for granting opportunities for progression.

The concept of symbolic violence was utilised to explain the perceived power discrepancy between dancers and staff, and led to the perception of an ‘unfair career’.

EG - Our career is unfair. There are so many talented people and it is often about luck. Being in the right time, at the right place and have a director that is going to like you. Some people still make it, but it can take a whole career.

Symbolic violence broadly suggests that an individual perceives, as a consequence of an indirect cultural mechanism, that they are required to partake in a particular activity (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). The existence of symbolic violence encouraged dancers to engage in activities regardless of their physical condition and was further compounded by the value placed on an individual’s physical capital and the existence of a dominant hierarchy.

This chapter has offered an alternative insight into dancers’ experiences of progression and development. The evidence highlighted how a dancer’s progression was dependent upon an ability to meet and exceed the demands of the presented environment. A dancer’s ability to positively negotiate the environment was considered a product of their ‘early experiences’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p.60-61), with ‘filters’ (Wacquant, 1998) evolving to align with the ‘rules of the game’ (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 98). Securing the relevant cultural capital ensured an individual had a stake in the game, and ultimately the power required to influence the ‘rules’.
Chapter Ten: Bridging commentary four

The present chapter contains the final bridging commentary of the thesis. As a consequence, it provides an ideal opportunity to reflect on the research journey that commenced several years ago with a phase of reconnaissance in an unfamiliar dance environment.

10.1. Personal reflections

Any researcher significantly influences the research process. Their mere presence can distort the behaviour and comments that a participant feels comfortable disclosing and expressing. This bridging commentary marks an attempt to counter this influence and provides an opportunity to reflect and reveal how I have influenced the research process. During the past few years, I have developed on a personal and professional level. My evolution has clearly had an impact upon the research process. I developed a range of skills that enabled me to access further detail. I developed a range of perspectives that have encouraged a broadening of my research horizons. During the first bridging commentary I referenced Frank (2000) and acknowledged the significance attached to the standpoint of the storyteller. The present chapter offered an opportunity to consider the current standpoint and how this influenced the intervening research process.

I have taken the time to read and re-read the initial chapters of this thesis. As I surveyed my early reflections I am consciously aware of my development as a researcher and person since initiating this project. I have developed relationships and a range of perspectives that I did not have access to previously. Indeed, my knowledge of the dance environment and its residents had increased enormously. The
observations reported, the focus groups facilitated and the interviews conducted were all context specific and temporally influenced. This is equally true of my interpretations and subsequent writing.

The research process was initiated by a series of observations. I entered an unfamiliar environment and openly considered myself an outsider. During the intervening years there was a subtle gravitation away from this extreme position on the insider-outsider continuum. I became acutely aware of the cultural nuances that defined the environment. I became more confident in deploying the ballet specific language that was second nature to the staff and dancers that inhabited the studio environment. These subtle yet significant developments provided the foundation to nurture positive relationships with the key stakeholders. Initially, my appearance in the studio would be greeted with an element of bewilderment and possibly skepticism. This latterly made way for familiarity, acceptance and interest. The research and researcher evolution recognised above permitted me intermittent access to what Goffman (1969) described as the ‘backstage’. These valuable insights complemented the research findings that had essentially explored the ‘front stage’ persona consistently promoted by dancers and staff. This was clearly evident during the focus groups with the dancers (Chapter Nine) and staff (Chapter Seven) respectively.

Importantly, during the focus group interactions I was able to retain my impartiality. Despite my increased familiarity and presence within the environment, I believe that I maintained an image that did not directly align me with either of the groups (i.e., staff or dancers). This allowed both an opportunity to openly express their feelings with no concern of recrimination or judgment. The staff were given the opportunity to share their frustrations, whilst the dancers were comfortable disclosing their challenges,
confident that this information would not be used destructively.

During the recent past I have also started a new job role. In bridging commentary one (Chapter Four) I acknowledged the significance of my work. Daily observations and conversations with different individuals can reinforce or inspire a particular thought process. A change of environment also initially created an opportunity for reflection and re-evaluation. I am currently working with two Olympic sports as a Performance Lifestyle Advisor. The sustained and focused engagement with two sports offered a different perspective to my previous role. Equally, the role encouraged athletes to approach you with a range of issues that often reside in life outside of sport.

10.2. Theoretical reflections

The early stages of the research process were heavily dominated with theoretical explanations. Individual behaviour and environments were neatly confined to their given theoretical box and strictly defined by pre-established characteristics. Initial reflections acknowledged my Masters degree and promoted achievement goal theory and self-determination theory as the informants of the present research initiative. As the research process evolved, I became less restricted by theory; in essence I became more comfortable exploring the utility of theory. Now theoretical perspectives are offered where appropriate. Furthermore, situations are not exclusively classified according to the theoretical perspective available.

Reviewing the reported data that had been accumulated via a range of research methods and over time, it became clear that the dancers and staff held similar objectives. An emphasis on delivering excellence focused these respective groups on a daily basis. Interestingly, the dancers and staff both tentatively questioned the other
group’s approach to achieving the identified objective. The staff inadvertently questioned the dancers’ commitment and expectations related to the process. Whilst, the dancers on the other hand were clearly frustrated when discussing the approaches that staff members were deploying. These tensions offered an interesting backdrop to the present research initiative. The concerns and tensions shared by both parties emphasised how much the groups cared about ‘success’.

The dancers occasionally believed they were being pushed beyond their maximum. The staff emphasised that to achieve, the dancers were required to heavily invest in the programme. Having said that the staff recognised that the lifestyle of a dancer can be ‘brutal’. The dancers accepted that the profession was challenging. Importantly, both parties acknowledged that a clear element of choice was evident in a dancers’ decision to pursue this career. However, and in contrast, there was also evidence to suggest that the career pathway became cemented at an early age and deviating from this established pathway was difficult.

The profession was shaped by traditions and a culture that had existed beyond many of the staff and dancers’ lifetime. There appeared to be a universal acceptance that pain is an inherent aspect of a dance career. A culture, documented in many biographies and further corroborated in the present research, encouraged performers to persist regardless of the physical challenges they experienced. Establishing the source of this encouragement presented a further challenge. The dancers suggested that they perceived heavy pressure from staff to maintain performance levels regardless of fitness. However, there was also a tentative suggestion by the dancers, which accepted that the staff’s primary focus must remain on those dancers who were
fit and available to perform. This offered an interesting insight into the emergence of a perceived pressure, which has permeated many generations.

The use of different theoretical approaches and concepts was reflective of the complexity of human behaviour. Introducing different theoretical approaches had required extensive investigation of the available literature. Clearly, reading different perspectives extends understanding of the specific area whilst also inviting acknowledgment of other insights. In addition to the academic literature other genres influenced my thinking. Autobiographies and behind the scenes insights in a range of environments, uncontaminated by theoretical explanations, challenged my perspective. For example Ronald Reng’s (2010) excellent portrayal of Robert Enke emphasised the importance of looking beyond the image that an individual consistently presents in the workplace. Paul Lake’s (2011) story, ‘I’m not really here’, offered the same perspective but thankfully with less tragic consequences. Additionally, John Feinstein’s (2006) and Michael Calvin’s (2010) behind the scenes coverage of the Oakland A’s and Millwall FC respectively offered an intriguing insight into the challenges that players and staff experienced in their professional and personal lives.

Early in the thesis I acknowledged that much was unknown. My initial observations felt superficial and lacked the necessary depth of understanding that I subsequently acquired following the interviews and focus groups. The case study (Chapters Eleven and Twelve) will offer a further layer of detail. However, I accept that my understanding of this environment and its inhabitants will always remain partial. Brief insights into the staff and dancers world offered unique opportunities to experience and empathize. I had become more comfortable aligning with McFee’s (2009)
viewpoint regarding the incomplete nature of research.

10.3. Methodological reflections

The research perspectives reported to date relied on relative snapshots of the environment and individuals. Observations (Chapter Three), interviews (Chapter Five) and focus groups (Chapter Seven and Nine) are bound to the context in which they exist (Randall and Phoenix, 2009) both for researcher and researched. For example, one of the dancers involved in the focus group (Chapter Nine) had sustained an injury in the days leading up to the scheduled session. The dancer was clearly frustrated and openly revealed his disappointment with the current situation and concerns for his future prospects. Given the timing of the focus group, it might be reasonable to suggest that had it been scheduled for a different time, perhaps preceding the injury, the dancer’s response might have been quite different. Any number of examples could be used to highlight the temporal nature of observations, interviews and focus groups.

The multilayered nature of the research process may help to negate the influence of these factors. A case study expected to span a period of six months and involving daily, weekly and monthly, direct and indirect interactions offered a solution to the temporal interferences highlighted above. Additionally, the case study was expected to provide consistent access to aspects of a dancer’s life outside of the dominating studio environment.
Chapter Eleven: Life story interview

11.1. Introduction
This chapter presents a narrative based on a life history interview with one dancer. Previous chapters included in this thesis highlighted the importance of understanding an individual’s development from a life span perspective (e.g., Chapter Seven and Nine; Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004). Specifically, it has been suggested that an individual’s background and lived experiences influence their engagement and compatibility with the current environment (Jones, Armour and Potrac, 2003). Aligned with the core research aims presented at the conclusion of Chapter Two (Review of Literature), this clearly has implications for progression and development.

11.2. Life story research
Papathomas and Lavallee (2006, p.146) believed that a life history approach permits an insight into the ‘intricacies and idiosyncrasies’ of an individual case. Introducing a life history approach at this stage of the thesis complements the evidence presented in previous chapters, and provides an insight into the individual meanings created through experience (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998, p. 8). Atkinson (1998, p.74) acknowledged how ‘life stories serve as excellent means for understanding how people see their own experiences, their own lives, and their interactions with others’. A life history interview affords a detailed insight into the experiences of an individual and, therefore, represented an appropriate choice at this stage of the research process. Previous chapters explored, in general terms, the experiences of the staff (e.g., Chapters Five and Seven) and dancers (i.e., Chapter
Nine). This chapter presents a detailed insight into how these general experiences and perspectives influenced a particular individual.

According to Lieblich et al (1998, p.2), a life story can be considered narrative research as it ‘uses or analyzes narrative materials’. Hence, a life story is a ‘written reconstructed narrative account, elicited through interviews’ (Papathomas and Lavallee, 2006, p. 147). Carless and Douglas (2013) believed narrative research adds value on a number of levels. Firstly, it encourages rich insights into lived experience (Carless and Douglas, 2013). This is because the nature of the approach allows, to some extent, the participant to prioritise their experiences. Secondly, by engaging in narrative research, the participant is given a semi-structured opportunity to reflect on the meaning associated with personal experiences.

Thirdly, and somewhat significantly in the present context, this approach permits an insight into the trajectory and development of a life over time (Carless and Douglas, 2013). Indeed, Mcadams (2006, p.114) suggested that ‘if a life story is to make psychological sense, then, it must explain how a person came to be (and who a person may be in the future)’. Finally, according to Carless and Douglas (2013), narrative research acknowledges the cultural influences that help determine behavioural outcomes.

Sparkes and Partington (2003, p.293) identified how narrative practice offers ‘a more sophisticated appreciation of people as active social beings and focuses attention on the way personal and cultural realities are constructed through narrative and storytelling’. According to Frank (1995), stories should be considered two sided.
They have a personal and a social side. This perspective, shared by Frank (1995), aligned with recent chapters of this thesis that promoted the need to consider the reciprocal influence of agent and structure (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Smith (2010), a narrative approach is able to illuminate this complexity and importantly recognise social influence. For example Jones, Armour and Potrac (2003, p.215) presented the life story of a football coach and acknowledged how ‘coaches usually come to their profession already socialized into ways of acting prior to advent of formal training’.

11.3. Methodology

In constructing the life story interview guide, several considerations had to be engaged with. Specifically, some structure was required to initiate the interview process. However, it was important that the structure remained facilitative and not restrictive in ensuring the participant enjoyed the necessary freedom to share the key details of her story. Indeed, Atkinson (1998, p.21) believed that ‘the key to getting the best interview is flexibility, and being able to adapt to specific circumstances’.

Atkinson (1998) also recognised the value of forwarding several questions to the participant in advance of the interview. Such an approach allows a participant the time to reflect on their life experiences. Equally, in a series of recommendations, Atkinson (1998) suggested some researchers actively encouraged participants to complete a self-report lifeline. This was included in the present study as a method for encouraging pre-interview reflection on the participant’s behalf. The self-report simply requires a participant to identify significant periods in his or her life, and add these to a time line of events from birth to the present.
The selected questions for the current study served as prompts that ensured relevant stages of life were acknowledged and key characters highlighted. In total, three interviews were conducted, and contributed to in excess of five hours of transcript (Atkinson, 1998). The first life story interview provided a more guided approach compared to subsequent follow up interviews (Papathomas and Lavallee, 2006). The interviews were conducted at a location of the participant’s choice.

Riessman (1993, p. 54) suggested that ‘it is preferable to ask questions that open up topics and allow respondents to construct answers, in collaboration with listeners, in the ways they find meaningful’. Following such advice, the type of questions deployed in the initial interview encouraged the production of a narrative that progressed in a logical and chronologically determined order (Papathomas and Lavallee, 2006). Specifically, general questions regarding early childhood (and life) experiences were complemented with questions orientated towards the experiences involving ballet. The questions sought to establish the key influences and experiences at various stages of the life cycle (please refer to appendix six for a full copy of the interview guide).

11.4. Analysis

In line with reflections from Denzin (1989), the present chapter highlights critical incidents, fateful moments and / or epiphanies that defined Helen’s (the subject in question) life. Helen’s story reflects a within-case approach that ‘reveals the unfolding trajectory of a single personal life story over time’ (Carless and Douglas, 2013, p. 30). The chapter is split into two distinct sections to reflect Smith and
Sparkes (2009) acknowledgment of a narrative analysis presented from the viewpoint of, firstly, a storyteller and, latterly, the story analyst.

In story telling, the analysis is the story. Here, ‘storytellers refrain from adding another layer of analysis and theory preferring instead to treat stories as analytical and theoretical in their own right’ (Smith and Sparkes, 2009, p.282). Section one (Helen’s story), presented below, abandoned any attempt to introduce theoretical explanations, instead encouraging readers to develop their own conclusions and interpretations. Ellis (2004) suggested a good story inadvertently offers an analysis, as it provides meaning. According to Smith and Sparkes (2009, p.282), as a ‘storyteller’, the ‘author trusts the audience, relinquishes control of the story, and, in doing so, allows audiences the freedom to interpret and evaluate the text from their unique vantage points’. It is perhaps necessary to recognise that a story analyst does not distrust the audience. However, their approach offers several theoretical perspectives that are considered relevant. Additionally, it is important to concede that a storyteller does not present their material in a vacuum devoid of theory or interpretation. Indeed, the story is crafted in a manner that guides the reader’s interpretation (Smith and Sparkes, 2009). The story to follow is integrated in to the fabric of the thesis and, in selecting the key themes for inclusion, this must be taken into account.

In section two, following Helen’s story, I take the standpoint of the story analyst (Smith and Sparkes, 2009). This approach is designed to supplement the preceding storyteller section. Importantly, it is not designed to replace and contradict. Smith and Sparkes (2009, p.287) recognised the potential value of such an approach in concluding their paper; ‘we seek to avoid privileging a story analyst above a
storyteller (or vise versa) as both are potentially useful and, with care and informed consideration, may work together’. The story analyst offers an analysis of the available stories (Smith and Sparkes, 2009). In contrast to the storyteller, ‘rather than letting the stories do the work of analysis and theorizing, the researcher steps back from the story generated and employs analytical procedures, strategies and techniques in order to abstractly scrutinize, explain, and think about its certain features’ (Smith and Sparkes, 2009, p. 281). The story analyst does not make any claims regarding the truth of the material presented, instead endorsing their interpretative position (Papathomas and Lavallee, 2006, p.147).

Lieblich et al (1998) suggested that life stories could be analysed on two dimensions; holistic versus categorical, and content versus form. When considered holistically, the life story is taken as a whole, and sections are considered in the context of previous contributions (Lieblich et al, 1998). In contrast, a categorical approach reflects an interest in a specific problem (Lieblich et al, 1998). Content refers to a focus on the explicit content, with a consideration of key factors such as what, why and whom (Lieblich et al, 1998). Content is contrasted by an analysis that considers form. According to Lieblich et al (1998) form refers to the structure of the plot and the sequence of events.

