

**Adult learners and their motivation: a comparison
of the instrumentally driven with
the personally motivated.**

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate individuals' reasons for educational re-entry, by comparing the instrumentally driven with the personally motivated. This exploration of the relationship between motives and past and present educational participation, is in the context of the current agenda for lifelong learning. This aim is pursued by examining the stated participation reasons, perceptions of educational experiences, and views, of mature students.

Two student groups were selected from two city-based FE colleges. They were on a vocational and a non-vocational course, traditionally defined as oppositional strands in the educational discourse. The research strategy was grounded in the major implications arising from the literature review and especially a key influential work. This entailed an evolving consideration of the central issues surrounding the portrayal of participants and representation of voice.

A multi-layered approach incorporated the essential element of biographical methods. The qualitative perspective, based on interview and observation, included some quantitative methods. A narrative form of questionnaire and use of visual imagery were introduced, to enable an exploration of subjective motives. The analysis of the emerging themes led to the development of a typology of the adult learner.

The findings indicate no distinction between those with career and non-instrumental goals, but a uniform pattern of enrolment in pursuit of change. The subsidiary commitment to study was accompanied by enjoyment of new learning, although expecting work or domestic conflict, and significantly, all non-vocational participants anticipated alienation.

The significantly intangible, though recognisable difference in self perceived as a result suggests learning to be more transformational than compensatory, particularly considering the non-vocational sample's previous high level of certification. This has implications for the compensatory model of lifelong learning, and suggests that further exploration of the perceptions of all adult learners, regardless of course destination, might be valuable for the promotion of lifelong learning.

Chapter 1: Background to the Research

Introduction

This thesis explores the factors which motivate adults to return to education. It concerns in particular, two groups of adults in further education studying on two distinct types of course (vocational and non-vocational). The opening chapter offers an outline of the research area with background details, then looks at the development of my initial field of enquiry, and my interest in the issues involved, with mention of the areas of literature to be drawn on. Then follows an outline of the general aims and objectives, and more specifically the questions I am investigating. Subsequent chapters provide a review of the literature, a discussion of the methodology adopted, a discussion of the findings, and finally, an outline of the outstanding issues to be addressed.

Background Leading to the Research

My field of enquiry developed from a range of resources, namely my long-standing interest in adult motivation for learning, the findings from earlier research and my wider reading. These have to be seen against the backdrop of the significant context of lifelong learning.

I have a particular interest in access opportunities for non-traditional higher education (HE) entrants as created by means of the Assessment of Prior Learning (APL). This arose from a deeper interest in student-centred and experiential learning, and prompted the topic of my Masters' dissertation, in 1996. The

findings from that research on the APL process suggested further areas to explore, surrounding the benefits candidates derived from the experience.

By means of documentary analysis and a critical review of recent literature, I had examined whether APL had valid links with the competence movement, which formed part of the then government's promotion of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). There had appeared little evidence of APL success in terms of NVQs, or inherent relevance to the competence movement.

There was however an interesting paradox inherent in NVQ accreditation by APL, which was being promoted as opening up new possibilities for individuals by means of its commonly recognised 'empowering' characteristics of portfolio-building towards HE access. Conversely, I had discovered that APL was also perceived by participants as a phenomenon that limited or even prevented their aspirations. This often occurred when those seeking training for either job enhancement or employment prospects were deflected into working towards gaining credit towards NVQs for skills already possessed, so making it, I felt, more a mechanism for accelerating movement on a horizontal plane rather than progression upwards. By reinforcing the status quo, this appeared to emphasise the value of APL as an apparatus for government initiatives and hence its current political rather than educational purpose.

There remained the element of empowerment. My findings pinpointed the main if not overriding feature of adult student experience of APL as resulting from the benefits gained from the process, notably those of improved confidence and self-esteem, which enhanced motivation. Other than the instrumental gains that could

be quantified, mainly that of acquiring a certificate, the developmental role of APL appeared paramount for participants.

Unfortunately these aspects of their experience were nowhere analysed rigorously, but were often singled out as illustration of the advantages of APL and proof of its success. APL had been utilised more as a tool in support of the system than to serve the needs of the students. I concluded that the 'hijacking' of APL to play a part in the competence movement, was far from convincing, with the particular model of APL being imposed now providing an element that was far from being an empowering one for adult learners.

Background Informing the Research

The aim of this current research followed on from these M.Ed. findings.

Originally I sought to use both quantitative and qualitative analysis to identify the nature of the benefits which were perceived as accruing from use of APL, and establish the validity of its developmental role.

During the course of wider reading after my M.Ed., in particular that on adult learners' choices and reasons for return to learning, my aim evolved into a slightly different area of research, from an examination of the non-instrumental features of APL, to a broader focus on the benefits (including the intangible) deriving from adult learners' educational experiences.

The key research question for this thesis is:

Are there reasons other than instrumental affecting participation, and can comparison of the instrumentally driven, with the personally motivated, help pinpoint these non-instrumental reasons?

The academic literature suggests that choosing to return to education is not necessarily determined by the individual's social and economic circumstances nor socio-demographic characteristics alone, but by a range of diffuse and not clearly identified elements. It is significant that personal reasons appear to operate beyond those straightforward, simplistic academic or employment motives often recorded in surveys (Johnston and Bailey, 1984; Woodley *et al.*, 1987) but these are seldom investigated. Since such conventional rationalisations do not necessarily apply for many such adult learners, it appeared useful to explore their views on educational experiences against the background of their overtly stated participation reasons.

Contrasting the vocational and non-vocational

As I was developing my research ideas, a significant study of adult learner motivation (West, 1996) was published and became influential on the development of my research. The focus here was on students who were progressing from access courses into HE, encompassed in the 'non-vocational' classification. This led me to consider that an examination of those on the other side of the educational divide, classed as 'vocational' would be useful, as I felt

another layer of personal experience of the educational system could be supplied by deliberating whether both types of group have similar experiences, and so possibly motivations, even though their participation reasons are held to be very different.

Vocational students are regarded in the literature as pursuing a course of study for instrumental purposes, such as to qualify for promotion, career enhancement or even a change of occupation, whereas students on non-vocational courses are recognised as having primarily non-instrumental goals such as gaining self confidence or interest in study for its own sake. This overriding vocational motive should logically lead to capacity participation in colleges and greatly reduced unemployment figures. It would render unnecessary the previous government's initiatives such as National Learning Targets (NACETT, 2000) to improve numbers of the trained and qualified. The (non-vocational) Access student has been fairly extensively studied in the recent past while vocational students have had little or no research from this perspective of motivation.

My distinction here between the aims of the two groups, is fairly polarised so as to lend clarity to the definitions. In the 1970s, as stated in a UNESCO report on lifelong education, "The traditional distinction between vocational and non-vocational education is becoming increasingly arbitrary and irrelevant" (UNESCO, 1972, in Johnston and Bailey, 1984, Ch. 2, p.11), yet Unwin commented on the long-standing segregation of those in the post-compulsory sector, "whether they are classed as educators or trainers", with their "two distinct cultures" (Unwin, 1991, pp. 97-98). She characterised training as "*the nouveau-riche arriviste*", or alternatively as "the working-class cousin who has never been

allowed to mix properly with the other branch of the family” (*ibid.*, p. 95), calling for a more “symbiotic” relationship to straddle the vocational-academic divide, and in so doing, “to transform society’s approach to and concept of learning” (*ibid.*, p. 102).

Examining the views, reflections and experiences of groups on these two course types which were traditionally held to be not only contrasting in purpose but also mutually exclusive might, I concluded, provide insights into their stated reasons and throw light onto their motivations. Thus it should be possible to pinpoint any differences between the motivational influences upon these two groups and also to gauge any similarities; and so build up a picture of the main features characteristic of either and both of the groups. This would provide interesting material for comparison with previous studies and may further inform the field of research into adult learners.

Since both groups may (as in this study) be studying with a view to possibly returning to or entering upon academic courses of study, this adds another dimension to the research, in terms of motivational issues and impact on the field of research. It may also have implications for the requirement of HE to provide for adults’ range of needs, particularly in view of the rapid recent HE expansion, which has resulted in inadequate provision, such as lack of resources with inevitable impact on existing practice.

The experiences of adult learners, who currently comprise the majority of HE students, together with what they bring to education, might thus provide a valuable contribution as to the means of satisfying provision for them at an

institutional level as well as from the individual learner's perspective. To enable this more responsive and supportive learning culture is particularly important, in light of the long-acknowledged need to address student-centred learning, and its consequent repercussions for teaching and learning. There are other implications, notably the change in attitude towards education as a lifelong experience rather than a short-term, finite experience of the compulsory school years.

The context of lifelong learning

The agenda of lifelong learning provides a significant policy context for my study. In his foreword to the green paper *The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain* (DfEE, 1998, p.2), the Secretary of State for Education and Employment suggested that a new *renaissance* was heralded by the twenty-first century, in his juxtaposition of "encouraging the acquisition of knowledge and skills and emphasising creativity and imagination".

The broad aim of the green paper was to promote participation (subdivided into Further Education (FE), HE and adult education, alongside work-based training) by widening access. These ideas were taken further in the 1999 White Paper, *Learning to Succeed* which announced the establishment of a Learning and Skills Council (LSC) (DfEE, 1999). This will be established in 2001, and will deliver all post-16 education and training (except HE), advised respectively by two committees about the needs of, and labour market skills required from, young people /adult learners. The LSC will seek to "embed lifelong learning in people's daily lives" (DfEE, 1999, p.5), by "putting learners first" and echoes the green

paper which called for “The fostering of an enquiring mind and the love of learning” (DfEE, 1998, p.23).

However, Coffield (1999, p.479) uses illustrations from the Economic and Social Research Council’s (ERSC) *Learning Society* Programme initiative to critique “the powerful consensus ... that lifelong learning is a wonder drug which, on its own, will solve a wide range of educational, social and economic ills”. Bates *et al.* (1999) warn that this has laid down:

... a highly significant marker of the gulf which has opened between policy drive and leading edge research for the post-compulsory sector, and hence, the gulf which remains to be bridged (Bates *et al.*, 1999, p. 424).

Coffield encapsulates the dominant consensus in a few central tenets and suggests ten key problems, with his own explanation for their continuing popularity. This sceptical view of lifelong learning as social control, in a “contested terrain between employers, unions and the state” (Coffield, 1999, p.479), is countered by his alternative visions of a learning society and lifelong learning as personal development or social learning.

Coffield believes that the “magic bullet” thesis promulgated by policy groups in their current promotion of lifelong learning, leads to a consensus which is “naive, limited and apparent as well as being deficient, dangerous and diversionary” (*ibid.*, p.479). Central here is the nation’s global competitiveness dependency upon “the skills of all its people”, which need upskilling because of irresistible economic forces (*ibid.*, p.480). This perspective implies the individual’s responsibility to ensure employability, and the need for the modernisation of

education so as to respond to employers' needs, following the model set by business, one he claims to be inappropriate.

Coffield offers three representative policy groups' viewpoints, including that of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) on individual responsibility. The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE, 1997a) similarly sees human capital as an investment in learning, while an equivalence between the learning society and people situated within the globalised market was drawn by Howells (1997), the first Minister for Lifelong Learning.

Coffield feels that the prevailing theory of lifelong learning means structural barriers to access are diverted into (and personified as) individuals' personal attributes. Social capital (such as shared values and trust in social relationships, needed to support learning) is considered an essential ingredient for the successful accomplishment of human capital (Schuller and Burns, 1999). Other, empirically debatable factors, such as personal characteristics, become seen as more relevant to work performance than educational attainment (Berg, 1973).

Coffield feels these factors have led employers to regard their main problem as having to recruit from a poorly educated workforce, for which the role of education offers no more than a remedy. In the new moral economy this promotes, some are more desirable than others (see Chapter 2 of this thesis), because their worth is seen only in terms of their potential contribution to the labour market, hence a "market value". Under these conditions, the costs of education can be cynically assessed, in view of likely outcomes for the employer,

with enhanced market value of the employee as the only consideration for investment.

Alongside this, credential inflation (arising from mass HE expansion of qualifications without a commensurate increase in jobs, and policies promoting human capital investment) renders much education and training of dubious value, as students “increase their credentials rather than their understanding” (Coffield, 1999, p.486). As Unwin warns:

Collecting credits can, however, become an end in itself rather than a means to an end. There is a danger that in pushing young people on to a qualification treadmill, we force them to cling on regardless of how suitable to the chosen occupational route (Unwin, 1990, pp. 200-201).

Although suggesting this version of lifelong learning has lost credibility, it remains popular through legitimating increased expenditure on education, just as human capital theory offered “quantitative justification for vast public expenditure on education” in the United States (US) (Karabel and Halsey, 1997, p.13).

Lifelong learning is thus limited as a “lever for wider social change” (Bates, *et al.*, 1999, p.424), as is reinforced in the findings by Gorard, Rees and Fevre (1999). They question the human capital view of participation, whereby education and training provides skills for those lacking them, and jobs for the unemployed. They suggest that “it is socio-economic changes that are driving changes in patterns of participation rather more than vice versa” (Gorard *et al.*, 1999, p.46). They agree that besides “the crucial role of an individual’s socio-economic background”, a significant factor is:

... the formation in individuals of a relatively stable learner identity based on their previous experience of learning, primarily at school, and affecting their view of what is appropriate participation for them in the future (*ibid.*, p.45).

They also feel that this stable identity in relation to learning may be decisive in mediating the influence of qualifications and examination failure. Bates *et al.*

summarise this as:

... the drive towards highly prescriptive economic instrumentalism [which] draws upon an overly narrow conceptualisation of the post-compulsory field, its problems and issues, and particularly the social contexts of learning (Bates, *et al.*, 1999, p.423).

Coffield states the “long-standing, brutal and awkward truth” emerging from the ESRC’s *Learning Society Programme* findings, that “the roots of educational disadvantage lie beyond education in our social structure and so beyond the remit of the DfEE” (Coffield, 1999, p.495). Hence, removal of those long recognised barriers such as lack of childcare, remains an unrealistic way to encourage participation, as:

... those who failed at school often come to see post-school learning of all kinds as irrelevant to their needs and capabilities. Hence, not only is participation in further, higher and continuing education not perceived to be a realistic possibility, but also work-based learning is viewed as unnecessary (Rees *et al.*, 1999, p.11).

It is not so much a matter of availability of opportunities, important as this remains, but of people’s perceptions, both of availability and of the appropriateness of opportunities. What is at issue here is the mismatch between how people perceive their own suitability for learning, and how institutions are suited to them, and there is thus an attitudinal dilemma. As Edwards and Usher state, citing Edwards (1996), at the same time as there are:

... unbounded spaces of lifelong learning ... opportunities are presented for diversity and for new and innovative practices which

switch the emphasis from provision to learning opportunities, from the student to the learner (Edwards and Usher, 1998, p.97).

Of significance to adult learners' decisions to participate is the impact upon other spheres of their daily lives, many having to resolve difficulties arising from conflict between the demands of home or work with study, an issue examined by Blaxter and Tight (1994) in relation to the needs of lifelong education. Some accommodated their studies by 'alternation' or 'substitution' with periods of work, leisure or retirement, while the majority (notably women unable to abandon roles of caring, childcare and part-time employment) adopted 'combination' or 'synchronisation' approaches. Substituting study as leisure was common.

Time available for study was "always relative: both to their other responsibilities, and to their perceptions of the situation of full-time students" (*ibid.*, p.167).

Comments on the ownership of time are revealing, such as that of 'free time' of those (usually younger women) without domestic commitments and men with a boring or undemanding job. Time as perceived in relation to other "real or imagined full-time students" revealed "something akin to envy" (*ibid.*, p.168) from those in full-time work, especially regarding their social life, but resentment from younger people supported financially by employers who had to use their own time for study.

Blaxter and Tight found that older students appreciated the pressures involved in studying and thus came to respect other students. Some of these students also revealed, however, that their own children, who themselves were students, believed their parents to have more study time, free of the problems for example, of "making friends and sorting my life out" (*ibid.*, p.169). A 'combination'

strategy often entailed study during the working day or childcare. Blaxter and Tight conclude that lifelong learning is more a reality “at an individual rather than a societal level”, the consequent burden meaning “the perception of the student role is of someone with no other major commitments, and with little or no reduction in their other responsibilities” (*ibid.*, p.178).

Questioning the ‘learning divide’ between participants and non-participants, Tight (1998) looked at two major surveys on participation and found figures suggesting both 40% and 74% represented those recently participating in education. He suggested these findings were complementary rather than contradictory, the lower figure referring to formal, accredited forms of learning, and the higher to more informal, and so unaccredited forms. The learning divide “seems, therefore, to be between kinds of learning rather than between learners and non-learners” (Tight, 1998, p.113). This stress upon formal provision characteristic of many current government publications, accounts for only a small part of all learning going on in institutions, at work, in the home or community, and ignores informal learning.

Tight’s study confirmed the existence of a “sub-oceanic portion of the ‘learning iceberg’ ” (Tight, 1998, p.114). Although initially feeling their activities could not be of interest to the researchers, “all of them, after further prompting, revealed elements of a personal lifelong learning culture” (*ibid.*, p.115). Offering the following two popular definitions of learning:

Learning is a change in human disposition or capability that persists over a period of time and is not simply ascribable to processes of growth (Gagné, 1985, p.2)

Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984, p.38)

Tight notes that both imply an ongoing process and hence participation is “a continuous, rather than a dichotomous variable” (Tight, 1998, p.115).

By contrast, recent policy reports as encapsulated in *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998), subscribe to the more dominant education and training style of language, with the exception of the “least institutionalised vision” of the language of learning evidenced in the Fryer Report (1997) (“to develop a new learning culture”). These reports are also based on the proposition that non-participation is the norm and hence a problem:

We must bridge the ‘learning divide’ - between those who have benefited from education and training and those who have not - which blights so many communities and widens income equality (DfEE, 1998, p.11).

Although unexpectedly noting the significance learning has for “the spiritual side of our lives” (*ibid.*, p.7), emphasis remains upon vocational education and training, maintaining the narrow interpretation of lifelong learning, linked predominantly to the needs of the economy. Here, the majority of adults (non-participants) need to be recruited, while the alternative would typically view all people as “more or less continually learning”, and all learning as valuable, occurring throughout the whole of the life course.

Tight (1998, p.118) concludes that we need to look at different kinds of learning, rather than a distinction between learners and non-learners, because “As researchers, that might give us a clearer understanding of the nature of learning and where it fits into people’s lives”. He suggests exploring the relationships “between learning and the rest of life” could inform policy on learning, and help “get beyond the vocational /non-vocational dichotomy” (*ibid.*). Ways forward to

remove inequalities according to Coffield (1999), entail the new social contract between state, business, trade unions and education, and adoption of the new social theory of learning.

Representing adults' educational progression as too simplistic and straightforward a matter can however be criticised in the light of the totality of individuals' experiences and lives, particularly since progress is often achieved in spite of, rather than because of, the educational system (Woodley *et al.*, 1987). Therefore, rather than investigating means of improving institutional provision, to boost participation and lower attrition rates, by expanding course modes and choices, I was interested in examining motives from the individual learners' stance, to gain a comprehensive picture of these people.

Since such motives involve issues to do with perceptions of education and of themselves engaging upon learning as a student, this might provoke feelings about self with the wider implications of family, work and social life. These can be seen against the background of class, economic and cultural traditions, although these are not explored here in depth. Essentially, my intention was to examine the dynamics of the students' relationship with FE, with the part played in their motives and educational participation by past and present experiences. This would counterpoint both a reflection upon reasons for returning to education within past and present contexts; and a consideration of how FE affects motives and feelings about self and others.

I felt it would be interesting to reflect the 'voice' of these people, who are "prepared to address themselves to study, usually after a day's work and often in

unpropitious conditions” (Hoggart, 1957, p.321) and yet, in opposition to traditional ‘real’ students, the adult learner is still seen as something of a “benign deviant” (Johnston and Bailey, 1984, Ch. 2, p.11).

Strategy for the Research

My overall approach was determined by the nature of my research question:

Are there reasons other than instrumental affecting participation, and can comparison of the instrumentally driven, with the personally motivated, help pinpoint these non-instrumental reasons?

Given that motivation is a prime factor in participation, it would be necessary to seek information concerning decisions to enrol and progress through a course of study (and if possible, end ‘success’), and ascertain reasons for re-entering education. A comparison of the different course types was also to be made.

Subsidiary questions arising from the key research question are:

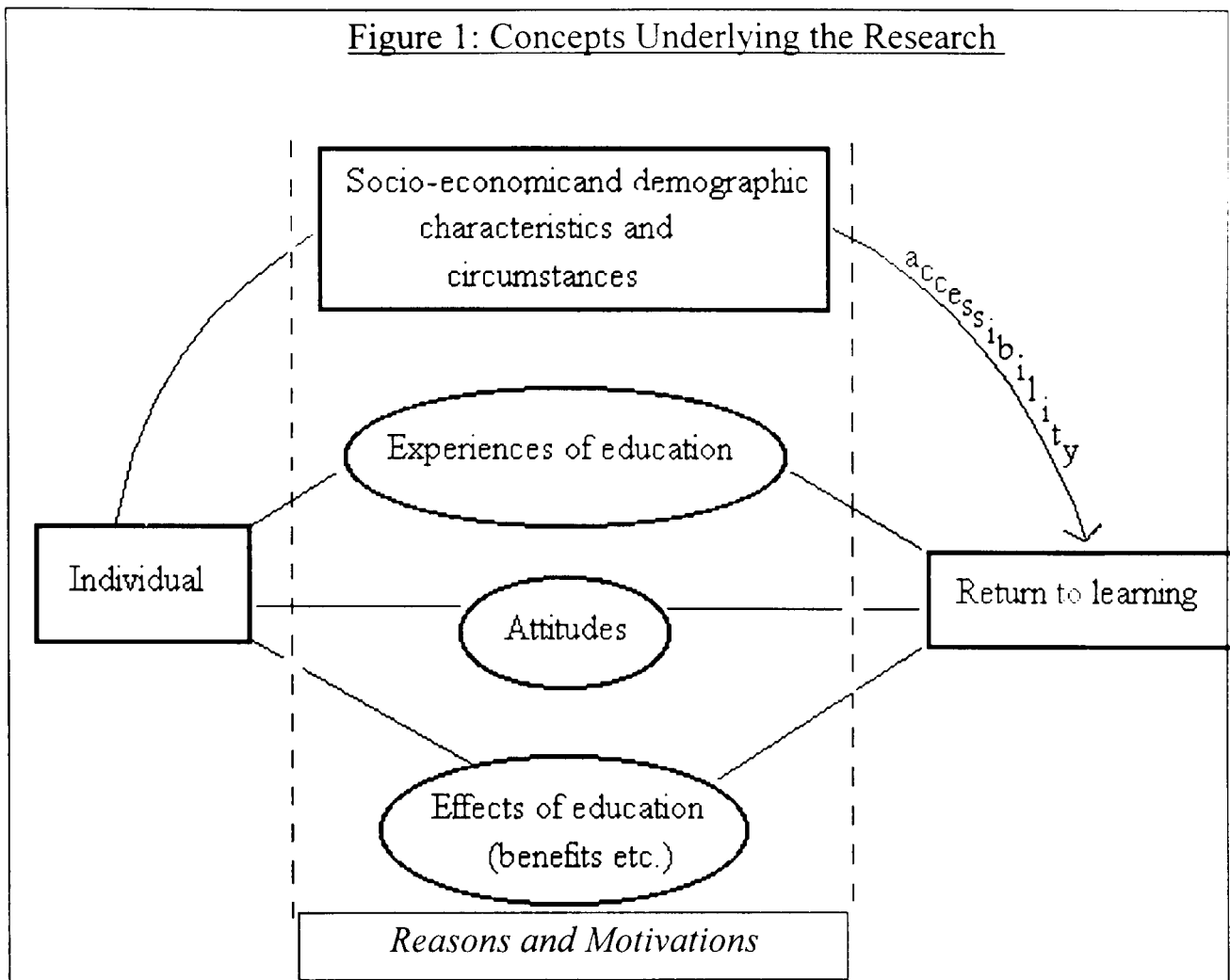
- What are adult learners’ reasons (stated and implicit) for engaging in study?
- What does learning mean for them in terms of their working and everyday lives, and in the context of their employment, social and family relations?
- What are their actual experiences of education (currently and in the past)?
- How has education influenced or affected them?
- What are their perceptions of themselves (both positive and negative) as learners?
- How far has this view /perception been influenced by others?

- What are vocational /non-vocational students' characteristic motivations?
- Do these differ according to profile (socio-economic and demographic characteristics and circumstances)?
- Does reflecting upon the role of education and the adult learner (i.e. participating in this research, among other things) affect the individual?

Conclusion

Since the visualisation of concepts strongly features in my approach (see Chapter 3), the conceptual framework of my study can best be illustrated by the following diagram (Figure 1), whose elements provide the various layers informing the participants' experiences. The move from the individual to a possible return to learning, set against the background of their reasons and motivations, circumscribes certain concepts.

The relationships between each of the elements may be two-way (as the lines in the diagram indicate). The most transparent of these elements to the outsider is the background provided by the individual's social situation. Among the less visible factors which impinge upon the individual are their past educational situations, and how these influence their opinion of education, as well as their attitudinal stance on the subject.



Following on from this conceptual framework for my research, the review of the literature in Chapter 2 identifies relevant published research, background information and issues of interest, as well as the relevant theoretical resources informing the contextual background.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the literature which framed my qualitative research strategy (see Chapter 3). Having read widely in the area of adult education, my interest in this field led me to wish to explore in greater detail the reasons given for adults returning to education and how their choices were motivated. Although little was written on these issues, a seminal study on adult learner motivation had recently been published (West, 1996). This proved to be the major influence on my research and instigated the direction of my thinking, leading to my specific focus on the topic of adult learner motivation in relation to the two contrasting (vocational and non- vocational) course types. This review is not concerned with the majority of texts on motivation which are to do with child psychology, manuals directed towards promoting student involvement, or the fields of training and management. Most significant here are those studies based on psychological or sociological perspectives on motivation.

Literature on adult learners' perceptions of participation

A range of literature covering the area of mature students or adult learners (ACACE, 1982; Ainley, 1994; Jarvis, 1987; Kolb, 1984; Rogers, 1986) accompanied the 1980s movement towards mass HE recruitment (CNAAs, 1987; DES, 1985, 1987; Fulton and Ellwood, 1989; James *et al.*, 1989). It addresses issues such as provision for non-traditional students, especially 'return to learn' or

access courses. A feature of this background literature on the question of adult learners' participation is its strong focus on the institutional perspective, on issues such as barriers to HE access, with its solutions on enhancing recruitment and retention, thus avoiding 'wastage' (Ames, 1986; Fulton, 1989).

Recent research by the DfEE (La Valle and Finch, 1999) to update their 1997 National Adult Learning Survey, monitored progress in participation levels towards the government's learning targets set for 2002. These state that, in England, 50% of economically active adults should reach NVQ III or equivalent (currently 46.5% or 10.8 out of a total of 23.4 million), while 28% should reach NVQ IV (now 26.9% or 6.3 million) (DfEE, 2000c). The DfEE study shows a strong link between past and future learning habits, particularly job-related plans, despite the fact that those who appeared most in need were least likely to participate, especially through vocational courses. The most powerful obstacle was concern about competence and ability to keep up.

Although some studies on adult learner participation incidentally included examples of students' attitudes or views on their reasons and motives for learning, few appear to be reported specifically from their perspective. The preference for a largely institutional perspective is exemplified in the technicist language employed in such surveys. It is interesting that some of these studies (though not all, and usually those with quantitative approaches to analysis) anonymise their 'subjects' by denoting them as case study numbers or by their socio-economic characteristics.

This phenomenon, of the anonymous approach to participants, aligns with the instrumental approach which the government appears currently to be taking to lifelong learning (for example, that widening participation is purely about quantitative measures). In my research I am seeking to depict the participants' views by offering an individualist rather than an institutional perspective, one which does not depersonalise these people, and affords them more dignity, which is something which is in line with Coffield's call for a "discourse of social justice and social cohesion" (*ibid.*).

Three main works provide the most apposite examples of surveys depicting attitudes (Hopper and Osborn, 1975; McGivney, 1992; Woodley *et al.*, 1987).

Woodley *et al.* examined factors surrounding adults' educational choices (1987), concentrating on adults choosing to return to education by entering OU courses, while Hopper and Osborn's definitive 1975 text had examined adults' participation from the perspective of their selection for social control.

McGivney's (1992) report for The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) looked at means of motivating the unemployed to participate in education and training programmes so as to improve their position in the labour market. I will now examine these studies in turn.

Adult learner perception survey: McGivney (1992)

The study by McGivney effectively examines the powerful disincentives operating for prospective adult learners but offers an interesting counterpoint to those factors promoting active participation examined by Hopper and Osborn, and Woodley *et al.*. It was based on research pertaining to the government's REPLAN programme and drew on studies in the UK and Europe. It sought to

identify the causes of low participation amongst those unemployed having the fewest skills or qualifications, examining types of programme successfully designed for these groups, and factors that encourage participation. She concluded that successful schemes are based upon a realistic understanding of individuals' circumstances, and offer benefits which offset costs and perceived risks, for which several organisational strategies are suggested.

To counter the 1990s' decline in traditional jobs, the major problems of lack of skills to fill available jobs and lack of motivation to take up training places, were identified by the Department of Employment (DE, 1988). To redress the situation of low enrolment or high drop-out, from schemes dedicated to those unqualified and unskilled who form a high proportion of the long-term unemployed, and with the focus being upon the desired transition back into paid work, McGivney (1992) felt it necessary to examine the assumption that long-term unemployment can be partially attributed to the individual's lack of motivation. Since this group is the one least likely to participate (see Fuller and Saunders, 1990) the general issues surrounding key motivational factors were looked at. Nine major demotivators were identified:

1. Attitudes and perceptions (dispositional or psychological factors such as early leavers associating education with pointlessness, and scepticism over any training-promotion link),
2. Socio-economic status,
3. The roles of unemployment (a deterrent initiating negative feelings such as defeatism) and recent training experience (lack of which acts as a demotivator),

4. Lack of perceived links between training and jobs,
5. Individual experience (in a culture of continuing failure),
6. Inadequacies such as poor communication in agencies' promotion of schemes,
7. Perceived risks (to benefit entitlement and financial stability) and,
8. Barriers (facing the disadvantaged, although lack of time and finance provide the most often cited, acceptable reason, masking more personal factors).

Adult learner perception survey: Hopper and Osborn (1975)

The aims of Hopper and Osborn (1975) were to redress basic demographic data from previous research by using two earlier studies into full-time degree students, in the context of the educational and social systems, so as to investigate certain propositions about their personal and interpersonal characteristics. Traditional and adult students had been examined in one study, while the second sample consisted of 183 men (only 15 of whom were students). The former study was an exploratory investigation of degree course adults' re-entry reasons and experiences; the latter were selected to investigate characteristics of those displaying certain patterns of mobility.

The scope of this research covered, according to current definitions of adult learners, those over 21 with at least four years in employment. They were entering full-time formal courses, a significant study mode because of their inevitable relationships with younger students (and hence possible marginality), and because of their ultimate degree status (hence likelihood of social mobility, with distancing from initial social class). The small number who displayed initial

rejection routes followed by educational selection, represent the stereotype of the educationally deprived adult, and were thus unusual at that time.

The authors' model held that "education systems are designed more to facilitate the effective social control of the society than they are to facilitate the achievement of educational and instructional goals" (Hopper and Osborn, 1975, pp.18-19) and so enhance neither "intellectual and emotional potentials", nor the "fostering of curiosity and creativity". Such socialisation is effected:

... through the deployment of the population at certain phases of the life cycle into those educational routes which will prepare them for, and lead them to, those segments of the labour market for which they have been judged most appropriate (*ibid.*, p.19).

and thus forms a cynical disposition of the adult student into and through those employment pathways.

If this model operated smoothly, unwillingness for (in any case unnecessary) further formal education should logically coincide with entry to the labour market. However, demand for adult education outweighs supply, thus this model needs revising to account for inefficient selection procedures, each of these students illustrating an error, according to their individual personal and interpersonal characteristics. Six factors of such characteristics were derived from Hopper and Osborn's model:

1. Re-entry students coming from particular patterns of mobility (moving from upper-lower to lower-middle, or lower-middle to middle-middle social classes);
2. Having a few 'Os' and maybe an 'A' level (with selection then rejection or rejection then selection);

3. Educational then career and mobility experiences causing ambivalent goals and status expectations, negative discrepancy between levels of normative expectation and achievement, and associated feelings of deprivation;
4. A history of intense but unsuccessful competition for jobs leading to low (occupational) self-esteem and ambivalence about their (student, working, partner and parental) capacities; as well as isolation from supportive relationships and cross pressures (in families, status groups and occupational roles) i.e. marginality;
5. A set of decisions and actions (re-entry to reduce feelings of deprivation, ambivalence and marginality) constituting a form of instrumental adjustment to their feelings and situation, i.e. legitimate innovation, arising from specific bridging factors (via sponsorship through the support of significant acquaintances at work or in leisure pursuits);
6. The upwardly mobile (especially those originally upper-lower class) are more likely than the non-mobile or downwardly mobile to have problems about marginality, working out their personal values (how education relates to long-term goals), and (initial educational phase) academic difficulties.

Hopper and Osborn thus reveal many complex and conflicting factors to be in operation when a return to learning is considered, concerning the personal feelings of relative deprivation, ambivalence and low self-esteem, and marginality in relationships. Their data shows that:

Adult students are more likely than non-students to have negative discrepancies between their levels of normative expectations and their levels of achievement ... and hence, are more likely to feel relatively deprived, particularly with respect to goals of 'fulfilment and satisfaction in work' (Hopper and Osborn, 1975, p.94).

Many of these students displayed goals which rejected society's high valuing of money and status, emphasising rather an occupation allowing them "to maximize their sense of personal fulfilment and self-development" (*ibid.*). The complex rewards to do with the prestige arising from a degree had led to ambivalence, and often the substitute goal of 'alternative life style', while many failing in the job market had low self-esteem and highly ambivalent attitudes towards their own abilities.

Marginalisation resulted from these educational and work experiences, and ambivalent self-identifications with generally low self-esteem; in particular, for both upwardly and downwardly mobile. Rather than being "a full member of a well-organized and supportive group", a marginal person "belongs to or is in transition between two worlds whose norms and values conflict" (*ibid.*, p.35). In adolescence they had suffered cross pressures from home, school and peers, so frequently responded by leaving school early for work where ties with home and friends became weakened. Being "marginal men" before re-entry to the educational system (a form of adjustment, known as "legitimate innovation" (*ibid.*, p.132), "their marginality may be accentuated rather than relieved by this move" (*ibid.*, p.111) so, after overcoming "the earlier hurdles of re-entry, they entered a marginal situation within education" (*ibid.*, p.132).

The downwardly mobile were seen to be over represented among adults engaged in education. As with the upwardly mobile, marginality and isolation occurred before HE but they were initially 'selected' not 'rejected', so felt especially strongly the system's inconsistent judgements. Neither family nor school had prepared them for downward mobility, while peers (usually from lower classes)

formed cross pressures and conflicting identifications. Unlike the upwardly mobile however, HE helped reduce their social distancing from family and early friends, and thus resolve marginality.

Far fewer females than males became students in adulthood, younger women being similar to men in following instrumental adjustment to problems of relative deprivation and marginality, while older women were attempting to adjust to a phase of life cycle where the traditional female role could no longer fully occupy them. Thus age and life cycle stage were significant, although Hopper and Osborn did not investigate this further.

Marginality affected the meaning HE had for these adults who, more than traditional students, have strong achievement orientations, valuing education as an “instrumental” means to a future goal. Those with an alternative “evaluative” orientation (seeing education as an end in itself) tended to be vague about what they were doing. Possibly typical of HE students as a whole, they also tended to be anxious, confused and concerned about what they were “supposed to be doing”.

The findings were consistent with the propositions of the authors, who suggested the inclusion of trade unions to act as channels of mobility operating outside the education system. They also felt that some women may not perceive initial selection to be as significant for them as was the supportive influence of the family. This suggests that others may have alternative life plans, and such individuals may take a more active part in “negotiating” their own identities (*ibid.*, p.150).

To conclude, taking educational orientation (especially for the upwardly mobile) as an index of general difficulties in working out a system of personal values, these adult students are “in the throes of trying to work through an identity crisis which involves a change of friends, life style, and conception of self” (*ibid.*, p.133). They are summarised in Dahrendorf’s preface to the study as:

... people who have chosen a particularly arduous way towards improving their life chances in terms of career opportunities. They are generally unhappy about their original education, dissatisfied with their occupational experience, out of step with their human environment, highly motivated both in terms of learning and of achieving more, in short they are different. And being different hurts (Dahrendorf, 1975, p.6).

In future adult education could be seen, not as a correction of missed opportunities, but as “a second chance to enjoy the opportunities given in the first place.” As can be seen from the study’s conclusion, adult learners wish to combine rather than separate the spheres of work, leisure, education and family life, suggesting an ideal of “one integral human activity in several social dimensions” (*ibid.*, pp.5-6).

Adult learner perception survey: Woodley et al. (1987)

Improving adult HE participation rates was the main focus of the Department of Education and Science (DES) backed research undertaken by Woodley *et al.* (1987). Alongside the anticipated “sharp fall in the number of 18 year-olds entering full-time higher education” (*ibid.*, 1987, p.xiii) owing to the fall in birth rate in the 1960s and 1970s, was a corresponding rise in the proportion of older people, especially the over-60s:

... one effect of this decline in the demand for higher education from the traditional 18 year-old cohort would be to release places for non-traditional younger entrants, and for older students. This

‘window of opportunity’ ... coincided with a growing interest ... in the much wider concepts of continuing and life-long learning (*ibid.*).

The aims were to examine:

... the present population of mature students, the ease and difficulty of access to and progress through education, and in particular how well the existing pattern of courses met their needs (*ibid.*).

The researchers therefore examined adult learners’ available educational opportunities, traditionally marginalised, according to the institutional theories of Kelly (1970) and Percy et al. (1983), against the background of the two significant factors affecting HE participation. These were firstly social pressures, which influence the place of study in their lives (seen in situational theories such as Tough’s (1978)) and, secondly, and their motivation, as expressed in individual needs and personal goals, seen for example, in Houle’s motivational theory (1979).

Social pressures indicate the relationship between the participants’ characteristics and why a minority pursue formal educational activity. Although this group nearly always constitutes a disproportionate sector of the population (namely those of working age, in non-manual occupations, with more than minimal previous educational success), they suggest adult education is performing similar functions to the initial education system.

The education system, as Hopper and Osborn (1975) earlier suggested, performs the role of selection and training for the existing social system. According to this, the cessation of formal education, upon the onset of employment, provides adult education with its role as the arena for remedying the inefficiencies in the system.

Because of these, the overlapping group of as many as 40% of youngsters in between manual workers and the élite were incorrectly selected or rejected before the comprehensive system was established, and accordingly given an unsatisfactory education for their real needs. If this theory is correct, HE growth in adults is explained largely by the success or failure of their earlier educational experiences, besides the current need for updating skills.

In contrast with this theory, of the socialisation of the selection process, the adults in the study appeared to be not so wholly dependent upon the institutions' assessment, but rather valued their own estimation of, and active involvement in their relative educational 'success' or 'failure' and thus, significantly the positive qualities of an educational experience which they perceive to be appropriate to them as individuals:

What are crucial for the individuals' definitions of their abilities and their educational aspirations for the future are not the labels that the system hands out (e.g. 'failure' or 'success') but the ones they negotiate for themselves. (Woodley *et al.*, 1987, p.68).

According to Houle (1979) the phenomenon of adult participation was described as follows:

... many people are moved to devote part of their time to the development of their potentialities. They ... are led by impulse, often obscure to themselves, to take part in it. Many other people never seek, are never aware of opportunity, or if it does come to their attention, are apathetic or negative to it (Houle, in OECD, 1979, cited in Woodley *et al.*, 1987, pp.2-3).

Participation is described by the researchers as arguably a part of adult daily life (Howe, 1977), as is evidenced in studies among Americans, most of whose learning projects are self-planned or informally accomplished via friends (citing

Tough, 1978; Peters and Gordon, 1974). Yet it varies over time with breaks of varying length. In order to identify a motivational theory:

... to understand the reasons ... [adults] choose to participate in some form of learning activity at a particular point in their lives, why they select a particular course, subject and mode of study ... (Woodley *et al.*, 1987, p.3)

The authors looked at Houle's (1961) three (as on p.48) and Burgess's (1971) seven educational orientations, the 14 of Boshier (1971), and the six of Morstain and Smart (1974). All have superficial differences, yet "broadly congruent" findings, analogous to Houle's original.

Yet the more complex pattern emerged, in Houle's finding that people are motivated by a characteristic orientation to learning throughout their lives, while Morstain and Smart found multiple reasons can exist within the same individual, but change over time. From these, Woodley *et al.* developed their typology, which distinguished between nine goal types: career; social; escape /stimulation; cognitive; personal fulfilment; role development; obligation fulfilment; practical skill; and finally, health and well-being. It shows that one course can satisfy several students' different goals as well as an individual's many different goals.

They also suggested account should be taken of Cross's (1981) 'chain of response' model whereby participation in learning results from a series of responses. These are based on an individual's evaluation of their position in the environment, according to individual then external factors (such as course availability). This suggests that the theories Woodley *et al.* investigated should not be regarded as competing but as partial explanations of the complex processes at play during the participant's decision.

Previous research had apparently failed to address the simple matter of “who are the mature students?” (*ibid.*, p.1). The enormous diversity of courses and modes of study identified in their mapping of adult learner distribution, were found to be compounded by the “equally wide variety of students whose ‘maturity’ is virtually their only common characteristic” (*ibid.*). The main characteristics of adult learners in this study reveal an equal balance between the sexes, one tenth as belonging to ethnic minority groups, and most being fairly young, indicating they were taking breaks between study periods rather than returning to study. Two-thirds were employed, contrasting with those few unemployed, while most studied part-time, compared with a quarter studying full-time.

Students from a working class background (especially women) were in a minority, with more skilled than semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers participating. By contrast, among the predominant middle classes, the ‘service class’ formed a majority, balancing evenly between the sexes, but there were more women than men among the higher-grade professionals. A third possessed professional qualifications above ‘A’ level, which supports the truism that those who are already highly educated are the ones who will “continue to indulge their taste for education in adult life” (*ibid.*, p.29).

Their educational routes were more difficult to assess, having no discernible pattern. Mature students’ educational qualifications were seen to be much higher than for the population as a whole. A quarter pursued certificated courses, and were unevenly distributed, with half at non-advanced FE colleges, almost one-third in HE and a tenth at the Open University (OU). Adults chose mainly social science subjects (44%), mostly at residential college, then polytechnic, then (at

postgraduate level) university; science subjects (30%), mainly at the OU; and arts subjects (26%). Besides the half studying above 'A' level, a third were at GCSE /'O' level. Their study mode showed great variation, spanning full-time, part-time, and release schemes from work.

This picture reveals the stereotype of the mature student to be wrong. He or she is not a younger middle-age full-time student on a degree course, but more likely to be a young, part-time student who is combining their course with some form of employment. The many factors operating in their choice (and effectively forming a compromise between incentives and barriers encountered) can be translated into a typical pattern, according to course type.

Among students on certificated courses (namely, at university, correspondence or residential college), early relative educational 'success' had caused upward social mobility, producing social discomfort in both former and current social classes, necessitating renewed social mobility. With the type of qualifications appropriate to their work being readily available in educational institutions rather than through in-house training, and past educational experiences having been 'successful', they felt able to cope with a return to formal education while still young enough for promotion prospects.

The non-certificated course students Local Education Authority (LEA) or Workers' Educational Association (WEA) adult evening classes) had equally good educational standards, and were middle class but slightly older, and predominantly female. Hence they appeared to be fulfilling traditional roles by participating in socially acceptable courses, including domestic and creative

skills, with the aim of developing interests away from the home in an appropriate and non-threatening social setting.

Stated reasons the certificated course group gave for choosing education often incorporated multiple aims, but were mainly career improvement (about two-thirds), the remaining third being split equally between reasons of self development and interest in the subject matter. But among the non-certificated course students, 40% sought self-development, only 20% each seeking subject interest and instrumental (though not career-related) goals. Course accessibility raised several important processes operating prior to enrolment, including the many obstacles surrounding practical considerations. Significantly, a half took two or more years planning their course, constrained by inadequate entry requirements, lack of funding, and work, family or travel contingencies (20% having to settle for a 'next best' option).

However, on-course progress was greatly linked to perceptions as to how satisfactory courses are, with adult learners feeling guidance and support under-utilised, largely through lack of awareness, and general amenities unsatisfactory, though study facilities were adequate. Drop-out rates indicate institutions need to be:

... aware of the context in which adult learners study and provide a supportive environment in which the students can make their own decisions ... (Woodley *et al.*, 1987, p.167)

A major feature of motivation was the primacy of negotiating their own educational success or failure. Overall, the picture of adult learners that emerges in this analysis of learners' experiences, is one of people who are succeeding in spite of the educational system rather than because of it: "the existing pattern of

participation is a tribute to their perseverance and dedication” (*ibid.*, p.179). In the words of Hoggart thirty years earlier, these are “people who insist on getting knowledge against the odds, whether the odds are material or less tangible” (Hoggart, 1957, p.321).

Literature from the United States (U.S.) on adult learner participation

There are two studies which provide a valuable insight into the US experience (Courtney, 1992; Taylor *et al.*, 1985). Motivational factors behind a return to learning were sought in Courtney’s (1992) *Why Adults Learn*, whose subtitle reveals the focus of this study, *Towards a theory of participation in adult education*, and provides the most recent, rigorous review of the literature, compared to the earlier study by Taylor *et al.* (1985). In this study, they examined the state of university adult education in England and the US. The ‘liberal’ tradition at its heart was concluded as too conservative and élitist for the needs, at the end of the century, of the whole population as opposed to a “tertiary educated élite” (*ibid.*, p. 240). A radically revitalised provision should adapt to the needs of the community, as part of a changing social, economic and political system, a line followed up and expanded by Courtney.

In order to understand adult education in the US, which Courtney qualifies as “a part of that vast ebb and flow wherein people’s dreams are tested and reformed” (Courtney, 1992, Preface, p. xiv), it is necessary to examine the nature of their motivation, as well as:

... the context within which men’s and women’s motives play out their ritual tattoo. For adult learning is as much a phenomenon of a society and how it defines itself and its destiny as it is a function of

individual men and women and their efforts to interpret that destiny in their own terms. Adult learning rests on individual interest and initiative. It also emerges from a particular kind of society at a particular moment in its history (*ibid.*, p. xv).

Thus his themes combine the educational and social contexts illustrated in Hopper and Osborn (1975) and Woodley *et al.* (1987), with those individualistic elements also seen in the latter study. His review shows that the majority of studies on participation follow a positivist tradition and policy-oriented framework, which his study attempts to remedy, building instead a systematic picture of the situation incorporating the sociological into the US psychological tradition, within a theoretical context thus far largely absent:

Hence my interest in the concept of social participation and its implications for a reinterpretation of adult learning as an aspect of the person's totality of involvement with his or her community and society (*ibid.*, p. xv).

The implications of this view are extended to two particular dimensions of social participation; membership of voluntary associations and leisure activities.

Significant here is the voluntary notion entailed in adult education, which:

... reflects the behavior of millions of men and women on the American continent busy in the business of life, now laboring, now loving, and, in between bites, now learning ... (*ibid.*, p.1)

and thus the little understood pressures affecting continuing education which he seeks to illuminate, the better to harness them so as to make them work, not for institutional purposes alone, but for adult learners themselves.

Courtney questioned two assumptions: that adult education is a response to personal and social needs, and that motivation leads directly to engagement in learning. Fewer participate than do not, and are characteristically fairly well educated and employed, young, white, middle-class, increasingly women more

than men, while those most in need of education remain absent from this profile.

Rather than opportunities open to all, US adult education appears:

... to resemble a club, of moderate to high exclusivity, whose entrance is on Main Street and thus visible to all, whose doors revolve for anyone to enter, but whose rules confront everyone once inside, beckoning some to advance further while rejecting many more as unworthy (*ibid.*, pp.5-6).

Although the most likely causes of participation were felt to be age and formal schooling, these factors alone accounted for only 10% of the adult student population, leading to the inference that other motivational factors remained unidentified and unrecognised.

In seeking to examine the question “Who are these people and why do they come to us?” (Ozanne, 1934) several surveys were reviewed, revealing an unchanging pattern. Although perceived as making up for earlier deficiencies, these students were more likely to be participating on ‘continuing’ rather than ‘compensatory’ pathways, for vocational reasons, revealing that they had already reached the highest levels of formal education.

Thus most participation is a continuation of formal schooling for certain occupational categories (professional, technical and clerical), arising from rather than leading to economic mobility (so resulting from success) and thus having strong links with the world of work. Even when vocational motives predominate, more personal factors equally operate, such as becoming better informed.

Participation also forms part of a wider pattern of social involvement, in leisure and community activities, possibly because:

... adult education is a form of cultural engagement, a form of consumption or expression, that is ideally suited to the educated

middle class. It appears to capture the essence of the bourgeois mentality and attitude to life (Courtney, 1992, p.51).

The US psychological studies reviewed by Courtney featured motivational orientation, the decision model and life cycle theories. According to motivational orientation, personality trait or temperament determine participation (Houle, 1961), so accounting for individual learning need rather than prompting the decision to enter education. Decision models provide the conditions (some psychological, others social or sociological) influencing the decision, whereas life cycle theory presumes that changes in the individual's life (according to particular life stage) create needs, especially at the 'transitional' phases. Needs become translated into the need to learn new skills to cope with change.

Life cycle theory has developed along two distinct lines; the 'phase' and 'stage' approaches. In the former, stable periods are interspersed with turbulent 'transitions', both age related (Levinson, 1978). The latter states that people experience definite sequences of developmental stages of increasing complexity, unrelated to age. Courtney felt this theory more readily explains the concept of adult maturity, and inclusion of developmental aspects beyond the purely biological, concerned with the sociological and historical, allow for the likelihood of major changes in life situation and perspective. The influential work by Aslanian and Brickell (1980) further explained transition as a complex problem of 'disequilibrium', whereby new learning is implicated, alongside specific life events which trigger different adults' reactions. This does not however, entirely account for factors other than age-related which also feature the cultural.

Motivational orientation is one of the most well developed theories, relating in the work of Houle (1961) the superficially distinct reasons for educational participation directly to specific 'learning orientations', influenced by individual values and beliefs. His typology of 'goal-oriented' (with a distinct objective or purpose), 'activity-oriented' (for non-educational aims such as socialising) and 'learning-oriented' (learning as an end in itself) has encountered many challenges. It does not successfully account for participation reasons which appear to be due to combinations of orientations.

Sociological dimensions were included by Courtney as none of the psychological theories appeared fully satisfactory, by extending these to encompass the concept of social participation, particularly as seen in membership of voluntary associations, and uses of leisure. Within the US context, Courtney concluded that participating in various activities, including educational, reflects the type of society people live in and their access to the institutions which express society's values and ideals.

Thus adult learning can be interpreted within a framework of social participation (based here on US notions of citizenship), occurring against "a matrix of organizational forms" (Courtney, 1992, p.112) and within a definable social context in which education acts as a culture of transmission and socialisation. He felt the expression of motives, centred on the vocational to remain very ambiguous since these also concern the individual's more practical need for knowledge and skills appropriate in family or community settings.

Thus Courtney placed adult education within a wider framework of general participation in which the student is more likely, as in Boshier's 'life-spacer'(1977), to experiment with life's possibilities and opportunities. Rather than an internalised, invisible, cognitive activity, for the acquisition of skills and knowledge, it is inherently a part of social involvement, with learning as process and encapsulating change. Courtney identified this element of change as the major factor behind adult learner participation.

Literature on adult learner attitudes

I will now look at the literature on adult learners' views, such as the attitudinal study conducted into full- and part-time mature polytechnic students, by Johnston and Bailey between 1982-4. Part of the interest in mature student participation was because:

... in terms of institutional protectionism, the numbers of mature students could lift the threat of contraction in the higher education sector by keeping the seats warm until the next baby boom (Johnston and Bailey, 1984, Ch. 2, p.2).

Since life experience and personal motivation were acknowledged as important attributes of adults, differing markedly from those of conventional students, expectations and attitudes were sought. However, a significant proportion indicated motives which remained largely unacknowledged and unexplored in their report.

In 1982, mature students formed half the polytechnic's total student population, with 36% aged 21-24, 52% aged 25-39 and 12% aged 40+. Men outnumbered women by 2:1, except in the upper age range where the ratio was reversed at 1:

1.7. Mature students formed 30% of all those on full-time and sandwich courses, 70% on part-time and 98% on evening courses. Of the two-thirds having continued beyond school leaving age, 8% without any formal qualifications, another 8% had professional qualifications (not commented upon), the remaining 66% of qualifications ranging from 'O' level to HE diploma, and 12% had degrees. The semi-skilled and unskilled were under represented, as were the oldest age range (over 60), ethnic minorities, the disabled and to some extent, women. Almost two-thirds had been employed previously, most representative of the occupational categories being education and welfare (29%) then clerical and office workers (23%), technicians, and those in science, engineering and skilled trades forming 12%.

This profile was broadly similar to that depicted by Woodley *et al.* in 1987, and a distinct pattern appeared, whereby the younger group (21-29) were mainly career-oriented males on full-time courses, while those over 30 were largely women, motivated by subject interest and studying part-time. The younger were studying engineering, science, and business and management, while the older favoured humanities, social studies and art and design. Interestingly, however, they discovered that many academic staff remained "suspicious of the vocational rather than purely academic motivation of many mature students" (Johnston and Bailey, 1984, Ch. 2, p.11).

Two items from their multiple choice questionnaire in particular appeared apposite to my study, namely participation reasons and trigger factors.

Respondents were asked to rank eight listed reasons for participation, using a scale ranging from 'very important' to 'unimportant'. By combining those reasons

ranked as ‘important’ and ‘very important’ and placing these in order according to response percentages for each reason, I drew up the following list:

1st	subject interest	91%
2nd	to be more cultured /better informed	69%
3rd	career option of improvement	68%
4th	wanting to prove something to myself	64%
5th	career option of change	59%
6th	for further study	57%
7th	wanting to make up for lost opportunities	47%
8th	for social reasons	45%

Interestingly, the two suggested reasons of ‘proving something to myself’, and ‘making up for lost opportunities’, which could be termed more ‘personal’ were not referred to by Johnston and Bailey, possibly because they appear difficult to explain in terms of the means of analysis used in their report.

Comparing this list with those deemed ‘very important’, the notably major difference is that ‘to be more cultured /better informed’ in the combined list above appeared second in order of importance, but here appeared sixth and hence does not appear alongside ‘subject interest’ as the “most widely shared concern” (Johnston and Bailey, 1984, Ch. 5, p.13) which participants reported.

Also significant was the question on specific trigger factors (reported by 68%), similarly ranked according to three possible responses, which attracted almost equal numbers. Beside the one-third volunteering ‘other reasons’, my analysis reveals that those agreeing with listed reasons are composed of 21.9% giving ‘study /employment’ reasons:-

FE course success	12.4%
unemployed /redundant	9.5%

and 11.7% with more personal reasons:-

children less dependent	8%
marital breakdown	2.2%
moving house	1.5%

These more personal events would not be as widely reported as the above triggers (McGivney, 1990). Overall, their participants were seen as “clearly and overwhelmingly work /career /qualification oriented, as opposed to having any holistic view of ‘student life’ ” (Johnston and Bailey, 1984, Ch. 5, p.33).

Literature on adult learner motivation

The key work by Linden West, *Beyond Fragments: Adults, Motivation and Higher Education - a biographical analysis (1996)*, as the sub-title indicates, examines motivation to enter and continue in HE, and is the most far-reaching British investigation so far. Of significance is his viewing participation in the context of whole lives among the adults concerned.

West conducted a three-year Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) study, from 1992-1995 at the University of Kent at Canterbury with research fellow Mary Lea. Thirty adult learners were interviewed over three years as they progressed from Access or Foundation courses to HE institutions within the region. Unlike the more commonly employed quantitative surveys, this study’s qualitative approach was intended to counter marketising tendencies of the

current managerial stance in education which claims that adults simply pursue vocational ambitions. These courses appear to equate with those women's socially acceptable choice of the non-accredited courses seen in Woodley *et al.* (1987), the most favoured course type for mature students (Johnston and Bailey, 1984). West posits the idea that HE can offer adult learners space to experiment with their identities, to explore the possibilities of new lives and manage change, within the wider context of teaching and learning (in which motivation is but one part).

The major imperative for this study is in contributing to an HE system which needs to be more responsive to adults who, although now comprising the majority among students, continue to be seen as 'alternative'. However this secondary focus on informing policy appears to have emerged after the pilot study and to run counter to the original wish to explore motivation and discover what learning represents to these students.

Too simplistic a representation of educational progression routes is criticised by the author in the light of the totality of individuals' experiences (often in spite of the system) and lives. Questions are raised about existing practices, resulting largely from the inadequate provision, including resources, to match expansion in access to HE. Pursuit of mere vocational needs is rejected in favour of a holistic perception of education.

West offers no explicitly formal statement of objectives, conclusion, or set of recommendations, possibly in line with the format of the book and ethos of the project. The aim was to explore HE, as:

... potentially a space in which to manage and transcend feelings of marginalization, meaninglessness and inauthenticity in interaction with others; in which it is possible, given their support and encouragement, to compose a new life, a different story and a more cohesive self (West, 1996, p.10).

The aim as stated in the interviewees' guidance notes is:

... to understand the motivation of Access students in depth ... with a view to understanding participation in learning, and motivation more generally, in the total context of a person's life history and current circumstances (*ibid.*, p. 219).

Elsewhere there is mention of the wish to listen to and reflect voices, as to why adults seek HE entry "at particular stages in their lives and what participation represents to them in the context of past, present and desired futures" (*ibid.*, p.

ix). Although the initial aim is not clearly defined here, it evolved into that of:

... documenting evolving narratives of self, motive, life history and education. The research ... frame of reference ... [was] to consider the interplay of personal and public worlds, intimate and wider social experience, past, present and future (*ibid.*, p.xi).

The move was away from why people participate and the meaning participation has for them towards a reflection of personal experience set within the wider context and possibilities of agency and reconstituting self.

The book reveals the complex and contradictory picture in the literature on motivation, whose theoretical bases tend to be exclusively sociological or psychological (the US emphasis). Those reviewed by West are outlined here, with indication of those reviewed above by Courtney (1992). The four main examples of the psychological are:- lifecycle theory (see p.45), where needs differ at each chronological stage (Levinson, 1978); hierarchy of needs, with higher orders of needs replacing lower ones, as achieved (Maslow, 1968); motivational orientation (see p.48), according to personality and temperament (Houle, 1961); and

decision-making theory, influencing sequence and manner of decisions

(Courtney, 1992).

Lifecycle theory

The main feature of lifecycle theory pinpointed by West is the predominant need in middle age of the earlier neglected (often repressed) artistic and spiritual aspects of the personality in contrast to earlier drives to satisfy career urges and competition. Such a need accords with searching for meaning and satisfaction in life, likened by Levinson as a move to wholeness and integration. This search for spiritual values, common at later stages in an individual's life, can become translated, for example, into a 'philanthropic' wish to promote the careers of younger colleagues.

This model, as West states, is flawed in that it is founded on "mainly North American, male lifestyles and biographical trajectories" (West, 1996, p.6).

Similarly, Fraser (1995) expresses the need for an extension of research into comparative life-cycles to include studies of women, citing Belenky *et al.*, (1986) as the only one in existence. Incidentally, in her study on admission into HE, Fraser sees in students' motivation the desire for change being expressed largely in career terms (Fraser, 1995, p.140).

As in West, references made to Levinson's lifecycle theory elsewhere in the literature (where more recent life stage studies, such as those in Courtney, rarely appear) assume its salient features are solely the earlier neglected creative elements of a person's life, although these are only appropriate for those in middle life (those of 40-47 to approximately 65 years old). This appears

implicitly to ignore younger adults (included in my study) whose concerns differ from older adults’.

According to Levinson, since those in early adulthood (the 20s and 30s) are initially exploring possibilities and building a provisional life structure, the development of mentor relationships (the ‘sponsor’) and forming a ‘dream’ in the life plan (see Winnicott, 1965) are vital. The dream, like the ‘vision’ found in the field of literature, reflects the kind of life they want to lead, and lends a sense of purpose and aliveness. Consequences of compromising this dream and hence personal fulfilment, recur in later life. During their 30s, emphasis moves towards establishing a niche then self-advancement.

Middle adulthood begins with: the ‘mid-life crisis’ transitional phase (40 to 45-46) revision of goals; through reappraisal of the past (a process of “de-illusionment”, see Levinson, 1978, p.192); modifying the life structure (according to changes, whether external such as divorce, or internal such as developing personal values); and, individuation. Polarities occur at each life transition but are first successfully dealt with at mid-life individuation (*ibid.*, p.197), between the young /old, destruction /creation, masculine /feminine (with expression of the feminine side possible for men) and, attachment /separation. From Levinson’s perspective, attachment “reflected in a man’s search for involvement, mastery, control, and material and emotional income” (*ibid.*, p.336), gives way to a stronger sense of self and hence greater separation from the world (this echoes those ‘needs’ in Maslow criticised by West below).

Levinson also mentions briefly late adulthood which incorporates negative issues of the 'generation gap' and ageing (with accompanying symbolism of the wise, creative elder) and necessitates the resolving of differences to acquire a sense of integrity in one's life.

Hierarchy of needs

Maslow's (1968) hierarchy follows a rigid sequence of needs, according to basic physiological then safety requirements, then love and belongingness, self esteem, and ultimately, self actualisation (autonomy). West questions this since needs to do with personal relationships figure merely as a stepping stone to more 'desirable' goals. These favour the independent and objective above the subjective and connected, which West points out is symptomatic of cultural (especially in education) reflections of the white, male middle-class.

Motivational orientation

Motivational orientation (Houle, 1961) is summarised by West as individual personality differences leading to people's different educational ends, the distinction being chiefly between the social, and love of the subject which becomes the central feature of the life of those 'learning oriented'. West however discovered that since many individuals reported several participation reasons, motives were neither exclusive nor hierarchical, being a matter of emphasis rather than distinction.

Decision-making theory

Courtney's (1992) model of predictive theory, based on empirical observation, was examined by West who considered this decision-making approach problematic as its focus is on immediate actions rather than the origins and causes of behaviour, and thus does not allow for past and present meanings behind learners' decisions.

Sociological theory

Sociologists, Hopper and Osborn (1975) (see p.23) suggested education reflected a desire for adults to break free from the difficulties of marginality. A similar sociological theory is that of managing change (see p.35) (Courtney, 1992), particularly at times of crisis, whereby education offers adults the possibility of a supportive environment to reconstitute a self. Drawing on these, West developed his ideas on the adult learner.

West's theory of adult learner motivation

West summarised Hopper and Osborn's sample as displaying great uncertainty as to who or what they were, not belonging to a definitive group and dissatisfied with roles and relationships currently offered at work or home. Progress beyond early educational success was thwarted, so although aware of their ability and potential they lacked confidence. Further education promised a possible way out of current difficulties. Overall, HE enrolment was felt to figure at a critical change period in people's lives as a means of overcoming the intolerable situation that further insecurity would present. He proposed their theory of marginality as a

means of combining the subjective and the cultural, and explaining individual differences.

West felt that Courtney (1992) also illustrates the dynamics of individuals' lives, with moments of crisis engendering strong doubts over identity, possibly resolved through the change mechanism of education. His social definition of education as a supportive culture implies the role of significant others in the rebuilding of a new self, a process he likens to a struggle necessarily dependent on support, that can promote a willingness to take risks.

West goes on to place such personal struggles in the "culture of late modernity [which] constantly precipitates crises of, as well as opportunities for, self" (West, 1996, p.8). The uncertainties of late capitalist modernity (he cites Frosh, 1991; Giddens, 1991) suggest "individuals have to make more of their own choices and construct more of their own meanings and biographies" (West, 1996, pp.8-9).

Essential here in countering cultural instability are either maintenance of a continuously revised biographical narrative, the "reflexive project of the self" (see Giddens, 1991) or, creativity in preference to a defensive stance against change.

The paradox of opportunities for experimenting with self against this fractured backdrop depends on the strength of self (see below in comparison, West's views on postmodernism, p.55).

The author gradually develops his hypothesis that HE can offer adult learners space to experiment with their identities, to explore the possibilities of new lives and manage change, through their:

... individual responses to the insecurities of modern life and how fragmentation may be exploited, however contingently, in a new

politics of identity and self through higher education (West, 1996, p.187).

In West's studies, rather than the confident assimilation of new identities, there appeared dilemmas for the students surrounding study, home and friendships in their anticipated transition. This reinforced West's wish for a longitudinal study, to allow for more in-depth exploration of these evolving stories, which were "intense and mutual searches for meaning" (*ibid.*, p. 12), facilitated by the use of interview transcripts, returned for comment at subsequent interviews, and personal journals. West also paralleled his own experiences with those of participants, in a sharing of stories which allowed him to make sense of their stories as much as his own. Thus, biographical and reflexive methods were used as part of a life history approach to chronicle and analyse experiences, within an interdisciplinary framework, including aspects of feminist perspectives (he cites Belenky *et al.*, 1986; Flax 1990).

