

Postgraduate Research Training Courses as Professional Development?

Paul Walker & Jenny Marie

UCL Centre for the Advancement of Learning & Teaching
(CALT)

Schön's Dichotomy

The 'high ground' of the academy or the 'swamp' of the real world?

“What aspiring practitioners need most to learn, professional schools seem least able to teach.” (1987)

Has this landscape changed since then?



Educational terrain

PG Research degrees:

MRes

Professional Doctorate (EngD)

‘Roberts Agenda’ in PhD

Skills ‘Training’:

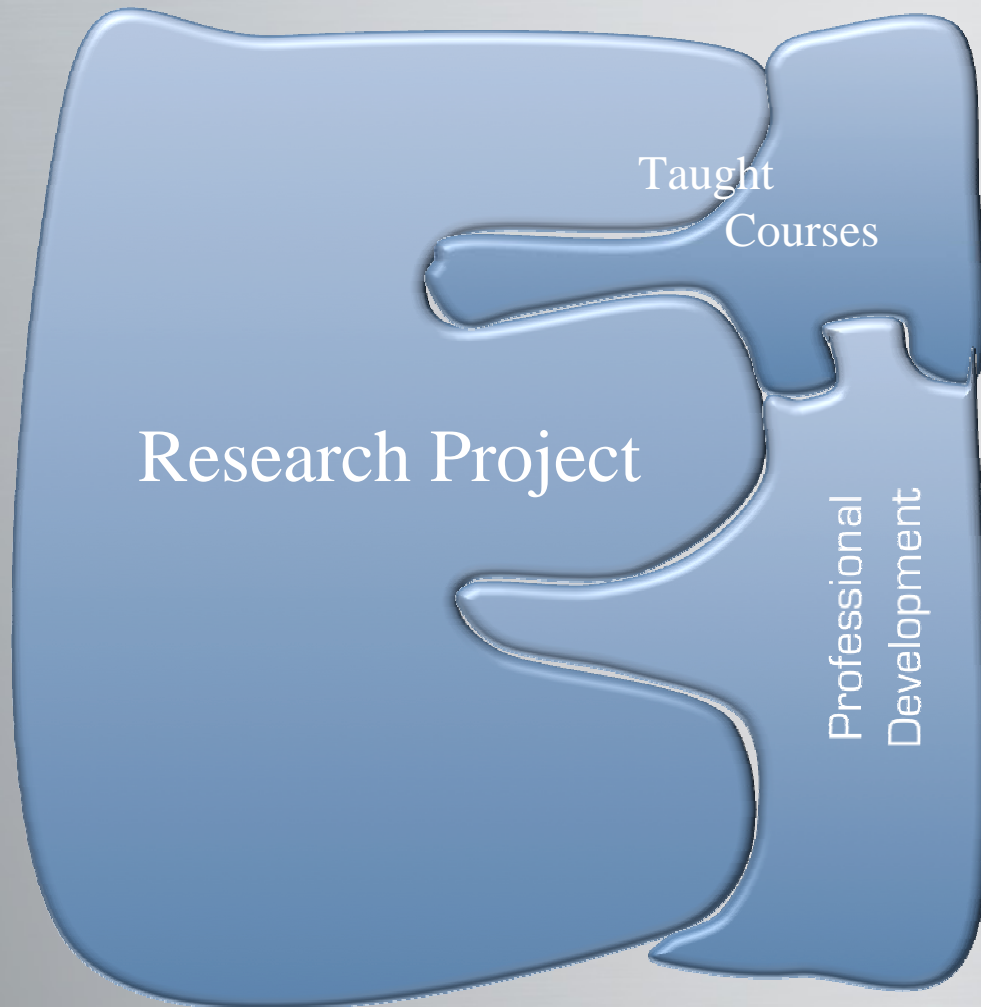
‘Embedded’?

‘Bolt On’?