Based on these two dimensions, four modes of presenting and reading a narrative are possible (Lieblich et al, 1998). These include holistic-form, holistic-content, categorical-form and categorical-content. Selecting the most appropriate approach is dependent upon the research question, type of text and the sample size (Lieblich et al, 1998). In the present research, a holistic-content approach was considered most
appropriate. This approach encourages a consideration of the entire story with a focus on content. Importantly, this permits an understanding of how the self is constructed (Lieblich et al, 1998).

Lieblich et al (1998) suggested that life stories should be judged against their ability to present width, coherence, insightfulness and parsimony. Width referred to the comprehensive nature and quality of interview, evidence and interpretation. Coherence considers the clarity of the presented story and the alignment with appropriate theory. Insightfulness is determined by the stories’ originality and, finally, parsimony recognises the researchers’ ability to provide an analysis based on a small number of concepts. This framework was used in the present context. A form of member checking was used within this chapter (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Specifically, Helen was given the opportunity to review the transcripts produced following the interviews and the ‘story teller’ section presented below. Helen’s involvement was both to check the accuracy of the content produced, and add further details where appropriate.

11.5. Helen’s story

The following paragraphs introduce Helen’s life story. Direct quotations from the interviews are included and appear in italics. In addition to the direct quotations, I intersect at regular intervals with a brief commentary that offers a sense of context and chronology. The story is split into three distinct but interrelated sections and reflects Helen’s geographical location during significant stages of her life (Bloom, 1985); namely Georgia, Russia and the United Kingdom.
11.5.1. Georgia

As might be expected for a performer of Helen’s status, dance has been a central and permanent feature of her life since she was seven years old. It was Helen’s mother who inadvertently introduced her to an activity that would eventually develop into a life-defining career. Taken to a class where time was split between poetry, singing and dance, the teachers quickly recognised Helen’s talent for dance and recommended that she focused on ballet. Helen’s recognition that, ‘I always say that was a good try’ underplayed the significance of this less than scientific approach to talent identification.

Helen’s early years were spent in her homeland of Georgia. She is fiercely patriotic, and today encourages her young son to develop the language skills that will permit him to comfortably engage with his Georgian relatives. During our exchanges, Helen regular acknowledged her Georgian roots and spoke emphatically when highlighting a performance in her home country. Helen’s description of Georgia prior to a devastating civil war is indicative of her love for the country.

*When people used to come from Russia, they said we lived in heaven. It was beautiful. We had beautiful weather. You put anything in the soil and it grows. You did not have to do anything.*

Sadly, this description rapidly changed with the onset of a civil war, which eventually forced the departure of Helen’s family.

*The economy just disappeared. We had no food. Nothing. For seven years we did not have lights. We did not have water, except cold. Nothing. Gas disappeared after five years. There were no jobs. No money. You had to queue at the bread shops.*
Helen’s departure from Georgia preceded her family’s by several years. Her decision to move to Russia did not reflect a specific discomfort with Georgia. Rather, it reflected a desire to accelerate her dancing education and access what she considered would be a springboard to a professional dance career. She was, incredibly, only twelve years old when she made this decision.

Helen’s parents, not unexpectedly given Russia’s status in the Soviet years, were reluctant to allow Helen to leave. Her father, now a professor, believed Helen’s academic strength in Maths would be undermined by a move to Russia. Indeed, her father confessed many years later that he did not believe that ‘the serious ballerina could come out’. Helen openly disclosed that she was not particularly close to her father during her youth as ‘he was always with the Scientists’. Their relationship however flourished in latter years.

It was Helen’s uncle who provided the necessary encouragement to facilitate the move. An internationally respected basketball player turned minister, he convinced Helen’s father that trying to prohibit a move would only produce a resentful daughter. Helen paused at this point in our conversation, as she allowed herself a quiet moment to reminisce. A concise and significant reference to her uncle concluded the moment. ‘I think he believed in me’.

11.5.2. Russia

A desire to move to Russia represented entry to the prestigious dance academy based in St Petersburg. Prospective dancers were expected to negotiate three exams. A test of physicality, a medical examination, and a dance assessment provided an evaluation
of a dancer’s potential. Helen gestured animatedly and paused deliberately between components when introducing how the test of physicality considered; ‘*The stretch. The turnout. The jump. Coordination. Flexibility*’.

I remember a part of the exam; I had to do the complete splits. They would not accept you in academy if you couldn’t. I had about that much left (hand gesture about a foot). *Before, I made sure. It was painful. At the age of twelve I was stretching at home because I knew I wanted it.*

The medical examination determined potential performance against limiting factors, such as the onset of sclerosis, breathing issues or concerns regarding an individual’s ‘*proportions*’. The final exam simply and appropriately reviewed an individual’s ability to dance. Such an examination represented a significant cultural difference in comparison to the system operating in the United Kingdom. Helen, in cynical mode, reflected on a UK system where initial entry and opportunity is often determined by a bank account in preference to a physical disposition. The three exams successfully negotiated, Helen and her mother visited her place of residence. Helen described a facility that might generously be considered a squat.

*Me and my mum went to the kitchen and the smell was just disgusting. I remember her face, she almost threw up, and this was the place with the teas.*

Despite her Mother’s concerns, the twelve-year-old Helen remained unfazed. School days followed a regimented schedule, which concluded with the lights being turned off at ten o’clock. Helen’s crowded room was shared with eight other girls who held similar aspirations for a career in dance. Sharing teenage years in such close quarters contributed to the emergence of several special relationships. The regimented schedule was punctuated with moments of creative mischief.
When we were young we were allowed an iron from downstairs. You would have to write down who had taken it. We would make toast with the iron! I would phone home and say Mum we are making toast! We would get bread from the academy, add a little butter, put it on a wooden thing and fry. You would then have to turn it over after twenty seconds!

Helen used the term ‘family’ to describe the classmates who shared her journey from enrollment to graduation in the dance academy. Aspirations, challenges, living quarters and homesickness were shared collectively. Nevertheless inheriting a ‘family’ in the form of her classmates did not replace her own family who remained in Georgia.

In some families the relationship between mother and daughter are not very close. You know, sometimes girls reach an age when they start to have secrets. They hold back something. They don’t understand that it is better to say and then you can get help. I was very lucky because I always had this. When I did something silly, my Mum would be angry. But she always loved me. It was a true friendship. She was always there...she always believed in me 100%. Truly.

Helen missed her family enormously, with contact limited to irregular phone calls. For the first time during our interview, Helen’s tone softened and she became evidently emotional as she recalled her determination to resist a desire to return home.

I missed it (home) so much. I cried almost every evening. I was very close to my Mother. I always missed her. My mum said, ‘come back home’. I used to say ‘no’, because I really wanted this. I wanted my dream so much. I was ready to go through difficulties to get what I wanted. But then, like any human being, you get used to it and you don’t want to change it.
Helen regularly acknowledged the role of others in her development and, from a dance perspective, the influence of Anna was significant. The Russian system encouraged dance teachers to identify dancers who have the potential to progress to Principal Ballerina status. Anna could be considered Helen’s mentor. Describing Anna’s contribution, Helen spoke with great pride and affection.

She was the one who started rehearsing with me when she was still dancing. She believed in me. She thought I could be a ballerina. She taught me everything. How to work. How to bow. How to do your make up. How to do your hair. How to sew your ribbon. Everything. But, mainly she was the one who, while I was a soloist in the corps-der-ballet, she saw I had so much on the inside. You need someone to help pull it out.

I was a student of Anna. I learnt so much. The quality. The coordination. The style. It was amazing. You can look and learn. I remember thinking how beautiful the most simple step looked.

Helen spoke about her aspiration to become a teacher following the completion of her performance career. She occasionally took class now and clearly enjoyed the experience. Helen’s studied preparation and thoughtful reflections provided every indication that she will be able to make a transition into this career when the time is appropriate.

I do think with teaching that there is so much possibility. If you teach people wrong it is a disaster. It will take you twice longer to make that correction. That is why I want to teach. I would like to teach in a school where they do education and not just ballet.

I want to build a generation of classical dancers. That is why I take it seriously. I want to find someone to pass my knowledge on to. I want someone
who was like me. Someone who wants to learn. I think this is the biggest achievement for a teacher. To find their only ballerina.

Helen believed she benefited from enjoying sustained contact with the same teacher for a considerable time period. Unfortunately, opportunities of this nature are not often afforded to dancers.

I don’t think it exists here that much. Even in the school they are changing teachers every year. I do not really agree with this. It does not help you improve. Every teacher has their own style. At the end of the year the dancers are beginning to learn and then you change to someone completely different.

Helen further reinforced the comment above in a follow up interview. She used an analogy of a sculpturer to emphasise her point…

During your early years you can make improvements. If you want to make a sculpture…you cannot achieve a perfect sculpture if you have ten different sculpturers. There is not one idea. When you have one person they can see you at the top. Different sculpturers have different perspectives.

Helen spent her formative years in St Petersburg and recognised this period as critical to her development as an internationally recognised dancer. The opportunity to move to the United Kingdom was initiated by her father. The encouragement offered at this time contrasted with his initial reluctance for her to pursue a career in dance, and perhaps demonstrated his growing acceptance of her commitment and excellence.

11.5.3. United Kingdom

Following a recruitment process that included a performance video and audition, a contract was offered. Helen declined the offer;
They offered me a first soloist contract. This is the one before the principal and I was brave enough to say no. I said to them, ‘it was a great pleasure but I have been a Ballerina for…I have spent so many years to achieve what I have achieved and you know what…I have been a Principal Ballerina for so many years that I am not going back’. Then, they actually called and told my father that they were happy to give me a Principal contract (Laughter).

Helen’s conviction and confidence in her own ability provided the company with an appealing insight into the personality of an acclaimed dancer. As a Principal Ballerina, Helen had fulfilled her ambition. However, the work ethic and desire remained unrelenting. For Helen, occupying Principal Ballerina status presented several significant challenges, from both internal and external sources. Within the company, she was considered amongst the premier dancers and, therefore, her every action was judged and her established standards hotly pursued. Jealousy was perhaps an inevitable consequence of her status.

Unfortunately, some people get jealous. I have an example here. I was very disappointed. I thought the people were my friends. They spoke behind my back. In the ballet world you get this a lot. People start to count the number of rehearsals, why do you do all the roles? It is very difficult to not make yourself feel jealous.

Helen’s reaction to the jealousy has tempered over the years. The perspective created by being a wife and mother appeared instrumental in this process. The occupation of these roles is discussed further in the latter stages of her story. However, the quote below acknowledged her attempts at reacting in a mature and balanced manner.
I am still very emotional. The ballet world is terrible but I try to react differently. You have to understand what is important in life. Some people only have ballet.

Helen was surprised that anyone would question her commitment to the training and performance schedule. Indeed, it was apparent that Helen prided herself on an unquenchable desire for improvement. As reflective of her status as a Principal Ballerina, Helen consistently strived for improvement and openly accepted a search for perfection.

I am a kind of...perfectionist. Certainly. A perfectionist in everything I do. If I eat, I eat good food. If I dance, I want to make sure everything is perfect. I want to achieve the maximum I can. I cannot rest if I can work.

Helen’s disclosure of her perfectionist tendencies did not come as a surprise. A desire to learn, improve and achieve was a defining feature of her life narrative.

The opportunity to relocate to London opened an important chapter in Helen’s life. During her time in the capital, Helen met her husband, a fellow Georgian and they have subsequently had a child. Helen regularly introduced her husband and son into our discussions, speaking with both passion and pride at their respective accomplishments. Helen openly acknowledged how the arrival of her son offered her a new perspective. She has become less emotionally engaged with the jealousy of other dancers and the casting lists that previously would have been a source of discomfort and frustration. Additionally, the nerves that would often precede an opening night have subsided into a quiet contentment.
The strength of love and admiration Helen holds for her husband permeates every conversation. Her face lights up and her exaggerated hand gestures demonstrated the significance of their relationship. They have been married over seven years. Helen’s husband studied international law in Georgia and had a secure income and professional status. Unfortunately, the onset of the Civil War forced his premature departure, and a subsequent relocation to the United Kingdom. Helen described the stark reality…

*If he had gone back he would have been killed. So many of his friends and his generation...good families were just killed. So he stayed (in the United Kingdom). He stayed as a refugee.*

On relocating to London he targeted a place at the prestigious University of Cambridge. Entry was dependent upon acquiring an exceptional standard of language. Studying for ten hours a day he achieved the necessary standard. Unfortunately, in the absence of funding the opportunity was declined. His early months in London were difficult.

*He said to me once, do you know how many times I have walked along here and been so hungry but not had any money to even buy a McDonalds. He was ashamed to get benefits. He had to for the first three months to survive. After he wouldn’t. He was just ashamed. I say now, you could not believe that you have achieved so much. He is an example to me.*

Helen recognised the role her husband has played in her development. He occupied a management role in an internationally recognised organisation. He is the main provider in the family and offered a constant source of emotional support. Helen confessed that she finds it difficult to balance the dual demands of family and life as a
Principal Ballerina. The intensive touring schedule and weekend training commitments impinged on family time. During domestic tours Helen often escaped post performance, rejecting the provided accommodation in preference for a night at home.

\[\text{I do see I am happy, and I have a life. Now I am near the end of my career. When I look back to when I was kid... (long pause). I didn’t have a real childhood. I was working. It was very hard. From the age of ten, I remember it was always ballet from the morning until the evening.}\]

Helen continues to enjoy an illustrious career as a world-class performer. However, during quieter moments she openly contemplates life after performance. The teaching experiences identified previously represent a clear strategy to ensure she is prepared when the inevitable performance career closure arrives.

\[\text{I am thinking already about retirement. It is not like I am going to retire tomorrow but I am thinking about it. I always like to say, that I never like to be shocked. I was shocked once and it hurt so much. I am already preparing myself for one day when I won’t be able to go on stage, which I love so much. I want to teach. I want to have another child. For now, I am a dancer and I say to myself, ‘not too early’. I still want to improve. There are still things, which I want to learn and make my dance better.}\]

The desire to improve and progress continued to drive Helen’s daily activity. However, she acknowledged that there was life after dance.

\[\text{Ballet takes a lot of our life. But you have to realize you have people who love you. At some point, the thing that has taken all of your time and all of your life will stop. You simply cannot do it anymore.}\]
The above paragraphs provide an insight into Helen’s life story. The narrative tracked Helen’s progression from infancy to an established, internationally recognised artist. The journey included the many experiences that define Helen’s character. The section to follow aligns Helen’s story with several theoretical sources, where theory is (lightly) used to make sense of Helen’s narrative.

11.6. Theoretical discussion (story analyst)

Helen’s story depicted a series of transitions (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004). Progression to the senior principal role, a position that recognised her status as one of the leading dancers in the company (and the world) was a product of her ability to successfully negotiate these transitions. The ‘thinking tools’ developed by Bourdieu (1986), which have featured prominently in preceding chapters, will again provide the theoretical framework to discuss Helen’s story.

McGillivray and McIntosh (2006, p. 373) used the concepts of habitus, capital and field ‘to demonstrate how the identities of young professional footballers are formulated and reformulated in a dynamic relationship with a range of familial, occupational and institutional arrangements’. Helen’s story documented her exposure to various environments, each characterised by unique features, traditions and expectations. Progression relied on Helen recognising these features and demonstrating to the relevant ‘gatekeepers’ her ability to adapt and excel (Cushion and Jones, 2012). This involved a constant process of negotiation and, in the terms of McGillivray and McIntosh (2006, p.373), the ability to ‘formulate and reformulate’ an identity that aligned with the core expectations of the environment.
11.7. Life story themes

The following paragraphs present three key themes representative of Helen’s life story (e.g., Carless and Douglas, 2013; Jones, Armour and Potrac, 2003). The first theme, ‘Prison’, discusses the ultimately positive impact of difficult and challenging scenarios experienced by Helen during her formative years. The second theme, ‘The sculpturer’, acknowledges the significant and enduring role of Helen’s mentor in her development. Finally, ‘Lifestyle’ explores the impact of family during various stages of her development.