To explore why certain individuals may take "biographical risks" (West, 1996, p.9), West's framework also incorporated psychoanalytic theory since this goes beyond psychological theory, founded on the subjective origins of individual meanings and actions. Such methods inevitably entailed ethical issues surrounding participants' welfare and care about the boundaries between research and therapy, which were resolved by the use of forms outlining guidance issues and conditions of use.

West also addressed issues of the relative equality of relationships with participants and power /control of the researcher, with considerations of alienated knowledge, misinterpretation and intrusion. The voice of the participant does not

appear as explicit as the author initially intended, appearing in the book largely as reflections from the author's perspective, while they are referred to at the end of the *Acknowledgements*:

... last but not least, to the learners who gave time, energy, selves and stories to the work ... all the students remain with me, sustaining a faith in, and a vision of, the possibilities for selves (*ibid.*, p.xiii).

Because West had more time than the participants to consider the material generated from the interviews, he concludes that "in the final resort the conclusions are more mine than shared" (*ibid.*, p.212), so that the intended shared reflexivity through dialogue was slightly compromised. He also acknowledged these problems became compounded by his use of psychoanalytical theory, yet he felt such a biographical approach, although creating a risk where sensitive issues arose and the role of therapy necessarily became implicated, still offers a means of empowerment to overcome oppression.

West's sample comprised people in their 30s, although some were older, and over two-thirds were women. They formed a diverse group from a wide spectrum of backgrounds, whose communities were undergoing economic and social crisis, and many of them emerged as having also experienced oppressive personal histories or recently undergone significant life crises. The author wished to reflect these seldom heard "voices from the margins" (*ibid.*, p.xi) of the socially disadvantaged. Rather than anonymising subjects (while anonymising identities), as is characteristic of quantitative research approaches (see p.20), West employed fictitious names and summarised the main features of their lives in the form of well depicted, individual case studies.

These were presented as chapters interlinked around a complex thematic structure, combining Thompson's (1988) three proposals for interpreting life history material. Reactions to change were explored in individual case studies, some of which were paired to illustrate common themes, such as the chapter exploring men's as compared to women's responses to major transitions. Connections are made across cases to examine the contemporary "paradox of self" (West, 1996, p.14), examples of which, contrasting experiences of learning, were extracted to inform HE policy makers. The case studies' wide-ranging introductory quotations summarise key issues, such as the autobiographical: "There is a great deal of unmapped country within us ... an explanation of our gusts and storms" (George Eliot, "Daniel Deronda", quoted in West, 1996, p.17). The pattern of the book thus reflects its basic thesis, that education is no "simple linear progression towards a surer self-image, greater confidence, psychological and material security and personal agency", but a fragmentary process (between private/public, experiential/academic).

The 15 case studies begin with an examination of a woman's separate career and personal motivation in *On Becoming a Solicitor*, which challenges the researcher to adopt appropriate biographical methods. *Telling Stories* contrasts Brenda and Paul's lives, scripted by history yet realising change through risk taking and the role of significant others. One chapter explores the contradictory nature of men's work (alienating/empowering), then *Men Talking: Thanet and the Poetic Object of Fishing* reveals how a more integrated self was attained through the self objects of higher education, fishing and renegotiated relationships. Similarly, two women who overcame the destabilisation their partners could not cope with, are

compared with two whose personal and occupational insecurities were interwoven. The theme in *Border Country* is of a reclaimed versus a conflicting cultural identity, while *East and West* sets two Asians' cultural identity against a background of racism and conflicting personal interests.

The narrative framework of the book reflects these fragmented lives, its style as West acknowledges, "developed in ways which appeared closer to the work of the novelist, poet and story-teller than the conventional social scientist" (West, 1996, p.32) which suggests the need for the reader's holistic perspective:

... there was also a sense of excitement in weaving patterns from fragments of experience ... and the concern to understand whole stories rather than simply linguistic fragments (*ibid.*, p.14).

This preference for analysis of narrative structure over the more rigid methods of linguistic analysis was also informed by the evolving nature of stories (citing Rosen, 1993). Similarly, data analysis using grounded theory was rejected, since:

... themes had already been generated in a highly interactive, dynamic process of testing and retesting hypotheses and refining them in the light of new experience, and ... this was always a provisional process, without a final answer or conclusion (West, 1996, p.31).

Therefore, the many themes identified were not necessarily explicitly explored, nor conclusive solutions offered. What can be drawn from these people's experiences appears to reflect the study's themes of reflexivity and narrativity: that of the dynamic, ongoing process of these people's lives as they evolve, and the importance of the need to reclaim past experience as a conduit to future self actuation and agency.

The original aim of the book was felt to have been achieved by means of the case study presentations:

The outcome was a much fuller picture of why adults learn but the conversations and interpretations might have continued indefinitely. These are stories and speculations without endings (*ibid.*, p.xi).

Its significance lies rather in suggesting issues than in providing clear-cut conclusions with recommendations, this inconclusiveness echoing Usher and Edwards' postmodernist provisionality (see below, p.58). Such narratives are "never complete. There is always another perspective ... [on] the fragments of experience. The stories remain contingent and their evolution uncertain" (*ibid.*, p.217).

Literature on postmodernism

In contrast with the significance modernism has for his study, West also raises postmodernism as representing part of the contemporary attempt to "re-draw the boundaries" (West, 1996, p.24) between the personal and the academic (he cites Flax, 1990; Frosh, 1991; and Hoar *et al.*, 1995). In this attempt the instrumental model in HE has distanced and dominated "critical and oppositional discourses" (West, 1996, p.205) emerging from diverse sources. He acknowledges his orientation is more modernist than postmodern, and so his tendency in this study towards the focus on integration imparts: "cohesive selves and a unifying narrative in managing change" (*ibid.*, p.209). Such integration represses those discourses defying a neat fit:

Fragmentation, in these terms, is to be celebrated not regretted: there are many potential selves and stories to narrate in a kaleidoscope of reflexive, diverse and endless possibilities (*ibid.*).

Since it constrains "the radical possibilities inherent in disintegration" (*ibid.*) this also limits the possibilities for exploration of identity and expression of a

renewed individualism, with “reconstruction in new, exciting and variable ways in a play of multiple identity and limitless invention” (*ibid.*, p.210). The “bits and pieces” evident in these “disjointed” stories offer the promise of “new, diverse and democratized cultures” (*ibid.*). West suggests there is more to a self than such positions alone afford, thus he depicts the importance of the struggle for cohesion as a necessity at the heart of the individual’s search and basis for experiment:

It is only when self becomes sufficiently strong that one can enthusiastically enter transitional space - between one’s self and others, reality and illusion - to take risks (*ibid.*, p.211).

The role of transformational learning, alongside that of biography, is thus central to his study.

Among other examples of the implications of postmodernism is the exploration of Usher and Edwards of the impact of key writers on postmodern social theory. Postmodernism is posited as complex, multiform and resistant to simplistic explanation, characterised by “questioning and critique, rather than the positing of confident alternatives” (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p.209). Similar to West’s stance, Usher and Edwards’ rationale for an educational system is based on the humanist idea of the individual’s potential to become a “self-motivated, self-directing, rational subject, capable of exercising individual agency” (*ibid.*, p.2), through the interventions of the “fully autonomous” educator (*ibid.*, pp.24-25).

Through “heightened awareness of the significance of language, discourse and socio-cultural locatedness” (*ibid.*, p.10), Usher and Edwards argue that there is a denial of “scientific method and of the stance of objectivity and value-neutrality in the making of knowledge claims” (*ibid.*). Characteristic of the postmodern is a world of change and instability: “it is complexity, a myriad of meanings, rather

than profundity, the one deep meaning, which is the norm” (*ibid.*), and consequent sense of fragmentation in people’s lives. The politics of research has implications for power relations and reflexivity, and yet:

.. even when we have some confidence that our research is useful or even emancipatory, we are still ‘objectifying’, still speaking *for* others ... still attempting to mould subjectivities in a modernist way ... Thus an awareness of reflexivity enables us to interrogate our own practices of research, in terms of how they can become part of dominant and oppressive discourses through a ‘reflexive’ acceptance of the neutrality of research (*ibid.*, p.152).

The role of feminism in the postmodern assists a valuing of experiential learning and recognition of feelings:

.. the malleability of personal identity is both a source of hope and an occasion for despair. Hope, because it means that change is always possible; despair because it implies that a belief in the real, true, authentic self is a fanciful indulgence (Tennant 1988, p.64).

This lends an important dimension to educational theory, practice and development: “the consequent fragmentation and decentring which is associated with the postmodern moment” (*ibid.*).

Thus the ambiguous contradiction between emancipation and oppression persists. Given their standpoint as provisional, and their approach as oblique, Usher and Edwards arbitrary observations include the possibility of certain dimensions to the postmodern, reinvigorating modern practice in education. They speculate on possible aspects of education as more diverse, with different levels and kinds of participation, and a general loosening of boundaries. No conclusion is possible as “the ‘answers’ lie in the process of continually asking ‘questions’ ” (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p.213) and so are provisional.

While Usher and Edwards foreground some interesting notions about education as it affects adults in the postmodern, they do not provide a consideration of the implications for adult education. Stronach and Maclure however, offer a useful postmodern perspective based on empirical evidence, which is particularly significant for my study. Although published after I had begun my research, *Educational Research Undone: the Postmodern Embrace*, (1997) offers insights into and parallels with, aspects of my study.

Although their focus is on schooling rather than the adult sector, issues of relevance here include that of people as represented by portraits, fragmentation of people's lives (people having experienced and so expecting further change), and the arduous nature of data analysis in this type of qualitative approach. Overall, they demonstrate that attempts to render the text coherent are at odds with the current ideology.

As a practical exploration of methodology in action, their practical stance is particularly useful, "in terms of research methodology and praxis ... [in addressing] a specific 'site' of deconstruction, 'identity' " (Stronach and Maclure, 1997, p.34). In their chapter, *Jack in two boxes: a postmodern perspective on the transformation of persons into portraits*, they questioned the representation of individuals, and especially the link between accounts and "reality" which makes visible "some of the textual devices that writers use to achieve the semblance of coherence and authenticity in their research portraits" (*ibid.*).

To this end the authors compared their narrative portraits (written independently) as part of their research project about teachers' lives and jobs. Based upon the

same interview material, the portraits are nonetheless distinctly different, raising questions as to the person-portrait relationship, and the nature of the process involved. They propound that 'portrait' means:

... something like a self-encapsulation, a theorizing in which the researcher facilitates the self-expression of the other, leaving control in the hands of the subject in so far as it is possible (*ibid.*).

This task involves representation both as a realistic likeness and, by acting as "a kind of agent for the subject" (*ibid.*) which entails the interests and articulation of the subject's voice (implicating the celebratory aspect of this task). I found the dilemma this entailed problematic during analysis of the findings when compared to the interviews.

They likened this researcher-subject relationship to a dialogue, since it is a collaborative 'inductive' process, and suggest the metaphor of a 'struggle'. This illustrates the attempt to " 'subdue' the raw material of the interview data and bring it under the regime of a tidy, coherent textual structure", even at the risk of misrepresenting the 'self', as well as the subject's "rescue attempt" after negotiating (*ibid.*, p.35).

Also questioned is the notion of the writer as absent from their own work, a device which should convince the reader of the 'authenticity' of a description: "the appearance of artlessness is a rather artful business" (*ibid.*). These "self-effacing aspirations" render the writer "often most visible and intrusive when ... trying to be reticent", and "the subject seldom less audible than when he seems to be speaking for himself" (*ibid.*). This latter issue was a concern I had felt about many research participants' voices, including those in West. The rendering of people's accounts (which remain inherently "contextual ... inconcludable and

reflexive” (*ibid.*, p.56)), appears to present an irreconcilable paradox, notwithstanding the attempt to subsume a reflexive intention within the text.

Stronach and Maclure’s separate narrative (apparently ‘naturalistic’) accounts, highlight the person-portrait links and question the notion of a ‘life’ as a textual product. The account by Stronach followed content analysis and was illustrated with quotations. These appeared more as “a series of summary judgements” interspersed with links which acted “more like summaries than judgements” (*ibid.*, p.46).

In the authors’ subsequent analysis of the two accounts, his was deemed a “male-author-saturated” text which manipulated the subject Jack, (a headteacher for 20 years, of a first school throughout its various evolutions). This developed into a male status story, yet Jack was not preoccupied with career according to the majority of the data.

A relation between plot and theory was sought, to explain the ‘meaning’ of the critical incidents and their implications, which in this covert critique of Jack . required a necessarily unhappy ‘ending’. The use of quotations allowed Jack to speak for himself and so presented a “depth theory” (as opposed to the suspect “cover-up” surface data). This resolved the author’s problem of otherwise having to summarise aspects of this “depth theory”. It appeared that Stronach had presented the narrative as three opposing resolutions, and Jack’s triumphs which were deemed a form of pride hence necessitated a ‘fall’. In terms of satisfying the narrative logic of the text, a resolution of the struggle was necessary.

Other readers' efforts to remove the intrusiveness of the author established more 'authentic' readings of Jack either as a man at odds with himself or at face value, both of which ignore the implicit editing. They posit the notion that, rather than an authentic portrait, the problem may be to do with assumptions about personhood; rather than representation it may be about conceptualisation (and so making problematic what we mean by a 'person').

The account by Maclure was felt to be a more "convincing", hence authentic and valid portrayal, thus confirming "methodological soundness and ... ethical probity" (*ibid.*, p.49). Since the writer was apparently effaced from the account, this contributed to a reducing of the "troubling gap" between language and reality.

They suggest that:

... recognition, authenticity and validity are not methodological or ethical phenomena at all ... but rather *textual* ones - the effects of particular generic conventions for representing reality (*ibid.*).

The strategies of her discourse centre on a recognisable story with beginning, middle and (textual) end, whose account is thus apparently empathic. This powerful explanatory structure lends meaning to the episodes:

So stories always work backwards as well as forwards: as the text accumulates, it spins itself into the form of a story; but it is also its overall structure *as* a story that allows us to make sense, retrospectively, of the individual elements (*ibid.*, p.50).

Similarly, the stylistic devices lend authenticity, such as use of the present tense and vivid detail to impart immediacy, of repetition and increasing signals to project a forward impetus, while the "act of ventriloquism" and authorial "nudges" give a retrospective slant on Jack's earlier life, particularly the artifice of creating a last word which lends a nostalgic retrospection (*ibid.*, p.51).

In this second story the simple “classic realism” (*ibid.*, p.53) provides a coherent, unified character as the source of action. Essentially, Jack remains the “same person” as in his youth, an identity at the core of his life choices. The plausibility of this portrait is attributable to the “tyranny of the text” rather than empathy between writer and subject. To provide consistency and resolve contradiction such texts must “insinuate a shared point of view between reader and writer” (*ibid.*) and conceal. Omissions might have concealed data that would not fit the “action man” thesis, one perhaps explicable as a “covert feminist critique” which attempts to allude indirectly to Jack’s sexism (*ibid.*, p.54).

At the follow-up interview ‘rescue attempt’ Jack’s reinterpretation of the text not only implicated the subject-researcher relationship (which alternated between democratic and authoritarian), but also revealed a different “plot structure”. Rather than the narrow ‘action man’ thesis, his analogy of a tree for his life had the broader core of an enthusiastic and positive nature. Rarely considered during research, this ‘struggle’ demonstrates the authors as “conciliatory in face-to-face encounters, but implacable in the construction of their texts” (*ibid.*).

Life history research may enforce too narrow a realist type of structure upon participants. Another possible approach to biography may be as discontinuous, with an episodic narrative form, allowing contradictory versions of the person to be developed from his fragmented experiences:

It seemed arbitrary to offer core identities for Jack, and increasingly necessary to find ways of representing the plurality and contradiction of his - and no doubt everyone’s - ideas and selves (*ibid.*, p.56).

An alternative might be through an examination of reflexivity and the researcher's involvement in the construction of text, since Stronach and Maclure problematise the routine acceptance and analysis of accounts, and finally posit:

Narratives that promote coherence, singularity and closure, and which aim to set up a cosy camaraderie with the reader, are ultimately conservative and uncritical of prevailing ideological and representational arrangements (*ibid.*, p.57).

As is clear from Stronach and Maclure's analysis of the subject-researcher dynamic, the narrative form remains problematic and open to question. This is a valuable perspective to adopt when embarking upon research entailing the representation of persons through the development of portraits (which reflect necessarily fragmented experiences), and when encountering the difficulties surrounding qualitative means of data analysis.

Attempts to impose a contrived form upon an account, and produce a cohesive and coherent text (West's "cohesive selves and a unifying narrative in managing change" (1996, p.209)), are questionable when consideration has to be given to diversity, reflexivity and the postmodern. The challenge lies in producing an integrated account yet permitting oneself and one's participants the freedom to express our own voices in a manner suggested by West's "kaleidoscope" (*ibid.*) of possibilities.

Conclusion

Whilst the aim of this research is to extend the work of West by contrasting groups on two different types of course so that views and perceptions might be compared among a small sample of mature students, consideration would be given to issues raised in the above examination of the literature.

Account would be taken of the particular, not the general, of the value and worth of each individual's story, of their particular circumstances (family, work and social setting) against which educational participation is yet another element. These were to be illustrated by means of each person's individual story and portrait. The impact that a return to learning has upon the students themselves (rather than the strategic implications for the institutions attended) is thus the focus of this research.

Hence, implicit in the development of the methodology for my study, was the challenge presented by the celebratory aspect of fragmentation and diversity, the reflexive mode, and a perspective founded more on the postmodern than the modern, in the portrayal of participants' voices.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction: the nature of the research

Since my aim in this research was to seek adult learners' views and perceptions, this necessitated an empirical study akin to an attitudinal survey and as such favoured a qualitative perspective. Rather than having a specific research design built into the original study, my research strategy was grounded in those major implications arising from the review of the literature (as outlined above), and largely the catalyst of the work by West (1996), discussed in Chapter 2.

Although a qualitative stance could be identified as most suitable for the subject area, I felt it necessary, however, to keep an open mind as the research strategy developed during the planning stage. This would enable an evolving consideration of the central issues surrounding the portrayal of participants and representation of voice. This led to the inclusion of some quantitative elements and the further inclusion of additional specific methods, in line with the subject area. As Bell notes:

Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses and each is particularly suitable for a particular context. The approach adopted and the methods of data collection selected will depend on the nature of the inquiry and the type of information required (Bell, 1995, p. 6).

The purpose of this study is that of basic research, which aims to add to our general knowledge, having an audience rooted in the scholarly and scientific communities (Ely *et al.*, 1991). In contrast to basic research, applied research aims to provide directly applicable improvements to educational practice as seen in the action

research model, rooted in “reflective practice” (Schön, 1983), whereby the teacher is a “practitioner-researcher.” It is a problem-solving (“on-the-spot”) procedure “designed to deal with a concrete problem ... the step-by-step process is constantly monitored ... so that the ensuing feedback may be translated into modifications” (Cohen & Manion, 1989, p.223). Besides embodying ‘relevance’, a major advantage of this prevalent style of research for the educator is the practical result of the researcher becoming an active change agent, not at issue in basic research such as this study.

Rigour is a distinctive feature of research, as in the definition of Howard and Sharp (1983, p. 6), “seeking through methodical processes to add to one’s own body of knowledge and, hopefully, to that of others, by the discovery of non-trivial facts and insights.” Bell (1995) emphasises this systematic nature of the research approach as imperative and typifies such research as follows, “evidence is collected systematically, the relationship between variables is studied and the study is methodically planned” (p. 8).

This rigour, in planning, execution and analysis, counters the criticism that qualitative research is ‘unscientific.’ Bogdan and Biklen (1982) support the ‘scientific’ claim, while Nisbet and Watt (1984) further argue such studies go beyond scientific research, being not only concerned with systematic collection of evidence, but also the interaction of factors and events:

Statistical analysis can identify important determining factors in a problem area, but to establish how these factors relate to each other in the real situation, it may be necessary to examine a specific case systematically and in detail (Nisbet and Watt, 1984, p. 73).

The qualitative approach

Qualitative approaches are often defined in terms of their antithesis to quantitative approaches, for example, "... any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.17). A comparison is provided by Bell:

Quantitative researchers collect facts and study the relationship of one set of facts to another. They measure, using scientific techniques that are likely to produce quantified and, if possible, generalizable conclusions. Researchers adopting a qualitative perspective are more concerned to understand individuals' perceptions of the world. They seek insight rather than statistical analysis. They doubt whether social 'facts' exist and question whether a 'scientific' approach can be used when dealing with human beings (Bell, 1995, pp.5-6).

The main features of qualitative research are that it studies behaviour in everyday contexts, is usually small in scale, focussing on a single setting, group or individual and so can be, "... about persons' lives, stories, behavior, but also about organizational functioning, social movements, or interactional relationships" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). It takes in a range of sources which avoid deliberately contrived experimental conditions, in favour of unstructured data collection approaches. These can be comprised of informal conversation or observation, or semi-structured interview, and produce data in the form of words, such as transcripts, personal documents, memos and field notes. An alternative is data in the form of pictures, including photographs and videotapes.

However unstructured the data collection may be, this does not detract from its systematic nature, as Hammersley argues "... initially the data are collected in as raw

a form, and on as wide a front, as feasible” (Hammersley, 1990, p.2). Nor is analysis compromised, as it entails interpretive approaches to the meanings and functions of human behaviour and actions, via explanation and description:

Whereas the quantitative researcher is apt to record a small set of previously identified variables, the qualitative researcher seeks a psychologically rich, in-depth understanding of the individual, and would argue that experimental and quasi-experimental methods cannot do justice to describing phenomena such as ... the experience of the homeless (Searight, 1990, in Rudestam and Newton, 1992, p. 31).

This may be supported by quantitative methods, although with “... statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most” (Hammersley, 1990, p.2).

The enhanced status and increasing usage of qualitative as opposed to quantitative approaches have led to the view that they are more appropriate for the collection and analysis of data in the social sciences. While each has its recommendations, neither should now be considered as necessarily discrete, some combination often seen as preferable, as this can better inform the research being undertaken.

Qualitative research originally derived from anthropology but was influenced by the natural sciences with the imposition of a ‘scientific’ model in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1960s, ethnography began to regain its predominance, becoming much more widely advocated and practised in the field of British education (for a review of the United Kingdom (UK) in contrast to the US perspective on qualitative research tradition, see Atkinson *et al.*, 1988). During the next decade criticism of qualitative research again centred on perceived inadequacies in meeting the nominally scientific criteria of quantitative research.

This dichotomy could be ascribed to the highly competitive nature of the quantitative-qualitative divide over approaches such as experiments and survey methods. Characteristic of such quantitative forms as these was the need for a clear specification of hypotheses, to be tested using a carefully designed research strategy. Criticism occurs over its artificial settings and failure to take people's words and actions into account. It is over-reliant on the observable, and so tends to treat social phenomena as static and clearly defined outcomes of social and psychological factors. The instrumentalism behind quantitative approaches has been criticised (Habermas, 1973) as inappropriate to the social sciences as compared to interpretive approaches, with their impetus to overcome inter-cultural misunderstanding.

Qualitative approaches on the other hand uniquely possess certain fundamental assumptions about the true nature of human society, thus enabling the three methodological bases of naturalism, understanding and discovery (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), which I will now examine in turn:

(a) 'Naturalistic inquiry' captures the essence of naturally occurring human behaviours, within their unique, natural settings (as opposed to laboratory conditions). The context of an action is emphasised by Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p. 27), "To divorce the act, word or gesture from its context, is for the qualitative researcher, to lose sight of significance." Thus the totality of experience is essential and every element should be studied so as to understand the experience as nearly as possible to the way its participants perceived it (Ross, 1988). Such data reveals

naturally occurring, everyday events in their normal setting, enabling a grasp of what 'real life' is like (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

(b) An understanding of cultural perspective is essential in order to explain human actions, whether in an unknown or more familiar society. The researcher has to integrate the polarised positions of both insider and outsider. It needs to be analysed so that the experiences are not treated judgementally but presented in ways that permit greater understanding: the resulting 'reasoned judgement' (Ross, 1988) arising from both involvement in participants' experiences and the recording of their understandings and interpretations of the experiences. This requires participants to speak for themselves, this perspective revealing "the inner dynamics of situations - dynamics that are often visible to the outsider" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p. 30).

(c) Discovery-based research overrides the dangers inherent in the assumptions behind hypothesis testing. Here, explicit hypothesis is replaced by a broader perspective on a phenomenon, or practical problem, which is gradually narrowed and refined, along with an evolving theory (see 'grounded theory', Conrad, 1982; Denzin, 1978).

Approaches suitable for my research

Because my research was to be multi-layered, no single approach would be appropriate. Thus a multi-layered approach was adopted, the main features of which I summarise here.

Ethnographic Study

This naturalistic style of study focuses on a society, culture or group, into which the researcher becomes integrated:

... *ethnography* usually implies an intensive, ongoing involvement with individuals functioning in their everyday settings that is akin to, if not always identical with, the degree of immersion in a culture attained by anthropologists, who live in the society they study over a period of one or more years (Schofield, 1993, p.213).

Such participant observation, with its tendency towards a sharing of and, therefore, insight into experiences does not confer membership of the group but allows for the possibility of empathising with group norms, values and behaviour (Becker, 1970).

There are inherent dangers in social relationships with research subjects, ethical problems arising over covert methods, particularly the implications of dangerous or illegal activities to maintain credibility within the group, and the use of data acquired without permission. There may be a tendency to conform and thus identify too closely, with resultant bias in the analysis. The researcher may need time for assimilation, especially if new to the group, and to overcome problems of his role being explainable including to group 'gatekeepers'. Such issues result in protracted and lengthy timescales.

The particular group's representativeness of that type of group, is also questionable, requiring issues of generalisability to be addressed. This style, however, allows the researcher access to the group's closed world of intersubjectivity, providing insights into both group interaction and individuals' social and familial interactions. The researcher's values, judgements and theoretical ideas cannot be excluded in this approach and this has consequences for data analysis, as Punch argues, "[The

fieldworker's] social and emotional involvement in the research setting constitutes an important source of data" (Punch, 1986, p.14).

Case study

Particularly appropriate for the individual researcher, the case study allows for in-depth examination of one specific aspect of a problem, usually within a somewhat limited time-scale. Although equally systematic and methodical in design, this approach is very flexible, since the interaction between factors and events lend it to a choice among a wide variety of possible methods, including observation and interview. However, this also poses the difficulty of lack of standardisation, with the individual researcher's field skills of paramount importance as well as the need for ability in multi-methods. Such methods are also personally demanding in nature.

The interactive processes at work may be identified as crucial to the success or failure of an organisation or system in operation. A major criticism is the possibility of distortion inherent in a system reliant on a single researcher selecting both the study area and its data, which is often in the form of material that is difficult to cross check. Since generalisation is not usually possible, the value of case studies is often questioned, along with criticisms over lack of rigour and being time-consuming.

Difficulties to be considered include access, the need for opportunism, the distortion of biased procedure and of identifying too closely with the subject, and the necessity for constantly monitoring the interaction between developing theory and the emerging data (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990, on 'grounded theory').

Life history

The biographical method explores the relationship between social forces and personal character through analysis of an individual life. Although not limited to “the studied use and collection of life documents” (Denzin, 1989a, p.7) alone, it often includes:

... autobiographies, diaries, letters, obituaries, life histories, life stories, personal experience stories, oral histories, and personal histories (*ibid.*).

Difficulties of accessibility to relevant documents, and designing the research study so as to discover possible materials, necessitate building such discovery into the research plan.

The life experiences thus revealed, both unpredictable and unforeseeable, are self-consciously reflected upon and integrated as ‘self-formation’. How this self-formation arises from the self-consciousness of others provides the core of the biographical method. Since, however, subjectivity is the product of a variety of social discourses, together with a unique life history, the biographical method has an intra-reflexive aspect, implying on the part of researchers a need for awareness of their individual cultural position. Concerned with investigation of the narrative forms of accounts of lives and selves, biography has become increasingly referred to as an auto/biographical method (Sociology, 1993).

With its peculiar applicability to the analysis of all forms of cultural life, hermeneutical procedure is necessary in life history investigation, to understand the ‘narratives’ of lives (through the “appreciation of both that which is interpreted and

the interpreting self' (Erben, 1996, p.172)). Such narratives impose upon lived experience a cohering feature, constituting the reasons for thoughts and actions.

Biographical method attempts to reconcile the positivistic-interpretive divide, regarding the individual as a complex social identity. Since cultural texts are both social products and individual creations, their interpretation may be resolved by use of narrative analysis, entailing both positivistic (quantitative) and phenomenological (qualitative) analyses to build up a biographical picture. Successful completion of forms of the biographical method being implausible and unattainable (Erben, 1996) the aim is, rather:

... to provide more insight than hitherto available into the nature and meaning of individual lives; and given that individual lives are articulations of the cultural, it will provide insight also into the nature and meaning of society itself (*ibid.*).

The methods employed

My intentions in this research incorporated several relevant features of the three approaches discussed above. I decided that my study would provide an individual researcher's in-depth examination of two separate groups of learners, usually to be seen in their normal college setting throughout one academic year. The ethnographer's need for integration into the group would not be applicable, as covert methods were not the intention, nor was the case study restriction to one aspect of a problem.

Particularly appropriate were life history's use of documents, allied to the individual's (here, the various individuals') relationships within the social setting. Thus the questionnaire was to be devised in a form incorporating the characteristics of life documents, such as personal experience stories and diaries (hence the relevance of the developmental journals). The autobiographical element in my research would not require great introspection, though I would ask for some degree of reflection on personal experience, dependent upon the individual's willingness or ability to be self-revelatory.

The three approaches have inherent difficulties or benefits for the researcher.

Ethnography's problems include bias deriving from social relationships (to be mitigated by maintaining awareness) and generalisability (not at issue with a small sample which is not comparable to larger populations). Benefits I hoped for included access to a relatively closed world and insight into personal experience, through the possibility of engaging in an empathic relationship with participants (significant here being the researcher's stance).

Case study places demands upon the lone researcher (this would present a challenge) with problems of distortion and generalisability. While indicating the degree to which the sample is representative of other such groups, I would remain aware of the need for care in representing data accurately and rigorously. I would also need to address the difficulties of group accessibility and the demands of a developing theory.

Life history raises the difficulty of accessibility of documents (not anticipated in the matter of the students' journals), while accommodating opportunism to access documents as they become available. Other issues are the self being interpreted alongside what is being studied (considered in the questionnaire), use of narrative analysis (to account for both quantitative and qualitative aspects), and the 'unattainable' nature of the goal (emphasising rather, the aim of gaining unique insights into individual experiences).

Thus I hoped for the flexibility that multi-methods should afford me, amongst which life history methods are an essential element of my research, providing a structure for the collection of the most relevant forms of data. The intention in this qualitative style of research was not the examination of large numbers but the interview and observation of select groups, essentially to look and listen to individuals, then seek emerging themes to consider in the light of available motivational theory. This would not provide a final, conclusive statement but as faithful as possible a rendition of the situation and thoughts of those volunteering to participate. Such analysis can effectively offer a resource for other researchers, forming an archive of descriptive data available for reinterpretation.

The participants

My research arose out of my interest in adult learners and their experiences as students. I particularly wanted to look at the ways their experiences of becoming a student (often after a long break from secondary education) then continuing on into

being (and remaining) a student impacted upon them, in particular the intangible benefits they derived from the experience, rather than the factor of acquiring a certificate.

My general aim was to explore the relationship between motives and educational participation, including their past and present experiences. This was hoped to provide a reflection upon reasons for returning to education and a consideration of how education affects motives and feelings about self and others. I wanted, therefore, to explore the whole range of reasons that are given for adults re-entering education.

In order to explore these reasons I would seek the views of individuals, among groups of students who could be identified as adult 'returners', either as adult learners or mature students. Since vocational students are regarded in the literature as pursuing a course of study for instrumental purposes (to qualify for promotion, career enhancement or a change of occupation), I decided to compare students on both vocational and non-vocational courses (the latter recognised as having non-instrumental goals such as gaining self confidence, and interest in study for its own sake).

I hoped to pinpoint the differences between the motivational influences upon these two groups and also to gauge any similarities. This would provide interesting material for comparison with previous studies and might further inform the field of research into adult learners and mature students. Since both groups might (as with my sample) be studying with a view possibly to returning to or entering upon academic courses of study, this adds another dimension to the study, in terms of

motivational issues and impact on the field of research. It may also have implications for the requirement of HE to provide for adults' range of needs, particularly in view of recent HE expansion in the UK to a mass rather than élite system.

Sampling strategy

The particular groups chosen for this research were mature students on two courses leading to the possibility of HE degree level study (vocational or academic). The first group were on an Access Course and the second group were studying for a professional qualification in Training and Development. I had access to these two groups through being personal friends with each group's tutor, both of whom I had also worked with in a professional capacity as an educational consultant. Because of this means of sample selection, the groups chosen were not representative of the wider population, but nevertheless reflected fairly varied demographic characteristics.

In order to simplify the task for the tutors, and avoid taking up too much of their time, I sent them an outline of the study's aims and my requirements from the students. This limited direct involvement proved problematic. I was unable to gain access to the students' addresses as anticipated after the first meeting, in order to post them reminders and the demographic questionnaire, so I was careful to request addresses from further groups.

The Trainers

The Training qualification in question is the Certificate in Training Practice (CTP) which is accredited by the Institute of Personnel and Development (IPD), the national professional body which covers the whole field of Human Resource Development.

The course aimed to develop practical skills in both public and private organisations, over one year's study for one evening per week.

In the case of CTP provision in the geographical region chosen, no formal qualifications are required for entry onto local college courses, neither is it necessary to have, currently or in the past, any experience in training. Consequently, course participants are from widely differing backgrounds, from the unemployed to those in paid or unpaid work, and with diverse cultural, social, gender and age profiles. As with Access students, the CTP Certificate course leads to the possibility of further study, although here it can be as a direct progression onto the diploma course.

It is perhaps symptomatic of the general picture in FE that men recently formed 95% on such Trainer courses but now number 5%. Although certification is becoming more essential, the work of their profession is less prestigious and thus lower paid, probably accounting for its opening out to more women.

The college running the course is set in an estate of council rented houses, some now privately owned. As the college delivered few evening classes, they were housed in a nearby smaller annexe. This had been converted from its original use as a purpose-built secondary school of the 1960s, with recent refurbishment to be pleasantly comfortable, fully carpeted with low-key lighting and new furniture. This made

Thornbury Centre a more welcoming environment for the targeted client group, adults on part-time professional courses.

There were, however, disadvantages to being in the annexe. The mature students had very little contact with full-time students, and no access to the college library which was closed during the evening. If they wanted to arrange a tutorial they had to come in during the day when teaching staff, in particular part-time staff, could make themselves available.

Few of the Trainers live locally, unlike the Access students who form a similar population type with shared cultural norms. For the Trainers, therefore, their shared interest lies in the subject matter, and being part of the same profession. They contrasted with the Access group, many of whom came from the same community, had often been to school together, and had family connections through work, for example, in coal mining. These Access students lived within a short bus ride from college, whereas most of the Trainers had between nine and 26 miles to travel.

My contact in the college offered his tutorial group of Trainers for a pilot study in the autumn, with the opportunity for his other three tutor groups to be invited to form another group later. A meeting was arranged for me with the students before their normal three hourly evening session. Six students volunteered, with another two in the second group and one postal volunteer. This gave me a sample group of nine Trainers.

The Access students

The second group (of Access students) I pinpointed was studying full-time on a Social Studies and Humanities day course for up to four days per week over one to two years. The course offers progression to HE programmes in a range of subject areas, through the accumulation of Open College Network (OCN) credits at each of the four levels of study. Though aiming nominally for university, some students choose to improve their education for other reasons.

‘Access’ is a term applied to students usually lacking any formal qualifications who are hoping to enter a course in FE or HE and are preparing for this by following a preparatory course. Access courses are mainly run in the FE sector, and the recent adoption of a mass rather than an élitist model has ensured that Access programmes are now an accepted pathway into HE. Such non-traditional entrants can form a diverse group, from a variety of backgrounds.

This route is open to mature students over 20 years old who have had a break from education and left school with few qualifications. However, comparison with the Trainers shows this Access group to have a higher level of academic achievement while at school and also subsequently. This may be symptomatic of the rising GCSE profile of the country in general, a factor that will be significant for the future of Access course provision. The college running this Access course was situated in the city centre. City College was originally built in the early 1960s as a large technical college, whose apparently unchanged uncarpeted rooms, with their blackboards and rows of tables and chairs resemble the traditional classroom.

My contact arranged for me to meet two groups of Access students. From these meetings, nine volunteered from one group and seven from the other. This gave me a sample group of 16 Access students. Tables 1 and 2 give details of the characteristics of the sample. To protect their confidentiality, all the names of interviewees and tutors, and the colleges concerned, were substituted for fictitious names.

Table 1: The Trainers (9 Students)

	<i>Age</i>	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Qualifications-school (& since school)</i>	<i>Employment currently in Training</i>	<i>Employment previously</i>
Don	49	married (m.)	2 CSEs (6 City & Guilds quals.)	full-time (f-t.)	6 yrs.f-t. in training and related areas
Geoff	49	m.	8 CSEs (ONC)	f-t.	other area but same company
Amanda	41	m.	None	p-t. as part of supervisor's post	f-t. other work
Felicity	24	single (s.)	GCSEs & A-levels (B.Ed, FE Certs.)	f-t.	f-t. university admin.
Jenny	29	m.	6 GCSEs (BTEC, vocational qual. in climbing)	left job-at home looking after baby	f-t. activity centre 9 yrs.
Liz	33	m.	O-levels & A-levels (part 1 OU degree)	f-t.	f-t. other work
Paula	34	m.	GCSEs (RSA admin.)	f-t.	f-t. other work
Sarah	41	m.	None (City & Guilds qual.)	unemployed	27 yrs. retail manager
Zoe	49	male partner	O-levels	f-t. social services officer	as now (33 yrs.)

Table 2: Access Students (16 students)

	Age	Marital status	Qualifications-school (& since school)	Employment currently	Employment previously
Mark	33	single (s.)	5 O-levels, 1 CSE (1 A-level, 6 City & Guilds quals.)	unemployed-incapacity benefit	full-time (f-t.) mature A-level student
Tom	40	female partner	6 CSE/O-levels (City & Guilds quals.)	part-time (p-t.) supermarket assistant & car paint sprayer	f-t. double glazing fabricator
Catherine	34	m.	8 CSEs, 2 AS-levels (1 O-level, 1 A-level, RSA health & hygiene, City & Guilds quals.)	unemployed	p-t. market researcher
Claire	24	s.	9 CSEs, 1 A-level	unemployed	unemployed
Debbie	23	male partner	9 CSEs, 1GCSE, 1 A-level	f-t. student	unemployed-disabled
Diane	35	male partner	None (4 level 2 OCN credits)	f-t. student	unemployed
Jan	30	female partner	6 CSEs (7 level 3, 1 level 4 OCN credits)	unpaid work	10 yrs. unpaid voluntary work
Judy	39	m.	6 O-levels (1 O-level, RSA typing)	p-t. secretary family business	occasional jobs in shops, cleaning & receptionist
Karen	26	female partner	1 O-level, 7CSEs (3CSEs, 3 AS-levels, 1GNVQ, City & Guilds qual.)	unemployed-incapacity benefit	f-t. bookshop assistant
Pat	38	male partner	None (4 level 2 OCN credits)	f-t. student	unemployed
Pippa	28	male partner	1CSE (GCSEs, RSA, OCN credits)	unpaid work	unpaid work
Rani	21	s.	5 GCSEs (City & Guilds qual.)	unemployed	unemployed
Sally	33	m.	O-levels (A-levels)	unemployed	clerical assistant
Sheila	38	lone parent	None (Nursery nurse qual.)	unemployed	short-term job
Suzi	21	s.	GCSEs (FE diploma)	f-t. student	unemployed
Vicky	38	m.	None (1GCSE, SEN, 2 level 2 OCN credits)	unemployed	20 yrs. NHS nurse

Theoretical underpinning to my research approach

The qualitative perspective I adopted was longitudinal and interpretive in treatment, incorporating partially the techniques of quantitative into the qualitative forms of analysis. Developmental research is central among many descriptive approaches which, in opposition to the experimental, tend to predominate in educational research, being concerned with:

... conditions or relationships that exist; practices that prevail; beliefs, points of view, or attitudes that are held; processes that are going on; effects that are being felt; or trends that are developing. At times, descriptive research is concerned with how *what is* or *what exists* is related to some preceding event that has influenced or affected a present condition or event (Best, 1970, in Cohen and Manion, 1980, p.68).

The developmental characteristics of the individual's physical, social, intellectual and emotional growth incorporate in this type of research the element of qualitative changes occurring over time, as seen in the various experiences of this study's participants within their particular educational setting and over the period of their current academic year. The longitudinal aspect of this research arises from its subject matter (concerning as it does, human growth and development), as well as the time element, being relatively short-term in duration (spanning approximately nine months).

This particular study can also be identified as a cohort study, with the same group of individuals followed throughout its duration and successive measures taken to collect information at various points. It can also be termed 'prospective' as it is ongoing, and the aim is to investigate the causal and individual variations, appropriately for a study

seeking patterns of development and changes affecting other characteristics. Any trends or apparent patterns can be evaluated more fully over time than would be possible from forms of study reliant upon single events. In this respect this research differs from the typical case study.

An interpretive treatment of the data was necessary because of the qualitative and longitudinal approaches, which were necessitated by the substance of the study, and its two most influential features, the addition of a novel pictorial method (see p.99) and the inspiration of West's influential text. Some methodological points related to West's work on adult learner motivation are raised here. Although West detailed at length the qualitative approaches he employed in his thorough examination of educational participation, I was sceptical of some aspects of the research base and of the absence of detail concerning the methodology. There appeared no explicit statement of the original study's objectives, and no separate project publication appears in the literature.

West's study raised several interesting issues, without specifying the means of analysis or definitive conclusions. Rather, it reflected the themes of reflexivity (see below) and narrativity: that of the dynamic, ongoing process of these people's lives as they evolve, and the importance of the need to reclaim past experience as a conduit to future self actuation and agency.

A sceptical questioning of the text and its research base greatly assisted in the development of my own critical stance. Such a stance was valuable in pinpointing the fact that many themes were identified, provoking my curiosity as to the means

employed and interest in exploring the range of associated issues. One of the most interesting aspects of the study was to do with the people who contributed. West addressed issues including power/control of the researcher and relationships with participants (see p.51). This was a concern I felt, and as well as the relative equality of such relationships, I also felt the need in my research, to look at the adults themselves, so as to give 'respect' to these people. This prompted me to investigate ways of providing the students' viewpoints from their individual perspectives, as far as is feasible in such a study.

As West also indicated, the researcher cannot be removed from the research (Hodkinson, 1997) and input of the individual researcher has to be modified, having identified the individual stance. An objective and open statement of my own position can only be stated in the light of the present, and of possible criticism about unconscious factors emerging.

While engaging with others in the research process, I am aware that my position is informed by a particular range of cultural experiences and constructs. As a middle-class, white, British woman my writing is identifiable as part of a specific intellectual and cultural base. Though gender, class, ethnic and religious features of an individual contribute to a person's social construct, at times suggesting certain prejudices, also apposite are the less tangible intellectual, aesthetic, spiritual and emotional factors that flavour their authorship. My stance can be illustrated as a wish to maintain a balance between being critical and searching as a researcher, and being unbiased and

empathising as an interviewer. This is at the heart of how I seek to reflect these people, and this stance influences my input into the research.

Reflexivity

Central to ethnography among other qualitative approaches, reflexivity emphasises the way that researchers express themselves, hence the emphasis placed upon the value of the field journal or diary, whose evidence is more than incidental to the other methodological tools. In particular this impacts on text and textual form:

... when it comes to writing up, the principle of reflexivity implies a number of things. The construction of the researcher's account is, in principle, no different from other varieties of account: just as there is no available neutral language of description, so there is no neutral mode of report. The reflexive researcher, then, must remain self-conscious as an author, and the chosen modes of writing should not be taken for granted. There can be no question, then, of viewing writing as a purely technical matter (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p.207).

The three main types of reflexive writing are: the continuous text, which implies that the series of events is logically and causally sequenced, and comprehensively accounted for; the broken text, representing "the unsystematic and serendipitous way data are frequently collected" (Scott & Usher, 1996, p.153); and the confessional text, which goes beyond outlining the data collection and writing up processes to include biographical detail:

... the reflexive understanding which is always potentially present in doing research is not primarily the gaining of an awareness of one's subjectivity, one's personality, temperament, values and standpoints. The desire that structures research is not the produce of a psychology which has been made 'public' through honest introspection. Rather it is the effect of sociality and the inscription of self in social practices, language and discourses which constitute the research process (Usher, 1993, p.9).

Beyond the mere social and biographical:

... the research act ... is shaped by the researcher's gender and personal biography. It is also a political act, involving values and ethics ... it is impossible to do value-neutral research (Denzin, 1989b, p.248).

Rather than a neutral medium, it is a form of discourse that expresses power relations. It also, uniquely in the field of education, provides a "self-referential element" (Scott & Usher, 1996, p.155) in that the ethnographer researches both the subject matter and himself simultaneously, and thus, because of the nature of education, both develops understandings of education and educates himself. This has implications of 'narrativity' (see Ricoeur, 1991), whereby humans locate themselves in the present by a continual process of revision and re-working of the past. Therefore, developing narrative versions of the past evolve from present activity, "the ethnographic text is therefore always located in the practice of education and is reflexively made" (Scott & Usher, 1996, p.156).

Another major aspect of the issue of reflexivity is its role for those researched in this study. This is significant since it concerns the meanings people invest in their own thoughts and ideas, and their representation as a textual account. A relevant cautionary note is raised by West:

The habit of reflexive introspection - exploring the roots and patterns of personal as well as collective behaviours - is an imperfect art without final conclusion. Most people for most of the time simply struggle to get through the day (West, 1996, pp. 5-6).

Since the nature of my study is biographical, this developmental approach, interpretive in nature, is appropriate, because people do not follow a linear pattern (in their study or careers), but rather a complex, multi-stranded route.

Planning the study

Based on the data requirements, means of data collection were selected as being appropriate for the participants. In view of the issues being explored, to do with individuals' attitudes, and the qualitative and longitudinal approaches, I intended to adopt a multi-layered methodology, which in the event developed into a more complex synthesis with the addition of further elements. I hoped this would provide a more complete representation of the students' experiences of education.

Central to the types of method initially chosen were the semi-structured interview (tape recorded) and written questionnaire, to be based upon the interview questions for completion after the meeting. These would be extended with my observations at both the opening and final interviews. Data on demographic information would be gathered by means of a standard questionnaire to utilise a quantitative form of analysis.

Due to the particular circumstances of identifying and recruiting suitable groups, the methods became modified. Thus, rather than individual interviews, group sessions were planned, to avoid discouraging participation through being time-consuming. This would also reinforce the researcher-participant relationship (with its associated issues of equality and difficulties of representation of power and authority). The written questionnaire was extended into a narrative form of expression. A further method, using the medium of drawing, was added at the pilot stage and became the main focus of the research strategy.

Comments were also sought from the pilot group, then final views from participants were included, together with feedback at the optional individual and paired interviews, observations and evaluation from tutors, and the course developmental journals of the vocational students (details of these appear below).

Certain issues and constraints decided the overall methodology. Difficulties for any study include accessibility to groups, cost, being time-consuming, sample mortality and control effect. Disadvantages of my particular study centred upon its small scale. Sample mortality might be avoided by various means of encouraging participation. Recruitment was simplified by means of an introductory letter which, in the case of the first group, emphasised the benefits in terms of their current area of study. The two-way nature of the participant-researcher relationship was also made clear, with appropriate forms of feedback to be exchanged in both directions.

Additionally, to prevent any cost to them, written materials were to be returned by means of college internal mail or postage was provided. Also, the time-consuming element was considered, with meetings organised to avoid disruption by dovetailing with regular classes, time limits indicated beforehand then adhered to at meetings, and materials requiring completion in their own time were kept to a minimum.

Control effect was to be avoided by employing a variety of collection methods, ranging from pictorial to oral and written, and of discussion topics. It was also important to maintain awareness of the range of such effects on participants, and some drop-out was anticipated (sample mortality).

Data were collected as follows:

1. Focus group interviews on general themes (tape-recorded);
2. Focus group interviews to hear picture presentations (also tape-recorded);
3. My observations;
4. Narrative questionnaires;
5. Questionnaires to collect demographic information;
6. Observations and evaluation from each participant's course tutor;
7. Views on the research from the pilot group's comment sheet; and,
8. End of course views from evaluation sheets.

These various methods and groups involved were designed to provide a form of triangulation. Such means of cross-checking help assess the validity of findings and lend reliability to the data (Cohen and Manion, 1989, pp. 269-286). Method triangulation compares data produced by different methodologies to check for accuracy. Data triangulation collates data relating to the same phenomenon from different groups. My research accordingly employed multi-methods and the use of data from different groups on two different types of course about their return to learning. However, the point at issue here is:

... not the combination of different *data per se*, but rather an attempt to relate different sorts of data in such a way as to counteract various possible threats to the validity of our analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p.199).

Developing the questionnaire

A written questionnaire is an appropriate means of seeking insight into personal opinions that participants might prefer not to make in public. Whilst wishing to allow

for the voicing of such views as my paramount objective, the requirements of drawing up a suitable questionnaire were influential. This should be in a form acceptable to participants yet provide adequate data for analysis and interpretation (Bell, 1995, p.75). Foreseen as a rigorous task (Youngman, 1984), the design of the questionnaire was informed by my reading on instrument design and administration, to account for choice of language and wording, question type and structure, awareness and sensitivity about participants' range of knowledge and expertise, layout appearance, and methods of distribution and return.

The literature review had informed my awareness of the areas to be explored, and helped decide the subjects on which I sought attitudes and opinions. Influential here was the questionnaire designed by Belenky *et al.* (1986, Appendix A) to interview women, which provided a useful way of looking at attitudinal studies with adult learners and how to draw people out in interview. Their questions on 'education' and 'ways of knowing' covered issues which suggested those questions which I hoped would elicit attitudes and opinions. However I remained heedful of the need to avoid shaping answers and had no specific categories of ready-made themes, and I was hopeful of as wide ranging a raft of responses as possible (West, 1996, p.34).

Design of the questionnaire originally centred on a combination of closed- and open-ended questions. However, I wanted to avoid any tendency by participants to provide the 'predictable' answers; those they thought I would either expect or prefer. In effect I was hoping positively to encourage the unpredictable among the range of responses. Thus I looked for alternative forms of questionnaire, and designed a 'narrative

questionnaire' (see Millard, 1997). By this, I hoped to provide the opportunity for participants to reflect on their perceptions of themselves as learners, and engage their interest through the reflexive nature of this format. It would allow scope for expression in the form of a story or biographical mode, and would thus have significant implications for the methodology.

By encouraging the participants firstly to talk about how they saw themselves as learners at the interview, I hoped that in their questionnaire responses they would depict not only these perceptions, but also some of the cultural and social factors influencing them. These would enable the research to reflect the significant attitudes and experiences adults bring with them from their previous and current range of environments.

The range of stimuli to elicit these responses was designed as a series of 26 questions arranged under four sub-headings as related issues (see Appendix 1). These were to do with choosing to return to education, themselves as learners, others' perceptions of them and the future. Used at the course start and end, this narrative form of questionnaire was hoped to identify changes in the approach of the individual student, the group as a whole, and between groups, over time. This necessitated design of another, retrospective version of the questionnaire for the end meeting (see Appendix 2).

Participants' comments revealed the questionnaire was enjoyed by many, including Jenny, despite her not usually liking writing, as she explained: "my mind usually jumps ahead of what I am writing and misses bits out." Originally intended as an

exercise to be written during the interview, there did not appear to be enough time for this when planning the pilot. Therefore the questionnaire was used as the basis for the group discussion, then taken away to be written up and returned by post. Because all 26 questions could not be covered in the time, a revised, shorter question list was adopted for future interviews, with a verbal explanation to simplify instructions about the task (Appendices 3 & 4).

Interview method

The pilot, originally envisaged as a standard form of semi-structured interview with each participant, was altered to a focus group so as to remove time obstacles and encourage participation. This ran for an hour with the six Trainer students and was tape recorded. The interview has many advantages, including its adaptability and flexibility (Cohen and Manion, 1989, Chapter 13). It employs the central skills of listening, observing and forming an empathic alliance with subjects. The face-to-face nature of this strategy has many facets, such as the verbal or non-verbal clues suggesting that prompting may reveal further clarification. Such expanded responses may produce more insight into motives and behaviour, enabling greater depth as well as breadth.

Use of a focus group was preferable to a group interview where the need to elicit responses in rotation according to a fairly structured interview schedule appeared to run counter to the aims and ethos of the intended research. The focus group offered potential, since:

... the data that emerge are the direct consequences of the method used to collect them, and have therefore been structured by the social activity which constitutes that method (Scott & Usher, 1996, p. 65).

Similar to group discussions which explore a specific set of issues from several perspectives, focus groups however feature “the explicit use of the group interaction as research data” (Kitzinger in Oates, 1996, p. 38). This allows not only for the voicing of individuals’ views and attitudes but also the demonstration of their reasons for those perceptions, of value where reasons and motivations are being sought.

Another advantage was the fact that insights could be gained from their shared understandings of everyday situations, a significant factor when pre-existing groups were to be interviewed. Since these people who would participate met on a regular basis, the social context in which their “collective remembering” occurred provided another level of naturally occurring data (and one influenced to some extent also by the context of the interviews which were expected to be in their usual college setting). Although these groups would be in a sense artificially constructed, the interviews could be weighed against the evidence gathered from the individuals’ personal accounts in their written questionnaires.

Besides the “participants’ interaction” and “community of interests” outlined above, the element of an interview guide was resolved by use of the questionnaire. It was hoped that this would both allow for rich data expressed in the participants’ own words and written reflections, and facilitate coverage of sensitive topics. The richness of qualitative data is a reflection of its “local groundedness” (Miles and

Huberman, 1994), or the extent to which data is collected in close proximity to a specific situation, emphasising its focused and bounded nature. The local context is thus retained as an influential element in the overall picture.

The theme of 'narrativity' (Ricoeur, 1991) is also at issue, since social beings are in a continuous process, whether deliberately or unintentionally, of ascribing new meaning to their past, in terms of the present. I also hoped this type of interview might help resolve the issue of power relations (Finch, 1993), characterised by Scott as, the "asymmetrical relationship between interviewer and interviewee" (1996, p.65). The possibility of a reciprocal nature to the relationship appeared a likely outcome of the interviews. The opportunity to engage in the study in the role of 'expert' and to collaborate in the research might be empowering for the participants.

Difficulties with the focus group method include: time and resource implications for implementation and analysis; the need for good group handling skills, in part due to problems of group dominance by one member; and difficulty over interpreting responses. Therefore, I sought to achieve a balance between initiating and maintaining a discussion, and allowing the participants free reign, without any individual or myself dominating the conversation, overt directing of the topics raised or a free-for-all developing which would prove unintelligible for tape transcription. The major associated challenge was interpretation of the results of this open-ended type of debate, together with the writing up of these (to be dealt with in the forthcoming section on analysis). Issues of generalisability also arise (Schofield, 1993), with bias due to the subjective nature of the technique (Jayaratne, 1993).

The pilot study revealed unforeseen problems due to timing, leading to alterations, by removing or combining questions, while maintaining a critical overview of the questions and their wording, to ensure reliability and validity (Bell, 1995). As these students were currently researching into use of questionnaires, their comments sought on methods proved valuable, Don for example considering the discussion “very successful and rewarding.”

Disappointingly, other groups did not follow the pattern suggested by the ready co-operation of the pilot group, of whom all but one returned narrative questionnaires. However, their willingness to participate (and to attend optional meetings), and interest in the research were encouraging, particularly as I had little previous experience of interviewing, which I foresaw as a challenge. Their enthusiasm promoted my confidence, encouraging me to extend my methodology with the addition of further strategies than I had originally planned.

The study thus initially consisted of the introductory group interview, then paired /individual interviews, the letters confirming these to enclose each person’s transcript for their comments, as an additional means of informing the research. A final group meeting would be held at the end of the course, to summarise and review future plans. I also suggested optional individual interviews after the course’s end.

In accordance with life history methods (Thompson, 1981), I adopted certain conventions for tape transcription. Besides the use of normal punctuation, such as three dots (...) to indicate words omitted, I also used five dots (.....) for a long pause by the speaker, and a comma (,) for a shorter pause. A question mark (?)

indicates the speaker's voice is raised in query, and underlining (___) shows spoken emphasis, whether continuous or for separate words. Brackets indicate speaker's actions, for example, (laughing) while square brackets indicate others' interjections, such as [Zoe laughs].

Conducting the study

The methodology was extended with tactics other than those planned, to include a picture presentation, as well as views on the research, developmental journals and evaluation with observations from tutors (referred to in Chapters 4 and 5 on Findings). In accordance with my wish to explore a multi-media approach I considered alternative means of introducing the topic for discussion for the pilot.

This would be engaged at varying levels of subjectivity and involve issues of self-image, and it would therefore be valuable to facilitate group discussion by means of an appropriate method.

It was partly because of this that I was taking pains to word the questionnaire and all other materials, including my own conversation, to avoid the term 'motivation'. I felt this word may have overtones to do with psychological scrutiny and this seemed inappropriate when I was trying to build a rapport with each group. It could also, in the case of the group of trainers, prompt fairly stock replies from people whose professional lives are partly concerned with self-presentation.

Picture presentations

In order to make best use of the time and enter at once into a non-threatening activity, I devised a task utilising a form of visualisation technique. This was to produce a representation of their perceptions of themselves as a student when at the outset of the course, by drawing a sketch. Accustomed as the pilot group was to the concept of 'ice breakers', the exercise could be presented to them as a simple though unexpected introductory exercise. This appeared a useful means of resolving the subjective nature of the topic, as it would allow space and time for the participants individually to portray this issue in a figurative way which would both focus attention with a well-defined activity, and allow for simultaneous reflection. This accorded with my interest, both in ways to explore the subjective, and alternative means of representing concepts and ideas.

This would enable movement then onto a shared activity with presentations of individual ideas about the pictures to the group, and allow a more precise statement of the topic's main themes to emerge. These could then form the subjects for a more general group discussion and assist their subsequent completion of the questionnaires. They would also allow for the public as well as private voicing of views and opinions, via both group and individual means, and possibly revealing the explicit and implicit, yet ensuring the confidentiality and integrity of the individual.

All the participants readily co-operated in drawing (pictures appear in Appendix 9), though some reservations were expressed, dealt with by reassuring them that test of artistic skill was not at issue. Their comment sheet responses reveal a range of views

on this method, for example Don felt it “different” as a strategy, giving an “interesting new slant”, Jenny thought it “hard - but worthwhile”, and Geoff felt “drawing of ‘feelings’ was a bit too conceptual for an ‘old-fashioned’ engineer and person that deals in facts and figures not feelings.”

Comment and evaluation sheets

In multiple choice form, the Comment Sheet (Appendix 5) sought views from the pilot group on the research; specifically about the narrative questionnaire, ice breaker, discussion and the session as a whole. All six responses were positive, most feeling the session too short, partly because too “rushed” (Zoe) but also because they “were having to finish as it was becoming very interesting” (Don) and Jenny felt it too short “to really get into it and explore deeper.”

It was apparent that this meeting had “made me think”(Don), while Jenny remarked the questionnaire “helped me focus and think why I was doing it (the course, what were my motives)” while the discussion at times made her wonder “if we were answering your questions or side tracking down something unnecessary”, significant in light of my efforts to avoid ‘leading’ questions, but reinforcing participants’ tendency to second guess. Don thought the focus group very enjoyable and Jenny expected “there would be more to it”, adding she had “Actually found out something about others on the course. Able to get to know them better”, revealing there were incidental, unforeseen benefits for participants, while suggesting they often fail to appreciate the value of their input into research, as Stronach and Maclure suggested (1997).

Jenny's comments demonstrate how unsure several participants appeared about the 'point' of the research, a factor that provided me with a dilemma over my feedback to them. They appeared to want definitive 'answers' which I felt arbitrary and difficult to provide so instead gave descriptive feedback to those requesting this, by verbal accounts about data collection and use of transcriptions to seek reasons for a return to learning.

The end course Evaluation Sheet (Appendix 6) was presented as a selection of views, of which participants were asked to circle as many as wanted, and anonymously if they wished. Of the four trainers' and nine access students' replies, views were largely positive, since three of the negative and 11 positive views were circled altogether. Most circled (eight times) was 'thought-provoking', followed by 'straightforward', 'clear', 'useful', and so on. Two (incidentally present at the Access group meeting) who felt it 'too long' additionally only circled 'a waste of my time' in one case but 'thought-provoking' in the other. Another felt it 'boring' but also only 'easy to do', suggesting a lack of reflection on her part. These comment and evaluation sheet views proved useful in deciding the further planning of the study.

Developmental journals

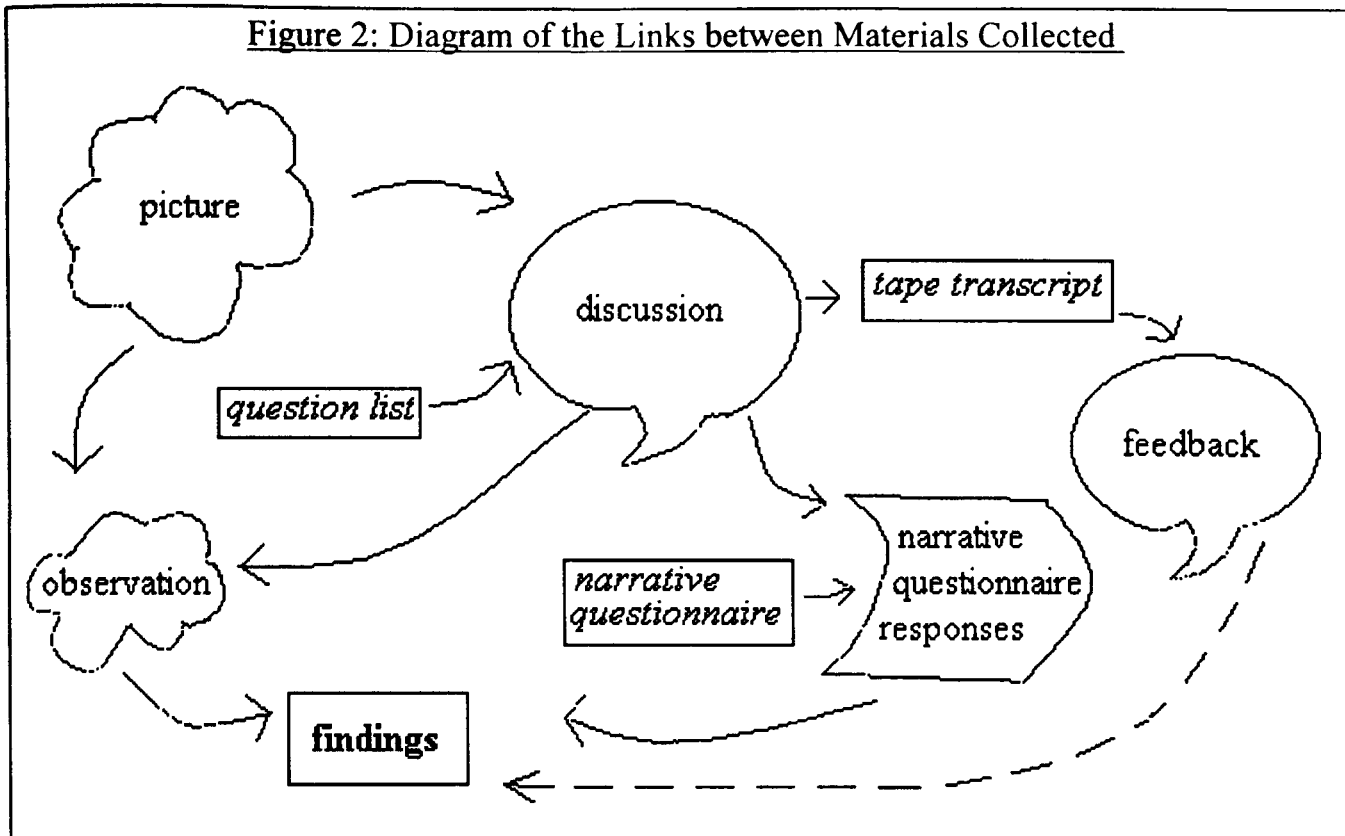
The Trainers' developmental journals form part of their coursework, for use in support of the assessment procedure. They are confidential in nature, normally seen only by the individual's tutor, but the co-operation of this group led me to hope some participants would allow my access for the benefit of this study. They would be particularly useful since they reveal the student's personal and professional

development as a trainer over the year, as part of their process of reflective practice. They would add another layer to those resources emerging as suitable for data collection, so I sought permission to use them, effectively as provided after completion and assessment by tutors at the course end.

Apparently relatively simple to arrange, their collection however proved difficult. After gaining the agreement of the four participants available at the course's end (two in writing) I arranged for their collection and photocopying, then posting back to students. However, after the end of term the students were apparently still awaiting journals from their two tutors (one of whom also sent no tutor evaluations) who did not respond to several requests for their collection by their colleague. This illustrates one of the problems associated with accessibility of data, particularly through a third party, and had to be abandoned.