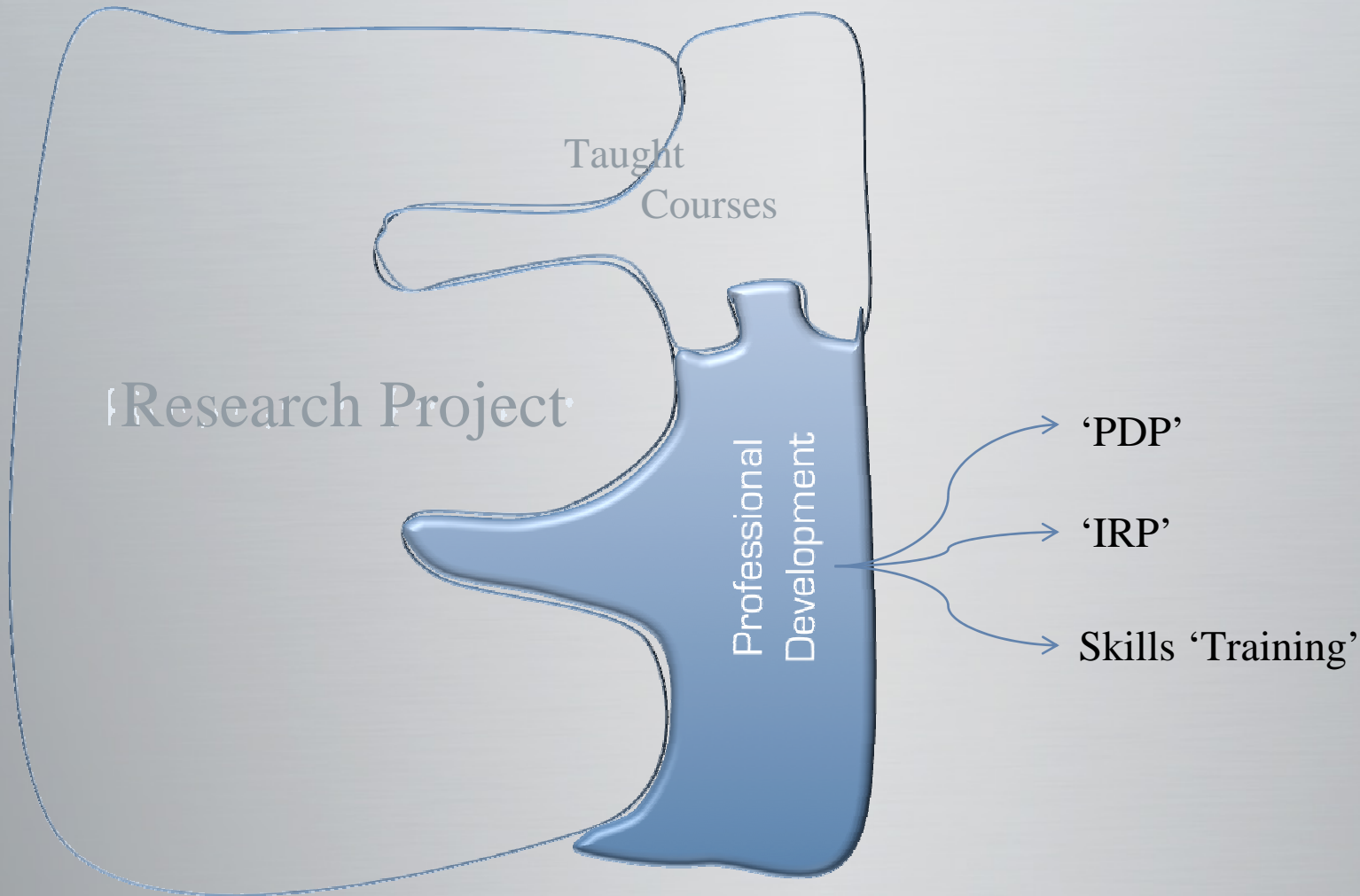
‘Integrated’!



