My histobiographical baggage weighed heavily on me as I commenced my doctoral studies in 2005, having failed to get to grammar school (at age 11) or achieved sufficient Advanced Level grades to go to university (at age 18). As a Study Advisor supporting art and design students with the theoretical content of their degrees, I experienced a further sense of lack because in that pedagogic context I had no practice or theoretical reference points from which to draw. However, through increasing familiarisation with cultural theory, its potential to contextualise not only art and design practice but also my own study of education emerged, since the same social, political and economic contexts from which artefacts are derived are arguably the catalysts for educational and policy change. Thus within an educational theoretical framing, the constructivist paradigm acknowledges the power of social contexts to inform and influence cognition, making reality a subjective representation constructed by individuals. This brings the ontological-epistemological inter-relationship into sharp focus, and resonates with theorists who view the shift within modernism towards postmodernism as a ‘condition’ (Lyotard, 1984; Harvey, 1990) which simultaneously disavowes all meta-narratives, including individual subjectivity, and proffers new ways to challenge, deconstruct and reconstruct the world. In my doctoral thesis, whilst seeking to improve my professional practice as an academic developer, I used a postmodern methodology - the bricolage - to do just that. By employing a range of methods: a Foucauldian approach to analyse policy and institutional discourse; heuristic devices derived from the literature to reflect the concerns of higher education; portraiture to turn interviews of participants into visual narratives of lived experience; I flirted with post-colonial metaphors of otherness and hybrid states of in-between, whereby a narrative account of my professional context slowly emerged.

When technical rationalist mechanisms for professionalising teaching in higher education came into view I was able to challenge my assumed function as an agent of normalisation. The ‘realisation of oppression…. makes oppression more oppressive still’ (Friere, 1996:33) but it can also serve to emancipate. Nowadays, adopting from Noddings (2003) an ‘ethic of care’, I seek to reveal the oppressor-oppressed subjectivity and to guide staff as they self-author their teacher identities.