The following diagram (Figure 2) illustrates how the findings emerged from the combination of data sources and their complex inter-relationship. Pivotal in this framework is the role of the picture, which feeds into all the other forms of data. The texture of this multi-layered data derives from the varying levels of expression (representational, graphic, visual, written, oral and narrative) and subjectivity, as revealed within the group or in solitary reflection, and degree of involvement (on a continuum from immersion towards detachment).

Figure 2: Diagram of the Links between Materials Collected



Limitations of this study

The limitations of this study are:

1. The study was restricted to one particular set of people in a particular context at one particular time. The sample was limited to those available and willing to participate on an Access course and a Trainers' course in local Further Education colleges. This research did not attempt to seek the views of the individuals' families or friends, nor those of college staff, other than those contained in a short evaluation sheet. Interviews with tutors were not considered necessary for the purposes of this study, particularly with the time and resource restrictions of the study, and the availability of tutors.
2. The sample was not necessarily representative nor generalisable to the wider population, by age, ethnicity nor gender ratio, nor by socio-economic grouping.

Analysis of the data

Expectations were that analysis would be protracted and concurrent with data collection, since grounded theory places many demands upon the procedure (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). I would use grounded theory in an inductive, evolving framework informed by several motivational theories. Besides the time-consuming transcription of tapes, alongside running of other interviews, categories had to be identified and interpreted.

This proved a lengthy and challenging process as I could not produce generalisable findings by constraining the data into pre-determined categories. As West suggests (1996, p.31), difficulties with this process lie in the positivistic echoes whereby data are broken down and abstracted in a process far removed from the actuality of the 'subjects' lives. Because these people are so individual, it is their differences which appear rather than their commonalities.

Instead, I sought categories emerging from their material in as empathic a manner as possible, constantly scanning the data in search for apparent patterns and relationships, and conscious that "The investigator ... resists any temptation to structure or analyze the meanings of an observation prematurely" (Rudestam and Newton, 1992, p. 33). Many emerged and I listed them, attempting to categorise these systematically into groups. By means of repeated sifting through these and comparison with freshly acquired data I could devise an abbreviated list of themes which appeared early in the year to be common to the groups participating.

Few alterations proved necessary as new themes could often be codified under existing headings. I used this set of themes to produce a list of 29 which were similar to the four narrative questionnaire subgroups, with some crossover between them. Incidentally, this list also provided the categories from which tutors were requested to select the six most representative of each student (Appendix 7). As it seemed useful as a tool to assist in the process of analysis, particularly where so many themes were concerned, I drew up a Table of Themes which reflected the students' expectations at the start of the year. Themes were numbered according to subsection (see Table 3), for ease of analysis of each picture, transcript and questionnaire.

At the course end, the retrospective viewpoint and thus an appropriately revised version of the narrative questionnaire, necessitated a change to the themes. The production of a second set of themes appeared problematic for both analysis and interpretation, with relationships between as many as 60 themes being too complex. In order to resolve this problem, I used the same table but altered the phrasing of subsets to show their retrospective nature. For example, 'Expectations of learning' became 'Expectations of studying having been realised.'

Finally, I drew up a further table (see Table 3 below) which incorporated both 'before' and 'after' points of view, while indicating the data source acquired from each meeting throughout the year. This could then be used to draw up a separate sheet for each participant, displaying their individual themes appearing in their picture, transcript and questionnaire at each meeting (see Chapters 4 and 5). As a

typology of the adult learner, this was valuable for interpretation, as well as illustration of each individual's particular portrait.

Themes

The following table is designed to show how the 29 themes emerged for each individual participant at each stage of the research. These stages were: the first meeting, the optional second meeting and final meeting, as each shaded block of columns indicates. The themes are subdivided into five sections:- expectations of studying, reason for returning to education, being an adult learner, others' views and support, then the future.

These themes reflect the participants' expectations and anticipated perceptions at the outset of the course, with the first meeting. The themes also represent the realisation of their expectations and retrospective views at the end of the course, with the further meetings (as indicated by the shaded blocks).

The 'Total' row allows the possibility of totalling up how many times the individual participant has used each particular theme. The 'Total' column at the bottom allows the adding up of the number of themes each participant used at each meeting. Both kinds of total converge with the final total of themes each person displays. An additional column to the right indicates, where provided by each participant's tutor, those six themes which they feel to be most appropriate for the participant. This throws further light upon the themes most significant to each person.

Table 3: Table of Themes

		First Meeting			2nd Meeting	End Meeting			Total	Tutor	
		picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ			
1.	Expectations of studying:	Expectations realised									
a	alienation										
b	social aspect										
c	home vs. study conflict										
d	difficulties of study										
e	a challenge										
2.	Reason for returning to education:	Reason for return reinforced									
a	key incident e.g. redundancy										
b	career /personal change										
c	qualification at the end										
d	status /dream										
e	prior academic failure										
f	recent academic success										
g	personal achievement										
h	enjoy education										
3.	Being an adult learner:	Having been an adult learner									
a	group support valued										
b	unexpected that they can cope										
c	sense of commitment										
d	confidence from others' validation /empowerment										
e	horizons broadened										

		First Meeting			2nd Meeting	End Meeting			Total	Tutor	
		picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ			
4.	Others' views and support:	Others' views and support									
a	partner's /parents' support										
b	partner /parents unsupportive										
c	family pressure to succeed										
d	continuing tutor support valued										
e	some tutors not as supportive as they are able										
f	others' support										
g	others' criticism										
5.	Future:	Future									
a	no long-term plan										
b	long-term plan										
c	better job										
d	participate in education again										
Totals:											
No. of Themes:											
Sub-total:											

During this exhaustive process of analysis, the interpretation was foremost in my mind, presenting me with the tension between ‘capturing’ the specific aspects of these people’s lives:

... the focus is on what the person experiences in a language that is as loyal to the lived experience as possible ... to describe and elucidate the meanings of human experience (Rudestam and Newton, 1992, p. 33).

I wanted to represent them fairly and honestly but would generate a vast amount of unmanageable material. Analysing the data to provide, in greatly reduced form, a reconstruction of the original material, I was in danger of producing something that may no longer be representative of their voice. This representation of participants’ experiences through such ‘products’ is styled the researcher’s ‘trustworthiness’ (Berg, 1989). The dilemma which this large amount of data posed for me, as well as the various lines of enquiry open for pursuit, suggested that a useful follow-up to this research might be further analysis of this data. Also, since the data is so rich, new ways might be explored of looking at it and presenting further findings.

In writing up the study, I encountered several issues for consideration. Scott and Usher (1996) describe how research is often viewed as a technical process which moves from data collection to interpretation, yet it is:

... not simply a matter of ‘reading out’ a meaning which is already there. Rather, meaning is read *into* the data and this is not simply a matter of elucidating it by applying neutral techniques (Scott and Usher, 1996, p.177).

So this neutral form of procedure can be seen as “a way of imposing an abstract order on the complexity, confusion and struggles of life as they are researched” (*ibid.*). The difficulties associated with writing up experienced by postgraduates

(Phillips and Pugh, 1994), can appear among students at all levels, as participants such as Sarah revealed:

I tend to sort of do it, and then jiggle it round, re-do it and read it again and, erm, (whispers) “Oh no I think it’d be better that way” and, so I tend to sort of shuffle it, shuffle it about as I do it, in in, written work.

Yet constant revising of the writing may imply more than the requirement of “good, clear English” (Bell, 1987, p.160):

In fact *rewriting* is a very important factor in the writing process, and authors often read and rewrite to discover what it is that they have to say (Phillips and Pugh, 1994, p. 58).

Phillips and Pugh ascribe this phenomenon to the link between written language and thought, whereby the act of writing causes people to think about their work in a different way, since it may be that “writing leads to discovery and not, as is generally supposed, that discoveries merely need to be put into writing” (*ibid.*). Their reference to study findings on diverse types of writer contrast interestingly the characteristics of the ‘serialist’ (who sees writing sequentially, planning before beginning and correcting as they progress) and the ‘holist’ writer (who can only think as they write, composing successive, complete drafts). They recommend a staged approach, since “It is not at all easy *both* (i) to say what you want to say *and* (ii) to say it in the best possible way *at the same time*” (*ibid.*, pp. 60-61).

The perception of writing as process rather than product has other implications raised by Becker (1986), as it is “shaped by all the choices made by all the people involved in producing it” (Becker, 1986, pp. 15-16). He feels that “Every time we answer a question about our work and what we have been finding or thinking, our choice of words affects the way we describe it the next time”, but refers also to

the 'curse' of seeking the "One Right Way of organizing all that stuff" (*ibid.*, pp. 15-16).

Conclusion

This study deployed qualitative, longitudinal approaches with some quantitative analysis, and was interpretive in treatment. Twenty-five students participated over one academic year. Data were gathered by means of picture presentations, interviews, observations, narrative questionnaires and use of the subsidiary means of comments and evaluation sheets, with tutors' evaluations and views.

I hoped thus to reflect the participants' views, as far as possible, through their own voices, in pictorial images and through narrative means of expressive writing. It was hoped this would contribute to understanding of the adult learner's motivation and that creation of a typology of the adult learner might prove useful to other researchers in the field, alongside the newly devised methodologies of picture and narrative questionnaire.

Chapter 4: Vocational Students' Portraits

Introduction

The following portraits of each participant at the first meetings are intended to reflect the dynamic process of these people's lives, as well as the value of past experience for them. They were derived from the collected material which depicted their individual perceptions, through their drawings and the way in which they described them to the group.

Alongside the individuals' statements, my reflections contribute to the development of the participants' portraits, by defining their relationship to the range of themes emerging as the research progressed. This means of analysis was extended to the material from the group discussions and confidential questionnaires. Thumbnail sketches of the participants (6 in Group 1 and 3 in Group 2) are provided overleaf (in Figure 3), then each is examined, beginning with Amanda whose meeting was shared with five others in November 1997.

Figure 3: Vocational Students (Groups 1 & 2)

Amanda 41
 married with 2 sons old enough to leave home
 full-time employment: Supervisor and part-time Trainer for a producer of chilled foods with nationwide distribution for 15 years
 previously employed: full-time elsewhere
 no experience of redundancy
 education: no formal qualifications
 journey to college: 26 miles by public transport

Felicity 24
 single
 full-time employment: as a Trainer for a charity to do with drug and alcohol awareness
 previously employed: administrative post as Regional Liaison Officer at a university
 no experience of redundancy
 education: GCSEs and 'A' levels from school
 since school: university degree in History; FE course certificates in counselling
 journey to college: short distance within city by car

Jenny 29
 married with a baby
 currently unemployed
 previously employed: full-time in management training and personal development for Larchwood Outdoor Activity Centre for 9 years
 no experience of redundancy
 education: 6 GCSEs from school
 since school: BTEC National Diploma in Outdoor Education; First Aid certificate; Single Pitch Supervisor's Award
 significant event: birth of first child 3 weeks before course start
 journey to college: 15 miles by car

Paula 34
 full-time employment: Trainer in personnel in a TEC
 previously: full-time elsewhere
 education: some GCSEs
 since school: RSA in administration
 journey to college: 9 miles by car

Don 49
 married with a son at college
 full-time employment: Trainer in a TEC- and local authority funded community project (a voluntary sector organisation providing people with the skills and confidence to seek work)
 previously employed: 6 years full-time elsewhere as instructional officer in a private company
 redundancy: 3 occasions
 education: 2 CSEs
 qualifications since school: 6 City & Guilds ('924' in engineering, 5 equivalent to teaching- '730-737')
 journey to college: 9 miles by car

Geoff 49
 married with adult children
 full-time employment: in Technical and Sales Training for an international industrial water treatment company, also Trainer 2½ years
 previously employed: other capacities in the company for many years
 no experience of redundancy
 education: 8 CSEs from secondary modern school in the North East
 since school: apprenticeship and ONC in engineering
 no significant events
 journey to college: 16 miles (car)

Liz 33
 married
 full-time employment: Training Officer at an insurance company 2½ years
 previously employed: full-time elsewhere in the North East
 education: 'O' and 'A' levels
 since school: middle stage of an OU degree in Earth Sciences
 journey to college: within city by car

Sarah 41
 married
 currently registered unemployed
 previously: Regional and Visual Merchandise Manager (27 years)
 nationwide chain of clothes stores
 redundancy from previous job
 education: no formal qualifications
 since school: City and Guilds
 significant events: long-term illness now largely overcome
 journey to college: 15 miles by public transport but needs a lift from her husband to return home

Zoe 49
 with a partner and adult daughter
 employed full-time: Family and Community Services administration for a local authority (since school)
 education: several 'O' levels from grammar school
 journey to college: within city by car

Amanda's picture

Amanda depicted herself in her picture (see Appendix 9), as a student happily looking forward to beginning college, as three identical smiling stick figures accompanied by speech balloons and captions, attributable possibly to her opening self-deprecating remark that “my drawings aren’t beautiful.” At first, ‘THE UNKNOWN’ showed her saying “SEPTEMBER CONFIDENCE READY FOR THE CHALLENGE”, then the second, labelled ‘CAN I ACHIEVE - YES FOR ME’, with the accompanying exclamation ‘BOOKS - STUDY - ASSIGNMENTS - HELP!’ showed her saying “NOW I KNOW CONFIDENCE SLIPPING EXPECTATIONS HIGH”. Finally appeared ‘NOW. POSITIVE APPROACH’, saying “ENJOYMENT OF THE LEARNING PROCESS.”

By examining her words as she presented her picture to the group it is possible to identify 12 themes (see list alongside) representative of Amanda’s views. Partly due to the significant

no alienation no study difficulties challenge key incident career /personal change end qualification status /dream personal achievement enjoy education coping expectedly commitment better job
--

life event of children leaving home she wishes for change through re-entering education in order to enhance her career prospects and status:

I’ve been in training for eleven years and thought, “Yeah, I’m good at what I do, I’m okay” and I wanted a challenge because, I’ve come back to college, I’m a forty-one-year-old, yeah?, and, I had my children young ... I’ve achieved ’cos I’ve got my two sons but then as they’ve grown up and fled you know, it’s like what do you want to do.

She said, “I’ve seen people at work, you know get on and go to courses, and get promotion and things like that so ‘What do I want?’ ” Her preparedness for the course reveals she did not anticipate study problems: “When I joined in September I were quite confident and ready for the challenge.”

The reality of study brings difficulties with coping, “books, studying, assignment it were like “Help!” you know where do you get out of this” countered by her strongly emphasised desire to achieve now translated into a sense of commitment:

... confidence has like slipped a bit, because I’m thinking “Ooh! a good sort of course this, I’m only on the verge of training you know”, and expectations at the start were like high like, “Oof! All this you know and I’ve got to do this and a full-time job”. But then, yeah, can I achieve, yeah, ’cos it’s for me and I want this for myself.

Her ‘dream’ goal of the qualification is enhanced by enjoying learning:

... I’ve got a positive approach, enjoyment of the learning process em, putting things into practice already, and, I just want that end certificate for myself to prove to myself that yes I can achieve at my age [all laugh].

The amusement this evoked probably reflects the unspoken significance age has for many of the group. It is noticeable that although her picture labelled her facing ‘The Unknown’ in September, she verbally described herself in terms of being “quite confident”, so that any sense of alienation is negated by her overriding and characteristic enthusiasm for the task of studying. Her positive attitude and, especially confidence, the trait most typifying her, are major features of this presentation and the group discussion.

Amanda’s contribution to the discussion

When it came to Amanda’s contribution to the group discussion, she discussed seven of the listed questions.

no alienation home/work vs. study conflict no study difficulties challenge coping expectedly commitment family unsupportive family pressure tutor unsupportive others unsupportive

Her themes are pictured alongside. Children were introduced in terms of asserting their independence, whilst dismissive of parental achievements, and experience, so ignoring their advice “yeah, they know best don’t they? we don’t (laughs).”

Although not foreseeing study as problematic, she thinks older people in general find return to study difficult, some acquaintances adopting an age barrier to rationalise their participation fears and conceal lack of confidence and negative attitudes. By contrast she demonstrates confidence and expects to cope:

... older people ... go “Oooo, I couldn’t do that, not at my age”, you know. They use age as an excuse whereas a younger person would go for it thinking positive, an older person would think “I were crap at that” I don’t think they’ve got that confidence.

Amanda’s time management difficulties add five new themes to her original list, concerning less support both at work and home, conflicting with her wish to study:

... finding time to do everything you know, run a home, do your job etcetera you know and that you’re set an assignment and it’s getting closer and closer and it’s like “Ohh-dearie me” when am I going to get you know round to doing it.

Family pressure in their expectations of her success possibly demonstrates an unsupportive element in the home background, when she says, “I don’t get any support, it’s just ‘You can do it’ that’s it, that one sentence.” Amanda agreed with Don about unsupportive tutors, reflecting her continuing sense of commitment: “Your time’s valuable and yet you’re expecting to learn and, and when you come away with like one handout and you look at it again, and you think but Why?” Don’s mention of changing perceptions evokes her suggestion that they appear “Cocky.”

Her contribution echoed her picture’s participation reasons of desire for change, achievement and status through the qualification. Amanda’s manner, often while supporting other people, was frank and amusing with down-to-earth observations, as reflected in her writing style.

Amanda's narrative questionnaire

Amanda covered almost four pages. The questions she avoided suggest her focus is more the future than past or present, adding comments on learning being a self-perpetuating activity, the value of an active brain, and age as both incentive and barrier. Of 19 themes, (see box) her wish to achieve and especially commitment are the most often referred to. Her manager supports her two main aims of career and through promotion, tempered by caution and her willingness to commitment again if needed:

... to feel confident in my role as Training Co-ordinator ... hopefully gain promotion to Training Manager ... but I can wait for that and if I have to prove myself further then I will.

Her achievement in the future is linked to the two lesser aims

of qualifying and gaining status: "I see myself as glowing with pride when and if I receive my C.T.P. certificate ... my biggest thrill ... to prove to myself that I can achieve at the ripe old age of 41!"

Family support, possibly with an element of pressure recurs, (for example, "my family see me now as a Career Woman studying for a future") though she foresees no problems with study at home: "My motto is 'You're Never Too Old to Learn' but I sometimes think can you learn old dogs new tricks!" Thus she anticipates the coming challenge, despite the prejudice of friends:

As I started my family young and my family were my life until they turned 16, I found a gap in my life, an exciting time when I realised what I do now is for me. The majority of my friends of the same age think I am crazy to "go back to school" but I wonder whether they would do the same if they had the confidence to do so.

no alienation no home vs. study conflict no study difficulties challenge career /personal change end qualification dream personal achievement coping expectedly commitment no empowerment horizons broadened family support family pressure others' support others unsupportive long-term plan better job future participation
--

Equally critical are colleagues who, “see me as a pain because what I have learnt I am starting to put into practice and this means changes which they see as more work.” As an adult learner, Amanda’s hopes for challenge were counteracted early on with a sudden loss of confidence, due partly to lack of peer reinforcement and partly to unexpectedly feeling unable to cope:

Prior to the C.T.P. Course I felt positive and excited, a new challenge which I like. Once the Course began I started feeling negative. Will I cope? Will I succeed? The positive mental attitude was failing. Meeting other students was hard as everybody was wary of each other.

She determinedly continues to attend despite the obstacle of travel: “I never look forward to commuting ... by buses and trains.” Long-term, she has already pinpointed the necessary qualification to continue:

Looking at the future I feel it to be important that my peers at work change their views of me. I am already planning ... to do Advanced Food Hygiene to enable myself to be qualified to teach Basic Food Hygiene within our company.

Comparing Amanda’s and my own views of her as a student produces a picture of her as an outgoing, enthusiastic entrant to this course who after three months’ study appears from her behaviour to identify strongly with the group despite no reference to them in any of her data. Single references to disempowerment, broader horizons, partner support and plans for future education show these to be of relatively minor importance.

Her constant themes of challenge, coping expectedly, no study problems nor alienation reinforce the most conspicuous theme throughout of commitment, while she has a pithy attitude to learning as a resource for extending her horizons: “I feel the more you learn the more you want to learn; all you need is your brain cells being activated again after being dormant for a long time.”

Table 4 below shows which of the 29 themes emerged for Amanda at the outset of the course. As stated at the opening of this chapter, the 'Total' column and row allow the adding up of all the themes arising at each meeting, and how many times these occur. For example, here Amanda's 'Total' row shows that she raises the theme of challenge (1 e) three times, and her 'Total' column for the taped discussion shows ten themes altogether. Amanda's final total of themes from this meeting was 23.

Table 4: Amanda's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	x	x	x					3x	
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict		✓	x					1✓ 1x	
difficulties of study	x	x	x					3x	
a challenge	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy	✓							1✓	
career /personal change	✓		✓					2✓	
qualification at the end	✓		✓					2✓	
status /dream	✓		✓					2✓	
prior academic failure									
recent academic success									
personal achievement	✓		✓					2✓	
enjoy education	✓							1✓	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued									
unexpected they can cope	x	x	x					3x	
sense of commitment	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment			x					1x	
horizons broadened			✓					1✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support			✓					1✓	
partner/parents unsupportive		✓						1✓	
family pressure to succeed		✓	✓					2✓	
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able		✓						1✓	
others' support			✓					1✓	
others' criticism		✓	✓					2✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan			✓					1✓	
better job	✓		✓					2✓	
participate in education again			✓					1✓	
Totals:	9✓ 3x	7✓ 3x	14✓ 5x					30✓ 11x	
No. of Themes:	12	10	19					24	
Sub-total:	23							23	

Don's picture

Drawn at a computer, determinedly working on his 'PROJECT - IPD' Don was saying "I WILL COMPLETE ALL MY

home vs. study conflict no study difficulties challenge coping expectedly commitment
--

ASSIGNMENTS (FINGERS CROSSED)" illustrating his typically single-minded approach. The group's only realistic self-portrait, as was complimentarily

remarked on, showed his recognisable profile on a swivel chair with the computer equipment, notes being typed, and typescript on the computer screen. Don's presentation showed five themes, particularly those of commitment which echoes his title, and coping, partly with home conflict: "I do thrive under pressure anyway, em, my son's put me under a bit more pressure 'cos he's got my computer at college", since he neither expected nor finds the work to be difficult, merely a task:

I'm not one for writing. I'm not prepared to, to type and try and give it a professional, image sort of thing, erm, I will complete the course I will complete my assignments and as I say I work well under pressure so, the pressure is now on and I'm going for it so I'll wait to the end and see.

He is coping despite pressure of work:

I'm running a six-week course on like an eight, ten week cycle and at the moment other things, seeing clients, and what have you, um I can take the portable computer home which I've done, to do my er, first assignment ... but er, er the way things is going I'll be going out to buy a computer the next couple of weeks anyway so as I say the pressure's on then to get stuck in and and complete it.

Don's characteristic determination appears the most significant aspect of his approach to study, sharing Amanda's confident and positive outlook, as his participation in the group's debate illustrates.

Don's contribution to the discussion

Don contributed to 14 listed topics and raised six extra. Don cited his wife as an example of the adult learner, typifying past failure and especially alienation. Speaking matter-of-factly, his 22 themes emphasise the qualification, status, his confidence and especially commitment, as borne out in his picture's overriding image.

no alienation
home vs. study conflict
no study difficulties
challenge
key incident
career change
end qualification
status
personal achievement
enjoy education
group support valued
coping expectedly
commitment
empowerment
horizons broadened
family unsupportive
tutor's support
tutor unsupportive
others' support
others unsupportive
long-term plan
better job

He values the certificate as providing the foundation to his work in training (“the concrete base to your brick wall”) and explains its status:

... there’s nowhere similar to prestige when you’re I.P.D. and you’re Institute of Professional And I understand that you get information from them about particular jobs that are in that area ... And you can put I.P.D. after your name if you so desire at the end you know I wouldn’t bother with that ... I think it, it gives you a better standing in the, in the field that you’re working in. I suppose it’s the edge if you’re applying for a job and there’s one with an I.P.D. and twenty without, if [Sarah: You’re more likely to get it] if you only feel as though you’ve got the edge, whether you have or not’s a different matter sort of thing ... obviously you’ve got the fact that’s a professional qualification, err gives you that air of, you know professional standing sort of thing and makes you feel that little bit more confident.

He seeks to improve his performance and that of his company, “to make me a better tutor and to improve our business with whom I’m at the moment.”

Qualifying will enable him to pursue a new career in Human Resources: “that’s the kick-start to that for me”, as he explains:

... prior courses in the past one as a trainer and one as a teacher sort of thing so, this’ll be a professional qualification I’m now looking for, maybe in the long-term future a view to it accelerating my career wage-wise ... I want to develop more into, helping people rather than training, you know, hence the Human Resource side.

Expectations of coping with the challenge of study are matched by his continuing commitment, “I’m also ... doing an N.V.Q. III counselling course, side by side with this which is part of my job”, as shown in his planning ability, “that’s a life skill isn’t it? ’cos you learn to prioritise ... you visualise, what what big issues are coming along and then you, prepare yourself along the way”, which younger people do not have, demonstrating his children’s unsupportiveness through not appreciating his advice, “they don’t want to listen to your experience, they want to make their own mistakes don’t they?”

Enthusiasm for his experiences of education since 1989 (“I think it’s brilliant. I love being either side of the desk, either up there with the board, or here looking at the board”) contrasts with his views on the ‘adult learner’ who he feels typically seeks personal change by means of educational achievement, and:

... maybe didn’t like school when they were younger and they’ve done nothing with their life, and then they feel now’s the time I, you know, my life’s coming quickly to an end I’ve not achieved.

He describes his wife as “a prime example”, her lack of confidence in comparison with him making her wary of undertaking a course. Although wanting some personal change, she is fearful and would not be comfortable in a college environment, illustrating possible friction at home over his studying:

She hates [taps his papers] the fact that I’m on these courses not because I’m on the course not because I’m not at home but she says “Oh all these qualifications, you’ve done this you’ve done that, you’ve been there and I’m a housewife and a cleaner” and she’s really really fed up, because she’s, er not done anything like this, and you say “Well, there’s plenty of nightschools let’s find you an interest” but I mean she doesn’t want to find something or she can’t or she’s afraid of going back into education or whatever, but she dearly really wants to get hold of something and do something, you know, if it’s only er maybe flower arranging [chuckles] and a certificate to say I’ve done this with my life now, ’cos I think she feels she’s a loser, and she’s by no way, er I wouldn’t say any housewife is a loser sort of thing, they they they, when you identify their skills.

Support from work inspires confidence, “My boss is very encouraging, she wants to have me in for interviews and wants to discuss and know how I’m getting on”, as does the group dynamics, which he recognises as a valuable contribution to learning to learn. Empowerment is also attributable to negative and positive aspects of their tutors, some of whom do not maximise opportunities in their sessions:

... the time itself doesn’t bother me whether it’s nine o’clock, eight o’clock, ten o’clock. What I know is me is situation where

you have certain tutors who'll talk for two hours and you think to yourself "Well now what have we covered in this last two hours, this is a complete waste of two hours". We've got a particular tutor and I'll mention no names ... and um, the sessions are so, boring, and there seems to be no start and finish and end to them on dark nights, and it seems a complete waste of my time, and and effort.

Some tutors, however, are very supportive, while outside college he thinks "people's perception of you changes as well, and, it's, either they're jealous or they're appreciative, you know or they think you're being a bit cocky."

Strikingly the subject of his three redundancies is mentioned only at the end, when referring to qualifications: "I'm an external assessor's and verifier's. You know three times I've gone for my 'D' [NVQ IV] units and three times I've been made redundant and not completed them." This spare comment reveals that redundancy was the source not only of loss of employment but also of his chance for the qualification to ensure future prospects.

Don noticeably demonstrated a greater willingness to participate in shared as opposed to individual discourse, and incidentally to be self-revelatory. This was confirmed later in the smaller number of questionnaire themes he disclosed in written form, particularly in his sole references to past academic failure and to hoping for social contacts.

Don's narrative questionnaire

Don produced one carefully presented side of typescript, covering most questions in precise order with brief answers though little explanation. His confident attitude is reinforced,

social aspect no home vs. study conflict career change end qualification academic failure personal achievement enjoy education group support valued commitment empowerment horizons broadened partner's support others' support long-term plan better job future participation

particularly as his 16 themes omit the negative aspects of studying and emphasise his general wish to achieve with long-term career changes founded on successfully acquiring this certificate.

Table 5: Don's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ		tape	picture	tape		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation		x						1x	
social aspect			✓					1✓	
home vs. study conflict	✓	✓	x					2✓ 1x	
difficulties of study	x	x						2x	
a challenge	✓	✓						2✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓						1✓	
career /personal change		✓	✓					2✓	
qualification at the end		✓	✓					2✓	
status /dream		✓						1✓	
prior academic failure			✓					1✓	
recent academic success									
personal achievement		✓	✓					2✓	
enjoy education		✓	✓					2✓	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓	✓					2✓	
unexpected they can cope	x	x						2x	
sense of commitment	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment		✓	✓					2x	
horizons broadened		✓	✓					2✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ		tape	picture	tape		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support			✓					1✓	
partner/parents unsupportive		✓						1✓	
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued		✓						1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able		✓						1✓	
others' support		✓	✓					2✓	
others' criticism		✓						1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan		✓	✓					2✓	
better job		✓	✓					2✓	
participate in education again			✓					1✓	
Totals:	3✓ 2x	19 ✓ 3x	15✓ 1x					50✓ 9x	
No. of Themes:	5	22	16					28	
Sub-total:		26						26	

He mentions enjoyment of study and the wish to counteract deficiencies in his academic record, “to improve my academic qualifications. This has always been one of my long-term goals.” Certification will make him:

... less worried if I were to lose my job ... in a much stronger position for improving my career prospects professionally and a better all-round trainer personally.

Beyond support from his wife and boss, others “seem to be treating me with a great deal of respect since joining the course, especially my fellow classmates.”

His hopes to increase work and social contacts have so far been realised. Overall, the image Don projects is of a confident and determined learner as his end questionnaire confirms.

Felicity's picture

The second vocational group meeting in February consisted of Geoff and Felicity. Felicity's full-length picture was of her triumphantly standing on her educational and professional route, the completed stages, diversions or side roads of her career signifying those completed or open before her on the empty road ahead. A stick figure, recognisable from her long hair, she is smiling with arms raised triumphantly at the centre of the winding red and black road whose banners read: 'SCHOOL, UNIVERSITY, COUNSELLING COURSE' and where she stands, 'CTP COURSE'. Beyond a junction the roads ahead, to the right and left are designated by banners marked '? ? ? ? ?'. and these continue with red question marks to the page's edge.

The emphasis of her 15 themes is appropriately that of broadening horizons.

Felicity summarises her picture's appearance with the analogy of "Spaghetti

Junction." Her expectations are far removed from any

alienation, as in, "I call myself a (chuckles) perpetual student,

and so I've drawn that a continual road", or problems: "I

expected it to be very much like, a previous, F.E., college

course, and, that's proved to be the case." Hence, continuing

academic success bolsters her hopes for achievement, "I'm going through these

Finish Lines and I'm getting through."

no alienation no study difficulties challenge career change not end qualification academic success personal achievement enjoy education group support valued coping expectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened no long-term plan future participation

Enjoyment of education appears to explain her confidence in not planning ahead,

"part of this, path is like a, is me searching for some sort of career direction,

because the degree I did at university was, History it's not a vocational, subject."

However, she expects education to challenge while choosing courses based on

"just following really what I've been interested in." Rather than seeking

certification, she experiences empowerment from broadened horizons, "that's

why, this is, this is a kind of windy path that's you know I may be going

somewhere but I may not be going (laughs) direct route."

Her present position is a jumping off point for the future ("just about to go under

the training, course banner. But I do see that as opening up other opportunities"),

involving further participation "in the future, more, learning, so in a way I'm not

really a returner to learning (chuckles) ... I've had a variety of learning

experiences." As a newcomer she did not anticipate socialising beforehand but

appreciated group supportiveness "on this course there's been a better experience,

in terms of that. But I think I've also been making more of an effort because, I'm new to this area."

Felicity's contribution to the discussion

The extra time available and willing involvement of the two participants, allowed the development of many more points beyond the range of given topics. Felicity's 23 themes emphasise achievement, empowerment, others' support and especially planning for career change, all supported by tutor Keith's evaluation which adds that of partner support, entirely omitted by Felicity.

no alienation
social aspect
home vs. study conflict
no work vs. study conflict
no study difficulties
challenge
no challenge
key incident
career change
end qualification
status
academic success
personal achievement
enjoy education
group support valued
coping expectedly
commitment
empowerment
horizons broadened
others' support
others unsupportive
long-term plan
better job
future participation

A key incident had been her supervisor at work suggesting courses, prompting her application so as to capitalise on this financial support:

... I thought well, Ahah! here's an opportunity for me to get them to pay for something I want to do (chuckles) ... So I think he kicked me into gear rather than looking for a new idea of my own.

Her commitment to achieve would remain, "but I think I

would have paid for it myself, had they not, anyway, because I wanted to do it, it's a very big sort of thing, you know," the latter words demonstrating this course's status and possibly challenge.

However, her expectation of studying being predictable reveals she anticipated no challenge, alienation, nor study difficulty as opposed to her recent academic achievement:

... the workload wouldn't be too heavy and I wouldn't be, stretched academically, because the level's lower than, what I was doing at university ... But it's only with the minimum effort. Minimum effort 'cos that's what I choose to do and anything else that involves the minimum effort is a bonus you know I can get

through this course, without reading any books probably (laughs). Just by you know going to all the lectures, and by talking to people, and using my notes.

The practical nature of their coursework produces a sense of achievement and enjoyment different from other courses' end assessment:

I'm getting a chance to demonstrate that I can, perform that skill Rather than, just ... I've crammed it into my head and regurgitate it on the page next day forgotten it the day after In some ways this is more satisfying.

Group support had provided the validation to prompt her confidence in applying for a new job, "I was really uhming and ahring about whether to take it or not ... I was asking everyone 'What would you do?' ", including Geoff:

... you were instrumental in me deciding to take this job ... and he said euh, "Surprise us." Do you remember saying that? (laughs) [Geoff: Yeah!] That stuck in my head I thought, "Yeah. Bloody hell I'm gonna do it, you know, why not?"

Attaining her new job is the unexpectedly early culmination of the sought-for career change, which was unseen further along her sketched road: "one aim of me enrolling on this course was, that I wanted to move into this area." She also unexpectedly discovered the prestige associated with this course which empowers her:

... this course was a major factor in me getting this job, Eum, which they told me explicitly ... I didn't, realise that this particular course was that well respected, that was why I saw it as a fairly basic course.

The opportunity for continuing development of her newly acquired skills base has enhanced her confidence in her new role as facilitator, "what you do need to have is the skills to, erm, present, the subject, in a way that enables other people" and her commitment which expands horizons, "I think, based on my past experience I

will enjoy that, but to a certain extent it's an unknown quantity ... this is like a beginning not an end."

She has alternative qualification routes to consider, "the other thing I'm thinking about is euh, higher level qualification in counselling" and she talks about the professional implications opened up by new horizons:

... there's two kind of, professional issues. One is am I a professional trainer or do I know about training? ... And the other is or do I know about counselling ... well I wanna be both (laughs) but one will have to wait 'cos I can't do both things. So erm, I'm investigating both options.

Her as yet undefined career plan revolves around access to funding more advanced, and hence expensive, courses:

... whether the, organisation I'm gonna work for will support me ... about a thousand, two thousand pounds, as opposed to four hundred pounds? So that's ... more of a barrier, about the cost, if I had to pay it personally, (laughs) you know, and then two years instead of a year and so it's more of an investment ...

Her contemplated career implicates the current issue of professional accreditation:

"in counselling at the moment, it's quite topical ... you do really need to be qualified", and necessitates recognised qualifications in the eyes of both colleagues and trainees, "I feel I have to have the credibility, of being qualified."

This incidentally enhances both status and confidence, through their validation rather than criticism due to her age, " 'cos people look at me and think well you can't be experienced, 'cos you're too young, (laughs) ... perhaps you don't know what you're talking about."

Table 6: Felicity's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	x	x						2x	
social aspect		✓						1✓	
home vs. study conflict		x						1x	
difficulties of study	x	x						2x	
a challenge	✓	✓x						2✓ 1x	✓
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓						1✓	
career /personal change	✓	✓						2✓	✓
qualification at the end	x	✓						1✓ 1x	
status /dream		✓						1✓	
prior academic failure									
recent academic success	✓	✓						2✓	
personal achievement	✓	✓						2✓	
enjoy education	✓	✓						2✓	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued	✓	✓						2✓	
unexpected they can cope	x	x						2x	
sense of commitment	✓	✓						2✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment	✓	✓	x					2✓	✓
horizons broadened	✓	✓	✓					2✓	✓

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support									✓
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support		✓						1✓	
others' criticism		✓						1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan	✓							1✓	
long-term plan		✓						1✓	✓
better job		✓						1✓	
participate in education again	✓	✓						2✓	
Totals:	11✓ 4x	18 ✓ 5x						29✓ 9x	
No. of Themes:	15	22						25	
Sub-total:		23						23	

Despite the fact that Felicity seemed very willing to attend, having made the journey specially as she had no need to be in college that evening, she did not participate further in the research, but continued successfully on the course, receiving her certificate at the end of the year. A confident learner, as represented in her drawing, committed to the realisation of purely work-centred future

objectives, significant for Felicity is job improvement, absent from her picture where the focus was indecision over her future path, but now apparently shifting as she talks through her ideas to clarify her two options.

Geoff's picture

Geoff perceived himself before starting as an anonymous

individual among college groups, but as the focus, particularly as the happy 'expert', of his work situation. Two similar rows of four purple sketches separated the windowed buildings labelled 'COLLEGE' and 'WORK'. The top had small rows of faces with eyes turned to watch a figure using a pointer before a board, a set of faces arranged in rows, and a further set forming a circle. The second had a similar figure using a board before more faces, the much larger face of a happy Geoff beneath a question mark, and finally a graph that was rising depicting 'SALES'.

alienation no study difficulties career change status /dream personal achievement group support valued commitment empowerment horizons broadened tutor unsupportive long-term plan
--

By contrast with the pictures which were not particularly self-explanatory, his description of the drawn images was very informative and gave a slightly different portrayal. His description also distinguished between college-based and work-based perceptions of his return to education. His 11 themes especially emphasise status, then alienation, valuing the group, commitment and wider horizons. Associated with the potently described (though not illustrated) theme of status, is Geoff's strong sense of alienation:

... first of all I saw college as a building you know, ivy-clad building ... Last time I was at college, was at technical college ... as an apprentice engineering, an er that was ... Thirty years ago. Er, so I had this idealised image ...

Another aspect of alienation concerns how he would feel about other students whose mass image as uniform rows of faces appears anonymous and depersonalised, even threatening, while remarks about their perceived relationship reveal his prejudices:

Starting the course ... coming from, business or from industry or whatever, I tended to, put people into groups. You know there seemed to be a lot of voluntary erm, workers there, Yeah? Lot of social workers services type work and er, civil servants ... I've got absolutely nothing at all in common with these people and ... I'm totally anti those kind of people yeah-ah? They don't er, do anything for me or turn me on as the expression or whatever.

A final cohesive circle of faces represents his response to the situation at college, eventually valuing the group, whose support increases his confidence and broadened horizons:

I've really enjoyed coming to college and just, for the social side of things of just meeting these people, yeah?, people that I thought I I'd absolutely nothing, in common with at all, yeah? and we see' we've gelled I think euh euh as a group, it's been a very good group, and have been very enjoyable, actually coming ...

His depiction of straightforward study approaches is based on past experience:

I thought I would turn up there and, I would be taught things, you know someone would stand in front of me, and give me lectures, I would make notes, err and, I would learn things.

However horizons have been broadened through the discovery of more proactive approaches, involving responsibility for his own learning, and exacerbated by feelings that the course content is undemanding, raising the problem of poor tutor support:

Maybe as that bit's not been as enjoyable, that bit that's not been delivered the actual learning or teaching me something ... it's more or less pointing you in the right direction in a direction and expect you to go on for yourself which is, erm is a little alien to me.

Geoff's work-based perceptions of course gains are of job improvement and personal achievement, enhancing his wish to be seen as the expert in his company, "so people come to me and ask me questions 'how do I go about doing this and what's the best way of doing it?' " These aims may be realised through improvement of his company, as depicted by the graph:

... it's business that pays my wages, and I want to see the effect of coming here, being a better trainer, advising people better I want to see a, a result at the end of it ... in being a better company.

His images of college and what it would be like for him as a learner are thus juxtaposed with representations of how his experience at work would be transformed by this, his preconceptions of college and prejudices before getting to know fellow students becoming reversed.

Geoff's contribution to the discussion

In conversation Geoff spoke confidently and apparently openly though noticeably not revealing anything of areas such as family. His 20 topics display 23 themes emphasising empowerment, coping and seeking change.

The qualification is "something I needed to do. Erm, 'cos

I'm in Training but without any formal, qualifications." Previous educational experiences provide his impetus of academic success, coloured by some regret at not having achieved better than his "very old formal qualifications at the very low level":

... 'CSEs' were just coming out when I was sixteen so I did, 'CSEs' and not 'O' levels. And erm, I went on to do, you know night school and day release and things like that and er, they were all mechanical engineering, qualifications so I went through to, to twenty-one, but I suppose it's like an equivalent of an ONC ...

alienation social aspect home/work vs. study conflict study difficulties challenge key incident career/personal change end qualification status academic failure academic success personal achievement group support valued coping unexpectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened family pressure tutor's support tutor unsupportive others' support long-term plan future participation
--

Thus the status of the certificate will reinforce his achievement in the eyes of colleagues, whose support is a source of empowerment for him:

... but yeah if I can, put a tag at the end of umm you know, at the end of my name of Associate of whatever. Erm, yeah it's it's I think it'll change other people's perceptions of ... my professional standing ... within the organisation ... most of the people I work with are euh, a graduate chemist microbiologist chemical engineers or, or erm, environmental scientists or something of that ilk. Yeah? Erm, so they're professionals in their field. Um I like to think that this will make me a little bit more professional in my field.

Status again derives from colleagues' support:

Personally satisfied, if I get through or, whatever or, yeah? I'll have a, a personal achievement I think, I'll have achieved something. Err, professionally I'll, I'll have achieved something. Erm, and I will have achieved something within the organisation as well. Erm, 'cos I'm sure both my boss and my M.D. will be pleased, that err, that I've got to the end of it and got through it and got something out of it.

His manager was a vital source of pressure to succeed and a colleague had influenced him in prompting career change through self-development and thus personal achievement:

... one particular colleague ... he's a graduate, and er, he's been the perpetual student ... he's done his MBA and all that kind of thing, er and and, how much, he enjoys it as well. So that was a a big influence on me, and, the realisation that, erm, you've got to develop yourself ... I've always been one with plenty of good intentions I'm always going to do something and never actually done it. So, I think it was, euh, err, it was the time when it was, err, to bite the bullet and actually do something this time ... one was my boss who suggested I do it, Err huh, 'suggested' in inverted commas, and erm, [Felicity: and said or you're out of a job] No, it didn't but she said it would be of help to you, if if you did it, You know with your status and your standing you know within the company and things like that, and for your own personal benefit as well. So, I think they're the two people who have influenced me most the, guy as I say who's done the MBA then he's done law and and things like that so, yeah him and then my boss, as well.

His commitment is illustrated by his willingness to work outside business hours towards personal development for his career:

... some people like colleagues have err, I don't know I couldn't say it for a fact but, I think they've euh I don't know is impressed the right word, you know impressed that, you know that I'm actually doing something ... for personal development you know outside of working hours and things like that, And er, I think it's err, maybe, you know, lit a few, you know lights of, of recognition in in their minds as well about what they should be doing.

He adds a self-derisory note here: "Yeah, maybe it's it's a case of if that dummy can do it maybe I should do it!" Geoff's anticipation of an alienating college setting is based on earlier experiences "Yeah you don't get that feel, that college feel it is slightly old technical college that I was used to say thirty years ago." Its "ivy-clad" image also initially inspired alienation, because of feeling not in control and insecurity about other students' academic standards:

I was very nervous, I like to be, I'm not a control freak but I like to, be in control, Ahh, and I wouldn't be in control of this situation. Erm, and I couldn't I wasn't sure who else was gonna be there, what standard they were gonna be and what level they were going to be ...

Study fears appear more overtly in his analogy: "I thought I could be like the dummy among them, you know I could be the one in the corner with the pointed hat on with a big D on it."

Change was also foreseen at the personal level where he anticipated socialising ("the networking"), and although claiming nothing has altered his approach, he has new perceptions of some co-students: "maybe I don't view euh social workers in as bad a light as I did before Yeah. Some of them do have a brain and some of them, are reasonable people (laughs)." Recognition of the group's value has broadened his horizons, and reinforces his determination:

... respect for other people, and the jobs that they do. Ahmm, I've I've gained an awful lot of enjoyment 'cos I'm I don't know probably the oldest one on the course, and it's been lovely to be with fifteen women once a week! [Felicity laughs] So, euh, erm, yeah it's it's been, it's been good, err, umm, so, yeah, I've, I've got an awful lot out of it and I think I'll carry on. Maybe as I've been lucky and fortunate I don't know in choosing this course and, and the people have gelled, erm so well, Erm, maybe I might get a real sickener well you know when I go on the next one it might be the work might be too hard, er and, the people might not be as nice, and things like that so, I don't know I think I've been fortunate.

The anticipated time commitment to study is unexpectedly one he has readily coped with:

I wasn't looking forward to, the workload. And to be honest there hasn't been one. (laughs) I'm, I'm up to date with assignments, and things like that, erm, with a minimum amount of effort, I've not been pushed at all. [I: So ... you feel critical about the course?] Not critical. Grateful.

There is an entirely new teaching style for Geoff, "the unexpected thing was the way you learn. You know I was expecting to be taught. And, it's not like that. Yeah?" Although some sessions appear poorly planned, "I don't think the organisation's very good", he is conscious of the tutor support available:

I keep being asked ... if I'm, I'm ready for a tutorial ... and I've not had a tutorial I can't see the point of them yet. Mind you, if I come up against a brick wall I'll be screaming for one I suppose.

The autonomy conferred by his job allows Geoff the flexibility to plan his study time:

... time-keeping isn't ever a problem for me I, I do what I want. Er my boss is, two hundred miles away so, erm, but, that's the kind of organisation we are anyway. You know. You can't do the job nine to five or on, you know, you know thirty-seven or forty hours a week. It is a commitment and it is a lot of hours. So, erm, i' if you want to, to, you know use, some of their time, for for other things you know it'll be okay with them so ... I arrange meetings and nights away and things like that around, around this course. Erm, but I've got the flexibility to do that. There's, I I've missed, I've missed one night since it started 'cos I was in Canada, so-oo, and

that was a short notice thing I euh decided to go on the Thursday and went on the, Saturday type of thing so it was err, unexpected. And err, I might miss, maybe another one or two, but hopefully not urn much more than that before the end of the year.

New confidence in his abilities (“it’s removed that fear, barrier I think”) has convinced him of his wish for future participation as part of a long-term career strategy:

... so, I would think I would definitely be, carrying on into something else. Err mainly job-related so, probably IPD, you know, related so, I might go the euh, you know like the personnel management route type of thing.

Geoff’s narrative questionnaire

Geoff s 18 themes emphasise change and the status of this “ideal qualification”, which will:

... underpin, expand and develop my skills as a trainer ... a means of establishing my credibility as a trainer within the company and to contribute to my own personal development.

alienation social aspect work vs. study conflict study difficulties career change end qualification status personal achievement enjoy education group support valued coping unexpectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened others' support no long-term plan not better job future participation

He is aiming for career improvement, though not job change:

... [I] hope to be a much better trainer and whilst I don’t see it contributing to career progression (as I am very happy in my present role) I am sure the skills and knowledge gained will be of benefit.

Colleagues, who “obtained a great deal of personal satisfaction and sense of achievement” from FE study influenced him and his hopes to end “with a great sense of achievement”. He is also pleased to discover he can prevent the anticipated conflict between study and work:

... the time commitment and how it would fit in with my work schedule ... travelling from region to region meant that there was the possibility that I would miss parts of the course.

He had expected to find studying difficult:

... having not been in the role of a student or learner for nearly 30 years my main apprehension was my ability to cope with the 'intellectual' issues, i.e. would I be out of my depth?

which was not borne out: "in practice I have been pleasantly surprised at my own level of skills and knowledge and do not feel overwhelmed in any way", partly because of the routine aspect to study: "merely completing a task which needed to be done."

Geoff had hoped for career contacts, to "establish a working relationship", but group dynamics had proved to be a source of confidence and unexpectedly expanding horizons:

My co-students come from a diverse age and skill group and I have found myself enjoying the company of people I would normally have dismissed as being 'do-gooders' or from the looney left.

They had inspired his determination to progress further, in his first explicit mention of enjoying the course:

... rather pleasant mainly due to the people with whom I have worked. It has certainly given me a taste for continuing the process and now that I have dipped my toe in, the water is comfortably warm and not icy cold as I expected.

This telling metaphor summarises Geoff's initial course anxieties, while the embellishment of his signature with the words "Certificate in Training Practice", indicates his confidence, if not conviction, in his ability to complete and pass the course.

Table 7: Geoff's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
social aspect		✓	✓					2✓	
home vs. study conflict		✓	✓					2✓	
difficulties of study	x	✓	✓					2✓ 1x	
a challenge		✓						1✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓						1✓	
career /personal change	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
qualification at the end		✓	✓					2✓	
status /dream	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
prior academic failure		✓						1✓	
recent academic success		✓							
personal achievement	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
enjoy education			✓					1✓	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
unexpected they can cope		✓	✓					2✓	
sense of commitment	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
horizons broadened	✓	✓	✓					3✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support									
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed		✓						1✓	
continuing tutor support valued		✓						1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able	✓	✓						2✓	
others' support		✓	✓					2✓	
others' criticism									
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan			✓					1✓	
long-term plan	✓	✓						2✓	
better job			x					1x	
participate in education again		✓	✓					2✓	
Totals:	10✓ 1x	23 ✓	17✓ 1x					49✓ 2x	
No. of Themes:	11	23	18					27	
Sub-total:		26						26	

Jenny's picture

Jenny's humour and confidence set the tone for the discussion.

Her four alternately brown and green sketches showed herself anticipating, then despite parenting concerns happily coming to terms with college work, aiming for the end certificate.

- social aspect
- home vs. study conflict
- study difficulties
- key incident
- personal change
- end qualification
- academic failure
- personal achievement
- horizons broadened
- long-term plan

Confidently smiling she was thinking “Leaving work, What next”, in her second with arms raised, she looked down on a cradle labelled ‘BABY’, lack of a mouth reinforcing the anxious message “Will I cope, with college - Not the Placenta BUT your Brain that goes.” Thirdly, with arms raised higher and a lopsided smile, she was thinking “Start of college”, “Done it in practice. Can I do the theory” and “Assignments. Last minute. Don’t like writing essays.” At ‘The End’, a scroll represented her ‘Certificate of Training Practice’.

Ten themes begin with the key event of pregnancy which marks her changing personal circumstances from a responsible job:

... very happy then to be at home and just remain a mother ... my priority’s motherhood so when like I’ve got that out of the way, I can go back to work.

While not of immediate use, she seeks the achievement of the qualification: “my ultimate aim, my goal.” Relating to Jenny’s anxieties (“whether I can actually cope just kind of having given birth ... and can I cope with the baby”), are her foreseen difficulties in concentrating on study:

A week later and I’m here starting a college course [laughs] and so really certainly saying as far as work goes they say it’s not the placenta that leaves after the birth it’s your brain [laughs] ...

These difficulties arose during a previously attempted correspondence course (“I didn’t have the discipline to actually sort of persevere”) and relate to assignments:

I’d much rather talk about it than write about it ... that’s sort of a sticking point for me, that’s sort of what I really have to work hard at that, like for example a deadline. There’s something that had to be in today, I did it this morning [laughs] ...

Although having nine years’ experience in training, Jenny realises the course is broadening horizons:

... what I've started to understand you actually need to understand everything rather than doing it or being told to do it in this way ... but I think it's important to be able to take one step back, to look at what do we actually do.

This significantly reveals her new-found awareness of the value of the theoretical background to her work. Of minimal interest here is the social aspect of study,

“[you] have a break, you get out, and meet people”, which is reinforced later on.

end qualification status personal achievement coping expectedly commitment partner's/parents' support tutor's support tutor unsupportive others' support long-term plan future participation
--

Jenny's contribution to the discussion

Jenny's six debate topics reveal 11 themes, emphasising future plans, namely her long-held intention of achieving the qualification:

... so that when I do actually go back out and look for jobs I can actually say I have achieved, I have got this, 'cos I've got experience but I've also got something to back that experience up ... I'll be armed with a full qualification ... it's certainly becoming more of a requirement for my job.

as well as future courses such as computing, so as to “continue with this kind of learning.” Assets will be both status and job security: “most of the jobs'll say ‘I.P.D. qualified’.”

Support from others also features, largely arising from her family and husband, and incidentally from his employers: “my husband finishes work at three o'clock, and, so really I mean, his firm is actually committed to give me the support to actually come and do this.” Although she agrees some tutors are not using the time constructively, tutor support is paramount among the beneficial features of this course:

I did a lot of research ... and also the quality test ... that was the big influence to actually say this was the college for me, erm it's affordable, erm and it's within travelling distance, and you get a lot of support erm available.

Her sense of commitment and ability to cope surmount the student identity: “as anyone knows who’s prepared to do it, that I can deal with that ... And I still don’t see myself as a student.”

Jenny’s narrative questionnaire

Jenny’s four page questionnaire expanded on her thoughts and feelings, her 16 themes emphasising conflict, and the qualification “to consolidate the nine years I’ve spent as a Trainer ... I will see myself as being very happy and proud to have achieved”, allied to personal and career change (“gives you more credibility”).

Leaving work (“to be a full-time mum”) was significant, as was the perceived home-study conflict: “although I know he is the first priority adjusting is a challenge, especially when I look back at the responsibility I had in my job.”

Following her son’s birth (“luckily he was slightly earlier than the expected date”), she expected difficulties: “I had to consider ... the sleepless nights who would look after him whilst I was at college ... how would he get fed because he is breast fed.”

She also anticipated the recurrence of study problems, encountered earlier during unsuccessful distance learning:

“[especially] when it was correspondence or occasional workshop sessions. I knew that I wouldn’t be disciplined enough to complete the course.”

Course benefits include broadened horizons:

The job I did required all the skills involved in the course outline - I did them all within my job and more but since September I have discovered how little I really know.

and empowerment, “I also look young and when meeting clients it can give you more confidence because you can prove that you have a professional

home vs. study conflict
study difficulties
key incident
personal change
end qualification
academic failure
personal achievement
group support valued
empowerment
horizons broadened
partner’s/parents’ support
tutor’s support
others’ support
others unsupportive
long-term plan
future participation

qualification.” Having hoped for the opportunity of professional networking, she now values tutors’ and group support, “help indirectly could come from fellow class mates, but if you don’t know them it’s harder to ask.” Domestic support continues though she hopes for less parental demands soon “it will be easier to leave him with other people as he will be older and less dependent on mum.”

Enrolment had brought criticism “most people thought I was mad.”

Since she omitted answering questions about the anticipated and realised features, both good and bad, of being a student, this appears an irrelevance for Jenny:

I don’t see myself as a student, and hadn’t thought about being labelled as an adult learner. I always considered students to be full-time or attend college more than one evening a week. I am not looking to gain anything by being a student.

Future participation however is significant, as she has a continuing belief that “it will help ... if you keep up with things rather than standing still. You need to live life for the present and future not for the past.” These final words on the developmental worth of education indicate her current attitude to study, which incorporates her need to accommodate others, especially the increasing demands of a small baby, as well as her constant intention to return to full-time employment.

Table 8: Jenny's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation									
social aspect	✓							1✓	
home vs. study conflict	✓		✓					2✓	
difficulties of study	✓		✓					2✓	
a challenge									
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy	✓		✓					2✓	
career /personal change	✓		✓					2✓	
qualification at the end	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
status /dream		✓						1✓	
prior academic failure	✓		✓					2✓	
recent academic success									
personal achievement	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
enjoy education									
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued			✓					1✓	
unexpected they can cope		x						1x	
sense of commitment		✓						1✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment			✓					1✓	
horizons broadened	✓		✓					2✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support		✓	✓					2✓	
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued		✓	✓					2✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able		✓						1✓	
others' support		✓	✓					2✓	
others' criticism			✓					1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
better job									
participate in education again		✓	✓					2✓	
Totals:	10✓	10 ✓1 x	16✓					36✓ 1x	
No. of Themes:	10	11	16					21	
Sub-total:		21						21	

Liz's narrative questionnaire

Liz was the only person participating solely by post, her four pages giving her responses to every aspect of the questionnaire, covering in varying detail her two current courses, for the C.T.P. and her more significant focus on an Open University (O.U.) degree. The certificate is purely a routine task, rather than status-driven, which she is doing in order to qualify for a job in a more favourable

environment elsewhere, thereby placing her in a better position to subsidise her
pursuance of postgraduate study:

I had been a training officer with Counties Insurance for two and a half years and my career was going nowhere. This course would give me a professional qualification and enable me to seek better opportunities ... The course will just provide a piece of paper to prove I can train.

The most emphasised of her 25 themes demonstrate her continuing commitment to learning in the face of direct conflict between study and her work, with resulting criticism from colleagues. (Her tutor Gill's evaluation surprisingly lists the least significant among Liz's themes.) She concludes that "taking this course and achieving excellent results has caused jealousy and resentment within the workplace."

She attributes work problems wholly to her "singularly unhelpful" colleagues, in particular her "immediate boss", who "tries to place as many hurdles in my way as possible", such as scheduling her to work on college nights. She says:

Last year, he made sure I was away on business every time I had an assignment due ... I missed tutorials and even worse - at exam time he gave me a lot of grief and pressure. Despite his petty interfering, I passed and since this, he barely speaks to me. The words "insecure and childish" spring to mind.

no alienation work/home vs. study conflict study difficulties challenge key incident career/personal change end qualification not status dream academic failure academic success personal achievement enjoy education group support valued coping unexpectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened partner's support family pressure others' support others unsupportive long-term plan better job future participation

The life event of reaching thirty prompted pursuit of personal change through a
challenging dream:

I had achieved very few of the goals I had set for myself at 18. I passed up an opportunity to study Geology at University, and deep down have regretted this ever since.

She is now coming to terms with this past academic failure: "The most surprising thing is that I am taking Chemistry this year - putting ghosts to rest after failing it

at school.” Foreseen difficulties are being unexpectedly dealt with: “I have surprised myself, as I never thought I would see the study through.”

Difficulties over continuing the course have been resolved with family support (and possibly pressure to succeed):

My husband sent the forms off to the O.U., and just kept getting me to sign ‘on the dotted line’. All the time, I believed I wouldn’t see it through. Suddenly books and assignments arrived in the post, and I was on a rollercoaster that I couldn’t get off!

At this stage she has the impetus of recent success on her Earth Science O.U.

course, which fuels her long-term plans “to work with my passion in life -

volcanoes”. Her commitment has been reinforced, “My confidence has increased

by 100%. I feel stimulated, stretched and fulfilled”, and new horizons have

opened up for her: “I have a broader scope for discussion and more importantly

feel that my points are relevant and knowledgeable.” The influence of ‘adult

learning’ is far reaching:

Before the O.U., I watched a great deal of rubbish on T.V. Now I have to be selective and choose programmes carefully (Sometimes even negotiating with myself).

Equally, her own enjoyment is influencing others: “My enthusiasm for study has

rubbed off on friends. Several have signed up for courses.”

Benefiting socially from the group situation at college and OU meetings, she is

more confident of her ability to:

... juggle home, work and study ... valuable in improving my time management skills. I have learnt to prioritise and indeed not to worry if something like housework or ironing doesn’t get done. I’ve also learnt to appreciate ‘free’ time and to make the time worthwhile.

Table 9: Liz's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation			X					X	
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict			✓					✓	
difficulties of study			✓					✓	
a challenge			✓					✓	✓
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy			✓					✓	
career /personal change			✓					✓	✓
qualification at the end			✓					✓	
status /dream			✓X					✓	
prior academic failure			✓					✓	
recent academic success			✓					✓	
personal achievement			✓					✓	
enjoy education			✓					✓	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued			✓					✓	✓
unexpected they can cope			✓					✓	
sense of commitment			✓					✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment			✓					✓	
horizons broadened			✓					✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support			✓					✓	
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed			✓					✓	
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support			✓					✓	✓
others' criticism			✓					✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan			✓					✓	
better job			✓					✓	✓
participate in education again			✓					✓	
Totals:	9		23✓ 2x					23✓ 2x	
No. of Themes:	9		25					25	
Sub-total:	24							24	

Her confidence extends to the future, "I can only see myself going from strength to strength, and in three years time I will graduate with a B.Sc. (Hons.). Then I'll start my second degree!"

Paula's picture

Paula was at first tentative about drawing, using pastel shades and fairly neutral stick figures without features. She depicted herself at work, with colleagues attending one of her training sessions. In her first picture in emerald green, Paula was standing before a board pointing at a (dropping) graph before two neat rows of tables and chairs, where one seated person slept, indicated by 'Z Z Z Z' sounds. The second, almost identical in lilac, showed a rising graph and seats full of wakeful occupants.

career change
status
long-term plan

Her simple contrast (which she stated to be a symbolic, not literal representation) between one sleeping individual and a roomful of alert trainees, illustrates quite potently her wish to change both the image and role of her job. Her few words emphasise this work-oriented focus on a single-minded concern, which potently demonstrates the power of a drawn image to reveal a realistic anxiety.

Her words only obliquely reveal her three themes: "I want to raise the profile of internal training. Get more people on, on the courses ultimately see that as a business benefit as well." These are a wish for status, through change in her work situation, linked to the long-term vision for her company. To this end, Paula intends to combine theory with her practical training skills.

Paula's contribution to the discussion

Paula contributed in a forthright but fairly guarded manner to seven discussion topics. The only two unrelated to work, were being too tired after the session for socialising, and the topic of school. She apparently preferred the routine of school life, disliking any disruption to it

work/home vs. study conflict
study difficulties
career change
group support valued
coping expectedly
family unsupportive
others unsupportive
long-term plan

deriving from other people rather than her study organisation, (perhaps indicating some past academic failure).

Paula's eight themes especially emphasise others' criticism, besides study conflicting with work, and career change. This latter, sole reason for participation is thus "plugging that gap" of theoretical background to her training. Paula disagrees with the group's coping tactics of anticipating course difficulties, as compared to those of schooldays, "you knew where you were going and you knew you had the lessons which led to an exam you'd got, your coursework and some PE." Now she feels there are unpredictable distractions:

... somebody'd throw something in from there and it does, it's the things that are coming at you from the side that stop you from getting where you want to be, and that's the difficulty I have. I know where I need to be, but it's other people's drawing on my time and that ... I mean somebody comes in and throws an enormous one in there for you to deal with, and that's where it throws all your plans out and that's the difficulty that I have, when I'm trying to do a full-time job and a course as well ...

She raises here the theme of conflict between study and work as well possibly as home, here lack of family support becoming hinted at besides that from "other people". Study problems are evident too:

I ought to know better 'cos I studied I.P.D. when I was working full-time, while we were going for Investors in People, while I'd got a new boss so I knew, you know, that's how it'd go and it's not as bad as that this time, there's a bit more room to show and, I knew what I was gonna be expecting.

She is coping much as she expected with the course despite pressure from other people:

... it's the, the outside pressures and the outside influences that there were people wanting certain things doing and certain time, and that draws on you, and time for me it's the problem.

Her pointed confirmation (“Exactly!”) of Don’s comments on people’s jealousy over their qualification again suggests others’ critical attitude towards her. Rather than anticipating the course outcome of the end certificate, Paula reveals a hard-headed instrumentalism in her valuing of input from the group, in terms of suggestions to capitalise upon in her own training practice. This appears the only valued aspect of their support:

... from the point of view of presentations ... because it’s a great place for picking up tips ... you think “Oh! I’ll try that next time” and “Oh! that worked really well, that’ll be useful” and I mean things like that are invaluable for me.

Paula contributed no further to the study and I found she was worried about keeping her job, becoming dismissed around two months later when she also began falling behind in her college assignments. From that point she no longer attended college nor completed her assignments. This situation underlines the criticism, conflict and change, characteristic of her theme profile.

Table 10: Paula's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation									
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict		✓						1✓	
difficulties of study		✓						1✓	
a challenge									
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change	✓	✓						2✓	
qualification at the end									
status /dream	✓							1✓	
prior academic failure									
recent academic success									
personal achievement									
enjoy education									
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓						1✓	
unexpected they can cope		x						1x	
sense of commitment									
confidence from others' validation /empowerment									
horizons broadened									

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support									
partner/parents unsupportive		✓						1✓	
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support									
others' criticism		✓						1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan	✓	✓						2✓	
better job									
participate in education again									
Totals:	3✓	7✓ 1x						10✓ 1x	
No. of Themes:	3	8						11	
Sub-total:		9						9	

Sarah's picture

Using the broad tip of a bright green board marker, Sarah depicted herself firstly as a stick figure, saying "Bored", then as a large pair of wide open eyes with large eyelashes and the caption 'Looking for a Challenge.' The lower half of the paper, labelled "NEW JOB", was symbolised by a hill with an arrow pointing straight up one side. Sarah's succinct

- | |
|------------------------|
| challenge |
| key incident |
| career/personal change |
| end qualification |
| commitment |
| horizons broadened |
| better job |

description of these vivid images illustrates seven themes. She sought personal change following a key incident:

... my job was made redundant this time last year. So I was (sighs) bored, what can I do, I need something, erm. I were, I was, initially when I first left work I was pacing up and down in the house because I was so used to being out working and Suddenly it was like “What can I do?”