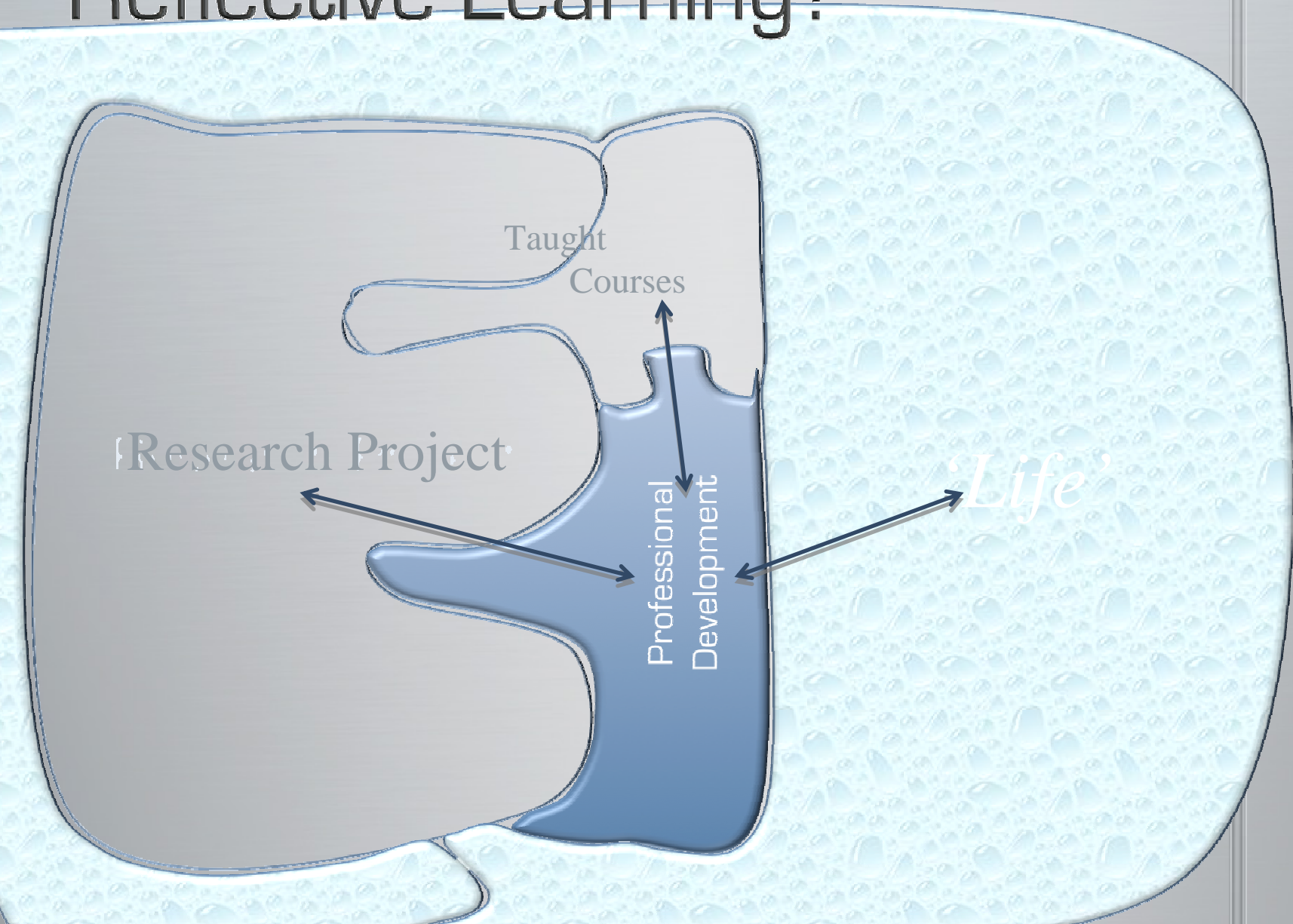
The piecewise curriculum?



The piecewise curriculum?



