

# Pursuing 'mastersness' through relational pedagogy: a qualitative multiple case study in the UK

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3rd July 2025



# Outline

- **Introduction:** Key concepts, research aims, and research questions
- **Research context:** One-year full-time Master's programmes in three disciplinary areas in one research-intensive university in the UK
- **Key literature**
- **Research design**
- **Finding 1:** Master's students' preparedness for their studies
- **Finding 2:** The features of ideal pedagogical relationships
- **Finding 3:** Contextual factors and the institutionalisation of pedagogical relationships
- **Implications and directions for future research**

# Key concepts

- **Pedagogical relationships**

- Levinas' philosophy of otherness, Buber's relational ontology, and ethics of care promoted by Gilligan and Noddings (Hinsdale, 2016).
- *Sui generis* and fundamentally "makes human development possible, and which makes it possible to become a person." (Spiecker, 1984, p.208)
- "The unique (eigene) creative or generative relationship that binds educator and educand ..." (Nohl, 1926, p.153, cited in Friesen, 2017).

- **Teacher-student relationships**

- "Human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong, that is, by a strong desire to form and maintain enduring interpersonal attachments." (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p.522)
- Emotional-bond based on on-going interactions (Newberry and Davis, 2008)

# Research aims and questions

- **Aims:** To provide a nuanced understanding of pedagogical relationships in a sector (i.e. UK PGT sector) in which pedagogical relationships were not previously explored.
- **Research questions:**
  1. What are the key features of ideal pedagogical relationships conceptualized by academic teaching staff (ATS) and students in one-year full-time Master's programmes in a research-intensive university?
  2. How are pedagogical relationships experienced by ATS and these students in a marketised learning context?
  3. What factors influence the way in which these pedagogical relationships are built and experienced.