This change became more specifically focused upon her career through a better job:

I went to sort of see a Career Adviser and, we discussed things and this was why I wanted to join the course. So it was like, I was looking for a challenge, and something, possibly a new career.

Personnel training presents Sarah with new horizons: “it is totally different to what I was doing”, and she is now committed to pursuing her qualification “I feel as though I’m down here, but, I’m climbing this, hill and, heading for the top, trying to get my certificate and a new and, up to a career?”

Sarah’s contribution to the discussion

Sarah contributed on nine topics in the group debate, giving the impression she thought carefully before speaking briefly but succinctly, prepared to initiate as well as join in discussion. She offered supportive comments to others, although her 11 themes again omit anything on others’ views. Career change followed psychometric testing, “to see the sort of things I was capable of and I had a little bit of training but only delivering training as opposed to any theory.”

no alienation home vs. study conflict challenge career change end qualification personal achievement group support valued coping expectedly commitment no long-term plan future participation

Sarah’s commitment and lack of alienation as an adult learner are apparent in her view that age is irrelevant to study:

I don't think you're ever too old to learn though, I think it's if you want to do it, but then, you've got to get on and do it haven't you? I don't think, you know, the age, is really, the barrier.

When Zoe talks about the difficulty of study whilst working to maintain a standard of living, Sarah's emphatic agreement hints at possible conflict between study and home. In her insistence that it is necessary not to drop standards, she is apparently both avoiding her course attendance compromising this through its expense and time commitment; and ensuring that the eventual resulting qualification is a way forward to resuming her means of income and so ensure her living standard.

Her explanation to Zoe of how well recognised the certificate is, suggests its status as well as its value when applying for a job: "You're more likely to get it."

However she also agrees it confers "some sense of worth", suggesting it contributes to personal achievement. Her commitment and continuing to cope, show in her attendance on a computing course: "which erm, I will continue until

I've finished, whatever." Uncertain of future plans, she will participate in education again, this being contingent upon course success: "at the end of the course I'll think of that I would, you know ... really want to know how well I'd done on doing this course before I made that decision."

Sarah's narrative questionnaire

Sarah expressed herself, as in speech, clearly and matter-of-factly in her three page questionnaire, with passing reference to family (her husband), her new themes being about her dream goal and study problems. Her 17 themes reveal little about expectations of becoming a student, perhaps indicating she has few

study difficulties
no study difficulties
key incident
career /personal change
end qualification
dream
personal achievement
group support valued
copied expectedly
copied unexpectedly
commitment
horizons broadened
partner's support
others' support
no long-term plan
better job
future participation

preconceived ideas about study, whereas it is most striking that she details carefully each stage in her preparations, overcoming all difficulties she encounters:

... last December my job was made redundant. There didn't seem to be any jobs around in this field, so I went to see a careers adviser. I underwent psychometric tests and questionnaires and she suggested I think about a career in Training as I had done a bit of this in my previous job. I then wrote to I.P.D. for some information on what courses they did and where they were held. I live in Milford and Newland College was the nearest for me to attend. I then contacted the college for further information like what day /time was the course held etc. and I arranged an interview with the tutor. Up to this point I still hadn't made my mind up whether this was what I really wanted to do. I attended the interview armed with a list of questions to ask about the course. I then came away thinking I can do this.

Hence she will apparently not suffer difficulties with study, although one anticipated problem ("I don't particularly enjoy writing essays"), has unexpectedly proved she can cope: "generally I find it is the thought of doing them that tends to be the worse part. Once I get started it's surprising how much I seem to know." Support from another quarter again demonstrates her coping ability:

... we have to do a work based project. My first thoughts were, I haven't got a job, what am I going to do, how am I going to achieve this. However I got around this problem fairly quickly as I was chatting to a store manager I know and he suggested I go and do my project there.

Support from her partner is evident in the arrangements she has had to make:

... to check on times of transport etc. to see if it was actually possible for me to get there and back. It turned out that I would need my husband to fetch me home or I wouldn't be able to attend. Fortunately he agreed.

She feels herself to be unchanged: "I am not aware that there are any differences in me as a student, no-one has indicated any." Despite this comment various skills

gained provide a broader outlook for her: "But along the way I hope to learn from others, gain lots of information, experience and skills in order that I can do a good job." A new dream aim appears, incidentally appreciating participating in the group situation: "I now have something to aim for - a goal to achieve. I learn something new every week and I have made some new friends."

Table 11: Sarah's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation		x						1x	
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict		✓						1✓	
difficulties of study			✓x					1✓ 1x	
a challenge	✓	✓						2✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy	✓		✓					2✓	
career /personal change	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
qualification at the end	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
status /dream			✓					1✓	
prior academic failure									
recent academic success									
personal achievement		✓	✓					2✓	
enjoy education									
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓	✓					2✓	
unexpected they can cope		x	✓x					1✓ 2x	
sense of commitment	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment									
horizons broadened	✓		✓					2✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support			✓					1✓	
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support			✓					1✓	
others' criticism									
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan		✓	✓					2✓	
long-term plan									
better job	✓		✓					2✓	
participate in education again		✓	✓					2✓	
Totals:	7✓	9✓ 2x	15✓ 2x					31✓ 4x	
No. of Themes:	7	11	17					35	
Sub-total:		18						18	

This course is the means to change in both present and future employment: “The ultimate thing I am hoping to gain ... is a professional qualification which in turn may help me get a job.” Future plans now probably involve study, such as her additional course, “Whether I look for a job immediately or whether I decide to continue at college and do the next level.”

Lack of reference to others suggests she may feel isolated, seemingly independent and quite determined by nature. By contrast she values support from the group, as mentioned in both narrative questionnaire and the discussion, but does not rate their validation as promoting confidence in her nor did she expect the social aspects of the course to be of importance.

Zoe’s contributions to the discussion

Zoe arrived too late for a picture presentation but spoke on

14 discussion topics. Her 22 themes most heavily

emphasise study conflicting with work and home, then

coping expectedly and commitment. Her input was

enthusiastic and lively, speaking at length, with a down-to-

earth approach, typified by her apparently hasty enrolment: “I stumbled into this

to be honest ... I came in really late, into this. I rushed in and I did an interview

for about ten minutes, didn’t get loads and loads of information prior.”

Zoe reveals a double-edged impetus, with pursuit of a new training role: “it really

is two-fold it’s about training aspect I really am interested in I can see myself

going further with this now”, which arose from desire for career change:

I was stuck with my job ... [Careers] ran through a number of options One of the things that came up was training now apart from er my work I do have a training capacity in-house N.V.Q.,

work/home vs. study conflict
study difficulties
career /personal change
end qualification
not status
academic failure
academic success
personal achievement
enjoy education
group support valued
coping expectedly
coping unexpectedly
commitment
empowerment
horizons broadened
family pressure
tutor’s support
tutor unsupportive
others’ support
others unsupportive
long-term plan
better job

and I like that, a lot, so I thought well maybe this would be good, to actually get into.

Her work on this certificate can incidentally be capitalised upon for other accreditation purposes “this’ll be good for my N.V.Q. units as well.” Secondly she seeks personal change, through some form of educational achievement: “the other bit is like actually getting back into being, an academic”, indicative of the course’s impact in having already broadened her horizons. She appreciates these opportunities for personal change and achievement:

... I owe it to myself, you know, because midway, you’ve, had a family, ran a business, you’ve had a job, der-der-der, der-der-der, der-der-der, all those things, and then you come back to yourself, at some stage, and I I think well where was I at sixteen? Oh I know. And then you do something else. And, and I know you’ve got other things, other skills and that besides, but you pick up. I don’t want to do ‘A’ levels, ’cos I just don’t wanna do them. But I mean, this is more me, now.

Despite the empowering nature of a return, her resolution became called into doubt. Her long educational break implies study difficulties, which are becoming reinforced for her by the college building’s appearance:

... I really started to enjoy the work I found that it was like the academic side ’cos I’d been so much in the work real world from being sixteen, the academic side was strangely new again, it was like being back at school. It still is to some extent. I think that, the building doesn’t, help that. I still feel like I’m coming to school.

Zoe’s school experiences reveal her school academic record to have been successful in terms of qualifications, but partially representing failure, in that she reacted against pressure to take ‘A’ levels by leaving school:

I left school at sixteen with quite a lot of qualifications, ‘O’ levels, but the, I, I was creamed off quite a I was, not wishing to sound egotistical, I was creamed off as top notch, and we were pressured to do, in fourth and fifth year, ‘O’ levels. And it did me in, ’cos I’m not a natural but I work, so I did real well, but then I said “See you”. And, they said “Wha-at? You can’t do that you’ve got to

stay on”, and I said “Sorry. Not for me. Done.” Now, I think that decision was reactive to say the least ...

This provides the background to her current expectations of difficulties:

... I’m saying to myself, now, Crikey, years on, thirty, thirty years on-ish, more, you’ve got a chance again, do i’. Now, it’s gonna be harder, but you owe it yourself.

which are compounded by problems due to her age, as Zoe’s emphatic agreement with Amanda illustrates “Oh god yeah! Very. Draining.”

Initial doubts about her ability were apparently dismissed too readily by her interview tutor, who possibly gave inaccurate advice, revealing her theme of tutors not acting as advisedly as possible:

My main question I had when I came for interview was I wanted to know if I had the in his opinion it was Tim’s opinion I could actually do this and I and I just kind of blurted out the whole thing of me in about ten to fifteen minutes, and actually said at the end of it, and, the option is that if you want a (tapping on the table) bum on a seat and you want my money out of my pocket tough if you think I’m crap and you think I can’t do it and I want you to tell me the truth, and because you know it’s like, I mean it might be the cheapest I hadn’t a clue it was one of the cheapest, I just thought “Christ it’s expensive this!”, but I mean, I just said, you know, if it’s if that’s the case then “No forget it” I’m off out the door, ’cos I don’t want that, So-oo, I asked and he said “No that’s fine” (laughs).

Despite foreseeing conflict with work Zoe maintains her determination :

I hope that I haven’t bitten off more than I can chew with this that’s the thing that I’m finding ’cos I’m working full-time but I mean i’ there’s quite a lot of work more than I anticipated, erm, but I’m ploughing on.

which is matched by her coping ability:

It’s not about the actual work itself it’s about the time ... I actually can, I think get my head round the work but, I’ve missed a couple of weeks ’cos I went to America so that’s not helped me either in fact it’s been an uphill struggle ... I’m looking forward to Christmas ... because I’ve got time out of work ... time’s so valuable so and have a life at the same time as well.

The more limited time her employers now allow for study, is compounded by colleagues' criticism which exerts pressure on her to succeed:

... we don't get time out of work at all for anything ... in council. We used to get day release, everything ... there's still so much commitment to their jobs, that, the the study side of anything is like extra and, you know you're a brave soldier if you go out and do that now, in that adult world ... they range from "You must be nuts, don't you think you've got enough on?" (laughs) You know I'm "I'm really in admiration of you", "You'll do it I know you will", and all this an-n', and I think "Gee I dare not do it now" (laughs). I've got all this pressure around me now as well.

Others' reactions to her studying are exemplified either by "academics" who have said, "Yes you can do it", or those "who've probably experienced this better or lower or whatever the words are", who "seem to think, "Oh, I could do it" (laughs)." Being employed unexpectedly causes tiredness, "After the break I start to flag ... I'd rather it'd be two evenings, shorter, 'cos you know, I can't absorb after about seven", the resulting problems demonstrating the potential risks such adult learners face:

... I sometimes can't remember driving home. Don't tell my friend. [laughs] And I just get in and I just think "Oh God, that's another Tuesday over", [all laugh] (laughs) ... I mean what is the thing? I mean you just wonder why you do.

Early coursework success has reinforced her confidence and unexpected coping ability, with evidence of continuing commitment:

... some days, when I cracked that presentation the other week that were it I'd done it, I didn't care if I didn't do anything else after, that were it. (chuckles) But like then I think everything after this is not gonna be as hard as that for some reason or other, except it's just knuckling down and finding the time, and, i' it doesn't seem Now I see what's coming in a training thing and I'm getting my head around, all I need to know is how to put a bloody business report together now you know, but I mean I'll have to go to somewhere and say "Help" and I'm quite happy to do that, but it's like I see major stumbling blocks along. You know I've looked along and seeing what what's happening out you know further on, that's not so bad I can deal with that I can show somebody how to

do it fine. Those sorts of things you get further on and I see this biggy coming along and I see that biggy. So I'm like, it's there, but you know it's like climbing a hill mountain actually Everest.

She utilises prioritising: "that's a skill you learn ... I don't know if it's a student thing or not but it's just the way uh, I see it's where I handle what's happening", whereas traditional students' experiences differ greatly:

I still don't seem a proper student I don't actually say "I'm a student". I find this book in my folder every now and again, it says 'Student Handbook' and I go, "Oh yeah!" [all laugh] and put it back in [Don: I see a student as just being five days a week] ... yeah, you can get up at eleven if you want [laughs] if there's something happening ... That is not how it is. You rush here and you rush there, and, and I mean that's about being an adult ...

Appreciation of sharing the group's circumstances increases her determination:

Yeah, you've got other things people bring in, problems, their things, childcare, stuff like that, so you think "Oh God you know, I've got all this stuff" and and lots of people have got other things.

Career change now focuses on plans abroad:

... I don't know what I'm going to do with this ... I'm going to America hopefully and, I'll wave it around somebody's face and say "What do you think of this? Any good?" (laughs).

Among many factors in acquiring the certificate, Zoe reveals her wish for the qualification, while not seeking its status. She refers once to enjoying education, which is compromised by needing employment to maintain her standard of living:

If I got two years out of work, if somebody gave me χ amount of money, and I took two or whatever three years I'd love that, I would just be in an element ... But I can't afford to do it. It's as simple as that so, I have to do it, alongside. Well I could if I lived in a tent.

This typifies her enthusiastic yet trenchant attitude to learning to which she is committed despite conflict, predominantly with work.

Zoe's narrative questionnaire

Zoe's four pages reveal 18 themes, a newly figuring key event leading to her seeking career change: "the need to look at a possible /probable career change following excessive and (in my view) unrealistic rationalisation of my organisation." Prospects for improvement centre on acquiring the certificate: "Professionally, nowhere new but further down the line looking at future training possibilities out of my current organisation in another country?" Enrolment was again described as precipitate:

On a fairly spur of the moment decision I attended an interview with the course tutor and, to be quite honest, much to my surprise, was accepted on the course. Then I started to 'get my head round' what this was all about ... As the start of the course was maybe only a week from my 'enrolment' I didn't get a chance or even feel that I had become a student.

work/home vs. study conflict key incident career change end qualification academic failure personal achievement group support valued commitment empowerment horizons broadened family support family pressure tutor unsupportive others' support others unsupportive long-term plan better job future participation
--

Her only expectation of difficulty as an adult learner is heavily influenced by conflict of interest between study and her home, work and social life:

I don't consider (still) myself a student:- I consider myself as an adult, working full-time, using some of my spare time to further my learning around an area of work I have lots of practice in but no theory of. I wonder sometimes if the two will match up at the end of the course!! All I feel about the understanding of my role as a student is that it is extremely difficult to find time to work full-time, run a home, be self-sufficient, try to achieve all the course deadlines and keep my sanity.

Library facilities are her employers' sole contribution to her studies: "work has not sponsored me or paid for any of my study", which is vital as she states, "the College library is almost impossible for me to get to." Her sense of commitment can be seen in her reaction to criticism she receives (besides support) from colleagues:

... some admire, others think I am crazy and I work far too hard as most have very low morale and have not yet realised that being pro-active can /could change their attitude and style to work.

Her first mention of family support incorporates pressure to succeed: “encourage me strongly: though again wonder if I have bitten off more than I can chew! (fair comment).” The apparent break in their tutorship continuity presented a setback: “I have recently encountered a change in tutor; which has to some extent thrown me: I consider this move slightly off-putting.” Group support has broadened her horizons:

The good so far has been meeting a whole new crowd of people with similar aims be it that most of them appear to be more down the trainer road than I am - gives me some insight into varieties of trainers and styles.

Personal achievement has been partially realised through her empowerment:

Personally I will have “grown”. I have done already in both self-confidence and ability. The future can only get better as long as I pace myself well and continue to focus (not obsessively) towards my career goal which fortunately parallels my current life goals.

Future courses may well be coloured by her perceived academic failure:

Academia stopped at 16 then picked up again at 49. It seems, it is never too late and I would encourage all adults to consider some form of adult learning to keep the old grey matter moving.

Table 12: Zoe's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation									
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict		✓	✓					2✓	
difficulties of study		✓						1✓	
a challenge									
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy			✓					1✓	
career /personal change		✓	✓					2✓	
qualification at the end		✓	✓					2✓	
status /dream		x						1x	
prior academic failure		✓	✓					2✓	
recent academic success		✓						1✓	
personal achievement		✓	✓					2✓	
enjoy education		✓						1✓	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓	✓					2✓	
unexpected they can cope		✓x						1✓ 1x	
sense of commitment		✓	✓					2✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment		✓	✓					2✓	
horizons broadened		✓	✓					2✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support			✓					1✓	
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed		✓	✓					2✓	
continuing tutor support valued		✓						1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able		✓	✓					2✓	
others' support		✓	✓					2✓	
others' criticism		✓	✓					2✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan		✓	✓					2✓	
better job		✓	✓					2✓	
participate in education again			✓					1✓	
Totals:		9✓ 2x	18✓					27✓ 2x	
No. of Themes:		11	18						
Sub-total:		24						24	

Comparative analysis of the vocational group

These portraits were developed from materials collected early on in this study and illustrate the range of people engaged on one particular vocational study route, something of their various past and present educational experiences and indication of their hopes or intentions for the future. The reasons initially given

for participation do not follow a predictable pattern of purely vocational aspiration, and other elements such as individual, domestic and social motivational forces, may be significant for the complex and multi-faceted picture arising. Various themes emerged from the above analysis as significant in varying degrees to some or all of this group. In order to ascertain the extent to which these factors are indicative of the participants, there follows a comparative analysis of the individuals, to highlight any differences or similarities.

The group's pictures

Comparing various aspects of all seven pictures enables identification of the significant factors among group members. An illustration of their involvement in learning is revealed in the opposing work or college perspective in their pictures, Jenny, Don and Amanda illustrating a purely student-based standpoint without reference to work, Jenny's baby and Don's home providing the implicit background. The work-based point of view of professional or career reasons for returning to education, appears in Paula's literal representation of the workplace and is implicit in Sarah's abstraction of her task of climbing a hill. Felicity and Geoff however combine both student and professional trainer perspectives.

Feelings about a return to study are strongly expressed through imagery, especially as revealed in the general impression of the college building and attending lectures (Geoff), or their feelings at being at college (Amanda and Jenny), or being engaged on college work (Don). Further perspectives on the role of adult learner emerge in their attitude to learning, all sharing a determination and positive outlook with respect to the study being embarked upon, in spite of setbacks once on the course for some (Amanda, Don, Geoff) and prior to it for

Sarah, her participation being in order to overcome difficulties. Only Jenny and Geoff displayed anxiety about academic study, she specifically about theory.

The group's contributions to the discussions

A comparison of the eight contributors reveals they covered 10 topics while between 17 and 30 arose during paired discussion. Allegiance to the group was exhibited to varying degrees during discussion, but closer examination of the data revealed certain differences between individuals' speech, as some people used certain pronouns and others used different ones. Since this study seeks to identify how individuals see themselves as students, these were analysed and compared. When analysed an unexpectedly different picture emerged to the first impressions of the conversations, those distinctions that had been initially noticeable becoming confirmed, while others that were not apparent now appeared. Varying emphases on the roles of studenthood and trainer reinforce their differing attitudes to learning and work, as displayed for example by their attitudes about group identity. As illustration of this, use of the pronouns 'I' and 'we' is given here.

The pronoun 'we' would appear to suggest allegiance to others, and was most frequently employed by Amanda, then Don, and to a lesser extent by the others, ending with Sarah. This suggests the extent of their identification with this college group since Amanda, like Don and Jenny, used the word exclusively to refer to them. However, those themes relevant to this phenomenon fail to reflect this, for Amanda, who omitted social expectations, valuing group support, confidence enhanced by their validation, and any support from others. Geoff's usage signified both the group: "this particular course, erm, an' the job that I do

the job that *we* do as trainers *we're* there because *we* want to be there” but also colleagues at work “that’s the kind of organisation *we* are anyway.” This was also applicable to Paula, Felicity and Zoe. Sarah was alone in employing ‘we’ to refer to herself and an outside agency, that of the careers adviser. Her themes support this absence of group identity, omitting those of social expectations, confidence enhanced by their validation or any support from others, although she values group support as was evident throughout their meetings.

The pronoun ‘I’, apparently indicating an assertive attitude, was most frequent among Sarah and Zoe, followed by Amanda, Jenny, Felicity then by Paula, Don and Geoff. This may be because Zoe’s extrovert nature prompts her wish to promote her personal opinion, while Amanda is similarly forthright and Paula appears determined to establish her point of view. However, Sarah who is quieter and less confident in initiating discussion, appears from this analysis to be self-possessed enough to offer her opinion more than the others. This is supported by her independence in her perseverance in seeking out the course for herself and continuing attendance under difficulties. Both men unexpectedly used ‘I’ much less than the women, despite the great extent of their contributions and readiness to offer much about personal experiences.

Use of ‘you’ signified both ‘we the group’ and ‘we at work’ as Geoff demonstrated: “one o’ the things *we* learn on the course is, err, y’know why are *you* doin’ it have *you* got, y’know, commitment.” Others using ‘you’ to signify ‘we the group’ were Don, Jenny and Sarah. Amanda, Zoe and Paula instead meant ‘one’ or ‘I’, as suggested by their earlier emphasis on this pronoun. Part of the explanation of this phenomenon could lie in the fact that some of these

trainers, because of the nature of their job, would be acquainted with assertiveness training techniques, including the use of 'I' to express one's views in order to reinforce self-expression, rather than the pronoun 'we' which could be viewed as a device to mask one's viewpoint. Therefore, they may be using this personal pronoun consciously. Discussion in the group situation thus produced a broad range of topics and their associated themes, influenced by the group interplay.

The group's narrative questionnaires

By contrast with the evidence gleaned from the 'public' meetings, the questionnaire provided private reflection influenced by both the meeting and suggested questions. The seven questionnaires ranged from one to four pages, questions answered ranging from 15 to 20. Few responded about having had a key incident or what they were looking forward to as a student, no-one here revealing the theme of lack of support from a partner.

There are stylistic differences, demonstrating varying degrees of reflection and detail, Don's concise answers in strict order contrasting with those writing on selected areas or combining questions, such as Jenny. Geoff and Liz combined questions from various sections to compose answers, this combination style of writing having been the original intention behind the design of the Narrative Questionnaire, to enable a more creative approach rather than rigid adherence to a question list.

Comparison of the group's materials

Following the separate analysis of the three forms of material, here the data from their pictures, discussion contributions and questionnaires are compared. Greater involvement in the task of personal writing, rather than group interaction, was shown by the higher proportion of written topics, ranging from 15 to 28, as compared with those spoken (8 to 23).

Patterns can be identified amongst the various themes representative of the three types of data, especially those omitted, and the least or most frequently occurring themes. That of others' support was not well represented, and was omitted entirely by Sarah verbally and covered by Geoff alone in the picture session. The influence of others upon these learners is therefore revealed most in their written material, possibly because here they felt more confident over divulging insights about colleagues (possibly mutual in their area of work), tutors, friends and family, although the issue may only have been prompted by the question sheet.

Only one person demonstrated some individual themes, showing these to be unique to that person at this stage of the course. These were as follows: in the pictures; lack of tutor support and alienation (Geoff), not seeking the qualification, academic success and intending to follow further courses (Felicity), expecting study difficulties and past academic failure (Jenny). In discussion were: others' support (Jenny), alienation (Geoff), no long-term plan (Sarah), neither conflict nor challenge (Felicity); and, in the questionnaires: tutor support (Jenny), lack of tutor support (Zoe), past academic success (Liz), alienation and not seeking a better job (Geoff), not finding empowerment (Amanda).

A major focus of various participants' total materials were themes of change, commitment and conflict. Themes most representative of the group differed according to source. These were, in the pictures: firstly personal or career change, then broadened horizons, achievement and lack of study problems. During discussion was firstly expecting conflict, then expectedly coping, commitment and valuing group support. In the questionnaires they were: change, the qualification, achievement, broadened horizons, others' support and future courses.

Therefore those themes most representative of the vocational group are the seeking of career or personal change, followed by seeking achievement, experiencing commitment and expecting some form of conflict. This comparative analysis of the groups' initial participation reasons has identified several emerging themes which are of significance, and these will be followed up in the following examination of their incidental materials.

Further Data on the Vocational Students

The incidental materials from four individuals are analysed here. These arose from a paired and an individual discussion, then the final meeting of this group, which only two could attend, while two more posted questionnaires. Their four portraits, originally established in the previous section, are further developed here from this incidental data. Thus there emerge their participation reasons as these developed over the course of time, and particularly their retrospective views at the course's end.

Jenny's paired discussion contributions

This discussion was held with Sarah, during the Trainers' full schedule of college lectures following Christmas, when they could be expected to have developed a college routine, and to be prepared to reflect on their course experiences so far. This midway stage in the course year prompted their characteristic shared viewpoint. The similar theme patterns are due to the topical subject matter, centring upon study difficulties and conflict, arising particularly from Jenny's home circumstances.

home vs. study conflict no home vs. study conflict study difficulties no study difficulties challenge end qualification academic failure academic success personal achievement enjoy education not enjoy education group support valued coping expectedly coping unexpectedly commitment empowerment partner's /parents' support tutor's support tutor unsupportive others' support
--

Her 23 topics reveal 20 themes, centring on her participation reasons of enjoyment and achievement, largely influenced by her academic past, but nothing on future plans. Anticipated difficulties were borne out in her coping strategies and aided by the support she receives. Most emphasised are study problems, then conflict, commitment, and the newly arising themes of challenge and enjoyment of learning.

These derive from practical experiences, both at school: “if there was something creative, I used to do sewing and I liked making things I used to love PE, and erm the outdoors”, and currently:

Overall, it’s very enjoyable, er I enjoy ... doing a presentation, the skill test and preparing for a training delivery I probably seem to have a lot more motivation and energy for those.

Past educational experiences feature both failure and success:

I stayed on to do ‘A’ levels. Failed them I had too many outside interests, D. of E. (Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme), other pursuits ... I wanted to always go into the outdoors, and so, I then went to, Sutton Fen College and did the BTEC National, and again, I did manage to actually achieve that, and then, I started at Larchwood [Outdoor Pursuits Centre] ...

While talking, it suddenly occurs to Jenny that she has always had problems with completing work: “I can always remember now, I never used to hand in my English assignments, my essays, erm so I’ve always, been very bad, at assignment work.” This resurfaces anew in writing skills proving again problematic:

... I shuffle it about, and also I’m not very good at, putting down on paper what I want to say I can’t can’t explain, but, it’s in my head but when it sort of goes on the paper, I either miss out words or I’ve gone ahead, or I think “Oh no this is crazy.”

Others’ support has so far prevented domestic difficulties:

... it used to be easier when my child was smaller, ’cos he’d sleep longer, and now at the moment, it is quite difficult to discipline myself, to actually sit down and do my assignments. Erm, I have had quite a few offers, “I’ll take him for a day so you can sit down and do it”, or I’ll do it at the week-end when my husband’s around, but then I feel, guilty that I’m studying when I should be, with the family ...

However she realises her preferred study arena (“I normally spread out all over the [lounge] floor”), portends coming problems with her son (“Later on when he gets moving”). She acknowledges she needs self-discipline over managing her time:

... I can use that time for my husband to have my child ... I'd rather not give up my week-end and I'd rather I need to discipline myself to do it during the week. But that means finding a routine where I can sit down and do some study, versus, when you're going to go to sleep ... I'm very much fitting in around him, when I can find the space, and time ...

Loss of the structure that work provided for her, reveals an interesting point about 'going it alone' as an adult learner, which can have ramifications for the individual that are not easy to predict:

... if I'd have still been at work, then there's plenty of opportunity to do it there, and to use the books and the facilities that were provided. I'm out on my own now, and er reality is it's it's hard, 'cos you need to discipline yourself ...

Her study approach again demonstrates preference for the practical:

... there's more, effort, more sort of having to write in silence than, sitting down, and working on, the training, delivery, session, when you, when you're, up in front of other people, and there's probably a lot more, sort of things that can go wrong, in front of other people, than an assignment, but yet the delivery's more enjoyable ...

Since her confidence is reinforced by others, she values group support in preference to independent study:

... you get the encouragement from other people, to er you know, if you are having a slight problem with something or you don't understand, a certain point for an assignment, or you need some information, then there is that support. Whereas if you are sort of doing it through the television or through books, and, you don't quite get that network ...

Empowerment derives from a tutor who suggested part-time work:

Steve gave me a lot of encouragement ... to, apply to the E.L.S.? (Education Learning Services) for an application form to do part-time training ... and that actually really sort of gave me a good boost. And then I came along to college and he said have I and I said no and he said well pull your finger out and do it [laughs] "Right yes Steve Right then I will do that Steve." [Sarah: And have you?] I have done but it's a fortnight since and I'm still waiting for the information. But yes I mean, that does sort of give

you that personal lift and, I don't know feeling of satisfaction and, and whatever else, a good feeling.

Her continuing commitment counteracts disillusionment, caused by some tutors' apparent waste of time over parts of the course:

I'm beginning to feel at the moment that the course is being packed out just to fill it with little bits, and, and therefore I'm beginning to sort of question some of the erm, the relevance to the course and if I don't see that it's relevant then I'm not quite as motivated to actually come here, and now I'm probably sometimes saying well do I need to go there tomorrow or shall I do something else But overall it's good.

Enjoyment contributes to her rationale for continuing:

... you have to enjoy what you're studying for ... and certainly seeing the relevance of why you're studying for it and I guess because I'm I'm linked into this course at the moment, and that's very much the focus of learning is, and, as I say some of the the evenings are, "do I need to be there or don't I?"

Jenny's final narrative questionnaire

Unable to attend the end meeting, Jenny willingly contributed five pages of detailed questionnaire responses. The three months' interim since the paired discussion shows her different perspective, with the new themes of alienation and family pressure among her total of 22. She emphasises broadened horizons, long-term plans, achievement and especially the qualification. All three latter significantly occur throughout all her materials, alongside conflict, study problems, academic failure, with support from family, tutor and others.

alienation
home vs. study conflict
study difficulties
challenge
no challenge
key incident
end qualification
academic failure
academic success
personal achievement
copied expectedly
commitment
no commitment
horizons broadened
no horizons broadened
partner's/parents' support
family pressure
tutor's support
tutor unsupportive
others' support
long-term plan
future participation

Home life provides the constant background to this course (for example, "During the year I have had to come to terms with - becoming a mum"), where study problems persist: "trying to get through the back log of work." Her wish for the

certificate now embraces personal achievement: "my only motivation was to achieve the qualification and to prove something to myself", owing to past failure.

Table 13: Jenny's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation							✓	1✓	
social aspect	✓							1✓	
home vs. study conflict	✓		✓	✓ x			✓	4✓ 1x	
difficulties of study	✓		✓	✓ x			✓	4✓ 1x	
a challenge				✓			✓x	2✓ 1x	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy	✓		✓				✓	3✓	
career /personal change	✓		✓					2✓	
qualification at the end	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	5✓	
status /dream		✓						1✓	
prior academic failure	✓		✓	✓			✓	4✓	
recent academic success				✓			✓	1✓	
personal achievement	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	5✓	
enjoy education				✓x				1✓ 1x	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued			✓	✓				2✓	
unexpected they can cope		x		✓x			x	1✓ 3x	
sense of commitment		✓		✓			✓x	3✓ 1x	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment			✓	✓				2✓	
horizons broadened	✓		✓				✓x	3✓ 1x	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support		✓	✓	✓			✓	4✓	
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed							✓	1✓	
continuing tutor support valued		✓	✓	✓			✓	4✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able		✓		✓			✓	3✓	
others' support		✓	✓	✓			✓	4✓	
others' criticism			✓					1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan	✓	✓	✓				✓	4✓	
better job									
participate in education again		✓	✓				✓	3✓	
Totals:	10✓	10 ✓1 x	16✓	16✓ 4x			18 ✓ 4x	70✓ 9x	
No. of Themes:	10	11	16	20			22	33	
Sub-total:		21		11		19		26	

Jenny's future course is now postponed for a term until after the birth of her second child Her course input appears a source of broadened horizons:

... looking back I could have possibly contributed more to the sessions, which might have meant that I would have felt that it was, better use of my time.

Her personal circumstances have affected her in as yet undefined ways: "It is hard to identify whether it is because of study or having the baby that things have changed /been given up".

Don's final narrative questionnaire

Although unable to attend the final meeting, Don sent a handwritten page of largely brief answers, whose only new theme of less broadened horizons arises from thoughts on being a mature student remaining unchanged. He has coped with the course, having "readily achieved what I set out to do", and widened his perspective on some aspects of training: "Overall I feel I have gained a better understanding for the need for training and individuals' learning styles."

no alienation social aspect challenge career change status personal achievement enjoy education coping expectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened horizons not broadened others' support long-term plan better job future participation
--

Sixteen themes mirror his initial questionnaire, emphasising commitment: "I feel that both the course experience (meeting new people, etc.) and a lot of my own inner drive has carried me through the year", meaning his only sacrifice was his pastime ("production of wrought iron items, gates, ornamental

planters"). The perceived change in himself, and status implicit in his professional attitude, reflect the sense of empowerment deriving from support at work: "colleagues seem to see a change in me ... They feel it has contributed over all to the way I deal with our clients. People have remained very supportive."

Being an adult learner has reinforced his wish for continuing study challenges:

... more keen to pursue further education, both in a career mode, but also for my own personal interest, e.g. I would like to attend some art classes for oils and water colour painting, and some in-depth computer course of repair work ...

Table 14: Don's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation		x					x	2x	
social aspect			✓				✓	2✓	
home vs. study conflict	✓	✓	x					2✓ 1x	
difficulties of study	x	x						2x	
a challenge	✓	✓					✓	3✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓						1✓	
career /personal change		✓	✓				✓	3✓	
qualification at the end		✓	✓					2✓	
status /dream		✓					✓	2✓	
prior academic failure			✓					1✓	
recent academic success									
personal achievement		✓	✓				✓	3✓	
enjoy education		✓	✓				✓	3✓	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓	✓					2✓	
unexpected they can cope	x	x					x	3x	
sense of commitment	✓	✓	✓				✓	4✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment		✓	✓				✓	3✓	
horizons broadened		✓	✓				✓x	3✓ 1x	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support			✓					1✓	
partner/parents unsupportive		✓						1✓	
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued		✓						1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able		✓						1✓	
others' support		✓	✓				✓	3✓	
others' criticism		✓						1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan		✓	✓				✓	3✓	
better job		✓	✓				✓	3✓	
participate in education again			✓				✓	2✓	
Totals:	3✓ 2x	19 ✓ 3x	15✓ 1x				13 ✓3 x	50✓ 9x	
No. of Themes:	5	22	16				18	28	
Sub-total:		26				15		26	

Past enjoyment of learning ensures an absence of alienation in educational settings: "I always enjoyed me earlier school days and I will carry on with some kind of further education while ever I am fit to attend." According to Don's

contributions as shown in the table above, the social aspect and future participation are apparently minor elements, yet both appear significant features of his presence at the meetings. His constant focus throughout is the theme of commitment, reinforcing his initial portrait.

Sarah's paired discussion contributions

At the paired discussion with Jenny, the most emphasised of Sarah's 16 themes were enjoyment, empowerment and especially, study difficulties and challenge (both either self-imposed because of her high standards, or obstacles arising during the course). Since she needed to make no special arrangements for studying, conflict of interests was not foreseen:

There's only myself and my husband at home, so, somewhere to study's not a problem ... and having the time to study's not a problem ... my best time for study is when, my husband is out at work, and the house is quiet.

alienation no alienation no home vs. study conflict study difficulties no study difficulties challenge academic failure academic success personal achievement enjoy education group support valued coping expectedly coping unexpectedly commitment empowerment tutor unsupportive

This routine encapsulates her approach to work, "daytime preferably to me as opposed to the evening 'cos I tend to get tired then and my concentration goes", and tactics of prioritising:

... most of the time I can, sort of pack it away and forget about it, but then ... when you're sat down with a book or whatever ... The ideas tend to come when you're not thinking about it ... as opposed to concentrating ... half sleeping ...

Being unemployed, both Sarah and Jenny are reliant on the college library facilities, but it is still closing in the early evening, despite a later time having been mooted: "that has been a problem for us, getting all the books." Efforts at gaining tutor assistance over this have evidently not been responded to: "We did bring the point up didn't we? with the tutors, we have discussed it."

The challenge of her training presentation demonstrates how group support has boosted Sarah's confidence:

... like yesterday, I did my training delivery, and afterwards, you know you get the feedback and, you've done a good delivery and you think (whispers) "Oh. Yeah that was great!" you know, and That's when you feel good and have enjoyed it, when, er, that's the satisfaction you get back from it isn't it and the achievement ...

Enjoying learning (a new theme here) and allied lack of alienation, were gained from school, where subjects' relative difficulty or success, led to her feeling more at ease with practical forms of expression, similar to Jenny:

I'm er, a very practical person as well, the sewing the crafts the art and ... the subjects I hated were English. (laughs) Maths was one of er one of the ones I liked as well. Erm, but, as, a learning thing enjoyable really, but erm, I quite I quite liked going to school.

Like Jenny, dislike of English is attributed to difficulty in expressing herself in writing, over which she characteristically perseveres. While reminding her of their recent shared success, Sarah unexpectedly finds herself coping:

... you're criticising yourself about your assignments ... it's the assignments, that you think, you're weaker at, or not as good at, or whatever, but yet we both got distinctions, in, our written assignments.

She explores Jenny's idea that their dissatisfaction with their assignments may arise from them setting themselves too high a standard, seeking a level they cannot realistically attain. This should be a source of mutual empowerment: "are we looking for perfection, erm, that we see that as a, as a weakness in ourself, but, we both got a distinction in that assignment, didn't we?"

A particular skills test exercise they shared again shows her confidence inspired by the group situation, as opposed to the arduous challenge of writing, which entails a different sense of achievement:

Is it because we find 'practical easier ... you did the Carrick Mat and I sat there and I did it and I was like this (folds arms patiently) waiting for everybody el' People were throwing it up in the air around the table weren't they ? And I just picked it up like that (snaps fingers) 'cos it comes naturally. Whereas, the paperwork, I have to work at. So maybe that's, yeah and I get there (chuckles) but I find that I have to work at that as opposed to it coming more naturally.

This is summarised in Sarah's thoughts on education: "I think you need that challenge something to stretch you that little bit." Although both, when asked, categorically denied any differences came about because of the course, many instances throughout this meeting suggest change in them, especially the confidence Sarah refers to several times, as evident in her more outgoing and relaxed behaviour.

Sarah's picture at the final meeting

At this final meeting (in the unfamiliar setting of the university), retrospective views were sought, in contrast with

study difficulties
challenge
end qualification
academic success
personal achievement
enjoy education
not enjoy education
coping expectedly
commitment
empowerment
horizons broadened
long-term plan
future participation

the outset and transitional stage. As the official course end had elapsed, most participants had effectively finalised coursework seven weeks earlier, causing difficulties over attendance for all but Sarah and Geoff. His delayed arrival allowed Sarah to discuss her sketch with me in private. Her 11 themes make no reference to others, emphasising only commitment, but most themes on her course experiences have been reinforced in the interim.

Sarah's dark purple hill had a rugged, naturalistic outline, compared to her earlier picture, with an arrow pointing straight up one side, marked at the halfway and three-quarter stages, by signposts labelled 'IPD' and 'D32 /33'. Sarah was a small stick figure half-way along the arrow, evidently struggling in her climb, with

knees and elbows bent, and arms raised at either side, and flustered in her effort, perspiring as indicated by pen strokes around the head.

Compared to the first meeting, Sarah here depicts herself with goals having shifted, engaged still in a challenge though equally a struggle, on what has now become a continuing career path, with success on the course having paved the way for further courses, reflected in her broader range of themes. The anticipated challenge initially signified by the mountain, is now more indicative of her continuing sense of commitment (“what I feel at the moment is, I’ve not quite got to the top”), while she has coped as foreseen with the challenge of study difficulties:

That’s me, struggling up ploughing up the mountain, and, I think, Sometimes it was a little bit, hard, but that was only to be expected I didn’t expect the course to be, easy I expected to have to put in some hard work ... I did achieve it, and, eum, I did get good marks, and, everything was, in on time, and no problems in that respect.

Having successfully attained the qualification, she now wishes to further her goal through further courses:

... now I’m considering the next, signpost, and the next, bit further up the mountain, it’s possibly going to be, the successor’s D32 D33, and, maybe, who knows after that, as well ...

This changed perspective brings commitment to her new priority, and further reveals her broadened horizons and empowerment: “I do see it well, as an ongoing thing, as opposed to having reached my goal, and, that being the end of it.”

Sarah's contribution to the final discussion

Sarah and Geoff appeared to enjoy the opportunity to engage in extended conversation, on 16 questions with 17 additional topics from Sarah. Her 25 themes newly broach tutor support, and emphasise achievement, coping as expected and especially commitment. As her conversation echoes throughout, she coped as expected without encountering any feelings of alienation:

I can't think of, sort of anything outstanding, nothing sort of springing to mind, that, I think "well that's shocked me a bit or, I didn't realise I had to do that" ...

Absence of conflict with home interests occurs in her not foregoing anything for this course, "No I still got my holiday. (chuckles) It was booked before I started the course but fortunately it was right at the end", while the sole problem of travel reveals her self-sufficiency:

I made it even though, class doesn't start while half four I used to leave home at half one, to get there. Erm, so i' i' it wasn't only an evening for me it was an afternoon as well ...

Her determination means travel is no deterrent:

I would still make the effort and, you know do the same journey again, it won't won't put me off. No. Even if I had to walk, trudging through the rain (chuckles) and everything, as well when I got off the bus, you know, I've got a good twenty minutes' walk, at the end of it ...

even though Sarah has had to depend on a lift from her husband, which she possibly resents as curtailing her independence:

I think it was just the fact that I had to, rely on my husband, to pick me up after, college, otherwise I couldn't get home. But he agreed, and I enjoyed the course anyway so erm, it wasn't a problem.

no alienation social aspect home vs. study conflict no work/home vs. study conflict study difficulties no study difficulties challenge career /personal change end qualification dream academic success personal achievement enjoy education not enjoy education coping expectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened no horizons broadened partner's support tutor's support others not critical no long-term plan long-term plan future participation
--

Neither has coursework impinged upon home life, due to her strategy of daytime study:

... no I had just a couple of evenings. I think possibly the difference with me, is I, wasn't in work like you (nods towards Geoff) were. And I think that's possibly made a difference because I could do my work during the daytime, whereas you probably had to do yours in the evenings and at weekends, so you would, that's the difference in why I didn't have to give anything up, because I still had my evenings and, weekends free.

partly through preferring this to evenings: "that would be the worst time for me it just would not, stick (laughs) ... No, I'd be asleep before I finished the first page."

The skills or qualities she feels mature students bring to their studies are gained from life experiences, such as her broadened horizons, and commitment which resolves any study difficulties:

Lots of experience, of eum, different things. Things that you may, particularly yourself in mind, like, your job, things that you've had to face, and problems you've had to solve, and things like that that err, i' probably not, so daunting, timescales, having to stick to them, whereas I think, definitely, younger, people, don't seem to be in that frame of mind. You know, they, tend to drift along sometimes ...

Her coursework has become part of her daily life:

.... it was something I built innn-to my weekly routine in a way And, err, (smiling) Now it's finished it feels like it's gone, You know i' i' it's like, "Oh I've got today free" sort of thing. (laughing) Does that make sense?

She is conscious her enthusiasm for learning is associated with meeting challenges, whereas dislike of certain school subjects was because she found them difficult:

... it was the subjects, that I were interested in, that, I put more effort into. (laughing) I knew which subjects I liked and which I didn't ... I loved Maths. (laughs) Erm, it was History, and, English, that err, I didn't like, and, I used to find hard, they used to be hard work to me, whereas, like the practical things, and Maths and whatever, came much easier to me, I enjoyed those.

Subject enjoyment (and consequent success) is disproportionate to the effort involved, compared to difficult subjects involving more challenge and commitment:

... it just comes easier, somehow. It does to me anyway ... to solve, a problem in Maths, was a lot easier for me, than to sit down, and, write an essay. No matter how much work I put into it, I still found Maths easier.

She disagrees with Geoff claiming difficult subjects are not enjoyable, since challenge and commitment lead to success and hence empowerment. She reveals her inspiration to be viewing the qualification both as goal and dream:

... you can still, enjoy it if you've achieved, Even if you've struggled along the way Yeah. You know, you get the result you get the reward for it I think I am, I'm someone who likes the reward at the end you know some people, don't do they, you know, it it doesn't matter to them, the grade or whatever I think, that sort of, inspires me a lot, as well. You know. Something to aim for.

Sarah valued available, though unnecessary, tutor support:

I didn't, use it very much, it was there for us, as a facility and, was easy to, to get hold of someone to, speak to if you wanted them. But I didn't use it at all. It was there. Available. Yeah ... I did use it a couple of times but, you know, not as much as the time it was allocated to us.

as is shown by her self-reliant study approach:

I think it's in myself, but I'm that way inclined anyway. I push myself to do things, erm, I (smiling) I'm sure Geoff knows I'm like that I was always the first to hand work in anyway, 'cos I've set myself a task, to do, and, i i it's me that pushes myself as opposed to me relying on the tutor to push me to get things done.

Emerging gains are broader horizons and empowerment, deriving from welcome feedback from tutors:

Experience I think. 'Cos the course was, not only, classroom, erm it was, work based or out in the field. There was, presentations and sort of things to do as well as, written things, practical and, you know there was more than, one side to the course. So I think,

having the experience of like delivering, a training programme, getting feedback, and your good points and your bad points ...

This emphasises the importance she attaches to people valuing their opinion: “we sort of had a discussion about it and everybody put, their opinions and, their ideas and, I think it was worthwhile, to do it ... (laughing) feedback is important.”

Her one mention of regret at leaving reveals the social aspect of group membership has now emerged. Although unaware of others’ views, she feels she does not merit adverse comment at the course end since, “I’m not working anyway so, I’ve no err, colleagues to err report back on me”, which may suggest Sarah considers official appraisal as the only valid form of assessing others’ perceptions, or that she has little insight into these.

Sarah had no long-term strategy for any alternative to this year’s course, but she had expected to feel competent to build on her inner resources to manage any situation:

No idea. (chuckling) I probably would have spent my time (smiling) sewing and doing crafts and that, and passing my time doing things like that if I wasn’t studying.

Course success and enjoyment have led to a challenging career change, the ease this presented proving empowering:

I actually really enjoyed the course. I think it was a-aa, good experience, learning from it ... I went straight into another course after err I’d finished this ... they insisted that you went on a volunteer’s course so I went straight into, another course, which erm, I found I’d just done most of it anyway so I found that course quite easy ...

Compared to her early expectations of facing very hard work (whereas now she says, “(laughing) It doesn’t seem like that does it?”), Sarah perceives herself in a very different light, as a successful and committed course ender, resolving on

altered plans for a new course: “I’m now thinking, which course next, what am I going to do next that’s, that’s like my next step really.”

Incidental attendance on other courses, which are not in pursuit of qualifications, reveals her parallel interest in education for enjoyment and personal change:

I’m already going to painting classes ... I’ve been doing them a year. It’s just a hobby ... I’m doing it purely for pleasure. My painting on the wall. There’s my, there’s my reward after that (laughs).

Broadened horizons equally ensue from her already successful career-linked courses, “I was also doing a computer course, which I started last year as well. Euh, I’ve completed, level one and level two, and, I’ve done four subjects.”

Sarah’s final narrative questionnaire

Sarah’s two pages omit the good, not so good, unexpected or key events. She again refers to no-one beside her husband, reinforcing the self-contained image she projects. Of her 18 themes she emphasises expectedly coping and commitment. Her resolve to organise studying as part of her life foresaw no problems to be overcome:

I set myself goals which I aimed for and I planned my time in order to achieve them ... I planned my studying into my daily life to ensure I got it done. I prefer to study during the day when I am alone with no interruptions ... I used very little tutorial time and all my work was handed in before the dates indicated.

no alienation no home vs. study conflict no study difficulties challenge key incident personal change end qualification personal achievement coping expectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened no horizons broadened partner’s support tutor’s support long-term plan better job future participation
--

Correspondingly, her husband has “remained supportive of me

over the year and he has always come to fetch me home from college as he agreed he would from the start.” She values having her views sought from tutors, as it is “very important to me and for the benefit of others who may attend future courses.”

She claims she (and her “feelings about coming to college”), remains unchanged by the year’s experiences, “I am sure it was my own ‘inner drive’ that got me through the course”. Yet contradictorily she refers to gains: “I still see myself as the same person but with more knowledge”, which, on a personal level indicate expanded horizons, particularly owing to this study, “I think it has affected how I look at myself as a learner.”

Future courses will enable her job search, validating her original enrolment decision, due to redundancy: “My plans for the future have now changed as I am now thinking of doing another course in September.” Long-term plans for work-related, and other courses, may result from her attendance on a variety of courses this year, which reinforce her wish for personal change:

However, during the last year I have been attending computer classes, painting classes and I have learned how to do parchment craft. I plan to continue with my painting class next year and I also plan to learn the ‘Internet’. These classes are just hobbies.

Themes arising once for Sarah, are social aspect (in the final discussion), academic failure, and unsupportive tutors (at the paired meeting). Commitment and coping well remain constant in all seven of her inputs, and are thus the major themes portraying her characteristic determination to succeed.

Table 15: Sarah's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation		X		✓X		X	X	1✓ 4x	
social aspect						✓		1✓	
home vs. study conflict		✓		X		✓X	X	2✓ 3x	
difficulties of study			✓X	✓X	✓	✓X	X	4✓ 4x	
a challenge	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	6✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy	✓		✓				✓	3✓	
career /personal change	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	5✓	
qualification at the end	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	6✓	
status /dream			✓			✓		2✓	
prior academic failure				✓				1✓	
recent academic success				✓	✓	✓		3✓	
personal achievement		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6✓	
enjoy education				✓	✓X			2✓ 1x	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓	✓	✓				3✓	
unexpected they can cope		X	✓X	✓X	X	X	X	2✓ 6x	
sense of commitment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment				✓	✓	✓	✓	4✓	
horizons broadened	✓		✓		✓	✓X	✓X	5✓ 2x	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support			✓		✓	✓		3✓	
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued					✓	✓		2✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able				✓				1✓	
others' support			✓					1✓	
others' criticism					X			1x	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan		✓	✓			✓		3✓	
long-term plan					✓	✓	✓	3✓	
better job	✓		✓				✓	3✓	
participate in education again		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	5✓	
Totals:	7✓	9✓ 2x	15✓ 2x	12✓ 4x	10✓ 1x	18 ✓ 6x	13 ✓ 5x	84✓ 20x	
No. of Themes:	7	11	17	16	11	24	18	33	
Sub-total:		18		13		23		27	

Geoff's picture at the individual meeting

Geoff proposed this individual interview, three months after his first meeting, to coincide with his visit to college to hand in his final piece of work before Spring Bank Holiday. Although further meetings appeared unlikely, since he would probably not be required to attend a moderators' review of his work, he also volunteered for the end meeting with Sarah. Geoff's 19 themes repeat his earlier material, emphasising not having challenges realised, nor finding horizons broadened, and especially his major focus on commitment and challenge.

His monochrome sketch depicted a road curving diagonally, flattening out for most of its length, but rising sharply at the end, as indicated by a road sign. It incorporated a crescent branching from one side of the road, and at the opposite side, a group of three people, beside a cul-de-sac ending in a brick wall. At the top right was the curved scroll of a certificate embellished with seal and ribbon.

no alienation social aspect no work/home vs. study conflict no study difficulties challenge no challenge no key incident key incident career/personal change end qualification status academic success personal achievement enjoy education not enjoy education group support valued coping expectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened not horizons broadened family support tutor's support tutor unsupportive others' support long-term plan future participation

Geoff attributed his picture to "Felicity's analogy last time of a journey", signalling the anticipated challenge running through most of his impressions of the course. With his initial perspective perceived as the qualification (cautiously qualified, "well if I get one"), the early transition into studying featured neither study difficulties, nor anticipated alienation, so he appeared unexpectedly to be coping: "it was going along very smoothly ... we'd been coasting along, on fairly level ground."

By comparison the final stage reveals again the challenge but also, in the pressure of deadlines, his single reference to not coping:

... and then suddenly it was err, err that's a signpost for a steep hill you know, there was a lot of stuff to get in a lot of work to do and things like that in a short space of time ... it's the pace and the quantity.

This was compounded by conflict with work: "a very busy time at work as well ... I was working all of Easter weekend, erm, both on college work and my own work ... I haven't had a day off yet, this year."

He sums up the coursework, as "very easy, you know obviously you get out what you put in, err and obviously with all the commitments and I can't say that I've put a great amount of effort into it". He has though, encountered several instances of inactivity or irrelevance, which suggest lack of achievement through challenging his horizons, and poor tutor support. The resulting disenchantment provokes some alienation:

... there's a few side tracks or lay-bys or whatever, you know that we went into ... there's, didn't seem to be any great activity or whatever. Errm, and there was also some dead-ends ... couldn't see the point of them really ... there seemed to be a lot of time wasted.

Confidence having reinforced his sense of achievement, newly emerging commitment to learning and widened horizons, future courses offer promise of a challenge building on his enjoyment:

But overall I would think err, that I've really, enjoyed it, erm, it's given me, the, erm, the incentive to do something else ... so yeah I'll look forward to doing something else.

This admixture of apparently contradictory positive and negative themes, seems to indicate that only certain aspects of the course have proved unsatisfactory for

Geoff, whereas the majority of his experiences have notably reinforced his commitment and appreciation of the challenge presented.

Geoff's individual discussion

This allowed Geoff the opportunity to reflect individually on his course experiences, adding 24 to the suggested topics to provide 42. His 27 themes emphasise challenge, empowerment, commitment, achievement, and especially horizons being expanded, with personal and career change.

Examination success appears the sole highlight of an unhappy school background:

I went to a secondary modern school. It was a boys' school. It was run by, Christian brothers. Erm, and they were vicious bastards in the, most of the time, but err, I, and you were expected at that stage to leave school at 15 and get a job, erm, I, my year at school, it was the first year I think that CSEs were introduced ... I did stay on and try and get erm err, like a poor man's GCE type of thing.

alienation
no alienation
work/home vs. study conflict
no study difficulties
challenge
no challenge
end qualification
academic success
personal achievement
no personal achievement
enjoy education
coping expectedly
coping unexpectedly
commitment
empowerment
horizons broadened
not horizons broadened
tutor unsupportive
future participation

Although schoolwork was “somethin’ that had to be done”, he now appreciates the rewarding challenge absent from school (“Now I do, yeah!”), coursework being:

... quite pleasant really, and interesting. I would just hope that err that's, it's not just been a one-off, for this course, and err, that's what I can expect from, other courses.

Comparing earlier and current viewpoints reveals he found no study difficulties nor sense of alienation, so was empowered by his coping ability “it's been err, um, better than expected easier than expected, and I've been able to cope with it better than I expected, so ... I've got nothing to worry about.” Absence of study problems now contributes to his sense of fulfilment, carried by his own ‘drive’: “it's my, inner being or inner feelings and er, and as I say I feel quite smug that

I've, I have achieved it ... and got through it relatively easily." His ease with study, limits the possibility of expanding horizons:

... at school and when I went to technical college ... I never put the work in I never put the effort in, err, I didn't study, I've Similarly in this course as well I've got through on a wing and a prayer I've always thought. I've never put, all that much effort into anything.

He has achieved additional goals entailing personal change:

... knowledge, and theories, and practice, erm, I've mixed with my peers in the industry as it were, I've got ideas and things like that from them, erm, I've mixed with other people I wouldn't have met before you know, in normal day-to-day activity and different areas I've gained insight into, what they do and erm, what goes on, other than in my own industry, so yeah, I've gained a lot out of it.

Plans now incorporate career enhancement, "I'd just like to develop more in the role that I'm in ... I'm going to do that what do they call, Personnel Management Course." Opportunities available on leaving school had determined his career choice, and curtailed the route he favoured, in keeping with his strengths and preferred subjects. With the benefit of his broadened outlook, Geoff has only now discovered his 'niche', in the new aim of change linking both career and personal goals:

I took the wrong route really. You know when I left school I went into Engineering, which was, that was, more or less the only option available ... My forte has always been, erm, the things I like, is History and err, English and those kinds of subjects ... I should have gone into, something, Well one of the things I wanted to be was a policeman, you know, I wanted to do that and I think maybe as doing that would have led onto doing Law ... And, err maybe as I should have been something in that side or, or I think I've found my niche now in, in Personnel, I should have gone that route, something you know with with people.

He is now aware of further possibilities as revealed in his learning style preference (as a theorist):

... that's how I learn is by, reading about things, err and really I should, have a reading list and, and keep working my way through

it and adding to it. And, that's what I need to do a lot more than anything now.

Promptings from his employer formed the key to him applying: "it was just a little sort of thing in the back of my mind but then with the impetus from my employer ... that was the spur to it", yet when asked, he later denies any specific incident, demonstrating the problem of direct questioning to elicit accurate responses. Since not encroaching on domestic routine or pastimes, study provides a challenging outlet for his personal achievement:

... when I'm not at work I'm a couch potato (laughs). So it's, it's spurred me into, you know, doing something ... I just, fall asleep on the settee, watch TV, and so I've, I've got to be doing something, so if, your type of gardening decorating DIY or or, my hobby is motorcycling so I, I'm usually either tinkering with my motorbike or out on it something like that ... it's nothing to lose is it? Watching a few TV programmes.

Among the year's positive experiences are Geoff's perceptions having expanded considerably, through the unanticipated social interaction:

I've mixed with and enjoyed the company of, erm people ... previously I wouldn't have said they're my type of people ... but, yeah I've learnt from them I've er I've got a lot of, more respect for them ...

Group cohesion contributed to the "quite, constructive, feedback", which was necessary as it forms professional good practice in training. This demonstrates the limitations of the course, by contrast with its hoped-for challenge: "there was wasted time and effort." Elsewhere, Geoff enjoys support only from his family, "they've been very pleased that, you know that I I've done it."

The original goal incorporates status, "one of my objectives ... [is to] be recognised within the company as a professional trainer", as reflected in appraisals by colleagues, who:

... have been impressed with, what I've learned, and what I've applied to my work. And it's, you know they have definitely seen an improvement, in my image ... my profile, has increased within the company ...

He identifies strongly with work and his company:

There is no life outside work. (laughs) I don't want to give the impression that, erm, you know I'm like you know the workaholic or anything like that ... the people I mix socially with are colleagues at work.

His sole current goal is qualifications to aid his career prospects, revealing the value he attaches to purposeful learning:

I would rather spend my time, erm, doing something that has a purpose to it rather than just for the enjoyment of it if you see what I mean. I'd rather concentrate on the work side. And get something at the end of it ...

His willingness to commit himself to courses is dictated by work interests, since "I wouldn't have done it by choice and enjoyed it so much." Yet courses not related directly to work (as exemplified in his particular area of interest) could present a future challenge: "criminology is one of the things is something I'd have, liked to have done, maybe as I'd like to do in the future." He raises the significance of generating enthusiasm for learning:

Well, looking at learning in general it's err, if if you can make that part of the the learning process ... If I, if that enthusiasm had been generated in me, maybe as when I was at school ... this would have been academic now, you know, I maybe as would have been a lawyer or a policeman or something else ...

The current example of the BBC promotion of teachers as role models, introduces the subject of one inspirational teacher, who enhanced his confidence and promoted his enthusiasm for particular subjects:

The advert that's coming on TV now you know, have you seen it on the BBC? The, err it's, certain, it's a list of celebrities and they're just saying, err, like Mr. MacGregor, and, and that's all it is, and what the names are are good teachers, teachers that they've

had the respect for. Yeah Yeah. (chuckling) Mr. MacGregor the guy I've just said. Yeah. But, he was my English teacher. And he was my Drama teacher. Yeah. So that's why I've, got the, err, that's why I like the English side and the Drama side because of him.

Geoff's final narrative questionnaire

His final brief questionnaire was again signed alongside the qualification now gained. The 22 themes emphasise empowerment, partly by managing to overcome alienation or study difficulties:

My initial fears ... were unfounded as I found the work fairly easy and other than a build up of work towards the end of the course I coped quite well without too much infringement on my own time.

His sole experience of limited horizons is when tutors have

“padded out” the course, prompting doubts over any constructive outcome resulting from feedback.

Change in the work sphere includes the notion of status, “much more confident in my role ... must be apparent to others.” The most significant course outcome for Geoff is the qualification's usefulness as validation of his work role, but he also particularly valued the company and help of course members.

Geoff's contribution to the final discussion

The final meeting allowed Geoff's retrospective thoughts to emerge in comparison to Sarah's, both enjoying the opportunity to engage in conversation, in preference to following question lists. His 37 topics repeat many earlier views, his 27 themes emphasising enjoyment, achievement, coping, empowerment and, especially commitment, resulting in end success of “contentment smugness whatever you want to call it.”

social aspect no home/work vs. study conflict work vs. study conflict study difficulties no study difficulties challenge no challenge no key incident career change no personal change status academic success personal achievement enjoy education not enjoy education group support valued coping expectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened no horizons broadened family support tutor's support tutor unsupportive others' support no long-term plan long-term plan future participation

Relative inaccessibility of the college library was a hindrance, and although not affecting progress, it limited scope for exploring further study, by preventing him spending “a bit more time, in the in the library doing some reading, err but it just wasn’t, convenient, and, wasn’t practical really”. Since he does not identify with the college, leaving does not affect him greatly: “No it served a purpose that’s all. I don’t think there’s any great sense of belonging, You know to the college itself ... it was just a facility.”

social aspect
no home/work vs. study conflict
work vs. study conflict
study difficulties
no study difficulties
challenge
no challenge
no key incident
career change
no personal change
status
academic success
personal achievement
enjoy education
not enjoy education
group support valued
coping expectedly
commitment
empowerment
horizons broadened
no horizons broadened
family support
tutor’s support
tutor unsupportive
others’ support
no long-term plan
long-term plan
future participation

He and Sarah concur on commitment carrying them through the year, “it’s been, my own determination and and, wanting to achieve something, and setting a goal, that’s err, driven me through”. His schooldays were “just something to get through you know, to do your time, and things like that”, but this course is more of an opportunity to learn, which stimulates him to work harder. His new perception of study is as a source of satisfaction:

Yeah I think I put a lot more effort into it now than, err than I did at school. It’s erm, it’s not just a, it’s not just a task to get out of the way, like the assignments and things like that it was a a-aa, it’s a case of wanting to learn from it as well, as well as completing a task, to learn from it and to do your best, and and make a good job of it.

Contrary to the evidence of his individual interview, Geoff considers himself unchanged by study, reflecting some limitation to his perspective, “I’m still the same person. I mean it hasn’t it hasn’t drastic’, drastically altered my character or anything like that.” He derives some empowerment from tutors’ requests for recommendations, which he recognises as significant, although this year assessed

group presentations were set, as to how this course could be improved in future years:

... it was like one of the assignments as well wasn't it? to euh, like restructure the course if err, however you you know thought fit, ... we realise the benefit of ... how important feedback is.

He prides himself on requiring no tutorial support: "I didn't call on that resource, really, erm, but yeah I appreciated that it was there." He has enjoyed incorporating independent learning and supportive group work: "there's times when you need that quiet on your own and things and times when you need to-oo bounce ideas off people", but feels valuable opportunities for group work, which would have enhanced their studying, were missed by tutors.

His status and confidence are now enhanced by professional validation:

... it's given me the rubber stamp, Yeah I had the experience and the knowledge things like that before, but erm, it wasn't you know finalised, there wasn't that rubber stamp to it and this has done that so yeah, I think colleagues do see me now as, err a professional trainer and as a erm, a consultant type role within the company.

Attaining personal change has led to Geoff revising his future intentions, "I was just going to do this and then that was it, but erm, my experience has given me, err, encouragement to do something else ... work related again."

He mainly appreciates the social aspect of a supportive group:

... there was, you know quite a, a camaraderie among the people that were doing it and, a' and the tutors ... it was ... very nice and it was, yeah it was sad for it to, for that group to, to break up, and finish ...

This was because of their shared professional background:

... the biggest things was mixing with other people that were on the course ... it was good to, draw on other people's experience and knowledge and things like that for your, for your own, for your own work, and a couple of people have helped me out in, you

know pointed me in the right direction for, you know, supplies of things or, you know, ideas and suggestions and things like that.

affirming his final view on the year “just to say as how enjoyable it was really.