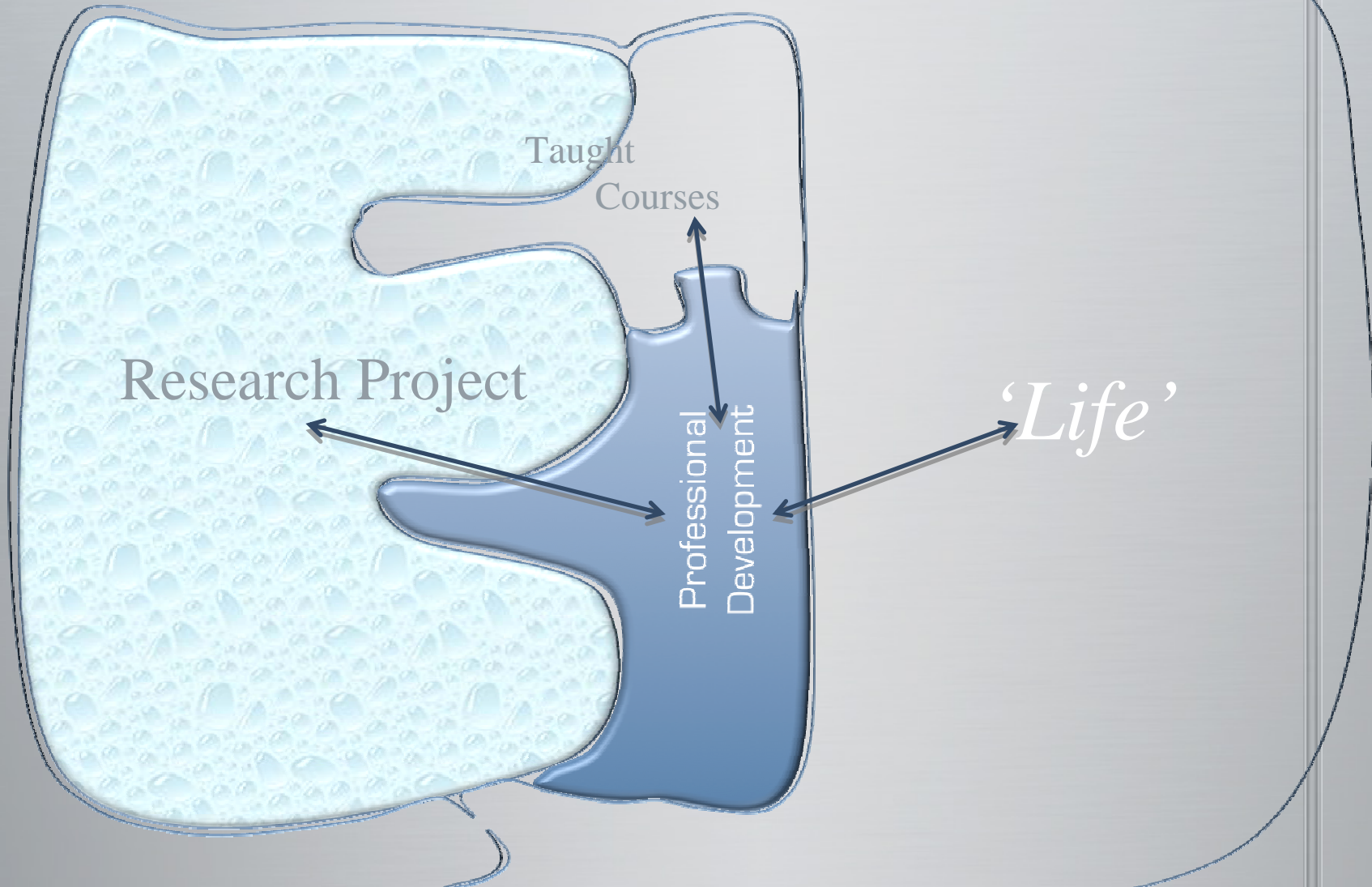
Reflective Learning?