11.7.1. ‘Prison’

During Chapter Seven, the staff debated how a dancer’s initiation represented a subtle yet significant influence on progression. Individuals who were ‘chosen’ had often negotiated a less challenging entry to company status based on their physical disposition. To maintain their progression, these individuals were expected to recruit and develop other forms of capital that aligned with the values of the field. These individuals were considered ‘fishes out of water’ during the dancer focus group as they struggled to maintain a positive development trajectory (i.e., Chapter Nine). Helen actively chose to dance at the age of ten. This decision ultimately culminated in her relocation to a boarding facility, described as a ‘prison’ two years later.

I started at the age of ten. I was told if I wanted to be a professional ballerina I would have to go to the best ballet school, which is St Petersburg in Russia. They had a boarding house. Obviously, you can imagine what it was like being there. I had only ever been at home...The food was disgusting. But I said I will stay.

What did you think?
When you are young you are fearless. You are not afraid of anything. You think you can do it, because you do not understand and realize. You have never experienced difficulties. But then, of course, in the boarding house you had eight girls in the one room...it was like a prison...

This theme illustrates the significance of several events and choices that Helen made during her formative years, and how they subsequently allowed her to negotiate the challenges characterising the journey to expertise (Young and Medic, 2008). This formative environment (i.e., ‘prison’) contributed to a habitus that determined her approach and filtered her subsequent choices (e.g., Wacquant, 1998; Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2006). The early investment in deliberate practice (Ericsson et al, 1993) provided Helen with the opportunity to construct a habitus that enabled her to develop the capital required for advantage and distinction (McGillivray and McIntosh, 2006).

During Chapter Seven (staff focus group), staff members were unanimous in their belief that an ‘optimal background’ for a dancer did not exist. Indeed, Wainwright, Williams and Turner (2006, p. 548) suggested that ‘individuals vary both in terms of their capital (some are great turners, others great jumpers; some are polished technicians, others are wonderful actors and so on) and in their embodied histories’. However, it was apparent from the evidence presented in this and previous chapters (e.g., Chapter Seven and Nine) that an appreciation of a dancer’s background was critical to understanding their subsequent engagement (Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2006). Helen’s early experiences encouraged the development of a habitus that embodied the technical aspects of dance and (equally importantly) the robustness required to negotiate the challenges of a high performance environment (Collins and
MacNamara, 2012). This ensured her experience of the ballet world was like a ‘fish in water’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 127), where a ‘doxic’ alignment (Paradis, 2012; Chapter Nine) encouraged a positive developmental trajectory.

Helen’s early experiences were significant in establishing her habitus and, therefore, determining the choices that subsequently followed (Bourdieu, 1990a). Collins and MacNamara (2012, p.909) reported that ‘there is a disproportionately high incidence of early trauma, or at least incidents with the potential to traumatize, in the life histories of elites’. Collins and MacNamara (2012, p. 909) suggested that ‘the talent pathway should not be a comfortable place to be; rather, it should offer a variety of lessons to be learnt through both explicit and implicit means’. Helen’s habitus was influenced by her institutional experience in both Georgia and Soviet Russia (Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2006). These experiences somewhat prepared her for the challenging (and ‘brutal’; Chapter Five, staff interviews) demands of high performance dance (e.g., Young and Medic, 2008; Collins and MacNamara, 2012).

Cushion and Jones (2012) discussed the ‘hidden curriculum’ in operation at a football club. The nature of a ‘hidden curriculum’ aligns with the ‘implicit’ lessons highlighted by Collins and MacNamara (2012). In the context of Helen’s life story, it was apparent that her experience of the ‘prison’ offered both implicit and explicit lessons. The explicit lessons focused on the core competencies required to be a successful dancer and encouraged the accumulation of physical and artistic capital (Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2006). These lessons were coupled with several more implicit or subtle interventions that helped embody a determination and robustness.
Helen’s story shared several parallels with the evidence reported of working-class students’ experience of attending a prestigious and predominantly ‘middle-class’ university (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009). Here, Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009, p. 1107) recognised how ‘students had developed a propensity for dealing with the discomfort of being a “fish out of water”’ (p.1107). The students had ‘managed tensions between habitus and field since early childhood’ (Reay et al., 2009, p. 1115), and subsequently developed a habitus resilient and reflexive enough to cope with adversity and change (Reay et al., 2009, p. 1107). Similarly, the environment experienced by Helen during her formative years in Georgia and Russia encouraged the development of a habitus attuned to, and prepared for, the challenges she subsequently faced (Bourdieu, 1990b).

Bourdieu (1990b) suggested that in developing a ‘feel for the game’ (p. 61), a player is able to do ‘at every moment what the game requires’ (p. 63). The ‘feel for the game’ described by Bourdieu (1990b, p. 61) is reflective of an ability to execute the technical elements of the discipline (which will be discussed further in a subsequent theme; ‘sculpturer’) coupled with additional specific attributes frequently described as essential to progression (e.g., dealing with adversity and change; e.g., Collins and MacNamara, 2012). Helen’s experience in this respect embodied a particular way of ‘seeing, thinking, and acting’ (Crossley, 2001, p. 89) appropriate to elite dance.

Specifically, Helen’s experiences of ‘crisis’ (Crossley, 2001, p. 113) or ‘trauma’ (Collins and MacNamara, 2012, p.909) encouraged the development of a reflexive or flexible habitus (Bourdieu, 1990b; Sweetman, 2003). Crossley (2001, p. 92)
suggested that ‘when the “fit” between objective structures and subjective expectations is broken, the opportunity for critical reflection and debate upon previously unquestioned assumptions is made possible’. Crossley’s (2001, p. 113) belief that ‘our very capacity for reflexivity is rooted in the habitus’ established the importance of Helen’s diverse and challenging experiences in Georgia, Soviet Russia and the United Kingdom. Indeed, Sweetman (2003, p. 542) believed that ‘contemporary conditions do not simply demand a heightened degree of reflexivity, but may contribute to the development of a particular type of habitus, characterised by a pervasive and habitual reflexivity’. I previously acknowledged how the ‘influx of dancers with a more widely varied individual habitus’ (Wainwright et al., 2006) created a dynamic field representative of the ‘contemporary conditions’ (Sweetman, 2003, p. 542) characterising this dance environment.

In a dance context, Helen possessed the desired physical capital (Chapter Seven and Nine), with distinction determined by the symbolic contribution that was grounded in her early experiences (Harker, 1984). Helen’s ‘early experiences’ (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 60) contrasted with those of her colleagues (e.g., Chapter Seven, staff focus group; Chapter Nine, dancer focus group) and importantly assisted the development of both physical and symbolic forms of capital. The accumulation of this capital subsequently translated into the power and autonomy necessary to negotiate the performance environment (or ‘field of struggles’; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.101).

11.7.2. ‘The Sculpturer’

Helen compared the work of Anna, her mentor, to that of a sculpturer. As a ‘sculpturer’, Anna was able to assist in the construction of a ‘ballet habitus’ aligned
Helen’s habitus, and subsequent approach to the multiple fields that she now finds herself in were the products of objective conditions and socializing agents (Harker, 1984). The objective conditions experienced during her formative years (i.e., ‘Prison’) were coupled with the influence of Anna, who was considered the key socializing agent (Harker, 1984). The ‘continuous process of socialization’ experienced with Anna effectively moulded Helen’s habitus (Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2006) and prepared her for future transitions (Cushion and Jones, 2012, p.9).

Anna created a ‘habitus inspired “map” of embodied action’ (Shilling, 2004, p.75), with the destination of Principal Ballerina status the focus from the outset. Cushion and Jones (2012, p. 2) believed that ‘a major function of socialization in coaching relates to the imparting of enduring values and ideology that guides behaviour in accordance with given expectations’. This was apparent in the comprehensive approach taken by Anna, teaching Helen ‘everything’, including ‘how to work, how to bow, how to do make up, how to do hair, how to sow a ribbon’. Anna’s contribution can be described as pedagogic action (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu and
Passeron (1977, p. 31) defined pedagogic action as ‘a process of inculcation which must last long enough to produce a desirable training, i.e., habitus…capable of perpetuating itself after pedagogic action has ceased’. It was evident in Helen’s narrative that the contribution of Anna exceeded her physical presence and had stabilized ‘into schemes of disposition or habitus’ (Cushion and Jones, 2012, p.4). The holistic teachings of Anna, coupled with the implicit nature of the lessons learnt during her formative years (Collins and MacNamara, 2012), contributed to a habitus aligned to the demands of high performance dance.

Van Rossum (2001) developed a questionnaire, designed to reconstruct an individual’s personal dance history. Amongst other factors, the questionnaire explored the dance teacher’s behaviour at each stage of a dancer’s development. Results indicated that a dance teacher was consistently recognised as the biggest career influence. Van Rossum (2001) suggested that it was critical that the teacher displayed an increased interest in the dancer, understood the professional future of the dancer, was disciplined, very critical and able to motivate and inspire. These components were certainly evident for Helen, in respect of Anna.

If the necessary alignment between an individual and institution is not achieved, the outcome is likely to be less than desirable for both parties (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.127-128). Helen’s middle years were spent exclusively in Russia in permanent residence at an academy focused purely on dance (Bloom, 1985). During this period, Helen predominantly worked with a mentor who provided a comprehensive dance education that considered all elements of the discipline. The continuity and focus provided by this support allowed Helen to negotiate the demands of the field and maintain a positive developmental trajectory.
11.7.3. ‘Lifestyle’

Previous chapters recognised how a commitment to dance should be all encompassing. Indeed, dance was considered a ‘lifestyle’ choice (see Chapters Seven and Nine) that required a full commitment from individuals who aspired to progress. The observations (Chapter Three) and staff interviews (Chapter Five) highlighted the intensity of the schedule, whilst staff (Chapter Seven) discussed how success was dependent on a commitment that extended beyond the confines of the performance environment (Wacquant, 1995a). This perspective was subsequently reinforced during the dancer focus group (Chapter Nine). This final theme in the chapter discusses how Helen’s approach to dance evolved as a consequence of changing circumstances and an adjustment in priorities at various stages of her career and life. Aalten (2005a) suggested that many dancers shared a belief that living and dancing do not go together. Similarly, Turner and Wainwright (2003, p.285) believed that being a professional dancer is ‘an embodiment of identity’. Likewise Helen suggested…

*Our job is not really an ordinary job, like others. It is a lifestyle. It takes a great deal of time. It takes so many years to become a dancer. It takes all of your time to become a dancer. It requires all of your attention. It requires all of your mind. That is why it is a lifestyle. You are constantly thinking. You have to look after yourself. You have to stretch. It is constant...*

Aalten (2005a, p. 7) acknowledged how ‘individual people tell their own personal stories by drawing on and referring to the stories of the (sub) cultures they are part of’. The findings constructed during the dancer focus group (Chapter Nine) aligned with Helen’s perception, and matched the popular cultural narrative promoted within an elite dance environment (Douglas and Carless, 2009). Quotes such as ‘*I do not...*
think I ever chose to be a professional ballet dancer. It just sort of took over my life. It was a lifestyle more than a decision to do it' captured the essence of a particular interaction evident during the dancer focus group (Chapter Nine).

Douglas and Carless (2011) identified three types of narrative constructed during research in professional golf. These included a performance, discovery and relational narrative. A performance narrative was the most frequently identified narrative. This type of narrative recognised that performance related concerns naturally infuse all areas of life and the individual promotes a single-minded dedication to their profession. Douglas and Carless (2011, p.9) suggested that in this narrative, individuals follow a mantra that, ‘sport is life, and life is sport’.

A performance narrative defined Helen’s early years. Decisions were made in accordance with perceived impact on her established performance goals. Indeed, the previous themes (i.e., ‘Prison’ and ‘Sculpturer’) highlighted the single-mindedness that characterised her life prior to her move to the United Kingdom. A change in personal circumstances (i.e., marriage and child birth) evidently influenced her perspective and subsequent approach to the performance environment. Indeed, Helen’s later experiences more closely aligned with a discovery or relational narrative. An individual who displays the characteristics of a discovery narrative will demonstrate a diverse and multifaceted self. Douglas and Carless (2009) acknowledged that these individuals will not solely prioritize sport and that invariably stories are constructed from a range of positions. A relational narrative is characterised by a promotion of a significant relationship (Douglas and Carless,
This evidence highlighted the significance of considering Helen’s approach in the context of the multiple fields in which she operated (Ingram, 2011).

Carless and Douglas (2013) believed that the performance narrative is dominant in the sports literature. However, it was apparent in recent years that Helen had experienced the challenge of managing ‘competing’ narratives. Indeed, Carless and Douglas (2013, p.704) would define Helen’s experience of the relational narrative as a ‘counter-story’. This created a degree of ‘narrative tension’ (Carless and Douglas, 2013). Similar to the hockey player documented in Carless and Douglas (2013) research, the ‘counter-story’ is created as a consequence of some form of personal change. For Helen, this reflected a gradual change based on family circumstance. The following extract was in response to a question regarding impact on family.

*It is difficult. It does affect it. When I just joined the company I did not mind working Saturdays and Sundays but now…I have to sometimes. Even on tour, if there is a chance to escape I would rather finish on Friday and disappear.*

**How do you find the touring?**

*I hate it now. There is nothing I can do…I try to perform and…I think it affects my husband so much. When I go away he really misses me. Of course my son as well. But, I think my husband more. It is just the culture. We are a very close family.*

***

*Ballet takes a lot of our life. But you have to realize you have people who love you. At some point the thing that has taken all of your time will stop.*
Helen’s questioning of the ‘performance script’ (Carless and Douglas, 2013a, p. 704), encouraged her to develop strategies that more appropriately aligned with her evolved / evolving perspective. Carless and Doulgas (2013b, p. 33) suggested when an individual’s story is challenged, the ‘individual either modifies their behaviour to fit the dominant narrative, or modifies the story (by drawing on alternative narratives) so it better fits their experience’.

The adjustment in priorities, caused by the interaction of multiple and competing fields (i.e., home and dance) encouraged a different strategy to satisfy the expectant ‘career gatekeepers’ (McEwen and Young, 2011; Chapter Nine). Specifically, due to her acquired ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu, 1990b, p.61), Helen was able to ‘play the part’ (Carless and Douglas, 2013a) of the dancer and continued to effectively manage the conflict arising between the multiple fields. Helen’s understanding of the ‘game’ and prolonged immersion in the discipline allowed her to accumulate significant quantities of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1985). The accumulated capital ensured Helen enjoyed a mutual power dependency with staff (Aalten, 2005a; Roderick, 2006), reflective of the ebb and flow of power highlighted by Purdy, Jones and Cassidy (2009). The evolution from a performance narrative to a relational narrative was more easily accepted by the dance culture for an established performer (Aalten, 2005a).

11.8. Closing thoughts

The life story afforded an insight into Helen’s development across a lifetime. This complemented previous methodologies in the thesis and provided a further insight into the factors that support progression and development. The chapter commenced
by introducing the life story methodology, before sharing Helen’s story from the perspective of a storyteller. The chapter concluded with an analysis of Helen’s story through three themes.

The first theme, ‘Prison’, discussed implications for the experiences detailed in Helen’s formative years. Specifically, it was suggested that the challenges defining this period helped create the ‘filters’ that encouraged Helen’s subsequent approach. ‘The sculpturer’ discussed the role of Helen’s mentor in assisting the construction of a habitus compatible with the demands of high performance dance. Anna occupied the role of mentor and provided consistent individualised support for the duration of Helen’s residence at the academy. The individualised support focused on every element of performance and preparation. The third theme, ‘Lifestyle’, acknowledged the impact of family and broadly represented the influence of factors outside of the performance environment. Helen made the decision to leave her family at the age of twelve. This decision was based on the performance opportunity available and challenged the traditional view regarding the role of families in talent development (Côté, 1999). This decision facilitated her progression and aligned with the dominant performance narrative. This had more recently been challenged in recognition of Helen’s changing status outside of the performance environment. The evolving narrative in this respect highlighted the importance of taking a more holistic perspective and recognising the challenges inherent in competing fields.
Chapter Twelve: Audio diary

This chapter introduces solicited audio diaries as a method for exploring the day-to-day experiences of Helen. In the context of previous methodologies, the chapter discusses the reasons for using solicited audio diaries, and shares relevant details regarding the methodology and analysis. Finally, the chapter presents and discusses the findings in relation to previous chapters whilst remaining aligned to the established research aims.