How nice the people were.” He only mentioned once each, themes of academic

failure and family pressure (opening conversation) and not seeking job

improvement (first questionnaire). Interestingly, tutor Gill’s evaluation included

the latter among his significant themes. His constant themes are study and

horizons issues, achievement, empowerment and outstandingly, commitment.

Table 16: Geoff's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓	✓	✓	x	✓x		x	4✓ 3x	
social aspect		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	5✓	
home vs. study conflict		✓	✓	x	✓	✓x	x	4✓ 3x	
difficulties of study	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓x	x	3✓ 5x	
a challenge		✓		✓x	✓x	✓x	x	4✓ 4x	✓
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓		✓x		x		2✓ 2x	
career /personal change	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓x	✓	6✓ 1x	
qualification at the end		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	5✓	✓
status /dream	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	6✓	
prior academic failure		✓						1✓	
recent academic success		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	5✓	✓
personal achievement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓x	✓	✓	7✓ 1x	
enjoy education			✓	✓x	✓	✓x	✓	5✓ 2x	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	6✓	
unexpected they can cope		✓	✓	x	✓x	x	x	3✓ 4x	
sense of commitment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7✓	✓
horizons broadened	✓	✓	✓	✓x	✓x	✓x	✓x	7✓ 4x	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support				✓		✓		2✓	
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed		✓						1✓	
continuing tutor support valued		✓		✓		✓	✓	4✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	6✓	
others' support		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	5✓	✓
others' criticism									
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan			✓			✓		2✓	
long-term plan	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	5✓	
better job			x					1x	✓
participate in education again		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6✓	
Totals:	10✓ 1x	23 ✓	17✓ 1x	19✓ 8x	13✓ 6x	20 ✓ 8x	16 ✓ 6x	118 ✓ 30x	
No. of Themes:	11	23	18	23	14	22	21	37	
Sub-total:		26		27		24		27	

Comparative analysis of the vocational group

Having analysed participants' materials individually to provide further information on each portrait, this section will compare the resulting data to examine what is significant about their end of course reasons for participation.

The group's pictures

Both pictures reveal a similar pattern to their earlier presentations, Sarah's image of climbing a hill recurring, as does her work-orientated perspective on her career reasons for her return to learning. Geoff uses the similar motif of a journey, and changes a solely student-based perspective, rather than combining it with the previous work perspective.

Their use of imagery again reflects feelings about the return to study. Geoff's brick wall as a dead-end symbolises time wasting, his steep incline and Sarah's uphill struggle displaying work pressure. Significant here is Geoff's absence from the scene, his earlier strongly featured presence now replaced by a group of three undefined characters, probably suggesting his new group identity, especially since he uses the pronoun 'we' throughout this presentation: "So if *we* start off on, on the road to the end ... *we* 'd been coasting along ... *we* could 'ave got a lot more out of it," except for his final emphasis: "*I found the work, err, very easy.*"

Further perspectives on the role of adult learner appear in their shared continuing determination and positive outlook to study, despite obstacles. They had 14 themes in common, both notably omitting the social aspect and valuing the group, although referring to having their confidence validated by the group. The sole reference to others is about unsupportive tutors (by Geoff). Both had strongest

emphasis upon experiencing commitment and Geoff equally focused on the challenge presented.

The group's contributions to the discussions

Analysis of the individual and two paired meetings shows a similar pattern to those earlier, Jenny and Sarah covering 24 topics, while Sarah and Geoff discussed 39. Twelve of the 29 themes, including future plans, were omitted at the meeting between Jenny and Sarah where group valuing and confidence having been enhanced by others' validation featured strongly for both women, recent academic success appearing for both participants for the first time. The focus for both was on study problems, challenge, then empowerment and enjoyment, although Jenny demonstrated commitment rather than empowerment.

Themes omitted by Sarah and Geoff were four, notably academic failure, Sarah's major focus now being commitment and having expected to cope, then achievement, while Geoff most emphasised personal and career change, horizons, then achievement and commitment. His individual meeting, by contrast, emphasised commitment, then empowerment, expecting to cope, achievement and enjoyment. These three participants' major focuses provide the themes most representative of them as commitment, followed by achievement, expecting to cope, horizons, enjoyment and empowerment.

The group's narrative questionnaires

The four returned questionnaires ranged from one page to five, while questions answered ranged from 16 to 27, very few replying about a key incident, special arrangements necessary to enrol, and the unexpected or disliked elements. Those

themes omitted in the responses were an unsupportive partner, others' criticism and lacking future plans. Themes demonstrated by only one person are as follows: valuing group support (Geoff), academic failure, family pressure, conflict, study problems and lacking commitment (Jenny). The major focuses of all four coincide with their most common themes: commitment, then achievement, horizons broadened and coping expectedly.

Comparison of the group's materials

Comparing the above three forms of material unexpectedly reveals, by contrast with the initial findings, greater involvement in the conversations rather than personal writing, by the slightly higher proportion of spoken topics ranging from 16 to 39, as compared to those 16 to 27 written.

Patterns identified among the various themes representative of the three types of data, are others' criticism and unsupportive partners as unrepresentative of the four, while Jenny's questionnaire alone demonstrated the two themes of experiencing lack of commitment and family pressure, showing these to be unique to her at this end stage.

Themes most representative of these four were sought by identifying their major focuses, which emerge as having experienced commitment, followed by achievement, expectedly coping, meeting a challenge, being empowered, having enjoyed education and having broadened horizons. These differ markedly for these four at the end stage, as compared to the initial themes most representative of the whole group. These had been seeking career or personal change, then seeking achievement, experiencing commitment and expecting conflict, while

themes they had most emphasised initially had been change, commitment and conflict. This section has provided an extension of the group's portraits and a contrast between these four participants' projected and retrospective views. The following chapter offers in contrast, the portraits of the non-vocational students.

Chapter 5: Non-Vocational Students' Portraits

Introduction

As with the previous chapter on vocational students, portraits of each participant were derived from the collected material, which depicted their individual perceptions. Juxtaposing the perceptions of participants and researcher further defines their relationship to the range of themes emerging during the progress of the research.

At the first group meetings held one week apart in March 1998, five months into their course when group cohesion had evidently developed for both first and second year members of each group, the participants (9 in Group 3, and 7 in Group 4) began by a visual depiction of how they recalled feeling at the outset of the course. A thumbnail sketch of all sixteen participant is given in the two sets of diagrams overleaf, then each is examined in turn to identify what can be learned from them from the first meetings, beginning with Catherine from Group 4.

Catherine's picture

home vs. study conflict challenge

Catherine depicted herself at home, wearing yellow trousers and purple top, holding an open book while cradling a small smiling baby in pink. A young child stood at her knee, tugging at her jumper. dressed in brown skirt and green top, with curly hair like the baby's. Catherine was smiling wryly beneath her chin-length bob, as she looked down at the book, but her creased brow suggested the exclamation in her thought bubble.

Figure 4: Non-vocational students: (Group 3)

Debbie 23
 with a male partner
 currently full-time student
 previously disabled unemployed and in unpaid work
 no experience of redundancy
 education: 9 GCSEs (grade A-G), 1 GCSE (grade C), GCE 'A' level
 significant event prior to course: long-term illness (3½ years)
 journey to college: within city by car

Jan 30
 with a female partner and 2 children (infant boy junior girl)
 currently in unpaid work
 previously 10 years in unpaid voluntary work
 has experienced redundancy
 education: 6 GCSEs
 since school: 7 level 3, 1 level 4 OCN credits
 significant event prior to course: separation/divorce
 journey to college: 7 miles by public transport

Pat 38
 with a male partner and 1? child
 currently full-time student
 qualifications since school: 4 level 2 OCN credits

Rani 21
 single
 currently unemployed
 no experience of redundancy
 education: 5 GCSEs (A-C)
 since school: City and Guilds (Basic Computing)
 no significant event prior to course
 journey to college: within city by public transport

Suzi 21
 single
 currently full-time student
 education: GCSEs?
 since school: diploma

Karen 26
 with a female partner
 receiving incapacity benefit
 previously employed full-time with a large nationwide chain of bookstores
 no experience of redundancy
 education: 1 'O' level, 7 CSEs
 since school: 3 CSEs, 3 'AS' levels, 1 GNVQ, City and Guilds (Community Care)
 significant event prior to course: long-term/seious illness
 journey to college: 7 miles by public transport

Pippa 28
 with a male partner, 2 pre-school & infant daughters
 currently & previously in unpaid work
 no experience of redundancy
 education: 1 CSE
 since school: GCSE/'O' levels ?, RSA, OCN credits
 no significant event prior to course
 journey to college: within city by public transport

Vicky 38
 married
 currently unemployed
 previously 20 years RGN (Grade E) in the NHS
 redundancy from previous job
 education: no formal qualifications
 qualifications since school: 1 GCSE (English), SEN, 2 level 2 OCN credits (Maths and Social Studies)
 no significant event prior to course
 journey to college: within city public transport

Diane 35
 with a male partner and 3 children
 currently full-time student
 qualifications since school: 4 level 2 OCN credits
 journey to college: within city by public transport

Figure 5: Non-vocational students: (Group 4)

Catherine 38
 married with 2 children (baby and 4-year-old girl)
 currently registered unemployed
 previously part-time market researcher
 no experience of redundancy
 education: 8 CSEs, 2 AS levels
 since school: 1 'O' level, 1 'A' level, RSA (Health and Hygiene), City and Guilds, YHCFE, 1st Aid, BII
 no significant event prior to course

Judy 39
 married with 2 daughters (7 & 9)
 part-time employment as secretary for husband's painting and decorating business
 previously 13 years as insurance underwriter until birth of her children, then various jobs in shops, cleaning and reception work
 no experience of redundancy
 education: left school at 16 with 6 'O' levels
 since school: 1 'O' level, RSA (Word Processing and Typing level 3)
 no significant prior event

Sally 33
 married with a daughter and 2 (junior school age) sons
 currently unemployed
 previously several years' office work (clerical?)
 qualifications from and since school: 'O' levels, 'A' levels
 significant event: resigned after being passed over for promotion

Tom 40
 with a female partner and 2 daughters (baby and 5-year-old)
 part-time employment as supermarket general assistant and occasional night work as car paint sprayer
 previously full-time double glazing fabricator
 4 redundancies:-
 5½ years bodyshop manager
 5 years bus driver
 5 years fabricator
 2 years fabricator
 education:left school at 16 with 6 CSEs/ 'O' levels
 since school: City and Guilds (Light Motor Vehicle)

Claire 24
 single
 previously and currently registered unemployed
 part-time bookshop assistant (publisher's clearance company) at course start
 no experience of redundancy
 education: 9 CSEs, 1 'A' level
 no significant event prior to course
 journey to college: within city

Mark 33
 single
 receiving incapacity benefit
 previously full-time mature 'A' level student
 no experience of redundancy
 education: 5 'O' levels, 1 CSE
 since school: 1 'A' level, 6 City and Guilds (including Bakery, Flour Confectionery, Communication Skills), RSH (Hygiene)
 significant event: long-term depression

Sheila 38
 lone parent with 3 children (2 girls are 4 and 18)
 unemployed ?
 previously a short-term job
 qualification since school: Nursery Nurse certificate
 significant event: failed Nursery Nurse job interviews

To one side a garment lay over the waiting ironing board, alongside a pile of ironing. To the other was a table with a mug surrounded by notes and books which cascaded over onto the floor. This striking image of domestic concerns illustrates two themes, exceptionally the conflict but also the challenge which study presents to many mature students:

... that's me, with a book in my hand, baby in the other hand, four-year-old round my feet, with a pile of ironin', and, all my coursework on one table, and a cup of coffee in the middle of it, and, I'm thinkin' 'HELP!' (laughs)

The end words "it's as simple as that" typify her uncomplicated attitude.

Catherine's contribution to the discussion

Catherine's 13 themes repeated that of conflict. Past educational enjoyment influenced her dream goal of personal change to become a teacher, following a key incident:

alienation no alienation home vs. study conflict key incident personal change dream enjoy education group support valued coping expectedly commitment empowerment parents' support parents unsupportive

... my three-year-old daughter, when she started nursery, and I thought "School! I liked school ... I always used to say I was goin' to be a teacher." An' I thought ... I really liked school, why did I never do it? An', takin' her to school an', bein' involved ... I decided that, I'd come back to college.

Along with Judy, Sheila and Sally she had felt alienation likely: "afraid you'll stand out", while identifying with "the old ones", a source of support and commitment, "Well, we're mature, we don't mind [the 'mature' label] (chuckles)." She recounts an empowering incident that diminished her alienation:

There's a funny side to it as well, with all the other students that, I was in the Learning Centre, and, sittin' workin', an', a group came up to me an' said, "'Scuse me are you a student or a teacher?" I felt flattered actually. [laughs] [Judy: You do look like a lecturer.]

In view of the implicit ageism encountered at college, is the significant criticism from parents, who "wonder how I juggle, coursework, an' two small children, at

the same time”. This indicates some conflict in her domestic situation, her mother alone apparently supportive: “she’s pretty sound, I believe, I’m not so sure about dad.”

Catherine’s narrative questionnaire

Here she reveals childcare is eased by her partner: “ferrying my children about from Nursery to crèche”, repeating support comes from one though not both parents. Her ten themes

alienation home vs. study conflict no home vs. study conflict key incident empowerment partner’s/parents’ support parents unsupportive tutor’s support long-term plan future participation

newly introduce tutor support, and future intentions necessitating this course, which “chose me”, explaining: “on an open day [I] told the person who was showing me round that I wanted to go into teaching and she recommended the access course”.

Her daughter was the key influence: “Megan starting school gave me the ‘buzz’ to go back into education myself”. The anticipated alienation has given way to confidence: “I thought I might look out of place as a student but I don’t worry about it now as most of us are of a similar age”, characteristic of her profile as confirmed in her end of course questionnaire.

Claire’s contribution to the discussion

Claire arrived after the picture session, her ten discussion themes slightly emphasising alienation, as she identifies with

alienation end qualification status academic failure academic success no commitment parents’ support parents unsupportive others unsupportive long-term plan

the older women rather than the “very immature” students: “I’ve only been out for about five years but it was still a big step for me to come back into education. It was still very alien, strange environment.” Academic success and failure have impelled her to pursue the course, to qualify for a higher status university:

... basically with one 'A' level I wasn't going ... so I decided I'd do an Access course in a year, in order to get, a good place at a university rather than, get a place but (laughs) not very good university.

Table 17: Catherine's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation		✓x	✓					2✓ 1x	
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict	✓	✓	✓x					3✓ 1x	✓
difficulties of study									✓
a challenge	✓							1✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓	✓					2✓	
career /personal change		✓						1✓	
qualification at the end									✓
status /dream		✓						1✓	✓
prior academic failure									
recent academic success									
personal achievement									✓
enjoy education		✓						1✓	✓
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓						1✓	
unexpected they can cope		x						1x	
sense of commitment		✓						1✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment		✓	✓					2✓	
horizons broadened									

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support		✓	✓					2✓	
partner/parents unsupportive		✓	✓					2✓	
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued			✓					1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support									
others' criticism									
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan			✓					1✓	
better job									
participate in education again			✓					1✓	
Totals:	2✓	11 ✓ 2x	9✓ 1x					22✓ 3x	
No. of Themes:	2	13	10					18	
Sub-total:		16						16	

Her mother alone is critical of poor commitment, "she thinks that I should have worked harder ... got it right then", resulting in wasted opportunities:

... I've wasted, what the last sor' of five or six years ... I could have done my degree by now could have had a good job an', been earning some money ... [Sally: Do you think your mum's jealous?] and my father's not like that Yeah, I think my mum is jealous.

Claire's narrative questionnaire

A further 13 themes distinctly emphasise future courses and Access enhancing her university chances, "without showing 'an interest in recent study' I do not think I would have gained as many uni. offers", and improved career prospects, as Claire is "fed up with dead end low pay jobs." She is prompted by pressure from parents, "I finally decided I might have to conform and do as my parents had always wanted", whose influence appears paramount, "[I] definitely have a chip on my shoulder to prove to my parents that I can do this course."

alienation	commitment
no alienation	empowerment
home vs. study conflict	no empowerment
no work/home vs. study conflict	horizons broadened
no study difficulties	not horizons broadened
no challenge	family pressure
career change	others' support
end qualification	no long-term plan
status	long-term plan
academic failure	better job
personal achievement	future participation
enjoy education	

Her rationale for postponing university appears: "[I] didn't see the point in doing a degree for the sake of it like most of my peers without really

knowing why I wanted to do it! So I didn't!", as for future courses, "if I train as a teacher, which I am interested in, it is a guaranteed job." Qualifying for HE then graduating are evidently straightforward but unwelcome, timewasting hurdles she regrets deferring, "I'm delaying the process of getting on in life as I have to do this degree to get a decent job and therefore be skint for another 4 years!" Despite enjoying her current student lifestyle, coursework is unfulfilling: "[I] find the course frustrating and wish I was at uni. now ... I feel a little in limbo this year."

Table 18: Claire's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation		✓	✓x					2✓ 1x	
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict			✓x					1✓ 1x	
difficulties of study			x					1x	
a challenge			x					1x	✓
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change			✓					1✓	
qualification at the end		✓	✓					2✓	✓
status /dream		✓	✓					2✓	
prior academic failure		✓	✓					2✓	
recent academic success		✓						1✓	
personal achievement			✓					1✓	✓
enjoy education			✓					1✓	✓
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued									
unexpected they can cope			x					1x	
sense of commitment		x	✓					1✓ 1x	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment			✓x					1✓ 1x	
horizons broadened			✓x					1✓ 1x	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support		✓						1✓	
partner/parents unsupportive		✓						1✓	
family pressure to succeed			✓					1✓	
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support			✓					1✓	
others' criticism		✓						1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan			✓					1✓	
long-term plan		✓	✓					2✓	
better job			✓					1✓	✓
participate in education again			✓					1✓	✓
Totals:		9✓ 1x	17✓ 7x					26✓ 8x	
No. of Themes:		10	24					29	
Sub-total:		24						24	

She values the impetus of her own reflections above any external influence, "it's more me thinking and sorting my life and career out that has prompted me". Yet she acknowledges outside influence: "Lots of my friends finished their degrees ...

probably influenced me although I'm not sure how specifically", denying that of her family, whose possibly unrecognised pressure emerges in a subsequent list:

I do not know many people in education at the moment ... my brothers who are at different stages primary, secondary and 'A' levels. My uncle is a professor, my step-mum a headteacher, mum-in-law a teacher! Gosh I didn't realise I was surrounded by it so much!

Debbie's picture

Debbie's unique flowchart format focused on social aspects of college life, all pointing to her end qualification. An arrow led from a red car with smiling driver, to two chatting people standing smoking before the large building.

no alienation social aspect end qualification

Exploded inserts displayed a canteen with people seated at tables, and a lecture where two were seated surrounded by books, taking notes from a blackboard.

Arrows indicated the large 'DIPLOMA OF EDUCATION' scroll.

The many relaxed, smiling figures reflect Debbie's comfortable circumstances in a friendly sociable environment, "... gettin' to college and you've got your desk an' there's your canteen an' there's your outside the buildin' havin' a fag [laughs]", as well as the straightforward process of studying, "an', all of it, leads to a Diploma of Education." Her smoking reference amused most of the group, presumably smokers who would thus share the depicted fate of being relegated to the outdoors, since no smoking facilities are provided. Visitors thus have to negotiate both student and staff groups stationed at the main entrance, few other areas offering shelter on this largely exposed site.

Debbie's contribution to the discussion

Ten themes join her first three, emphasising the empowerment resulting from mature student status: “you’ve got more confidence and you know who you are and where you are and where you’re coming from when you get a bit older”. She is at ease with the student identity and associated socialising, partly assured through lack of domestic responsibilities:

... when I get to university I’m gonna be, well five six years older than most o’ them ... I’ve still got that typical student lifestyle I still go to college and don’t do much else, sit about with my boyfriend go out clubbing go to parties ...

no alienation social aspect no home vs. study conflict no study difficulties personal change end qualification personal achievement group support valued coping expectedly empowerment horizons broadened long-term plan future participation

As a newcomer to the area she anticipated socialising,

appreciating group support and the opportunity to expand her horizons:

I’ve really enjoyed meetin’ people ... It’s been nice to get out an’ do somethin’ for myself again, after bein’ ill for years, ’cos ... I feel more capable of meetin’ new people, an’ getting on with them.

Implicitly lacking study difficulties, personal change is a more significant feature of the course, “it’s helped me more personally, rather than academically”. The outcome of the certificate is paramount in her plans, “a stepping-stone to university”, and she explains:

... I thought it was more relevant and I’d learn the computer skills that I’d need an’ the presentation skills ... I thought it’d be a gentler way back in ... an’ I’d been ill, prior to coming here ... one year ‘A’ level’s very intensive and I didn’t want to leap in, like, you know at the deep end ...

This re-emphasises her straightforward course progression, in a familiar environment helping regain her self sufficiency and social skills neglected due to illness, as her brief end contribution reinforces.

Table 19: Debbie's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	x	x						2x	
social aspect	✓	✓						2✓	
home vs. study conflict		x						1x	
difficulties of study		x						1x	
a challenge									✓
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change		✓						1✓	
qualification at the end	✓	✓						2✓	✓
status /dream									
prior academic failure									
recent academic success									
personal achievement		✓						1✓	
enjoy education									
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓						1✓	
unexpected they can cope		x						1x	
sense of commitment									✓
confidence from others' validation /empowerment		✓						1✓	
horizons broadened		✓						1✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support								1✓	✓
partner/parents unsupportive								1✓	
family pressure to succeed								1✓	
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support								1✓	
others' criticism								1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan		✓						1✓	
better job									
participate in education again		✓						1✓	✓
Totals:	2✓ 1x	9✓ 4x						11✓ 5x	
No. of Themes:	3	13						16	
Sub-total:		13						13	

Diane's picture

Diane's picture represented her confidently resuming the studying she abandoned at school, despite concerns of neglecting her children, and being older than the typical student. A smiling, short-haired figure holding books, her caption read 'GOING BACK to learn

- alienation
- home vs. study conflict
- challenge
- academic failure
- personal achievement
- empowerment

what I should have at school'. Two long-haired figures were labelled 'College more for younger people - first felt old and out of place'.

Diane appeared again, labelled: 'Study study study', beside three small figures, whose upthrown arms and downturned mouths underlined her words: "Feel I'm neglecting kids, trying to fit in everything" and hence theme of home conflict. She hopes to overcome the lost opportunities of school, and despite alienation, her closing words reinforce her confident attitude:

I wanted to come back to learning, "what what I should have done at school", err when I got there I thought everybody were younger, and, I felt a bit "older, an' (smiles) out of place." Err, I feel I thought I'd be "study study studying", an' I've not got time for the kids an' I'm "trying to juggle everything", like, yeah, "fit everything in", around college and that. But I'm, quite happy.

challenge key incident end qualification academic success group support valued coping expectedly empowerment horizons broadened partner unsupportive tutor's support no long-term plan future participation
--

Diane's contribution to the discussion

Diane's 12 themes emphasise recent academic success, resulting from their local centre courses "from euh, first level, wi' the, united an', social studies last year, level II, and this were jus' like a follow-on, from that." Mutual support from those five also following that route is appreciated, as she expands her horizons through acquiring credits to enter HE, the new goal replacing her absence of plans:

[Pippa: ... university ... That weren't me, initial thought] No, no no Yeah I agree ... we heard abou' this HND course, an' ... you could get twelve credits at Level 3, this year ... so we've just had us interview, an' an' we've got a place if we pass ... [Suzi: Congratulations!] We've gorra get them yet!

Continuance of tutor support is vital to all three since the new college is more challenging ("We do presentations an' that which is, coming on initially demanding"), than the empowering experiences of the neighbourhood centre:

We had a lot of help from Lynne, [Pippa: Yeah] ... But we were transferred from Linley Community Centre, an' I think it were more a one-to-one basis. Err when you get down here it was totally different but she was still there to give us, support an' that, information, feedback ...

Asked their feelings about the 'mature student' label, she whispers audibly to Pippa, "It's better than bein' an immature student anyway [loud laughs]". Her age is the only factor causing her alienation among other students. Following an unclarified key incident, she mentions lack of partner support, "So I don't speak to 'im ... I think they think we're doin' nothing don't they?"

In this final contribution, the only two of her six picture themes reappearing are alienation, dwindling with course familiarity, and continuing confidence, deriving from the group and one tutor. Home conflict is displayed in her partner's criticism of her studies, but continuing academic success reinforces Diane's immediate goal.

Table 20: Diane's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓							1✓	
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict	✓							1✓	
difficulties of study									
a challenge	✓	✓						1✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓						1✓	
career /personal change									
qualification at the end		✓						1✓	
status /dream									
prior academic failure	✓							1✓	
recent academic success		✓						1✓	
personal achievement	✓							1✓	
enjoy education									
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓						1✓	
unexpected they can cope		✓						1✓	
sense of commitment									
confidence from others' validation /empowerment	✓	✓						2✓	
horizons broadened		✓						1✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support									
partner/parents unsupportive		✓						1✓	
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued		✓						1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support									
others' criticism									
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan		✓						1✓	
long-term plan									
better job									
participate in education again		✓						1✓	
Totals:	6✓	12						18✓	
No. of Themes:	6	12						16	
Sub-total:		16						6	

Jan's picture

Jan's colourful, naturalistic representation extended beyond the borders of the page. Poised between a departing bus and packed college

alienation home vs. study conflict horizons broadened

windows she was facing, Jan wore black jeans, brown shoes and jacket with a turquoise back pack, her brown hair in a short spiky style. She was in profile with downcast features, and anxious thoughts of her childcare concerns, beneath a

clock showing 10 o'clock, and her last speech balloon embellished with pound signs.

The overwhelming theme of conflict between study and home is shown by five means: her arrival, conflicting responsibilities, timetable versus childcare problems, finance, and resorting to home life in the face of difficulties. Alienation derives from feelings of being different (to non-parents) and guilt at her perceived selfishness:

... gettin' off the bus at ten o'clock, everybody else in college an' I'm sayin' "Oh no. I must be late I'm the only one who has to drop off kids first." Aa-an, "this nine-fifteen start and three-forty-five finish, is really unfair! I thought the course would think o' this". And, "This is, costing too much, the kids need new clothes!!" erm, an' "I'm jus' bein' selfish." Basically, that's me, 'Cos I'm off home on the bus.

Jan's contribution to the discussion

The previous three themes recur with 20 more, most significant being challenge, unsupportive tutors, and especially conflict. She had anticipated the change of circumstance ("after, bein' at home with the kids") and intellectual challenge, without suffering the alienating effects of being among younger students, by repeating the 'A' levels she had previously failed:

alienation	copied expectedly
no alienation	empowerment
social aspect	horizons broadened
home vs. study conflict	no partner's support
challenge	tutor's support
career /personal change	tutor unsupportive
end qualification	others' support
academic failure	others unsupportive
academic success	no long-term plan
personal achievement	better job
enjoy education	future participation
group support valued	

... lots o' mature students an' in my situation, single parent, with, coupla kids, erm, so I thought it would be a good confidence boost 'cos I didn't feel I'd be comfortable in a class full of, erm, sixteen to eighteen-year-olds doin' 'A' levels ... been down that route ... an' didn't find it successful then, an' got bored with it, so I thought this might be more interesting ...

Unlike Pippa, whose domestic responsibilities override any sense of being a student, Jan enjoys "a student lifestyle I go to parties every weekend an', dance wi' me frien's, Yee-eah!" Jan perceives herself as a student, rather than (as Pippa

suggests) claiming allegiance because seeking this lifestyle, as it is one she has previously lived comfortably. Thus she had not expected to fit in with the Access group, “I thought mature students would be, thirty-plus bu’ they’re not, they’re twenty-one plus”, and was appreciative of them, and unexpectedly meeting her new partner:

I were surprised at how well I got on with everyone, I f’ I f’ felt like I was I was gonna be a bit of an outcast ... Bu’ I get on well with everyone an’ I’ve got really really close friends, at college and, met my partner at college ...

Her role as lone parent entails reliance on the goodwill of fellow students, and conflict arising from her dependence on a childminder:

... for the first, certainly the first three weeks ... havin’ to leave classes at, half pas’ two, which meant I was constantly catchin’ up, from other people’s notes ... until I found out about the Access fundin’ ... but, that took quite a long time to come through, an’ it was jus’ the good grace o’ my, childminder, I didn’t actually get to pay her, till, the beginning of January ...

besides practical problems of travelling “seven miles in to college every morning”:

... an’ drop my kids off first ... the first day I started to get here, nearly on time I had to leave them to walk half way to school on their own, So the first day I spent nearly all (laughs) day, worryin’ about whether they’d got to school all right, as well as worryin’ about bein’ in college ...

She foresees childcare problems at university, yet the current course, specifically targeted at mature students, fails to provide support in the form of funding and a less challenging workload:

“We’ll support you all the way if you have these problems” then you find out half your holidays don’t match with your kids’ holidays, so, and childcare ... it’s underfunded ... an’ it’s same wi’ workload, they’ll say “Oh, ne’er mind”, or say, you know each tutor seems to set an essay jus’ before an ’oliday an’ jus’ because they presume tha’, half term’s there’s lovely when in fact I’ve go’ less time ...

These pressures are not appreciated by all tutors, though some are supportive:

... the onus is still on you to catch everythin' up, so borrow someone else's notes, an', when people are arrangin' tutorials or something for you to be comin' in at strange times ... they don't realise it costs money to come ...

Despite expecting toleration, she was undermined by the criticism of one atypical, older tutor ("really, unpleasant, arrogant, sexist"), yet derives confidence from most tutors' appreciation of mature groups "they seem to enjoy teaching you as mature students 'cos the classes are livelier and there's more debate." Jan feels herself "the same person just a bit more confident about my views bein', acceptable and, valid".

Her ambition is to "bring up my kids in a sound financial environment which is the major driving force", with job improvement dependent on a degree "apart from personal satisfaction of a career ... it's a stepping-stone to gettin' a job. Then I'll have better wages." However, continuing studying will entail inevitable home pressure:

I'm torn ... I don't know whether to go to university ... there's a possibility of a job comin' up now ... you've got to start tha' whole searchin' for a support system again, with money, an', the uncertainty with the grant system ... so it's jus' really hard financially. And juggling time, an' things an', sometimes you think it'd just be easier to get a job.

Alienation and domestic pressure of her lone parent status remain the most significant features of becoming a student for Jan, as her end contribution will reinforce.

Table 21: Jan's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓	✓x						2✓ 1x	
social aspect		✓						1✓	
home vs. study conflict	✓	✓						2✓	
difficulties of study									
a challenge		✓						1✓	✓
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change		✓						1✓	
qualification at the end		✓						1✓	✓
status /dream									
prior academic failure		✓						1✓	
recent academic success		✓						1✓	
personal achievement		✓						1✓	
enjoy education		✓						1✓	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓						1✓	
unexpected they can cope		x						1x	✓
sense of commitment									
confidence from others' validation /empowerment		✓						1✓	
horizons broadened	✓	✓						2✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support		x						1x	✓
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued		✓						1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able		✓						1✓	
others' support		✓						1✓	
others' criticism		✓						1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan		✓						1✓	
long-term plan									
better job		✓						1✓	
participate in education again		✓						1✓	✓
Totals:	3✓	20 ✓ 3x						23✓ 3x	
No. of Themes:	3	23						23	
Sub-total:		22						22	

Judy's picture

Symbolised by a fish out of water, Judy's foreseen predicament of age and domestic concerns vied with study time, contrasting with her current happy thoughts of her dream goal of university. Her monochrome 'cartoon' sequence showed firstly, waves beneath a glum fish, then herself with chin length wavy

hair, holding an open textbook, and in the other hand both a broom and frying pan, containing sausage and eggs. Two exclamation marks reinforced the message of her downturned mouth, snub nose and round blank eyes.

alienation
home vs. study conflict
dream
personal achievement
enjoy education
commitment
empowerment
long-term plan
future participation

Thirdly she supported herself with a walking stick, her portrayed old age revealed in half-closed eyes, pursed lips and wrinkled cheeks, in contrast to two broadly smiling figures. Largest was a joyous self with upflung arms, her hands outspread and wide awake eyes, a broad smile emphasised by a cupid's bow, with her thought bubble of a road leading to a turreted castle. Judy displays nine themes, emphasising alienation and conflict due to domestic responsibilities:

... I'm a fish out of water (laughs). And that's me an' a frying pan with a brush in one hand ... and, the college work in the other wondering which way to turn. And that's me (smiling) it's not a shepherd it's me as an old lady (chuckles), and all the ... other people are like little schoolchildren.

The larger sketch represents present enjoyment and confident commitment to ongoing university plans, "wi' a big smiley face, thinkin' about goin' to university, next year, and after I'm at university like my castle in the sky", personal achievement also to be realised in the dream goal she pursues. Her original alienation metaphor amused most who would identify with this because of their age.

Judy's contribution to the discussion

Key is her daughter's teacher who qualified late in life, prompting resurgence of a longstanding dream, with the idea of qualifying to study for a degree and so career improvement:

alienation	coping
no alienation	expectedly
home vs. study conflict	commitment
challenge	no empowerment
key incident	partner's support
career change	parents unsupportive
end qualification	others' support
dream	others unsupportive
academic failure	better job

I, had this idea bubblin' away, in the back of me mind ... I thought "Oooh! Well if she can do it at that age then, probably I can as

well.” So she was the one that euh, sort o’ got me off my backside, an’ er, set the ball rolling really.

She attributes other teachers’ apparent negativity over her intentions, either to lack of professional commitment or disillusionment, “all they do is try to talk me out of it ... a lot o’ them that go into teachin’ ... jus’ don’t want to be a teacher.”

Early alienation (“I’m not going to look like a student I’m going to look like an old lady”) was countered by being mistaken for a member of staff. The ‘mature’ label is appreciated: “they don’ call us ‘old’ students, (laughs) so, I mean they chose quite a nice term”, entailing commitment which younger (“very immature”) students lack. Her husband is supportive, unlike her parents:

I’ve got, fantastic fantastic support from my husband, and, my mum and dad, have just like I don’t think they even know I’m at college, I don’t ... an’ I’m so disappointed an’ I’m so disappointed.

This has led to feelings of disempowerment, and conflict with them, reminding her of her past academic lack of success, when they had equally failed her:

... I thought, why aren’t they takin’ any notice of this? it’s really important to me ... why didn’t you take any notice when I left school at sixteen? an’, I should a’ been doin’ this like, twenty odd years ago ... I started feelin’ a bit resentful, that they perhaps hadn’t, given me that sort of shove all those years ago) an’ they’re doin’ it again now.

Eventually she concurs with the experiences of Catherine and Claire: “Yeah. Well my husband’s said that to me ... I said ‘Don’t be so stupid how can a seventy odd year-old woman be jealous?’ ” Parents’ lack of support, the overwhelming feature of her 17 discussion themes, is summarised at the start of her questionnaire.

Judy’s narrative questionnaire

Emphasising slightly alienation, absence of conflict and empowerment, Judy writes, her parents “have hardly acknowledged what I’m doing, and I’m sad about

that". Her husband supports her in the hoped-for job improvement, that was impelled by her daughter's teacher:

... had a break for 2 children, knew I didn't want to go back to insurance (boring!) ... and wanted a new career ... then a chance remark by my daughter's teacher ... made me think more seriously about it ... my husband has completed a certificate in post-16 education and has taught part-time evening classes in painting and decorating, and he's been very enthusiastic and supportive.

She avoids domestic conflict of interest by

utilising friends' support:

I've tried really hard not to let college encroach on time with my two girls - I do my work at night when they go to bed ... friends help with collecting Heather and Alice from school.

alienation	horizons broadened
no home vs. study conflict	partner's support
challenge	parents unsupportive
key incident	tutor's support
career change	others' support
end qualification	others unsupportive
group support valued	long-term plan
coping expectedly	better job
commitment	future participation
empowerment	

At the outset she felt her age a disadvantage, but appreciates group support,

"everybody is really nice and I feel like I'd like to mix with them a bit more than I do - I wonder if they find me 'aloof' ". This is improving her confidence ("I'm realising that I can do it"), as seen by tutors, who "would notice that I'm coming out of my shell now." Confident that she will continue her studies at HE "When I've passed the course, I'm going to do English Studies ... (offered) or a B.Ed. in Primary teaching - which I REALLY want."

This will resurrect feelings of alienation and challenge, "I'll be worrying all over again about being a fish out of water at Uni., coping with work loads etc.", but she already feels committed due to broadened perspectives:

... I've met people I'd never have mixed with otherwise, and I can have an informed conversation on lots of topics ... This Access year has probably been one of the most important ones of my life!

These 19 bring her initial total to 23 themes, new being horizons, with support of tutors and group; most constant being those to do with alienation, home conflict, empowerment and commitment.

Table 22: Judy's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ		tape	picture	tape		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓	✓x	✓					3✓ 1x	
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict	✓	✓	x					2✓ 1x	
difficulties of study									
a challenge		✓	✓					2✓	✓
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓	✓					2✓	
career /personal change		✓	✓					2✓	
qualification at the end		✓	✓					2✓	✓
status /dream	✓	✓						2✓	
prior academic failure		✓						1✓	
recent academic success									
personal achievement	✓							1✓	✓
enjoy education	✓							1✓	✓
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued			✓					1✓	
unexpected they can cope		x	✓					1✓ 1x	
sense of commitment	✓	✓	✓					3✓	✓
confidence from others' validation /empowerment	✓	x	✓					2✓ 1x	
horizons broadened			✓					1✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ		tape	picture	tape		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support		✓	✓					2✓	
partner/parents unsupportive		✓	✓					2✓	
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued			✓					1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able								1✓	
others' support		✓	✓					2✓	
others' criticism		✓	✓					2✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan	✓		✓					2✓	
better job		✓	✓					2✓	
participate in education again	✓		✓					2✓	✓
Totals:	9✓	14 ✓ 3x	18✓ 1x					41✓ 4x	
No. of Themes:	9	17	19					27	
Sub-total:		23						23	

Karen's picture

Karen's self-doubt at the overwhelming nature of college work appears in her anxiously facing the building, whose windows are filled with smiling faces.

Alongside was an orange tower of books reaching the second floor beside which stood the diminutive figure of Karen, a stark figure in navy with short spiked hair, contrasting with brown shoes and backpack, with arms and legs spread and wide mouth indicative of her exclamation.

alienation study difficulties challenge end qualification personal achievement
--

The caption reinforces the two most emphasised of her five

themes, alienation and study difficulty, in the overwhelming nature of college and the coursework, alongside the challenging qualification:

“Ahhhhh! Too big too much, work, how will I succeed?” ...
basically I jus' saw it as really really big with lots o' people inside
... an' I had this horrible fear of (chuckles) loads an' loads of
books an' loads of study, an' I was jus' scared basically.

Karen's contribution to the discussion

All six themes differ here, career change sought in the much

career /personal change dream horizons broadened others unsupportive long-term plan future participation

emphasised future plan, entailing postgraduate social work studies towards a specific dream: “my long-term ambition is to, set up a ... safe house, for people who've been abused.” Change in her personal circumstances has produced a critical attitude from former church friends: “they all see me differently 'cos I'm, I I don't go to church any more and, my whole lifestyle's changed.” Future plans contrast with her picture's perceived difficulties of alienation versus achievement.

Table 23: Karen's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓							1✓	
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict									
difficulties of study	✓							1✓	✓
a challenge	✓							1✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change		✓						1✓	
qualification at the end	✓							1✓	✓
status /dream		✓						1✓	
prior academic failure									
recent academic success									
personal achievement	✓							1✓	
enjoy education									
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued									✓
unexpected they can cope									
sense of commitment									
confidence from others' validation /empowerment									
horizons broadened		✓						1✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support									✓
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support									
others' criticism		✓						1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan		✓						1✓	
better job									
participate in education again		✓						1✓	✓
Totals:	5✓	6✓						41✓	
No. of Themes:	5	6						27	
Sub-total:		11						23	

Mark's picture

Mark depicted himself in three-quarter profile, proud of past and hoped-for achievements, firmly placed on the "ROAD TO SUCCESS" which ran across the bottom of the page. Grinning broadly, he held aloft a gold "TROPHY". Seven themes especially emphasise confidence, deriving from recent achievements, ensuring commitment to his

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> status /dream academic success personal achievement commitment empowerment long-term plan future participation |
|--|

university plan, both a dream goal and source of status, as personified by the trophy:

... further along the road, is the university ... nevertheless they've got trophy now because, academic success now is something in it's own right now. That's why he's got such a big grin.

Mark's contribution to the discussion

Sixteen themes reinforce his focus on achievement, the means to a new career. Recent

home vs. study conflict	academic success
no work vs. study conflict	personal achievement
study difficulties	enjoy education
challenge	commitment
key incident	empowerment
end qualification	parents unsupportive
status	family pressure
academic failure	tutor's support

academic experiences entail success and failure, a significant factor due to study difficulties, having "English Language 'A' level, and ... History I just failed completely ... so I chose this course because I wasn't willing to accept failure."

The key factor of his depression is linked to his course decision, having previously sought OU study and having enjoyed 'A' levels: "it gave me, lots o' pleasure, really, to be involved, doin' 'A' levels". Experience of failure made him aware this also was too ambitious a goal, leading to pursuit of the more realistic Access course.

He appreciates tutors ("a lot of support") but thinks his parents critical: "My mom and dad ... think I'm just, get carried away with ... History or whatever, and ... I don't spend enough time, with ... study skills stuff." Citing acquaintances in education, "my sister has got, a, a university degree, my dad's got a degree ... one of my cousins is a doctor ... another one o' my cousin's got a degree", he reveals much implicit family pressure to succeed.

Mark's narrative questionnaire

Eleven themes bring his initial total to 21, most frequent reference being to achieving the qualification for university

no alienation
social aspect
study difficulties
end qualification
academic success
personal achievement
group support valued
commitment
empowerment
others' support
future participation

entrance. Support of those suggesting the Access course was decisive, as was promise of help with study problems “I was told that continuous assessment was a good aspect of access courses.” Although family and ex-course members earlier figured among those he knows in education, here he claims only “fellow access students”, indicating strong group identity, as suggested in his hopes for social involvement. Others’ views of him as hard working suggest increased confidence and commitment to study.

Views on himself centre on study problems, especially “as one who found it difficult to achieve things.” He sees the course ending with him “having achieved a pass access course with enough credits to go on to University”, where being “at the top of a small hill” indicates empowerment.

Table 24: Mark's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation			x					1x	
social aspect			✓					1✓	✓
home vs. study conflict		✓x						1✓	
difficulties of study		✓	✓					2✓	
a challenge		✓						1✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓						1✓	
career /personal change									
qualification at the end		✓	✓					2✓	✓
status /dream	✓	✓						2✓	✓
prior academic failure		✓						1✓	✓
recent academic success	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
personal achievement	✓	✓	✓					3✓	✓
enjoy education		✓						1✓	✓
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued			✓					1✓	
unexpected they can cope									
sense of commitment	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
horizons broadened									

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support									
partner/parents unsupportive		✓						1✓	
family pressure to succeed		✓						1✓	
continuing tutor support valued		✓						1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support			✓					1✓	
others' criticism									
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan	✓							1✓	
better job									
participate in education again	✓		✓					2✓	
Totals:	7✓	15 ✓ 1x	10✓ 1x					32✓ 2x	
No. of Themes:	7	16	11					22	
Sub-total:		21						21	

Pat's picture

Pat's uncertainties as an older isolated student counteracted her ambition of surmounting work deadlines. Largest of her series of turquoise rectangles, was a stick figure labelled 'Lonely', alongside "Was I ready for this? Big step", then three smaller labelled 'Kids', and one figure marked 'Bottom', beside three

dashes representing rungs marked 'Where I wanted to be!' and 'Uncertainty' in the other half. A final stick figure was labelled 'Work Hard'.

alienation study difficulties challenge dream academic success personal achievement
--

Alienation derives from her age and perhaps self doubt, and she appears at the bottom of the Access ladder contemplating the challenge of study difficulties. On the path to achieving her dream, she is encouraged by recent success:

... it were a big step to take 'cos I were at Linley [Community Centre], and er, I did see college full o' young kids, an' I also looked at ladder where, I were like Foundation, an', it were jus' an impossible dream to think tha', you know, what I'd go through, it's just been a lot of hard work.

Despite this emphasis on the challenge and difficulties faced, those elements of her drawing not commented on, notably her loneliness, suggest her wish for personal change. This is reinforced in her diagram of the ladder of Access stages with its upward pointing arrow, and in particular the 'party' motif of fireworks and various drinks she doodled.

Pat's contribution to the discussion

end qualification group support valued tutor's support
--

Following this presentation little was volunteered by Pat, although she joined the group debate about study conflicting with home life. This provided three different themes, of seeking the qualification, and valuing group support from her neighbourhood centre's outreach courses.

Table 25: Pat's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓							1✓	
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict									
difficulties of study	✓							1✓	
a challenge	✓							1✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change									
qualification at the end		✓						1✓	
status /dream	✓							1✓	
prior academic failure									
recent academic success	✓							1✓	
personal achievement	✓							1✓	
enjoy education									
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓						1✓	
unexpected they can cope									
sense of commitment									
confidence from others' validation /empowerment									
horizons broadened									

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support									
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued		✓						1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support									
others' criticism									
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan									
better job									
participate in education again									
Totals:	6✓	3✓						9✓	
No. of Themes:	6	3						9	
Sub-total:		9						9	

Pippa's picture

Pippa's images reflect her chaotic struggle to compromise demands of home (childcare) and college (traditional teaching and younger, able students).

Clockwise were a yellow bus, the green caption 'Series of session teaching from a blackboard', beside an olive green teacher in mortar-board labelled 'Stereotypical

teacher - repetitive learning'. In the 'impersonal crèche', orange stick figures then a green group stood: 'Young students that were more knowledgeable'.

alienation home vs. study conflict study difficulties no challenge academic success empowerment
--

Emphasis rests on alienation, home conflict, and absence of challenge. Although recent success with her foundation year at their neighbourhood centre have empowered her, she makes one mention of her probably unfounded study difficulties, feared because of the younger and more able students:

... "chaotic rushin' about jugglin' kids house, study - rushin' for a bus," ... I jus' thought it'd be "stereotypical ... teachin' ... repetitive learnin', blackboard" you know like what you got from school. Erm, I had worries about the crèche thinkin' ... you jus' left your kids in 'em an' you didn't know what they were goin' to do with them, an' where it proved different ... thought it'd be full o' "young students, more knowledgeable" ... knew where they were at whereas I didn't, just insecurities really.

Pippa's contribution to the discussion

Striking emphasis is on tutor support and home conflict, with hopes of personal change partially linked to the social element:

I did it jus' to get out o' house I'd also worked at home wi' 't little one and it just drove me crackers, an' I jus' wen' into typing, erm Women's History ... there were six of us weren't there ... we came down last year to do 't foundation ...

This has reinforced her wish to extend herself: "which gi' me a taste o' credits ... an' tha' you could, build them up", and revise her absence of plans to pursue a place at university "it's led on to like opportunity, of euh university ... That weren't my, initial thought ... it were jus' like just a bit o' typin'."

alienation social aspect no social aspect home vs. study conflict challenge personal change end qualification academic failure academic success personal achievement group support valued	coping unexpectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened partner unsupportive tutor's support tutor unsupportive others' support no long-term plan long-term plan future participation
---	---

The interdependence built amongst these three is evidently valuable in the transition to college: “I think it helped ... people set off, basic use of English, an’ then they find, you know, progression.” Continuing support from their previous adult education tutor is also significant, “they don’t set masses o’ homework straight away they gradually you know a lot o’ ... discussion work an’ support”. Confidence is growing, after unexpectedly coping with the challenging initial qualifications, in contrast to previous failure and alienation from school:

... to be pampered a bit, to give you that confidence. Because it’s a long time since school an’ ... if you’ve failed at school then you’re not, gonna get on in later life but they give you that confidence they make you believe in yourself ...

She perceives a contrast in childcare provision, “neighbourhood centre they’d spare time so ... put kids in ... Last year they were more, more caring weren’t they? this year ... it’s the hard line.” Pippa depends on support from her daughter’s teacher: “[I] finish at quarter to four so my eldest left wi’ literally wi’ t cleaners, an’ it’s a good job y’know I’ve got a good relationship wi’ t school wi’ t teacher.” Pippa follows the group’s avid debate, about “partners what don’t accept” them studying, because of not fulfilling their domestic role: “he just sees it as a luxury an’ I’m not really doin’ anything. An’ then you’ve still got your role to do ... kids an’, other things”. These domestic responsibilities lead to her lack of identification with younger students.

Rani’s picture

no alienation social aspect study difficulties no challenge
--

Rani’s enthusiastic encounter with college, depicted as a building with faces at the windows, epitomised hard work and friendship opportunities. Her green image with lilac captions showed herself entering college, whose top windows

showed one figure saying “LOTS OF HARD WORK, ASSIGNMENTS, DEADLINES TO MEET ETC.”, and three declaring, “MEETING NEW PEOPLE, MAKING FRIENDS”. A student stood glumly at a bus stop watching another eagerly running in saying “GETTING TO COLLEGE ON TIME!”

Table 26: Pippa's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓	✓						2✓	
social aspect		✓ x						1✓ 1x	
home vs. study conflict	✓	✓						2✓	
difficulties of study	✓							1✓	✓
a challenge	x	✓						1✓ 1x	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change		✓						1✓	
qualification at the end		✓						1✓	✓
status /dream									
prior academic failure		✓						1✓	
recent academic success	✓	✓						2✓	
personal achievement		✓						1✓	
enjoy education									
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓						1✓	
unexpected they can cope		✓						1✓	
sense of commitment		✓						1✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment	✓	✓						2✓	
horizons broadened		✓						1✓	✓

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support									
partner/parents unsupportive		✓						1✓	
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued		✓						1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able		✓						1✓	
others' support		✓						1✓	
others' criticism									✓
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan		✓						1✓	
long-term plan		✓						1✓	
better job		✓						1✓	
participate in education again									✓
Totals:	5✓ 1x	21 ✓ 1x						26✓ 2x	
No. of Themes:	6	22						24	
Sub-total:		22						22	

The wish to socialise, and study foreseen as hard but manageable work, are most emphasised. Attending college and coursework are more a minor inconvenience than problematic, as her last remark hints at lack of both challenge and alienation:

... I'd be waitin' at bus stops a lot an' payin' for them, constantly ... "lots of hard work, and assignments there's deadlines to meet" and ... "getting to college on time" as well ... "meeting new people" which I think was important in "making friends", so that, the course is made easy for you ...

Rani's contribution to the discussion

end qualification future participation

Rani spoke briefly before leaving early, about her participation reasons, providing two themes different to the four in her picture, concerned with expectations. These confirm her wish to go to university via the Access course, seen by her as a mere means to qualifying for university, indicating lack of reflection as borne out later.

Sally's picture

Sally had not foreseen curtailment of personal and family pursuits, despite expecting extra study time, nor the unequal treatment of students by tutors. Two columns of featureless stick figures show those at college in olive green. First there was someone reading, two labelled 'lecturer pupil - equals', then herself at a desk working late. Those at home, shown in brown, begin with 'Sunday', herself watching two children playing football, window shopping for clothes, then a pair of walking boots beside a rucksack.

no alienation home vs. study conflict challenge coping unexpectedly commitment no empowerment tutor unsupportive
--

Table 27: Rani's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	x							1x	
social aspect	✓							1✓	
home vs. study conflict									
difficulties of study	✓							1✓	✓
a challenge	x							1x	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change									
qualification at the end		✓						1✓	
status /dream									✓
prior academic failure									
recent academic success									
personal achievement									
enjoy education									
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued									
unexpected they can cope									
sense of commitment									✓
confidence from others' validation /empowerment									
horizons broadened									

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support									✓
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support									
others' criticism									
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan									
better job									
participate in education again		✓						1✓	✓
Totals:	2✓ 2x	2✓						4✓ 2x	
No. of Themes:	4	2						6	
Sub-total:	6							6	

Sally's seven themes reveal challenge over study, with an unexpectedly strong emphasis on conflict over personal and family pursuits, more illustrative of her coping and commitment to study:

... I'm sat at the table studyin' late at night. I expected that What I didn't expect, was I'd have to give up too much of my own time, so I, this is me you see with my boys playin' football they play in a

football team, or go shopping or, an' this is my favourite hobby which is like I like hikin' all over the place.

Also unexpected is the imbalance of inequitable relationships, by some lecturers who disempower students older than themselves, by extending the same approach they use with younger students:

But I hadn't of expected, being a mature student, that, pupils would be treated as equals by the lecturers, because some of them are younger, (laughs) than us. And I found out that, that isn't true, some of the, lecturers, erm, tend to, treat us, as though we are, sixteen to eighteen year old.

Sally's contribution to the discussion

Her eight discussion themes are different to her picture's foreseen elements and unexpected discoveries on-course. Most

alienation key incident career/personal change academic success parents unsupportive family pressure others' support better job

strongly featured is her wish for change through a better job, precipitated by the key event of being passed over for promotion:

... a dead-end of a job anyway, I was, only working for the money, getting nowhere ... I liked being in the {initiation?} department and a job came up ... it should have been mine and I came out an' I applied for it, an' they said yes we'll send you for an interview. Anyhow about two days later, someone else came, an' they'd already interviewed somebody, and they overstepped me, and I felt so (laughs mirthlessly) disgusted actually ... if it hadn't a' happened I'd a' probably still been there, But I thought, well I don't like being walked on like this I want something a bit better ... I'd probably have been stuck in tha' rut.

Familiarity with studying while at work ("at night school to do 'O' levels and 'A' levels"), suggests the latent intention to resume full-time education to improve her unfulfilling job situation. Agreeing with the others' feelings, amongst the "very immature" student majority, she derives support from some schoolteachers: "I used to help at school quite a lot, an' do voluntary work ... the teachers at my children's junior school are always askin' me how it's goin'." However she

reflects upon the negative attitude of some late entry teachers to those such as

Judy, Sheila and Catherine, now entering the profession:

... they've all had their families, then do an Access course an' then go on to teachin' so, they've really been supported. But like now y'know, they're very critical. Y'know! (laughs) you know you've done that now, get on with your life!

Another source of support is surprisingly her mother-in-law:

... a pretty supportive mother-in-law who, an' we've never got on very well (smiles) But actually since I've started the course, she's always ringing me up an' err, have you got tons o' work, have you got the kids well send 'em round for tea (laughs), or come on I'll do some ironin' for you or somethin' weird, (laughs loudly) we get on really well now, we're like, we're like really good friends now. She's been really kinda brilliant, [Judy: Crikey!]

Sally's insight is that fellow students experience lack of support because of parental jealousy, reflecting such pressure ("I think my mum is"), derives from her pursuing both career and motherhood.

Sally's narrative questionnaire

Expanding on these views, her 22 themes most emphasised job improvement, partner's and others' support. Her husband's encouragement is countered by his criticism of her no longer earning:

... he knew I was unhappy at work and suggested a long term approach to financial achievement ... then this [support] diminished when he realised what my loss of earning meant to the family ...

This disempowered her: "trying to be a housewife, mother to 3 children, wife and constantly being reminded

alienation	no horizons broadened
no alienation	partner's support
home vs. study conflict	partner/parents unsupportive
no home vs. study conflict	family pressure
key incident	tutor unsupportive
career /personal change	others' support
end qualification	others unsupportive
academic success	no long-term plan
enjoy education	long-term plan
no empowerment	better job

that although I am in full-time education I'm not bringing any money into the house." However he adjusts his working hours to accommodate her, his attitude

as Sally states: “[I] should give myself a chance in life to help my children”, one shared by her mother-in-law who is key in reducing any conflict in the home:

... she picks the children up from school when I’m late home, looks after them when I’m ill or any of them are, without her support I’d probably have missed a lot more lessons.

Family pressure to succeed is pervasive, “I want to do well for my husband’s sake, my mother-in-law’s and my children.” Besides the supportive attitude of others she attracts some criticism, from a neighbour (“I should be at home”), and her mother (“I’m wasting my time”). Her wish for change through a better job hinges upon earlier academic success and enjoyment:

I’ve always been interested in Humanities subjects and did better at school on ‘O’ levels than Science subjects. I’d always done studying as a housewife then an employed person. I was at work when a position higher up became available and I was bypassed. I felt so annoyed for about two months, I knew I wanted something better in life.

The immediate goal of qualifying (“to get a degree”), appears inseparable from family concerns: “so I can put my own children through university.” She exhibits alienation, in her perception “that I was too old to go to college full-time, and in the expectation that she would “stick out amongst younger students”. Yet anticipations of being “the same as the other students” are probably attributable to their shared identity as mature entrants, perhaps reinforced by their tutors’ disenfranchisement.

Explicit gains are only a better job and degree, her sole perceived achievement, as she is unaware of gains otherwise. This indicates some lack of reflection, suggestive of her prosaic attitude to benefits she appreciates as a student (“cheap bus fares and discounts”).

Though most of her writing concerns others' views, Sally demonstrates no appreciation of group support, and apparently knows "only the people on the access course", relying on the goodwill of her direct family in the face of overt criticism outside. According to tutor Nick she is a solitary, "solid hard-working student", seeking "to improve job prospects and fulfil her potential," both comments supporting his theme assessment of her, which omits her theme of change, but adds achievement.

Table 28: Sally's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	x	✓	✓					2✓ 2x	
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict	✓		✓x					2✓ 1x	
difficulties of study									
a challenge	✓							✓x	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓	✓					2✓	
career /personal change		✓	✓					2✓	✓
qualification at the end			✓					1✓	✓
status /dream									
prior academic failure									
recent academic success		✓	✓					2✓	✓
personal achievement									✓
enjoy education			✓					1✓	✓
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued									
unexpected they can cope	✓							1✓	
sense of commitment	✓							1✓	✓
confidence from others' validation /empowerment	x		x					2x	
horizons broadened			x					1x	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support			✓					1✓	
partner/parents unsupportive		✓	✓					2✓	
family pressure to succeed		✓	✓					2✓	
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able	✓		✓					2✓	
others' support		✓	✓					2✓	
others' criticism			✓					1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan			✓					1✓	
long-term plan			✓					1✓	
better job		✓	✓					2✓	
participate in education again									
Totals:	5✓ 2x	8✓	16✓ 4x					29✓ 6x	
No. of Themes:	7	8	20					23	
Sub-total:		21						21	

Sheila's picture

Sheila foresaw herself as the oldest, anxious to maintain the level of work

because of unrealistic expectations of her abilities. Her opening

quotation was illustrated by a purple textbook, the second by a

stick figure wearing a mortar-board in red, as were the remaining captions.

alienation study difficulties challenge

She displays lack of a positive self image, echoed in her comments on her lack of drawing ability. Although opening with the theme of challenge, her many “negatives” in effect provide several illustrations of the same two themes. These are study difficulties, perceived over her poor ability, and alienation deriving from the (younger) others’ cleverness and capability:

I thought there was gonna be lots an’ “lots o’ work that I wouldn’t be able to, keep up with” ... that everybody else would be, much “more knowledgeable and capable” than me ... “I felt expectations of myself were too unrealistic and I wasn’t nearly clever enough” to be here (chuckles), I thought they would sort of, suss me out or ... throw me out, and, “thought I’d be the oldest in my group,” and, I thought that the, lectures would be probably, “at a higher level than I could manage.” Quite a lot of negative things really.

These feelings about self and her ability, echo many notions of risk, of being found to be wanting, and especially of ‘being found out’, as in her significant words “I thought *they* would sort of, *suss me out* or ... throw me out” (my italics). She cannot match the high expectations demanded according to an undefined set of criteria, and must face the humiliation of discovery and rejection. With such fears her decision to participate is striking.

Sheila’s contribution to the discussion

Her earlier three themes recur alongside 16 more, the emphasis less now on study difficulties than on empowerment and

alienation	group support valued
social aspect	coping unexpectedly
work vs. study conflict	commitment
study difficulties	empowerment
challenge	no empowerment
key incident	parents unsupportive
career/personal change	family pressure
end qualification	others’ support
dream	long-term plan
academic success	

disempowerment, and especially others’ support. The prime factor in her course application was to match up her career plans in primary teaching. This sole reference to the future perhaps indicates lack of assurance, as Nick reflects, “because of family has not gone to HE before.” Wish for change via the

qualification has to be seen against the background of early success, unfortunately leading to a key failure at interview:

I did a course here about nine years ago, it was a nursery nurse ... I, went for several interviews last yee-ar and ... I was absolutely terrible ... I didn't get any of them ... I wanted something better for [my children] and for myself and the only way of me doing that was me goin' out an' doin' somethin' about it.

Despite teaching forming a dream goal she had dropped out on two previous occasions due to lack of confidence, with too daunting an initial workload at her first attempt seven years ago, demonstrating the alienating effects of the anticipated study difficulties and disempowerment:

The first time my daughter ... was about six months old ... an' the workload that was piled on that very first day ... I couldn't handle it and I knew couldn't do i' then.

The previous year the competing influence of temporary work undermined her second attempt: "it was nothing definite nothing fantastic ... but there was something concrete there, rather than the potential of something that I might not achieve." Yet tutor Nick summarised her as "Very able ... no problem. Sensible. Well organised." Support, notably from her children, constitutes pressure reinforced by uncertainty (as future plans reveal) about coping with the challenge:

I'm goin' to have a go but I'm not sure if I can do it ... they just talk about when you've got a good job and lots of money well what, they're spendin' the money already (laughs) ... I can't fail them now I'll sort of feel more of a failure now than before ...

The example and support of her sister, the first family member into HE, form a source of empowerment, "my sister is my inspiration ... she, did a law degree, and, against, all odds really." Encouragement from her child's teacher has affected her decision to adopt the challenge, as did her key failure to gain an interview she felt merited:

... I didn't even get an interview or any even recognition or the fact that I've worked in that school an' helped, an' ... I thought well, I'm not goin' to get a job doin' what I'm qualified for I've got to do somethin' else, and I was helping in another school at that time, three days a week, and the teacher ... said, I think you'll, be brilliant at it, an' ... I thought if she's got confidence in me, I'll try it an' see ...

She feels the mature student label appropriate, although age remains a source of alienation: "I saw some people really young ... an' I thought well, I'd feel really, I don't know different bu' I think it's a nice mix." These are her only references to the social aspect that has arisen, and group support. Confidence results from being mistaken for a lecturer: "I was asked that by Reception whether I was a lecturer or a student or not, quite shocked. Do I look intelligent or, ... if I take off my glasses! (laughs)." Following general agreement about other students' immaturity, Sheila cites her eldest daughter (studying 'A' levels here) as an example of younger FE students being undecided about their future ("they're just fillin', time in"), as compared to Access students:

... we've come ... with a purpose ... bu', they sometimes stop you working ... in the Learning Centre, you've got a specified time you want to do it ... you've got motivation an' they haven't always ...

Nick confirms her commitment and empowerment, as well as course success and her goal of certification, but suggests achievement and enjoyment of learning which she does not display. Her father's behaviour undermines Sheila, whereas some degree of supportiveness is displayed by her mother, possibly due to missed opportunities ("My mum could have had a go she could have had the opportunity"), and significantly jealousy:

... I get annoyed, an' he .. starts talkin' about somethin' else with my mum, but then ... when my mum phones my sister now ... she's tellin' her how well I'm doin'. So I so I know she is she's proud of me bu' she's never said it to me.

Sheila reveals the more positive aspects of her confidence derive from much support, despite the underlying consistent lack of faith in her abilities.

Table 29: Sheila's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓	✓						2✓	
social aspect		✓						1✓	
home vs. study conflict		✓						1✓	
difficulties of study	✓	✓						2✓	
a challenge	✓	✓						2✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓						1✓	
career /personal change		✓						1✓	
qualification at the end		✓						1✓	✓
status /dream		✓						1✓	
prior academic failure									
recent academic success		✓						1✓	✓
personal achievement									✓
enjoy education									✓
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓						1✓	
unexpected they can cope		✓						1✓	
sense of commitment		✓						1✓	✓
confidence from others' validation /empowerment		✓x						1✓	✓
horizons broadened								1x	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support									
partner/parents unsupportive		✓						1✓	
family pressure to succeed		✓						1✓	
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support		✓						1✓	
others' criticism									
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan		✓						1✓	
better job									
participate in education again									
Totals:	3✓	18						21✓	
		✓						1x	
		1x							
No. of Themes:	3	19						19	
Sub-total:		18						18	

Suzi's picture

Suzi's monochrome picture also featured a doodled Christmas tree, bedecked with gold star and bright decorations, to take advantage,

no alienation
no challenge
end qualification
academic success
long-term plan
future participation

as her opening words indicate, of the opportunity to use the colours available, “That’s got ‘Nothing to do with anything.’ [laughs] It’s to do with the felt tips.” She was depicted confidently smiling with fashionably short, individually curled spikes of hair, alongside the diagram of her planned educational route, a ladder with rungs labelled ‘School’, ‘College’, ‘DEGREE UNIVERSITY,’ ‘M.A.?’ and an arrow alongside marked ‘Natural progression’ while above was ‘= UNDERSTANDING + CAREER = £ £ £’.