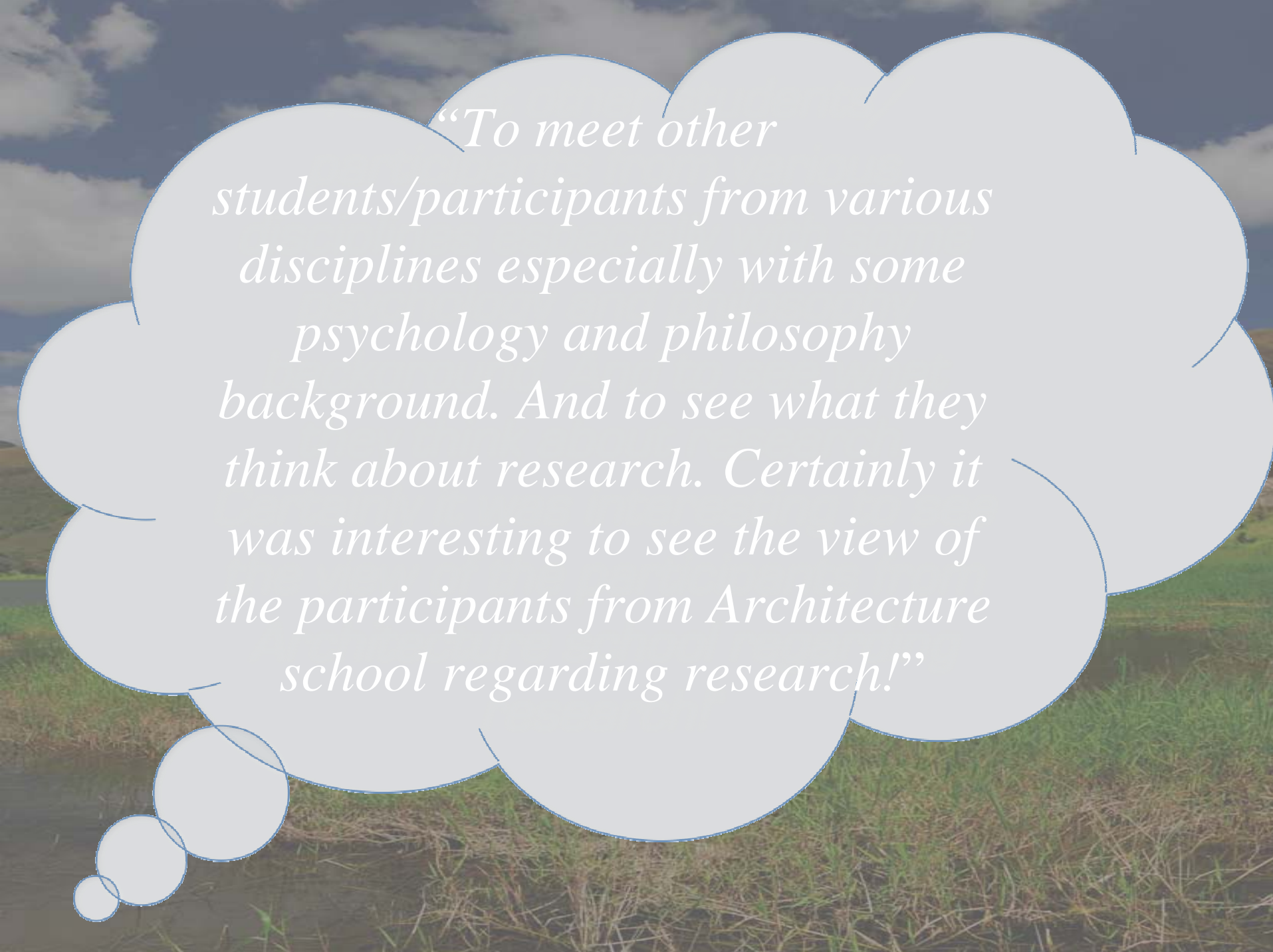


...direct experience of real
professional work environments?



What's a 'real' professional working environment?





“To meet other students/participants from various disciplines especially with some psychology and philosophy background. And to see what they think about research. Certainly it was interesting to see the view of the participants from Architecture school regarding research!”