12.1 Audio diary

Monrouxe (2009) conceded that the use of diaries in qualitative research is rare. However, importantly, ‘the world into which the solicited audio diary method brings us is brimming with a multitude of ways in which to understand how our participants make sense of their world and the manner in which they narrate their developing identities’ (Monrouxe, 2009, p.101). The audio diary featured here extended the content derived from the life history interviews (Chapter Eleven) by focusing on the day-to-day lived experiences of Helen (Day and Thatcher, 2009). In this context, the term solicited refers to the fact that Helen maintained the diary in the knowledge that it would be used for ‘external consumption’ (Hawkes, Houghton and Rowe, 2009, p. 212).

According to Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli (2003), a diary-based methodology is designed to achieve three research goals. Firstly, it provides access to person level information (Alaszewski, 2006). Secondly, it can monitor within-person change over an established period of time. Finally, it permits an understanding of individual differences. At this stage of the thesis, these goals were certainly relevant. The life
history (Chapter Eleven) highlighted Helen’s experiences from a historical perspective. The methodology deployed in this chapter permitted an insight into the daily activity experienced and interpreted by Helen.

Felski (2000, p.15) suggested that everyday life was ‘everywhere, yet nowhere’. An audio diary methodology offered an opportunity to gain a further, more detailed, insight into the experiences of an individual expected to produce perfection, in performance terms, on a daily basis. The ‘stuff’ of everyday life is often taken for granted (Cherrington and Watson, 2011). However, this ‘stuff’ is undoubtedly significant and influences the daily-observed behaviour (Bourdieu, 1986). Alaszewski (2006) believed a diary is personal, defined by its regularity and contemporaneous. Regularity refers to the regular (or daily) nature of entries. These diary entries are personal and relevant to the individual. The entries are also considered contemporaneous, in that they are made close to an event to avoid any form of recall distortion. These features are deployed over time to maintain a record of activity (Alaszewski, 2006).

According to Alaszewski (2006, p. 113), a diary permits an insight into ‘hard to reach or hard to observe phenomena’. As a consequence, the daily diary has been highlighted as an ecologically valid approach (e.g., Day and Thatcher, 2009) less impacted by memory distortions (e.g., Almeida, 2005) compared to alternative methodologies (e.g., interviews; Randall and Phoenix, 2009). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 164) suggested that ‘when carefully managed, and with suitable co-operation from informants, the diary can be used to record data that might not be forthcoming in face-to-face interviews or other data collection encounters’.
Following their research into risk perception, Hawkes, Houghton and Rowe (2009, p.223) suggested that ‘although interviews and diaries identified similar types of risks, diaries were much better at providing a more nuanced view of people’s less significant concerns’. Almeida (2005) shared a similar view, recognising that the daily insight recorded encouraged participants to include frustrations that might be overlooked or dismissed in other forms of research. This is particularly relevant in the present research, as evidence increasingly highlighted the significance of viewing an individual socially and understanding their lived experience beyond the confines of the performance environment. Indeed, a diary approach is adept at capturing the ‘little experience of everyday life that fills most of our working time and occupy the vast majority of our conscious attention’ (Wheeler and Reis, 1991, p. 340).

The most common approach to using diaries is a pencil and paper approach (Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli, 2003). Following a consultation with my supervisory team and Helen, I decided to refrain from adopting such an approach. Instead, an audio diary was deployed (e.g., Monrouxe, 2009) that involved Helen recording her daily reflections into a Dictaphone. The audio diary was selected, as it did not require a particular level of literacy (Hawkes, Houghton and Rowe, 2009). Additionally, the audio diary was considered a discrete method of documenting immediate thoughts and reflections that necessitated less effort and time from Helen. This was expected to increase her compliance and engagement with the process, and was relevant given that diary keeping has been referred to as ‘a minority habit’ (Alaszewski, 2006, p. 78).
The audio diary offered an opportunity for Helen to record an entry at a time and place of her convenience, an advantage not permitted in an interview (Randall and Phoenix, 2009). Subsequently, the emotion that preceded or followed an event was certainly evident in several of the entries provided by Helen (Day and Thatcher, 2009). Additionally, Helen frequently made entries at a range of times and locations, including home, the studio, and on route to both ‘venues’. The opportunity to record entries prior to or directly following an event was expected to encourage a more accurate depiction of the situation from her perspective.

A potential limitation of a diary-based methodology was the reliance on Helen in terms of timing, consistency and detail of entries (Day and Thatcher, 2009). The diary is less reliant on the researcher and their skills, and more reliant on the participant (Hawkes, Houghton and Rowe, 2009). Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli (2003) similarly identified several risks based on the reliance seemingly placed on participants in diary-based research. These included ‘honest forgetfulness’, ‘retrospection’ and ‘uncertain compliance’ (Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli, 2009, p. 593) as factors that a researcher may have to contend with.

Day and Thatcher (2009, p.258) countered these potential problems by suggesting that ‘the diary method, although less controllable by the researcher, may serve as a valuable method for eliciting data of a sensitive or emotional nature and allow the researcher to better understand the experience of their participants’. Indeed, the diary method provides the researcher with access to a social context that might otherwise be ‘off bounds’ (Hawkes, Houghton and Rowe, 2009). Cherrington and Watson (2006, p.270) shared a similar view, which acknowledged how such insights might only be
possible in ‘personalised, private and spatial contexts’. Hence, the method was considered particularly relevant at this time in the thesis.

The optimal time for maintaining a diary has received some attention, with authors suggesting a range from one week to three months (e.g., Day and Thatcher, 2009). Additionally, the guidance provided to participants in terms of the number and type of entries varies widely across studies. For example, Cherrington and Watson (2010) requested that participants make two recordings per day during a seven-day period, whilst Nicholls, Holt, Polman and James (2005) expected participants to maintain their diary entries over a 31-day competition period. Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli (2003, p. 586) acknowledged how, ‘one of the greatest strengths of diary designs is their ability to characterize temporal dynamics, such as diurnal cycles, weekday versus weekend effects, seasonal variation, or the effect of time to, or since, an event’.

During the present research, Helen confirmed her intention to maintain a diary through a peak training and performance period for the company. In reality, this involved consistent daily (often multiple) entries for three consecutive weeks, and more sporadic entries over a period of three months.

I deliberately gave Helen freedom in terms of what she might want to discuss in the audio diary. The license to include details that Helen recognised as most significant or important on any given day provided a valuable insight into her thought processes. This approach was similar to that deployed by Cherrington and Watson (2011) who used video diaries to capture the experiences of a University basketball team. Cherrington and Watson (2011, p.270) stated their aspiration: ‘we wanted the recordings to reflect participants’ embodied identities in the context of their everyday
lives, we also wanted them to feel empowered to tell and produce their own stories’. Such was the aspiration in the current study.

Wheeler and Reis (1991) believed that diary studies could be classified according to three categories; namely interval-contingent, signal-contingent and event-contingent. An interval-contingent approach involves individuals completing diaries at a predetermined time. This replicates the approach adopted by Didymus and Fletcher (2012), who requested swimmers completed their diary daily at 6pm. Didymus and Fletcher (2012) also sent the participants a daily text message as a reminder. Their prompt was reflective of a signal-contingent approach (Wheeler and Reis, 1991). Finally, an event-contingent approach requires participants to complete diary entries aligned to the emergence of key events.

The present research followed a design that integrated key features from each of the categories highlighted by Wheeler and Reis (1991). Helen agreed to make daily entries into the diary (interval-contingent). However, I did not prescribe the time or number of entries that was expected. I wanted to ensure Helen had the freedom to use the Dictaphone at various intervals during the day and was not restricted to singular entries. For the duration of the audio diary, Helen did not follow a pattern with her entries. I maintained communication with Helen via text message during this period. This was designed to provide gentle reminders (i.e., signal contingent). However, more importantly, I wanted to demonstrate my genuine support for her engagement in the process and provide guidance in the event of any technical issues. Finally, Helen was loosely instructed to document any key events or activities, which aligned with Wheeler and Reis’s (1991) final factor (i.e., event-contingent).
In addition to the frequency and timing of entries, the studies that have used daily diaries (often with paper and pencil versions) have offered varying levels of structure and guidance to their participants regarding the content of entries. This creates a dilemma for researchers deploying a ‘solicited’ approach who want to encourage the diarist to record what they consider relevant, whilst also ensuring that they retain an interest related to the specific research area (Alaszewski, 2006). In the present research, the wide remit afforded to Helen, recognising my interest in her everyday experience, potentially negated this dilemma.

During the present study, I encouraged Helen to maintain her diary throughout an established period regardless of activity focusing directly on dance. Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli (2003) believed that by providing choice, in terms of the number and type of entries, a researcher is left open to some form of participant bias. These expectations were discussed during a face-to-face meeting and supplemented with written guidance (Alaszewski, 2006). Helen made a total of fifty diary entries during a three-month period. This included an average of two entries per day during the first two weeks using the audio diary. Entries usually preceded or followed training activity or were initiated during periods of quiet reflection.

Support has been identified as one factor that can influence the quality and level of detail provided by the participant (Kelecher and Verrinder, 2003; Anderson, 2005). Indeed, Monrouxe (2009, p.88) identified how the ‘relationship between researcher and participant that the solicited audio diary method develops, can become an intimate association: one in which participants feel comfortable to share their most
difficult and intense experiences’. This was particularly relevant in the context of my evolving relationship with Helen. Interestingly, Monrouxe (2009) suggested that diary entries were often directed at the researcher; this aligned with my experience where Helen acknowledged me at the start and conclusion of respective entries.

12.2 Analysis and presentation

Following the transcription of each diary a form of member checking was used (e.g., Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Sending Helen the full transcript was not designed to encourage changes. However, it served the purpose of providing her with an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the transcript and share further contextual details if appropriate. Similar to the approach described and deployed in previous chapters (i.e., Chapter Seven and Chapter Nine), a thematic analysis was used to explore and identify relevant key themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

The diary maintained by Helen provided a fascinating insight into the daily experiences of a Principal Ballerina in an international dance company. The extracts provide evidence of the structure and routine that defined a week. Each day, Helen acknowledged her involvement in class, followed by a series of rehearsals determined by her selection for performance roles. Two themes were highlighted during the analysis and form the basis of the discussion to follow. Firstly, ‘physical capital’; in this respect, daily entries often referenced the body and discussed strategies for managing and enhancing its impact as a performance resource. Secondly, ‘family life’ is discussed. Helen frequently discussed her family during diary entries and highlighted the challenges involved in maintaining her dance aspirations whilst nurturing her young family.
12.2.1 Physical capital

During each stage of this thesis the significance of the body had been highlighted. The observations (Chapter Three) acknowledged the intensity of the schedule and the dancers’ focus on maximizing their bodily resource. This was reinforced during the staff interviews (Chapter Five) and focus group (Chapter Seven), where staff identified the significance of an individual’s ‘physical facility’, referencing its initial and ongoing contribution to performance progression. The dancers offered an alternative perspective (although within a bodily discourse) through sharing their frustrations regarding the perceived pressure to participate regardless of their physical condition (Chapter Nine). The evidence compiled highlighted physical capital as a critical factor influencing power and progression within the dance context. The day-to-day interactions, recorded via the audio diary, permitted an appreciation of how physical capital was required, maintained and invested.

**Monday 7\(^{th}\) March**

*I am going to do my exercises now – Pilates. It helps me a lot actually. I spend half an hour or forty minutes after class. I am doing my exercises to help move my body. My back is usually very stiff after days off.*

**Tuesday 8\(^{th}\) March**

*I have massage, which is great. I have to do my back at the beginning of the week because I am quite stiff. So, hopefully my late rehearsals today, which are only three, not five or six...so, only three and a half hours, which is not much at all, will be better than yesterday. So, I will speak to you later after my massage. Bye.*

**Wednesday 9\(^{th}\) March**

*Five different short ballets and you end up having the same people dance everything and then this causes trouble. It is impossible. After two, three shows they are going to be dead. That is what is going to happen to me after*
the five shows dancing everyday. At my age it is difficult anyway, but we will see. Hopefully, I will survive.

We did Black Swan today and it was not too bad. Getting there. There is still so much (sigh). It is harder and harder everyday. Now, I have a big break. I think I have may have another massage today for my legs because the calves are stiff. I then have another late rehearsal, five thirty to six thirty. I am going to go out and enjoy a bit of...I sometimes like to...when I feel tired...and how weird is this...when I am tired and my muscles are stiff, I like to walk.

**Thursday 10th March**

I am always amazed with the body. I don’t know where the limit is because today I came for rehearsal and I was not able to move. Then, you slowly start to push yourself. Slowly. You start to sweat and you end up doing the White Swan. Then end up doing the Black Swan, just running through for 50 minutes. It is amazing. I don’t know where the limit is.

**Monday 14th March**

I have just finished my last performance and I am disappointed and very tired. I really pushed myself and tried to be good. This Saturday I only did Pilates. It was not as bad as usual. I did class with Martha this morning. I came in early. Before class I did my exercises to make sure I was warm. I then had time for my back massage.

**Tuesday 15th March**

I did everything I needed to dance today. I am already exhausted. I do not know how...tomorrow is the dress rehearsal and then performance. But I am already so tired.

**Friday 18th March**

It’s Friday! It’s Friday! We had a late class again so I didn’t go with my son to school again. I had a longer sleep as I felt exhausted...Hopefully, I will survive Saturday.

**Saturday 19th March**

Well...that wasn’t that bad. Actually, I danced quite well. The Black Swan was very hard. It is always very difficult. The musical was beautiful. I was very tired but because you love it, you enjoy it.

**Monday 21st March**
Hi Edd. We have just completed a Black Swan rehearsal. I feel very tired. As you know I have been working every day and rehearsing loads. Sunday was my one-day off. Instead of feeling recovered, I feel more tired.

(Sigh)...I work too hard. We push so much. We don’t have enough freedom and enjoyment of dance.

**Wednesday 23\textsuperscript{rd} March**

*Today I was pretty dead (sounds exhausted). I did class and had a stretch.*

Wacquant (1995a, p.66) described boxers as entrepreneurs in bodily capital and suggested their ‘whole existence is consumed by its servicing, moulding and purposeful manipulation’. The series of diary extracts reflected a similar status for Helen. The pain and tiredness that defined the content and tone of entries, was countered by a series of strategies, such as Pilates, massage, stretching and walking, designed to enhance her body’s ability to manage and cope with the schedule.

From an early age, Helen had the ‘rules of the game’ reinforced (see Chapter Eleven) and acquired a logical approach to practice (Bourdieu, 1990). As a consequence, she understood the significance of the body and ‘accepted’ pain and fatigue as inevitable (Wainwright and Turner, 2004, p. 317). Aalten (2007) believed dancers experienced two types of body. Firstly, the tangible body, ‘the body they experience daily, with the toes that hurt because they are forced into pointe shoes, the stomach aching for a meal, and the muscles that are tired after a long working day’ (Aalten, 2007, p. 113). Helen introduced us to the tangible body on an almost daily basis.

**Friday 12\textsuperscript{th} March**

*Help! I need help please! Oh my God...At the beginning I couldn’t move at all today. But, again I pushed myself and did everything.*
Aalten (2007, p.113) also highlighted the ideal body, which ‘has a specific form and the ability to perform specific movements endlessly and with ease’. Each dancer had aspirations to experience the ideal body, with career gatekeepers making judgments regarding the match between tangible and ideal (Aalten, 2007; see staff focus group, Chapter Nine). The daily struggles experienced by Helen, represented a focus on accumulating the physical capital most closely aligned to this ideal (Aalten, 2007). In a ‘field of struggles’ (Jenkins, 2002, p.85), Helen was required to acquire and demonstrate the capital that enhanced her position (McGivillvray, Fearn and McIntosh, 2005, p. 105). Indeed, Crossley (2001, p. 107) believed ‘agents create and mould their bodies in accordance with the fields in which they are involved and the demands of those specific fields’. The capital valued most highly in the social arena of dance is physical capital (e.g., Cushion and Jones, 2006). For example, physical capital provided the basis for the emergence of artistic capital (see Chapter Nine, dancer focus group) and importantly could be converted into cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1985). In progressing to a senior role, Helen evidently satisfied the physical requirements of the discipline, whilst also securing the cultural capital that contributed to ‘distinction and social privilege’ (McGivillvray, Fearn and McIntosh, 2005, p. 104).