Her participation aims of the qualification and diploma reinforce her expectations of lack of both alienation and challenge in particular, as she fully anticipates her immediate coursework being straightforward:

I jus’ ... see it as a natural progression, from school to college ’cos I went to college before to do a diploma so I’ll do that for a couple of years. [laughs] That’s it. So I can mess about for a couple of years.

As her doodling during the meeting suggests, her end comment, which provoked laughter in others sharing this attitude, gives a strong indication of her approach to college as a place to fill in time on the easier Access option, in preference to ‘A’ levels. Despite her “understanding” caption she does not seem to be interested in the learning process on her way to the next stage in her education, and is effectively embarking on two years’ out but with the bonus of an end qualification.

Suzi’s contribution to the discussion

Three picture themes recur among these 11, emphasising lack of alienation, end qualification and HE goal. Further

no alienation social aspect no work/home vs. study conflict end qualification group support valued coping expectedly tutor’s support tutor unsupportive others unsupportive no long-term plan future participation
--

emphasis is on absence of conflict, supportive and unsupportive tutors.

Expectations are of socialising amongst a predominantly younger age group, causing some feeling of alienation though she has quickly adapted:

I was like twenty-one plus so I did expect some older ones but I didn't expect tha' that many people would have kids. An', most of them have go' kids. So, when they're, it's like the first few weeks of bonding with everyone, it's all abou' kids. I was like sat there scratching my head thinking "Oh dear," but no it's been quite good.

She appreciates the others' childcare problems, suggesting their treatment by tutors is intended to be supportive: "it's to, to prepare you If they pampered you now, when you got to university you'd have the shock of your life." Hence absence of domestic responsibility aids her in continuing with her immediate HE plans, for which the qualification is essential:

... I've just got to do the work ... It's not major 'cos I've got no responsibilities. So I don't have to, mess about jugglin', although financing it's a bit hard anyway.

Besides future plans, her tutor Sue confirms unsupportive tutors and social aspects as significant for Suzi, but unexpectedly adds expanding horizons and seeking change, since her input suggests minimal effort will allow Suzi to coast through the next two years.

Tom's picture

Tom faced a long and mountainous route to his goal, concern as an older student shown by facing the empty windows of the university. His mountain was topped by a goalpost while on the lower grassy slopes he happily stood by a 10% incline warning sign, another further on indicating 'GOAL 7,000 MILES'. Below was the imposing facade of 'COLLEGE /UNIVERSITY', a five-storey construction with large

alienation
challenge
dream
personal achievement
commitment
long-term plan
future participation

rectangular windows. A tiny orange figure stood at the double entrance doors, smiling with knees bowed and arms spread for support from a walking stick.

Table 30: Suzi's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	x	x						2x	
social aspect		✓						1✓	✓
home vs. study conflict		x						1x	
difficulties of study									
a challenge	x							1x	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change									✓
qualification at the end	✓	✓						2✓	
status /dream									
prior academic failure									
recent academic success	✓							1✓	
personal achievement									
enjoy education									
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓						1✓	
unexpected they can cope		x						1x	
sense of commitment									
confidence from others' validation /empowerment									
horizons broadened									✓

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support									
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued		✓						1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able		✓						1✓	✓
others' support									
others' criticism		✓						1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan		✓						1✓	
long-term plan	✓							1✓	
better job									
participate in education again	✓	✓						2✓	✓
Totals:	4✓	8✓						12✓	
	2x	3x						5x	
No. of Themes:	6	11						14	
Sub-total:		14						14	

Tom's seven themes emphasise alienation and challenge, the goal denoting achievement of his dream, but equally commitment to future plans, also visible in the long challenging journey: "χ thousand miles, I've got a long way to go, and ...

it's, something of an uphill struggle, that's why my goal's at the top of a hill."

Alienation is shown in the scale of the university environment, anticipated because of his age: "a very large, buildin' ... college or university, an' me ... a very small person ... with the walkin' stick, erm an old person in, what is a very young environment."

Tom's contribution to the discussion

Five themes recur with 11 more, the key incident of his fourth redundancy prompting Tom to seek job improvement: "something, erm office-based academic or whatever ... I hadn't ... given my family any kind of financial security." Being first in his family ("all, in manual trades") to follow an academic route, is a source of status, this achievement enhanced by course success and family support. Unlike youngsters, he suggests Access students have accepted the challenge of study: "we're here by like choice."

alienation work vs. study conflict challenge key incident career /personal change status academic success personal achievement coping expectedly commitment no empowerment partner's support tutor unsupportive others' support others unsupportive better job

Alienation, deriving from his age and self image, is illustrated by comparison with Catherine ("they're more likely to mistake me as a caretaker than as a lecturer"). Mature students are disempowered by many considering them to be avoiding fulfilling their roles, such as his responsibility as a breadwinner:

... people I work with ... they think that ... you should be out there doin' a full-time job takin' a wage home, to support your family ... because they're there workin' all the, day an' I'm only there two nights ... it's an assumption in their minds tha', when I'm not there I'm not doin' anythin'.

Lecturers equally consider them not to be fulfilling the 'mature student' role, so although coping with study workload, he cannot resolve the alienation resulting

from tutors' implicit, and unreflective dismissal of them as indistinguishable from youngsters:

... they give you the college work an' you sort of rattle that off an' then, the rest of your time you're out at the boozier, or the sort o' thing that students like, are supposed to do.

The dilemma of the mature student is elaborated here in this clash of roles and perceptions on all sides that roles are not being fulfilled:

... people you work with ... assume that you've nothin' else to do bu' work, an' the, academic side ... assume that, you've only got your college work to do an' the rest o' the time's your own and of course in between there isn't any time for anything aught.

The major emphases in Tom's theme profile are criticism, conflict of interests between workmates and college work, and alienation.

Tom's narrative questionnaire

His 22 themes bring six new themes to do with support, enjoyment of learning, and emphasising job improvement, long-term plan and career change. His dream goal, of a career "in the field

work vs. study conflict	coping unexpectedly
no home vs. study conflict	empowerment
challenge	horizons broadened
key incident	no horizons
career change	broadened
end qualification	partner's support
status /dream	family pressure
academic success	tutor's support
personal achievement	tutor unsupportive
enjoy education	long-term plan
group support valued	better job
	future participation

of Urban Regeneration /Conservation", takes into consideration only the support ("essential if I am to achieve this") and inevitable pressure from family:

"anticipated problems are ones of finance and time; particularly as I am the only breadwinner in the household." Hopes of qualifying derive from last year's success, and earlier attainment of his apprenticeship equally promotes his enthusiasm for current and future study, "something I was looking forward to."

Course challenges promise new horizons:

... a firm academic base which will provide the springboard to a professional career ... positive aspects include meeting new people, learning new facts, ideas and concepts and a sense of achievement when a piece of work is completed, accepted and credits awarded.

Table 31: Tom's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓	✓						2✓	
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict		✓	✓x					2✓ 1x	
difficulties of study									
a challenge	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓	✓					2✓	
career /personal change		✓	✓					2✓	
qualification at the end			✓					1✓	
status /dream	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
prior academic failure									
recent academic success		✓	✓					2✓	
personal achievement	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
enjoy education			✓					1✓	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued			✓					1✓	
unexpected they can cope		x	✓					1✓ 1x	
sense of commitment	✓	✓						2✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment		x	✓					1✓ 1x	
horizons broadened			✓x					1✓ 1x	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support		✓	✓					2✓	
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed			✓					1✓	
continuing tutor support valued			✓					1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able		✓	✓					2✓	
others' support		✓						1✓	
others' criticism		✓						1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan	✓		✓					2✓	
better job		✓	✓					2✓	
participate in education again	✓		✓					2✓	
Totals:	7✓	14 ✓ 2x	20✓ 2x					41✓ 4x	
No. of Themes:	7	16	22					28	
Sub-total:		24						24	

He is critical of "the heavy and at times erratic workload, and some of the 'unnecessary' components." Group validation inspires confidence about coping:

Surprisingly enough, people ... see me as being confident, clever and in control ... This I can assure you is far from the truth at times, my seminar presentations for instance, for which fellow

students have described me as a “natural”, is rather like a Wild West town film set - all front with nothing behind it.

His writing demonstrates a change of emphasis from alienation and criticism over work conflict, towards more optimistic plans for improvement through a new career, to be reinforced in other interviews.

Vicky's picture

Vicky depicted herself as an older student, before then after college, her black cloud dispelled by radiant sunshine, a stick figure with short curly hair and downcast expression shown by downturned mouth and tiny dots for eyes, beneath a 'Black cloud'. Also in emerald green the distant building with rows of windows, was topped by a question mark and the words 'All Young People', beside which she was now transformed into a wide-eyed cheerfully smiling figure beneath a radiant sun.

alienation no social aspect personal change

For Vicky the prospect of college, a remote and unknown place, makes her feel singled out as different and unsuccessful, by contrast with her expectations of all other students as youngsters. Her hope is of personal change in the transformation to a happier self:

... I'm lonely, I'm a loser, 'cos I'm under a "black cloud" thinking that, college would be, "all young people", an' wha', what would I be like here, an' I come out, an' there's sunshine at the end.

Vicky's contribution to the discussion

alienation social aspect challenge personal change academic success personal achievement enjoy education coping unexpectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened partner's support no long-term plan future participation
--

Another 11 are added to her three repeated picture themes, slight emphasis being on partner's support. Enrolment brings alienation due to her age, but she is sustained by her success and enjoyment, from which she has derived broadened horizons

and new-found commitment to university plans:

... it were like twenty-five years since I were last at school. An' err, I plucked up courage an' came through the door ... an' I'd got no thoughts o' goin' to university or anythin', an' erm, I enjoyed it last year so, I've gone on this year, an' I hope to go on to university ...

Vicky cites her partner's support as an example of differences others see in them. Her riposte on the distinction between age and maturity, is countered by Diane's statement, that whether partners (as appears unlikely for Diane) accept them studying depends on their work and life experiences. Vicky indicates that the nature of his work tends to predispose her husband to be supportive of adult learning:

... he looks at things differently an' I think he's quite proud o' me ... [Diane: That's 'cos he's more mature. Is he? , y'know.] Well he's forty-three but I don't know whether he's mature or not. [laughs] ... [Diane: What does your partner do?] ... Robert works at 't university, so he he's used to, workin' wi' students, so he's probably, in that frame o' mind really.

She was looking forward to challenging personal change and socialising in a “a different environment”, reiterating no specific plans beyond university: “I'm just gonna see how it goes really. I think 'cos o' my age, I'm just gonna leave it open.”

Vicky's narrative questionnaire

Her 16 themes bring four new ones, group and others' support, key incident and ease with study, while she emphasises empowerment, wider horizons and commitment. She was impelled by the wish for a challenging career change: “After spending 20 years in the same profession, I had the opportunity to either carry on for the next 15 years, or try something different”. Key was a colleague's

alienation no study difficulties challenge key incident career/personal change academic success personal achievement group support valued coping expectedly coping unexpectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened partner's/family support others' support future participation
--

experiences of a similar course: “She enjoyed it so much, she was going on to study Psychology at university.” Enrolment was a major consideration:

... the most frightening experience. I had never been in a college before and it was many years since I was last at school. Everyone seemed to know where to go and what to do ...

Her goal of studying History at university entails commitment to her expanding horizons:

... a big step and a great achievement for me. 18 months ago I never even dreamed I would be capable of going on to university. I thought I had missed my chance years ago, imagining studying was only for the young.”

Alienation was replaced by empowerment as she met fellow students: “I imagined all the other students to be about 18 and full of confidence. I was surprised to find everyone ... in much the same position as I was.” She viewed the course as a means of self assessment (“as a way of finding out my abilities, academically”), and unexpectedly found she could cope and achieve success in several areas:

I did much better than I had ever anticipated. Along with Level 2 credits ... I achieved my first GCSE ... found the work easier than I imagined, made new friends with similar hopes and fears and found a whole new world opening up for me ...

Hence her commitment to study: “I have not encountered problems doing the work or keeping up, it is just more demanding.” Her husband is “proud of what I have achieved”, while others “think I have been brave to change direction and they wish they had the courage to do the same. They see how my confidence and hopes have grown”. Vicky’s new-found confidence is tempered with some caution: “though the future is still a bit scary I am as good as anyone else”, in marked contrast to her initial image of herself. Her constant themes of alienation and personal change, are reinforced at the end meeting.

Table 32: Vicky's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
social aspect	x	✓						1✓ 1x	
home vs. study conflict									
difficulties of study			x					1x	
a challenge		✓	✓					2✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy			✓					1✓	
career /personal change	✓	✓	✓					3✓	
qualification at the end			✓						
status /dream									
prior academic failure									
recent academic success		✓	✓					2✓	
personal achievement		✓	✓					2✓	
enjoy education		✓						1✓	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued			✓					1✓	
unexpected they can cope		✓	✓x					1✓ 1x	
sense of commitment		✓	✓					2✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment		✓	✓					2✓	
horizons broadened		✓	✓x					2✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support		✓	✓					2✓	
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support			✓					1✓	
others' criticism									
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan		✓						1✓	
long-term plan									
better job									
participate in education again		✓	✓					2✓	
Totals:	2✓ 1x	14 ✓	14✓ 2x					30✓ 3x	
No. of Themes:	3	14	16					20	
Sub-total:		18						18	

Comparative analysis of the non-vocational group

These participants' portraits illustrate the range of people engaged on their particular non-vocational study route into higher education, which did not appear to provide a narrowly academic source of reasons for educational re-entry. The various themes emerging as significant to the group members, from the above

examination of their source materials, are here examined to provide a comparative analysis of this group.

The group's pictures

By comparing various aspects of all 15 pictures it is possible to identify major features. Various differences in perspective illustrate the extent of their involvement in studying, whether as pre-course views, current ones, or an on-course perspective informed by experience. The focus of the home which some display provides a significant insight into their participation motives, since these people (other than Tom), unlike the vocational group, do not have the competing force of an employment perspective. Those depicting their domestic setting or a specific impact on the family include Sally's sons playing football, Judy's chores, Catherine combining childcare and study, concerns by Pippa about creche facilities, and Diane and Jan about neglecting their children. Sally's window shopping and hiking, are the sole interests beyond college and home expressed by this group.

Their feelings about re-entering education are most potently expressed through the striking image of the college building, whose physical presence is represented by six as a gaunt, imposing facade towering above the onlooker, the view when approached uphill from the town centre.

Appreciation of group support and experiencing a key incident do not feature in their pictures. Although not representative of the group as a whole, study difficulty is a major focus for two participants, while themes most commonly arising are alienation, followed by challenge, achievement and expecting conflict.

The group's contributions to the discussions

Involvement in the discussion appears in the wide range of responses, although lack of time meant the sections on others' views and being an adult learner were not covered by anyone. Conflict, others' support, empowerment and unsupportive tutor were the major focus of two participants. Themes most commonly arising and thus most representative of the debate are the qualification and personal or career change, followed by alienation, academic success and unsupportive partner or parent.

The group's narrative questionnaires

Questions to do with prior entry considerations, and course hopes, were most often omitted, perhaps indicating lack of prior concerns for many. The major focus of two participants is a better job and seeking personal achievement, while most commonly written about and thus most representative of the group are the themes of empowerment and future participation, followed by alienation, no conflict, key incidents, change, and the qualification.

Comparison of the group's materials

Those themes unique to individual participants' pictures are as follows: anticipating personal change, but not social gains (Vicky), expecting to cope, unsupportive tutors and disempowerment (Sally), academic failure (Diane), enjoyment of education (Judy) and widening horizons (Jan). Only one person reflects each of the following themes: lack of commitment (Claire), not anticipating the social aspect (Pippa) nor study difficulties (Debbie). The questionnaire answers of only one person represent each of the following themes;

social aspect and study difficulties (Mark), academic failure and finding no challenge (Claire).

Amongst the data at this early stage in the year, the major focus of various participants is upon the themes of conflict, alienation, others' support and empowerment. Those themes most representative of the non-vocational group are anticipating alienation, then seeking the qualification, and career or personal change.

Further data on the non-vocational students

The portraits detailed above are here extended with evidence from some participants' further interviews, which reflect a retrospective stance. The relevant individual's incidental materials arose from a paired discussion and the final group meeting in June. Five from Group 3 attended the only available session, during the end of term assessment procedures, when an entire morning was dedicated to the external moderator's interviews about their final coursework submissions. This atmosphere possibly influenced these participants, while their concurrent review session prevented the participation of Group 4, six of whom posted back questionnaires soon afterwards.

Debbie's picture at the final meeting

Debbie could only participate briefly in the picture session, with

social aspect challenge personal achievement coping expectedly empowerment
--

little time for her consequently sparse drawing. The most significant features of her year, friends and her work were illustrated, as Debbie, shown in profile typing at a computer was hailed by four smiling friends with arms upraised in greeting. Her five themes reflect the realisation of the anticipated social aspect, and her expected ability to cope with the course challenge: "I've been busy workin', that's me sat at the computer there's loads of friends I've made, that I'm gonna be sad to leave when I move to London in a month."

Personal achievement enhanced her confidence: "I've, been happy here, euh, progressed well I think, I've got my confidence back in that I can study, an' do work, an' get that done." Reminded her of her views in the picture in March, of

the college building and those “standing outside ‘having a fag’ ”, she reveals no perceived change, “Yeah, not much different ... how I feel about it now”. This is interesting, in light of the slight disparity in themes whereby a new theme of challenge emerges, with only one of her original three (the social side of college life) repeated here. This is omitted in her tutor Sue’s evaluation, which differs in that it also suggests commitment and partner support are of significance for Debbie.

Table 33: Debbie's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	x	x						2x	
social aspect	✓	✓			✓			3✓	
home vs. study conflict		x						1x	
difficulties of study		x						1x	
a challenge					✓			1✓	✓
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change		✓						1✓	
qualification at the end	✓	✓						2✓	✓
status /dream									
prior academic failure									
recent academic success									
personal achievement		✓			✓			2✓	
enjoy education									
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓						1✓	
unexpected they can cope		x			x			2x	
sense of commitment									✓
confidence from others' validation /empowerment		✓			✓			2✓	
horizons broadened		✓						1✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support								1✓	✓
partner/parents unsupportive								1✓	
family pressure to succeed								1✓	
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support								1✓	
others' criticism								1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan		✓						1✓	
better job									
participate in education again		✓						1✓	✓
Totals:	2✓ 1x	9✓ 4x			4✓ 1x			15✓ 5x	
No. of Themes:	3	13			5			14	
Sub-total:		13			5			14	

Jan's picture at the final meeting

Jan's single striking image in red illustrates her triumph at gaining a university place, with three aspects of herself juggling several objects, representative of her domestic and study experiences. In jeans and jumper with short spiky hairstyle, she is standing smiling broadly, with her arms by her sides, a paper reading 'University acceptance!' in one hand, and 'CREDITS!' in the other. It unusually

features two alternative faces emerging from either shoulder, one with a glumly downturned mouth, and the other's tightly shut eyes reinforcing the circle of her widely yawning mouth.

An extra pair of arms appear, in the act of juggling a semicircle of objects: a vacuum cleaner, saucepan, two printed bills, two open

alienation
home vs. study conflict
challenge
end qualification
academic success
personal achievement
coping expectedly
empowerment
future participation

books, a small boy and long-haired girl, whose blank expressions are suggested by straight lines for their mouths. Uniquely expanding on her various emotions throughout the year, Jan has coped as expected despite these demands:

... this is me ... bein' happy, an' this is me bein' tired an' me bein' miserable an' I've gone through all those emotions this year, the whole lot ... I think I've cried a couple of times, (smiles), when I've been so frustrated and so tired ...

Her analogy illustrates the conflict with home:

... I'm jugglin' housework, and cookin' and my children and my bills and my books and that's how I felt the whole year it's just I've constantly had to juggle everythin' ...

The qualification gained and university place offered accompany her sense of personal achievement and empowerment after taking up the challenge:

I've got my credits which I'm very pleased about gettin', an' the other my acceptance for University that I thought I would, Never get but I have done and I'm come out feelin', really pleased an', really aware that I've worked really hard to get what I've got, and that I can be proud of myself So I've come out feeling good.

Her earlier picture themes of alienation and conflict are reinforced, among her nine themes, though no mention of tutor support recurs.

Jan's contribution to the final discussion

Her 27 themes slightly emphasised commitment

alienation	coping expectedly
no alienation	commitment
social aspect	no commitment
not social aspect	empowerment
home vs. study conflict	horizons broadened
no home vs. study conflict	not horizons broadened
no study difficulties	tutor's support
challenge	tutor unsupportive
no challenge	others' support
personal change	others unsupportive
academic failure	long-term plan
academic success	better job
personal achievement	future participation
enjoy education	

and empowerment, then achievement, others' support, horizons and coping. She

has adopted a valuable strategy for future study: “I’ve learned to production line everything ... go home, write the notes, next night write the assignment, next day hand it in, forget about it and done”, and friends have confirmed this is a realistic tactic to avoid stress: “if you start to stress about every piece of work being perfect ... you’re just gonna do yourself in aren’t you? mess with your head.” Commitment has increased with the year’s achievements, and she now anticipates the challenge of HE:

I’m more determined than ever after doing this year ... I can’t wait for university now, an’ take it a level further ’cos towards the end of the course although it was pressurised, I found the work felt easier, ’cos I knew how to do it, an’ now I want something a bit more, challenging.

Empowerment has resulted from wider horizons, after initial discomfort in the social arena of college life and in respect of her intellectual ability:

... to mix with lots o’ different people ’cos ... hard when I first came ’cos I felt I didn’t fit in ... an’ you get confident about your own abilities an’ your own intelligence to hold a conversation with other people that you think are more intelligent than you, and realise that you’ve got something to say an’ people will listen to you ...

The example of former students helps them cope with alienation, “that demystifies it a bit dun’t it? ... this person’s just like me, you know, so, if they can do it, then, so can I. I think that helps a lot.”

She describes her study approach, “that thing o’ laying in bed as well, an’ writing your essay in your head in bed ... that strikes me as part o’ the process”. Although continuing to be consulted by tutors about course reviews is empowering, lack of response is a cause for criticism of tutors:

... we’ve done reviews haven’t we through ’t year? ... but we’ve had nothing back in return. Yeah. Well y’know if we’ve made recommendations ... or if we’ve made, criticisms an’ an’ said

there's a better way of doing this for us, nobody's actually acted on them.

Significant for her was the unacceptable behaviour of one tutor, altered by her assertive approach to the problem:

I had a run-in with a tutor. (laughs) ... I was very honest and very frank about it, an' I really put my cards on the table an', told him you know, that we were havin' a problem ... he actually realised that that the way he's been treating me wasn't acceptable ... acted on it and he's helped me through the last bit of my course.

Others' views of her come firstly from family, unsupportive of her more assertive self:

I'm more assertive, in sayin' what I don't want to do any more I will turn round an' say "Oh! you know I'm busy I I I really an't got time to do, to run around for you ... But it's about tha', lookin' after me for once in my life.

Secondly those "in authority" who tend to adopt a patronising attitude because of assumptions due to her background and manner demonstrate, in the person of her doctor, a change due to the achievement of her recent course successes:

... he like, looked at my notes, single parent two kids y'know (smiling), an' obviously thought, "I'll speak very simply for her, 'cos she talks dead common," an' all this stuff, an' then he was askin' me about, stresses in my life, an' I said, well I'm gonna university in September an' Suddenly, his whole way o' speakin' changed ... people just seem to respect you.

Thirdly a former colleague's support over the expected study conflict ahead:

... the woman who I work on playscheme with ... she's, just finished her first year at University, and we have these massive, long conversations on 'telephone about ... (smiling) all the new government policy, an' policies on loans like, jus' like moanin' generally about how crap it's gonna be bein' a student an', she's tellin' me how hard it is (laughs) ...

Commitment is reflected in loss of leisure time, though regretting the effect on her parental responsibilities:

... we never go to school fairs an' things 'cos we've not got time and um, just the little things that matter to kids, and, havin' to

apologise that they can't have a new pair of trainers 'cos, you need bus fares for college the next week o-o-or, silly things like that or you need a new book or somethin'. You get (chuckles) a big guilt thing from that don't you? ... I had to give up a holiday ... Nights out.

Her children have benefited from and been empowered by her and Karen's role model:

... like, when your kids pick up a poetry book, an' they're sayin' "Oh I really love this poem!" an' you're (animatedly) "Yes! Yeess! my children have got an interest in this an' they love books an', you know, they don't wanna sit an' watch, children's, BBC ... my seven-year-old's just read Oliver Twist, which is like, on his own, is a massive thing, an' ... I just can't believe it, an' I'm so happy, an' it's just a silly little thing, an' I'm so proud of him, an' I think because they see us with books all the time, an' they've both learned to use the computer 'cos I've learned to use one ... an' I think their confidence in their own education, is a lot better.

School held no study problems, nor challenges for Jan, whose failure to complete her 'A' levels was partly due to peer pressure. However, she rationalises by claiming her perspective at the time was limited:

I found school easy I just, rebelled, (laughs) and I think if you're in that rebellion at 14, 15, and you're too busy out with your mates and, discovering illegal substances an', (laughs) [others laugh] an', things like tha', you jus' want to have a good time, I think, you just don't see your education as being that important, at that time in your life. I think it's only later that you realise what, missed opportunities you had. 'Cos I started doin' an 'A' level course an', got to the end o' the first year and thought "Oh! I've had enough of this, I'm fed up with people telling me what to do", I I an' I jus' left and I'd just wasted that whole, time at at school really, But I feel, that I wouldn't have, benefited from it if I'd have done my 'A' levels then, gone on to university, I don't think I would have really found ... what I really wanted to do 'cos my views ... were very different from what I want to do now. So, I feel, that I've done it at the right time of my life.

She will be comfortable amongst the mature students who typify her university course 'norm': "the majority 'people goin' on social work courses are mature students anyway, So I'm just anticipatin', a very similar, sort o', mix o' people".

The challenge of new horizons heralds her degree course entry, with commitment and achievement undiminished:

... although the workload's goin' to be heavier an' it's gonna be more demandin', I'm anticipatin' it just bein' a further level on from this an', so I'm really excited I can't wait to get there an', get on with the work.

This end contribution shows the new theme of no study problems, but her other new theme, of commitment, is outstandingly emphasised. Less focus now occurs upon valuing the group, as she is more self-reliant. Emphasis has altered, from conflict to academic success and some achievement, but most emphatically to commitment, and empowerment, besides achievement, horizons, coping and others' support.

Therefore, her themes constant throughout the study are alienation and conflict. Interestingly, this is not confirmed by her tutor Sue's evaluation, which replicates some themes, although coping unexpectedly (according to Sue), is seen by Jan rather to be expected. Sue includes partner support, evident at the meetings, but absent from the data.

Karen's picture at the final meeting

Looking forward to summer holidays, then the prospect of university, Karen stood smiling happily in jumper and jeans, saying "Yeh I've finished." Beneath the huge central sun with its beaming face, was a tall patch of bright green grass ("I've gotta (laughing) do the garden this summer ... if I want to go away"), labelled 'SUMMER HOLIDAY FUN TO COME'. An arrow pointed to the exclamation within a green zigzag flash, and "What's next!" alongside the tall building only just visible at the paper's margin.

Table 34: Jan's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓	✓x			✓	✓x		4✓ 2x	
social aspect		✓				✓x		2✓ 1x	
home vs. study conflict	✓	✓			✓	✓x		4✓ 1x	
difficulties of study						x		1x	
a challenge		✓			✓	✓x		3✓ 1x	✓
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change		✓				✓		2✓	
qualification at the end		✓			✓			2✓	✓
status /dream									
prior academic failure		✓				✓		2✓	
recent academic success		✓			✓	✓		3✓	
personal achievement		✓			✓	✓		3✓	
enjoy education		✓				✓		2✓	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓						1✓	
unexpected they can cope		x			x	x		3x	✓
sense of commitment						✓x		1✓ 1x	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment		✓			✓	✓		3✓	
horizons broadened	✓	✓				✓x		3✓ 1x	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support		x						1x	✓
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued		✓				✓		2✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able		✓				✓		2✓	
others' support		✓				✓		2✓	
others' criticism		✓				✓		2✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan		✓						1✓	
long-term plan						✓		1✓	
better job		✓				✓		2✓	
participate in education again		✓			✓	✓		3✓	✓
Totals:	3✓	20 ✓ 3x			8✓ 1x	19 ✓ 8x		50✓ 12x	
No. of Themes:	3	23			9	27		31	
Sub-total:		22				22		25	

The university building on the horizon presents alienation over the future degree

(“ ‘AHHHHH!’ because that’s what’s next but it’s an even bigger

building”), yet also offers the challenging achievement of a

dream:

alienation
challenge
dream
academic success
personal achievement
empowerment
future participation

Yeah!! (very enthusiastically) I’m right looking forward to it, really erm, ‘Cos we’re goin’, it’s all, jus’ (unable to express her strong feelings she resorts to comically dramatic gesturing) [laughs].

Nevertheless she is more confident about her future (“I’m quite happy”), which derives from her achievement: “yeah I’m really pleased I’ve finished, I I’ve got better ... I think I’ve done a lot better than I probably thought I would have.” Just as Karen earlier feared coming to college, similar pictorial devices indicate apprehension at going to university, tempered now by new-found confidence and recent academic success.

Karen’s contribution to the final discussion

Karen’s 15 themes strikingly emphasised personal change and commitment (not however registered by her tutor). She has acquired coping strategies over coursework: “it’s a matter of prioritising things and meeting deadlines ... Getting everything in. You can only do so much anyway. ... And learning how to do that.” The difficulty of the work has been compounded by its volume:

home vs. study conflict
no home vs. study conflict
study difficulties
challenge
career /personal change
personal achievement
enjoy education
coping expectedly
commitment
empowerment
horizons broadened
partner’s/parents’ support
parents unsupportive
others’ support
future participation

“there has been a lot more work. Y’know. I think it’s been a lot harder than I anticipated at first.” Previous illness with glandular fever influenced her decision to limit herself to the attainable, shorter Access timetable:

I think I might still have been ill actually ... comin’ on this course ‘cos I knew it was only so many days a week, erm, my GP actually suggested it, erm to try and get me back into being able to go, to work.

Others have similarly experienced changed horizons: “peoples’ lives’ve changed on this course ... somebody else as well ... they’ve met, their partner.” Her only losses were domestic and social: “time, for the kids ... I had to give up my holiday ... and nights out.” She and her partner display their mutual support for each others’ studies:

’Cos there’s times that you get low ... when Jan’s felt really really down, you know, an’ I’m sort of “just think of all that work you’ve done, an’ you’ve only got two more days to go, an’ Come On!” (laughs) ... it happens the other way round as well, it is, it’s support ...

Increased confidence provides their role model for her partner’s children who appear empowered:

... our kids have ... started to ask a lot more questions ... when we first started goin’ out, erm they didn’t ... but now if they don’t understand something ... they’re more they’re more assertive an’ I think that’s because we’re more assertive ...

Support otherwise, comes solely from her parents:

... my parents would say that I’m more honest. More open an’ you know say, “Oh well sorry I’ve got such an’ such” ... I am more, more assertive really ... last year, before I started this course, I wouldn’t stand up to anybody ...

Karen’s enthusiasm for school (“I loved school. I thought it was great. I enjoyed going”) helped alleviate difficulties at home, “so school was a way out, so I sort o’ like put everything into, my school”. She is equally enthusiastic about current experiences “what we do on this course is really good”, and the implicit support of her partner who will attend the same course. This final contribution adds new themes of commitment, enjoyment, coping as expected, others’ support and issues on conflict. Most constant of all her themes are challenge, achievement and future participation, the latter confirmed by tutor Sue, who included valuing group support.

Table 35: Karen's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓				✓			2✓	
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict						✓x		1✓ 1x	
difficulties of study	✓				✓			2✓	✓
a challenge	✓				✓	✓		3✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change		✓				✓		2✓	
qualification at the end	✓							1✓	✓
status /dream		✓			✓			2✓	
prior academic failure									
recent academic success					✓			1✓	
personal achievement	✓				✓	✓		3✓	
enjoy education						✓		1✓	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued									✓
unexpected they can cope						x		1x	
sense of commitment						✓		1✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment					✓	✓		2✓	
horizons broadened		✓				✓		2✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support						✓		1✓	✓
partner/parents unsupportive						✓		1✓	
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support						✓		1✓	
others' criticism		✓						1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan		✓						1✓	
better job									
participate in education again		✓			✓	✓		3✓	✓
Totals:	5✓	6✓			7✓	13 ✓ 2x		32✓ 2x	
No. of Themes:	5	6			7	15		21	
Sub-total:		11				17		20	

Pippa's picture at the final meeting

Pippa happily working at a desk, contrasted with the dominant calendar and clock representations of her struggle for deadline, complicated by her partner's and daughters' needs. Seated at a large desk, her smiling face with shoulder-length hairstyle was looking between piles of books, and dominated by the wall calendar

showing September to June with the single orange word “DEADLINES!” An orange clock with arms and legs reading three o’clock, was labelled ‘Time Running Away, Chaotic!!’ Outside a plumbers’ and heating engineers’ firm premises stood a car, and unsmiling stick figure. Finally there were two smiling girls in turquoise dresses with chin-length hair, beside a school sign, toys and television.

home vs. study conflict challenge end qualification coping expectedly long-term plan future participation
--

Her six themes recur here, with major emphasis on conflict, interestingly the only repeat from her first picture despite its similar images. She copes with the challenging work: “year’s gone really quick ... time ... runs away an’ you jus’ don’t know where it goes everything’s chaos, chaotic.” Conflict appears in the early start necessary to drive her partner to work: “takin’ ’im into work doesn’t ’elp, you know we’re up at half five an’ routine here an’ back all the time”. She also has to organise her coursework and children’s school routine:

... school, routine, kids playin’, tryin’ to spend time wi’ them. An’ that’s just basically all the work piling up ... I really try to get all time management an’ that an’ then it jus’ goes.

She alludes briefly to the qualification (“then it’ll sink in, and, that I’ve actually got it”), and university plans: “disappointed ... once I’ve had a break I think I’ll feel happier ... I don’t feel as though I’ve achieved anything really ... excitement of goin’ to university.” This overwhelmingly negative picture of disappointment and not feeling achievement, is attributed to tiredness and possibly end of course anti-climax.

Pippa’s contribution to the final discussion

Of her 23 themes, issues surrounding criticism and enjoyment were new, partner and parent unsupportiveness featuring as prominently as does conflict, while

significant too are alienation, commitment and personal change. She readily assimilates study into her daily life, “in’ bath I’m readin’ when I’m cookin’ tea there’s something on ’side”, preparations for a sociology lecture showing her immersion in study:

... I were gutted ... convinced it were Media ... an’ I were followin’ videotape an’ “Oh Yes this’ll be alright” an’ I’d seen summat in a book ... then it were like Religion ... like “Oh no!” (laughs).

Conflict and subsequent
disempowerment emerge over negative
relationships with both parents and
partner, due to her changed perspective:

alienation	commitment
home vs. study conflict	empowerment
no home vs. study conflict	no empowerment
challenge	horizons broadened
no challenge	partner/parents unsupportive
personal change	tutor unsupportive
academic failure	others’ support
personal achievement	others unsupportive
enjoy education	no long-term plan
not enjoy education	long-term plan
group support valued	future participation
coping expectedly	

... I can’t talk to my mum about’ it. I’m not sayin’ that I’m clever an’, she’s thick or owt (laughs) but y’ I can’t talk, about my course, ’getting a black look ... I’ve tried to ... but I jus’ know it was above her head so then (voice low) I don’t I don’t, bother, so now I have to ... revert back to like talkin’ about curtains an’ gardens an’ then, I’m alright ... like you when you were saying, something like “That’s functionalist” ... I’m above myself if I come out with a comment like tha’ ...

This happens with other mothers:

... I see all the mums when I’m sat up at school, an’ they, say “What you doin’ now” ... an’ I have to give up talkin’ about it ’cos then it sounds as though you’re tryin’ to be above them when you’re not, but you’re aware you must be talkin’ as if you are ’cos y’know that they’re still watchin’, y’know, Richard and Judy ... an’ I find that really, difficult ...

and again at home “when I’ve done a piece of work I’ve got no-one to read it, for me ... I don’t get any, any help.” Former Access students are supportive: “they’ve set themselves up one of these support groups because they don’t have, err, tutor support like we get”. This demonstrates the value of peer support to overcome an unsupportive home situation: “ ’cos that’s what I, I an’t got ... someone, educated

round me ... (laughs) just to have a conversation with, or look at my work". Her partner is not only unsupportive but openly opposed to education:

He's got an attitude to education that it's done nowt for him an' he's gonna do nowt for education an' I can't even get 'im to a parents' evening but I jus' see it, as his loss ...

Her mothers' restricted expectations had evidently provided a poor model for

Pippa:

... my mum's not very clever anyway but, she's got on ... successful in her own way got her own money now, sort o' thing so she don't worry, as long as, she sews curtains an' that.

Pippa thinks it important that her children's home background should offer some role model, " 'cos they're wantin' to, to sit an' do their homework with you", demonstrating the mutual support between mother and children, which reinforces their learning experiences. Pippa's school experiences were of disillusionment due to the traumatic loss of friendship groups, and feelings of alienation leading to study problems, unresolved by teachers:

... all right till eum, end o' third year we all got put in sets, an' then I go' split, an', a lot o' me friends ... so it were like a case o' findin' a new set o' friends ... just went downhill ... I went to school with Jan didn't I? "You are the ones what're gonna get the 'O' levels" pressure pressure pressure.

There were social and community impacts on her home life then, when her parents' inability to support her led to early school leaving:

... as soon as you started stopping out an' you needed tha' support that were it there were no support. Like my mum's not very clever my dad my dad were always at 'pub, an' then 'miners went on strike an' then that were it our house were up in chaos an' I'm just glad to leave home an', I went an' worked down south for a couple o' year, bu', but that's just, where families go in life dun't it I mean I don't dwell on it I just thought I'd, never come back to education.

She foresees work-based training after graduation. Feelings of alienation have occurred at her degree course introductory meeting, due to the differences in age of the majority of students, as well as their personal interests and perspective on the course.

Yet Pippa is aware her perceived study difficulties are unfounded:

I'm goin' on to do Urban Studies an' I were in 'lecture theatre an' all these, like 18 year olds an' these lads seemed to be about six foot six an', All, all they're bothered about is rock climbing an' Thwaite Crags ... An' they were goin' on about geography geography all the time, an' I'm like "God I'm the only one what's come to school in Geography an' don't really like it, 'Cos I don't like physical geography I jus' like the urban side on it, an' I'm like really really nervous thinkin', "Oh God, have I got to go back, back in with (laughing) all them, an' all this but when it turns out, it's more sociology based so I'm like (laughing) relieved ... (laughs), but, that gives me fear, 18 year olds gonna be so clever.

Of her total of 24 themes, those recurring from previous data are conflict and various aspects of challenge, which become finally resolved as more positive.

Also featuring were coping, unexpectedly at first, then increasingly more expectedly, besides alienation, empowerment and HE plans, the only significant theme confirmed in Sue's evaluation.

Table 36: Pippa's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓	✓				✓		3✓	
social aspect		✓x						1✓ 1x	
home vs. study conflict	✓	✓			✓	✓x		4✓ 1x	
difficulties of study	✓							1✓	✓
a challenge	x	✓			✓	✓x		3✓ 2x	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change		✓				✓		2✓	
qualification at the end		✓			✓			2✓	✓
status /dream									
prior academic failure		✓				✓		2✓	
recent academic success	✓	✓						2✓	
personal achievement		✓				✓		2✓	
enjoy education						✓x		1✓ 1x	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓				✓		2✓	
unexpected they can cope		✓			x	x		1✓2 x	
sense of commitment		✓				✓		2✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment	✓	✓				✓x		3✓ 1x	
horizons broadened		✓				✓		2✓	✓

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support									
partner/parents unsupportive		✓				✓		2✓	
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued		✓						1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able		✓				✓		2✓	
others' support		✓				✓		2✓	
others' criticism						✓		1✓	✓
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan		✓				✓		2✓	
long-term plan		✓			✓	✓		3✓	
better job		✓						1✓	
participate in education again					✓	✓		3✓	✓
Totals:	5✓ 1x	21 ✓ 1x			5✓ 1x	18 ✓ 5x		49✓ 8x	
No. of Themes:	6	22			6	23		30	
Sub-total:		22				20		24	

Vicky's picture at the final meeting

Vicky appeared engaged on working through piles of coursework, at first with downturned mouth and arms thrown up beside a computer table stacked high with books. Secondly she was in profile, seated at her desk with an even higher pile, beneath sun and moon. Finally the computer alone appeared, beneath a large, brilliantly shining sun, with Vicky smiling happily, with outspread arms and halo. Vicky is committed to reducing this work: "you seem to be at it, morning noon and night, and then, eventually you get an empty desk an', you're at the end an' everything's worked out alright." Achieving success has boosted her confidence: "feeling really good about it you know, that's all. (laughs) ... I've done a lot better than I thought I would."

challenge academic success personal achievement coping expectedly commitment empowerment

Vicky's contribution to the final discussion

The six picture themes (evident in initial data too) were repeated among 21 here, emphasising coping expectedly, commitment and the challenge entailed by the amount of work.

alienation home vs. study conflict no home vs. study conflict study difficulties no study difficulties challenge personal change no personal change dream academic failure academic success	personal achievement coping expectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened partner's support others' support others unsupportive future participation no future participation
---	--

Vicky appreciates acquiring new skills but has had to compromise to meet deadlines:

There's certainly been a lot more work ... Well I am an organised person anyway, but even I've found it hard ... I like to be able to do my best for everything ...

Career change has arisen: "I'd probably still have been in the job ... I've been in the last 20 odd years (laughs) Erm without getting much out of it". A former colleague was decisive in arousing her interest in FE, but she does not seek to influence others similarly. This source of support has been maintained:

... we've had a reunion, a few weeks ago ... she was like "Ooo isn't it great you're going on to uni. now" ... I have so much more in common with her now, than (laughs) I had before ...

Uncertain whether she will continue on to postgraduate study ("I don't know I'd be too old [laughs]"), she is determined to pursue her 'dream' aim of degree

studies: "I think it's a bit daunting but it's important to me".

alienation	group support valued
no alienation	coping expectedly
social aspect	coping unexpectedly
no home vs. study conflict	commitment
study difficulties	empowerment
challenge	horizons broadened
key incident	partner's support
personal change	tutor's support
dream	others' support
academic failure	no long-term plan
academic success	better job
personal achievement	future participation
enjoy education	

Vicky's final narrative questionnaire

Her 25 themes suggest job improvement and

tutor support for the first time. The latter is pinpointed by tutor Sue, besides pursuit of the qualification, which Vicky does not feature. She emphasises commitment and challenge, and confines the themes of group valuing, and key incident, to her two questionnaire responses. The mode of study has caused problems for Vicky: "not a great deal of actual teaching time. Independent study was not something I had done before". Her perceived confidence is demonstrated "both in written work and in discussions and debates." She has coped significantly well:

... I am as able as anyone else and better than most ... all those late nights and early mornings have been worthwhile in the end; though at times it was hard to keep going ...

She elaborates on the meaning being a mature student has for her:

I always like to do the best I can, even if I know something less will suffice ... When the going gets tough I do not give up easily, it usually makes me more determined to overcome obstacles and succeed.

Study is now part of her daily life, demonstrating extended horizons:

At times I do read something or see a programme coming on T.V. I think may be useful in the future ... Also if there is something I do not understand or I want to know more about I am more inclined to do something about it.

She has overcome the alienation shared by her group, with their support:

I have enjoyed meeting people similar to myself, we started off with the same fears etc. (this is good to know that you are not alone), and have developed together sharing a common bond and a common goal.

Support has continued from home, as with former workmates (who “say I seem much happier”):

... quite often others will say I wish I could do that or they say I am very brave to have given up a good job for something unknown. In the past I know I would have been just like them, but with a little self-belief I know anyone is capable of whatever they want.

Successful completion of an assignment initially begun with difficulty, produced a significant response from her tutor:

My first essay had been covered in red pen and criticism, my last ... had no red pen and the words “excellent, impressive piece of work” ... from a tutor that was a very hard task-master.

University prompts new aspirations of personal change, more important than a possible future career:

Returning to learning has been the best thing that happened to me. I am going on to University to study History, something I would never of dreamed of two years ago. Although I would obviously like it to lead to employment in the future ultimately to succeed at University is my challenge.

Themes constant throughout most of Vicky’s materials are all positive, including the removal of alienation. As expectations of success predominate by the year’s end, she no longer demonstrates coping unexpectedly, though problems now arise over assessment pressures. This reinforces her portrait as self-directed learner with unflinching home support, determination to overcome obstacles and growing expectations of success.

Table 37: Vicky's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓x	5✓ 1x	
social aspect	x	✓					✓	2✓ 1x	
home vs. study conflict						✓c	x	1✓ 2x	
difficulties of study			x			✓x	✓	2✓ 2x	✓
a challenge		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	5✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy			✓				✓	2✓	
career/personal change	✓	✓	✓			✓x	✓	5✓ 1x	
qualification at the end			✓						✓
status/dream						✓	✓	2✓	
prior academic failure						✓	✓	2✓	
recent academic success		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	5✓	
personal achievement		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	5✓	
enjoy education		✓					✓	2✓	
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued			✓				✓	2✓	
unexpected they can cope		✓	✓x		x	x	✓x	3✓ 4x	✓
sense of commitment		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	5✓	
confidence from others' validation/empowerment		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	5✓	
horizons broadened		✓	✓x			✓	✓	4✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's/parents' support		✓	✓			✓	✓	4✓	
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued							✓	1✓	✓
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support			✓			✓	✓	3✓	
others' criticism						✓		1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan		✓					✓	2✓	
long-term plan									✓
better job							✓	1✓	✓
participate in education again		✓	✓				✓x	4✓ 1x	
Totals:	2✓ 1x	14 ✓	14✓ 2x		5✓ 1x	16 ✓ 5x	22 ✓ 3x	73✓ 12x	
No. of Themes:	3	14	16		6	21	25	31	
Sub-total:		18				24		24	

Rani's final narrative questionnaire

Rani's five brief replies suggest lack of reflection, not apparently having expanded her horizons, "no-one has

no alienation
study difficulties
challenge
coping expectedly
not horizons broadened
no long-term plan

indicated any differences in me as a student." Studying "has become a part of my

daily life”, revealing coping ability and lack of alienation, while the only element of challenge lies in her summarising the course as “interesting, but difficult at times. I have learned a lot from the subjects I chose.” While her initial materials featured six themes, at the end her total was only ten, making it difficult to draw many reliable conclusions.

The three themes to recur are study problems, lack of alienation, with absence of challenge now being overturned. Her tutor’s evaluation confirmed only study problems and plans to attend university, adding those of status/dream, commitment and home support, commenting “parental pressure to succeed.” The overriding picture is the useful route to university (beyond which she sees no plans) in a straightforward college environment, her only other concern being to socialise with her peer group.

Catherine’s final narrative questionnaire

Catherine was one of five from Group 4 who posted questionnaires. The five new themes arising among the 16 in her

no alienation social aspect home vs. study conflict study difficulties challenge career /personal change status /dream academic success personal achievement enjoy education coping unexpectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened partner’s/parents’ support long-term plan

replies are the social aspect, widened horizons, achievement, academic success and study difficulties. Her earlier sought career has altered, “I have decided not to go into teaching but to be a journalist instead.”

Otherwise she has enjoyed her return to education, study problems being faced with commitment despite anxiety over conflict of interest with home: “although worrying at first how I was going to manage study and family. I got into it slowly at first and intend to do more in my second year.”

Table 38: Rani's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	x						x	2x	
social aspect	✓							1✓	
home vs. study conflict									
difficulties of study	✓						✓	2✓	✓
a challenge	x						✓	1✓	
								1x	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change									
qualification at the end		✓						1✓	
status /dream									✓
prior academic failure									
recent academic success									
personal achievement									
enjoy education									
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued									
unexpected they can cope							x	1x	
sense of commitment									✓
confidence from others' validation /empowerment									
horizons broadened							x	1x	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support									✓
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support									
others' criticism									
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan							✓	1✓	
long-term plan									
better job									
participate in education again		✓						1✓	✓
Totals:	2✓	2✓					3✓	7✓	
	2x						3x	5x	
No. of Themes:	5	2					6	10	
Sub-total:		6						9	

Her commitment to continuing derives from enjoyment and dwindling alienation:

"I am looking forward to going back next year." She has coped unexpectedly ("I have achieved more than I thought I would"), and thus extended horizons:

"overall I have grown in confidence and feel I know more not just in my chosen subjects but in life generally." Continuing achievement is because of her wish for

status and/or dream: “I was very keen to succeed with the challenges I gave myself and my own ambitions keep me going.”

Besides her husband’s support (“at home and with looking after the children and I am very grateful to him for this”), there is family support over her success:

My husband and parents are very pleased with what I have achieved. Both my children enjoyed going to crèche and my eldest will miss it next year when she starts school.

The tenor of her writing is that pleasure in her developing confidence and commitment as the course progresses, are enhanced by an increasingly supportive home background. This contrasts with earlier anxieties about coping, and being undermined by some parental criticism and ageism at college.

The theme constant throughout her data is conflict with home interests (as her tutor confirmed), and recurrent too are empowerment, partner/parent support and some alienating elements. Most notably, her career wish has altered over time, worries about appearing old have waned, mixing with other ages has encouraged a younger outlook, and unexpectedly prompted friendships. Tutor Nick’s evaluation raises the qualification (which she does not allude to), and highlights the less significant of her themes. He comments on conflict, and the prevailing study problems (“she doesn’t admit”), as he believes she “probably wants to prove to herself she can succeed”.

Table 39: Catherine's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ		tape	picture	tape		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation		✓x	✓				x	2✓ 2x	
social aspect							✓	1✓	
home vs. study conflict	✓	✓	✓x				✓	4✓ 1x	✓
difficulties of study							✓	1✓	✓
a challenge	✓						✓	2✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓	✓					2✓	
career /personal change		✓					✓	2✓	
qualification at the end									✓
status /dream		✓					✓	2✓	✓
prior academic failure									
recent academic success							✓	1✓	
personal achievement							✓	1✓	✓
enjoy education		✓					✓	2✓	✓
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued		✓						1✓	
unexpected they can cope		x					✓	1✓1 x	
sense of commitment		✓					✓	2✓	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment		✓	✓				✓	3✓	
horizons broadened							✓	1✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ		tape	picture	tape		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support		✓	✓				✓	3✓	
partner/parents unsupportive		✓	✓					2✓	
family pressure to succeed									
continuing tutor support valued			✓					1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others' support									
others' criticism									
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan			✓				✓	2✓	
better job									
participate in education again			✓					1✓	
Totals:	2✓	11 ✓ 2x	9✓ 1x				15 ✓1 x	36✓ 4x	
No. of Themes:	2	13	10				16	24	
Sub-total:		16				16		21	

Claire's final narrative questionnaire

Claire's 19 themes emphasise lack of broadened horizons, and as she writes, the few anticipated challenges were not apparently met in many intangible gains: "it hasn't been as good as I hoped ... feel this year was slightly wasted- it would have been much better if I had been at uni!" This affected her enjoyment, marred too

by encountering institutional problems: “My experiences have led to frustration with the disorganisation of H.E.!” She has managed the Access qualification effortlessly, “I simply knew it was what I had to do. I have achieved what I set out to”, so appears not to have committed herself fully to study: “something I find very hard to get around to doing.”

She maintains her original plan “despite financial worries”, for career improvement, “in order to get a good job one day!!” She has found no direct conflict in alternatives to the course (“I would have either been working or travelling abroad”), or with other interests: “I have not had enough time to work and ... had to sign on- Therefore being skint meant giving up lots!” Her commitment (“my own perseverance that has got me through the course”), and empowerment derive from tutors seeking course feedback, “very important I think”.

no work/home vs. study conflict challenge no challenge end qualification academic success personal achievement enjoy education not enjoy education coping expectedly commitment no commitment empowerment not horizons broadened tutor unsupportive others' support others unsupportive long-term plan better job future participation
--

Views about herself as an adult learner remain unchanged by this study, but residual difficulties appear with the role, as she thinks it “hard for people to understand what being a mature student is like”. Constant themes arising throughout her data are, issues to do with commitment, and long-term plans, but in particular lack of conflict and the qualification (echoed in her tutor’s evaluation). She no longer exhibits alienation and past academic failure, nor seeking status and change, since she is confirmed in her expectations of future success, as Nick contributes: “an able student who with a few blips is maintaining her academic study.”

Table 40: Claire's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation		✓	✓x					2✓ 1x	
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict			✓x				x	1✓ 2x	
difficulties of study			x					1x	
a challenge			x				✓x	1✓ 2x	✓
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy									
career /personal change			✓					1✓	
qualification at the end		✓	✓				✓	3✓	✓
status /dream		✓	✓					2✓	
prior academic failure		✓	✓					2✓	
recent academic success		✓					✓	2✓	
personal achievement			✓				✓	2✓	✓
enjoy education			✓				✓x	2✓ 1x	✓
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued									
unexpected they can cope			x				x	2x	
sense of commitment		x	✓				✓x	2✓ 2x	
confidence from others' validation /empowerment			✓x				✓	2✓ 1x	
horizons broadened			✓x				x	1✓ 2x	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support		✓						1✓	
partner/parents unsupportive		✓						1✓	
family pressure to succeed			✓					1✓	
continuing tutor support valued									
some tutors not as supportive as they are able							✓	1✓	
others' support			✓				✓	2✓	
others' criticism		✓					✓	2✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan			✓					1✓	
long-term plan		✓	✓				✓	3✓	
better job			✓				✓	2✓	✓
participate in education again			✓				✓	2✓	✓
Totals:		9✓ 1x	17✓ 7x				13 ✓ 6x	38✓ 13x	
No. of Themes:		10	24				19	31	
Sub-total:		24			16			25	

Mark's final narrative questionnaire

Mark's answers, again numbered according to the list, though brief were more forthcoming than before. Most emphasised of his 14 themes were commitment and study problems. Participation reasons remain unchanged, with the

accomplishment of his intention “to do the course over just one year”. This has proved more difficult than expected, “time seemed to be too short,” as revealed in the impact on his pastimes: “stopped playing the piano altogether for a while ... reduced visits to swimming baths”, which increased his commitment.

alienation social aspect no home vs. study conflict study difficulties career change end qualification academic success personal achievement coping expectedly commitment empowerment others' support long-term plan future participation
--

Alienation appears in the discovery that “people are slow to accept new friendships.” Overall gains include study skills, and reveal empowerment: “greater confidence in my academic ability ... and socially.” A key incident had

demonstrated the commitment he required to overcome study problems:

“realising I needed to get a lot more credits than I had, and being determined to get them.” Such difficulties lie behind his thoughts about being a mature student:

“it is important for me to understand why deadlines are set.” Others perceive unstated differences in him, and acknowledge his achievement of “a step forward towards fulfilling myself.” He continues in his future commitment to education:

“Possible MA, probable work /career related course.”

Themes reveal that constant throughout all his data, are achievement, empowerment, commitment, academic success, with the less significant study difficulties, qualification and future participation. Comparing his earlier hopes and end gains, reveals no change in social gains, but one of focus, from the qualification as an end in itself, to specific study skills' acquisition, with greater confidence in his ability. Formerly perceived as hard working, now he is seen as changed, acknowledging his achievement towards self fulfilment. His goal has moved from university alone, to a specific degree and plans beyond. Tutor Nick confirms his themes, giving his participation reason: “to improve grades and

prove himself”, but adding he expects Mark will have problems with higher levels of this course.

Table 41: Mark’s themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation			x				✓	1✓ 1x	
social aspect			✓				✓	2✓	✓
home vs. study conflict		✓x					x	1✓ 2x	
difficulties of study		✓	✓				✓	3✓	
a challenge		✓						1✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓						1✓	
career /personal change							✓	1✓	
qualification at the end		✓	✓				✓	3✓	✓
status /dream	✓	✓						2✓	✓
prior academic failure		✓						1✓	✓
recent academic success	✓	✓	✓				✓	4✓	
personal achievement	✓	✓	✓				✓	4✓	✓
enjoy education		✓						1✓	✓
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued			✓					1✓	
unexpected they can cope							x	1x	
sense of commitment	✓	✓	✓				✓	4✓	
confidence from others’ validation /empowerment	✓	✓	✓				✓	4✓	
horizons broadened									

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others’ views and support:				Others’ views and support					
partner’s /parents’ support									
partner/parents unsupportive		✓						1✓	
family pressure to succeed		✓						1✓	
continuing tutor support valued		✓						1✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able									
others’ support			✓				✓	2✓	
others’ criticism									
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan	✓						✓	2✓	
better job									
participate in education again	✓		✓				✓	3✓	
Totals:	7✓	15 ✓ 1x	10✓ 1x				12 ✓2 x	45✓ 4x	
No. of Themes:	7	16	11				14	25	
Sub-total:		21			14			23	

Judy’s paired discussion contributions

Two months after the introductory session, Judy and Tom met at the university to discuss further their study experiences. The emphasis of her 21 themes was on

alienation, enjoyment of education and especially commitment, with new themes of study problems, unsupportive tutors and family pressure. College life has no social relevance for Judy, too preoccupied with other roles to extend relationships outside college: “[as] soon as the lesson’s finished I’m out ’cos I’ve always got something else to do.”

She feels more prepared for the coming challenge of university: “it’ll be like starting all over again ... the same sort of worries ... but I do feel a lot more confident. I used to be, painfully shy.” Judy sums up (as her “loads of advantages”) her study use of the family business’s office and computer for which she has received training: “I can, go up at half past eight at night and stop till half past 12 if I feel that way inclined, and I can type a whole essay in a night.” She avoids study coming into conflict with her daughters’ needs:

alienation no alienation home vs. study conflict no home vs. study conflict no study difficulties challenge no challenge career /personal change end qualification personal achievement enjoy education group support valued coping expectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened partner’s support family pressure tutor’s support tutor unsupportive future participation
--

I really, really don’t want ... that my two daughters start to feel that I’m pushing them out ... ’cos there’s only those hours when they’re coming home from school, an’ bedtime.

Her husband has been influential with moral and practical support, having proved an unacknowledged role model, via his teaching certificate and revelation here of his university place. This was abandoned due to his father’s retirement and need to take over his business, thus forming a source of pressure for her maintained commitment:

... he actually started ... part-time ... there was no way that he could do both, so now that I’m goin’ to be tryin’, he thinks a second chance, (chuckles) I can’t let him down sort o’ thing.

A broadened perspective emerges in her giving up television viewing (“some nights that’s all I really used to do (chuckling)”), and temporarily limiting her ability to earn extra, to spend on socialising: “but I don’t really mind that, I don’t go out, any more.” If not studying, she would still have been doing various short-term jobs (“I was in a real rut”), indicating her wish for personal change: “I jus’, didn’t know where I was goin’ ... if I wasn’t doin’ this ... I’d just be a full-time housewife.”

She both has studies at the back of her mind (“readin’ somethin’, things come into your head ... are more relevant”), and literally ‘carries around’ her work: “I’ve usually got a book in me bag, y’know in case I’ve got a spare ten minutes”. She faces the challenge of completing assignments: “I really enjoy learnin’, much more ... an’ all these, (chuckles) trials an’ tribulations of gettin’ all the work in, I still really enjoy doin’ it at the end o’ the day.” Judy feels she is an example for her daughters of ongoing learning:

... they see me, workin’ even at my age ... it’s good to know it’s a continuous process ... you don’ jus’ go to school an’ learn, they come home they know that I’m still learnin’ ...

She consciously involves them, “they ask me abou’ what I’m doin’ an’, I read them bits out of books”, familiarising them with HE:

... makes them see tha’, one day they might be able to go to university Heather’s only nine bu’ she desperately wants to be an archaeologist ... they think my mum’s done it so why can’t I?

She benefits from group support in learning: “I wouldn’t like to think that we weren’t goin’ to be, together in classes at some point discussin’ things, you get everybody’s point of view there”, but also copes with independent study “I enjoy workin’ on my own.” School was a routine, rather than inspirational experience:

I was considered ... quite bright, an' never had any trouble but, nondescript really I sort of went, did everythin' I'd got to do, came out with my 'O' levels an' that was it. (reflectively) Bit of a non-event in a way ...

Current study, by contrast demonstrates her difficulty in 'letting work go': "Don't get too attached to your essays ... Don't think of it like your baby", and need to avoid feeling that, when "someone's scribbled all over it in red pen you don't feel so, so upset." Besides 'owning' her work, she enjoys the sense of achievement upon acquiring qualifications, demonstrating that her single-minded approach to schoolwork is now superseded by conflict of interest with home life:

I love getting marked work back, I can't wait, I get all giddy when I see that I've got all three [credits] ... Especially when you're buildin' your credits up, an' ... you've got that goal of a certain number.

Judy's final narrative questionnaire

Comparing her questionnaires, both of which display 19 themes, shows omission here of key incident, job improvement, the qualification, criticism of parents and others, while coping is changed from unexpected to expected. Emphasis is now on horizons and confidence, newly arising themes being social aspect and academic success. Her career plan persists, "BA in Primary Education ... so three years from then, I'll be an infant teacher".

alienation no alienation social aspect no home vs. study conflict challenge career /personal change academic success personal achievement enjoy education group support valued coping expectedly commitment empowerment horizons broadened partner's support tutor's support others' support long-term plan future participation
--

Challenge was foreseen: "I was so much "in the dark", I didn't have many expectations, except ... it would be hard work (it has been) and I would be the oldest there (I wasn't!)", along with alienation, now shed in her evident strength of identification with college: "I feel really "at home" in college, not an outsider ... I'm feeling very strange now the course has finished." She balanced study and home, employing reciprocal childcare arrangements, and her husband's aid: "we

still go out at weekends, walking, or in the caravan, and my two daughters still get to brownies, band practice, pack holidays". Gains go beyond achievement of qualifications, to her enjoyment and future empowerment:

... haven't only gained enough credits for a Uni. place, more than that, I'm feeling very positive and confident and pleased I took action myself to achieve ... It's been a good year - everything has been enjoyable, even coping with the pressure and deadlines. I feel as though I can cope with whatever Uni. throws at me.

Personal change includes developing thoughts on herself as a student, due in part to group involvement and socialising:

I've got a "young" outlook on life - I don't feel 39 - I've got on with people I'd never have got involved with before ... I like to take an interest in things again, and read much more.

She appreciates the extent of support and interest from tutors, who are "more than willing to listen to constructive criticism" at end of term reviews. She evidently wishes to appear unchanged ("but perhaps more interesting"), as indicated by her concealment of her studying; despite discovery of which people have been supportive: "I tried to keep things quiet at first, not many people knew what I was up to, but now word has got round, everyone is very supportive and interested."

Clearly her main emphases have altered, from initial alienation, and home conflict with unsupportive parents, towards enjoyment, and especially commitment, ending with enhanced perspectives and confidence. Constant throughout are her determination, as tutor Nick comments, "a long-term commitment to be a teacher", and empowerment. Aspects of alienation and conflict both emerge as more positive than earlier on.

Table 42: Judy's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓	✓x	✓	✓x			✓x	5✓ 3x	
social aspect							✓	1✓	
home vs. study conflict	✓	✓	x	✓x			x	3✓ 3x	
difficulties of study				x				1x	
a challenge		✓	✓	✓x			✓	4✓1 x	✓
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓	✓					2✓	
career /personal change		✓	✓	✓			✓	4✓	
qualification at the end		✓	✓	✓				3✓	✓
status /dream	✓	✓						2✓	
prior academic failure		✓						1✓	
recent academic success							✓	1✓	
personal achievement	✓			✓			✓	3✓	✓
enjoy education	✓			✓			✓	3✓	✓
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued			✓	✓			✓	3✓	
unexpected they can cope		x	✓	x			x	1✓ 3x	
sense of commitment	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	5✓	✓
confidence from others' validation /empowerment	✓	x	✓	✓			✓	4✓ 1x	
horizons broadened			✓	✓			✓	3✓	

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support		✓	✓	✓			✓	4✓	
partner/parents unsupportive		✓	✓					2✓	
family pressure to succeed				✓				1✓	
continuing tutor support valued			✓	✓			✓	3✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able				✓				1✓	
others' support		✓	✓				✓	3✓	
others' criticism		✓	✓					2✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan	✓		✓				✓	3✓	
better job		✓	✓					2✓	
participate in education again	✓		✓	✓			✓	4✓	✓
Totals:	9✓	14 ✓ 3x	18✓ 1x	16✓ 5x			16 ✓ 3x	73✓ 12x	
No. of Themes:	9	17	19	21			19	33	
Sub-total:		23		18		18		28	

Tom's paired discussion contributions

Tom discussed more issues surrounding home and work with Judy, his 23 themes emphasising commitment, academic success and future plans. Group cohesion is restricted by the nature of FE: "You get this sort of fragmenting ... people

experience a sort of a dovetailing of different subjects”, while previous or developing friendships lead to “cliques.” He repeats Judy’s comment that study “does widen your horizons”, and that group support also lends a different perspective, “people have different angles ... you need to see, the other person’s point of view.”