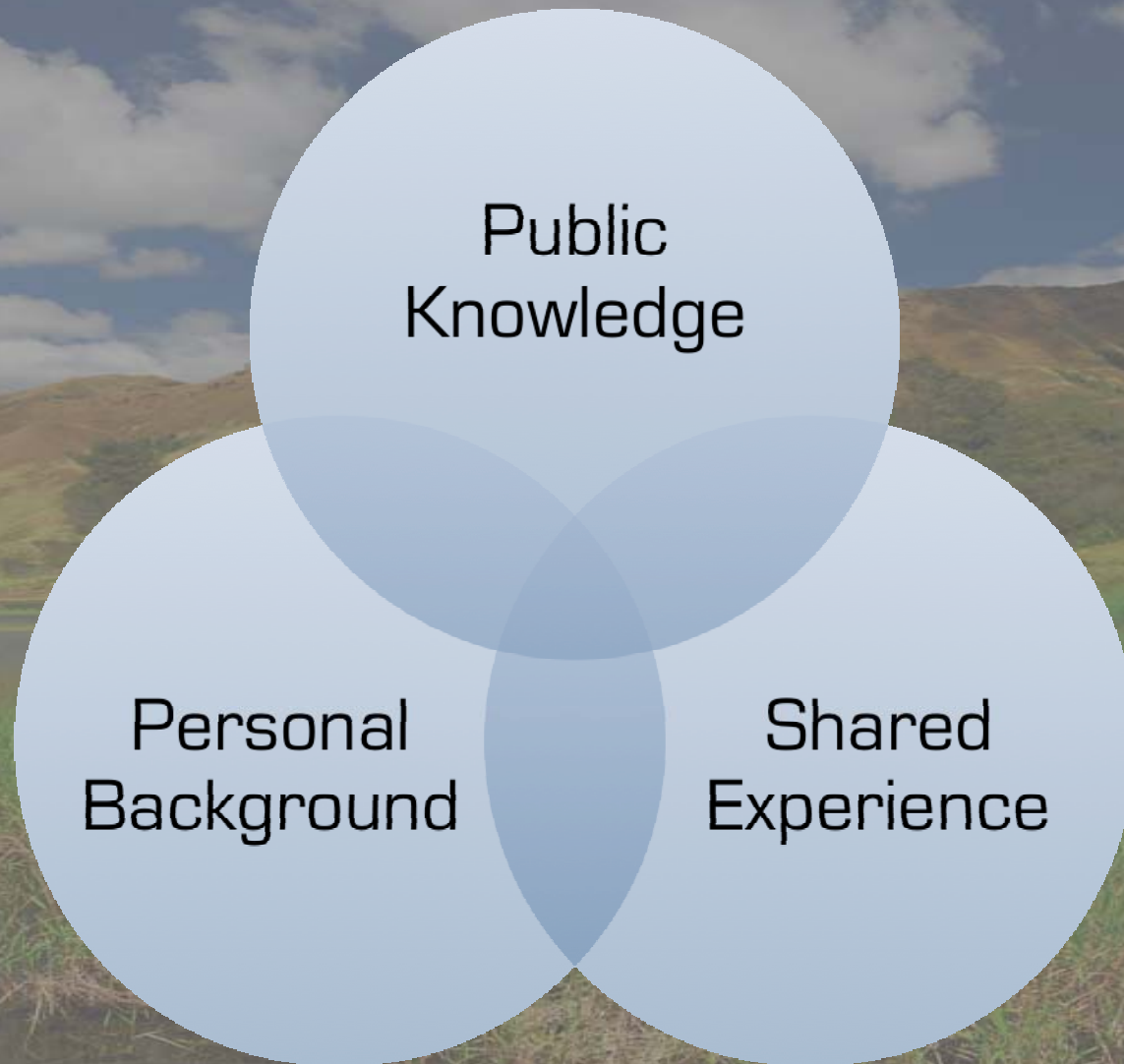
...qualities that can create excellence
in any professional practice?





“The material covered was diverse and applicable to all areas of research, whether engineering, science or social sciences. I also enjoyed the fact that the module encourages participants to consider aspects and principles of research practice that are not normally directly addressed in postgraduate study.”