The hierarchy in any field is endlessly disputed based on capital (Wacquant, 1998). Helen occupied the role of a Principal Ballerina and, therefore, had recruited significant cultural capital (Hunter, 2004). Despite the continual work then, this permitted a degree of autonomy and made her less vulnerable to the belief that she constantly had to prove herself by pushing her body unnecessarily (Aalten, 2005a;
McEwen and Young, 2011; Brinson and Dick, 1996; Chapter Nine, dancer focus group). The extracts introduced below provided some insight into this autonomy and are explored further in the theme to follow (i.e., family life).

I cannot work today and I am going to go home and try to rest as much as I can. It is quite difficult with the family and the child (yawning), because I want to be with them. I want to spend some time with them you know.

It is Friday. I did not go to class today. Instead I went to a private school. My son was accepted in to the school.

Helen’s relationship with the career gatekeepers had progressed from what might be considered ‘permanent dependency’ (Aalten, 2005a, p. 9) to a scenario more reflective of mutual dependence (Roderick, 2006). This was significant in the context of the following theme (i.e., family life) where devoting time to family life was highlighted as important. Despite the ‘mutual dependence’ and heightened autonomy, it was evident from the diary entries that Helen continued to recognise the need to ‘service, mould and manipulate’ her physical qualities to retain her position (Wacquant, 1995a, p.66).

12.2.2. Family life

Helen’s long-term investment had essentially allowed her to (mostly) operate like a ‘fish in water’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 127-128). However, more recently, the alignment between Helen’s habitus and the field had been challenged (see Chapter Eleven; Life story interview). Specifically, the emergence of family life presented a significant test as documented in several diary entries presented below.
Monday 7th March
My working day now has finished. I am going to have a shower and rush home before I put my son to bed. And then that’s it...Maybe I can meet my husband and have a bit of time together. We never have enough time. That’s the life of a Ballerina.

Thursday 10th March
I didn’t do my Pilates because I took my son to school. I usually take him to the school buses. But, sometimes he asks me to go with him and because he had a spelling test I said let’s go together.

Friday 11th March
You know, when I don’t have rehearsals on Saturday I don’t come in for class. It gives me an opportunity to have time with my family, who I miss so much.

Saturday 12th March
So, it’s Saturday and I am so tired. I am thinking why on Saturday do I have to go to work, when all the normal people are resting and having their weekend. I got up early anyway, because I took my son to Tennis. He really likes it when I at least take him to tennis. I am going to the studio. But, at the same time I am thinking why am I going to the studio, because I won’t be able to move and I don’t want to.

Saturday 19th March
It is Saturday. Most people are staying in bed. Staying in bed, planning and looking forward to their weekend. It is only us...us the dancers trying to get to the studio. Today is like a long, long marathon. I hope I will be able to make it to the end.

Wednesday 23rd March
Today I was pretty dead (sounds exhausted). I did class and had a stretch. I then had a meeting for my son. I was very proud as he improved a lot. Of course, he always needs to work some more. But he got better with his maths and English. See...It’s not just the ballet! Family is very important.

Simultaneously operating in several different fields contributed to a change in Helen’s habitus (Lahire, 2008), and subsequent (albeit occasional) experiences of ‘hysterisis’ (i.e., misalignment between habitus and field; Paradis, 2012). Ingram (2011, p. 300) cautioned how, when a ‘habitus is engaged with two fields exerting different
influences, it can become characterized by conflict’. Helen’s reflections indicated that the ‘life of a ballerina’ is not always compatible with her life as a mother and wife (Ingram, 2011). The evolving nature of an individual’s habitus, and a ‘game’ susceptible to constant change (Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2006, p. 542), made hysterisis almost inevitable (Paradis, 2012). Retaining an aspiration to perform at the highest level, Helen deployed several strategies designed to negotiate hysterisis, and capitalize on the ‘distinction and social privilege’ afforded by her status within the company (McGivillvray, Fearn and McIntosh, 2005, p. 104).

As discussed in the previous theme (i.e., physical capital), over time, Helen had acquired a significant bank of cultural capital (Hunter, 2004) that afforded her a certain level of autonomy (Roderick, 2006). The autonomy was manifest in being able to ‘miss’ class or selected rehearsals to spend time with her family. This allowed her to manage the potentially disruptive ‘habitus tug’ between two incompatible fields (Ingram, 2011).

Despite the cultural capital and her position in the company, Helen demonstrated a certain level of vulnerability whilst expressing her frustrations. These reflections were coupled with a ‘presentation of self’ that was designed to satisfy key career gatekeepers (Carless and Douglas, 2013a) and maintain active involvement in two different fields (Reay et al., 2009). The ‘self’ presented in this scenario was more reflective of Helen’s early years (Chapter Eleven; Life story interview), where a single-minded devotion to the discipline was apparent. Helen essentially ‘played the part’, where her approach was designed to appease the identified gatekeepers, whilst
also negotiating a position aligned with her other life commitments (Carless and Douglas, 2013a, p.706).

An accurate ‘presentation’ was only possible as a consequence of her explicit understanding of the rules governing ‘the game’ (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 61). The perspective provided by Carless and Douglas (2013a) is closely related to previous work by Collinson (2003), which was featured in the dancer focus group (Chapter Nine). Collinson (2003) suggested individual’s deployed specific strategies in surveillance based organisations to maintain or enhance their position. These included conformist, dramaturgical and resistant selves (Collinson, 2003). By ‘playing the part’ Helen was able to negotiate the demands of the high performance dance environment and maintained her status as a Principal Ballerina (Carless and Douglas, 2013a). The audio diary highlighted how Helen was able to embrace the counter story (i.e., family life; Carless and Douglas, 2013b) and sustain ‘a multidimensional life story’ (Carless and Douglas, 2013a, p.705). She was able to resist the approach most commonly ‘expected’ in the environment (i.e., where dance is all consuming; life story interview, Chapter Eleven; Carless and Douglas, 2013b) whilst avoiding ‘being excluded or ostracized’ (Carless and Douglas, 2013a, p. 707). Over time her practice (or presentation) legitimized certain orientations, stabilizing to (re) form the habitus (Brown, 2005). Subsequently, the ‘rules of the game’ defining the field were somewhat altered (e.g., Purdy, Jones and Cassidy, 2009), due to the structured and structuring nature of the habitus (Hunter, 2004).

The evidence presented in this chapter might appear to offer several contradictions. On the one hand, Helen enjoyed a certain level of autonomy that permitted the
occasional absence from scheduled rehearsals. Helen was essentially granted ‘permission’ to miss these sessions as a consequence of her status within the company hierarchy. In contrast, despite her cultural capital, on occasions Helen felt the need to present a particular ‘self’ to staff to ensure her position was maintained. This reflected the complex nature of the context, the field of struggles (Jenkins, 2002), and the constant requirement to negotiate a social position with individually appropriate strategies.

The consistent reference to ‘family life’ during the diary extracts reinforced the importance of viewing progression in more social terms. To sustain her positive development trajectory and retain a superior social position, whilst operating simultaneously in different fields, required careful consideration. On a daily basis, Helen negotiated her scenario by deploying several related strategies that recognised her understanding and investment in the ‘game’, which had essentially spanned a lifetime (Chapter Eleven, life story interview). Helen was able to ‘formulate and reformulate’ her habitus (McGillivray and McIntosh, 2006, p. 373) by trading her cultural capital for autonomy and ‘playing the part’ (Carless and Douglas, 2013a; Collinson, 2003) where necessary.

**12.3. Summary**

The audio diary presented in this chapter complemented methods deployed in previous chapters. Specifically, closely associated with the life story interview (Chapter Eleven) it permitted an insight into the everyday experiences interpreted by Helen (e.g., Monrouxe, 2009; Day and Thatcher, 2009; Cherrington and Watson, 2011). The audio diary highlighted the structure that defined Helen’s experience and,
following an analysis, highlighted two themes for further discussion; namely ‘physical capital’ and ‘family life’.

Consistent with previous chapters, references to the body were a defining feature of most diary entries. Specifically, Helen highlighted her experiences of tiredness and the strategies designed to combat fatigue and maintain her position within the company. Theoretically, Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of physical capital was used to signify these activities in relation to progression and development. Helen’s understanding of the ‘rules of the game’, developed and embodied over time, reinforced the significance of the body in this high performance environment (Bourdieu, 1984) and, subsequently, influenced her approach to practice.

Securing and demonstrating the field-valued capital, determined by the career gatekeepers (i.e., ballet staff), allowed Helen to succeed in a ‘field of struggles’ (Jenkins, 2002, p.85). Helen’s status subsequently created a mutual (albeit temporary) dependency with the staff (Roderick, 2006) and was potentially responsible for the degree of flexibility afforded as a consequence of her family commitments. The second theme, ‘family life’, explored this in further detail. Helen made multiple entries that referenced an apparent conflict between her role as a Principal Ballerina and her role as a wife and mother. The term ‘hysterisis’ was used to describe the apparent (albeit occasional) misalignment between Helen’s habitus and the field (Paradis, 2012). This was despite the leeway granted by her status and was reflective of the complex nature of a social and competitive environment.
Chapter Thirteen: Epilogue and conclusive thoughts

This research commenced several years ago by considering implications for progression and development in accordance with two motivational theories (i.e., achievement goal theory and self-determination theory). The subsequent research journey encouraged conceptual, methodological and personal developments that continue to inform my applied practice. It has been a journey of discovery that broadened my horizons and consistently challenged my beliefs. This is well represented in my struggle with the psychological theories and approaches that characterised the early stages of the thesis. At that time, these perspectives were ingrained into my core and influential in my professional practice. A schematic that depicts the chronology of the research and identifies key issues and milestones is presented in Appendix 7.

The final chapter provides an opportunity to reflect on the objectives established at the conclusion of the review of literature (Chapter Two). The objectives were established in relation to the primary aim, which aspired to explore individuals’ experience of progression and development in an elite performance context. The specific objectives of the work related to;

1. Exploring the perception of dancers who experience life as part of a high performance environment.

2. Developing an insight into the staff’s perception and consideration of dancers’ on-going development, and their role in it.
3. Examining the social conditions that both support and inhibit individual progression and development within a professional dance company; and

4. Reflecting on my development and journey as a researcher from methodological, theoretical and personal perspectives.

From a methodological perspective the research deployed a range of qualitative based approaches. Using observations (Chapter Three), interviews (Chapter Five; Chapter Eleven, life story), focus groups (Chapter Seven and Nine) and an audio diary (Chapter Twelve) I was able to secure multiple perspectives and data sets that required retrospective and live recall from dancers and staff. These perspectives, coupled with my longitudinal engagement in the environment, provided a detailed insight and facilitated the inclusion of the theoretical reflections that followed.

Progression and development were initially considered from the viewpoint of two motivational theories (i.e., achievement goal theory and self-determination theory). The motivational theories were thought to provide a basis for understanding the longitudinal engagement required to achieve elite status (Ericcson et al., 1993), by considering the interaction that occurred between an individual (disposition) and the environment (motivational climate). In broad (and ultimately simplistic) terms, these interactions would lead to positive or negative behavioural outcomes.

As the research progressed, the contextual utility of the motivational perspectives was challenged and the theoretical possibilities afforded by Bourdieu’s ‘thinking tools’ (1986) became increasingly prominent. In this respect, an understanding of
progression was dependent upon a more complex deconstruction of an individual and environment. Indeed, the performance context represented was a complex, chaotic, and dynamic one; a challenging place inhabited by a group of individuals emanating from various backgrounds and often holding competing aspirations. The perspective provided by Bourdieu’s ‘thinking tools’ was more considerate to this dynamic and messy disposition. Specifically, it recognised the reciprocal and constantly negotiated relationship between agent (subjective) and structure (objective).

An individual should be considered an active social agent, a product of the past, influenced by the present. These influences extend beyond the confines of the performance environment and recognise a more holistic interest. The formative years provide ‘filters’ for future experience and prepare individuals for the inevitable ‘struggles’ that characterise each stage of progression and transition. From an early age, individuals develop an understanding of the ‘rules of the game’, of the embodied logic based on and in practice. In securing the perspective of staff (Chapter Five and Seven) and dancers (Chapter Nine), it became clear that retaining the motivational theories at the core of the thesis would be untenable.

Successfully negotiating a succession of environments is a pre-requisite to progression. The outcome of these transitions was entry to an abrasive, challenging and competitive performance context (the archetypal ‘field of struggles’). It could be argued from this research that preparing individuals by exposing them to ‘comfortable’ environments encouraged the development of a habitus under-prepared and unsuitable for the demands of high performance. In these scenarios an individual would be considered a ‘fish out of water’ (Bourdieu, 1986).
Within a subjective and hierarchical discipline, the role of career gatekeepers was significant and characterised the power dynamic that pervaded the field. The ability to satisfy career gatekeepers was dependent on securing an awareness of their expectations and accumulating (or presenting an image aligned to) the desired capital. These ‘rules’ were not explicitly shared and, given the dynamic nature of a performance environment, were liable to change. Maintaining progression or sustaining a position, therefore, required engagement and intelligence.

To ensure the thesis remains contemporaneous the following paragraphs contain some recently published and relevant literature. The integration of several ‘new’ strands of literature is discussed in the context of findings presented in this thesis. The review of literature (chapter two) referenced the seminal work of Ericsson et al (1993) to promote the significant commitment required to reach an elite stage. The paper produced by Ericsson and colleagues has been popularised and continues to be used frequently within the talent development context. During the intervening years, despite being challenged and (on occasions) misinterpreted (Ericsson, 2013), the general sentiment promoted by Ericsson et al (1993) retains a level of prominence. That is, to achieve expert status an individual is required to display an enduring commitment to their (chosen) discipline. The present research explored the nature of this commitment.

Collins, MacNamara and McCarthy (2016) recently identified several factors differentiating ‘super champions, champions and almosts’. The authors recognised the ‘non-linear, complex, and individualised route to the top’ (p.1) discussed in the
present thesis. Generally reflecting on the talent development pathways experienced by individuals from a range of sports, they identified how many sports ‘purposefully try to smooth the pathway for their most talented performers’ (p.2). The outcome of this well-intentioned ‘smoothing’ is invariably individuals who are underprepared for the demands and challenges characterising high performance environments. In the present research, the impact of previous experience (considered in most chapters) was discussed in the context of (a reflexive or flexible) habitus (Bourdieu, 1986). Importantly, individuals who had experienced a ‘challenge filled progression’ (Collins, MacNamara and McCarthy, 2016, p. 2) responded to subsequent adversity and setbacks like a ‘fish in water’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 127-128). The increasingly holistic view taken in the present research acknowledges the importance of not restricting a consideration of challenges (and development) to the performance environment (Sarkar, Fletcher and Brown, 2015). Indeed, life experiences and priorities must be considered.

Rees and colleagues (2016) recently published a review of ‘current knowledge on the development of the world’s best sporting talent’. The research, requested by UKsport, aimed to collate evidence drawn from a range of sources to provide recommendations for practice. In completing the review, the authors acknowledged that research involving world class performers is limited. This further emphasises the significance of the present research that afforded an insight into a world leading Ballet Company. Notably, in the context of the present thesis, the review also identified the need for future research to explore the impact of experiences at a junior level on long-term performance. The previous paragraph highlighted how the concept of ‘habitus’ was introduced to interpret the indelible contribution early (life and performance)
experience (and developed ‘filters’) had on the subsequent resilience and approach individuals demonstrated in a high performance context. This evidence also offers an (at least partial) explanation to the question Rees et al (2016) pose regarding why some individuals ‘fail to progress at key transition points’. Whilst most organisations aim to construct a pathway defined by continuity, there should be an appreciation that each stage (or ‘field’; Purdy, Jones and Cassidy, 2009) is defined by a slightly different set of ‘rules’ (Bourdieu, 1992). Therefore, permitting performers time to adjust and ensuring previous experiences encourage the development of a reflexive and resilient habitus is essential (Bourdieu, 1986). As acknowledged (see Chapter Eleven), a reflexive and resilient habitus can be influenced by both implicit and explicit lessons (e.g., Collins and MacNamara, 2012).