Because of his young family (who “don’t appreciate, peace and quiet”), he has to fit in with available space at home, “work

alienation	no alienation	work/home vs. study conflict	challenge	career change	end qualification	status /dream	academic failure	academic success	personal achievement	enjoy education	group support valued	copied unexpectedly	commitment	empowerment	horizons broadened	tutor’s support	tutor unsupportive	others’ support	long-term plan	better job	future participation
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tends to be done ... at home on the dressing table”, and around his family responsibilities, “it can become uncomfortable, at times, particularly if you’re really, battlin’ ... with the family, an’ tryin’ to pigeonhole, your life”. However, he is “very conscious of the fact that, err, I’m seen as some sort of role model, for my children”, his five-year-old remarking as they pass the university: “That’s daddy’s big school in September”. He says, “I don’t have any educational role models, within the family”, so his status as sole family member to enter HE is significant.

Without studying this year, he would have been in an unpromising (“dead-end”) job, but is dedicated to career change: “I want some long-term stability, for myself and for my family.” The previous foundation year “helped prepare me academically”, for the degree course he nevertheless fears, “I’m still quite terrified about university.” Drawbacks for the family are restricted leisure time, and loss of earnings, which signifies managing finances to accommodate his future degree course: “if workin’, is goin’ to undermine the ability to complete my studies successfully then, it’s goin’ to be self-defeating.”

Differing levels of tutor support are significant for coping, with “the amount of study that’s involved and the amount of work that you need to do on your own.”

The end of the course has brought “pressure, the past couple o’ months, you feel quite stressed out”, despite the commitment of “those that have survived this far”, mentioning the high drop-out rate which he partly attributes to the alienation some experienced:

... simply don’t know what to expect, and are quite shocked, mebbe a culture shock, for them, sittin’ down in a classroom an’, I s’pose in some circles it would be seen as very uncool perhaps if you come from a working class background ...

Unlike school “I hated school”, all post-16 education has been enjoyable for Tom, “I’ve always enjoyed the college environment, I feel quite comfortable with it.”

His theme profile is thus reinforced and more positive than earlier, despite newly arising academic failure, constant being achievement, status/dream and challenge.

His emphases move from alienation and challenge, through alienation, conflict, change and others’ criticism, to change via planned job improvement, then to commitment, success and future plans. His tutor adds “redundancy led Tom to reassess his working life and replan his aims.”

Table 43: Tom's themes

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Expectations of studying:				Expectations realised					
alienation	✓	✓		✓x				3✓ 1x	
social aspect									
home vs. study conflict		✓	✓x	✓				3✓ 1x	
difficulties of study									
a challenge	✓	✓	✓	✓				4✓	
Reason for returning to education:				Reason for return reinforced					
key incident e.g. redundancy		✓	✓					2✓	✓
career /personal change		✓	✓	✓				3✓	✓
qualification at the end			✓	✓				2✓	
status /dream	✓	✓	✓	✓				4✓	
prior academic failure				✓				1✓	
recent academic success		✓	✓	✓				3✓	
personal achievement	✓	✓	✓	✓				4✓	
enjoy education			✓	✓				2✓ 1x	✓
Being an adult learner:				Having been an adult learner					
group support valued			✓	✓				2✓	
unexpected they can cope		x	✓	✓x				2✓ 2x	
sense of commitment	✓	✓		✓				3✓	✓
confidence from others' validation /empowerment		x	✓	✓				2✓ 1x	
horizons broadened			✓x	✓				2✓ 1x	✓

	First Meeting			2nd Mtg	End Meeting			Total	Tutor
	picture	tape	NQ	tape	picture	tape	NQ		
Others' views and support:				Others' views and support					
partner's /parents' support		✓	✓					2✓	
partner/parents unsupportive									
family pressure to succeed			✓					1✓	
continuing tutor support valued			✓	✓				2✓	
some tutors not as supportive as they are able		✓	✓	✓				3✓	
others' support		✓		✓				2✓	
others' criticism		✓						1✓	
Future:				Future					
no long-term plan									
long-term plan	✓		✓	✓				3✓	
better job		✓	✓	✓				3✓	
participate in education again	✓		✓	✓				3✓	✓
Totals:	7✓	14 ✓ 2x	20✓ 2x	21✓ 2x				62✓ 7x	
No. of Themes:	7	16	22	23				31	
Sub-total:		24		21				25	

Comparative analysis of the non-vocational group

Following the analysis of individual participants' materials, the resulting data are here examined for details of their end of course participation reasons.

The group's pictures

Comparing the five end pictures reveals significant features. Differing perspectives appear in the disparity between picture and description, which all used to elaborate at length. Pippa's dominant image of herself at her desk scarcely features beyond her words "work piling up", and about disappointment at lacking a sense of achievement, and Debbie's dedication is attributed verbally to confidence and happiness at her progress, while Karen has apprehension about the university building (bigger than her first picture of college), despite which she says she is not only happy but enthusiastic at the prospect.

Differing perspectives of studying again arise from the division between home and college. These appear in Jan and Pippa's children's presence in their thoughts, Jan's additional domestic chores, Karen's gardening, and Pippa's demands from her partner for lifts to and from work. Perspectives on the student role appear, since all but Karen depict themselves experiencing college work life, and all have positive feelings at completing the course and happiness at their success except Debbie, though Jan includes feelings of misery and tiredness. Future educational concerns reappear in the university (Jan) and the prospect of this (Karen and Pippa).

While all five pictures had 13 themes in common, all notably omitted any themes on others' support, and having had a key incident and valuing group support which were also absent from earlier pictures. Only one person demonstrated the themes about having experienced the social aspect (Debbie), having status reinforced (Karen) and experiencing commitment (Vicky).

The group's contributions to the discussions

A comparison of the four contributions to the end meeting reflects reflects 26 themes, all omitting a key incident, the qualification and family pressure. Only one person demonstrates each of the following themes: status, no personal change nor future participation (Vicky), group support, but neither enjoyment, empowerment nor long-term plans (Pippa), social aspect, supportive tutors, job improvement, not experiencing alienation, widened horizons, and absence of both social expectations and commitment (Jan). The negatives featured here suggest all three had some negative attitudes to their experiences of self-improvement.

The group's narrative questionnaires

Topics they most omitted are key incidents, study as part of their daily life and others' indications of differences in them. None reflects the themes of family pressure (as before) nor unsupportive partner, perhaps indicating enhanced domestic situations, while only one person demonstrates each of these individual themes: home conflict (Catherine), academic failure and key incident, interestingly in light of the expected focus here being more on success (Vicky), neither enjoyment nor challenge, less tangible gains (Claire).

Comparison of the group's materials

Self improvement is no longer their immediate focus, thus the themes of having sought change and job improvement are omitted. Since at this end stage they are focusing on current experiences of success, having experienced key incidents, study difficulties and failure do not feature either. Unusually, those of wider horizons and enjoyment of education were also omitted, although this latter featured strongly in the paired meeting debate together with that of commitment.

A major focus of various participants' materials were themes of commitment, empowerment, horizons, achievement, challenge and conflict (this and empowerment recurring from the earlier data). Those themes most representative of the non-vocational group at the end stage are challenge, empowerment, achievement and coping expectedly, while that of commitment features strongly as the most significant focus for individual participants.

These differ entirely from the preliminary themes of alienation, the qualification and career or personal change, reflecting their change in perspective and development of their views. Although not a major theme, alienation is shared by four of the end eleven participants, a continuing concern at the course end since their continuing into HE means further alienating prospects are imminent.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings

Introduction

The previous two chapters illustrate, the varying reasons people give for returning to learning, and suggest several associated factors. Here, these findings will be discussed in light of these people's motivations and with reference to the theoretical background (see Chapters 1 and 2). It is immediately apparent that straightforward categorisation according to either academic or employment motives is not at issue, neither are these characteristically either discretely vocational or non-vocational. Many factors are operating here, offering a complex pattern of participation reasons.

Reasons offered for a return to learning

Reasons given by all the participants for a return to education are very similar, as shown by comparative analysis of the themes (from subsection number 2 of the Themes table). Initially both groups overwhelmingly sought *change*, in either personal or employment spheres. The vocational students also aimed for *personal achievement* and a *qualification*, which non-vocational students sought in reverse order of importance (the *qualification*, then *personal achievement*).

The non-vocational students, incidentally, had other aims which differed according to group. The vocational students sought further *enjoyment of education*, and *status*, but the non-vocational students were impelled by *recent academic success* and a *key incident*. This may partly be attributed to the Access

course being a continuation into a second or more year, while the nature of the Training course is job-related.

At the course end, both groups overwhelmingly had found reinforced, their initial intention of seeking *personal achievement*. They had incidentally focused on further aims, as earlier, of having *enjoyed learning*, and gained the *qualification* (vocational students), and of having experienced *academic success*, and *change* (non-vocational students).

Analysis of the remaining theme subsections shows that, overall, the theme profiles are very different for both groups initially, but again alike at the end. Themes at first representative of the vocational group were seeking *change*, then *achievement*, followed by expectations of *commitment* and *conflict*. The non-vocational group anticipated *alienation*, then sought the *qualification* and *change* (however, some individuals most emphasised *conflict*).

At the end of the year, all had almost consistently experienced *commitment* (which was also the single theme most emphasised by participants). Following commitment were, having *achieved*, and *coped*, being *challenged*, and *empowered* (vocational students), while having been *challenged*, and *empowered*, having *achieved*, and *coped*, all preceded commitment (for the non-vocational students).

Career goal or subject interest

When comparing those instrumental and job-related reasons traditionally attributed to the vocational student, with other, more personal reasons for a return

to education, usually associated with non-vocational students, my findings reveal that both groups of participants have very similar, if not identical, aims. Yet a rigid division between the two appears fundamental to the framework of many theories.

Thus there is the distinction between the instrumental, illustrated for example, in the 'goal-oriented' learner of Houle (1961), whereas the non-instrumental appear in a combination of his 'activity-oriented' and 'learning-oriented', as well as in the 'evaluative' perspective in Hopper and Osborn (1975), and in the 'self-developmental' approach in Woodley *et al.* (1987). These are echoed to some extent in the sequence apparent in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, among the basic physiological and safety requirements (instrumental), and the shift towards more personal relationships, then autonomy (personal, non-instrumental).

An examination of the evidence in this study reveals that a simple contrast, such as career goals versus subject interest, does not exist for vocational and non-vocational groups. Most have a combination of aims. One of the Trainers cited personal reasons, three cited career aims, and five cited a combination. However, Jenny's wish for *personal change* is allied to some career aims, through the credibility afforded by the *qualification*, which also promises some *status*, alongside future job security for her planned return to work. Her wish for personal *achievement* also entails the certificate, her major emphasis at the course end. Hers is not a purely non-instrumental motivation.

Similarly, two of the apparently career motivated Trainers also combined the wish for personal *achievement* and *enjoyment* of learning. They are Felicity and Don.

Don's enthusiasm for educational experiences is underlined by his views on the typical adult returner seeking change in the personal arena, by means of education as compensation. This is accentuated by his use of the subtitle for his narrative questionnaire: 'part of my personal development'. Only Paula appears solely career-driven, demonstrating nothing beyond the long-term wish to *change* her job role and image of her *status* at work, with the addition of course theory to her practical skills. Her fears about retaining her job possibly lie behind this focus on work and accompanying *conflict* with colleagues.

The Access group demonstrate personal reasons operating for two, two participants with career aims, and eight with a combination, while four ostensibly seek entry to degree courses alone. Of these academically driven, two want to *achieve*, as compensation for *lack of success* at school, having entered Access through the neighbourhood outreach provision. The other two appeared not to reflect on the year as much beyond a secure HE route from which little personal gain is offered.

Of the career-driven Access students, Claire sees the *qualification* as a means to a higher *status* university place and consequently better paid employment. She also perceives the course as a means to *achieve personally*, but her end narrative questionnaire demonstrates she did not gain other than *enjoying* the stimulating environment, though feeling *unchanged* by this. Mark refers in passing to *future work-related courses*, but appears mainly driven to *achieve personally* through the course entry to university, a source of fulfilment in light of his past difficulties. Personal reasons also combine career aims for Pippa who refers briefly to unspecified work-based courses, though not for Debbie, who values the

certificate but views the route into university as uncomplicated, career plans appearing irrelevant.

Career or learning orientation according to life phase

Another comparison can be made of instrumental and non-instrumental participation reasons, as related to age, found in Levinson's lifecycle theory (1978), as in his distinction between the needs of 'competition' and 'career' of early adulthood, and the process of 'integration' facing those in middle age. These two distinct phases are thus characterised by these opposing tendencies, arguably representative of the instrumental and non-instrumental divide.

Hence, the variable of age alone provides categories for the two groups. Those in their 20s consist of Felicity and Jenny (vocational), Debbie, Rani, Suzi, Claire, Pippa and Karen (non-vocational). Their aims should be the exploration and building of possible life plans. Those in their 30s, with the aim of establishing a career and self-advancement are, Liz and Paula (vocational), Jan, Mark, Sally, Diane, Pat, Vicky, Catherine, Sheila and Judy (non-vocational). Examination of participation reasons in the previous section revealed all combining reasons, regardless of vocational /non-vocational category, except for Paula and Claire, the only younger adults to be solely career-driven, while Debbie was the only Access student motivated by personal reasons. Rani and Suzi (20s) and Diane and Pat (30s) demonstrated academic purposes.

The middle aged consist of those possibly in the turbulent transitional phase of approximately 39-47: Amanda and Sarah (vocational), and Judy and Tom (non-

vocational). The remainder should be aiming to establish their separateness from the world: Amanda, Sarah, Don, Geoff and Zoe (vocational), Tom (non-vocational). Although some refer to their age, such as Amanda (“I can achieve at my age”) and Zoe (“30 years on ... you’ve got a chance again”), this is not their driving force behind enrolment, but more an element in their identity as a student. Again, all these on different courses combined instrumental /non-instrumental reasons. Thus, the instrumental /non-instrumental distinction is not simply age-related.

Based upon US male lifestyles of the 1970s however, Levinson’s theory is not entirely applicable to women’s experiences, nor to current patterns of working life in the UK. Those in early adulthood are not as certain of advancement in a secure job, facing problems of long-term unemployment, dwindling employment prospects in certain areas, job insecurity, redundancy, and promotion difficulties. They are less determined by traditional expectations of work and life models in the family, and are as likely as older adults to suffer ‘life structure’ changes such as divorce, and searching for personal values, increasingly seen as a desirable goal for all.

Rather than an increasing drive towards more personal, spiritual elements in life, the middle aged now also face work problems. Separation from career urges is problematic, in the face of changing patterns of career structures, towards longer working hours, greater stress, less financial security in old age , enforced early retirement, and pursuit of a succession of part-time, short-term contract work, besides the possibility of extended working lives for some, with better health and life expectancy.

The role of trigger events

Both elements of the life span theory appear relevant to some extent to both age groups, and hence appropriate as part of those life stages of increasing complexity, of the 'stage' theory, unrelated to age but triggered by events (Aslanian and Brickell, 1980). Problems of transition arise from disequilibrium (social or economic forces, or internal prompts), prompting the remedy of new learning, but affected by their individual reactions to trigger events.

There were 16 participants in this research who admitted some key factor operating as an impetus to enrol, including all the vocational students but Paula, the only one appearing to be solely career-driven. For example, Liz reached the significant age of 30, and Amanda's sons left home, against the background of colleagues continuing to achieve promotions.

Of the non-vocational group having key triggers, Diane was academically driven, Mark referred to undefined future work, but had other, more personal motivations, while Vicky, Sally, Catherine, Sheila, Judy and Tom, also combine both reasons. All these are in early adulthood, but for Tom, aged 40, for whom the difficulties of retaining employment in his trade led to a series of low-skilled jobs and the key, fourth redundancy, critically prompting enrolment.

Low esteem and alienation

Other evidence for participation can be sought through the impact of marginality and managing change. Marginality featured greatly among Hopper and Osborn's (1975) sample, with uncertainty and dissatisfaction about current roles. Initial

educational success had been thwarted, so they were aware of unfulfilled potential. Often hence lacking in confidence, education offered them a route out of current difficulties. Similarly, the theory of managing change (Courtney, 1992) suggested this helped resolve doubts, influenced by moments of crisis points, through education. Such a supportive social setting, including significant others, is influential in the process of rebuilding self, through a willingness to take risks.

Perceptions of alienation, found among half of all my research participants regardless of age, reveal an unfounded lack of confidence. For example, the many references to feeling older than other students appear in Judy's "old lady" picture, Jan's mention of mature students being "thirty plus", and Amanda's phrase "can you learn an old dog new tricks!". They also extend to the more tangible "fear" depicted in Geoff's image of himself, invisible among a sea of faces, and prospect of an "ivy-clad building", and Karen's similar feelings when confronted with college "I was jus' scared basically." Vicky found enrolment "the most frightening experience".

Sheila had many negative factors, after a succession of unsuccessful attempts at attending college, exhibiting much uncertainty over her ability, with underlying fears that "they would sort of, suss me out". Judy also described graphically her first week in college: "it was like, this out of body experience, an' I was, "Why am I sitting in this room, readin' Shakespeare?" you know, it was really weird an', uncomfortable".

In contrast, Jenny and Paula do not display the theme of alienation while Zoe's words "This is right for me, now" indicate she identifies with the culture, so

feeling she 'fits in'. Nine more (Amanda, Sarah, Liz, Felicity, Don, Rani, Suzi, Debbie and Mark) positively refute any alienating factors. They appear, like Felicity, the "perpetual student", comfortable in a learning environment, as Debbie's scenes of socialising at college depict.

Lacking confidence due to academic failure

Such low esteem is often associated with Hopper and Osborn's 'deprivation' feelings of those suffering negative discrepancy over education and career. This is evident in those 13 who have experienced *academic failure* in the past (although 18 gained *qualifications* at school: see p.81), of whom all also felt the end qualification to be of significance for them, and most incidentally sought *career change*. For example, Liz has the direct goal of a more comfortable and better rewarded working environment to further her postgraduate studies, following her failure to qualify for a university place at 18.

In contrast to her, Judy felt unsupported by parents over her early school leaving, and sought the dream of graduating to become a teacher, unfulfilled by uninteresting office work, then a series of relatively low-skilled jobs. Of those with *no prior academic failure*, nine wished for the *qualification*, five of whom for *career change*, such as Sheila, Karen and Sally, the other four being Access students pursuing academic ends.

Karen, for example, wants to achieve a specific goal through a social work degree, home problems having hampered progress from school, leading to an unsatisfying job. Sheila had experienced initial success, but recent interview

failures for her desired employment, so that the qualification promised a more profitable future job role, and security, as a single parent, for her children. Sally's familiar, constant background of study, had not prepared her for the shock of an outsider gaining the promotion she felt entitled to, and the degree promises a route into a more rewarding career.

Role conflict

Dissatisfaction about current roles is also evident in relationships in their home or work backgrounds. While studying, Tom has identity doubts relating to both spheres, those at home deriving from his curtailed time to spend with his family, and his more longstanding inability to provide financial security, as are those at work, where he is considered as not fulfilling the traditional male role of breadwinner, by continuing to work full-time. Yet another identity problem relates to college, where he feels tutors implicitly treat mature students like the "irresponsible" younger student with too much spare time.

More longstanding *conflict* at both home and work is equally the focus of many other participants. Eight suffer both, of whom five also lack such conflict, such as the pressure from Claire's parents, for her to follow the family pattern of attending university, as opposed to their supportive influence. Eleven more experience domestic conflict, all women, as in Blaxter and Tight's (1994) study, who organised study around their many responsibilities, to the detriment of any wider student socialising. Pressure they felt to maintain overall performance was achieved by adopting a regular routine where study was confined to their 'own

time', as in Judy's use of evenings after her daughters were in bed, and Sarah studying when her husband was at work.

A 'combination' strategy often entailed study during the working or domestic day, for instance using the car as study space when arriving early for appointments (Liz) or waiting to collect children (Judy), while Pippa studied as she cooked family meals, as Catherine during childcare and ironing. Jan had almost overwhelming anxieties as a single parent, surrounding the needs of her children, and Pippa the "burden" of having to rise very early to drive her partner to and from work, then organise her children's school and nursery routine.

Ten of these increasingly depict a contrasting *absence of conflict* at subsequent interviews, including Sarah whose time management strategy overcame any minor conflict of interest and allowed for a long-awaited holiday. *Criticism* from former friends, who were from the church she no longer attends due to the change in her lifestyle, contributed to Karen's *domestic conflict* and *lack of parental support*, while in her new situation she derives *support* from her partner Jan.

Supportive environments

The supportive social setting which college now affords is often influenced by the presence of a significant other. For the Access group, the move from neighbourhood centre was enhanced, if not prompted by the empowering influence of their tutor, Lynne. In relation to current whole college approaches, discussed in FEDA's *FE College and its Communities* (2000), it was noted that "students don't relate their experiences to a whole college but to individual

tutors” (DfEE, 2000, p.2). Significant here are inspirational tutors or previous teachers, such as Geoff’s teacher of English and Drama. Many enjoyed the group’s support, Geoff appreciating “the company of people I would normally have dismissed”, and were not only enjoyable company but were also:

... very helpful and supportive. This made attendance very easy and a pleasure so the task didn’t become a bind or a chore but something to look forward to.

Don and Sarah’s exchange of views furthermore reveals appreciation of the role that group activities can offer in the learning process:

... we can pick up as much from the group as from the tutors if not more ... I say let’s get split up into groups of three and four and let’s get on with it it’s a lot more interesting and so on (Don). ’Cos you learn a lot more when you’re active don’t you? (Sarah).

Several had been influenced by the example of workmates or acquaintances, who had recently re-entered education, such as Vicky’s former nursing colleague’s successful and enjoyable completion of a similar course, which had paved her way onto a Psychology degree programme.

Judy had been prompted by chance remarks from her child’s teacher as had Pippa and Sheila (“you’ll be brilliant at it”), whose sister is her main “inspiration”, having been the first family member to move to London and study for a Law degree. Most of the Trainers received encouragement from their managers, while Felicity’s (“he kicked me into gear”), Geoff’s and Don’s had instigated their registration on the course.

Alongside the encouragement of others, the majority (16) mentioned instances of *unsupportive* or critical comments, apart from three (including Geoff). Sarah denied any opposition deriving from colleagues’ evaluations, and Vicky’s only

lack of support had come in relation to absence of help when she fell behind with her schoolwork, which prompted her early leaving at 15.

Those three apparently experiencing only criticism and no support outside college were Paula (whose colleagues were a source of distraction and some criticism over jealousy at her studying), and Diane (whose partner criticised her studying).

Suzi had complaints over LEA funding but family support appeared likely.

Another three mentioned neither support nor criticism elsewhere, though both Debbie and Pat receive encouragement at college, while Debbie and Rani's tutors indicated respectively partner and parental backing were significant for them.

College may not have provided a supportive setting for some though, as five displayed support from neither group nor tutors. Of these, Claire, Amanda and Sally referred to tutors behaving in an unsupportive manner, while Rani mentioned no outside encouragement (as referred to above). Karen's tutor however considered group support significant for her. Observation suggested Amanda and Sally did not appear to identify with their groups.

Enjoying learning

As stated above, the process of rebuilding a self is contingent upon the supportive and empowering background that educational settings can provide. Thus, what learning means to these participants, can be seen in the views they profess about education in general, and their experiences in particular. Most had very distinctive attitudes to school and their subsequent learning.

Seven, of whom three anticipated *study problems*, made no reference to *enjoying learning*. Paula, for instance, talked at length about the predictability of school life, although current study poses her some problems, possibly owing to her time management. College holds no study fears for Diane, Suzi and Debbie, for whom the *social side* is paramount, while Sheila, Pat and Rani have difficulties with the work.

Of the 18 who *enjoy learning*, Sally's confidence was however bruised by encountering the inequity of older lecturers' maintaining, with them, the same approach she felt appropriate for younger students (she was also one of the two appearing not to identify with the group, as noted above). Karen said about her imminent university course at the end meeting, "Yeah! I'm right looking forward to it ... 'cos we're going', it's all, just [inarticulately making dramatic gestures to express her feelings]", and Jan agrees "I'm really excited ... I can't wait for university now, an' take it a level further", saying "I like education for pleasure as well, and do something that I really enjoy". Geoff was "bitten by the bug" of further education adding he was "looking round for the next "add-on" course."

Study problems

Five among these 18 each demonstrate *study problems* and lack of them, while Vicky's initial expectations were overturned with developing skills and her end of year *achievements*: "when you're with a lot of 18 year olds you think 'Oh they'll know it all' and, you know that they won't (laughing)". Those with *study problems* are Liz, Zoe, Catherine, Karen and Mark. Those with *no study problems*

are Jan (“nice to come and use my brain again, and get into intellectual debate (laughing) ... nice to get back to study”), Judy, Felicity, Don and Amanda.

Student identity

No identification with student life as a whole, owing partly to their age, is shown by six. Diane typically, says “I don’t class myself as a student”, (Zoe feeling “I still don’t seem a proper student”, Judy (“very apprehensive really”) and Vicky (“I’m under a ‘black cloud’ thinking that college would be, ‘all young people’ ”). Don sees a student as “just being five days a week”. Others, such as Sheila and Sally, appreciate the distinction of being a ‘mature student’.

Despite her age, Jan identifies with other students (“I go to parties every weekend”), while her closeness in age means Felicity identifies with the role “I’ve got good associations with it”, describing the “stereotypical image”:

... a layabout getting up at one o’clock being a bit grubby drinking a load of beer, you know and, up to now anyway, getting a load of money off the state going out on a good time.

though qualifying this:

... there’s always some element of truth in it, you know students may get up late but then they may stay up all night working hard ... they’re not erm, constrained by having to work a nine to five day.

Geoff distinguishes himself from the student type:

No I don’t class myself as a student (voice drops) as such no. I’m a learner. Yeah? (drums fingers on table) Well that’s right yeah I don’t regard myself as a student ... most of my colleagues are graduates And, from the stories they tell me it’s what student life was all about that’s what a student was so as I say, I don’t lump myself in with that same crowd No. No. (reflectively) That’s it, you don’t actually mix with that student element as such.

A changed self

Some have noticed a difference in themselves which they attribute to the acquisition of knowledge or study skills, or effectively to the “generalised knowledge” which Ainley (1994) noted leads often, in the words of one of his participants, to “a loss of innocence really. Books were just books before” (*ibid.*, p. 74). As Jan and Karen described, they constantly hoarded newspaper articles and videotaped television programmes they thought would be useful in future, and similarly their altered viewing habits:

... we watch ‘East Enders’ now and there’s always something Freudian about it or something you know Sociology about it ... (laughs) And you just can’t, can’t watch anything on the TV (Karen).

Yet others display a more fundamental, though subtle difference in themselves. This accords with Ainley’s “transformative” effects of HE that he especially noticed among mature students, and particularly those of working class origin, who described their “confidence ... [as] people are starting to take you seriously as a thinking person”, having felt something akin to a “religious experience” (Ainley, 1994, p. 69) upon commencing their course.

Vicky’s empowerment brings no awareness of change in herself: “I wouldn’t say my life’s changed directly, but I’m a lot more confident”, yet she is conscious she no longer has as much in common with former friends: “I’m quite wary about going on about college work”. Liz prefers learning as an adult, since she feels “more motivated now than at school, simply because I choose to study”, while her friends have “commented on how much more confident and assertive I am”.

Initially feeling herself unchanged but, “a bit more confident about my views being acceptable and valid”, Jan later described her new outlook, “Different. (laughing) Very different ... we were just goin’ out there, an’ demanding something, you know, our rights ... we’re more assertive”. She feels she has now “got more respect” after her initially unwelcoming reception:

... there was that, “Oh! Single mum!” You know, and ... I’m sure she’s not very intelligent really” ... I’ve, had a lot of, discussions, shall we say, with different people, an’ then come out of it an’, they’ve ... taken on board my points of view ... (Jan)

Judy feels “very motivated” due to her wider horizons, but wants to remain unchanged: “most important thing is to be still ‘me’ - people sometimes think you’ve got ideas above your station”. Geoff spoke at length about the change he had noticed in himself:

Yeah. I don’t know what’s happened I don’t know if this is a result of this course or is a result of the work that I’ve had to do, but I think, erm, there has been a fund’ a fundamental shift in, in the way I work, erm, and, and the way, the way I live, and I don’t know what I can put that to and I don’t know if that’s down to my own determination, or something else I don’t know, but nowadays, I would, watch the TV until, you know 12 o’clock or something like that and I would go to bed and I wouldn’t want to get out of bed on a morning. But now, you know, I, it’s err, you know like going to bed at 10 o’clock, up at 6 and, things like that so there has been a, a fundamental change and I don’t know what, I can put that down to.

This encapsulates the awareness some had vaguely felt but not expressed.

Abraham Maslow describes the role of education in the discovery of identity, in

The Farther Reaches of Human Nature:

... The ideal college would be a kind of educational retreat in which you could try to find yourself; find out what you like and want; what you are and are not good at ... but moving towards the discovery of vocation, and *once they found it*, they could then make good use of technological education. The chief goals of the ideal age, in other words, would be the *discovery of identity*, and with it the *discovery of vocation* (1973, p.194).

He develops further this idea of discovering identity:

... the discovery of vocation, of one's fate and destiny. Part of learning who you are, part of being able to hear your inner voices, is discovering what it is that you want to do with your life. Finding one's identity is almost synonymous with finding one's career (*ibid.*).

This is reflected in the personal development and social learning models Coffield proposed as alternative visions of a learning society and lifelong learning. The developmental model argues for "an increase in capacities to achieve individual self-fulfilment in all spheres of life, not just in economic activities" (Rees and Bartlett, 1999, p.21, in Coffield, 1999, p. 487), and in the latter, social capital is incorporated into a purely human capital model.

He cites the Faure report of 1972 for UNESCO, *Learning To Be*, whose enlightened form of 'education permanente' would create manifold links between education and industry, but with the (now largely forgotten) proviso that "the primary concern of the schools should not be with the living that [the students] will earn but with the life they will lead" (Halsey *et al.*, 1961, Foreword, in Coffield, 1999, p.492). This crucial role of education has been bypassed entirely in the human capital version Coffield critiques. Instead, (citing Lave and Wenger, 1991, and Rees *et al.*, 1997) he reinvests the social theory of lifelong learning with a vision similar to that found in Maslow:

... a *social* theory of learning argues that learning is located in social participation and dialogue as well as in the heads of individuals; and it shifts the focus from a concentration on individual cognitive processes to the social relationships and arrangements which shape, for instance, positive and negative 'learner identities' which may differ over time and from place to place (Coffield, 1999, p. 493).

This encapsulates much of the theoretical background to this research, such as the social theory of adult learner participation seen also in Courtney, and the lifestage theory of Aslanian and Brickell (see Chapter 2, Literature Review).

Effects of this study

Participation in the study has affected how 19 feel about themselves as learners, some of the Trainers suggesting to tutors that a similar introductory exercise to that employed here would be beneficial to professional reflective practice for future years. An absence of reply probably implies that no effect was perceived by the others, as there were no negative responses.

Jenny for example, wrote: "I feel that by doing the questionnaires for yourself I have learnt something about myself". Notably beneficial for Catherine too, it has "made me sit and think about how college has affected my family and friends as well as myself", and Judy felt it "thought-provoking - it's made me realise a lot about myself as a person, not just a student", while her perceptions of self have also evolved: "even writing this, I'm realising what a different person I am now - I feel really "lively" - my brain is working again."

Findings

1. Reasons for a return to education are consistent among all participants, according to the 'Reasons for Returning to Learning' section of the Themes Table. Initially both groups overwhelmingly sought *change* (personal or

employment), and retrospectively they had found reinforced, their initial intention of seeking *personal achievement*.

2. The overall theme profiles, gathered from all sections of each person's themes table, are very similar at the course end, but quite different for both groups at the outset. The main features of the profiles reveal that initially the vocational group sought *change* and *achievement*, and expected *commitment* and *conflict*. The non-vocational group anticipated *alienation*, then sought the *qualification* and *change*. Retrospectively all had almost consistently experienced *commitment*.
3. Participation reasons are also very similar for both groups, according to a contrast between instrumental and non-instrumental reasons. Effectively nearly all had a combination of such reasons, only one Trainer appearing solely career-driven. The Access group demonstrated one who was career-driven but unclear whether expected personal gains had been met, and one who was solely personally motivated. This group included a separate, academic category, who solely sought entry to degree courses (for two), or viewed Access as a secure HE route, incidentally offering personal achievement (for another two). Neither group displayed entirely instrumental, nor purely non-instrumental motivation.
4. The differentiation between instrumental and non-instrumental aims, associated with the life phase, does not appear valid for the majority of participants. Of those in early adulthood, all provided evidence of the goals typical of both younger and older life phases, but for two who were solely

career-driven, and four academically driven, two of whom combined personal, non-instrumental reasons. The six middle aged also displayed a combination of goals.

5. At different life stages, 16 participants sought new learning after *trigger events*, against a background of disequilibrium. These eight vocational students (besides Paula), and seven non-vocational students all combined instrumental and non-instrumental participation reasons, except for one academically motivated student.
6. College provided a *supportive setting* enhanced by the influence of significant others, for the Access students progressing from outreach courses. Almost all (amounting to 19) had the role model or encouragement of friends or colleagues, all but three incidentally mentioning *criticism*. Two received no support outside college, and experienced direct criticism for studying. Three mentioned neither support nor criticism elsewhere, though two were encouraged at college, and the tutors of two indicated *partner and parental backing*. College support was lacking from both group and *tutors* for five, three of whom experienced unsupportive tutoring. Rani had also mentioned no outside influence (conflicting with tutor evaluation). The other student, according to tutor evaluation, benefited from *group support*, as did apparently two more here.
7. Half of all participants initially *lacked confidence*, and felt the *qualification* to be important to them, having either experienced *examination failure* in the past, or left school early. Most of these also sought *career change*. Of those

not experiencing prior academic failure, or having early *academic success*, nine viewed the *qualification* as important, five also towards *career change*, and four in pursuit of academic ends.

8. Dissatisfaction about current roles was also evident in ambivalent home or work relationships. Eight suffered home and work *conflict*, of whom five also depicted absence of conflict. Eleven more experienced domestic conflict, of whom ten depicted the contrasting lack of conflict.
9. The majority anticipated *enjoying new learning* experiences, although not all necessarily identifying with the student lifestyle, whether because of their age difference, or because they appreciated the distinction of a separate, 'mature student' status. Their enjoyment continued, whether or not they found *studying difficult*.
10. Many were aware of some, often intangible, *difference in themselves* as a result of the learning experience.

Conclusion

My research has looked at participation reasons among vocational and non-vocational samples, but also considered a range of allied motivations. The resulting identical aims and similar feelings surrounding a return to learning by both groups appear the main finding of this study. In the following chapter I explore further these findings and their implications, in the light of the conceptual and contextual background to this study.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Introduction

As the literature suggests, returning to formal education is not directly determined by socio-economic circumstances nor socio-demographic characteristics alone.

My aim in this study has been to identify some of the elements among the diverse range of influences on adult learners. Hence, whilst formulating my key research question, to do with adult learners' motivation, and specifically instrumental compared with more personal participation reasons, I had further subsidiary aims.

These are reflected in the subsidiary set of questions I drew up (see pp.15-16), based upon previous educational experiences, the effects emanating from these, and attitude to learning.

My core issues surrounded participants' stated and implicit reasons for engaging in study and the significance learning holds for them in terms of their working and everyday lives, and in the context of employment, social and family relations.

The influence of current and former experiences of education incorporated perceptions of themselves as learners and the influence of others' views.

Methodological implications of this research

This research has employed alternative methodological approaches, in order to capture the participants' interest, offer different modes of self-expression in line with individual preferences, and allow for greater rein for the imagination. These

proved valuable as a means of expanding the methodology to provide several layers of very rich data, yet allow for rigorous analysis through triangulation.

I introduced a means of exploring the subjective which is quite novel in academic research, through a visualisation technique employing sketching. This method has here been proved to be of great practical use and creative potential. The other major method was the adoption of a form of questionnaire whose narrative possibilities proved equally valuable. Both may usefully be explored further in future research. Also, the employment of a developing framework during data analysis led to my drawing up of a typology of the adult learner which I feel should offer further potential exploration.

Summary of findings

A comparative analysis of themes to seek motivation characteristic of vocational and non-vocational students (see Findings, Chapter 6), suggests a universal pattern in which enrolment was in pursuit of change. All consistently combined personal and career goals, except for two students. These exceptionally career-oriented people came from each group. Retrospectively all furthermore sensed personal achievement. Participants had a combination of instrumental and non-instrumental reasons, which were not age-related. New learning played a crucial role prompted by the impetus of trigger events against a background of disequilibrium, where current roles were a source of dissatisfaction.

Their current courses prompted a sense of commitment in both groups, although the non-vocational group had expected to feel alienated at college. All but three

of this group felt the qualification to be important to them, half having failed academically in the past. The vocational group, by contrast, foresaw commitment, in their pursuit of achievement. Past experiences led the majority to expect they would enjoy their new learning situations, although not all necessarily identifying with the student lifestyle. Subsequently they found they enjoyed their current learning, despite (10 only) finding difficulty over study.

Some benefited from the influence of significant others, in a supportive college setting, almost all (amounting to 19) having the role model or encouragement of friends or colleagues, of whom most coincidentally mentioned criticism. Two of these furthermore received no support outside college, effectively receiving direct criticism for studying. The unanticipated outcome of the course for many was that they became conscious that some, often intangible, difference in themselves had occurred as a result of their learning experiences.

Further areas of investigation

These findings suggest further areas of fruitful exploration. One issue I was not able to deal with, for example, due to insufficient data, was a thorough exploration of the role of certain demographic factors. Because this is a complex area of enquiry, beyond the scope of this study, I did not utilise questions specifically targeting notions of class, feeling these would arise (as in some cases they did) out of the interviews. This would provide an interesting area for future research, as would more complete data, to allow for further comparison of participants' themes according to occupation and level of academic/vocational qualification.

Their planned academic course attendance implicates some motivational issues which I have not been able to address more fully here, notably in terms of attitudes, as these students were very forthcoming about their opinions and expectations of formal learning environments. This would assist in the facilitation of a system driven more by learner-centred needs than by institutional requirements, and should be a source of further fruitful enquiry.

Exploration of the research findings and their implications

My research has effectively pinpointed the participation reasons of vocational, as compared to non-vocational adult learners, and discovered these not to be predicated upon traditional oppositions of course type. Rather, the less predictable pattern of reasons discussed in the findings points to identical aims for both groups, who were actuated by the wish for the end certificate, and a sense of personal achievement, but universally and overwhelmingly for change.

Concurrently with these aims emerged their very similar feelings about the return to learning. Both groups anticipated conflict, significant in light of adult learners needing to resort to alternating or combining study with work and/or home (Blaxter and Tight, 1994) (see Chapter 1, p.11). Many initially lacked confidence, the issue I had originally pinpointed as significant to adult student experience, particularly their empowerment as learners. The non-vocational students' fears of encountering alienation at college is an issue of possible significance to pursue in future research on Access courses, particularly in view of findings on participants only responding to availability of courses when they felt these to be appropriate to

them (Rees *et al.*, 1999), and themselves to be suitable for a formal learning experience.

Their growing awareness of an indefinable change in self was a finding I had not anticipated. I had asked participants whether the fact that they had engaged upon self-reflection had in any way influenced them, as I felt this to be an essential element of the research, due to its reflexive nature and to the value of learning to learn, which is vital to the acquisition of 'generalised knowledge'. Those who responded to this in the questionnaire all felt that having reflected on their past and present education had been valuable.

Enrolment in pursuit of change was eventually found to result in some unidentifiable alteration in self. This effectively brought the findings full circle, although the changes originally sought were not necessarily those expressed at the end. The specific, identifiable changes sought were usually expressed through work-related terminology, whereas at the course's end they were rarely so expressed, and usually articulated in terms more of personal change, often as the acquisition of concrete skills and knowledge, or occasionally as either an awareness of a new outlook, or some inexpressible difference in self.

Many of the participants in this research, therefore, approach learning more as a transformational experience than merely to redress the current situation, as in the compensatory model of lifelong learning. In this, for example, NVQs are gained as a means of filling their qualification gap, in their current employment.

Transformational learning brings change, and is foreseen as taking place in an uncomfortable environment, where the work will be neither straightforward nor

easy, among those of superior ability. This typifies, among others, those four Access students arriving from neighbourhood centres.

Compensatory learning appears characteristic of a minority, namely Debbie, Rani and Suzi, for whom their qualification will be the natural outcome of the year's attendance, as they progress into higher education. They are the exception amongst the Access group, who chose it in preference to the traditional 'A' level route to HE, an apparent trend in Access course promotion which offers an easier option.

This is a situation the older group members appeared not to expect, nor to be entirely happy about. Although verbalising this in terms of the age difference, and preoccupations to do with socialising, it appears more that they are uncomfortable with the presence of this group because their aims and intentions, those inherently compensatory objectives, are in contrast to their own pursuit of transformational learning. The compensatory model now being promoted for lifelong learning by many agencies is therefore at odds with either the expectations or final 'outcomes' (those unanticipated end experiences), of most participants in this study.

The existence of a profoundly influential learner identity appears important for these participants, as seen in Tight's findings on an individual "personal lifelong learning culture" (1998, p. 115), as opposed to a governmental device, societal in operation (see Chapter 1, p.12). Their perception of the student role, whereby some did not identify closely with student lifestyle, was influenced by age

differences, or more specifically, because they appreciated the distinction of a separate, 'mature student' status.

It is interesting that life phase did not impact upon reasons for enrolling, yet age was significant for many in their perceptions of self as student. It has not been possible to examine learner identity in great depth here, as this forms a complex picture informed by their social background in the prevailing class, economic and cultural settings. However, this issue offers another area of promising research.

It was significant that of the only two who dropped out, from the Trainers' course (Zoe due to unavoidable circumstances), Paula was solely career-driven, and foresaw no personal gains accruing from her participation. Continuing would apparently have been yet more essential in fulfilling the certificate she greatly desired, as a means now to re-employment. It may be possible that instrumental aims alone may not enhance continuance.

As an element in the provision of lifelong learning, the role of the Access course in compensating for previous academic failure lies open to question, in view of my sample's high level of certification (higher than the Trainers'), and preference for the course as 'A' level alternative route to HE, as such providing a 'continuing' educational route (see p.81).

Also, as the drop-out rate on this course appeared atypically high, amounting to approximately 85%, it is interesting that none of my Access participants left their course. This suggests that their having felt prompted to participate in this research probably derives from their determination to succeed (as appeared consistently in

their theme profiles), particularly as in the case with this research, which could be viewed by participants as self-developmental in nature.

This is probably allied to Courtney's participants' (1992) wish to join in several parallel fields of social activity, as part of a wider pattern of social involvement and encompassing notions of altruism. This is thus a significant characteristic of these people. Equally, the compensatory version of lifelong learning would nullify much of these and the Trainer participants' non-instrumental gains (with the exception of Paula), their search for change also encompassing the personal and social spheres.

Therefore, the upskilling implicit in the government's current policy on lifelong learning proves to be a side issue for these people, their claim for certification towards career change lying alongside, if not subservient for some, to their prime motivation of the wish for achievement through change at a personal level.

Although these participants assumed responsibility for their own learning, this may be more a reflection of their characteristically individualistic determination to succeed, than attributable solely to their wishing to accord with employers' reliance on a proactive workforce. Targeting individual responsibility and "mobilising their commitment" (CBI, 1989, p. 9) may produce little effect on participation rates, since those displaying such commitment are already disposed towards participation. In Coffield's terms (1999), such personal attributes are not translatable into structural barriers to access.

Conclusion

It does not appear useful to compartmentalise adult learner motivation rigidly according to vocational or non-vocational aims. Motivation cannot be separated out and attributed either to instrumental employment aims or less well defined non-instrumental purposes, according to the findings in this study. It may be valuable to recognise that the one rarely exists in isolation from the other, and the evidence here suggests that the one cannot be sustained without the support of the other. This has several implications for the role of lifelong learning in its current context and form.

In this research, I hope to have contributed to the means of investigating, and to have identified some of the range of diffuse motivations apparent in the participation of adult learners, and to have suggested some of the implications for further research alongside those of possible significance for policy makers.

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Appendix 1: Narrative Questionnaire

Narrative About a Return to Learning

Narratives provide greater opportunities than other types of questionnaire, to write about your own views and opinions and especially, those occurring over a long period of time. Writing your own 'narrative' about your return to education and what this has meant to you will help us gain a deeper understanding of its significance for you and also other adult returners, and may provide greater insight into specific needs and particular issues. Please write as much or as little as you like on each section, but without re-drafting or trying to 'polish it up'. You may find it helpful to use the questions suggested here, to think about the discussion at the group meeting, or anything that has occurred to you since. Thank you for taking the time to write this.

I. Course choice and choosing to return to education:

Why this course?
What were your reasons for returning to education?
Did you have any specific or long-term goals; was it a spur of the moment decision, etc?
Did someone suggest this course or did you seek it out yourself?
Is there anyone you know in education (recently or at the moment)?
...and would you say that their experiences have in any way influenced you?
Was there anything in particular to be taken into account when considering a return to study?
Were people supportive of you while you were coming to a decision?
...and was any single person or incident of key importance?

II. Yourself as an adult learner:

Before starting, how did you see yourself as a student?
Did you have any thoughts of yourself as an 'adult learner'?
What are you hoping to gain from the course and being a student in general?
Was there anything you were looking forward to about being a student?
...or not looking forward to?
Have you come across anything unexpected?
What has been good so far about becoming a student?
...or anything you have not liked as much?

III. How others perceive you:

How do others see you now, since starting the course?
Have other people (workmates, students, tutors, those at home, friends) indicated there are any differences in you?
Do you have to make special arrangements to fit in with others (such as swapping work slots; childminders; etc.) ?

IV. Future thoughts:

At the end of this course how do you see yourself?
Where will you be, personally or in other ways?
What will you be doing?
Will you have got anything besides the concrete or practical from being involved in the course?
Are the views or perceptions of others important in this?
Do you plan to participate in education again?

Appendix 2: End Narrative Questionnaire

Narrative On Having Returned to Learning

Narratives provide greater opportunities than other types of questionnaire, to write about your own views and opinions and especially, those occurring over a long period of time.

Writing your own 'narrative' about your return to education and what this has meant to you will help us gain a deeper understanding of its significance for you and also other adult returners, and may provide greater insight into specific needs and particular issues.

Please write as much or as little as you like on each section, but without re-drafting or trying to 'polish it up'. You may find it helpful to use the questions suggested here, to think about the discussion at the group meeting, or anything that has occurred to you since.

Thank you for taking the time to write this.

I. Expectations of the course and your return to education:

- Has the reality matched up to your expectations?
- Have your initial reasons for returning to education changed?
- Have your earlier feelings about coming to college changed?
- Have you achieved what you set out to?
- What would you say you have gained, overall?
- What would you say your experiences over the year have been like?
- ...and have these experiences increased or lessened your commitment to learning?
- If you had not been on this course, what else would you have been doing?
- What other interests, pastimes etc. do you have and have they been affected by study time?
- Is there anything you have had to give up (T.V., a holiday, etc.)?

II. Yourself as an adult learner /mature student:

- How do you see yourself now, after the course?
- Is it your course experiences or your own 'inner drive' that has been most important in carrying you through the year?
- Do you have any further thoughts (or different ones) of yourself in the role of the 'adult learner' /'mature student'?
- Have your course tutors asked for any feedback or recommendations?
- ...and if so, is this important to you?
- Have you encountered anything unexpected?
- What has been good about becoming a student?
- ...or anything you have not liked as much?
- Has any single incident of key importance happened to you?
- Is your studying a part of your daily life: something you 'carry around' with you?

III. How others perceive you:

- How do others see you now, at the end of the course?
- Have other people (colleagues, students, tutors, those at home, friends or acquaintances) indicated any differences in you, as a student?
- Have you had to make any special arrangements to accommodate others (such as swapping work slots with colleagues; childminders; etc.) ?
- Have people generally remained supportive of you over the year?
- Would you say that participation in this research may have affected how you look at education?
- ...and how you look at yourself as a learner?

IV. The future:

- Have your plans for the future remained or altered?
- Do you plan to participate in education again?
- ...and if so, will this probably be courses to help your work/career, or something other than that?

Appendix 3: Interview Question List

A Return to Learning

I. Your choice of course and choosing to return to education:

Why did you choose this course?

Why did you return to education?

Did this decision take a lot of thought?

Did you receive a lot of support?

Is anyone you know in education (and has this influenced you)?

Was any single person or incident of key importance?

II. Yourself as an adult learner:

What did you think it would be like to be a student?

What do you hope to get out of the course and from being a student?

Was there anything you were (or weren't) looking forward to?

Has anything been unexpected /good /not so good?

III. How others see you:

How do others see you now, since starting the course?

Do others see any differences in you as a student?

Do you have to make special arrangements to accommodate others (such as swapping work slots with colleagues; childminders; etc.) ?

IV. In the future :

How do you see yourself after this course (personally /professionally)?

Will you be doing other courses?

What will you have gained besides the concrete or practical from the course?

Are the views or perceptions of others important in this?

Appendix 4: End Interview Question List

A Return to Learning

I. Expectations of the course and your return to education:

Has the reality matched up to your expectations?

What have you gained, overall?

What would you say your experiences over the year have been like?

... and have these experiences reinforced /detracted from your commitment to learning?

Is there anything you have had to give up (T.V., a holiday, etc.)?

If you were not studying, what would you be doing instead?

II. Yourself as an adult learner:

How do you see yourself now, after the course?

Is it your course experiences or your own 'inner drive' that has been most important in carrying you through the year?

Have your course tutors asked for any feedback /recommendations?

...and is this important?

Has any single incident of key importance occurred?

Is your (study) work a part of your daily life: something you 'carry around' with you?

III. How others perceive you:

How do others see you now, at the end of the course?

Have other people (colleagues, students, tutors, those at home, friends or acquaintances) indicated any differences in you, as a student?

Have people generally remained supportive of you over the year?

IV. The future:

Have your plans for the future remained or altered?

Do you plan to participate in education again?

... and if so, will this probably be courses to help your work/career, or something other than that?

Appendix 5: Comments on this Research (Focus group)

Comment Sheet

Although there has not been time for us to have the opportunity to discuss this at the meeting, your views on the questionnaire in particular, and about the focus group session in general, will be greatly appreciated. Could you please complete (circle the answer and/or write a few words) and return this with the narrative questionnaire. Thank you for your comments.

Questionnaire:-

1. ... was good/not so good.
2. ...the questions were helpful/too many of them.
3. ...the reason for doing it was clear/not clear.
4. ... it was easy/difficult to understand what was being asked of us.
5. ...I enjoyed/did not enjoy the opportunity to give my answers in narrative form.
6. ...it was straightforward/difficult to write about my experiences.

Ice Breakers:-

7. ...useful/not helpful as an introduction to the discussion.
8. ...I understood/did not understand the reason for this activity.

Discussion:-

9. ...this was/was not a success.
10. ...I felt able/unable to contribute as much as I wanted.

Session as a whole:-

11. ...was just long enough/too short a time.
12. ...the researcher made clear/did not make clear what we had to do.
13. ...I understood/did not understand the role of the focus group in this research.
14. ...the method (or combination of methods) I would have preferred is:--
 - individual interview
 - discussion (e.g. focus group)
 - drawing
 - tape-recording
 - writing in my own time
 - writing in the session
 - multiple-choice questionnaire
 - narrative questionnaire
 - any other...

15. ...the session was/was not enjoyable.

16. ...I would/would not be willing to participate in future sessions to continue this research

Could you also provide any further comments or suggestions below.

Appendix 6: Course End Views on the Research

Views on the Research

Name (optional):- - - - -

Please would you circle any you think apply to this research study:-

- | | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>useful</i> | <i>irrelevant</i> | <i>easy to do</i> | <i>enjoyable</i> |
| <i>too long</i> | <i>valuable</i> | | <i>a waste of my time</i> |
| <i>boring</i> | | <i>thought-provoking</i> | |
| | <i>helpful to me</i> | | <i>too difficult</i> |
| <i>interesting</i> | | <i>worrying</i> | <i>clear</i> |
| <i>too short</i> | <i>worthwhile</i> | | <i>successful</i> |
| | <i>rewarding</i> | <i>too hurried</i> | <i>complicated</i> |
| <i>little purpose</i> | | <i>straightforward</i> | |
| <i>too much jargon</i> | <i>reassuring</i> | | <i>did not see the point</i> |

Also, if you have any other comments to make, they would be gratefully received:-

Appendix 7: Tutors' Evaluation Sheet

Tutors' Evaluation Sheet

Confidential

The following themes have been identified by the participants in this study as being important to them in their return to education as an adult learner.

Please indicate (by ticking a total of 6 boxes below) which you consider to be the six most significant for this student.

Expectations of studying:

- not fitting in
- social aspect
- home vs. study conflict
- difficulties of study
- a challenge

Reason for returning to education:

- key incident e.g. redundancy
- career /personal change
- qualification at the end
- status /dream
- prior academic failure
- recent academic success
- personal achievement
- enjoy education

Being an adult learner:

- group support valued
- unexpected that they can cope
- sense of commitment
- confidence from others' validation /empowerment
- horizons broadened

Others' views and support:

- partner's /parents' support
- partner /parents unsupportive
- family pressure to succeed
- continuing tutor support valued
- some tutors not as supportive as they are able
- others' support
- others' criticism

Future:

- no long-term plan
- long-term plan
- better job
- participate in education again

If possible, I would also welcome your views on their individual reasons for returning to study and what this return has meant to them: _____

Appendix 8: Confidential Information Questionnaire

Confidential

Information Sheet

Please answer each question by ticking the box(es), and adding details where relevant:-

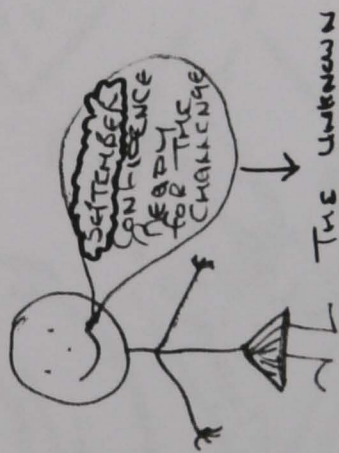
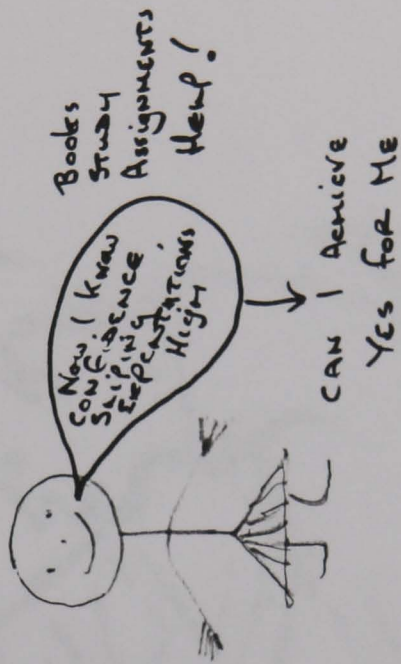
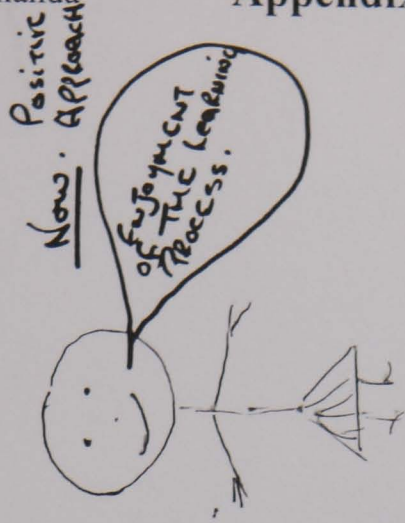
- | | | | |
|----|------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. | Are you male or female? | male
female | <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. | What is your age group? | 21-25
26-30
31-35
36-40
41-45
46-50
51-55
56-60
61 or over | <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. | Are you currently...? | employed full-time (please specify your work and type of company):- _ _ _ _ _
employed part-time (please specify your work and type of company):- _ _ _ _ _
self-employed
unpaid work e.g. voluntary work, caring for family
registered unemployed
disabled unemployed
unemployed
other (please specify) _ _ _ _ _ | <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. | Were you previously ...? | employed full-time (please specify your work and type of company):- _ _ _ _ _
employed part-time (please specify your work and type of company):- _ _ _ _ _
self-employed
unpaid work e.g. voluntary work, caring for family
registered unemployed
disabled unemployed
unemployed
other (please specify) _ _ _ _ _ | <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. | Have you ever been made redundant? | no
yes (please specify type of company, length of service, job, level of position):- _ _ _ _ _ | <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> |

6. Have you any qualifications from school? yes no
7. If yes, please circle, and note how many in the relevant box(es):- GCSE /O level /CSE
GCE AS level
GCE A level /GNVQ /NVQ III
other (please specify e.g. First Aid):-

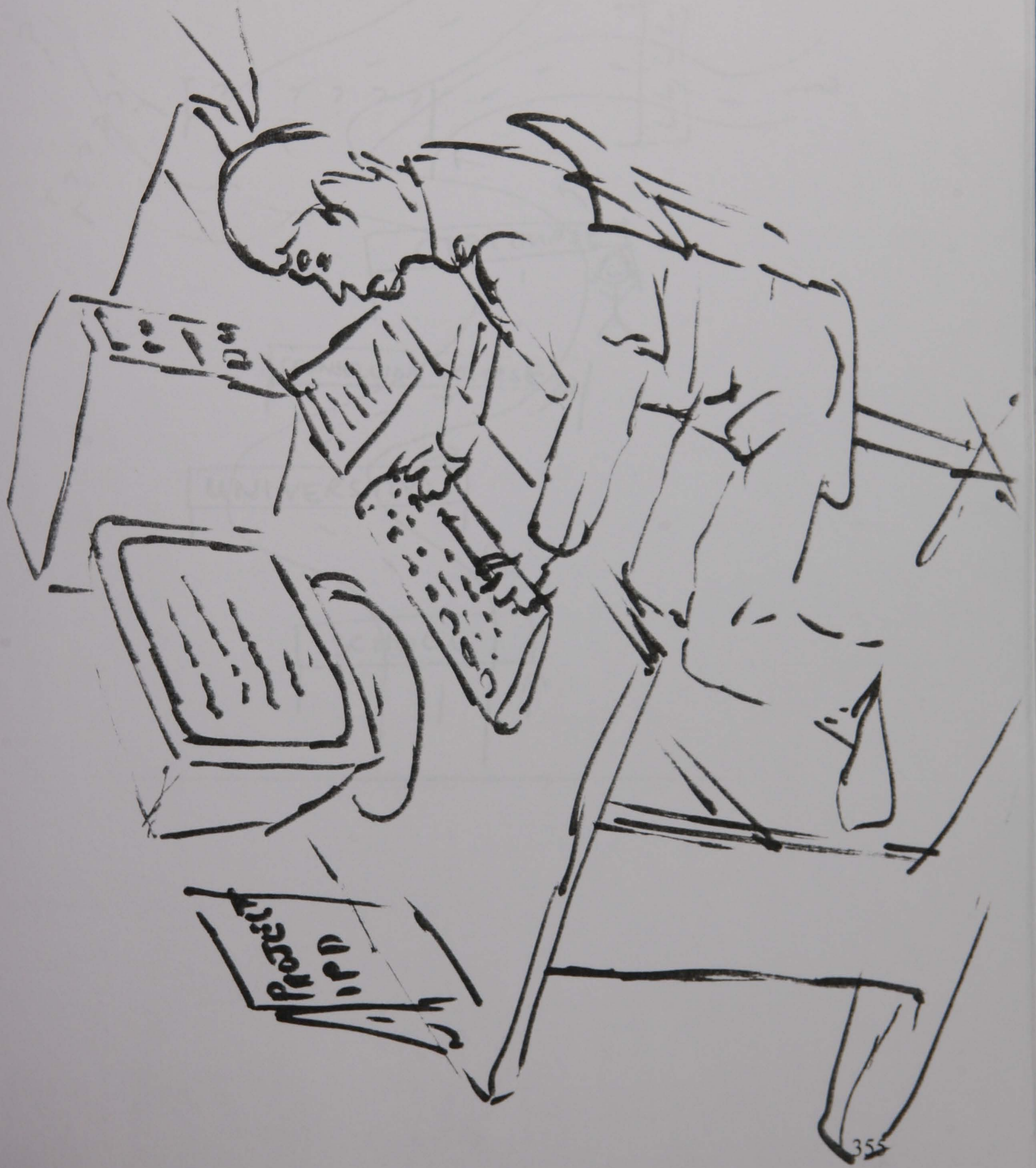
8. Have you any qualifications since school? yes no
9. If yes, please circle, and note how many in the relevant box(es):- GCSE /O level /CSE
GCE AS level
GCE A level /GNVQ /NVQ III
HND /NVQ IV
degree /NVQ V
postgraduate qualification
professional qualification (please specify e.g. SPAA, RSA):-
vocational qualification (please specify e.g.(City & Guilds):-
other (please specify) -----
10. Prior to the course did you experience any of the following? **redundancy**
illness (long-term or serious)
separation /divorce
bereavement
children leaving home
other similar event: -----
none
11. Are you ...? **single**
with a partner:- m.
with a partner:- f.
married
divorced /separated
widowed

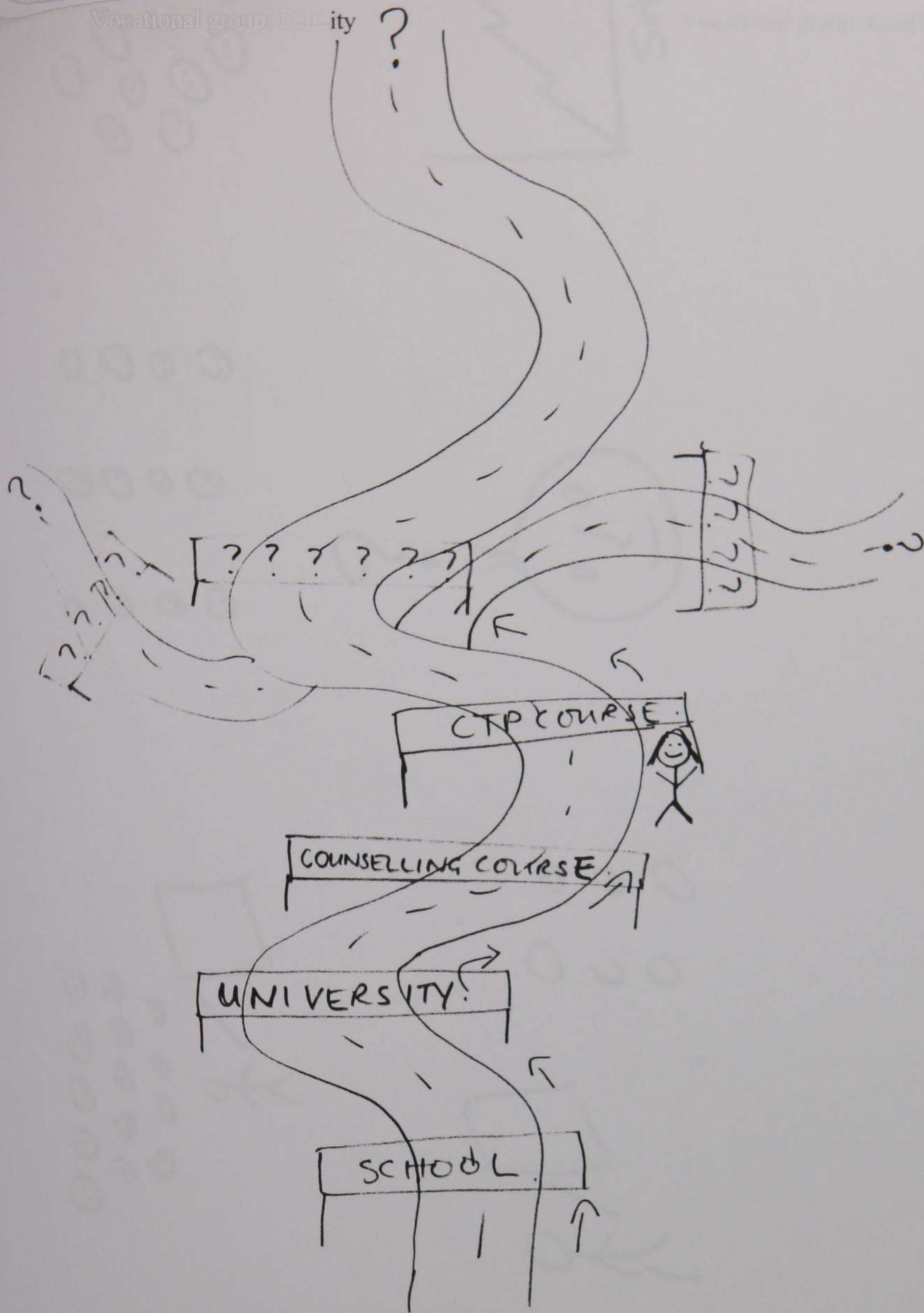
If you would like to offer any comments on this Information Sheet please add them over. Please return the completed questionnaire in the envelope provided. Thank you for your help and any comments.