# Research context

- Mastersness

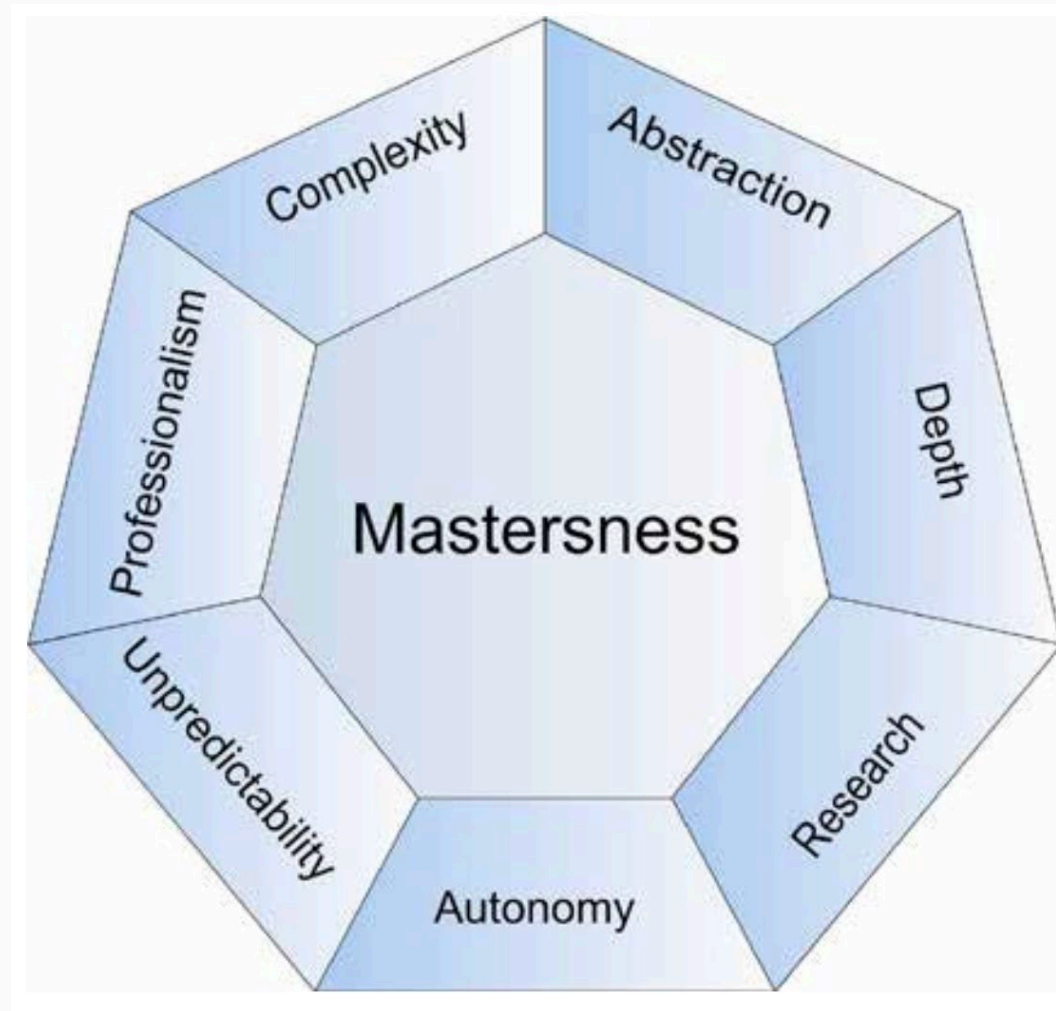


Figure 1 Facets of Mastersness

# Research context

## • Marketisation

- “A market is a means of social coordination whereby the supply and demand for a good or service are balanced through the price mechanism.” (Brown, 2011, p.11)
- “Education is likely to be reconceptualised as a commercial transaction, the lecturer as the ‘commodity producer’ and the student as the ‘consumer’. In this way, previously integrated relationships between academics and students are likely to become disaggregated with each party invested with distinct, if not opposing, interests.” (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005, p.271)

Table 1 Number of enrolments on Master’s courses at Scottish HEIs

<b>Masters Type</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>2021-22</b>
Masters (research)	745	865	835	860	785	790	840
Masters (taught)	30490	32600	35740	38400	41390	49765	64480
<b>Total</b>	<b>31235</b>	<b>33465</b>	<b>36575</b>	<b>39255</b>	<b>42180</b>	<b>50555</b>	<b>65315</b>

# Key literature

- **Martin Buber (1944)**

- “On the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow ridge, where I and Thou meet, there is the realm of ‘between’”. In other words, the in-between space between people is the ontological basis for human existence.

- *I-It* and *I-Thou*

*I-It*: Humans’ relationships with objects. Between humans: objectification

*I-Thou*: Featured openness, trust, immediacy, and mutuality (Friedman, 2002; Rossiter, 1999).

- **Nel Noddings (2013): Caring**

- **Dall’Alba (2009):** Attuned responsiveness: the educator to adjust their responses to let learning happen.



# Key literature

- Karpouza and Emvalotis (2019): The building and maintaining of teacher-student relationship is a complex dynamic process which continues over time and evolves gradually.
- Hagenauer, Muehlbacher and Ivanova's (2023): (1) Professional dimension: enthusiastic about teaching, classroom management skills, approachability; and (2) Personal dimension: closeness, which was featured by remembering students' personal details and telling personal anecdotes.
- Anderson *et al.* (2020): Good teacher: care about their subjects, care about teaching, care about students as a person.



# Research design

- **A qualitative multiple case study**

- Cases (Bounded systems): Three programmes in three different disciplinary areas
- Quintain (Stake, 2006): Pedagogical relationships
- In-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews

- **Selection criteria** (Table 2)

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Full-time	Part-time
On-campus	Online distance learning
SCQF level 11, with components of a	Integrated Master's degrees;
Dissertation; Taught Masters	Research Masters, dissertation only
1-year	2-year MSc
Student numbers: 20-30	
	Explicitly express caring in the
	course description; nursing

# Research design

- Student participants (19):

<i>MSc Social Sciences</i>				<i>MSc Humanities</i>				<i>MSc STEM</i>			
<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Region of origin</i>	<i>Interview language</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Region of origin</i>	<i>Interview language</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Region of origin</i>	<i>Interview language</i>
<b>Xinyi</b>	F	East Asia	Chinese	<b>Sally</b>	F	South America	English	<b>Quan</b>	M	East Asia	Chinese
<b>Lan</b>	F	East Asia	Chinese	<b>Elisa</b>	F	Europe	English	<b>Mike</b>	M	South Asia	English
<u><b>Xiaotong</b></u>	F	East Asia	Chinese	<b>Katie</b>	F	UK	English	<b>Tom</b>	M	South America	English
<u><b>Jinming</b></u>	F	East Asia	Chinese	<b>Peter</b>	M	North America	English	<b>Alice</b>	F	UK	English
<b>Yi</b>	F	East Asia	Chinese					<b>Hugh</b>	M	North America	English
<u><b>Jiawen</b></u>	F	East Asia	Chinese					<b>Alana</b>	F	West Asia	English
<b>Weiwei</b>	F	East Asia	Chinese								
<b>Shi</b>	F	East Asia	Chinese								
<b>Lei</b>	F	East Asia	Chinese								