Rees et al (2016) concluded their paper by suggesting the future direction for talent development research must involve ‘embracing the complexity’. The present thesis made efforts to engage with the ‘complexity’ that defines talent development by deploying multiple methods (e.g., Coutinho, Mesquita and Fonseca, 2016) and introducing a theoretical framework that permitted a detailed exploration of the power dynamics that pervade (and influence success in) each social space.

The conceptual possibilities (e.g., Bourdieu, 1986) were determined by the data (e.g., Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), which were based on the unique and dynamic ‘vantage point’ (Tsang, 2000, p. 45) I occupied as a product of my personal, theoretical and methodological positions (e.g., Frank, 2000). From the outset, I aspired to retain an open mind to the evolving research process (e.g., Charmaz, 2002). On a personal
level, since commencing this research, I am aware that I have developed in both professional (applied) and research terms (Attard, 2008). I used the opportunity afforded by the bridging commentaries (i.e., Chapter Four; Six; Eight; Ten) to offer some insight into these changes and speculate on the impact they had on the unfolding thesis narrative.

From the outset, I wanted to engage in research that was of practical relevance (to myself and others). Indeed, I deliberately chose to conduct the research in an unfamiliar environment (Chapter Four; Bridging commentary one) to secure a perspective that would both challenge and supplement my experience of elite sport. The bridging commentaries allowed me to share several personal reflections, whilst perhaps not capturing the extent to which the research influenced my practice. Still, I can say with conviction that the PhD journey has effectively synthesized my professional experience and academic knowledge.

The process of engaging in PhD research has provided a framework to allow me to formally reflect on my professional practice. The research, inextricably linked with my applied activity, has and will continue to influence my professional conduct I conclude the thesis with several reflective considerations for practitioners involved in talent development. These considerations compile (and conclude) lessons from the academic, professional and personal journey I have enjoyed since initiating the thesis and are designed to support effective talent development. These considerations represent key initiatives I have and continue to use in my applied practice operating within a professional football academy, and can be integrated as proactive (i.e., designing talent development environments) and reactive (i.e., supporting an
individual within a development environment) strategies. I broadly categorise these reflective implications into four sections; namely perspective, reflection, methodology and pathway.

1. Perspective

- Initiating the research as an ‘outsider’ (e.g., Louis and Bartinek, 1992) and ‘a man without history’ (Schutz, 1976) encouraged me to reflect on talent development in an unfamiliar context. As a practitioner, being immersed in a performance context of which you have knowledge is often (rightly) considered a pre-requisite for success. However, in my mind this should be supplemented with opportunities to view (and learn from) practice in other (sport and non-sport) high performance organisations. These opportunities offer the space to reflect and challenge aspects of personal delivery, whilst enhancing an ability to maintain progressive and impactful practice. In my current role we have actively sought, organised and benefited from visits (and knowledge share) to other professional sport organisations, Olympic sports, high performing music schools and European football clubs.

- The interpretative lenses that the variety of theoretical positions (i.e., from psychology and sociology) engaged with offered, encouraged a comprehensive examination of talent development. Engaging with different forms of literature and retaining an open-mind to the inherent possibilities was critical in further developing an understanding of environments conducive to development.

2. Reflection
• The thesis is characterised by a series of reflective chapters (i.e., Bridging Commentaries). Regularly reflecting on elements of the research process, and more generally, implications for professional practice was invaluable in generating ‘new’ or consolidating existing knowledge. Introducing opportunities for structured reflection in a dynamic fast-paced performance environment is often undervalued and overlooked, but when engaged with appropriately offers enormous benefits. Additionally, providing the space (e.g., audio diaries) and asking the questions that permits others to reflect (e.g., interviews, focus groups, life story interviews) can have a profound effect in encouraging ownership and initiating change.

3. Methodology

• The thesis included a range of, often underutilised, research methods (e.g., audio diaries, focus groups and a life story interview). These methods were identified as they permitted a detailed insight into the lives of the selected participants. Introducing these methods, and the required facilitating skills, into applied practice reflects a logical and impactful move. Specifically, it allows talent development practitioners the opportunity to further understand the background (i.e., life story interview) and day-to-day lived realities (i.e., audio diaries) of their performers (and staff). Taking an increasingly social view on talent development ensures staff retain an appreciation of a performers life in context.

• Facilitating ‘focus group’ type discussions where individuals (performers and coaches) have the opportunity to openly and honestly express their
view on the performance environment represents an inclusive and engaging way to empathise with their experience and make development enhancing adjustments accordingly. Such an approach, if structured and facilitated appropriately, and scheduled regularly, would also potentially help to alleviate the impact of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) and explore the consequences of the inevitable power dynamics (e.g., Roderick, 2006).

- In addition to introducing a range of methods into an applied context, practitioners might also be encouraged to consider the skills underpinning the effective integration of these approaches. In the previous paragraph I briefly mentioned the facilitation of focus groups. In addition to being able to effectively facilitate group discussions, good practitioners rely on developing a positive rapport and asking skilful questions.

4. Pathway

- Creating an environment that is ‘uncomfortable’ for developing performers might be considered counterintuitive. However, a compelling body of evidence (supported by this thesis) is advocating an approach that creates challenging conditions designed to prepare individuals for a transition into the abrasive and competitive context that characterise elite high performance environments. The present research detailed the importance of supporting the development of a reflexive and robust habitus. This is only possible if individuals incrementally experience challenge. Regular multidisciplinary meetings are recommended to discuss each individual and ensure adaptations are made to their programme where
necessary. Understanding each individual and providing a degree of parent education is necessary in facilitating these challenges.

The research reinforced the significance of taking an increasingly ‘social’ approach to supporting individuals in a performance environment. I have introduced strategies that permit an understanding of the life histories of athletes, in recognition of the importance attached to early experiences and the ‘filters’ that are subsequently developed. Additionally, the research, coupled with my professional insights, encouraged me to review the performance pathway construction within the sports I am involved with. Creating continuity via challenging and supportive environments is essential in a hierarchically defined environment. The nature of the research has allowed me to refine the skills required to successfully operate with both performers and staff. Positioning myself in a manner that has encouraged openness from both parties has undoubtedly influenced the research and maximized the impact I can have as a practitioner.

In concluding this chapter, and essentially the thesis, I feel comfortable that the objectives established several years ago have been achieved. On commencing this journey, I did not envisage the impact or inclusion of the sociological perspectives. Indeed, I was ignorant of the existence of this literature and the possibilities that it ultimately created. The evolving nature of the thesis considered in the context of the sociological perspectives certainly challenged my view of progression and development. The reciprocal influence of this challenge has meant I leave the PhD process better equipped academically, professionally and personally.
References


Carless, D., and Douglas, K. (2009). “We haven’t got a seat on the bus for you” or “All the seats are mine”: Narratives and career transitions in professional golf. *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*, 1(1), 51-66.


Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet

Name of Researcher:  *Edd Vahid*

Name of Supervisor:  *Dr David Gilbourne*

Title of Study / Project:

*Psychological Perspectives on Progression and Development within Elite Performance Domains*

Purpose of Study:

*Examining performance and practice experiences of elite performers drawn from a range of performance disciplines the present research aims to identify the key characteristics supporting progression and development.***

Procedures and Participants role:

*Participants will be observed and more formally involved in semi-structured interviews and focus groups.***

- **Participant observations – aim:** Provide the researcher with an opportunity to meet and interact with the groups involved. This process will support the establishment of key qualities such as trust and rapport and offer an insight into culturally specific behaviours and attitudes.

- **Semi-structured interviews – aim:** Based on the evidence collected in the participant observation and key identified literature sources, interviews will be conducted with practitioners and performers at different stages of the research process. This will permit a more detailed insight into individual’s perceptions and behaviours previously observed.

- **Focus groups – aim:** Supporting the interview process, focus groups will allow individuals to come together in sharing and developing their thoughts regarding progression and development.

- **Case studies – aim:** Permits an opportunity to follow a select number of performers. This will provide a detailed focus on the behaviours of individuals as they interact with the context under study.

Note: All participants have the right to withdraw from the project / study at any time without prejudice to access of services which are already being provided or may subsequently be provided to the participant.

***ALL DATA WILL BE TREATED WITH CONFIDENTIALITY***
Participant Consent Form

Participant name:

Title of Project

*Psychological perspectives on progression and development within elite developmental performance domains*

Name of Researcher: *Edd Vahid*

Participant to complete this section: Please initial each box.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

4. I agree to the interview / focus group being audio recorded.

5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.

______________________________________________________________   ____________________________
Signature of Participant                                      Date

______________________________________________________________   ____________________________
Name of person taking consent                              Date

Signature of person taking consent
Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview questions

Orienting statement: The following interview guide aims to gain an understanding of your role and the systems and structures you perceive to operate and support the dancers.

1. Practitioner focus
   a. Can you tell me about your background in high performance dance?
   b. Can you briefly describe your role?
   c. What do you consider to be the major aims of your role?
   d. How do you measure success in your role?

2. Performer focus
   a. Can you comment on the process of recruitment?
      i. What qualities do you identify in prospective dancers?
      ii. How does the dancer’s background prepare them for the demands of high performance dance?
      iii. What is the process of selecting performers for specific performance roles?
   b. Can you describe the dancers schedule between performances?
      i. How do you drive them on?
      ii. How do you keep them focused on maintaining their standards each day in training?
   c. Technical skills.
      i. How do you develop a dancer’s technical ability?
      ii. Will you deploy different strategies dependent upon the dancers level and / or age?
   d. Psychological skills
      i. How do you strengthen a dancer’s psychological skills?
      ii. Will you deploy different strategies dependent upon a dancer’s level and / or age?
   e. Lifestyle skills.
      i. What education do you provide dancers in terms of lifestyle support?
ii. Do you deploy different strategies dependent upon a dancer’s level and/or age?

f. Can you tell me about the process of reviewing performances?
   i. What key performance indicators are used when evaluating individual dancer’s performances?
   ii. Can you comment on the criteria used to promote dancer’s through the various levels of the company?

g. How do the dancer’s evaluate their own performances?
   i. In training?
   ii. In performance?

3. Environment & schedule focus
   a. The dancer’s seem fairly close and very supportive of each other when involved or not involved in games. Do you seek to develop team or group unity? How do you do this?

4. Other
   a. Finally, what are the characteristics and qualities that distinguish elite performers from the rest in the dance world?
## Appendix 3: Staff Interviews

### Table 1 Elite Dance Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw Data Themes</th>
<th>1st Order Themes</th>
<th>2nd Order Themes</th>
<th>General Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>S1</strong> We will do 8 to 10 performances a week on tour. We will do 7 weeks on tour, 6 weeks on...October, November, December and January. In four months they will be doing something like 70 performances and in total 120.</td>
<td>Yearly Schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>S2</strong> A week might involve a travel day on a Monday to a place or a Tuesday. They arrive somewhere like Southampton and they do class on the Wednesday and rehearsal Wednesday afternoon and performance on the Wednesday evening. The curtain will come down at about ten thirty so the following day they will start again at about eleven o’clock. So they have about twelve hours to turn themselves around. They’ll do probably a double show on the Thursday, finishing at ten thirty. Start again on the Friday at about eleven thirty. Generally there is no matinee on the Thursday so they will rehearse for the next performance on the Friday afternoon, performance on the Friday evening. Double show on Saturday and sometimes a double show on Sunday and then we are back to again the travel day. So its manic, absolutely manic.</td>
<td>Weekly Schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S3</strong> General. They start class at 10:30 and do an hour and 15 minutes. A sort of a warm up. They’re expected to do class every day because it is their warm up. Not everyone will do that. Then we have rehearsal from 12 to 2:30. Then they usually have a lunch break, an hour. And then they will work until 6:30 on average days. Whilst we are performing we will rehearse. We’ll rehearse and then will do the class for about three hours. Anything on top of that is overtime, so we’ll try to avoid that as much as we can. They do performances. Performances start at 7:30. Some productions are 3 hours long so they will finish at 10:30 at night.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Schedule</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>S4</strong> Doing class. There has become a change in attitude a little bit to class. When I was dancing you had to do class every day. Where as now dancers don’t always do class every day. They’re contracted to do four and we provide six. But it’s a different mentality now. As an artistic staff we can’t make them do six, because they are not contracted to do six.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>S5</strong> We rehearse, we dance, we rehearse, we dance, there’s this season, there is another</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 – General Dimension Two - Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw Data Theme</th>
<th>1st Order Theme</th>
<th>2nd Order Theme</th>
<th>General Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>S3</strong> I guess because we are always working on the next production, that’s their goal, they always have something to look forward to. Quite often when they’re not actually going to perform, we get some of the younger dancers to learn the roles. So they have something to feed their brain and soul really.</td>
<td>Next Production</td>
<td>Performance schedule</td>
<td>Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S1</strong> Yeah – because people are working on the next thing and it will depend…Some people will be much more motivated if they have a goal ahead of them.</td>
<td>Next thing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S3</strong> They learn an awful lot. If nothing else they learn how hard…because some of the principal dancers will make a dance look so easy, but actually it is very hard for inexperienced people to do. So it makes them realize how hard it is. It also gives them a higher goal in a way.</td>
<td>Comparisons with senior dancers</td>
<td>Ego involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S5</strong> When you senior principal here dancing, you have lots of experience to pass onto the younger guys. Plus at the same time they are going to look at you on the stage and see how you do things. Some young guys or girls probably won’t believe you as much as when they see you on stage. You have to have trust between teacher and student.</td>
<td>Watching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>S1</strong> As a dancer…when I was a dancer I learnt more from watching other people than I did from really you know…taking class. I would watch somebody like Ralph Nurev or Burichecof and I’d go I want to be like that.</td>
<td>Observing</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S1</strong> But you learn so much from just observing.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>S3</strong> With this particular girl we don’t have to nag her about doing the small</td>
<td>Progression</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
roles. She does that very well anyway. I think she is already thinking If I do this well then there might be the next step.

| S3 | I think sometimes with the slightly younger dancers they'll think, ‘I can do three pirouettes and he can’t, so why is he the prince?’ They don’t see the overall picture. Some of them do, some are much more realistic. Some dancers are trained to concentrate on their technique, rather than their performance as an artist. | Training | Goal selection |
| S3 | I think sometimes with the slightly younger dancers they'll think, ‘I can do three pirouettes and he can’t, so why is he the prince?’ They don’t see the overall picture. Some of them do, some are much more realistic. Some dancers are trained to concentrate on their technique, rather than their performance as an artist. | Training | Goal selection |
| S5 | I am never happy with whatever I do. I always think you can do better. This performance was better than the previous one. That is the aim for me, always doing better and better. It doesn’t happen always, but if you have aims like that, you have high standards for yourself and for your dancing. | Standards |
| S3 | It’s what you believe in yourself. I believe sometimes when I come out of rehearsals I can do better. I believe that, because I know I can do better. It’s about believing in yourself. | Belief |
| S3 | I guess it’s a personal ambition, isn’t it? I guess if they believe they can get somewhere, then I guess you would put more effort into getting what you want. Where some people maybe its like, ‘this is how I am going to be’. | Personal Ambition |
| S1 | But then some people make it and other people kind of realize they do have a limit. Some people never realize they have a limit but they are limited | Limits |
| S4 | Unfortunately, there will always be those people who don’t go past just being in the corps-der ballet. They’ll do maybe nine years, ten years and then leave and go on to do something else. There is a girl leaving in June to do a teachers course. She has enjoyed it, but she has always known that she would never really get to do anything more that where she was. It can be frustrating for that person, but then they will do something else. | Personal Limitations |
| S1 | But most dancers are...they have ambition to do as much as possible. And sometimes there ambition is more than their talent. But I don’t mind that so much. If people have dreams its quite nice. | Dreams |
| S5 | I don’t know what people want. Maybe they are happy with what they do. That’s why they don’t go any higher. Or maybe they can’t go any higher because of other reasons. I don’t want to be rude but some people are just not good enough to become principal | Personal goals |
S3 **Even within the ballet staff we are all watching the performance and one of us will think that person looks particularly beautiful in that particular performance. But then someone will go, ‘what are you talking about? She looked dreadful!’ It’s a very personal thing as well.**

Subjective interpretation

S5 **Because you have one teacher in class and you have…65 dancers in this company and then you have a ladies class and a gentlemen’s class of thirty and thirty, or whatever the numbers. So one teacher is not going to give corrections to everybody. They are going to give general corrections and then it is up to you how you will work with it, work with yourself.**

General Corrections

S2 - **But I think because of the numbers of shows they can sometimes only focus on the things that haven’t gone right. So the show comes down, you are happy that you have got through it and you will know what you did well and what you didn’t do well. For someone to come in and repeat to you at that immediate moment what you didn’t do well is not always effective in my opinion. You have to get corrections. You do seek out correction always. But I do think sometimes let it go and designate a time the next day. You never do not put in one hundred per cent. That’s a whole different problem if someone doesn’t care when they are out there. You have to talk to those dancers. For the most part if you’re in this company working as hard as we do, you care. You have to. You still need positive reinforcement at any stage in the company. The principals need it, the senior dancers need it who have been here for ten to twelve years and the younger dancers need it. They should say, ‘good job, good effort and here are a few things to work on’.

