Re-conceptualising Student Experience:
Transition into Initial Teacher Education from a Capabilities Perspective

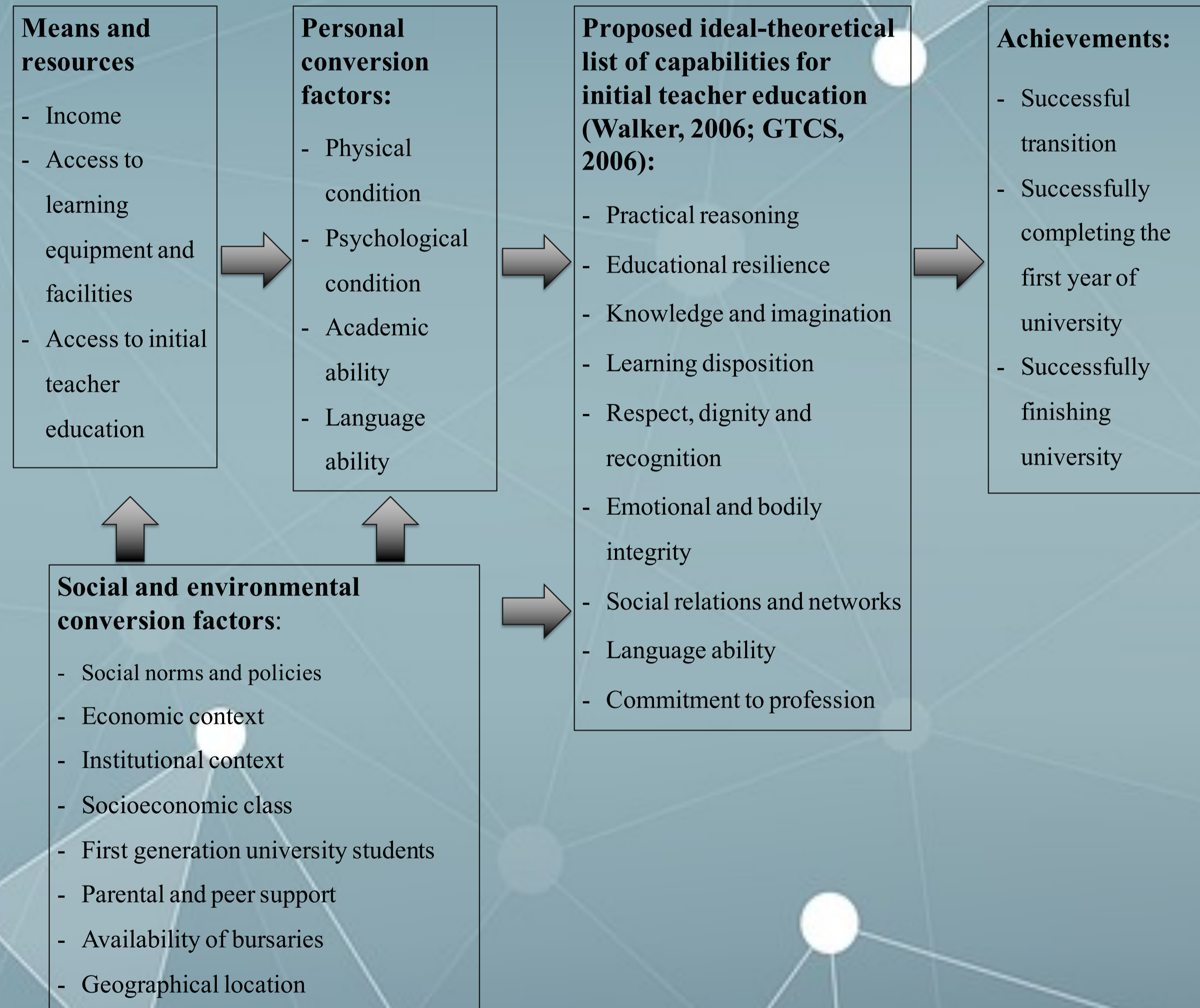Laura Puhalak, PhD Student, School of Education   e: laura.puhalak@abdn.ac.uk

Introduction

- The Scottish teaching landscape does not seem to be representative of the entire population. This raises questions for social justice and widening participation (Menter *et al*, 2005).
- Widening participation initiatives may increase the diversity of the student teachers, however, students from less affluent backgrounds may be less likely to successfully complete their studies (Hixenbaugh, Dewart and Towel, 2012).
- Successful transition may be influenced by psychological, physical and social factors, but the evidence is fragmented (Wilson-Strydom, 2012).
- It is argued that the Capability Approach (Sen, 1992), might provide a more comprehensive framework for evaluating students' wellbeing that may lead to positive experience and successful transition within initial teacher education.

Capability Approach

- A normative framework for evaluating individual wellbeing (Robeyns, 2003).
- Conceptualizes wellbeing as the expansion of capabilities (Robeyns, 2005).
- Capabilities are individual freedoms containing:
  - O-capabilities: opportunities and options
  - S-capabilities: skills, abilities, attitudes (Gasper and Van Staveren, 2002).
- Acknowledges human diversity in terms of:
  - Possession and requirement of means
  - Ability to convert means to achievements
- Differentiates between (Robeyns, 2005):
  - Personal conversion factors
  - Social conversion factors
  - Environmental conversion factors.

Proposed framework for the investigation of transition to initial teacher education

Means and resources

- Income
- Access to learning equipment and facilities
- Access to initial teacher education

Personal conversion factors:

- Physical condition
- Psychological condition
- Academic ability
- Language ability

Proposed ideal-theoretical list of capabilities for initial teacher education (Walker, 2006; GTCS, 2006):

- Practical reasoning
- Educational resilience
- Knowledge and imagination
- Learning disposition
- Respect, dignity and recognition
- Emotional and bodily integrity
- Social relations and networks
- Language ability
- Commitment to profession

Achievements:

- Successful transition
- Successfully completing the first year of university
- Successfully finishing university

Social and environmental conversion factors:

- Social norms and policies
- Economic context
- Institutional context
- Socioeconomic class
- First generation university students
- Parental and peer support
- Availability of bursaries
- Geographical location

(Robeyns, 2005 and Wilson-Strydom, 2012)

Proposed Methodology

- The nature of the Capability Approach suggests the adoption of pragmatist approach through mixed methods design (Feilzer, 2010).
- Step I:
  - Identification of valued capabilities and relevant conversion factors by participatory processes (e.g. focus group interviews, surveys, etc.).
- Step II:
  - Location and collection of appropriate data: for example, use of admissions data as proxy for resources and several conversion factors
  - Complement existing data with in-depth interviews.
- Step III:
  - Identify barriers and sources of support during the transition process.

Potential Implications

- The application of a non-deficit approach (Smit, 2012) helps emphasizing the role of higher education institutions in the removal of various barriers students from less affluent backgrounds face and the provision of better tailored support.
- Development and amendment of policies and practices targeting the following activities:
  - Supporting the development of particular capabilities and conversion factors on an individual level
  - Improvement of mentoring and tutoring services
  - Encouraging and organizing a greater variety and number of opportunities for networking
  - And so on...

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Acknowledgements

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