Table 3

# Research design

- **ATS participants (11):**

<i>MSc Social Sciences</i>				<i>MSc Humanities</i>				<i>MSc STEM</i>			
<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Region of origin</i>	<i>Tenure</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Region of origin</i>	<i>Tenure</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Region of origin</i>	<i>Tenure</i>
<b>Liam</b>	M	North America	Senior Career	<b>Neil</b>	M	North America	Senior Career	<b>Ann</b>	F	UK	Senior Career
<b>Charlotte</b>	F	North America	Early Career	<b>William</b>	M	UK	Senior Career	<b>Kirsty</b>	F	Europe	Senior Career
<b>Gabriel</b>	M	Europe	Senior Career	<b>Elizabeth</b>	F	UK	Senior Career	<b>Robert</b>	M	UK	Senior Career
<b>Rion</b>	M	East Europe	Early Career	<b>Nicola</b>	F	UK	Early Career				

Table 4

# Findings

- Motivations for pursuing Master's studies: Beyond finding a job
  - Feeling confused at three levels: programme-level, course-level, assessment-level
  - *Beneficiary-victim dyad* of students' experiences in a commercialised and expanded PGT context: Relatively low entry requirements and short durations vs. the willingness to fully express and exchange their ideas with ATS and with their peers, which in reality was not fulfilled.
  - Beyond language barriers
    - We are all mature students and have already obtained a Bachelor's degree. In theory, we shouldn't feel **that** [emphasis in original] challenging in Master's study. However, after all it was **the first** [emphasis in original] time to do a Master's degree and **the first** time to write essays at Master's level. [Laughing] (Quan, STEM, East Asia)
- Implications: (1) Communicating expectations; (2) Introduction of how to do well

# Findings

- **An equal relationship within a hierarchy**

- **Equality (respect and recognition)/Hierarchy (knowledge and experience)**

- ❖ *Some teachers made me feel they are very arrogant. They wanted you to ask them questions, but not to challenge their ideas ... Some teachers may feel what we [students] said are all non-sense. I know what I said are all bullshit. But maybe, just maybe, there are something valuable for digging out from the bullshit. I hope teachers play a role to guide me to find out those valuable stuff. (Xinyi, Social Sciences, East Asia)*
- ❖ *I am intellectually higher in that I have more experience, but I am not intellectually higher in any other way. (Robert, STEM, Senior Career)*

- **A friendship with a boundary**

- Implications: (1) A certain sense of hierarchy in knowledge and experience may not necessarily hamper students' learning. (2) Socratic Method.

# Findings

## • The institutionalisation of pedagogical relationships

- *I hope they can be accessed more easily. The arrange of the meeting should be more flexible. At the moment it **feels like making appointment with my GP**. I don't like such formal arrangement... My supervisor is kind, but always so busy, she gave me a big sense of distance. (Jiawen, Social Sciences, East Asia)*
  - *I chose to do a taught Master's because I wanted to be taught and I wasn't really taught as much as I would have liked to have been. For me **as a Master's student, if I just reflect on my whole year, it was just a year of me spent alone in the library**. This is just what I did. 90% of this year. I don't love being alone in the library, that is not why I came back [to uni]...but that is just I guess, part of what it is to be a Master's [emphasis in original] student. (Katie, Humanities, UK)*
  - ***I have had a better pedagogical relationship with myself and the searching engines in the library** than the relationships with my teachers...(Jiawen, Social Sciences, East Asia)*
- ❑ Implications: (1) ATS's workloads: The institutions had rightfully designed meetings for engaging students into the programmes, but this effort was counterbalanced by the workloads imposed on teachers; (2) Individualised advice; (3) Pedagogical caring

# Directions for future research

- The relationships between students with non-teaching academic staff
- Peer relationships
- The views of the members of university senior management team
- Disciplinary differences, differences between research/teaching-intensive universities, differences between UG and PG studies
- The influence of using generative AI



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