Temporal feedback

S2 But you know, its maybe not what’s happening in the centre of the room, but you might see as an after thought on the side of the room. And the way they react to, you know, if you’re throwing out a general comment to the men like, ‘this was really good but…’ In daily class if you are saying, ‘I want you to push the floor more here’. It’s how you might see them react if they are on the side of the room.

General Comments

S2 Honestly, I think one has to try to find a different way with every single individual. It sounds perhaps very far fetched, but you need to find the buttons
to push with each person. Some people need love and affection. Some people will only do it by being kind of driven. That’s part of my job to also find how to push the buttons.

**S1** Individuals are very different. Some people think they have done well. Other people are very depressed after their performance because they think they should have been perfect or should have done better. I never did a perfect performance in my life. I always say to them, ‘once you’ve done the perfect show stop.’ Because you’ll never match that. There are always things that can be better than other times

**S1** Maybe one person will get an opportunity quicker than others. When I started dancing no one was given opportunities for three or four years.

**S4** And I try to give people opportunities at the earliest possible moment.

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**Table 3 – General Dimension three – Determination**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw Data Themes</th>
<th>1st Order Themes</th>
<th>2nd Order Themes</th>
<th>General Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1 I think most people who do something well have got determination and they’ve got real…they can focus on where they want to go. It’s not necessarily the people with the best physique who make it always to the top.</td>
<td>Determination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1 But they’re lucky enough to have god given gifts so you deal with them. Usually the people who work the hardest and concentrate the most have had to. To get over the fact that they haven’t been so blessed. And they have fiery determination.</td>
<td>Determination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3 Some of them will have beautiful bodies, the physique, the facility that every dancer would dream of. But they will not do the basics like doing dance every day that will get them better. But because of their look and natural ability and technique they are often given the roles. And the outcome is disappointing because they haven’t prepared themselves well for it. It’s hard for the rest of the company to see as well. Some of them work so hard, but have limitations, and for these reasons are not given the role – but see somebody who has everything not given 100% work. It must be very frustrating.</td>
<td>Compensating natural ability</td>
<td>Sources of Determination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2 - You can have two equally talented Priorities</td>
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</table>
Some people get lost in the corps ballet, because it is too easy for them. They stay the same.

S7 - If you want to do leading roles you have to work with yourself as well as being noticed. That is another hard thing for younger people I believe.

S1 I don’t think you can give determination to people, I think they have to have it. I have a boy in this company who is determined to make it. But you know in the end he will get to a level which possibly will be much higher than if he wasn’t so determined. He’ll never get to that top level that I made. But he will do much better than somebody else who perhaps has less determination.

S2 - I don’t know if its parenting. If its parents that lead you the right way and support you. You also hear stories of male dancers whose parents don’t want to take it seriously even if they do. Maybe that makes them a little bit stronger and more driven. Because they’ve already had to fight to get into it. For girls it might be a different story. I don’t know. There are stage mums who push you and the child resents it and can’t do it anymore and can’t listen to authority. Or maybe the parent is just supportive and lets you chose your own path. It’s hard.

S2 - I don’t want to generalize too much but, you know, it’s my experience certainly, that people who come from certain countries where…they may be don’t have it as easier as some British kids have it, they do want it more. I can’t explain it.

S3 I was trained in this country and British trained dancers tend to be tougher and they’re more realistic as well.
don’t know why, but some Russian trained dancers quite often are trained to become the leading dancer, rather than trained to become part of the company. From a very little, young age they are drilled to become a prima ballerina. They do ﬁnd it very hard to dance with others. To us it seems like sometimes they are picking what they want to do. They’ll put more effort into some of their roles rather than do the corps-der ballet work.

S1 I had a girl, a Japanese girl in Amsterdam who, she changed the shape of her legs by the way that she worked. She had rather bowed legs but because she was so determined to make it she found ways of using her body to actually make the look of her Japanese kind of bowed legs look different. That’s determination. She didn’t have surgery and she didn’t have…It was just…she studied and she looked. And said, ‘if I do this and stretch like this’. You know, her legs were still the same as they always were. But she found, through her perseverance how to make herself look good.

S1 Determination. A real desire to do something to their best ability. I’m talking about people who have some kind of physical ability. But I am talking about the brains, you have to be smart to make it as a top class ballet dancer.

S3 It’s when you see them working. Not just in rehearsals, most of them work very very hard in rehearsals. But you see them in the corner of your eyes practicing the simplest thing. But they are practicing. Some people will never take walk on roles. Some will not take what they see as menial roles. But those with extremely good work ethic would put just as must energy and effort in to those roles as they would for their own variations where they have the spotlight on them.

S6 - You have to have character, you have to prove yourself, you have to work. Mentally, some people won’t, they will be weak and get tired. It is very, very hard.

S3 one of the girls in the corps-der ballet wants to get all the way up there. You can see it in her work, you can see it in her eyes. You can see. Not only when she is dancing herself but she will watch others rehearse. Everything is processed through even when she is just watching.

S3 She joined as a corps-der ballet and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Determination</th>
<th>Desire</th>
<th>Work ethic</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Process information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1 Determination. A real desire to do something to their best ability. I’m talking about people who have some kind of physical ability. But I am talking about the brains, you have to be smart to make it as a top class ballet dancer.</td>
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<td>S3 It’s when you see them working. Not just in rehearsals, most of them work very very hard in rehearsals. But you see them in the corner of your eyes practicing the simplest thing. But they are practicing. Some people will never take walk on roles. Some will not take what they see as menial roles. But those with extremely good work ethic would put just as must energy and effort in to those roles as they would for their own variations where they have the spotlight on them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>S6 - You have to have character, you have to prove yourself, you have to work. Mentally, some people won’t, they will be weak and get tired. It is very, very hard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>S3 one of the girls in the corps-der ballet wants to get all the way up there. You can see it in her work, you can see it in her eyes. You can see. Not only when she is dancing herself but she will watch others rehearse. Everything is processed through even when she is just watching.</td>
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</table>
within three, maybe four years she went right through all the way to principal. She just worked so hard. She is like a sponge. Everything you tell her, she just takes it. For some dancers it just goes over their head.

**S2** - I still think to get there you need to have your elbows out and be able to push through a crowd. There are a lot of people. If you are passive or self-conscious you’ll have a lot harder time.

**S3** She has not stopped that hungriness and the wanting to get better, even though she is 30.

**S1** Yeah, yeah it does. It’s very difficult because a lot of dancers get demotivated by, they think I’m not doing much and what’s the point. I can do it in my sleep so I’ve got no challenge. I always say to them there is nothing stopping you going to a rehearsal. Some places don’t allow dancers to go. But I say, ‘go and put in the work and you never know. You may be on tomorrow.’

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**Table 4 – General Dimension Four – Life outside of Dance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw Data Theme</th>
<th>1st Order Themes</th>
<th>2nd Order Themes</th>
<th>General Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>S6</strong> But actually now I think I dance better because the priorities change in my life. Things which were making me upset before, if people were saying stuff, I have stopped even noticing it.</td>
<td>Priorities</td>
<td>Life outside</td>
<td>Life outside of dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S3</strong> If they are happy in life they tend to do better at work</td>
<td>Happy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S5</strong> I think you only start enjoying your dancing after you are thirty. Because before you are thirty you are not scared, but you worry about everything. What might happen during the show? And then after the show you can’t stop analyzing it. You go home and lie in bed and think, ‘I should have done that better, I could have done that better’. May be other people will have a different point of view on that.</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S3</strong> I do not think it is healthy not to have an outside interest.</td>
<td>Outside interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S3</strong> It’s also important to remember that they are human beings and they have a life outside as well.</td>
<td>Life outside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S5</strong> People who’s very, who want to become senior principals, who want to become very good dancers, they have harder life than...Because if you have a</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You think about preparing. You don’t drink, you don’t go out, you go to bed early. You prepare yourself, you have a very hard routine.

**S3** You can see if they want more from you or if they just see it as a job. They just come in, do their job, go home and are happy how it is.

You finish in a week in Glasgow and then you’re in Bristol. There is no time to spend at home. It’s brutal. You have to really...Dancers have to grit their teeth. You may have one free day to go home and change some of your clothes, do the washing. It’s a very tough life.

Although, dance students work very hard, again they don’t know until they join the company how much we work, how many hours they work, how many performances they do. We do quite a lot more on average than other companies anyway. Being on tour, away from home, living out of your suitcases for weeks and weeks on end is another really hard thing for them.

When you travel and spend all your time with the same group of people you grow to love them as your family. You’ve heard the word family a lot. My ballet family. It really is. My old company was larger so you did separate. There is a healthy competitiveness on an individual level. You support them but there may be other things happening. On the whole you want the show to go up and look good. The only way you can do that is by working absolutely together and supporting.

Because they work so closely and they’re on tour a lot they live in each other’s pockets. They’re very supportive of their colleagues.
Focus group

Staff

Focus group aims

• Seek your personal opinions on a range of areas.
• The areas will include…
  a. Established theories in the areas of motivation and progression.
  b. My observations of the environment.
  c. Key themes emerging from interviews with staff.

• Please note: All evidence will be treated confidentially.
Research

- Progression and Development
- Theoretical approaches

Focus group structure

- I will introduce a topic or theory and encourage your feedback.

- Please use this as a forum to share your personal opinions and experiences.

- I will attempt to facilitate the discussion where appropriate.
Company

- 65 dancers, male and female, recruited from a range of cultures and backgrounds.
- As a company...
- How do you support each individual's development?
- Which areas of development do you believe requires further improvement?

Question(s)
- Question 1: Why do they want to dance?
- Question 2: What characterises the individuals in the company?
- Question 3: What aspirations do the dancers have?

Feedback

- Individuals are very different. Some people think they have done well. Other people are very depressed after their performance because they think they should have been perfect or should have done better.

I am going to use this slide to introduce AGT.
- Question 1: How do individuals judge their performance and progression?
- Question 2: What sources do dancers use to support this feedback?
- Question 3: What feedback strategies does the company employ?
- Question 4: How does the subjective nature of feedback effect the dancers?
Achievement Goal Theory (AGT)

- AGT suggests motivated behaviour is a consequence of an individual's perception of competence.
- A greater perception of competence contributes to higher levels of motivation.
- Competence is derived from the framework that individuals use to evaluate their performance.
- Two frameworks exist:
  1. Task
  2. Ego

  • Task  
    - Evaluation is based on personal standards
    
    There is a healthy competitiveness on an individual level.

  • Ego  
    - Evaluation is based on comparisons with others.
    I think sometimes with the slightly younger dancers they'll think, 'I can do three pirouettes and he can't, so why is he the prince?' They don't see the overall picture.

Questions
Question 1: Which framework do you think dominates in this environment?
Question 2: Which framework do you promote? A task or ego focus?
Question 3: Why do you promote this structure?
Question 4: Do individual dancers have different perspectives?
Question 5: What influences these perspectives?
Question 6: Are there cultural differences?
Question 7: Are there differences between the perspective held by junior and senior dancers?
Question 8: Are there specific situations where the focus is task or ego?
Question 9: Can individuals have both perspectives?
Self Determination Theory (SDT)

- SDT suggests social factors influence motivation through their influence on...
  
  a. Self determination (autonomy)
  
  b. Competence
  
  c. Relatedness

Question 1: Self determination: How much control do dancers have of their programme?
Question 2: How important is this? Does this effect their motivation?
Relatedness: discuss on the next slide.

Ballet family (Relatedness)

- Because they work so closely and they’re on tour a lot they live in each other pockets…they’re very supportive of their colleagues.

  - I think there should be a certain level of respect from those that have been in the company for longer, from the ones who have just come out of school.

Question 1: Relatedness: In what ways are the dancers supportive of one another?
Question 2: Is it difficult to create a supportive environment even when dancers are competing for roles?
Question 3: Is there a hierarchy in relation to the support provided?
Question 4: What is the role of the senior dancer?
Question 5: Do the senior dancers encourage a supportive environment? How do you consider their role?
Lifestyle

- There is no time to spend at home. It's brutal...dancers have to grit their teeth. You may have one free day to go home and change some of your clothes, do the washing. It's a very tough life.

- Being on tour, away from home, living out of your suitcases for weeks and weeks on end is another really hard thing for them.

Life outside of Dance

- I think you only start enjoying your dancing after you are thirty. Because before you are thirty you are not scared, but you worry about everything.

- If they are happy in life they tend to do better at work.
Appendix 5: Dancers Focus Group Guide

Focus Group

Dancers

Focus group aims

• Seek your personal opinions on a range of areas.
• The areas will include...
  a. Established theories in the areas of motivation and progression.
  b. My observations of the environment.
  c. Key themes emerging from interviews and focus group with staff.

• Please note: All evidence will be treated confidentially.
Focus group structure

• I will introduce a topic or theory and encourage your feedback.

• Please use this as a forum to share your personal opinions and experiences.

• I will attempt to facilitate the discussion where appropriate.

Dance

• In pairs discuss...

• How you were introduced to dance?

• When did you aspire to become a professional dancer?
Challenges

- What are the biggest challenges you face as a dancer?
- How do you cope with these challenges?
- What support is provided by the staff?
- In what areas do you think you could be better supported?

Measuring success

- How do you measure the success of personal performances during and following...
  a. Training
  b. On stage performances

- How do staff measure the success of your performances during...
  a. Training
  b. On stage performances
Motivation

• What motivates you on a daily basis?

• Their reward is actually doing it. I think if you go back to the beginning. Every dancer who enters the company, whether they dare to admit it or not, is hoping to become a principal.

• Has your motivation changed since you joined the company?

Lifestyle

• Can you describe the lifestyle of a dancer in this company?

• How do you cope with the lifestyle?

• How does your life outside of the company effect your performance?
Control

• How much control do you have over your development in this company?

• How do you think the staff monitor your progression?

Company

• How do you maintain a collective spirit when you are ultimately in competition with one another for opportunities and roles?
Dancer

- What do you feel are the most important qualities for success as a dancer?

Summary

- Do you have any questions?

- Is there anything further you would like to add?

- Thank you for your time
Appendix 6: Life Story Interview

1. What are your earliest childhood experiences?
   a. What significant events occurred during your childhood?
   b. How do you think your background has influenced you during your dance career?

2. Who were the most significant individual(s) in your life during early childhood?
   What influence did these individual(s) have on you?
   a. Parents?
   b. Other family members?

3. What were your experiences of primary school?
   a. What were your career aspirations as a child?

4. How do you think other people would have described you during your childhood?

5. When were you introduced to Ballet?
   a. What are your earliest memories of ballet?
   b. Who was your first ballet ‘teacher’?
      i. What are the key lessons you learnt from them?

6. Can you tell me about your experiences at secondary school?
   a. Was your school supportive of your dance interests?
   b. Did your friends have an interest in ballet?

7. Can you recall when you believed you could have a career in ballet?
   a. What were your first experiences as a professional dancer?

8. How do you think your current colleagues would describe you?
   a. How do you think the staff would describe you?
   b. How would you describe yourself now?

9. Who has had the greatest influence on your career?
10. Can you tell me about your life outside of dance?
   a. What interests / hobbies do you have?
   b. How does this affect your dancing?