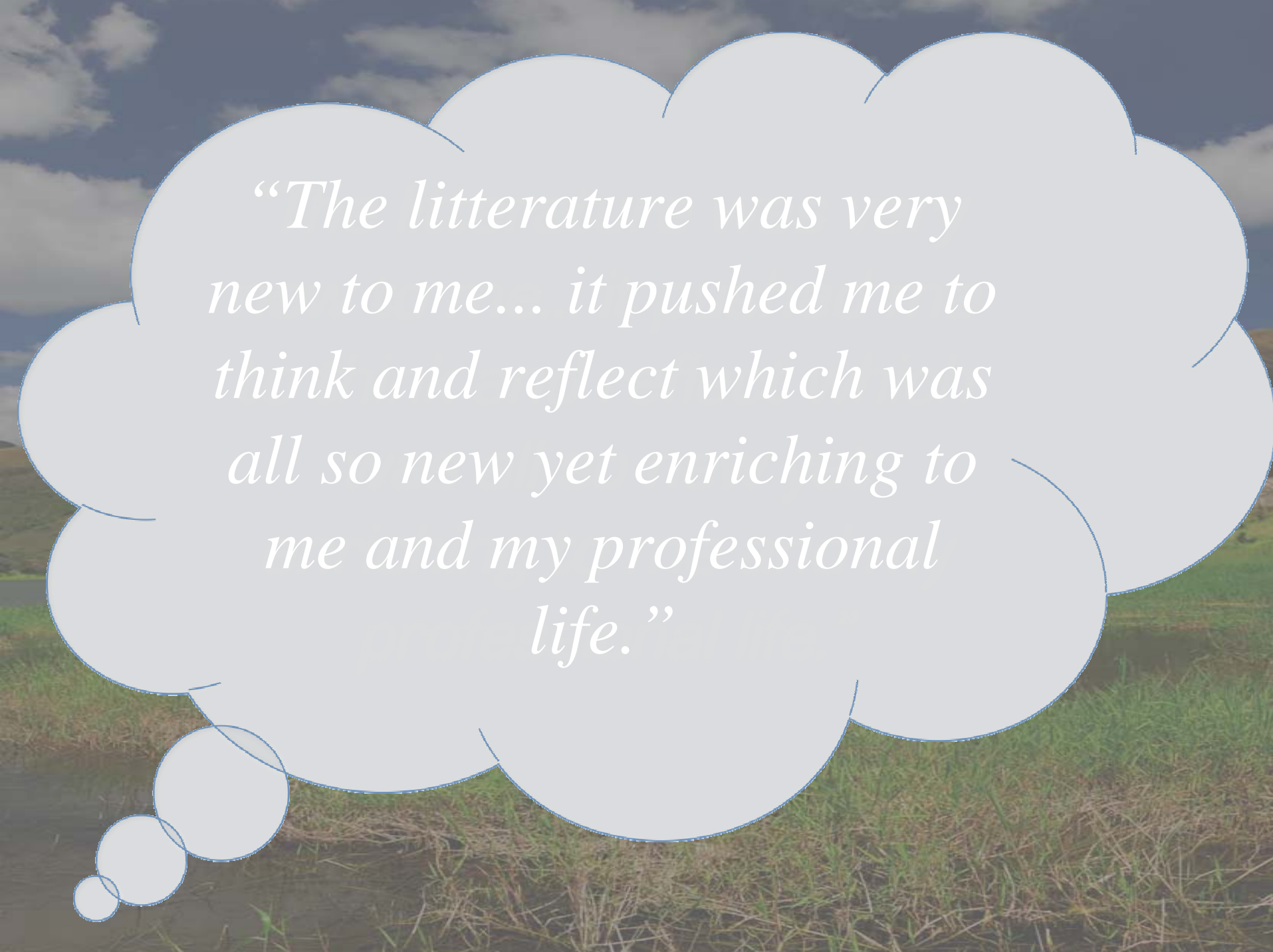
Resources for learning (Rowland)