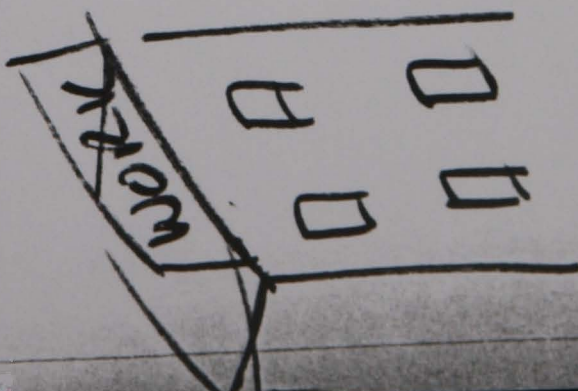
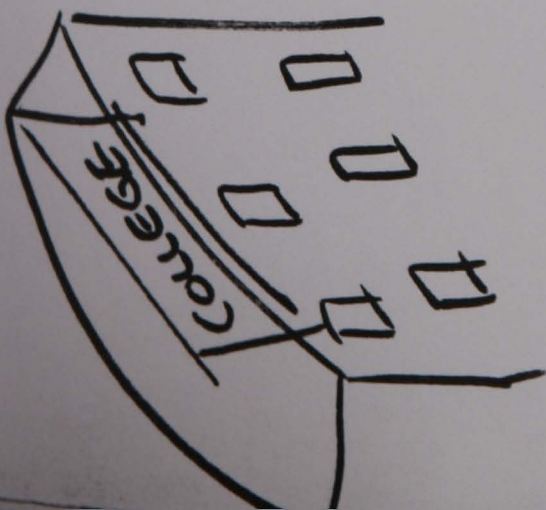
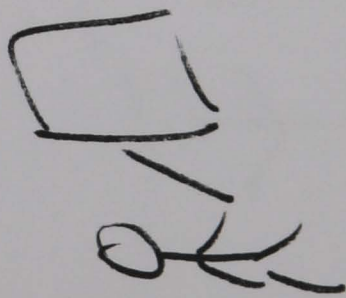
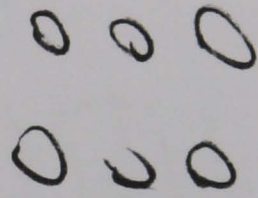
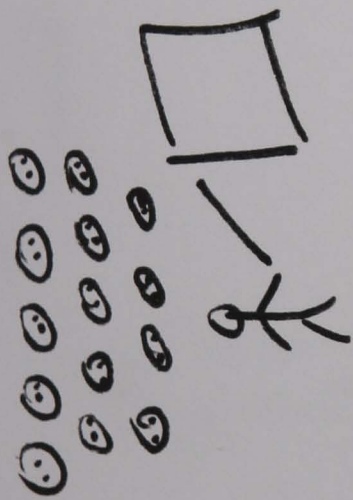
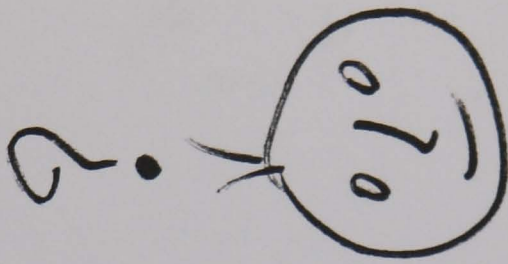
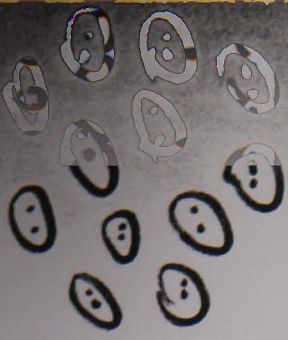
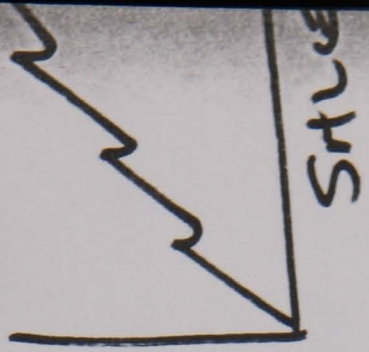
**TEXT CLOSE TO THE EDGE OF THE
PAGE IN THE ORIGINAL THESIS**

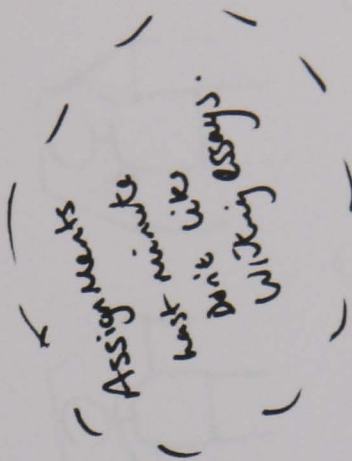
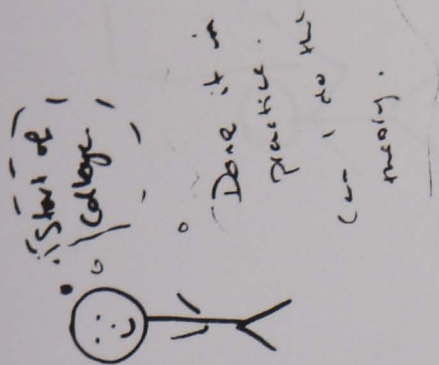


"I will.
complete o
my assignment
(fingers crossed)

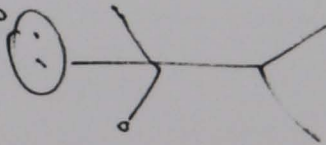
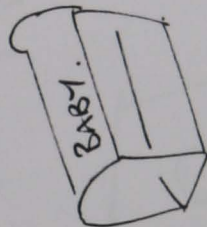
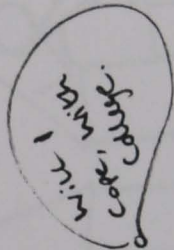
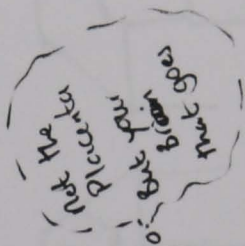
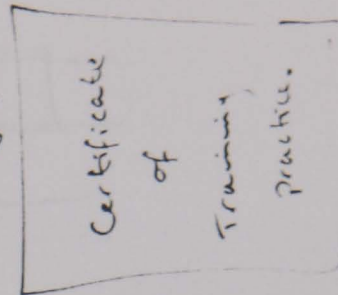




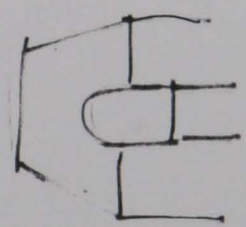
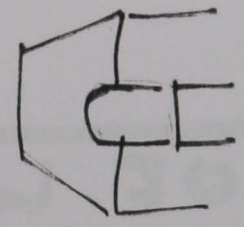
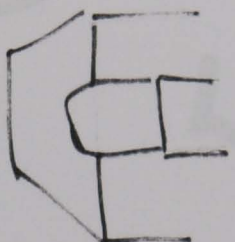
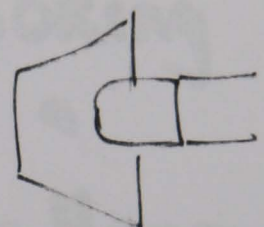
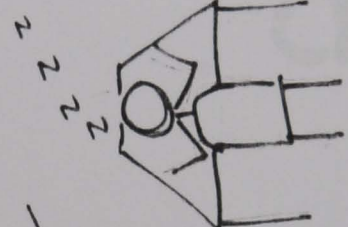
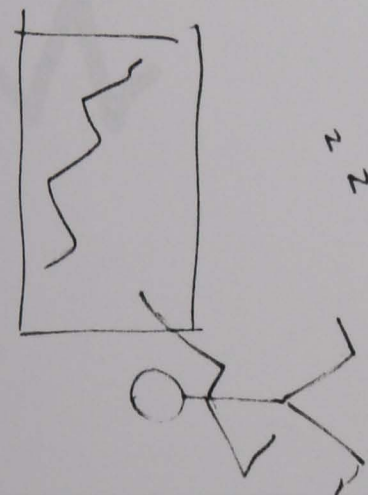
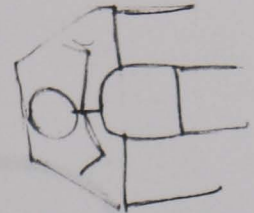
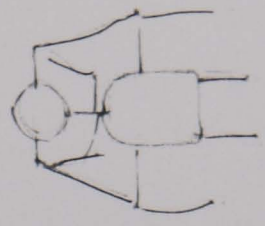
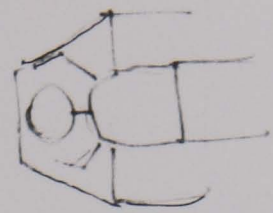
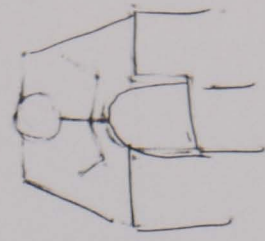
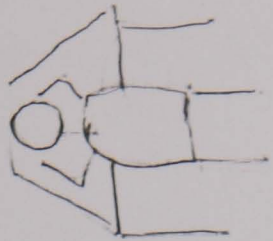
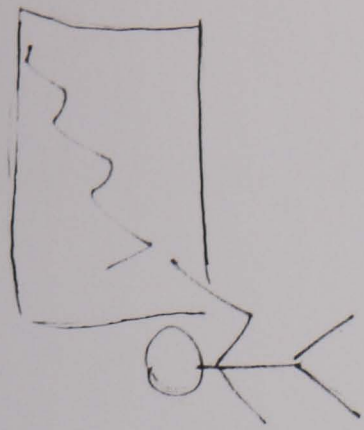


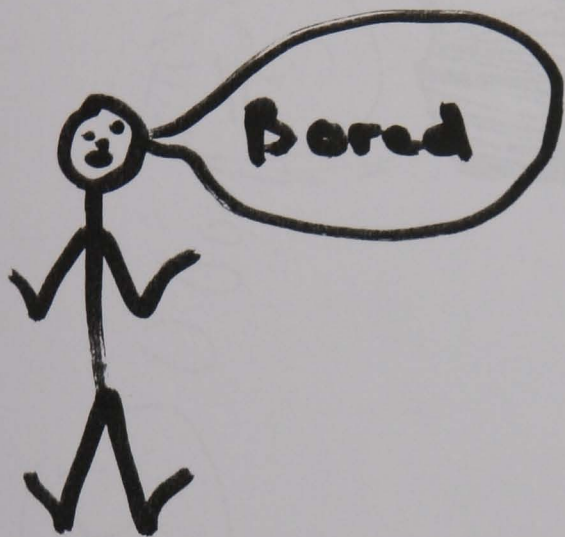


The End.



Vocational group: Paula





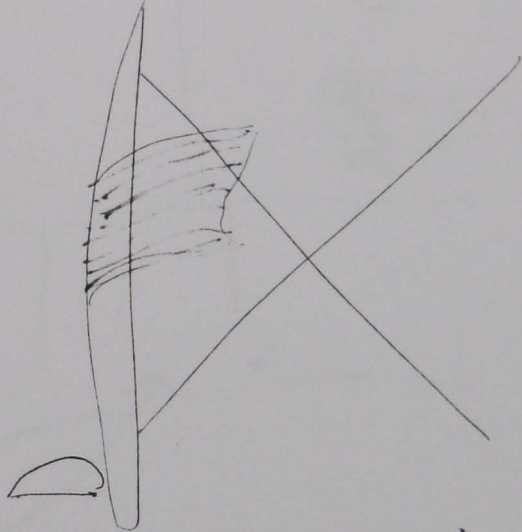
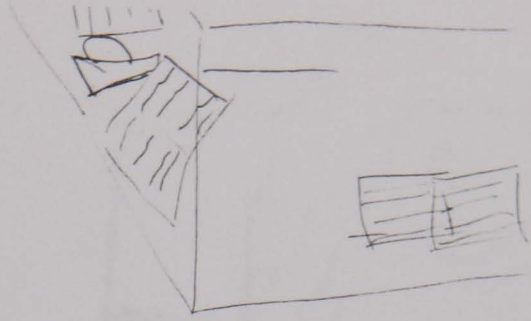
Looking for
a
Challenge.

NEW JOB.

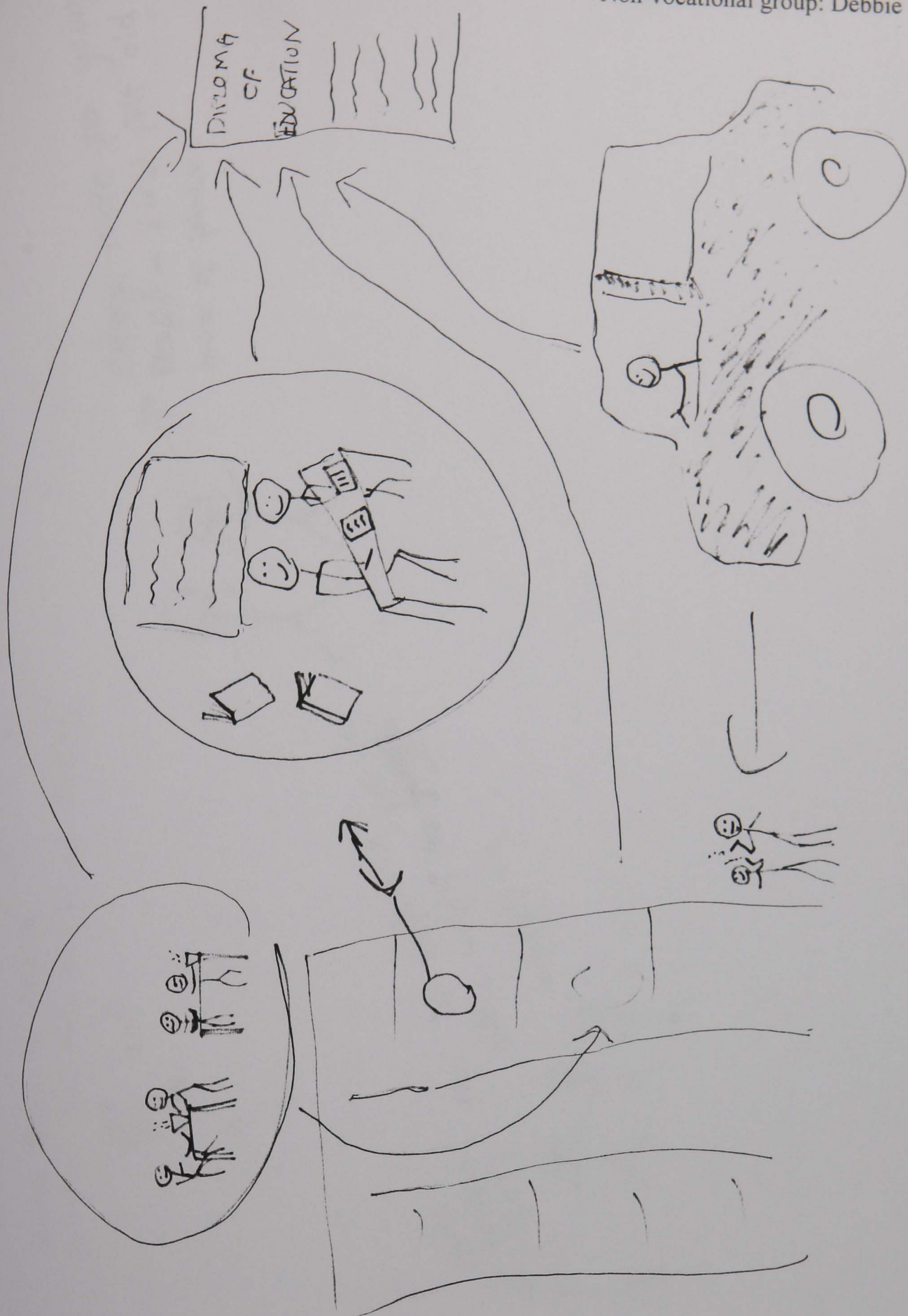


HELP!

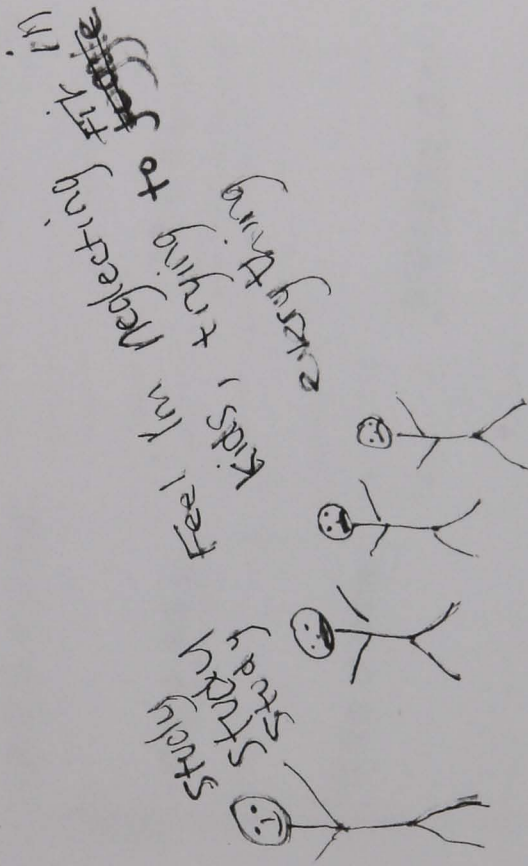
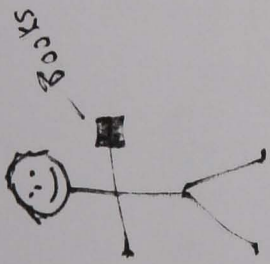
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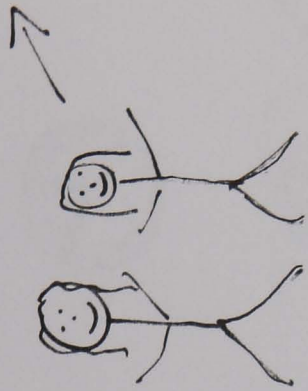
Non-vocational group: Debbie

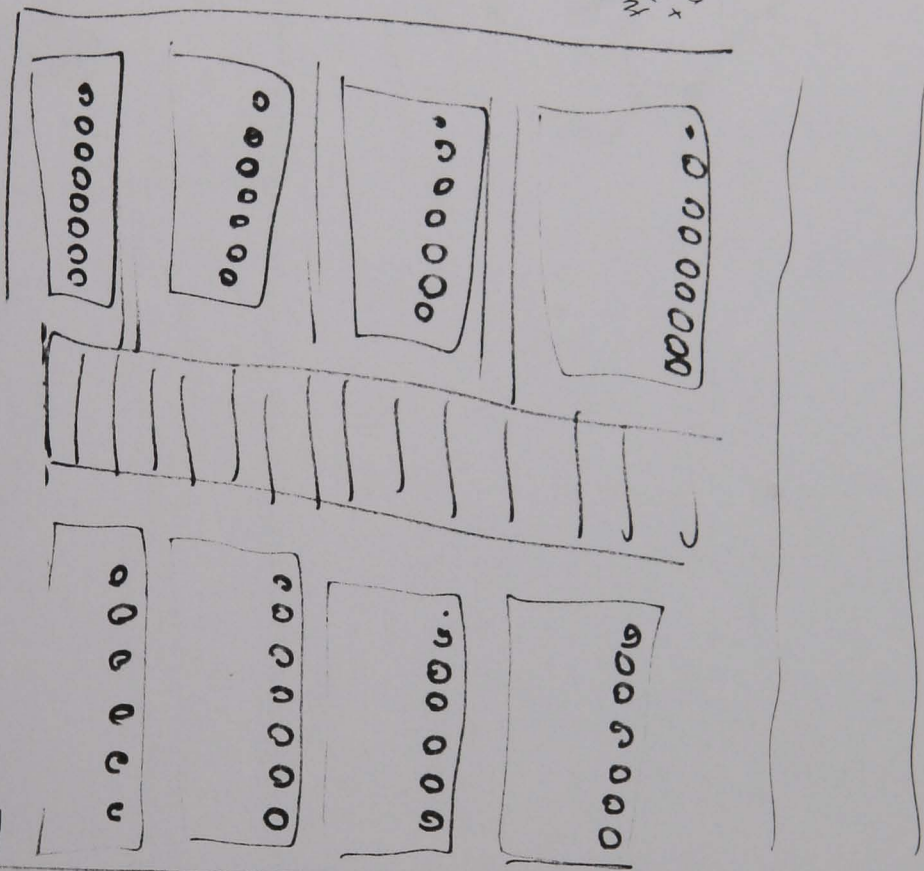
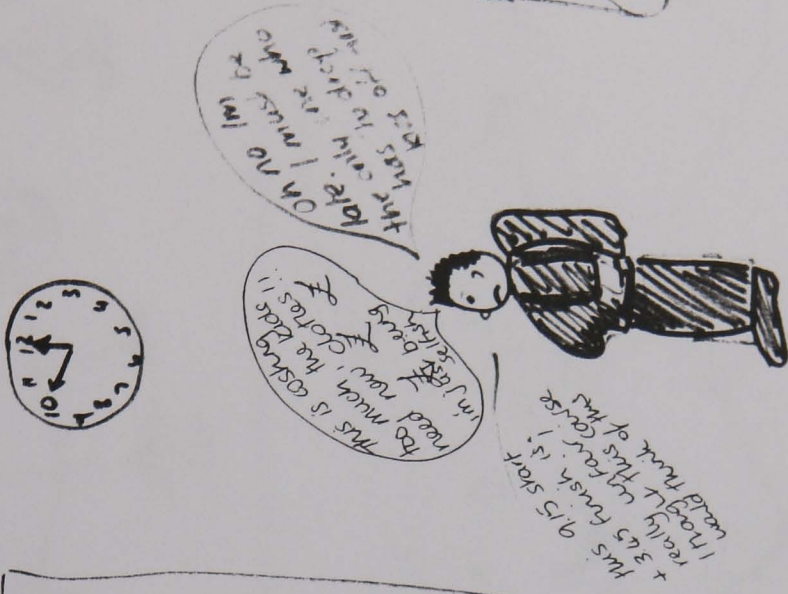
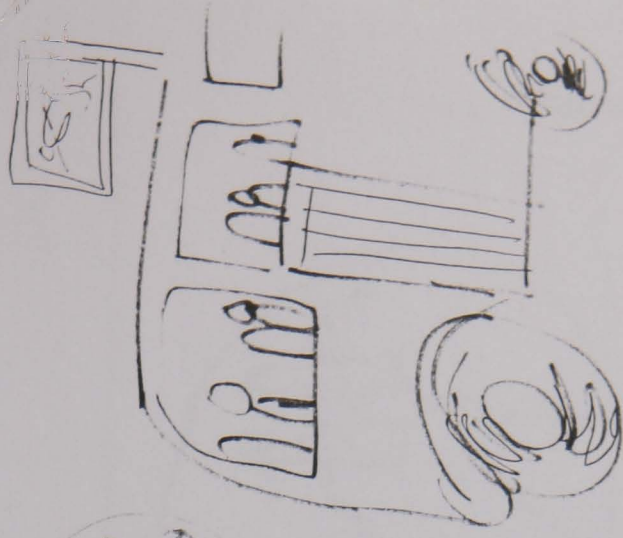


GOING BACK TO LEARN
What I should have at school.

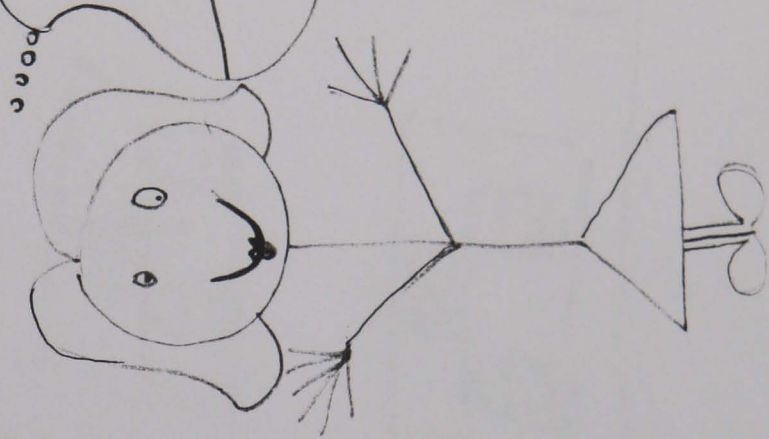
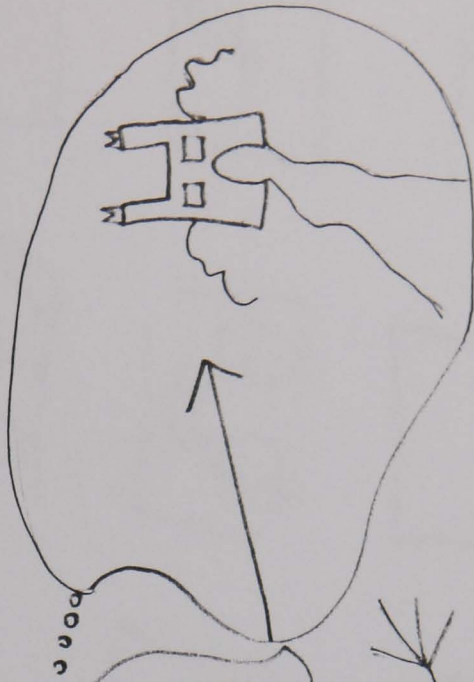
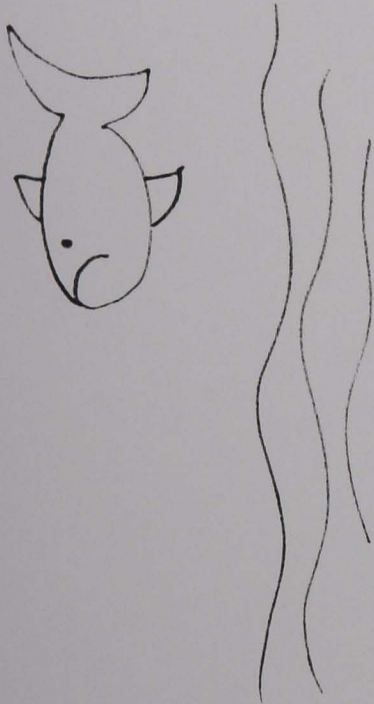
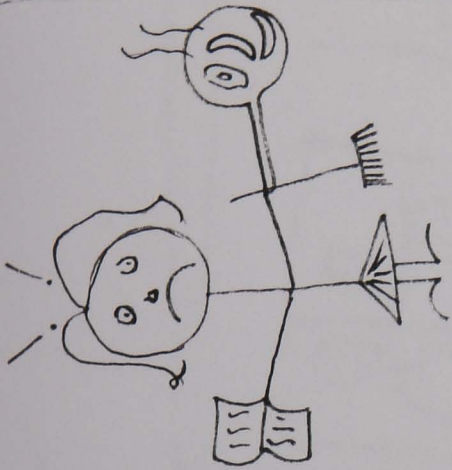
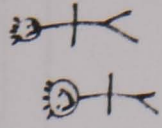


College more for young
People - first felt old
out of place.

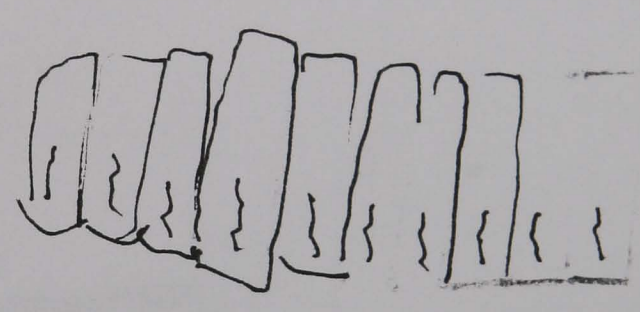
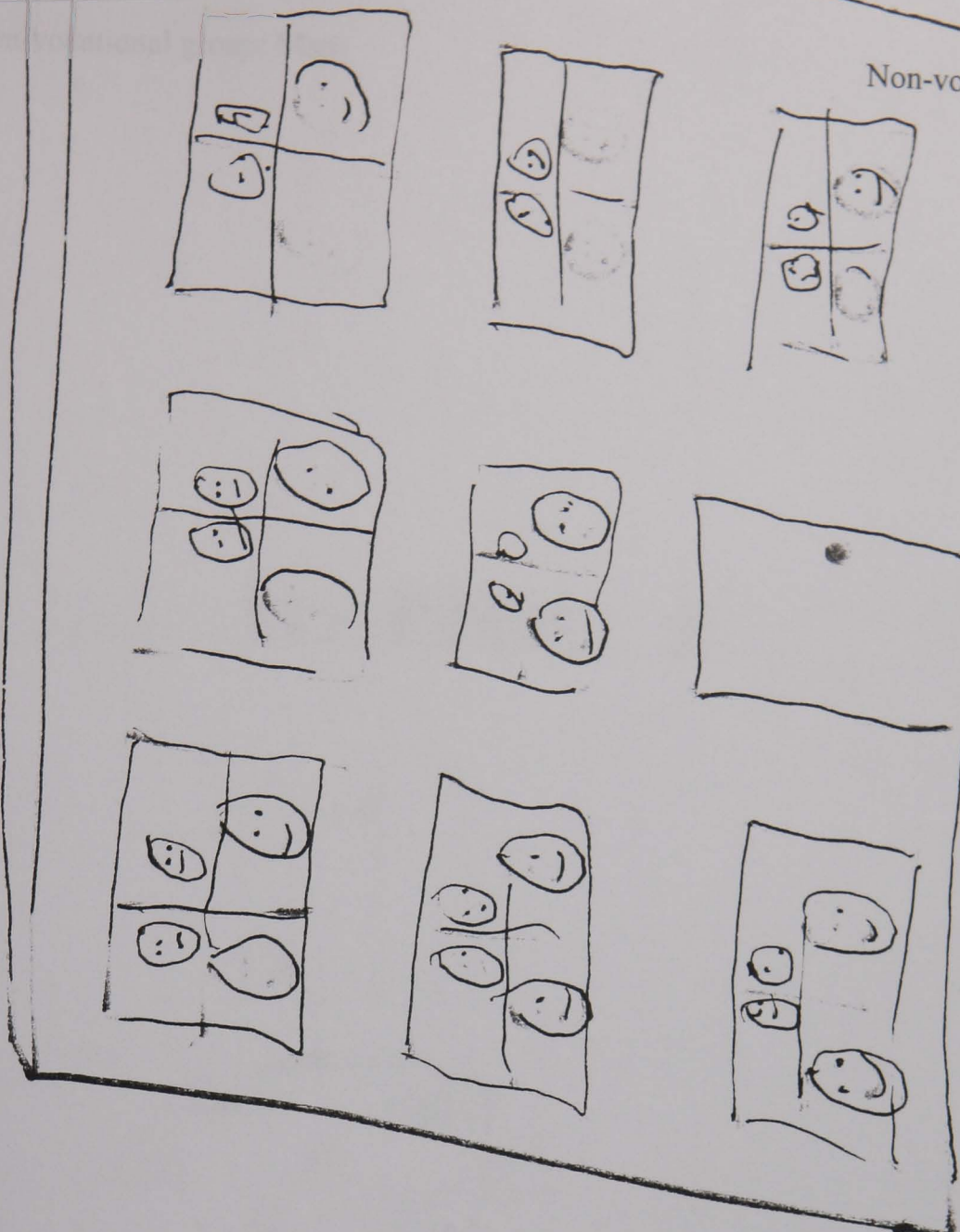




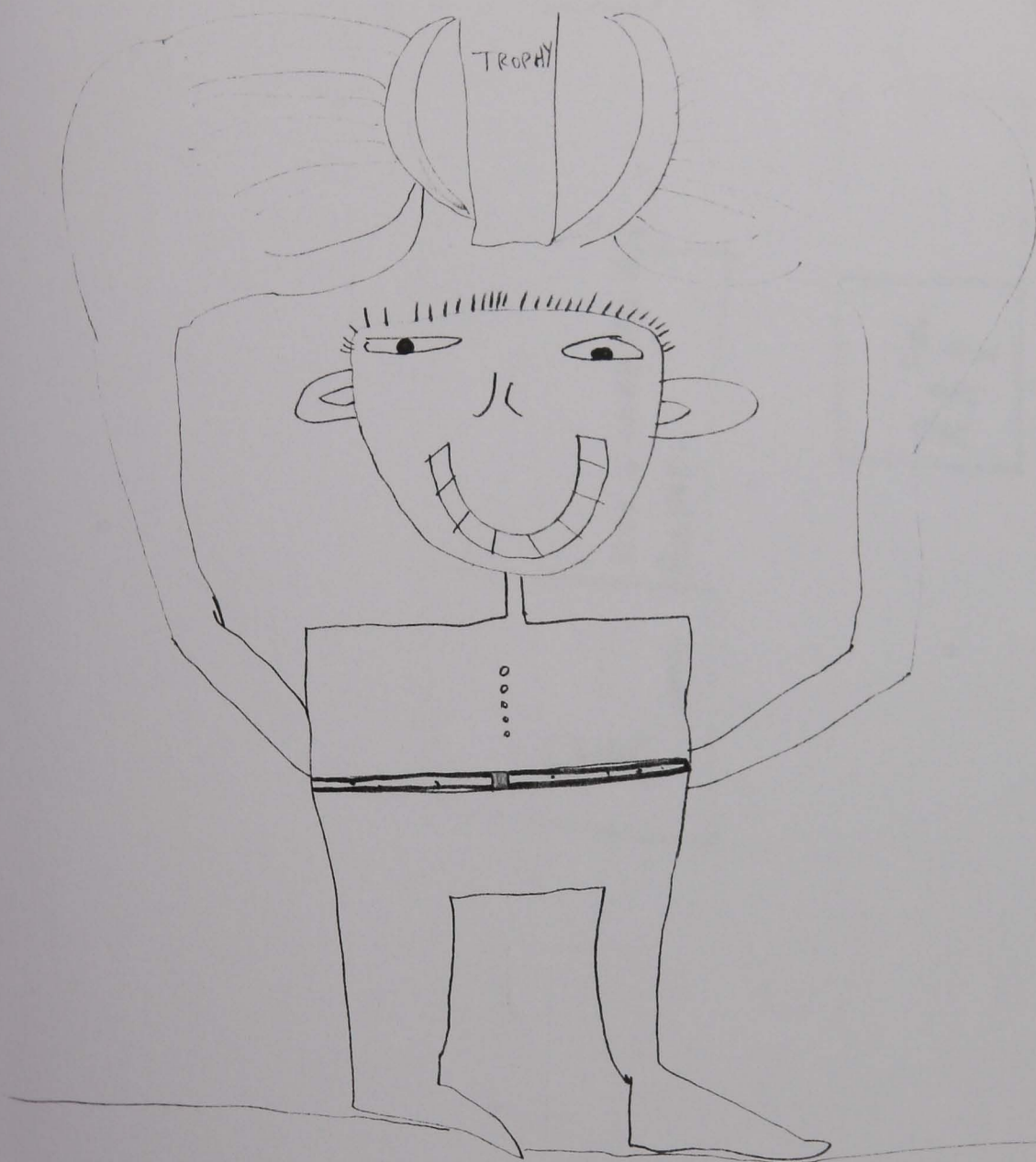
Non-vocational group: Judy



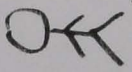
Non-vocational group: Karen





AHHH HHH!
Too big, too much
work how will
I succeed!




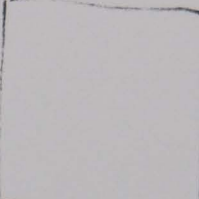


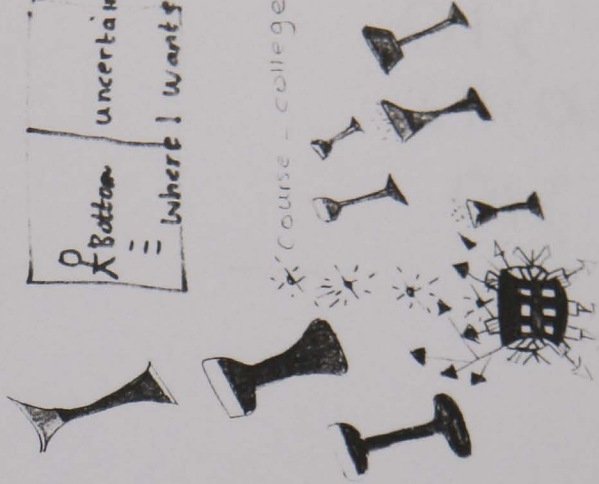
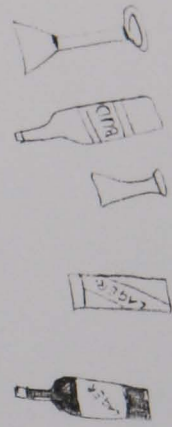
'ROAD To Success'

 Lonely	was ready for this. Big step -
---	-----------------------------------

 Work Hard.
--

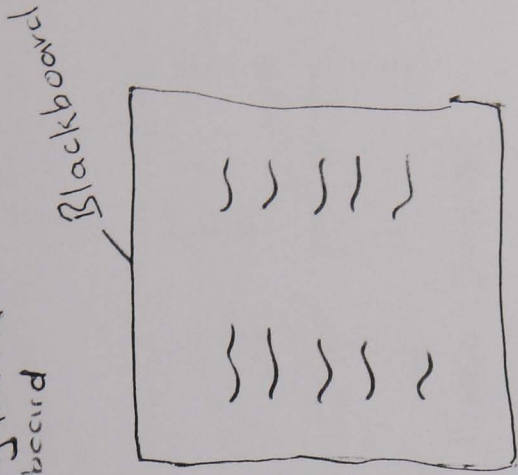
 Bottom =	uncertainly. where I wanted to be!
---	---------------------------------------

  Kids. 	
--	---

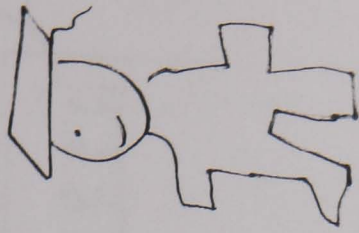


course - college - Moved & transferred down here.

Series of Session
teaching from a
blackboard

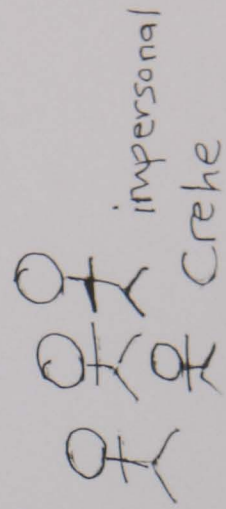


Stereotypical
teacher

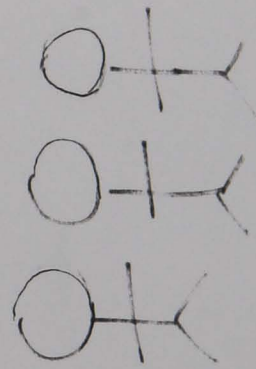
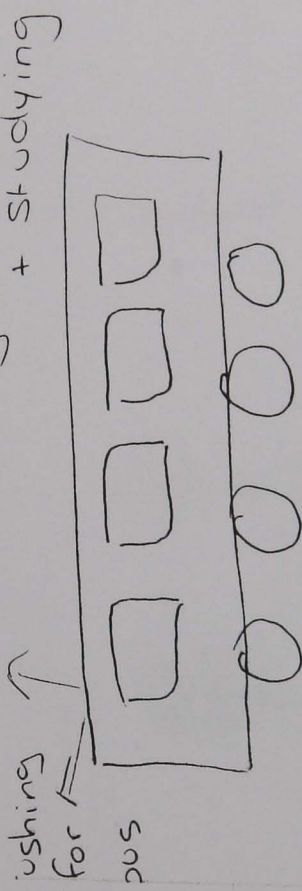


repetitive
learning

Non-vocational group: Pippa

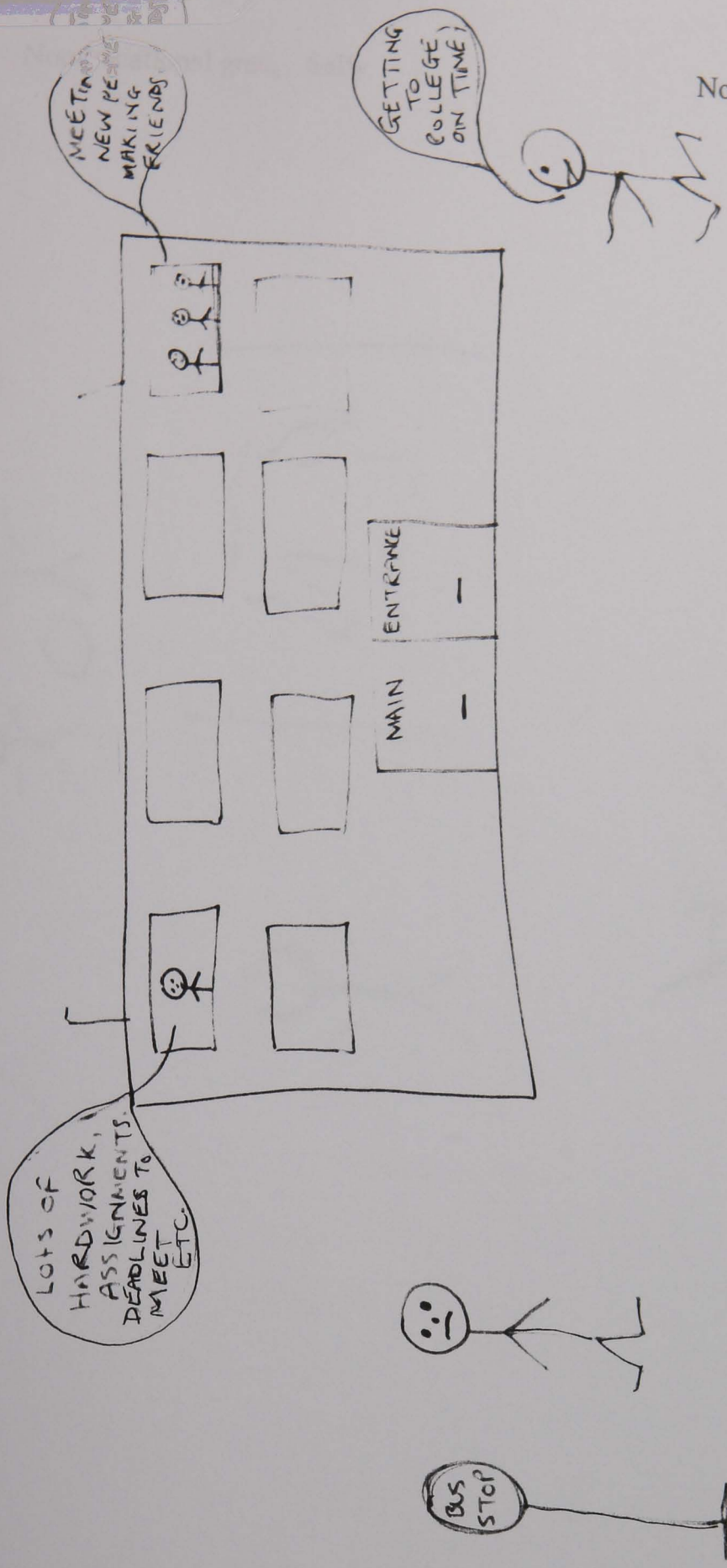


Chaotic and rushing
about juggling kids, house
+ studying

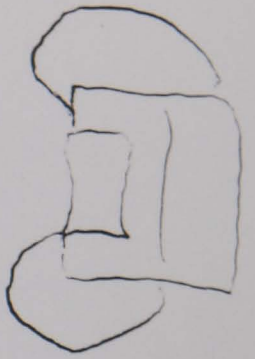
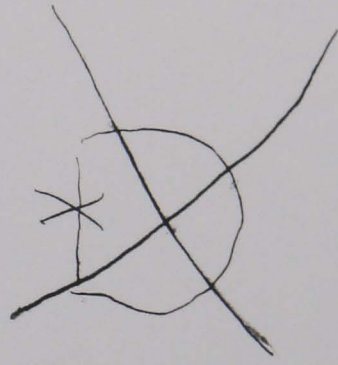
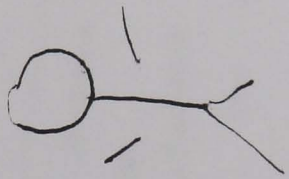
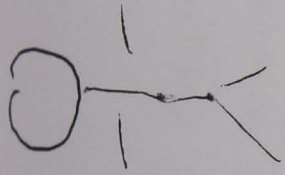


Young Students
that were more knowledgeable

Non-vocational group: Rani



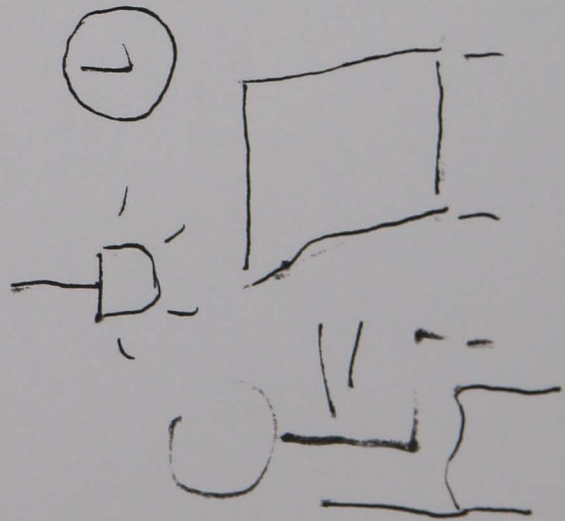
Sunday



lecturer pupil



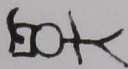
equals



acts of that I
didn't keep up with!



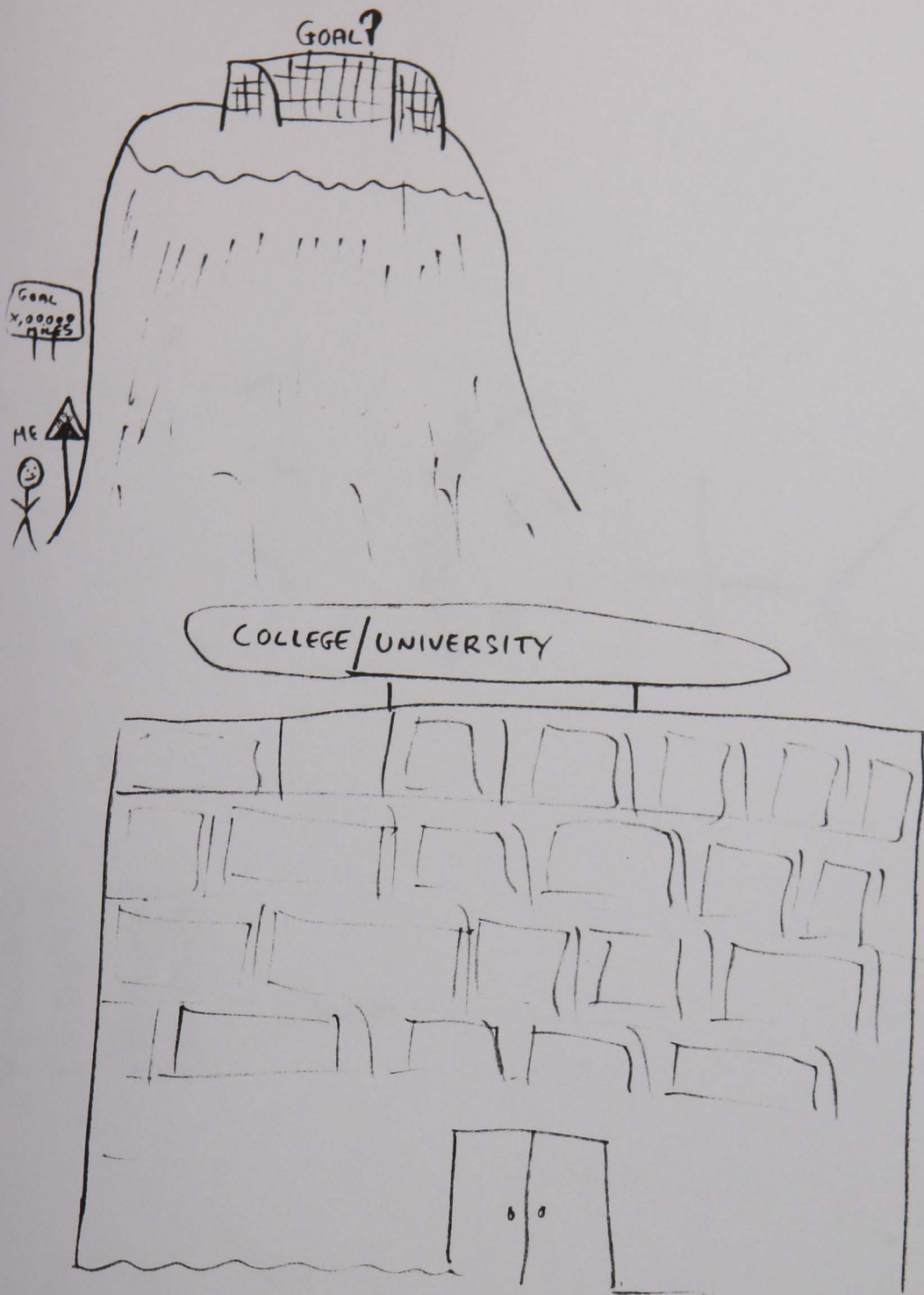
Others more
knowledgable + capable.

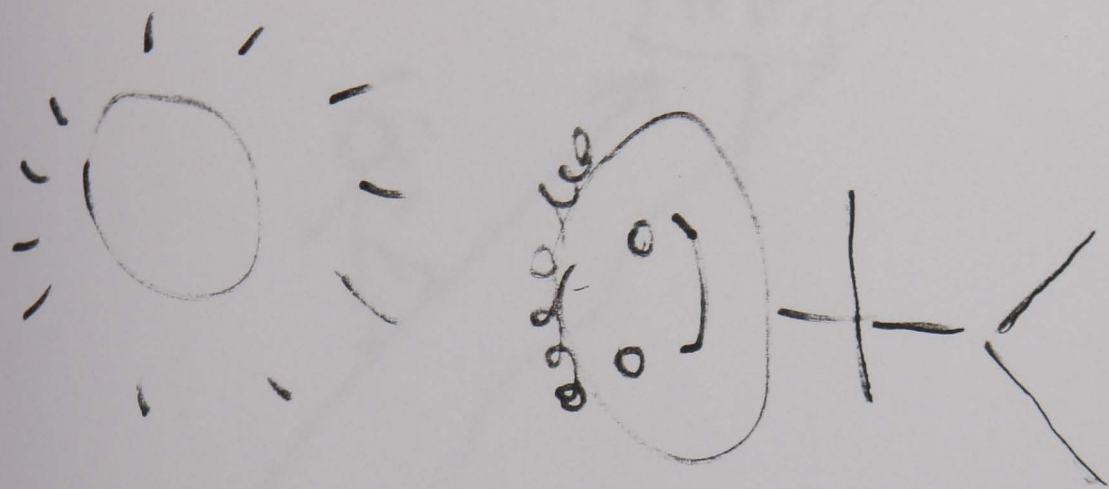


Lectures aimed at higher
level than I could manage

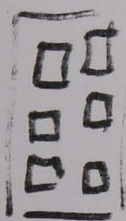
Thought I would
be oldest in
group!

Felt ~~I was~~ ^{my} ~~min-~~
~~expect~~ ^{expectations} of myself
were too unrealistic.
(Not clever enough!)

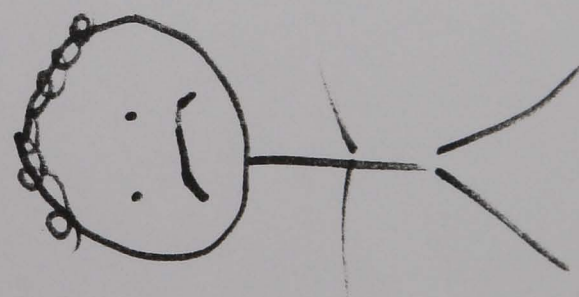
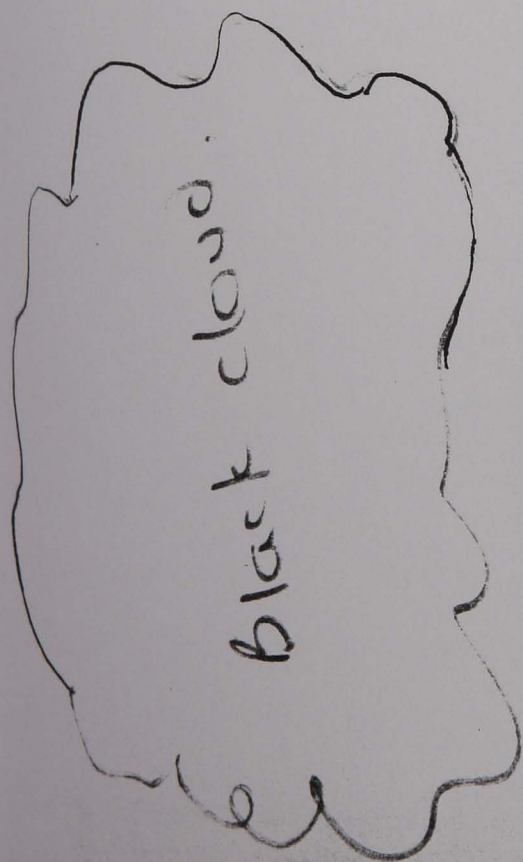


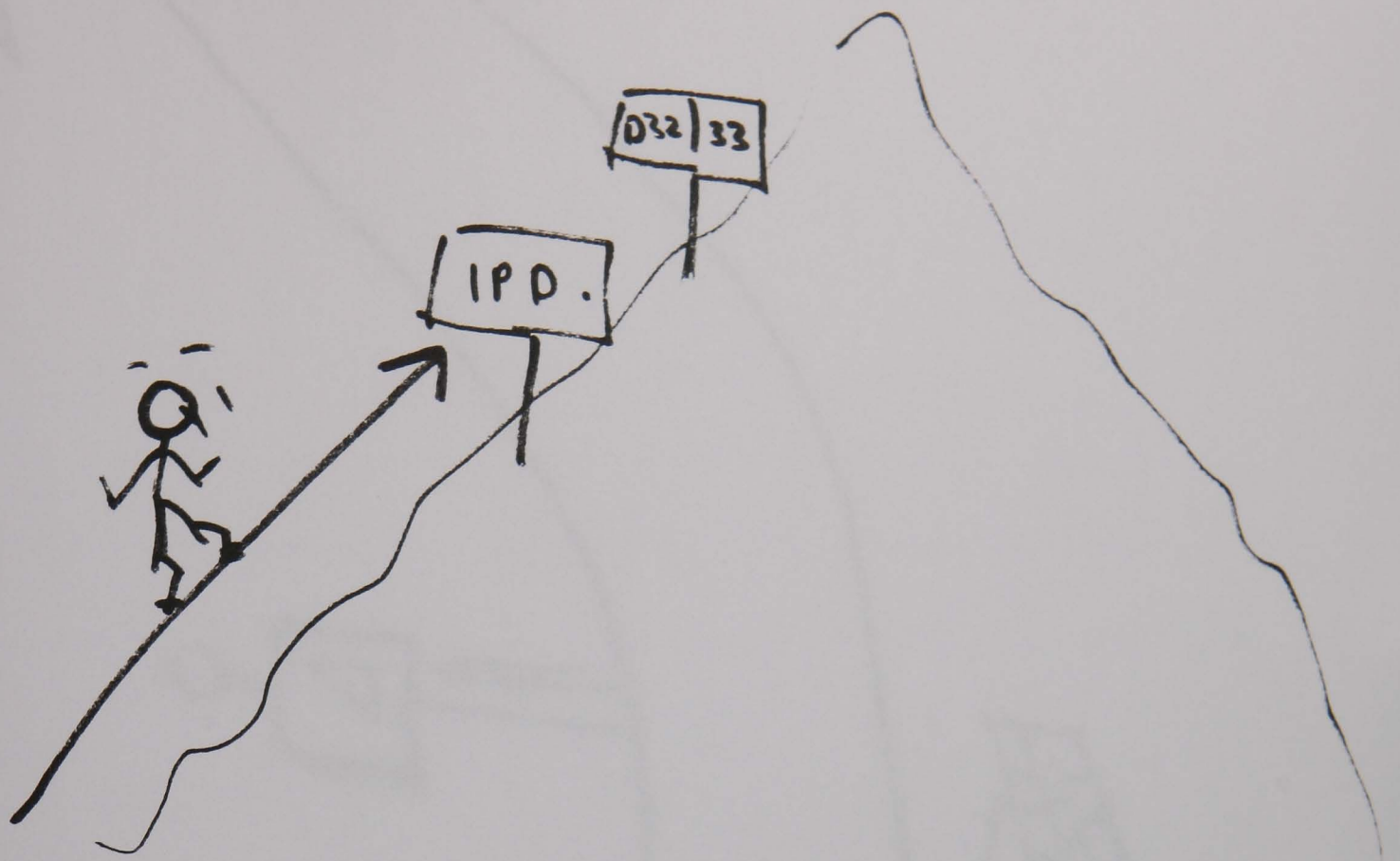


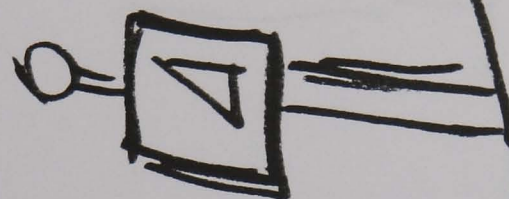
All
Young
people



?

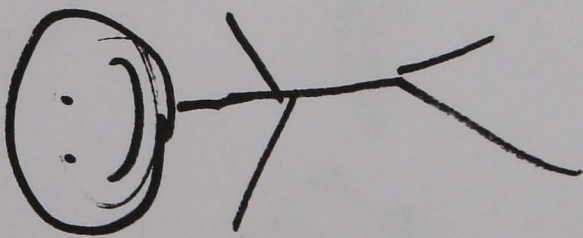
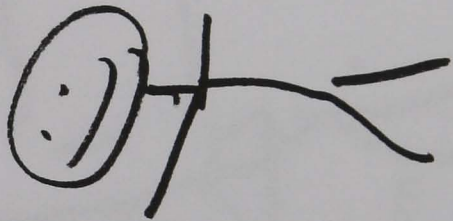






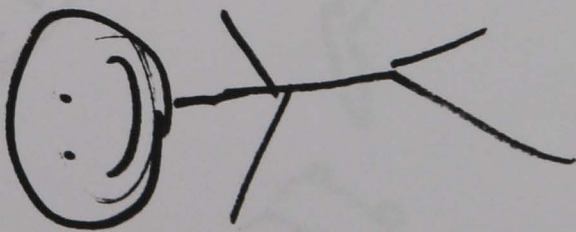
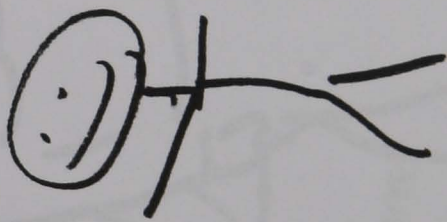
OK
OK
OK

Non-vocational group end meeting: Debbie



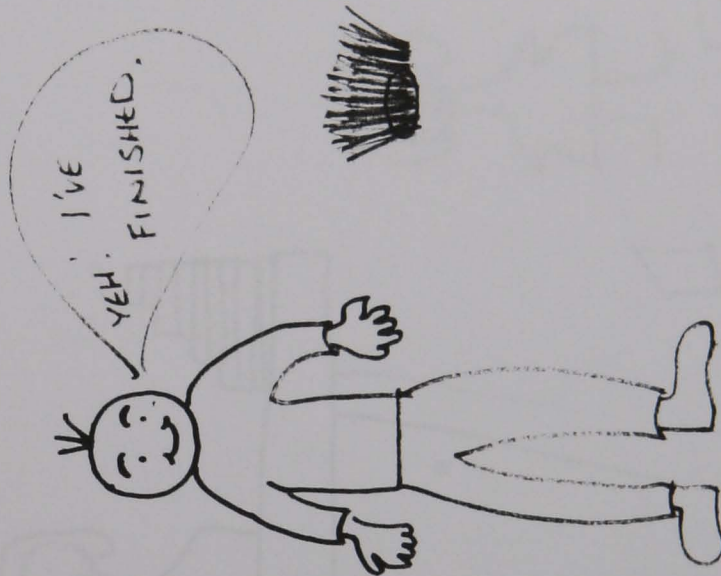
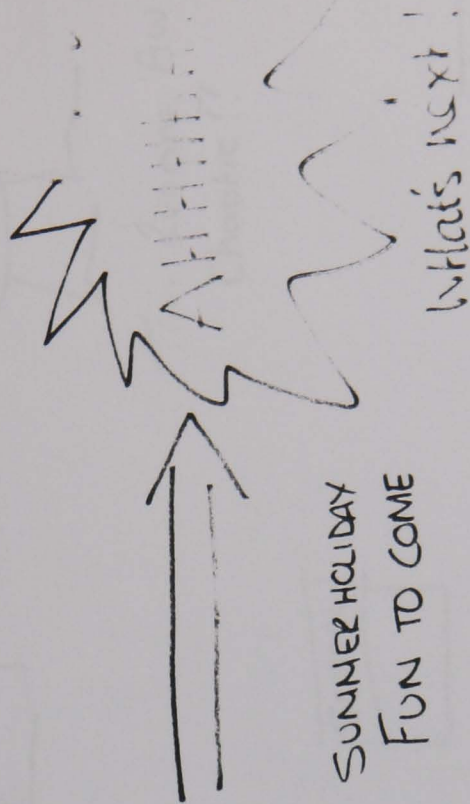
Friends.

Non-vocational group end meeting: Debbie

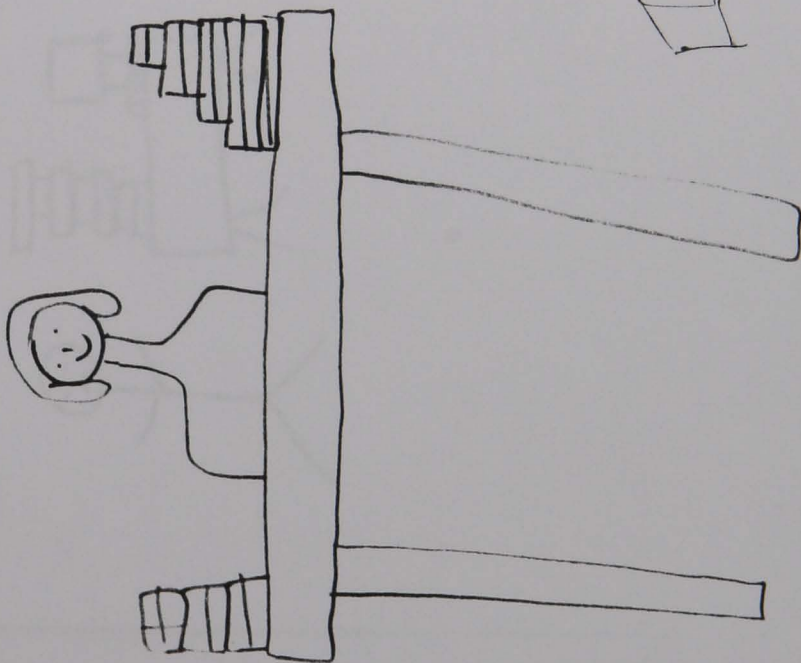


Friends.

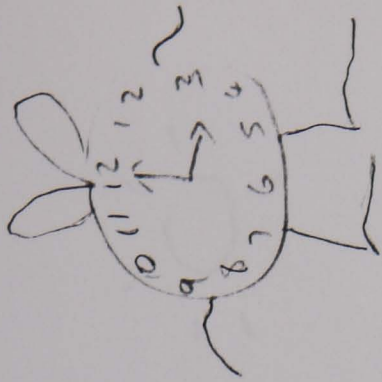
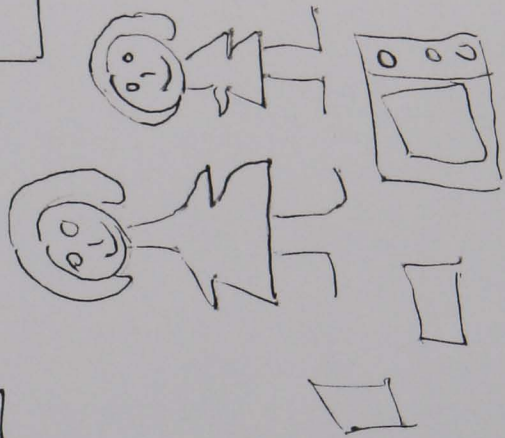




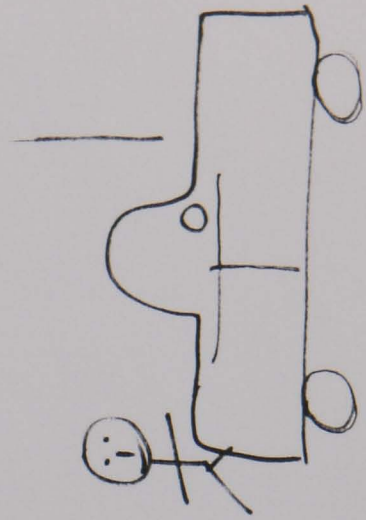
Sept	Oct	Nov	
Dec	Jan	Feb	
Mar	Apr	May	
Some DEADLINES!			



SCHOOL



Time Running Away
Chaotic!!



Non-vocational group end meeting: Vicky