11. What has been the biggest disappointment in your career to date?
   a. How did you overcome this disappointment?

12. What has been your greatest accomplishment to date?

13. What are your future goals?
   a. Six months?
   b. One year?
   c. Two years?
   d. Five years?

14. Is there anything you would like to add?
### Appendix 7 - PhD Thesis Map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Key Themes / Findings</th>
<th>Applied Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1** Preface | 2015 | • Preliminary Introduction  
• Contextualise research | Athlete Support Role  
Talented & Elite Athletes (University) |
| **2** Review of Literature | 2009 | • Talent Development  
• Psychological perspectives  
  o Achievement Goal Theory (Nicholls)  
  o Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan)  
• Methodological considerations  
• Research Aims | |
| **3** Observations | 2008 Dec  
2009  
2010 June | • Reconnaissance  
• Familiarisation  
• Preliminary Theorisation (AGT / SDT)  
• Redacted field notes from December 2008, April 2009 and December 2009 are included in Appendix 8. | |
| **4** Bridging Commentary One | 2010 | • Standpoint of the Storyteller (Frank, 2000)  
  o ‘A man without history’ (Schutz, 1976)  
  o Outsider  
• Sharing ‘Foreshadowed Problems’ (Malinowski, 1922) | |
<p>| <strong>5</strong> Staff Interviews | 2010 | • Questions re: Theoretical utility of AGT &amp; SDT | |
| <strong>6</strong> Bridging Commentary Two | 2010 | • Role of the (Research) Gatekeeper | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impression Management?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Staff Focus Group</strong></td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|   | • Sociological perspectives (Bourdieu)  
  o Habitus, capital and field  
  • Chosen vs choosing? (background influences)  
  • Conflict between habitus & field |   |
| 8 | **Bridging Commentary Three** | 2010 |
|   | • Theoretical possibilities  
  • Outsider to insider? (Louis & Bartinek) |   |
| 9 | **Dancer Focus Group** | 2011 |
|   | • A fish in water  
  o Doxa & Hysteresis  
  • A field of struggles  
  o Power (inc. symbolic) & capital |   |
| 10 | **Bridging Commentary Four** | 2011 |
|   | • Positioning  
  • Literature influences  
  • Methodological considerations |   |
| 11 | **Life Story Interview** | 2011 |
|   | • Story teller and story analyst (Smith & Sparkes, 2009)  
  • ‘Prison’ (influence of early experiences)  
  • ‘The Sculpturer’ (influence of mentor)  
  • ‘Lifestyle’ (influence of life outside of dance) |   |
| 12 | **Audio Diary** | 2012 |
|   | • Physical capital (maintaining and enhancing; power)  
  • Family Life (competing fields) |   |
| 13 | **Epilogue** | 2015 |
|   | • Concluding thoughts  
  • Psych to Social reflections  
  • Applied implications |   |
Appendix 8 - Selected redacted field notes

December 2008

The sun’s efforts to shine were overshadowed by the cold air, providing a frosty outlook to the day. My thoughts drifted to my research. Would I look back at this metaphor as an accurate reflection of my findings? The performers need to shine being constrained by their environment.

It was a cold morning in early December and I was making the journey down to the studios to witness the days ‘training’. Is that the word I should be using? For the past week I had several concerns over my use of terminology. I had been used to training, coach, team spirit, banter; would these apply? I feared for looking like Del Boy as he used any number of foreign phrases regardless of country or context in countless episodes of only fools and horses. Derek Trotter was certainly not the aim.

Another dilemma had also registered a week or so prior to this initial visit. What should I wear? The evening before I was In and out of my clothes more times than a teenage girl preparing for her first date. The options – formal, smart casual, casual? First impressions counting for everything was a recurring conversation being played out in my head.

The journey provided further time for reflection and it was with considerable relief when I arrived. I was invited to sit in the green room, an area the dancers use to relax. There was nothing green about it. Pictures of dancers drawn from any number of productions adorned the walls. The centre piece of the room was a machine selling
fizzy drinks. Fizzy drinks? Now I have never been a sports nutritionist (one module at university apart) but this struck me as slightly surprising. It was a strange thing to consume my thinking but for a short period of time I tried to work out why you would have fizzy drinks available to individuals who would be required to participate in intense day long sessions in the studios.

Programmes littered the coffee table. The busy schedule of a professional ballet dancer was clearly evident. Numerous newspaper columns actively and regularly seek the views of high profile sportsmen and women on issues such as athlete burnout and fixture congestion. The dancers were expected to perform daily for weeks. Alongside the programmes, reviews from papers decorated the table. Clearly performance was under regular scrutiny. Individual roles identified, highlighted and discussed. The profession defined by results, by performances…by hard work.

The dancers began to file through the green room on their way to the changing room in preparation for the morning rehearsals. The dancers drawn from all corners of the world characterised by their apparent emptiness. They dragged their delicate and weary frames devoid of enthusiasm or ‘life’. It reminded me of my underground journey earlier that morning. No one has ever formally educated me of it, but I understand from experience that there is an unwritten code of conduct on the London underground where talking, eye contact and smiling are strictly forbidden. Any individuals taking part in these activities can expect to feel the wrath of an entire carriage of city slickers. I thought these rules were exclusive to the underground?! It had clearly been a tough week…a normal week? Bob Geldof penned the lyrics ‘I don’t like Mondays’. If Bob thought Mondays were a struggle, clearly he hadn’t
experienced a Friday in the studios. Working 10 until 6 and maintaining high standards 5 ½ days a week, I’m not sure what I expected.

I was taken into the studios where I tried to place myself discreetly in the corner. Surrounded by mirrors I had to strategically manoeuvre myself into an optimal position. I had come to watch the dancers, yet every position I took up provided me with a further angle of myself! I settled on a position all but in the wall cavity. I wasn’t the only one aware of the mirrors. Each dancer fixated on their reflection. Every move analysed with the processed information offering a remedy to any perceived minor fault. These minor faults were conditioned to a facial expression which replicated that displayed by a surprised / disgusted contestant on countdown who failed to identify the simple 7 word letter hidden within a jumble of consonants and vowels. There was simply nowhere to hide for these students of dance. The environment demanded you looked your best (both physically and artistically) and performed to your optimal. The pressure heaped on these individuals in equal measure from themselves and their teachers.

The principal dancers taking the sessions before lunch demanded the highest standards. The attention to detail was incredible. The views of the dancers taking part in the session were actively sought. ‘How was that? How did it feel?’ became common catchphrases employed by the principals. They encouraged feedback. They recognised the demands. The atmosphere smacked of professionalism.

The schedule was relentless. Starting at 10 the dancers would be expected to be at the studios until after 6pm. Awarded a lunch interval other breaks emerged sporadically
dependent upon the dancer’s involvement in specific sets or scenes. These breaks were often characterised by stretching routines or press ups. The probability of sitting still or relaxing for any period of time would match the expectations of a teacher hosting a classroom full of five year olds. The closest the dancers got to sitting still was when repairing hardened feet or attending to their aching tender muscles.

As the day progressed the dancers moved closer to where I had placed myself. At the start they viewed this stranger with caution. Who was he? Was he a dancer? I’m sure the latter was dismissed before it entered their minds! Returning following the lunch break I was welcomed with smiles and nods. My new found semi-acceptance permitted a brief exchange with one of the principal dancers. Of Russian descendants this individual was clearly passionate and opinionated about the profession. He was under no illusions of how hard you must work if you want to achieve. ‘It has to be your life’, ‘it is not enjoyable’ were just two of the phrases defining the conversation. He believed many of the younger dancers did not share or at least demonstrate his philosophy. Instead believing they go through the motions and fail to ‘take responsibility’. Reinforcing this notion he compared dancers to those individuals who are happy to litter and throw chewing gum on the floor when no one is watching. You must behave as if the big ‘dancing’ brother is always observing.

It had been a long day; I think we were all tired.

April 2009

Its 1030 and class commences. The clear room is filled with young dancers who sporadically follow the routine displayed by today’s lead. The girls promote their
individuality with differing accessories modifying similar outfits. Some girls opt for t-shirts, others jumpers as the preliminary stages of the day are completed. The aim of the first hour is to perform the basics and warm up the active muscle groups in preparation for more intense and complex movements expected later. Leg warmers are advertised by most of the dancers’ shapely frames. The piano accompanies all movements and provides a relaxing backdrop to this seriously professional environment. Following a week off the dancers are clearly energised and revitalised. Movements are enthusiastically exaggerated as the girls catch up on a rare week away from the studios. The class is led by a wonderfully energetic and humorous woman who has clearly built up an enviable relationship with her dancers. She is evidently in love with the art of dancing. Her enthusiasm is contagious and helps to create a positive atmosphere.

Following the first class the dancers hurriedly disperse out of the centrally placed door. On their return they are in possession of snacks, drinks, magazines and newspapers. The next stage of the day offers dancers intermittent rest periods. The aim of the session is to perfect rehearsals for a forthcoming performance. The significance of the individual’s role determines their involvement. Firstly, only two dancers are requested to take centre stage in the room. The two dancers continually repeat the same movements characterising the start of the selected scene. Each foot step made is seemingly scrutinised as perfection is sought. The outer perimeter of the rectangular studio is occupied by small groups of dancers. As their colleagues search for the patience required to remedy frustratingly minor faults, they observe, stretch, exercise, read and gossip to avoid the potential for boredom. Often these activities are
combined as the restless dancers struggle to sit still while reading a magazine and invariably stretch, talk and read in unison!

The choreographer’s facial expressions define the quality of the performance. Disappointment, frustration, anguish and joy characterise a 10 minute spell of facial contortions. The choreographer hums the tune out loud as he glides through the required movements. The dancers think with their hands. Their eyes roll as their imagination conducts their hands through the next movement. Patience is a virtue as amid the growingly restless and volume intensified conversations of the perimeter, the original duet remain focused on the pursuit of excellence. A sense of relief and excitement is evident in the claps as the duet is considered ‘good enough’ and other dancers are invited into the fray.

The afternoon session splits the group into studios relevant to their performances. The dancers are distributed dependent upon their role and the focus required to ensure optimal movement patterns. I am invited to watch a duet involving the two dancers selected to play the leads in a fast approaching production. I feel a sense of anticipation coupled with nervousness as I take my seat in the far corner of the room, adjacent to the piano. I am acknowledged by way of a nod by the male dancer who is performing his stretching routine. The principal dancer who will provide guidance on the session offers me an almond. The nut is introduced with the flavour of a second hand car salesman from Essex, yet with an accent that would appear to emanate from a Soviet nation.
The Russian principal, almonds offered, starts proceedings by suggesting the two leads pick up the dance at a stage of their preference. The confident American female lead identifies a point to begin and the Pianist quickly flicks through the pages of music to the aligning tune without hesitation or request. You occasionally sense the frustration of the pianist who stops and starts as regularly as a car in rush hour London on request of a dancer who aims to rectify the most subtle of flaws. The session proceeds with the principals conducting the session actively encouraging feedback and input from the lead dancers. ‘Find a style’ becomes an often repeated mantra aimed at encouraging the dancers to create a movement which is best fitting of their morphology.

Several qualities strike me. The dancers are always focused and exude maximal professionalism. They give the impression they live for performance. Large blocks of rehearsals are followed by significant stints at the theatre performing for a paying and expectant audience. Salaries are not fantastic, long term dancing prospects are limited, with only a minority of dancers continuing past their early thirties. However, they appear desperate and self-driven to taste their optimum. What is it coupled with their personality that creates this?

Everything counts. Every step and every move is closely monitored. Mirrors provide instant feedback. There is no hiding place in an environment where the standard is set at excellence. What are the effects both mentally and physically of underachievement? Despite the individuality of each dancer, their peer created support network is admirable. Dancers not directly involved in a piece help
demonstrate movements and provide encouragement to those who are exhausted by the thought of following short of the set standard.

A hunger to learn is a quality characterising many of the group. During the short intervals designed for rest, Dancers will huddle around the doorway of an adjoining studio to observe rehearsals involving dancers selected for lead roles. Their intensity is phenomenal.

Dec 2009

Dancers arrive at 1030 in preparation for the 1100 start. The first hour is dedicated to a class session. The session appears to be devoted to performing a range of movements to prepare the dancers for their day of activity. The lead dancer tries to inject enthusiasm into the hour. The dancers struggle to respond to his efforts. The stage is characterized by a quiet, fairly somber mood. Dancers cluster around the arranged bars but share minimal communication, either verbally or physically. Spending time in each other’s company on a daily basis maybe restricts what conversation is available. Also, with the long day ahead it may be wise to keep something in your locker for the more quiet monotonous moments expected. Despite the quiet atmosphere the dancers diligently perform the choreographed moves. Each movement receives the full attention of the dancer, who follows the culturally specific instructions and demonstrations provided by the lead. The dancers have clearly performed each movement hundreds of times as they effortlessly and gracefully complete each action.
Today’s session is taking place at the Theatre ahead of the evening’s performance. The performers practice on the stage where there expectant audience of punters and critiques will later follow each of their movements with careful scrutiny. This is the dancer’s stage. This is what the weeks of practice in the studio count for. Interestingly, the evening’s performance would not be the focus of the day’s session. This came as a huge surprise to me. How many other performance disciplines would be able to move their focus beyond the ‘next’ performance. Sports managers and coaches who frequently talk of the importance of focusing on the next race, the next game, and the next competition would be concerned that their regularly used cliché was being made redundant. The dancers have the unenviable task of practicing for a future performance, whilst expected to produce today’s performance in only a matter of hours. Their ability to switch focus and dispatch any negative thoughts associated with the evenings performance is admirable. Also, putting in a full days work in advance of an evenings performance also deserves considerable recognition.

Many of the dancers spend time observing from the edge of the stage or in the auditorium as they wait patiently for their opportunity to contribute. Many of the dancers seemingly spend more time waiting than performing. The frustration must fully test the dancer’s patience and ability to remain focused and energized. For those dancers involved in practice scenes or acts the hawk like eyes of the choreographers allow no imperfections to pass. The stop-start nature of the sessions is reminiscent of rush hour traffic in London. The dancers dream of finding second gear. The motivation of all involved to find the perfect form is an awesome display of commitment and motivation if painstakingly time consuming.
The afternoon’s choreographer’s personality and drive for perfection was clearly infectious and appreciated by her attentive students. The afternoon session began with dancers going through the motions. Initial efforts were devoid of the passion often characterizing the dancers on stage demeanor. The choreographer was a middle aged lady who clearly had a wealth of dance experience to call on, evidently commanded respect from her dancers. Cutting an imposing, authoritative figure, Rose, seemed intent on draining every ounce of effort out of the dancers. After several muted efforts, Rose requested a microphone to help project her voice and ensure everyone was aware of her thoughts. There was nowhere to hide. When standards slipped she convincingly took on the part of the punter: ‘The cheapest ticket is £50, it’s cost me £30 to get here, and if I bring any of the family we’re looking at over £100…and you’re only going to offer that.’ The mantra breathed new life into the dancers who retreated to their starting positions with renewed vigor and expectation. In some respects the dancers spend much of their time committed to pleasing others; their coaches and the paying public. With the high standards demanded by these respective parties you could forgive the dancers for neglecting their own needs or motivations. Alternatively, the expectations of the staff and public may complement the dancers own motivations and desire.

Sport provides an opportunity to compare yourself directly to your opponents. Through competition an athlete can judge the level they have achieved. Additionally, opponents provide a dynamic environment, which is often unpredictable and challenging. Dancers perform in a relatively closed environment. Generally, dancers will be performing controlled movements that have been practiced tirelessly for months prior to the performance night. Subsequently it might be reasonably expected
that there is more pressure on a dancer to perform. They are fully accountable and responsible for all of their actions.

Two or three couples practice to perform the lead roles for future performances. I contemplate how much competition exists between the couples. The dancers show incredible support for one another. It appears the norm for a dancer to offer advice, constructive comments or encouragement to their colleagues following a sequence of difficult movements. Often at the end of an act dancers not directly involved will offer spontaneous applause in respect of the efforts and quality of performance they have witnessed. With two or three couples prepared to play lead roles coupled with a rigorous performance schedule, rotation and comparison are presumably inevitable, with promotion and progression an obvious byproduct. To remain as convincingly supportive as they do to one another despite of these conditions is to the huge credit of both the dancers and staff responsible for creating this environment.