Public
Knowledge

Personal
Background

Shared
Experience

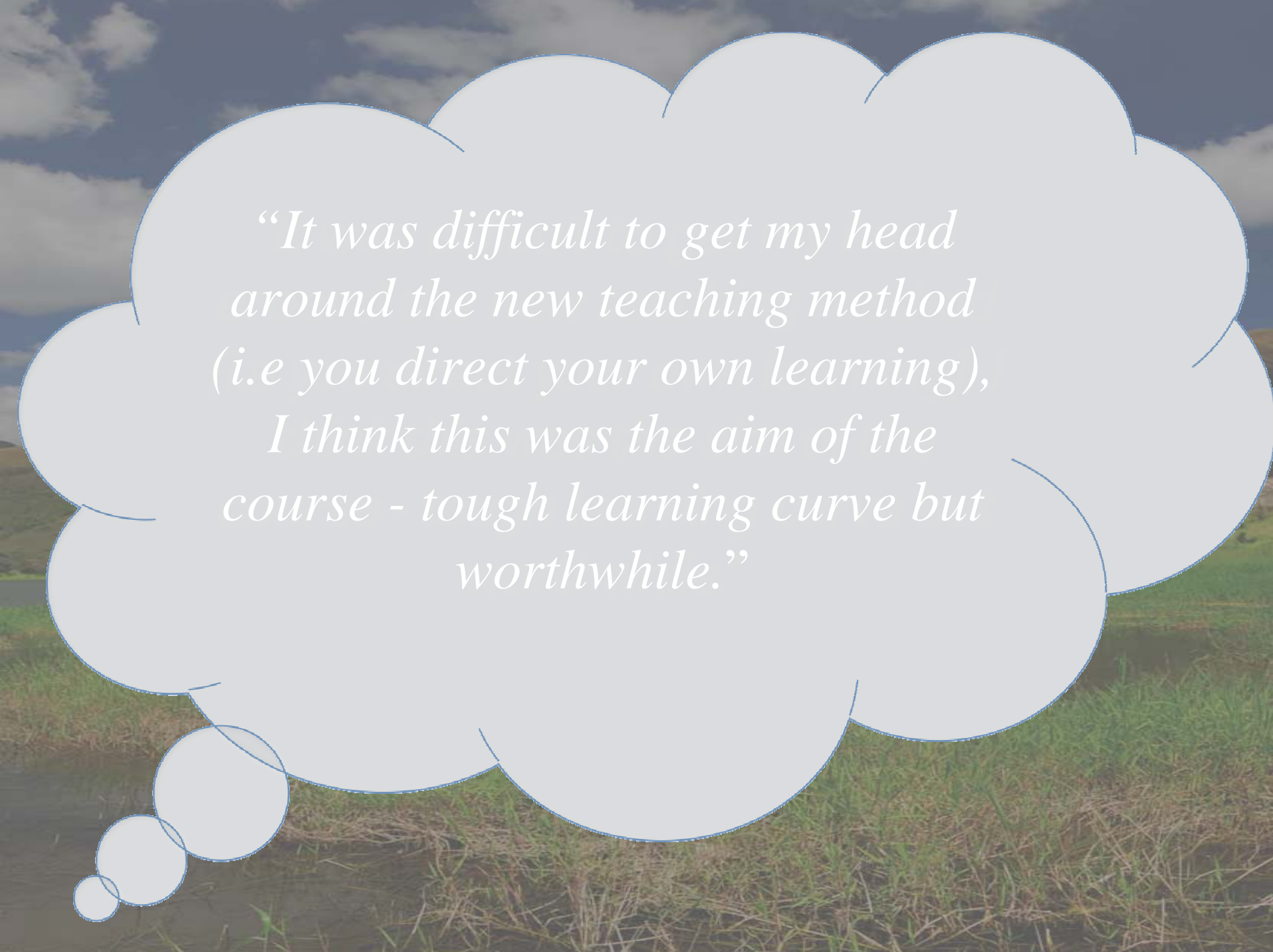


“The literature was very new to me... it pushed me to think and reflect which was all so new yet enriching to me and my professional life.”

A local complication...

The academic 'high ground' is also complex. Disciplinary affiliations and departmental identities create topography which needs to be navigated.





“It was difficult to get my head around the new teaching method (i.e you direct your own learning), I think this was the aim of the course - tough learning curve but worthwhile.”



“Improving critical thought and helping develop a more inquisitive view of the purpose of research in general. It was also helpful to hear opinions from people studying in different fields of research.”

Reflections & Conclusions

- **Postgraduate research projects are real work!**
- **Recognition/declaration of participants' own professionalism prompts reflection & discussion.**
- **Self-directed learning is vital for students in becoming independent professionals.**